

Deity and Divine Agency  
in the Hebrew Bible:  
Cognitive Perspectives

Daniel O. McClellan

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Cognitive Perspectives

Submitted by Daniel O. McClellan to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology and Religion  
in January 2020

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified. Chapter 1 includes some material drawn from a master's thesis I completed at Trinity Western University in 2013 (“‘You Will Be Like the Gods’: The Conceptualization of Deity in the Hebrew Bible in Cognitive Perspective”).

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'D. McClellan', is written over a horizontal line.

# Abstract

This thesis interrogates the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in the Hebrew Bible, focusing particularly on the problem of the relationship of divine images and representatives to their patron deities. In order to move beyond the tendentiousness of previous scholarship that addresses this problem, I employ an interdisciplinary approach that will center cognitive linguistics and the cognitive science of religion, and also include biblical criticism, archaeology, anthropology, materiality studies, and other disciplines.

I begin in Part One with a methodological discussion that describes the approaches being taken and interrogates some of the conceptual frameworks that have governed the previous scholarship on the question, such as “religion” and the practice of definition. It will then move on to discuss the concepts of agency and personhood, and how contemporary anthropological research on both can help inform our interrogation of the ancient world.

Part Two begins the interrogation of the generic concept of deity, demonstrating that such concepts are products of the engagement of our intuitive and reflective reasoning with our cognitive ecologies, and that they build on our everyday conceptualizations of agency and personhood. These dynamics facilitate a view of divine agency as separable and communicable, which will be demonstrated to undergird the unique relationships understood to be shared by deities and their divine images. Chapter 4 employs a cognitive linguistic lens to propose semantic bases, domains, and profiles for the generic concept of deity in the Hebrew Bible.

Part Three applies the models developed in Chapters 3 and 4 to an interrogation of YHWH as a deity and of YHWH’s divine agents, such as the ark of the covenant, the messenger of YHWH, and the very text of the Torah itself. The Conclusion summarizes findings and discusses implications for further research.

*This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Aleen,  
my daughters, Aryn, Vivian, and Neke,  
and my parents, Tom and Sue*

כִּי־הֵיית עֲזֹרָתָה לִּי  
וּבְצֵל כְּנַפְיךָ אֲרַנֵּן

Psalm 63:8

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# Abbreviations

## General

ABH	Archaic Biblical Hebrew
BCE	before the Common Era
BP	before the present
CBH	Classical Biblical Hebrew
CE	Common Era
CL	cognitive linguistics
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory
CSR	cognitive science of religion
D	Deuteronomistic source
DN	divine name
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
Dtr	Deuteronomic Source
E	Elohistic source
EB	Early Bronze Age
ET	English translation
HADD	Hyperactive Agency Detection Device
J	Yahwistic source
LB	Late Bronze Age
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
LXX	Septuagint
MCI	Minimally Counterintuitive
MET	Material Engagement Theory
MT	Masoretic text
Non-P	Non-Priestly (and non-Deuteronomistic) source
P	Priestly source
PN	personal name
PT	Prototype Theory
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
TBH	Transitional Biblical Hebrew
ToM	Theory of Mind

## Reference Works

<i>AA</i>	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
<i>AB</i>	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992
<i>ACP</i>	<i>Advances in Cognitive Psychology</i>
<i>ActaPsych</i>	<i>Acta Psychologica</i>
<i>AD</i>	<i>Archaeological Dialogues</i>
<i>AE</i>	<i>American Ethnologist</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJPsych</i>	<i>American Journal of Psychology</i>
<i>AJPrim</i>	<i>American Journal of Primatology</i>

<i>AJSLL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
<i>AmAnt</i>	<i>American Antiquity</i>
<i>AmPsy</i>	<i>American Psychologist</i>
<i>AmSci</i>	<i>American Scientist</i>
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. Edited by James B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
<i>AnnuRevPsych</i>	<i>Annual Review of Psychology</i>
<i>AntOr</i>	<i>Antiguo Oriente: Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Historia del Antiguo Oriente</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Archiv orientální</i>
<i>AoF</i>	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
<i>APJA</i>	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology</i>
<i>ARA</i>	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
<i>ARAM</i>	<i>ARAM Periodical</i>
<i>ARG</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
<i>ARIWP</i>	<i>Asia Research Institute Working Papers</i>
<i>ARN</i>	<i>Annual Review of Neuroscience</i>
<i>ARP</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionspsychologie</i>
<i>ARoP</i>	<i>Annual Review of Psychology</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BBS</i>	<i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>Brain and Cognition</i>
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BJP</i>	<i>British Journal of Psychology</i>
<i>BJDP</i>	<i>British Journal of Developmental Psychology</i>
<i>BJPS</i>	<i>British Journal for the Philosophy of Science</i>
<i>BL</i>	<i>Biology Letters</i>
<i>BP</i>	<i>Biology and Philosophy</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BRPBI</i>	<i>Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BSR</i>	<i>Bulletin for the Study of Religion</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . 26 vols. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>CB</i>	<i>Current Biology</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Consciousness and Cognition</i>
<i>CDPS</i>	<i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i>
<i>CF</i>	<i>Constructivist Foundations</i>
<i>ChildDev</i>	<i>Child Development</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>The Classical Journal</i>

<i>ClassAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CogDev</i>	<i>Cognitive Development</i>
<i>CogLing</i>	<i>Cognitive Linguistics</i>
<i>CogPsych</i>	<i>Cognitive Psychology</i>
<i>CogSci</i>	<i>Cognitive Science</i>
<i>CompS</i>	<i>Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East</i>
<i>ConscCog</i>	<i>Conscious Cognition</i>
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
<i>CRJ</i>	<i>Creativity Research Journal</i>
<i>CRR</i>	<i>Critical Research on Religion</i>
<i>CTC</i>	<i>Culture, Theory &amp; Critique</i>
<i>CTH</i>	<i>Catalogue des textes hittites</i> . Edited by Emmanuel Laroche. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1971
<i>CW</i>	<i>The Classical World</i>
<i>DAACH</i>	<i>Digital Applications in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Hebrew Bible. Second Edition</i> . Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1999
<i>DELTA</i>	<i>Documentação de Estudos em Lingüística Teórica e Aplicada</i>
<i>DevPsych</i>	<i>Developmental Psychology</i>
<i>DevPsychobio</i>	<i>Developmental Psychobiology</i>
<i>DevSci</i>	<i>Developmental Science</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Documenta Praehistorica</i>
<i>DWDO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
<i>ED&amp;P</i>	<i>Early Development and Parenting</i>
<i>EECERJ</i>	<i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i>
<i>EHB</i>	<i>Evolution and Human Behavior</i>
<i>EHLL</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics</i> . Edited by Geoffrey Khan et al. Leiden: Brill, 2013
<i>EJJS</i>	<i>European Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>EJT</i>	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . Edited by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum. 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 22 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007
<i>EP</i>	<i>Evolutionary Psychology</i>
<i>EPS</i>	<i>Evolutionary Psychological Science</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>F&amp;P</i>	<i>Faith and Philosophy</i>
<i>FHN</i>	<i>Frontiers in Human Neuroscience</i>
<i>FiP</i>	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>
<i>GBH</i>	<i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Paul Joüon. Translated and Revised by Takamitsu Muraoka. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006
<i>GBHS</i>	<i>A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by Arther E. Cowley. 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
<i>GL</i>	<i>Glaube und Lernen</i>
<i>GLB</i>	<i>Graeco-Latina Brunensia</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>

<i>G&amp;H</i>	<i>Gender &amp; History</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HCHCB</i>	<i>Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible</i>
<i>HeBAI</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
<i>HHRJ</i>	<i>Harvard Human Rights Journal</i>
<i>HJET</i>	<i>HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory</i>
<i>HN</i>	<i>Human Nature</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>Historical Review</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBD</i>	<i>Infant Behavior and Development</i>
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.</i> Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
<i>ICD</i>	<i>Infant and Child Development</i>
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Intercultural Communication Studies</i>
<i>IEEEESP</i>	<i>IEEE Security &amp; Privacy</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IJE</i>	<i>International Journal of Ethics</i>
<i>IJPhilRel</i>	<i>International Journal for Philosophy of Religion</i>
<i>IJPsychRel</i>	<i>International Journal for the Psychology of Religion</i>
<i>IJPT</i>	<i>International Journal of the Platonic Tradition</i>
<i>IllClassStud</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
<i>IPS</i>	<i>International Political Sociology</i>
<i>JAA</i>	<i>Journal of Anthropological Archaeology</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAB</i>	<i>Journal for the Aramaic Bible</i>
<i>JAEL</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections</i>
<i>JAF</i>	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
<i>JAJ</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
<i>JAMT</i>	<i>Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory</i>
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBT</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie</i>
<i>JCC</i>	<i>Journal of Cognition and Culture</i>
<i>JCD</i>	<i>Journal of Cognition and Development</i>
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Cognitive Historiography</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JCSR</i>	<i>Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JEAA</i>	<i>Journal of East Asian Archaeology</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JEP</i>	<i>Journal of Economic Psychology</i>
<i>JEPG</i>	<i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: General</i>
<i>JEPHPP</i>	<i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance</i>

<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JFS</i>	<i>Journal for Semitics</i>
<i>JGP</i>	<i>Journal of Genetic Psychology</i>
<i>JHE</i>	<i>Journal of Human Evolution</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JID</i>	<i>Journal of Individual Differences</i>
<i>JISMOR</i>	<i>Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JMC</i>	<i>Journal of Material Culture</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPH</i>	<i>Journal of Pacific History</i>
<i>JPSP</i>	<i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>
<i>JPSTC</i>	The JPS Torah Commentary
<i>JPsychC</i>	<i>Journal of Psychology and Christianity</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRAI</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Ritual Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JSRNC</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSSR</i>	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
<i>JT</i>	<i>Journal of Translation</i>
<i>JTB</i>	<i>Journal of Theoretical Biology</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JWP</i>	<i>Journal of World Prehistory</i>
<i>KAI</i>	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Fifth Edition. Edited by Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002
<i>KAR</i>	Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>MemCog</i>	<i>Memory &amp; Cognition</i>
<i>MHRC</i>	<i>Mental Health, Religion &amp; Culture</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Material Religion</i>
<i>MSA</i>	<i>Metaphor and Symbolic Activity</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Modern Theology</i>
<i>MTSR</i>	<i>Method and Theory in the Study of Religion</i>
<i>NBR</i>	<i>Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>
<i>NDLR</i>	<i>North Dakota Law Review</i>
<i>NEE</i>	<i>Nature Ecology and Evolution</i>
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by W.A. VanGemeren. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
<i>NLM</i>	<i>Neurobiology of Learning and Memory</i>
<i>NN</i>	<i>Neural Networks</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NR</i>	<i>NeuroReport</i>

<i>NTT</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>PAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>
<i>PB</i>	<i>Psychological Bulletin</i>
<i>PBR</i>	<i>Progress in Brain Research</i>
<i>Ped</i>	<i>Pediatrics</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PerPsych</i>	<i>Perception and Psychophysics</i>
<i>PILJ</i>	<i>Public Interest Law Journal</i>
<i>PNAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>PPS</i>	<i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Psychology of Religion and Spirituality</i>
<i>PRSB</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Society B</i>
<i>PRSL</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Society of London</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Psychological Science</i>
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
<i>PSPB</i>	<i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>
<i>PsychBullRev</i>	<i>Psychonomic Bulletin &amp; Review</i>
<i>PsychRev</i>	<i>Psychological Review</i>
<i>PTRSLB</i>	<i>Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B</i>
<i>QS</i>	<i>Quaderni di Semantica</i>
<i>QSR</i>	<i>Quaternary Science Reviews</i>
<i>RBB</i>	<i>Religion, Brain &amp; Behavior</i>
<i>RC</i>	<i>Religion Compass</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>RevBib</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
<i>RRR</i>	<i>Review of Religious Research</i>
<i>SAAC</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization</i>
<i>SAK</i>	<i>Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur</i>
<i>SANER</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records</i>
<i>SBA-IAS</i>	<i>Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Social Cognition</i>
<i>SCAN</i>	<i>Social Cognition and Affective Neuroscience</i>
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SocRel</i>	<i>Sociology of Religion</i>
<i>SPPC</i>	<i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i>
<i>SRC</i>	<i>Science, Religion and Culture</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TCS</i>	<i>TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
<i>TGUOS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society</i>
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. 2 vols. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971–1976

<i>ThLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TINS</i>	<i>Trends in Neuroscience</i>
<i>TIS</i>	The Information Society
<i>Trans</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
<i>T&amp;R</i>	<i>Thinking &amp; Reasoning</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>UILR</i>	<i>University of Illinois Law Review</i>
<i>UJP</i>	<i>Unisinos Journal of Philosophy</i>
<i>VEE</i>	<i>Verbum et Ecclesia</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WQ</i>	<i>Western Quarterly</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZDP-V</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

## Ancient Texts

### Hebrew Bible

Gen	Genesis	Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Exod	Exodus	Song	Song of Solomon
Lev	Leviticus	Isa	Isaiah
Num	Numbers	Jer	Jeremiah
Deut	Deuteronomy	Lam	Lamentations
Josh	Joshua	Ezek	Ezekiel
Judg	Judges	Dan	Daniel
Ruth	Ruth	Hos	Hosea
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel	Joel	Joel
1–2 Kgdms	1–2 Kingdoms (LXX)	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings	Obad	Obadiah
3–4 Kgdms	1–2 Kingdoms (LXX)	Jonah	Jonah
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles	Mic	Micah
Ezra	Ezra	Nah	Nahum
Neh	Nehemiah	Hab	Habakkuk
Esth	Esther	Zeph	Zephaniah
Job	Job	Hag	Haggai
Ps/Pss	Psalms	Zech	Zechariah
Prov	Proverbs	Mal	Malachi

### Christian Scriptures

Matt	Matthew	1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Phlm	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	Jas	James
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Eph	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil	Philippians	Rev	Revelation
Col	Colossians		



## Modern Editions

- BHQ* *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*. Edited by A. Schenker, Y. A. P. Goldman, A. van der Kooij, G. J. Norton, S. Pisano, J. de Waard, R. D. Weis. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–
- BHS* *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983
- KJV King James Version
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version

# Introduction

“One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again,  
and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.”

– Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

“Every boundary placement makes some things easy to see, and others impossible to see.  
The danger of putting boundaries in the wrong place is . . . that doing so will  
leave important phenomena unexplained, or worse, inexplicable.”

– Edwin Hutchins<sup>2</sup>

## Overview and Outline

The goal of this thesis is to interrogate conceptualizations of deity and divine agency in the societies that produced the texts of the Hebrew Bible, and particularly the conceptualization of the deity’s relationship to their cult images and representatives.<sup>3</sup> A primary question it seeks to

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 1.114 (“Man glaubt, wieder und wieder der Natur nachzufahren, und fährt nur der Form entlang, durch die wir sie betrachten”).

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Hutchins, “Cognitive Ecologies,” *TCS* 2 (2010): 706.

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew Bible will represent my primary data set, but I will draw also from other relevant material remains, including inscriptions. The terms “cult” and “ritual” are somewhat problematic, but I use both to refer generally to the social conventions associated with serving, communicating, or otherwise interacting with unseen agents and agency, whether through material media or other performative means. Those agents or agency may run the gamut from generic supernatural powers to deceased kin to members of international pantheons. I use “cult” to refer more broadly to the frameworks of those conventions, while I use “ritual” to refer more directly to the acts associated with them. I will use the pronouns they/their for references to deity throughout this thesis except where I am translating texts explicitly marked for gender or quoting secondary literature or other translations of primary sources. YHWH and other deities were frequently gendered in the literature, and in many places the performance of maleness is central to the rhetorical goals of the authors. Unless otherwise noted, translations of biblical passages will be my own.

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answer is why cultic images and certain representatives can appear to be simultaneously identified *with* as well as distinguished *from* the deities they index. Recent scholarship has engaged this issue in a variety of ways—particularly within Assyriology—and patterns emerging from the last decade or so of this research reveal significant progress. And yet, substantial methodological concerns remain. While most of the recent literature has framed the discussion largely in terms of artistic representation, scholars increasingly acknowledge that the cultic image was thought to have been divinized and to have somehow materially “presenced” the deity itself (reified its presence) while still maintaining some degree of autonomy.<sup>4</sup> As just one of numerous examples, the Ninevite Ritual Text gives the following instructions to the officiant preparing the cultic image (lines 164–68):

Into the ear(s) of that god you speak as follows:  
‘You are counted among your brother gods,’  
you whisper into his right ear.  
‘From today may your destiny be counted as divinity;  
With your brother gods you are counted;’<sup>5</sup>

The cultic image appears to be considered, according to texts such as the above, a divinity in its own right. Some offering lists from Mesopotamia even show offerings being separately presented to the cult image as well as to the deity it represents, as with the beginning of the

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<sup>4</sup> For recent scholarship that has begun with a framework of representation, but moved the discussion toward the concept of “presencing,” see Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Karen Sonik, “Divine (Re-)Presentation: Authoritative Images and a Pictorial Stream of Tradition in Mesopotamia,” in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik (SANER 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 142–93.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pī Ritual* (Finland: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 65. See also, Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian *mīs pī* Ritual,” in *Born in Heaven Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 95 (quoted in Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 28; Stephen L. Herring and Garth Gilmour, “The Image of God in Bible and Archaeology,” in *Between Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology: Essays on Archaeology, History and Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert D. Miller II [Leuven: Peeters, 2016], 64).

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*tākultu* text K 252.ii.26–32:

Sîn, Šamaš-the-cult-statue, Šamaš  
Ningal, Aya  
Bunene, Ebiḫ  
Kittu, Umu  
Tambâya  
Gods of the temple of Sîn (and) Šamaš  
of the Inner City.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the material and ostensibly artistic channels in which these phenomena have been preserved, they have long been evaluated under the rubric of mimetic representation,<sup>7</sup> but that framework has failed to adequately account for the features described above. The problem has become further entrenched by appealing to ontology to smooth over the concerns. For example, Stephen Herring describes the concept undergirding the Akkadian use of the term *šalmu* as rejecting “the binary opposition of representation and real.”<sup>8</sup> In order to dismantle this binary, Herring concludes that the concept reflects “a complicated ontological belief, where, by means of a transformative ritual, the ‘real’ presence of the referent is transubstantiated into the representation with the result that the representation exists as a valid substitute of said referent.”<sup>9</sup> This gets the scholar no closer to understanding the phenomenon, of course, it simply labels the unknown and “complicated” means by which the paradox is ostensibly resolved as “ontology.” Zainab Bahrani’s *The Graven Image* ruminates at length on

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<sup>6</sup> Translation is from Spencer L. Allen, *The Splintered Divine: A Study of Ištar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 38–39 and n. 88. Cf. Barbara N. Porter, “Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum: Were There Non-Anthropomorphic Deities in Ancient Mesopotamia?” in *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Barbara N. Porter (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 167–68.

<sup>7</sup> Mimesis comes from a Greek term that refers to imitation, and so mimetic representation refers to representation that visually mimics the source, or seeks to reproduce an appearance similar to that of the source. For a brief consideration of representation and presence in the study of religion, see Joachim Schaper, *Media and Monotheism: Presence, Representation, and Abstraction in Ancient Judah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 15–20.

<sup>8</sup> Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 37.

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the philosophical underpinnings of the modern scholarly approach to the *šalmu*, but similarly frames the ancient approach simply as a separate “ontological system,”<sup>10</sup> stating that, “*šalmu* is better thought of as an ontological category rather than aesthetic concept.”<sup>11</sup>

The eminent Assyriologist Thorkild Jacobsen described and endorsed the philosophical foundation for this concern in 1987:

The contradiction of *is* and *is not* in the matter of the cult statue is so flagrant and cuts so deep that there must seem to be little hope of resolving it unless one goes to the most basic levels of understanding and attempts to gain clarity about the very fundamentals of ancient thought, about what exactly ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’ meant to the ancients. We must consider, if only briefly, the ontology of the ancients, their ideas of what constituted ‘being’ and ‘reality’ . . .<sup>12</sup>

The observation that this ostensible contradiction arises because of the disparity between our modern conceptualizations of the world around us and those of the ancients touches on the root of the problem;<sup>13</sup> but despite his methodological sensitivity, Jacobsen still structures the issue in terms of “ontology” and “being,” imposing modern philosophical frameworks where there is no indication they belong.<sup>14</sup> Neither ontology nor its conceptual proximates are anywhere discussed in ancient literature related to the nature and function of divine images. It is not an ancient conceptual category, it is a modern one, but twenty-first century scholarship continues to employ it.

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<sup>10</sup> Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 121–48.

<sup>11</sup> Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 133.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobsen, “The Graven Image,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>13</sup> By “conceptualize” and “conceptualization” I refer to the formation or interpretation of concepts using imagery and mental spaces that do not faithfully represent reality, but utilize idealized cognitive models or generalized mental representations. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Observe that Jacobsen goes on to describe the ancient Mesopotamians as “*monists*” (Jacobsen, “The Graven Image,” 19, emphasis in original). For a detailed account of Jacobsen’s frameworks for ancient thought, see H. Frankfort, H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 125–219. See also Francesca Rochberg, “A Critique of the Cognitive-historical Thesis of *The Intellectual Adventure*,” in *The Adventure of the Human Intellect: Self, Society, and the Divine in Ancient World Cultures*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 16–28.

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This problem is not confined to the field of Assyriology, of course. While the ubiquity of material remains in Mesopotamia provides perhaps the richest vein of ancient Southwest Asian data, the apparent conflation of deity and image (or representative) is attested in texts from ancient Israel,<sup>15</sup> early Christianity,<sup>16</sup> Classical Greece<sup>17</sup> and Rome,<sup>18</sup> and contemporary Hinduism,<sup>19</sup> Roman Catholicism,<sup>20</sup> as well as other traditions and disciplines.<sup>21</sup> To one degree or another, these fields acknowledge the sticky methodological wicket highlighted by

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<sup>15</sup> The biblical manifestations of this phenomenon will be the primary object of analysis in this thesis. While the primary focus will be on the ark of the covenant (Num 10:35–36; 1 Sam 5:1–12) and the messenger of YHWH in early biblical narrative (e.g., Gen 16:7–13; Exod 3:2–6; Judg 6:11–23; 13:3–23), the phenomenon is also reflected in humanity as the “image” of God (Gen 1:26–27), the calves of Dan and Bethel (Exod 32:1–5; 1 Kgs 12:28–30), the temple at Jerusalem (Deut 12:11), and those human authorities said to be divinized or endowed with God’s power (Exod 7:1; 34:29–35; Ps 45:6–7).

<sup>16</sup> The central problem of the development of early Christology is how early Jews and Christians understood Christ to be both a human born on earth and one with God (cf. John 1:1; 10:30). As an example, Michael F. Bird describes Larry Hurtado’s “early high christology” model as holding that “early Christian worship shows a clear veneration of Jesus as the God of Israel in human form” (Michael F. Bird, “The Story of Jesus as the Story of God,” in *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus’ Divine Nature*, ed. Michael F. Bird [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014], 15).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Pausanias “frequently refers to statues by the names of their referents without differentiating them as *images*, and further records the active intervention and consultation of divine images in everyday human life, from their healing of the ill to their offering of prophesies or information” (Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, “Between Cognition and Culture: Theorizing the Materiality of Divine Agency in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, 47 and n. 91).

<sup>18</sup> Clifford Ando discusses several examples of ancient writers’ comfort and apparent discomfort with the Roman identification of gods with their idols in Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 22–27. On divine images more generally in the ancient Greco-Roman world, see Joannis Mylonopoulos, ed., *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> The animacy of Hindu idols is the topic of Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). He states in the introduction, “For many centuries, most Hindus have taken it for granted that the religious images they place in temples and home shrines for purposes of worship are alive. They believe these physical objects, visually or symbolically representing particular deities, come to be infused with the presence or life or power of those deities” (p. 6). See also Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “The Divine Image in Contemporary South India: The Renaissance of a Once Maligned Tradition,” in Dick, *Born in Heaven Made on Earth*, 211–43.

<sup>20</sup> The doctrine of the transubstantiation of the Eucharist holds that the bread and wine is actually transformed into the real body and blood of Christ. See Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Animation and Agency of Holy Food: Bread and Wine as Material Divine in the European Middle Ages,” in Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, 70–85. Michael B. Dick uses this doctrine as an analogy for evaluating the Mesopotamian cult statue in Dick, “The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity,” in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. N. H. Walls (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 43–69.

<sup>21</sup> For a comparison of Catholic devotion to the Virgin of Alcala in Spain and the “pagan” devotion to the Glastonbury Goddess in, well, Glastonbury, see Amy Whitehead, *Religious Statues and Personhood: Testing the Role of Materiality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Alfred Gell’s posthumously published *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) frames the discussion around questions of agency, significantly advancing the discussion. As will be seen, his work has catalyzed some of the most productive work on the question.

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Jacobsen, engage it with similar frameworks, and arrive at results similar to those discussed above.

### *The Goal of This Thesis*

The ultimate focus of this thesis will be the conceptualization of YHWH and of their relationship to cultic objects and representatives in the Hebrew Bible, with special attention given to the ark of the covenant, the messenger of YHWH, the deity's "glory," and the texts of the Torah. These entities attest in different ways to the conflation of identities discussed above. In the earliest literary strata, the ark functions as a divine image that presences the deity. When the ark is present, people are described as "before YHWH." The messenger of YHWH, on the other hand, is said to possess YHWH's very name and to exercise divine prerogatives as a result. In several places, the identity of the messenger and of YHWH appear to be conflated. The "glory" of YHWH seems to represent the overwhelmingly radiant divine body itself, but it remains obscured from direct view in most instances. Torah was understood as the very "word" of the deity, and while it becomes most salient as cultic images become problematized and prohibited, those cultic images were actually the vehicles for its earliest public consumption. I will seek a solution to the problems outlined above by attempting to reconstruct, as far as possible, those "very fundamentals of ancient thought" that Jacobsen desires. We have no living informants to question, however, and so this reconstruction must still depend to a significant degree on modern frameworks. This is an inevitability, however, and rather than appeal to the philosophical models undergirded by contemporary philosophical frameworks—more on the problems with their reflective natures in the next chapter—I will apply insights from the cognitive sciences to analysis of the one concept that is explicitly native to the relevant material remains: deity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The primary obstacle in the study of biblical conceptualizations of deity has been our modern

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I have chosen the cognitive sciences—and specifically cognitive linguistics (CL) and the cognitive science of religion (CSR)—primarily because the mental and behavioral features that are conventionally grouped under the rubric “religion” are not exclusively artifacts of culture, but of the mutual influence of both cognition and culture. The roots of these features are found in humanity’s shared cognitive architecture, with experience and socio-cultural structures serving to develop, restrain, store, and transmit them.<sup>23</sup> Historians have long worked under the unstated assumption that “understanding arises simply by situating mental products in their context”<sup>24</sup> (several examples of precisely this approach will be discussed below), but the cognitive sciences have demonstrated through repeated experimentation that environmental input alone is not sufficient to determine mental output. The mind is not a *tabula rasa*. The shared cognitive features of humanity’s evolutionary history contribute, along with top-down environmental affordances, influences, and constraints, to the production, canalization,<sup>25</sup> and structuring of those outputs. Both configurations are critical to a more precise understanding of those outputs. A better understanding of the contribution of cognition can further clarify the

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presupposition that a strict dichotomy must be thought to have separated the divine from the human. This is most clearly reflected in Rudolph Otto’s famous designation of the holy as *das ganz andere*, “the wholly other” (Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* [Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917]). For a contemporary reflection of this idea in the modern study of the Hebrew Bible, see Mark S. Smith’s description of humanity and divinity as generally constituting “two different divisions within reality,” and falling into “two generally incommensurate categories” (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic background and the Ugaritic Texts* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 6–7). Significant progress in dismantling this dichotomy has been made by Ittai Gradel in *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), and related fields have reaped some of the fruit of that progress (Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 31–36; Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Pongratz-Leisten [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 137–87; and Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* [New York: HarperOne, 2014], 52–55).

<sup>23</sup> The relationship of cognition and culture is perhaps best conceptualized as a feedback loop. For a thorough examination of the relationship of culture and cognition in human evolution, see Mark Schaller et al., eds., *Evolution, Culture, and the Human Mind* (New York: Psychology Press, 2010). Cf. James Cresswell, *Culture and the Cognitive Science of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Luther H. Martin, “Past Minds: Evolution, Cognition, and Biblical Studies,” in *Mind, Morality and Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches to Biblical Studies*, ed. István Czachesz and Risto Uro (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 16.

<sup>25</sup> “Canalization” is a metaphor based on the idea of a canal, which conveys, restricts, and directs the flow of water. In this context, it refers to the way environmental structures and constraints convey, restrict, and direct cognitive outputs.



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role and function of culture, fill in lacunae in the cultural record, and contribute to more precise explanations and the development of more robust heuristics.

Additionally, something researchers within the cognitive sciences have come to better understand in recent years is that many ideological “practices” and much that is labeled “belief” would be more accurately framed as socioculturally curated convention that may have no rational or practical foundation for the individual or the group.<sup>26</sup> When called upon to give a reason or a rationale for beliefs or practices, informants will sometimes acknowledge they have no rationale, they just “believe,” or they just “do it,” and frequently because it is what their ideological community suggests or requires they believe and/or do. The community itself may prioritize the belief or the practice for no other reason than for the sake of continuity with the past or for other concerns associated with identity politics and social cohesion. Some informants can rationalize ad hoc, or have done so in the past and have developed preferred frameworks, and sometimes these frameworks have gained salience or authority and can then inform the rationalizations of future adherents who are more concerned with carrying on the traditions or with doing what a good adherent to group X is supposed to do than with the rationalizations themselves. What this suggests to me is that there are a potentially infinite number of ways to explain an ideology or a practice that may have no relationship at all to the dynamics underlying the perpetuation and/or performance of the ideology or the practice. This is not to say that nativist accounts are irrelevant or wrong, only that *making meaning* is frequently not the same thing as *explaining*. I am interested in both, and the cognitive sciences provide sets of tools that better equip the scholar to more critically and insightfully navigate these waters.

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<sup>26</sup> Describing the results of a study on doubt in Christianity, James Cresswell explains, “Participants described belief, but they did not spend a lot of time wondering why they believed. They illustrated how belief . . . is a simple thing that becomes a matter of trust and not one worthy of preoccupation. It was just taken for granted as a truism, and participants did not know why they believed per se because they simply trusted” (Cresswell, *Culture and the Cognitive Science of Religion*, 2).

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Finally, the cognitive sciences prioritize experimental and inductive approaches to understanding the ways humans structure their perception of the world around them as well as communicate about it. This allows me to begin my reconstruction of ancient thought with the conceptual frameworks themselves, rather than force my own frameworks upon the material remains. While this prioritization of the scientific process is a modern understanding of how to best interrogate the data, and is itself heavily influenced by the Renaissance and Enlightenment, the approach gives scholars a new set of tools and frameworks that can spur more productive debate and innovation, and may lead to more far-reaching insights about human thought. There will obviously be limitations on the degree to which that research conducted on living informants can be overlaid on ancient contexts, and I will discuss those limitations as the contexts warrant.

A final caveat related to the use of the findings of cognitive psychology and related fields is the disproportionate use in experiments of participants from societies that are WEIRD, or Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.<sup>27</sup> While one can certainly raise concerns with the dichotomizing assumptions of categories like “Western,” the underlying point is that American and Western European college students provide the vast majority of the data used to construct psychological theories and models that are often presumed to be universal. While this has problematized some older data, it should be noted that recent cognitive research more consistently draws in analysis from non-WEIRD societies. I will be careful to consider this dynamic where it may bear on this thesis.

## *Outline*

In the remainder of this introduction I will discuss and engage with recent scholarship that has

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<sup>27</sup> See Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan, “The Weirdest People in the World?” *BBS* 33.2–3 (2010): 61–83, 111–35, and the 28 responses (pp. 83–111).

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developed specific theoretical models for accounting for the phenomena of divine multiplicity.<sup>28</sup> Chapters 1 and 2 constitute Part 1 of this thesis, and they primarily serve to lay the methodological scene. The first will introduce the main methodological approaches this thesis will employ, namely cognitive linguistics, or CL, and the cognitive science of religion, or CSR. I will pay special attention to prototype theory, conceptual metaphor theory, and dual-process models of cognition—three important theoretical frameworks that will be critical to the reconstruction of biblical concepts of deity. I will also briefly interrogate the concept of “religion” as an analytical category.<sup>29</sup> This category has been applied to the study of the ideologies of the Hebrew Bible for generations without any sustained consideration of its appropriateness. The concept of “religion” is a Reformation-era socio-cultural reification that has no real existence outside of discourse about it.<sup>30</sup> As a result, where that discourse does not exist, we ought to exercise caution about assuming its presence or its relevance. Because this thesis is concerned both with cognitive features that operate independently of that discourse and with cultures and time periods with no term for “religion” and no clear indication there was a discrete sociocultural domain representing it, I avoid using the term. Chapter 2 will engage the related concepts of agency and personhood. As will be shown, extensive experimentation within CSR and cognate fields of study has demonstrated that the perception of agency in the world around humans, past and present, sits at the very foundation of concepts of both personhood and deity. I will construct a case for understanding the conceptualization of humans and deities in early Israel and Judah as both partible and permeable, in stark

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<sup>28</sup> For related research I will not directly engage in this section, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1992); Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Iconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995); Karel van der Toorn, “Worshipping Stones: On the Deification of Cult Symbols,” *JNSL* 23.1 (1997): 1–14; Angelika Berlejung, “Geheimnis und Ereignis: Zur Funktion und Aufgabe der Kultbilder in Mesopotamien,” *JBT* 13 (1998): 110; Dick, “The Mesopotamian Cult Statue”; Andreas Wagner, *God’s Body: The Anthropomorphic God in the Old Testament*, trans. Marion Salzmann (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> While I use the word “religion” quite frequently in the introduction and the first chapter, I try to qualify my usage as frequently as possible as reflective of the traditional conceptualization of the category.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Pascal Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion: Science and the Dissolution of Religion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Jonathan Jong, “On (not) defining (non)religion,” *SRC* 2.3 (2015): 15–24.

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contradistinction to the modern reflective conceptualization of the individual as materially and psychologically bounded and indivisible.

Part 2 comprises Chapters 3 and 4, and discusses the conceptualization of deity. In the former, I will discuss insights from CSR related to the development of deity concepts and apply those insights to the reconstruction of the development of deity concepts in early Israel and Judah and their material engagement. While this thesis is primarily about the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in societies with long-established divine patrons, understanding how the conceptual roots of deity continue to influence its nature and function long after the firm establishment of divine profiles will be critical to understanding divine agency. Chapter 4 will interrogate the conceptualization of generic deity in the Hebrew Bible. By “generic deity” I mean the concept of deity as an abstract noun rather than a reference to a specific deity, like YHWH or Baal.<sup>31</sup> The chapter will consider the conceptual bases, domains, profiles, and boundaries of the category. I will argue that the relationship of deity to humanity consistently reflected in biblical texts is best represented not as a dichotomy, but as a spectrum or continuum, with both categories sharing significant overlap, and neither essentialized over and against the other.

Chapter 5 begins Part 3, which focuses on the conceptualization of YHWH and their agents. Chapter 5 will look at YHWH as a prototypical deity, interrogating their socio-material engagement and their relationship to the conceptual domains that govern generic deity. It will also interrogate the divine profiles of the El-type patriarchal deity and the Baal/Hadad-type storm-deity that were conflated early in the history of Israel. Chapters 6, and 7, and 8 will examine YHWH’s unique divine agents that presenced the deity but also broke new conceptual ground that aided the rhetorical goals of the literary elite. These agents include the ark of the

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<sup>31</sup> Because the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים likely derives from the abstract plural, we can be reasonably confident the abstract notion of deity was extant and in circulation. Additional support is provided by the frequent references to necessary features of deity, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

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covenant, the deity's כבוד, *kabod*, or “glory,” the messenger of YHWH, the deity's שם, *shem*, or “name,” and the texts themselves. The concluding chapter will summarize the thesis' findings and discuss the utility of the developed frameworks of agency and deity for other fields of study.

## Previous Scholarship

Countless publications overlap in some way or another with the several themes of this thesis, but in this section, I discuss four recent engagements with the question of deity and divine presencing and the methodological limitations of those engagements that make the inclusion of the cognitive perspective so pressing.

### *Benjamin D. Sommer*

Benjamin D. Sommer's 2009 *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* is one of the most ambitious recent engagements with the question of divine multiplicity, and will represent my primary interlocutor throughout this thesis. The volume draws sensitively on data from Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, and the Hebrew Bible, with its primary focus on the pluriform embodiment of the God of Israel.<sup>32</sup> Sommer's work astutely touches on an insight regarding personhood that will be shown to be absolutely critical to resolving this seeming paradox, but he unfortunately also imposes a framework of ontology, and this constrains the scope, the insight, and the heuristic value of the model he constructs.<sup>33</sup> This model, “divine fluidity,”

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> His model has nonetheless become very influential. In addition to winning the American Academy of Religion's 2010 Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion and the Association for Jewish Studies' 2009 Jordan Schnitzer Book Award, Sommer's divine fluidity model has been adopted in, for instance, Michael B. Hundley, “Divine Fluidity? The Priestly Texts in Their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts,” in *Text, Time, and Temple: Literary, Historical, and Ritual Studies in Leviticus*, ed. Francis Landy, Leigh M. Trevaskis, and Bryan Bibb (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 16–40.

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posits two types of “fluidity” characterizing divine selfhood in ancient Southwest Asia. The first is *fragmentation*, or the ability of divine selfhood to fragment and simultaneously occupy multiple different bodies. The second is *overlap*, or the ability of divine selves to overlap, inhabit each other, or converge.<sup>34</sup>

Sommer has brilliantly extrapolated this framework of divine personhood from close analysis of the texts of ancient Southwest Asia, evidently unaware that he very closely approximates a widespread anthropological framework of personhood that views the self as fundamentally relational, and frequently partible and/or permeable. Sommer actually briefly and rather obliquely engages some of the features of the framework, but rejects its analogy to his fluidity model:

Other cases outside Greece might suggest that human bodies can be seen as somewhat similar to what I describe in Mesopotamian divine bodies, but none overturns the basic contrast I outline. A person who believes in transmigration of the soul would argue that a human being does have more than one body, but not at any one moment in time. In some cultures we find a belief in possession or out-of-body experiences (especially mystic unity with a divinity), albeit as exceptional experiences noteworthy precisely because the human goes beyond the bounds of the normal human body. In any event, the ancient Near Eastern cultures under discussion here do not evince such beliefs, so that they posit the fundamental contrast between human and divine bodies.<sup>35</sup>

As I will show below, ancient Southwest Asian cultures absolutely evinced such beliefs, as do modern cultures, including those within which the scientific and philosophical frameworks of the Renaissance and Enlightenment are normative. Those beliefs are socioculturally mediated variations on the intuitive distinction between the loci of identity, like the body, and the loci of agency (I address the Cartesian nature of the scientific shorthand for this phenomenon, “mind/body dualism,” below). Even in contemporary English-speaking cultures we speak of

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<sup>34</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 13–19.

<sup>35</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 195, n. 145.

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“being there in spirit,” of people “being a part of us” or “taking a part of us with them,” of having our hearts in conflict with our brains, and of many other conceptualizations of personhood that reflect the underlying cognitive predispositions to relationality and the associated concepts of partibility and permeability. The ability of ancient Southwest Asian deities to be present simultaneously in multiple different bodies is a difference of degrees, not of kind, emerging from the widespread sociocultural demands for immediacy.

This will be discussed further in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, but it is important to note that Sommer insists that, because of this fluidity, deities were “radically unlike human beings.” He states, “For the peoples of the ancient Near East, the gods were made of a different sort of stuff, not only physically, but also ontologically.”<sup>36</sup> According to Sommers, divine selves were fluid and human selves were not, which safeguards the modern theological understanding of deity as *das ganz andere*.<sup>37</sup> The anthropological framework he approximates, however, is precisely a feature of the human understanding of the self (which becomes projected onto the mental representation of deities). Sommer’s oversight, which appears to derive from theological concerns,<sup>38</sup> undermines his model and prevents many and significant insights that could be

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<sup>36</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 12. Sommer makes a point of rejecting the presence of the fluidity model in archaic and classical Greece, stating, “no archaic or classical Greek source I know of describes these statues as embodiments of divinity, even though the statues in question were regarded as deeply sacred and even otherworldly” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 31 [30–36]). He quotes the *Odyssey* in support of this conclusion, but overlooks the episode in the *Iliad* in which a group of Trojan women take offerings to the statue of Athena at her shrine (Book VI 297–311). The text describes the priestess placing the offering “on the knees of Athena” (lines 302–03), but despite their pleas, Athena “threw back her head” (ἀνένευε; line 311), denying the prayer. The two important things to note are that the text indicates the group of women are before a cult image with knees upon which the offering can be set, and that the text makes no distinction whatsoever between the shrine’s cult image and the deity itself, which flatly contradicts Sommer’s assertion. For discussion of this text and many others that indicate that “[in] the Archaic period the Greeks did not yet conceptualize the difference between a divinity and its statue,” see Jan N. Bremmer, “The Agency of Greek and Roman Statues: From Homer to Constantine,” *Opuscula* 6 (2013): 7–21 (8). The text from the *Iliad* is also mentioned as witnessing to “the blurring of the line between divinities and their cult statues” in Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, “Between Cognition and Culture,” 47, although they identify the pericope as lines 360–66.

<sup>37</sup> This is Rudolph Otto’s famous characterization of the holy, frequently translated “the wholly other” (see note 22 above). As will be discussed further below, this dogma about deity’s fundamental otherness has significantly impeded scholarship.

<sup>38</sup> In his conclusion, he states, “The essence of the fluidity model, however, lies precisely in the recognition that God’s divisible bodies are not in fact like any other bodies. God’s divisibility does not detract from God’s might or transcendence; because the number of divine bodies is potentially infinite, the disappearance or fragmentation of any one of them is, ontologically speaking, a matter of no concern” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 142).

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drawn from the contemporary study of the partible and permeable self and then applied to the ancient data.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in limiting the concept of fluidity to the loci of identity, Sommer neglects the role of agency independent from identity. This will become critical in Sommer's discussion of the rejection of the fluidity model.

Another complication is the model's grounding in ontology, which limits its heuristic reach. Thorkild Jacobsen insisted that, to reconcile "is" and "is not," we must seek to understand the ontology of the ancients. While Sommer's model correctly identifies the primary source of Jacobsen's paradox in his assumption of a bounded, unified, and indivisible self, it neither explicates that ontology nor deconstructs the need for it; but simply advances the ball one more play before punting it away to ontology anyway.<sup>40</sup> Because the divine self can be divided into constituent selves, and those constituent selves represent incomplete manifestations of "God's entirety,"<sup>41</sup> entities like the מלאך יהוה *are* "Yhwh," but they are not "fully identical with Yhwh,"<sup>42</sup> "all of Yhwh,"<sup>43</sup> or "the deity's full manifestation."<sup>44</sup> Coarsely put, Sommer's model resolves Jacobsen's "is" and "is not" dichotomy by restating it as "is (a part)" and "is not (the whole)." Sommer's fluidity algebra does not solve for variable *o* (for ontology), it only divides one side and turns in the exam.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For instance, once we acknowledge that the human mind is predisposed to conceptualizing of personhood as permeable and partible, we can employ living informants in the study of the nature function of that conceptualization. Sommer limits his data pool to the exegesis of a limited number of texts from first millennium BCE Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine.

<sup>40</sup> "Punting" here is a sports metaphor that has reference to American football, a sport in which two teams attempt to advance an oblong ball past the opponent's goal line on a 100-yard-long field. The team in possession of the ball has four tries, or plays, to advance it at least ten yards. If they succeed, they are given four more tries to advance another ten yards. If they fail, the opposing team takes over possession of the ball where it sits. Punting is when the team with possession uses the fourth play not to try to advance the ball, but to transfer possession to the opposing team by kicking it as far away from their own goal as possible, forcing the opponent to cover more ground. In this context, the metaphor has reference to appealing to loaded, vague, or otherwise rhetorically deflective concepts in an effort to minimize or avoid engaging the challenges or complexities of carrying the line of argumentation on further.

<sup>41</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that compartmentalization and division of the "whole self" was not salient for these groups—I will argue that compartmentalization was a key rhetorical tool—but it certainly was not the only way to account for the phenomenon in question.



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The constraining nature of Sommer’s fluidity model can be illustrated with the following quotation, offering observations which, with the application of a more robust heuristic, could lead to groundbreaking insights into ancient as well as modern concepts of ritual and materialism:

The *mās pi* ceremonies show that the ancients did regard the statues as being what we would call ontologically identical to the deity—whereas the fact that the god could be identical with many statues at a given time shows that we are not dealing with a typical Western form of ontology. (Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understandings of Mass or Eucharist are perhaps the one example of a Western ontology that resembles the ancient Near Eastern notion I describe here . . .<sup>46</sup>

Sommer later returns to these parallels, but only to “point out the impressive and startling endurance of ancient beliefs in religions that lay claim to the Hebrew Bible as their scripture,” and “to recognize the rich debate that the fluidity and antifluidity traditions continue to inspire.”<sup>47</sup> Several questions spring to mind: Why should fluidity be so enduring as to disappear for centuries and reappear without explanation? Is fluidity really reducible to ontology when most living practitioners who assert it do not actually formulate an ontology? What insights about ancient Southwest Asian conceptualizations of the divine could be gleaned from studying contemporary Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians? What about non-biblical traditions, such as Hinduism, that also attest to beliefs in the divine inhabitation of cult images?<sup>48</sup> Sommer’s model begins to turn us in the right direction and to tease out some critical insights, but is still bound to contemporary academic frameworks that limit its insight and its utility.

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<sup>46</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 187, n. 68.

<sup>47</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 135. For a detailed discussion of the relevance of Roman Catholic notions of divine multiplicity to the interrogation of ancient manifestations, see Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 59–70.

<sup>48</sup> See page 5, note 19 above.

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*Beate Pongratz-Leisten*

A more interdisciplinary model that further teases out those critical insights is that of divine agency, which has been promoted recently by Beate Pongratz-Leisten in contributions to two of her own edited volumes, *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (2011) and *The Materiality of Divine Agency* (2015; edited with Karen Sonik).<sup>49</sup> The theoretical roots of Pongratz-Leisten's model are found in Alfred Gell's posthumously published *Art and Agency*,<sup>50</sup> which consolidates theoretical models from social anthropology and psychology to construct an anthropological theory of art as exercising distributed agency. Gell takes up the concept of partible personhood,<sup>51</sup> but also incorporates a cognitive framework, which lends further support and insight to that model.

In her first article, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods," Pongratz-Leisten applies this model of distributed agency to the study of divinity in ancient Mesopotamia, and particularly to the divinity of astral bodies. She first overturns Sommer's assertion of the divine prerogative of partibility, suggesting that, "Beginning with the ancient notion of the person, which was . . . conceived as an assemblage of parts, will enhance our understanding of the composite character of divine agency."<sup>52</sup> She further argues for understanding identity as predicated upon social roles and relationships rather than upon ontology, arguing that "the ancient notion of personhood was primarily relational—that one defined oneself through the functions and roles one was given in relation to others rather than by asserting one's individuality."<sup>53</sup> She incorporates findings from the cognitive sciences to further unpack this

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<sup>49</sup> Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia"; Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 3–69.

<sup>50</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*. His model will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 below.

<sup>51</sup> Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Roy Wagner, "The Fractal Person," in *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*, ed. Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 159–73.

<sup>52</sup> Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods," 138.

<sup>53</sup> This intuitive notion of personhood is widespread even today. This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

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relationality, highlighting the “theory of mind,” or the propensity for the human mind to decouple agency from the observable body and to be highly sensitive to the presence of mental agents in the world around it, to the degree that the human brain will intuitively attribute agency and intentionality to unknown events and even to inanimate and non-anthropomorphic entities.

The agency of others is all around us, and this applies to deity, as well.<sup>54</sup> Evaluating the application of the divine determinative DINGER, Pongratz-Leisten finds that cult objects and other entities may take on and even lose divine status as a result of their relationships to the partible and distributable agency of deities.<sup>55</sup> These features are “an abiding feature of human cognition,”<sup>56</sup> and Pongratz-Leisten suggests that incorporating them into our research could have “a revolutionary effect on the way that we deal with and interpret divine agency in antiquity.” The findings of the cognitive sciences, she continues,

explain why agency can be exercised by supernatural beings that are imagined not only in abstract and anthropomorphic terms but also in inanimate, invisible, and polymorphic terms, such as statues or other symbolic representations of the divine, body parts of divinities or celestial bodies alike, and even the transcendent invisible God.<sup>57</sup>

A criticism of this model has been the subordination of “secondary divine agents” to their usually anthropomorphic “primary agents,” which tends towards the notion of the agent as a “partial” or “not full manifestation” of the deity, *à la* Sommer. Michael Hundley, whose work

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<sup>54</sup> “Sacred objects, in opposition to mundane or even profane ones, were famously defined by Durkheim as ‘things set apart and forbidden.’ This definition may be retained here provided that sacred (as divine) is recognized as a relative rather than an absolute status, one existing on the latter end of the continuum stretching between the ordinary and the special, and that thing is understood as encompassing not merely material objects or matter, but also persons, phenomena, or events” (Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, “Between Cognition and Culture,” 7, quoting Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain [London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964], 47).

<sup>55</sup> See also Porter, “Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum,” 153–94.

<sup>56</sup> Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods,” 145.

<sup>57</sup> Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods,” 146.

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will be discussed below, raises this concern and advocates for situating these divine agents along a continuum rather than a dichotomy.<sup>58</sup>

Pongratz-Leisten's second article, written with Karen Sonik, is more directly focused on the concept of presencing the divine through representation. Acknowledging the limitations of the Peircean concept of signs and the signified,<sup>59</sup> they further develop the main concepts of divinity, the sacred, and presencing,<sup>60</sup> incorporating examples from several cultures to illustrate the material mediation of divine agency. According to their discussion, the properties of the materials used, the authorization of the image, the rituals of animation, and other culturally mediated practices and perspectives converged not just to produce an image or artifact that looked like or indexed the divine, but one that localized its agency and could become inhabited by it to some degree. The cognitive sciences are less well represented in this paper, but their work still forwards the discussion further beyond concerns for ontology and mimesis, setting the stage, in many ways, for the model I will develop.

### *Spencer L. Allen*

Divine multiplicity has also been given a fresh reading by Spencer L. Allen in *The Splintered Divine*, a revised edition of his 2011 University of Pennsylvania dissertation.<sup>61</sup> As with Sommer, Allen incorporates data from Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine to better contextualize his analysis of the biblical data, but his primary data pool are the god lists and

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<sup>58</sup> Michael B. Hundley, review of *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* by Beate Pongratz-Leisten, ed., *RBL* (2014): 4 (cf. Hundley, "The God Collectors," 186–87, n. 76). This review is cited in Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 36, n. 83. As I will discuss in the next chapter, cognitive linguistics, and particularly prototype theory, can provide a helpful lens for engaging with these questions of how conceptual categories form, are used, and relate to one another. In Chapter 7, I will show that some biblical authors did assert "secondary" status for some vehicles for divine agency.

<sup>59</sup> Herring and Bahrani both engage with a Peircean framework, but insist the cult image moves beyond mere representation to somehow presence the deity. See Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 135–37; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 47–48. See also Angelicka Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> Terms are defined in Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 6–11.

<sup>61</sup> See above, page 3, note 6, for 2015 bibliographic information.

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onomastica of divinity, and as a result, his research questions are different. He begins with the question of what the ancients understood by the term “god,” drawing out additional questions about the treatment required to be considered a god, the differences between deities with first and last names and those with only first names, and the circumstances under which those with shared first names and different last names were considered separate deities.

The first question is largely answered in the following description:

ancient Mesopotamians considered an *ilu* an entity that could: intentionally impose its influence on the universe; possess its own unique name, which was preceded by a divine determinative; deserve food offerings and other gifts from humanity; and participate in cult and state rituals.

This draws on some of the insights from Pongratz-Leisten’s divine agency model, and Allen engages with her model repeatedly, but his primary concern is not agency; it is determining whether or not deities like Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela were considered local manifestations of a single deity or simply separate deities with shared first names. Ontology is not a concern at all in Allen’s work, but primarily because he seems focused entirely on deity at the level of text, which contributes to the fundamentally dichotomous nature of the discussion. He states that he hopes to “expand the definition of deity in the ancient Near East to include not just non-anthropomorphic deities—as Pongratz-Leisten and others rightly have—but to include also a multiplicity of distinct and separate anthropomorphic deities who share a common first name.”

The principle Allen seems to be getting at is that a divine name was primarily constitutive of divinity, meaning distinct names distinguished distinct deities from each other:

These statues might have contained or reflected Marduk’s divinity within the cult, but they had their own claim to divinity because they had a divine name, which was

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preceded by a divine determinative and was bestowed upon them during an official temple rite.<sup>62</sup>

Appropriately named, the cult image or representative, then, is a distinct deity. If Pongratz-Leisten's understanding of these temple rites as the mechanism for endowing the entity with the agency of the patron deity is correct, though, the bestowal of that name is a function of the installation of that image as an agent of the patron deity. Allen seems to me to be emphasizing the "is not" of Jacobsen's paradox, while paying little attention to the "is" side of things. The "is" may not be particularly salient in his primary case study, Ištar-of-Nineveh and Ištar-of-Arbela, but there is little argument presented for considering that circumstance determinative, and Allen's framework does not significantly advance the debate.

*Michael B. Hundley*

Among scholars engaging with this debate in recent years, Michael B. Hundley has perhaps been the most prolific, having published two books and multiple articles since 2009 aimed at formulating a more helpful model for understanding divine presencing.<sup>63</sup> His more recent publications have drawn from "aspective theory,"<sup>64</sup> which is a theoretical model developed within Egyptology that suggests ancient Egyptians conceptualized deity primarily in terms of

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<sup>62</sup> Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 40. This is more explicitly stated in his discussion of embedded god lists: "The underlying assumption of this chapter's methodology has been that if a scribe listed or addressed a deity by a particular name, then that particular name identified a specific deity who was considered distinct from all the other deities in that EGL [embedded god list]. In essence, this assumption attempts to take the ancient scribes at their word and interprets a name as a defining aspect of each deity" (p. 138).

<sup>63</sup> Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be: A Reexamination of Name Language in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 59.4 (2009): 533–55; Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Hundley, "Divine Fluidity?"; Hundley, "Here a God, There a God: An Examination of the Divine in Ancient Mesopotamia," *AoF* 40.1 (2013): 68–107; Hundley, "The God Collectors: Hittite Conceptions of the Divine," *AoF* 41.2 (2014): 176–200; Hundley, "Of God and Angels: Divine Messengers in Genesis and Exodus in their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," *JTS* 67.1 (2016): 1–22.

<sup>64</sup> This theory, as Hundley states, is drawn from Emma Brunner-Traut, *Frühformen des Erkennens: Aspekte im alten Ägypten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), who is building on the work of Heinrich Schäfer, *Von ägyptischer Kunst: Eine Grundlage*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz, 1963).

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the arrangement, combination, and multiplication of their different aspects or characteristics, without concern for the unified or systematic whole.<sup>65</sup> Applying it to the societies of ancient Southwest Asia, Hundley uses this theory as the conceptual base for his constellation model, suggesting that, “each major god consists of a constellation of aspects that may act and be treated (semi-)independently or as a unity depending on context.”<sup>66</sup> The anthropomorphic manifestation of the deity, according to this model, is the “core” of the constellation,<sup>67</sup> while other aspects, such as “stars, statues, numbers, semi-precious stones, and emblems” provide points of access to the deity and magnify its potency.<sup>68</sup> This model is primarily aimed at Mesopotamian conceptualizations of deity, incorporating some of the insights of Sommer’s fluidity model, particularly in relation to fragmentation, but Hundley also acknowledges Allen’s findings regarding the individualization of the Ištar manifestations.<sup>69</sup>

Much attention is paid by Hundley to the lack of a unifying framework for these constellations, and here some of the methodological problems bubble to the surface, particularly related to the use of language.<sup>70</sup> As Hundley notes, “the whole deity is considered to be the sum of its parts, and with each new added part the whole deity becomes greater.” At the same time, however, “Mesopotamians nowhere synthesize all of the parts into one cohesive whole.”<sup>71</sup> Rather, different aggregations of aspects serve different rhetorical purposes largely focused on emphasizing the potency of the deity. Hundley gives different reasons for the

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<sup>65</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 203–04; Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 69–72; Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?” 22–24.

<sup>66</sup> Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?” 22–23.

<sup>67</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 82–84.

<sup>68</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 84.

<sup>69</sup> He states, “Although, and perhaps because, the fluid Mesopotamian divine world allows for multiple complex ways of conceiving and depicting deities, divine multiplicity brings with it potential pitfalls. For example, as is already apparent, the relationship between aspects may become tenuous as well as the relationship of each aspect to the whole. In some cases, with Ištar in particular, different local manifestations are treated as different deities all together” (Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 96).

<sup>70</sup> It bears noting that while Hundley engages with Pongratz-Leisten’s divine agency model in some work (Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 211, n. 25; Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?” 25–26; Hundley, “The God Collectors,” 186–87, n. 76), in his primary articulation of his constellation model in “Here a God, There a God,” he nowhere mentions it.

<sup>71</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 81. Elsewhere, however, Hundley does suggest deities like Aššur and Marduk are “treated more holistically” (Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?” 34).

## Introduction

ancient avoidance of the full representation of the deity, mainly drawing from theological claims and from conceptual frameworks which he acknowledges are modern. He suggests, for instance, that a holistic perspective would require removing conflicting aspects in order to promote unity and cohesion, which would “at least according to modern western standards,” make “the deity less rather than more.”<sup>72</sup> On the theological side, Hundley appeals to the “nature of religious language,” and more specifically, to “the classical problem of trying to define and describe the supernatural divine in natural, human terms that the divine, by definition, transcends.”<sup>73</sup> The Mesopotamians, he suggests, had “a broader definition of deity than many modern perspectives.”<sup>74</sup>

Two concerns may be raised with these statements. First, the practice of defining conceptual categories—which constitutes reducing them to necessary and sufficient features—is not universal. Rather, it is a modern and artificial framework of categorization that stems primarily from an Aristotelian system of classification and has little to do with the way people form, use, and communicate about conceptual categories. To speak of ancient “definitions” is to impose a thoroughly modern, and thoroughly distorting, scholarly framework (more on this below). Second, there is nothing unique about “religious language,” and the fact that the supernatural is not amenable to definition is a perfectly *natural* byproduct of the artificiality of the definitional enterprise. The English-language conceptual categories “game” and “furniture” are not amenable to definition either, but this has precious little to do with the categories’ transcendence beyond the grasp of natural, human language (apart, perhaps, from the game of golf). Indeed, the notion that natural, human language is insufficient to encapsulate or grasp deity is a theological rationalization that is most often trotted out to explain away

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<sup>72</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 81, n. 71.

<sup>73</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 70. Hundley has appealed multiple times to this concept. See Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*, 12–13, 39; Hundley, *Gods in Dwelling*, 141–43.

<sup>74</sup> Hundley, “Here a God, There a God,” 74, n. 40. I will discuss Hundley’s paper on the מלאך and its relationship to YHWH (Hundley, “Of God and Angels”) in more detail the fifth chapter.



## Introduction

anthropomorphic descriptions of the divine, particularly in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>75</sup> A conceptualization of deity that cannot be articulated, however, is one that cannot be linguistically transmitted and therefore cannot be consciously shared.<sup>76</sup> It can have no bearing on how we understand or reconstruct conceptualizations of deity in ancient social groups.

Now, having said that, Hundley's constellation model *does* approximate important models of conceptual categorization, like Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" model and, to some degree, prototype theory. Hundley does not seem aware of this, however, and similar to the way Sommer attributes partible and permeable personhood only to deity, Hundley attributes his constellation model specifically to the dynamics of "religious language." In reality, frameworks related to this concept of constellations underlie human conceptualizations of most conceptual categories, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

In summary, this thesis seeks to better understand how the authors, editors, and earliest hearers/readers of the texts of the Hebrew Bible would have understood the nature and function of deity and divine agency, as well as their socio-material relationship to the world around them. Most contemporary approaches to this problem apply thoroughly modern conceptual frameworks that significantly distort their results. Beate Pongratz-Leisten's application of the cognitive sciences shows the most potential for helping us to better approximate those

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<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 3–4; Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 159; Marjo C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugaritic-Verlag, 1990), 627; Martin Klingbell, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography* (Switzerland: University of Fribourg, 1999), 23.

<sup>76</sup> The experiences transmitted through ritual are generally unrelated to divine profiles, but, again, are relative and, insofar as they cannot be articulated, they cannot be discussed, compared, harmonized, or passed on. The exception are the underlying intuitive frameworks discussed in this thesis, but these frameworks, as will be shown, differ dramatically from most all theological ones. For a recent cognitive perspective on ritual and early Christianity, see Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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fundamentals of ancient thought, but her work is quite preliminary, leaves some gaps, and has not been applied to the study of deity in the Hebrew Bible.

Pongratz-Leisten's work also fails to account for a concern I emphasize in closing: a fundamental consideration that is missing from all the models that have been discussed to this point is an acknowledgement of and engagement with the degree to which a person's language is embedded in, subordinate to, and reflective of their perception of the world around them, their position within it, and their socio-material relationship to it. In order to close this methodological gap, cognitive linguistics will be a critical part of my interrogation of the data in Chapters 5 and 6. Understanding how cognitive frameworks influenced the way persons conceptualized deity and divine agency in early Israel and Judah is a part of the puzzle I aim to solve, but if we overlook the cognitive processes involved in the deployment of written languages to articulate those conceptualizations, our engagement with the biblical literature will leave many pieces missing from the finished puzzle. The next chapter will discuss these and other methodological concerns in much greater detail.

# PART ONE

## CHAPTER 1

# Methodological Considerations

## Introduction

This thesis will be interdisciplinary in orientation, engaging a variety of disciplines and approaches, including anthropology, material studies, archaeology, evolutionary psychology, textual criticism, and others, but the two main approaches I will employ throughout are cognitive linguistics (CL) and the cognitive science of religion (CSR)—and even more specifically, a small number of theoretical models developed within these approaches. This chapter will introduce these disciplines and highlight critical contributions that each will make to the interrogation of the data, most importantly prototype theory (PT) and dual-process models of cognition. I note here that throughout this thesis I will use the term “mind” to refer broadly to the collection of networks that facilitate thinking, feeling, and knowing. While recognizing that these are physical processes carried out through material channels, I also recognize that the “mind” is not limited to the brain or even the body. In this sense, I adopt an “embodied mind” paradigm, which “insists that the mind is irreducible to the workings of any

single organ or system.”<sup>1</sup> I will also frequently use it etically in reference to socio-culturally mediated conceptualizations of the various internal loci of cognition and emotion, which tend to accrete around the head, the chest, or the abdomen.<sup>2</sup> Given that my approach abjures traditional definitions and will seek to challenge many of the dichotomies that have become comfortable conventions within the study of the Hebrew Bible, some other clarifying remarks about terminology will be made in this chapter.

## Cognitive Linguistics

My frameworks for analyzing the linguistic data for ancient representations of deity and divine agency will be derived from the insights of cognitive linguistics.<sup>3</sup> This approach applies methodologies and insights from the cognitive sciences to the study of language and meaning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 44. Note that I use “embodied” not to refer to some process of incarnation, but to the fundamentally material nature of cognition and its constituent processes. Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenges to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Margaret Wilson, “Six Views of Embodied Cognition,” *PsychBullRev* 9.4 (2002): 625–36.

<sup>2</sup> A concern may be raised with my willingness to use “mind” etically 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 entirely novel. Second, I am concerned for the distortion that the application of the framework of “religion” has wrought within contemporary Hebrew Bible scholarship. I feel the most convenient means of challenging that distortion is by demonstrating that the abandonment of the term poses no real threat to the integrity or clarity of the scholarship.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Westh has stated that “the Cognitive Science of Religion . . . does not offer a principled way of working with textual, or even linguistic material. While it attaches great importance to the representation of superhuman agents and their actions, very little attention is paid to actual, linguistically encoded concepts of the divine as people speak them and write them now” (Peter Westh, “Illuminator of the Wide Earth; Unbribable Judge; Strong Weapon of the Gods: Intuitive Ontology and Divine Epithets in Assyro-Babylonian Religious Texts,” in *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography*, ed. Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen [London: Equinox, 2011], 45). Westh does not find a solution with CL or PT, but with Pascal Boyer’s “Cognitive Optimum Theory” (Pascal Boyer, “Cognitive Constraints on Cultural Representations: Natural Ontologies and Religious Ideas,” in *Mapping the Mind*, ed. L.A. Hirschfield and S.A. Gelman [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 391–411; Boyer, “What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations,” *JRAI* 2.1 [1996]: 83–97; Boyer and Charles Ramble, “Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Crosscultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations,” *CogSci* 25.4 [2001]: 535–64). For an application of PT to the study of deity within the field of Assyriology, see Gebhard J. Selz, “The Divine Prototypes,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Brisch (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 13–32. Some of the material presented here is drawn in revised form from my 2013 Trinity Western University master’s thesis, “‘You Will Be Like the Gods’: The Hebrew Bible’s Conceptualization of Deity in Cognitive Perspective,” supervised by Craig C. Broyles.

<sup>4</sup> The literature of this field is phenomenally broad and pluriform, but for foundational texts and helpful introductions, see Charles J. Fillmore, “An Alternative to Checklist Theories of Meaning,” in *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, ed. Cathy Cogen et al. (Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics

Language is a function of our *embodied cognition*, meaning that it arises from a person's material composition and their materially mediated conceptualization of themselves and engagement with the world around them.<sup>5</sup> The discipline developed in the 1970s in large part as a response to the formalism of the generative linguistic theories of Chomsky, Montague, and others.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to those theories' compartmentalization of the cognitive faculties responsible for language, CL places emphasis on their relationship to each other and to socio-material experience, promoting a thoroughly embodied and generalizing perspective.<sup>7</sup>

Dirk Geeraerts describes the CL enterprise as “an approach to the analysis of natural language that focuses on language as an instrument for organizing, processing, and conveying information.”<sup>8</sup> The critical observation here is that language itself has a role in organizing and processing the data a person uses to understand themselves and the world around them. A

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Society, 1975), 123–31; Eleanor Rosch and Carolyn Mervis, “Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories,” *CogPsych* 7 (1975): 573–605; Ronald Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Volume 1: Theoretical Prerequisites* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); John Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); John Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); William Croft and D. Alan Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); René Dirven and Marjolijn Verspoor, *Cognitive Explorations of Language and Linguistics. Second Revised Edition* (Cognitive Linguistics in Practice 1; Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004); Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Dirk Geeraerts, ed., *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Vyvyan Evans, Benjamin K. Bergen, and Jörg Zinken, *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader* (London: Equinox, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion is Rune Nyord, *Breathing Flesh: Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, 2009), 10–14. Conceptualizations of the self and of others will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> For a comparison of generative and cognitive theories, see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 582–85. For a helpful discussion of the origins of cognitive linguistics and its guiding principles, see Vyvyan Evans, Benjamin K. Bergen, and Jörg Zinken, “The Cognitive Linguistics Enterprise: An Overview,” in Evans, Bergen, and Zinken, *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader*, 2–36.

<sup>7</sup> “[T]he Generalization Commitment represents a commitment to openly investigating how the various aspects of linguistic knowledge emerge from a common set of human cognitive abilities upon which they draw, rather than assuming that they are produced in encapsulated modules of the mind” (Evans, Bergen, and Zinken, “The Cognitive Linguistics Enterprise: An Overview,” in Evans, Bergen, and Zinken, *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader*, 4). As will be discussed below, CSR research has occasionally appealed to a modular conceptualization of cognition, often following Noam Chomsky (e.g., Juraj Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion?’” *Religio* 22.1 [2014]: 21–23). On “embodied cognition” in CL, see Evans, Bergen, and Zinken, “The Cognitive Linguistics Enterprise,” 7.

<sup>8</sup> Dirk Geeraerts, *Diachronic Prototype Semantics: A Contribution to Historic Lexicology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 7.

foundational principle of this approach is that language is not an autonomous faculty that operates *independently* of human cognition, but is rather one of the many integrated functions *of* that cognition. In other words, language is not an independent tool that one just manipulates in social performance; rather, it originates in and is governed by our experiences and how we perceive the world. This has far-reaching implications for understanding how meaning is made. To begin, because language is contingent on experience rather than something that exists apart from it, meaning will be based on our cumulative embodied cognitive experience.<sup>9</sup> We know what words mean because we have experience with their usage in contexts, not because they have inherent, formal, or autonomous semantic value.<sup>10</sup>

Next, because language is a cognitive faculty, meaning is constructed at a cognitive level, not at the level of the language itself. In other words, meaning is constructed by the mind, it does not inhabit spoken or written words. It is *conceptual*, or based on *concepts*, which can be described as “a person’s idea of what something in the world is like.”<sup>11</sup> Concepts are not identical to linguistic expressions. The latter are merely signifiers of semantic structures drawn up by our minds in a process of mental mapping called *conceptualization*. Because meaning-making is a process of construction and reconstruction, governed by our continued embodied experiences with language usage, meaning is not merely a “thing” that can be packaged and transferred in written or oral language; it is produced in our minds by our own personal and unique set of experiences. Ronald Langacker explains:

The word concept alludes to the claim that meaning resides in conceptualization (in the

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<sup>9</sup> Geeraerts, “A Rough Guide to Cognitive Linguistics,” in Geeraerts, *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, 5–6. William Croft and D. Alan Cruse explain, “categories and structures in semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology are built up from our cognition of specific utterances on specific occasions of use” (Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 3–4).

<sup>10</sup> This distinguishes cognitive linguistics from generative grammar, which subordinates the level of language usage to the level of structure (language structures are innate and universal). In cognitive linguistics, language structure and usage occur at the same level. Cf. Geeraerts and Cuyckens, “Introducing Cognitive Linguistics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, 3–7.

<sup>11</sup> Dirven and Verspoor, *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*, 13.

broadest sense of that term). Semantic structures are simply the conceptual structures evoked by linguistic expressions, and viable semantic analysis ultimately reduces to conceptual analysis. However, an expression's meaning consists of more than just conceptual content—equally important to linguistic semantics is how that content is shaped and construed. There are many different ways to construe a given body of content, and each construal represents a distinct meaning; this is my intent in saying that an expression imposes a particular image on the content it evokes.<sup>12</sup>

To facilitate the more efficient and consistent construal of conceptual content, our minds formulate and make use of basic metaphorical frameworks called “image schemata.”<sup>13</sup> These are pre-conceptual patterns, shapes, and relationships that can be used simply to give structure to more developed or abstract concepts.<sup>14</sup> In other words, we use more basic and simple concepts to *construe* or give structure to more complex and difficult concepts. Scholars have postulated a variety of image schemata, such as space schemata (UP-DOWN, BACK-FRONT, NEAR-FAR), source/path/goal schemata (TO, INTO, TOWARD, FROM), container/containment schemata (IN-OUT, WITHIN-WITHOUT), and force schemata (COMPULSION, BLOCKAGE, ENABLEMENT).<sup>15</sup> Because we are embodied entities, spatial and orientational schemata are among the most basic to which we have access, and so they inform a great deal of our

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald W. Langacker, *Concept, Image, and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar. Second Edition* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), xv. Langacker elsewhere describes “construal” as “our multifaceted capacity to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways” (Langacker, “Cognitive Grammar,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, 435).

<sup>13</sup> “[D]ifferent people may categorize the same thing in the world differently and even the same person may do so at different times. One person may describe a half-filled glass of wine as *half full* and another person may describe the same thing as *half empty*. Each person's choice between various alternatives is called **construal**” (Dirven and Verspoor, *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*, 14–15, emphases in original). For more detailed discussions of schemata, see Carl Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 18–40; and the essays in Beate Hampe, ed., *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> By “pre-conceptual,” I mean structures that exist apart from and prior to our active and conscious representation of concepts. Recent research suggests similar structures govern object and concept representation in some non-human animals. See Sarah E. Koopman, Bradford Z. Mahon, and Jessica C. Cantlon, “Evolutionary Constraints on Human Object Perception,” *CogSci* 41.8 (2017): 2126–48.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Johnson provides the following list of schemata, which he says is “highly selective, but it includes what I take to be most of the more important image schemata”: CONTAINER, BLOCKAGE, ENABLEMENT, PATH, CYCLE, PART-WHOLE, FULL-EMPTY, ITERATION, SURFACE, BALANCE, COUNTERFORCE, ATTRACTION, LINK, NEAR-FAR, MERGING, MATCHING, CONTACT, OBJECT, COMPULSION, RESTRAINT REMOVAL, MASS-COUNT, CENTER-PERIPHERY, SCALE, SPLITTING, SUPERIMPOSITION, PROCESS, COLLECTION (Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 126).



conceptualizations of ourselves and the world around us.<sup>16</sup> (It should be noted that, although they are frequently illustrated, image schemata are abstract and are not limited to visual properties.)

As an example of how these image schemata work, the UP-DOWN schema maps abstract concepts against a vertical spatial relationship, providing structure that facilitates memory and comprehension. The UP-DOWN schema most commonly reflects the relative position of items on a vertical axis,<sup>17</sup> and it may derive from the upright stance and gait of healthy humans. It appears to be nearly universal, and a vast array of abstractions is intuitively mapped against it to produce what are called conceptual metaphors.<sup>18</sup> The following are common English-language examples based on the UP-DOWN schema:<sup>19</sup>

GOOD IS UP; BAD IS DOWN  
Things are looking *up*  
We are at an all-time *low*

HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN  
My spirits are *up*  
He's feeling *down*

VIRTUE IS UP; DEPRAVITY IS DOWN  
She has *high* standards  
I wouldn't *stoop* that *low*

CONTROL IS UP; SUBJUGATION IS DOWN  
She's in a *superior* position  
They are *under* my control

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<sup>16</sup> Lakoff and Johnson state, “the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant spatial experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment. Concepts that emerge in this way are concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way” (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 56–57).

<sup>17</sup> While the lower position can extend below an axis' zero point, focus is usually trained on space above it.

<sup>18</sup> For detailed accounts of conceptual metaphors, see Zoltán Kövecses, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, ed. Elena Semino and Zsófia Demjén (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 13–27; Zoltán Kövecses, “Levels of Metaphor,” *CogLing* 28.2 (2017): 321–47. Cf. Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 6–23. Sometimes the terms “image schema” and “conceptual metaphor” are conflated (cf. George Lakoff, “Image Metaphors,” *MSA* 2.3 [1987]: 219–22).

<sup>19</sup> The examples are drawn primarily from John I. Saeed, *Semantics. Second Edition* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 347. Note that while this example reflects modern English usage, this schema is common to many cultures and languages around the world, including, as will be shown, those of the authors/editors of the biblical texts.

Other image schemata can include subordinate schemata, like CONTAINER (INTERIOR + EXTERIOR + BOUNDARY) or PATH (SOURCE + GOAL).

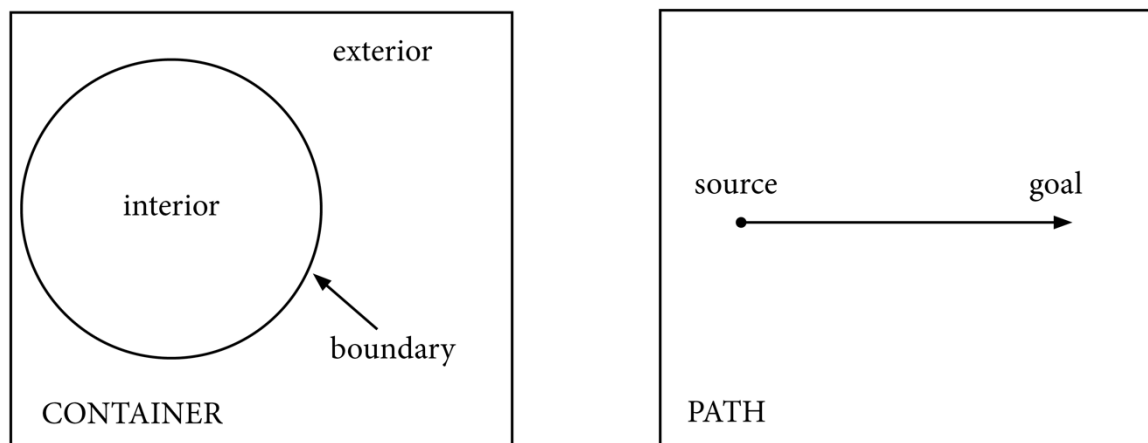


Fig. 1.1<sup>20</sup>

Understanding how these schemata contribute to conceptual metaphors, and how they differ synchronically and diachronically, can help us better interrogate our texts.<sup>21</sup> As a common example, in today’s English-speaking world, a conceptual metaphor to which we default is TRUTH IS AN OBJECT. The truth can be hidden, found, handled, twisted, buried, dug up, stretched, given, and provided in parts, halves, and wholes.<sup>22</sup> This conceptual metaphor is the framework that facilitates our thinking, talking, and even acting in relation to the abstract concept of “truth.” It is conceptual shorthand that we use to simplify concepts that would otherwise require a great deal of cognitive effort to adequately describe or contemplate.<sup>23</sup> The

<sup>20</sup> These illustrations are adapted from Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Although it should be noted that conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors are not always the same thing. For a discussion of this and related dynamics, see Zoltán Kövecses, “Methodological Issues in Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” in *Windows to the Mind: Metaphor, Metonymy and Conceptual Blending*, ed. Sandra Handl and Hans-Jörg Schmid (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 23–39.

<sup>22</sup> See Kenneth A. McElhanon, “From Word to Scenario: The Influence of Linguistic Theories upon Models of Translation,” *JT* 1.3 (2005): 55–56.

<sup>23</sup> A common example in the literature addressing conceptual metaphors is ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 4–5): “Your claims are *indefensible*. He *attacked every weak point* in my argument. His criticisms were *right on target*. I *demolished* his argument. I’ve never *won* an argument with him. You disagree? Okay, *shoot!* If you use that *strategy*, he’ll *wipe you out*. He *shot down* all of my arguments.”

## CHAPTER 1 – Methodological Considerations

Christian scriptures default to a different conceptual metaphor, however: TRUTH IS A PATH.<sup>24</sup> John 16:13, for instance, states, ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάση, “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth.” One can πλανᾶω, “wander from,” or ἀστοχέω, “depart from,” truth in James 5:19 and 2 Timothy 2:18. The author of 3 John 1:4 comments that they have no greater joy than this: ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα, “to hear that my children are walking in truth.” These authors and those influenced by the same conceptual metaphor thought about and talked about “truth” in significantly different ways. We decidedly distort our interrogation of the past if we simply impose our own conceptual metaphors upon these texts.<sup>25</sup> It is particularly problematic for our interrogation of deity in the first millennium BCE if we are imposing philosophical and/or theological frameworks about the divine developed over the two millennia since.

Next, because our cognition draws upon our overall experiences with language and communication, meaning is constructed from our “encyclopedic” knowledge rather than our “dictionary” knowledge. It is not a set of necessary and sufficient features neatly tying off a tidy little box of semantic content that governs our understanding and use of words (more on this below), but our experiences with their usage throughout the past and in a variety of contexts. That reliance on “encyclopedic” knowledge, or an “open-ended body of knowledge,”<sup>26</sup> also means a lexical item is not governed by a strict linguistic boundary.<sup>27</sup> Rather, as Ronald Langacker (one of the pioneers of the cognitive linguistics movement) states, “a lexical item draws upon (taps into) general knowledge in a gradient manner, with no specific

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<sup>24</sup> This likely builds on the Hebrew Bible concept of walking in the correct “way” or “path.”

<sup>25</sup> This is inevitable in many ways, and it is precisely how the Christian scriptures engage with the Hebrew Bible, but a scholarly approach ought to be committed to mitigating that distortion to the degree possible.

<sup>26</sup> Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.

<sup>27</sup> There is also not a sharp boundary separating the two kinds of knowledge. See Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 30; Geeraerts, “Prototype Theory: Prospects and Problems of Prototype Theory,” in Geeraerts, *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, 142–43. For encyclopedic knowledge, see Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 81–98; R. W. Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Volume 1*, 154–66. See also Terrance Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God” within the Pentateuch: A Cognitive-Semantic Investigation in Literary Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 31–33.

cut off point.”<sup>28</sup> The following schematizes these differences:

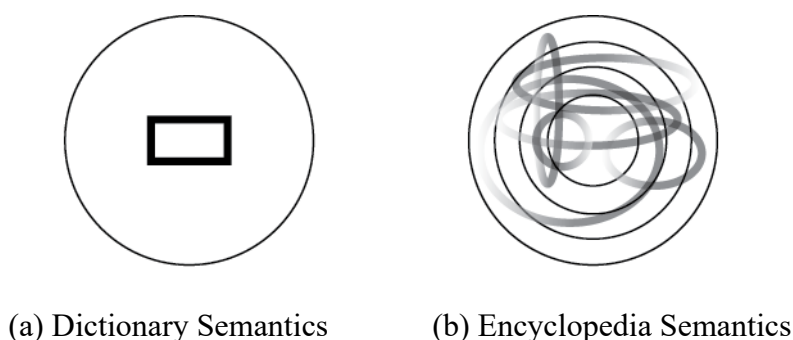


Fig. 1.2

Linguistic units are thus merely prompts for meaning-construction, which is “the accessing of a cognitive structure embedded in patterns of knowledge and belief.”<sup>29</sup> When a statement is heard, the hearer intuitively hierarchizes the conceptual structures that they have come to understand by convention to be symbolized by that semantic unit in order to *profile*, or designate, a particular sense as the most likely intended.

### *Profiles and Bases*

The construction of meaning is facilitated by profiles and bases. According to Langacker, “The semantic value of an expression . . . derives from the designation of a specific entity identified and characterized by its position within a larger configuration.”<sup>30</sup> Concepts do not function autonomously, but in relation to other concepts.<sup>31</sup> For example, the word “radius” cannot be

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<sup>28</sup> Langacker, “Context, Cognition, and Semantics,” in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 188. Here is where the value of dichotomies begins to break down, but that breakdown will be more thoroughly illustrated in the discussion below on prototype theory.

<sup>29</sup> Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 26; cf. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 83.

<sup>30</sup> Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1.183.

<sup>31</sup> “A central principle of cognitive semantics is that concepts do not occur as isolated, atomic units in the mind, but can only be comprehended (by the speaker as well as by the analyst) in a context of presupposed, background knowledge structures” (T. C. Clausner and W. Croft, “Domains and Image Schemas,” *CogLing* 10.1 [1999]: 2).

understood apart from the concept *circle*. Fig. 1.3 illustrates this relationship. The bold straight line is what the word “radius” profiles, or designates, within the configuration, and is thus called the *profile*.<sup>32</sup> The circle represents the base against which the word “radius” is understood.<sup>33</sup>

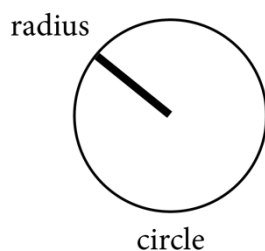


Fig. 1.3

A conceptual base is required for an adequate understanding of a semantic expression.<sup>34</sup> Many semantic units have multiple and complicated conceptual bases, and many involve more than one profile. As an example, we may profile the concept of “aunt” against the kinship system illustrated in Fig. 1.4. The parent/child, spouse, sibling, and male/female concepts are all required on at least the intuitive level for an adequate conceptualization of the prototypical sense.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The profile is not to be confused with an expression’s referent (Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 194). The former is a conceptualization that inhabits a mental space, while the latter is an instantiation in the real world of that concept. This organization of conceptual structures originated with a theory called Frame Semantics, which was pioneered primarily by Charles J. Fillmore in the 1970s and 80s (Fillmore, “An Alternative to Checklist Theories of Meaning,” 123–31; Fillmore, “Frame Semantics,” in *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*, ed. The Linguistic Society of Korea [Seoul: Hanshin Publishing Company, 1982], 111–37; Fillmore, “Frames and the Semantics of Understanding,” *QS* 6 [1985]: 222–54). Cf. Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 7–39; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 28–31.

<sup>33</sup> This example is used as an illustration in several publications: Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1.86–87; Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 14–16; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 29–30.

<sup>34</sup> According to John Taylor, a base is “the conceptual content that is inherently, intrinsically, and obligatorily invoked by the expression” (Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 195).

<sup>35</sup> This and the following images are adapted from R. W. Langacker, “Theory, Method, and Description in Cognitive Grammar: A Case Study,” in *Cognitive Linguistics Today*, ed. Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Kamila Turewicz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 15–16.

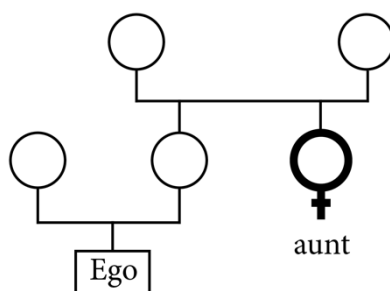


Fig. 1.4

### *Domains and Matrices*

Some knowledge is more general and relative and can be indicated by the context of a semantic expression. In the current theoretical model, this knowledge is organized into what are called “domains.”<sup>36</sup> This word suggests a conceptual field within which there can be movement and differentiation, as opposed to the word “base,” which suggests a foundation.<sup>37</sup> There is often a great deal of conceptual overlap between a base and a domain, but Taylor suggests considering “how intrinsic the broader conceptualization is to the semantic unit, how immediately relevant it is, and to what extent aspects of the broader conceptualization are specifically elaborated.”<sup>38</sup> For instance, “thumbnail” profiles against “thumb” as its base. “Thumb,” in turn, profiles against “hand,” which itself profiles against “arm,” which profiles against “torso,” or even “human body.” It would be imprecise to say “thumb” profiles against “human body” as its base, though. Rather, “human body” constitutes the domain within which multiple profile/base relationships may operate, with or without direct reference to the former.<sup>39</sup>

Just as a domain may comprise multiple different profiles and bases, most semantic

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 195–203. Other linguists do not distinguish between a base and a domain (Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1.147–56; Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 24–32; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 28–31).

<sup>37</sup> “The term ‘domain’ implies a degree of cognitive independence not found in a dimension [base]” (Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 25).

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 195–96.

<sup>39</sup> For the domain for *human body*, see Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1.147–54.

expressions can be conceptualized against multiple domains.<sup>40</sup> Take, for instance, the statement, “Gosh, it feels like a Monday.” The profile and base of “Monday” may be illustrated as follows:

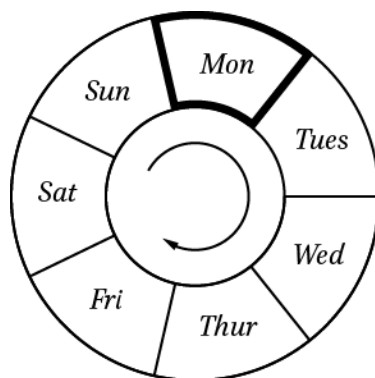


Fig. 1.5

In order for our statement to be adequately understood, the domains of the Monday–Friday workweek, the weekend, and the drudgery of the “rat-race” are required (among others). Fig. 1.6 illustrates the conceptual matrix that forms to activate the appropriate semantic sense. The organization of multiple domains (here  $D^1$ – $D^4$ )<sup>41</sup> into a conventionalized semantic construct will be called a “matrix.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Cognitive Grammar*, 196–201.

<sup>41</sup> This is for illustrative purposes only. I am not identifying specific domains.

<sup>42</sup> George Lakoff’s term for this configuration is Ideal Cognitive Model, or ICM (Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 68–76), but “matrix” has been more common in the scholarship (Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 25–27).

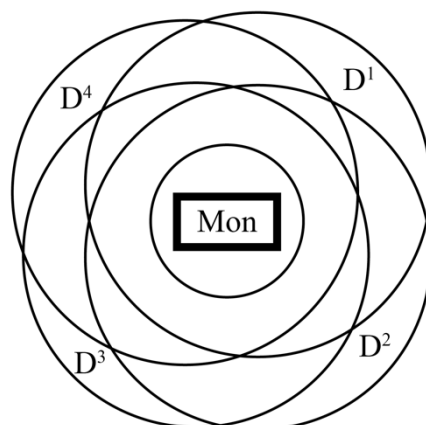


Fig. 1.6

In the above illustration, each domain appears to contribute equally to the overall matrix, but in reality, the different domains are hierarchized according to a number of factors. Often semantic meaning requires the foregrounding of one domain against another. According to Langacker,

The semantic value of an expression is consequently not exhausted by specifying its designatum and listing the inventory of domains in its matrix. A predicate is further characterized by its ranking of domains in terms of their prominence and likelihood of activation.<sup>43</sup>

We might illustrate this hierarchizing in the following way (Fig. 1.7), with the darker circles representing the more prominent semantic domains:

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<sup>43</sup> Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1.165.



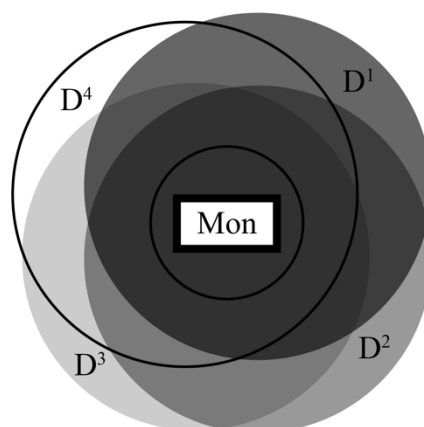


Fig. 1.7

A simple example that involves a variety of domains is that of the term *mother*.<sup>44</sup> George Lakoff identifies five different domains that may be activated by the term in reference to a human:<sup>45</sup>

- (1) Birth domain: “the person who gives birth is the *mother*.”
- (2) Genetic domain: “the female who contributes the genetic material is the *mother*.”
- (3) Nurturance domain: “the female adult who nurtures and raises a child is the *mother*.”
- (4) Marital domain: “the wife of the father is the *mother*.”
- (5) Genealogical domain: “the closest female ancestor is the *mother*.”

In the prototypical matrix associated with the concept *mother*, these domains all converge, with the birth domain generally prioritized. Any particular instantiation of the concept, however, may profile against any number of these domains. For instance, a *birth mother* might not raise her child or be married to the father, thus only activating domains (1), (2), and (5), with domain (1) prioritized. A *donor mother* does not give birth to her child, and may only activate domain (2). A *foster mother* will not have given birth to the child or have contributed genetic material,

<sup>44</sup> See, originally, Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 74–76, 79–89; cf. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 86–87; Croft and Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 74. He uses the term “model,” but the concept is the same as our term “domain” (cf. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 86).

activating only domains (3) and (4), with the former taking priority. In each case, the context or some qualifier will make it possible for informed listeners (those with the adequate encyclopedic knowledge) to identify the hierarchy of domains and adequately interpret the term's meaning.

### *Conceptual Blending*

Just as image schemata can be imposed on more complex concepts in an effort to make communication about them and their cognitive processing more efficient and consistent, concepts themselves can be imposed—or better, mapped—on each other to highlight certain properties or create new conceptual metaphors.<sup>46</sup> This process is called conceptual blending. According to early versions of the theory, conceptually relatable elements of two or more input spaces are projected onto a “blend space,” which represents the focal point of the conceptual blend.<sup>47</sup> The structural elements shared by the two input spaces are retained in a “generic space.” The pioneers of this theoretical model, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, illustrated the concept in the following way:

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<sup>46</sup> Boyang Li et al., “Goal-Driven Conceptual Blending: A Computational Approach for Creativity,” in *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Computational Creativity*, ed. Mary Lou Maher et al. (Dublin: Open University Press, 2012), 1. See also Joseph E. Grady, Todd Oakley, and Seana Coulson, “Blending and Metaphor,” in *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics. Selected Papers from the Fifth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, Amsterdam, July 1997*, ed. Raymon W. Gibbs Jr., and Gerard J. Steen (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 101–24; Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 23–30; Zoltan Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction. Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 267–83; Réka Benczes, “Blending and Creativity in Metaphorical Compounds: A Diachronic Investigation,” in Handl and Schmid, *Windows to the Mind*, 247–67. For an application of this theory to biblical studies, see Pierre J. P. Van Hecke, “Conceptual Blending: A Recent Approach to Metaphor Illustrated with the Pastoral Metaphor in Hos 4,16,” in *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Pierre J. P. Van Hecke (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 215–32.

<sup>47</sup> See Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, “Conceptual Integration Networks,” *CogSci* 22.2 (1998): 133–87; Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

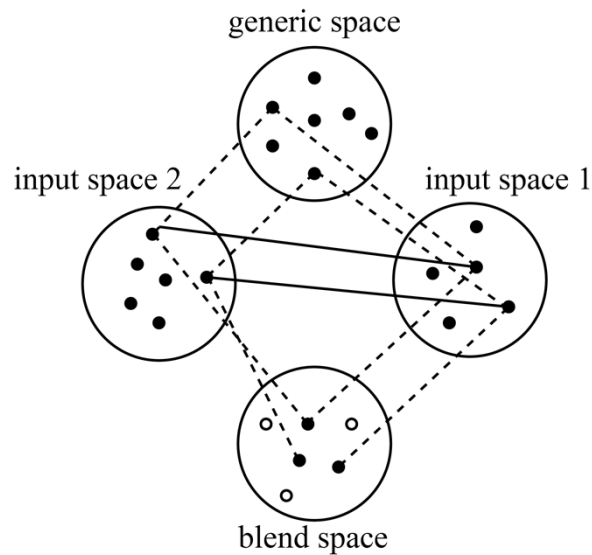


Fig. 1.8

Within this illustration, the larger circles represent mental spaces, and the black dots represent their relevant constituent elements. The dotted lines indicate correspondences between the elements, while the solid lines show mappings between the input spaces. The small circles in the blend space represent emergent structures arising from the blend.

While most conceptual blends occur within active “on-line” discourse, and function primarily to highlight certain properties of one input space by comparing them to elements of another (“this surgeon is a butcher,” for example<sup>48</sup>), standalone blends are those that produce an independent and durative concept that ultimately develops its own conceptual profile. A simple example of such a blend is the lightsaber, which combines into an independent blend space the properties of a sword and a laser emitter. In this way, the familiar sword-fighting motifs of classical adventure tales can be carried over into futuristic science fiction contexts. The lightsaber is not merely a metaphor used to comment on either a sword or a laser emitter, but rather functions independently as a discreet entity, developing its own conceptual structures

<sup>48</sup> Li et al., “Goal-Driven Conceptual Blending,” 1; cf. Tony Veale and Diarmuid P. O’Donoghue, “Computation and Blending,” *CogLing* 11.3–4 (2000): 253–81.

as it operates within its own contexts.<sup>49</sup>

### *Prototype Theory*

Prototype theory will be particularly relevant to our analysis of ancient conceptualizations of categories like “religion” and “deity.” In the traditional sense, a dictionary definition of a concept, term, or category provides a list of features shared by all the accepted members of that category in a way that distinguishes those members from those of other categories. These features are generally referred to as “necessary and sufficient features” (or “conditions”). They are *necessary* for membership in the category and they are *sufficient* for distinction from other categories. As an example of how this informs dictionary definitions, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “bird” as:

Any feathered vertebrate animal: a member of the second class (Aves) of the great Vertebrate group, the species of which are most nearly allied to the Reptiles, but distinguished by their warm blood, feathers, and adaptation of the fore limbs as wings, with which most species fly in the air.<sup>50</sup>

Here the first segment of the definition provides the broadest set of features necessary and sufficient to distinguish birds from all other categories: (1) feathered (2) vertebrate (3) animal. Possession of those three features absolutely determines membership in the category. The rest of the definition fills out a clearer picture of the relationship of the category to others, adding other features that are not sufficient for distinction, such as warm blood and “adaptation of fore limbs as wings” that help “most species fly in the air.” Because it occurs in nature and is

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<sup>49</sup> Later iterations of the theory criticized Fauconnier and Turner’s neglect of the context in which conceptual blends take place, but as I am not addressing blends arising within active contemporary discourse, that omission is not a concern. For context-dependent blending, see Line Brandt and Per Aage Brandt, “Making Sense of a Blend: A Cognitive-Semantic Approach to Metaphor,” in *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 3, ed. F. J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), 216–49; Li et al., “Goal-Driven Conceptual Blending,” 2–8.

<sup>50</sup> This comes from the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)).

biologically discrete, the category “bird” is more amenable to delineation by means of necessary and sufficient features,<sup>51</sup> but the assumption underlying most dictionary definitions—namely that this approach to categorization can adequately delineate all concepts—is incorrect; it presupposes a conceptual substructure of necessary and sufficient features underlying and governing the formation and use of categories, and that is demonstrably not the case.<sup>52</sup> Our contemporary reflective systems of categorization do not adequately approximate our intuitive systems, and this results in misunderstanding and distortion.

Research taking place in the early 1970s within the field of cognitive psychology led to an alternative approach to understanding categorization. That research was examining the perception of color, and it showed through a series of studies that colors tend to have natural focal areas across cultural boundaries, despite the inconsistent nature of its perception and fact that the color spectrum lacks natural boundaries.<sup>53</sup> Cognitivists began to investigate the possibility that this phenomenon extended to other kinds of categories, and a series of experiments conducted by Eleanor Rosch seemed to provide empirical evidence that it did. In one early experiment, Rosch asked psychology students<sup>54</sup> to rate different items according to

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<sup>51</sup> Although even this is not a clear-cut as we assume. For one discussion of the complexities of the “species problem,” see Jonathan Jong, “What Are Human Beings (That You Are Mindful of Them)? Notes from Neo-Darwinism and Neo-Aristotelianism,” in *Issues in Science and Theology: Are We Special? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*, ed. Michael Fuller et al. (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 79–97.

<sup>52</sup> The roots of this presupposition have been traced by linguists back to Aristotle. Taylor provides a helpful summary of this method of categorization and identifies four basic assumptions inherent in the presupposition: (1) “Categories are defined in terms of a conjunction of necessary and sufficient features,” (2) “Features are binary,” (3) “Categories have clear boundaries,” and (4) “All members of a category have equal status” (Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 21–37, esp. 23–24).

<sup>53</sup> Eleanor Rosch explains, “For English speakers, some colors are judged better examples of basic color names than others, and the better an example a color is, the shorter the time it takes to name it, the better the memory for the color in memory tests, and, for children, the earlier the color name is learned” (Rosch, “‘Slow Lettuce’: Categories, Concepts, Fuzzy Sets, and Logical Deduction,” in *Concepts and Fuzzy Logic*, ed. Radim Belohlavek and George J. Klir [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011], 94). The findings were the same for the Dani tribe in New Guinea, who do not have terms for different hues in their language. See also Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Eleanor Rosch Heider, “‘Focal’ Color Areas and the Development of Color Names,” *DevPsych* 4 (1971): 447–55; Rosch, “On the Internal Structure of Perceptual and Semantic Categories,” in *Cognitive Development and the Acquisition of Language*, ed. Timothy E. Moore (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 111–44; Catlin Mervis and Rosch, “Development of the Structure of Color Categories,” *DevPsych* 11 (1975): 54–60; Rosch, “Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories,” *JEPG* 104.3 (1975): 192–233.

<sup>54</sup> See page 9 above related to study participants from WEIRD societies.

how well they represented a given category term (the categories were furniture, fruit, vehicle, weapon, vegetable, carpenter’s tool, bird, sport, toy). The results showed a high degree of consistency in the way the different items were ranked, and particularly with those items considered most prototypical of the categories. An apple was consistently ranked as a good example of “fruit”; a strawberry was a slightly less good example; a fig was a poor example. This consistency suggests categories can be internally graded; that is, certain items can be better examples of a given category than others.<sup>55</sup>

Rosch described the fundamental process of categorization as follows:

[P]eople form and use an idea and/or image of the category that represents the category to them, and which is more like (or more easily generates) the good than the poorer examples of the category. That representation often serves as the reference point to which people refer when performing tasks relevant to the category, such as identifying something as a member of the category or using the category in some other way.<sup>56</sup>

Membership in a category is thus determined by some perception of similarity to a prototypical exemplar,<sup>57</sup> which directly conflicts with the traditional binary notion of categorization constructed upon necessary and sufficient features. Now, these prototypes are not individual members of a category, but cognitive exemplars or idealized conceptualizations.<sup>58</sup> We conceive of these prototypes according to broad outlines rather than extensive details.<sup>59</sup> If asked to

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<sup>55</sup> Rosch, “Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories,” 197–99.

<sup>56</sup> Rosch, ““Slow Lettuce,”” 99.

<sup>57</sup> The notion of “similarity” is itself quite a complicated concept that will not be dealt with here. See James A. Hampton, “Associative and Similarity-Based Processes in Categorization Decisions,” *MemCog* 25 (1997): 625–40.

<sup>58</sup> Describing developments in the field of prototype theory, Patrizia Violi states, “It became clear that it was not possible, at least for semantic applications, to think of the prototype as the concrete instance of the most prototypical member of any given category, and consequently as a real individual. Instead, it was necessary to turn it into a mental construal: an abstract entity made up of prototypical properties. In his way the prototype, being the result of a mental construction, frees itself from any concrete evidence, and as such may well never be actualized in reality as any real instance” (Violi, “Prototypicality, Typicality, and Context,” in *Meaning and Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Liliana Albertazzi [Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000], 107).

<sup>59</sup> This is limited to the basic level of categorization, which is the first level of categorization learned in childhood, the most common level used in language and cognition (Rosch et al., “Basic Objects in Natural Categories,” 383–84; Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 48–51), and the level indicated by default throughout this

imagine the concept “bird,” for instance, most will imagine something closer to the vague approximation of (a) rather than the detail and specificity of (b):



Fig. 1.9

Three particularly relevant axioms have developed out of this approach to categorization: (1) categories are not defined by a set of necessary and sufficient features, but by some manner of similarity to a prototype (whether physical, functional, conceptual, or some other type of similarity); (2) Category membership is usually graded (categories have better and poorer members);<sup>60</sup> (3) Categories usually have fuzzy boundaries. Attention is focused inward on the center of the category and its typical members, not outward on its boundaries or total membership. As a result, categories do not develop and are not learned through delineation of the boundaries, but through experience with the prototypical members. Boundaries develop as a need arises for them, and so often have a large degree of arbitrariness.

These three axioms can be effectively illustrated using the example of the category “furniture.” The *OED* provides the following definition for the most common sense of the word: “Movable articles, whether useful or ornamental, in a dwelling-house, place of business,

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thesis. The superordinate level of categorization brings together more disparate concepts that cannot be consolidated within a single illustration. One cannot draw an outline of the categories *animal* or *furniture*, but one can easily draw an outline of a *dog* or a *chair*. At the subordinate level, where we would find *mallard* or *beanbag chair*, there is a degree of specification that requires more detailed conceptualization. Prototype effects are found at each level, but we are concerned primarily with the basic level.

<sup>60</sup> Willett Kempton, *The Folk Classification of Ceramics: A Study of Cognitive Prototypes* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

or public building.” This list of necessary and sufficient features is quite broad as a result of the wide variety of forms and functions possessed by articles commonly labeled “furniture,” which renders the definition of virtually no use in adjudicating what qualifies as furniture. Any useful or ornamental movable item brought into a dwelling-house, place of business, or public building would qualify under this definition as furniture, no matter how ludicrous it might otherwise sound to refer to it as furniture. This would prioritize the conceptual substructure of necessary and sufficient features over usage, despite the fact that dictionaries ostensibly base their definitions on usage. Gradations of prototypicality are also abundant in the category. Chairs and dressers are considered highly prototypical of the category, whereas a rug, a telephone, or an ashtray are considered to be peripheral, or members of low prototypicality. In fact, few people would include an ashtray or telephone in the category of “furniture,” demonstrating the rather unclear and debatable boundaries of the category.

Prototype theory and other principles developed within CL will inform this thesis’ engagement with ancient and modern texts, but as stated earlier, it will mainly be relevant to our discussion of categories like “religion” and “deity”. Regarding these categories, scholars from a few different disciplines have noted the difficulty with providing satisfactory definitions of each. While a variety of alternatives have been proposed for both categories, very few scholars have applied prototype theory directly to their analysis. This framework has much to contribute to our understanding of these categories in their modern usage and our analysis of the Hebrew Bible.

### *Implications*

Applying these frameworks to the interrogation of the Hebrew Bible and the epigraphic remains of ancient Israel, Judah, and wider Southwest Asia helps the scholar to more confidently reconstruct fundamental conceptual categories. In short, they reveal the conceptual



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substructures undergirding linguistic and literary expressions. As an example, positing a conceptual base for the profile “deity”—as I will do in Chapter 4—is considerably more complex than that of “radius,” but it further fleshes out the concept’s interpretive context, it allows us to set aside the artificial dichotomies inherent in reducing the category to necessary and sufficient features, and it gives us a foundation upon which to begin to more confidently reassemble the conceptual frameworks of the concept of deity. Such a base need not constitute the essence of deity, simply a conceptual context apart from which the profile cannot be adequately conceptualized. Once the domains and matrices that constitute the literary manifestations of deity are identified, we can examine their prioritization and hierarchization to better understand what aspects of deity served what rhetorical functions in what contexts. Beginning with prototypical features and then moving to the unique, unexpected, and innovative features allows us to better understand not only the core and contours of the concept, but its fuzzy and contested boundaries. Interrogating the contexts in which authors wrangle with those boundaries further clarifies the areas of contention and, when examined diachronically, the developmental trajectories of the concept. In this way, the universals of the structure and function of language can be used to fill in some of the cultural lacunae that have so frequently frustrated scholars and compelled them toward more presentistic assumptions.

On a final note, the terminology I use throughout this thesis is used with prototype theory in mind. What that means is that I use that terminology in reference to prototypical conceptualizations of the categories I reference, recognizing their often-fuzzy boundaries, contextual nature, and overlap with other categories. As an example, I try to avoid it, but if I use the term “Western,” I use it as shorthand for societies where the scientific and philosophical influences of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment are socioculturally salient. While the prototypical Western societies in my perspective are concentrated in nations located in or descended from those of western Europe, this is not a “West and the rest” dichotomy that

clearly delineates a specific collection of language communities, geographic regions, or political entities. Rather it refers to one side of a spectrum of societies while also recognizing that the salience of that influence is not static, but contextually emergent to different degrees and in different ways in societies across almost the entire spectrum. I try to minimize such loaded terms, however.

## “Religion”

Any attempt to reconstruct ancient ideologies and worldviews must engage with the imposition of modern conceptual frameworks to schematize the data. If scholars understand those ancient data to fall under the category of “religion,” that significantly impacts the frameworks over which they choose to clothe their reconstructions.<sup>61</sup> Every time I refer to religious *texts*, religious *beliefs*, religious *practices*, and any other religious domains of experience, I evoke an entire suite of conceptual structures that may be unwanted. Far beyond simply shaping our discourse about these issues and the conclusions we reach, when these frameworks move beyond being provisional heuristics that are consistently critiqued and compared to others, they become, over the years, cemented into our conceptual architecture and they govern how we are able to *think* and *communicate* about them. At that point, they become “stultifying conventions”<sup>62</sup> that might not only evade detection, but might effectively marshal academic consensus and other power structures against their uprooting.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For some examples of how the data can be obscured by the simple imposition of the framework of “religion,” see Brent Nongbri, “Dislodging ‘Embedded’ Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope,” *Numen* 55.4 (2008): 440–60.

<sup>62</sup> This is drawn from comments from Benson Saler on the use of definitions in anthropological analysis: “Explicit definitions are explicit heuristics: they guide or impel us in certain directions. By doing so they tend to divert our attention from information beyond the channels they cleave, and so choke off possibilities. That can sometimes be something of an advantage, since it facilitates focused and orderly attention to one set of possibilities at a time. But it is only an advantage if heuristics are evaluated and compared relative to situational applications. If heuristics are not deemed provisional, subjected to criticism, and compared to alternative, they may well become stultifying conventions” (Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* [New York: Berghahn Books, 2000], 74–75).

<sup>63</sup> This scholarship is overwhelmingly produced by elite, white, straight, Western, males, which privileges a

## CHAPTER 1 – Methodological Considerations

A current example of such a convention within contemporary scholarship related to the Hebrew Bible and the archaeology of early Israel and Judah is the putative dichotomy of “official” and “popular” (or “folk”) religion.<sup>64</sup> According to William Dever, a well-known proponent of this framework, “there is a rather sharp dichotomy between what most of the writers and editors of the Hebrew Bible prescribe as the ‘religion of Israel’ and what we can now describe as the reality of religious practices in many other circles.”<sup>65</sup> Dever calls the ideologies of the biblical writers and editors “Book religion,” which operates in stark contrast to “folk religion.” The product of this dichotomy is an arbitrary and artificial compartmentalization and hierarchization of the data. Much modern and European/American scholarship related to religion tends toward such binary modes of thinking, in no small part because they facilitate the clear and convenient delimitation and delineation of concepts and categories, which primarily serves the structuring of values and power.

### *Defining Religion*

Enough scholarship has been published in recent years tracing the development of the concept of “religion” from its roots in the Roman concept of *religio* down through the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment that it need not be repeated here,<sup>66</sup> but there will be some

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small set of perspectives that tend to be more closely tied to the power structures that have given shape to the contemporary conceptualization of religion.

<sup>64</sup> See Francesca Stavrakopoulou, “‘Popular’ Religion and ‘Official’ Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal,” in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 37–58.

<sup>65</sup> William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 90.

<sup>66</sup> See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ernst Feil, “From Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*: Elements of a Transformation between 1550–1650,” in *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality*, ed. Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 31–43; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Ernst Feil, *Religio: Zweiter Band. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs zwischen Reformation und Rationalismus (ca. 1540–1620)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84; Ernst Feil, *Religio: Dritter Band. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001); Tomoko

value to addressing the need for a definition of “religion.” The conventional academic wisdom holds that before we engage in analysis of a phenomenon or concept, it is necessary to establish precisely what it is we will be analyzing,<sup>67</sup> which usually takes the form of a section committed to defining terms. I argued above, however, that when it comes to conceptual terminology, definitions are more about creating semantic boundaries than about identifying them. A definition of a conceptual category presupposes that its formation and use was and is governed by some underlying conceptual substructure, which is demonstrably *not* how our minds function and also not how the concept of “religion” developed.<sup>68</sup> *Sui generis* categories with empirical existence outside of our discourse about them need not rely on that presupposition, but even if we accepted that there was something empirically “out there” called “religion” that exists apart from our discursive cultural reification of it, our inability to produce a serviceable definition raises questions. Despite movement away from that concern for definition in the last

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Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Max Weber famously stated in 1922 that “To define ‘religion,’ to say what it *is*, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study” (Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff [Boston: Beacon Press, 1993], 1). As has been pointed out by virtually all who have cited him, Weber did not conclude the study with a definition. For other recent discussions on defining religion, see Melford E. Spiro, “Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (Oxford: Routledge, 1966), 85–126; Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian C. Wilson, eds., *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, & Explanations* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk, eds., *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Andrew M. McKinnon, “Sociological Definitions, Language Fames, and the ‘Essence’ of Religion,” *M TSR* 14.1 (2002): 61–83; Arthur L. Greil and David G. Bromley, eds., *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and Secular* (Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald, 2003); Victoria S. Harrison, “The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-cultural World,” *IJPhilRel* 59 (2006): 133–52; Stewart E. Guthrie, “Opportunity, Challenge and a Definition of Religion,” *JSRNC* 1.1 (2007): 58–67; William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, “On the Definition of Religion,” in *The Sacred is the Profane: The Political Nature of Religion*, ed. William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–30; Doug Oman, “Defining Religion and Spirituality,” in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. Second Edition*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York: Guilford, 2013), 23–47; Jeffrey Guhin, “Religion as Site Rather Than Religion as Category: On the Sociology of Religion’s Export Problem,” *SocRel* 75.4 (2014): 579–93; Juraj Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion’?” *Religio* 22.1 (2014): 3–27; Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, “On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion,” *JAAR* 82.2 (2014): 495–520; Nathan Rein, “When Is a Religion Like a Weed?: Some Thoughts on Why and How We Define Things,” *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 10–18; J. Aaron Simmons, “A Search for the ‘Really’ Real: Philosophically Approaching the Task of Defining Religion,” *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 19–26; Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, “A Deep-Seated Schism: Fundamental Discussions in the Study of Religions,” *BSR* 44.4 (2015): 27–23.

<sup>68</sup> See above, pages 43–47.

century, proponents of essentialist approaches to religion are still very much active.<sup>69</sup>

One question that might be raised: how can we be sure the category has been accurately constituted up to this point? It is phenomenally rare that anyone probes the academic identification of long-acknowledged religious traditions *qua* religions. The task is seldom, if ever, to test Christianity or Islam or Judaism to see if they are, in fact, religions; their membership in the category is the very point of departure. In fact, it is virtually axiomatic in scholarship that asserts the need for a definition, that an adequate one must subsume the entire catalogue of currently acknowledged religions, meaning we accept without examination that those traditions today commonly carrying the label “religion” were accurately labeled. In an essentialist approach, this presupposes they were all accurately determined to possess some necessary and sufficient feature that we, oddly enough, have yet to identify. That approach invests a wildly irresponsible degree of faith in the unconscious prescience of the authorities of the past. As has been shown, the far more parsimonious conclusion is that that labelling was rather arbitrarily conducted based on existing cultural frameworks and rhetorical exigencies, but has just become so deeply embedded in our worldviews and in the intellectual foundation of our academic edifice that it sits beyond reproach. This would mean religion exists only insofar as it is reified in discourse about religion.<sup>70</sup> The only feature shared by *all* and *only all* phenomena that are labeled religion is precisely that all and only all those phenomena have been *labeled religion*.

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<sup>69</sup> Some examples are Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197; Ilka Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works: Towards a New Cognitive Science of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 227; Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion’?” 3–27; and Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, “On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion,” 495–520.

<sup>70</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad describes discourses as “*practices that organize knowledge in a given community; they establish, stabilize, and legitimize systems of meaning and provide collectively shared orders of knowledge in an institutionalized social ensemble. Statements, utterances, and opinions about a specific topic, systematically organized and repeatedly observable, form a discourse*” (Kocku von Stuckrad, “Discursive Study of Religion: Approaches, Definitions, Implications,” *MTSR* 25.1 [2013]: 15, emphasis in original). Von Stuckrad provides the following discursive definition: “*RELIGION is the societal organization of knowledge about religion*” (p. 17, emphasis in original). See also, even more recently, Frank Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Heidelberg: Springer VS, 2016).

Such discursive frameworks will not do for many, but the alternative—to abjure a definition—is also often considered unacceptable.<sup>71</sup> Public policy and other legal consequences must be considered, for instance. A lot is resting on being able to distinguish “religion” from “not religion.” How will we know which organizations should receive additional rights and protections? How will we determine tax exemptions? There seems to be the tacit suggestion in some scholarship that Western tax assessors and the courts are struggling to function without the final word from anthropologists and scholars of religion. To my knowledge, they are not.<sup>72</sup> The most widely cited concern with a lack of definition, however, is the putative inability of our field of study to figure out precisely what it is it has been studying for all these many generations. From a recent publication on the question: “If we resign from attempting to provide at the very least an approximate definition, not only will the study of religion fail to demarcate the object of its study but it will also be at pains to formulate its basic theoretical postulates.”<sup>73</sup> This would seem to suggest not only that the study of religion is capable of operating from a dispassionate and objective distance from that object of study, but also that

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<sup>71</sup> Even Jonathan Z. Smith, who insists that religion, “is not a native category,” goes on to insist that “it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon” (Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” 281–82). Although, refreshingly, see Jonathan Jong, “On (not) defining (non)religion,” 15–24.

<sup>72</sup> This is not to make light of the serious consequences for the way religion is defined by the courts, but there are working definitions being used and refined, and if scholars of religion arrive at the conclusion that no adequate definition can be critically and empirically formulated, drumming one up anyway is certainly not the best way forward. For a helpful discussion of how defining religion bears on international law, see Jeremy T. Gunn, “The Complexity of Religion and the Definition of ‘Religion’ in International Law,” *HHRJ* 16 (2003): 189–215. On a brief history of US courts’ definitions, see Jeffrey Omar Usman, “Defining Religion: The Struggle to Define Religion under the First Amendment and the Contributions and Insights of other Disciplines of Study Including Theology, Psychology, Sociology, the Arts, and Anthropology,” *NDLR* 83.1 (2007): 159–87; cf. Jesse David Covington, “Taken on Faith: The Concept of Religion in First Amendment Jurisprudence” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007). See also Jesse H. Choper, “Defining ‘Religion’ in the First Amendment,” *UILR* (1982): 579–613; Eli A. Echols, “Defining Religion for Constitutional Purposes: A New Approach Based on the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg,” *PILJ* 13.1 (2004): 117–44.

<sup>73</sup> Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion’?” 4 (3–27); cf. Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, “On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion,” 510–11. See also Martin Reisebrodt, *Cultus und Heilversprechen: eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2007), 24: “. . . man ohne einen allgemeinen Religionsbegriff keine Religionstheorie formulieren.” Over and against this skepticism, von Stuckrad argues that a discursive approach offers “perhaps the most promising interpretive framework for the study of religion today” (von Stuckrad, “Discursive Study of Religion,” 21).

that study is necessarily prescriptive. Both of these positions strike me as deeply problematic. The study of religion does not require a definition of religion; it only requires a critically robust understanding of existing discourse about religion—not a particularly difficult task, especially given that academic study is one of the key contributors to that discourse.<sup>74</sup>

### *Studying Religion*

Religion is best understood as a cultural reification that defies definition precisely because (in addition to the fallacy of dictionary semantics), as a reification, it does not occur in nature, but is born of discourse, which is constantly changing. Because of the long process of development outlined above, and the disparate ways in which we describe and define the phenomenon, our contemporary conceptualizations of religion and its constituent elements have little to do with

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<sup>74</sup> Benson Saler's *Conceptualizing Religion* represents an engagement with prototype theory as formulated by Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues, although that engagement is somewhat superficial and seems to lean equally on elements of Wittgenstein's family resemblance approach. In a 1999 article, Benson Saler describes his approach to defining religion as "combining the idea of family resemblances with insights derived from prototype theory" (Benson Saler, "Family Resemblance and the Definition of Religion," *HR* 25.3 [1999]: 391–404; see also Fitz John Porter Poole, "Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion," *JAAR* 54.3 [1986]: 411–57). Despite the superficiality of Saler's approach, the discussion is sensitive and insightful. He settles on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as the three prototypes of religion, carefully noting that all three are monolithic abstractions of collections of millions and millions of adherents whose individual notions of their religious identities all differ from each other synchronically as well as diachronically. Each tradition itself displays marked prototype effects as well, with self-identified adherents to innumerable sects, factions, or interpretations within the broader categorization filling every nook and cranny of the spectra of activity, belief, devotion, etc. The category of "religion" is thus phenomenally reductive shorthand for a culturally reified domain of existence that offers little in the way of analytical insight or heuristic value. The large and small non-European/American traditions—the ones that so frequently problematize an essentialist approach—sit at a distance from the prototypes, and because of the graded nature of linguistic categories, would be considered poorer examples of religions. Because conceptual categories frequently have quite fuzzy boundaries, membership for those entities sitting at a greater conceptual distance from the prototypes would be debatable. In such situations, prototype theory does not provide a resolution; it does not settle boundary disputes, which, as I have suggested, is one of the primary deliverables of a working definition of religion for those scholars of religion in search of one. In fact, in many ways, a prototype approach to religion—without the necessary caveats and warnings—may perpetuate the very Eurocentrism from which many have been seeking release. Prototype theory can bring us to a more precise understanding of the shape of the category in contemporary discourse, but it cannot save it. For the study of religion in modernity, I would echo the sentiments of Andrew McKinnon: "There is no essence of religion outside the discourse of religion. There is no religion *per se*, *pour soi*, or *an sich*. Of course, concepts like 'religion' have real social consequences, and are important constitutive elements in the construction of global, national, and local social formations. In that sense, however, there is such a 'thing' as religion—or at least, it is a term we cannot do without, and we 'know' what it means. In this respect, Wittgenstein should get the last word: 'the best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the *application* of the picture goes'" (McKinnon, "Sociological Definitions, Language Games, and the 'Essence' of Religion," 81).

the broad and pluriform traditions of antiquity that we so frequently sweep up under that rubric. If we cannot agree on what constitutes religion today and what its features are—and this is not an indictment of the scholarship, but an observation about the nature of the category—on what grounds can we presume to determine what constituted religion within ancient communities to which we have sparse and unclear access? Because the reified nature of religion has gone entirely undetected for so long, a number of frameworks associated with that reification have become deeply embedded within the modern study of religion and now constitute the frame round which we trace when we attempt to define or even describe the ideologies of the Hebrew Bible and early Judaisms.<sup>75</sup> This section will briefly examine some of the most firmly embedded of these principles and how they have influenced the study of religion and/or the Hebrew Bible and early Judaisms.

### *Belief*

One of the most critical of these frameworks is the dichotomization of belief and practice, and the prioritization of the former over and against the latter, a product of the ideological processes by which religion was interiorized in the Renaissance, by which materiality and practice were marginalized in the Reformation, and by which belief came to define religion in the era of comparative religion.<sup>76</sup> Prior to this dichotomization, the intuitive conceptualization of human

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<sup>75</sup> A recent engagement with the category of “religion” as it applies to the Hebrew Bible can be found in the proceedings of what Christoph Uehlinger has called a “private seminar of sorts” held in 2014 at the University of Zurich, published in 2015 in the journal *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*. The articles are Christoph Uehlinger, “Distinctive or Diverse? Conceptualizing Ancient Israelite Religion in Its Southern Levantine Setting,” *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 1–24; Amihai Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov and Their Implications Regarding Religion in Northern Israel,” *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 25–55; Omer Sergi, “State Formation, Religion and ‘Collective Identity’ in the Southern Levant,” *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 56–77; Seth Sanders, “When the Personal Becomes Political: An Onomastic Perspective on the Rise of Yahwism,” *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 78–105; Terje Stordalen, “Horse Statues in Seventh Century Jerusalem: Ancient Social Formations and the Evaluation of Religious Diversity,” *HeBAI* 4.1 (2015): 106–32.

<sup>76</sup> “Non-material elements of religiosity such as religious experiences, beliefs, philosophies, psychologies, doctrines, textual history, literature, ethics, mythology, folklore, and so on, are common areas of specialization. The specifically material aspects of religion, however, are either examined under the rubric of religious art or architecture (or perhaps ‘iconography’ or ‘symbolism’), or are engaged peripherally as mostly unacknowledged



identity as embodied, socially reified, and entangled within complex material networks exercised far greater influence on the understanding of and interaction with the environment, with other human persons, and with the divine. What we identify as worship constituted performative interactions with the material world, throughout which the divine was infused.<sup>77</sup>

In the early Jewish and Christian traditions, the divine was treated as anthropomorphic and corporeal, and it was encountered in sacred images, spaces, sounds, smells, bodies, and food.<sup>78</sup> While the seeds of interiorization were planted early in the Christian tradition by Pauline denigration of the law and by neoplatonic influence, early Christians continued to center the human body in their theology and their worship. The most important ritual in the Catholic tradition, the Eucharist, was the “supreme *locus divinitatis*, the ultimate materialization of the divine.”<sup>79</sup> Relics, holy water, statues, incense, pieces of wood, and sacred spaces also played important roles in materializing and presencing divine power for Medieval Christians, but by 1518, reformers began to rail against the use of holy water.<sup>80</sup> By 1522, they were rejecting images and other sacred objects, asserting that *finitum non est capax infiniti*, “infinity cannot be conveyed by the finite.”<sup>81</sup> The “othering” of divinity, the interiorization of worship, and the exaltation of belief radically altered the landscape where the human interacted with the divine, and this new landscape would form the foundation of the modern concept of religion.

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elements of larger studies in sociology or anthropology, or under considerations of ritual within the social sciences” (Julian Droogan, *Religion, Material Culture and Archaeology* [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 23–24).

<sup>77</sup> A recent attempt to reorient archaeologists to the material in their study of cult objects is Mary Weismantel and Lynn Meskell, “Substances: ‘Following the Material’ Through Two Prehistoric Cases,” *JMC* 19.3 (2014): 233–51. A related approach is taken for Judean pillar figurines in Erin Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>78</sup> Christianity would be the first to abandon anthropomorphism, thanks to the reflective influence of early apologists. See David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *HTR* 83.2 (1990): 105–16. For an insightful outline of the process by which anthropomorphism was abandoned in Judaism, see Shamma Friedman, “Anthropomorphism and Its Eradication,” in Willem van Asselt et al., *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm*, 157–78.

<sup>79</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 28.

<sup>80</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 55–61.

<sup>81</sup> Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 3, 61–65.

The result for modern scholarship is a reductionism that trains our focus on a specific framework that either holds only marginal importance for adherents of non-European/American traditions or misconstrues their ideologies and values. This significantly distorts our reconstruction of both ancient and modern cultures, and for multiple reasons.<sup>82</sup> First, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith noted in 1962, the contemporary conceptualization of religion is uniquely focused on belief:

The peculiarity of the place given to belief in Christian history is a monumental matter, whose importance and whose relative uniqueness must be appreciated. So characteristic has it been that unsuspecting Westerners have . . . been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own as well, ‘What do they believe?’ as though this were the primary question, and certainly were a legitimate one.<sup>83</sup>

While Smith’s comment primarily addresses modern religions, the impact is even more distorting on the analysis of ancient ideologies, not only because the imposition of the “religion” rubric prioritizes the wrong things, but also because our modern concept of “belief” sits on the near side of a significant shift in the semantic senses of the terminology in the Hebrew Bible and Christian scriptures related to “belief.” The blazon of early Christianity was “faith”—*fide* in Latin and πίστις in Greek.<sup>84</sup> The concept is overwhelmingly considered synonymous with “belief” today, and both words are frequently translated that way, but the

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<sup>82</sup> “The academic study of religion in the modern West has been shaped by the idea that a religion is what someone believes, which consists of a discrete, subjective experience of assent to propositions concerning the origin of the cosmos, the nature of humanity, the existence of deities, or the purpose of life. When seeking to understand a religion, scholars have long tended to ask: what are its teachings? Focus on ‘belief’ as a set of teachings derives from the creedal tradition of Christianity, which was intensified by Protestantism. From there, belief passed beyond the realm of religion into the philosophy of language, where it came to be strictly defined in terms of the truth-value of a proposition” (Morgan, “Introduction,” 3).

<sup>83</sup> Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 180. Similarly, Talal Asad concluded his discussion of religion as belief stating, “It is preeminently the Christian church that has occupied itself with identifying, cultivating, and testing belief as a verbalizable inner condition of true religion” (Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 48).

<sup>84</sup> Note, too, that to refer to a religion as a “faith” additionally frames it in terms of Christian self-understanding. Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s universalization of “faith” is one of the most frequently criticized aspects of his *The Meaning and End of Religion*. See Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual & the Securing of Life: Reflexive Essays on a Bantu Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 54–56; Morgan, “Introduction,” 2.

salient sense in early Christianity was a socially oriented notion of “trust” or “confidence.”<sup>85</sup> Even the English “believe” appears to have meant “to hold dear” in earliest usage, transforming into a declaration of loyalty and finally to the modern concept of a conviction or an opinion about the truth of a given proposition.<sup>86</sup> Finally, the academic treatment of “belief” within the study of religion tends to be remarkably one-dimensional and flat. It is all too often treated as mere affirmation of the truth of a proposition, but the social-scientific study of the use of the term has unraveled “belief” as indexing a far more complex and multifaceted assemblage of phenomenological domains.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, in its usage within and between religious communities, it primarily serves interests of identity politics, and so is central only as a function of religious pluralism and diversity.

We impose modern Protestant-colored lenses when we insist on reducing the Hebrew Bible to codifications of belief or faith. Richard Hess’ *Israelite Religions* is an example of a relatively recent engagement with the concept of Israelite religion that helpfully moves beyond a monolithic conceptualization of a single Israelite ideology, but still fundamentally orients the evaluation towards belief:

this study proposed to reexamine the extrabiblical and biblical evidence for the religions of the southern Levant in the Iron Age (c. 1200–586 BC) and to locate features that might be distinctive in terms of the religions of Israelites and Judeans. If it succeeds at all, it will at best serve as an initial body of data that can be used for the study of Israelite religion. . . . In the end it will argue that, while there existed a bewildering variety of religious beliefs and practices in the relatively tiny states that were Israel and Judah, this does not exclude, in terms of logic or of evidence, the possibility of a single core

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<sup>85</sup> See Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language, and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference between Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Ruel, *Belief, Ritual & the Securing of Life*, 36–59. For an excellent cognitive linguistic examination of more recent translations of “thinking” and “believing” in the Bible, see José Sanders, “Translating ‘Thinking’ and ‘Believing’ in the Bible,” in *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, ed. Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 253–76.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 105–27.

<sup>87</sup> Morgan, “Introduction,” 3–12; Michael H. Connors and Peter W. Halligan, “A cognitive account of belief: a tentative road map,” *FiP* 5 (2015): 1–14.

of beliefs among some that extended back, perhaps far back, into Israel's preexilic past.<sup>88</sup>

The argument for a core group of beliefs extending “far back” into Israel's past reveals the conceptual banner under which the data and the methodologies are to be subordinated. The influence of this subordination plays out in the material and textual remains Hess chooses to examine, and the directions those examinations go. For example, in discussing Late Bronze Age archives, Hess begins in Egypt, commenting that,

Egyptian religious practices that can be related to later West Semitic forms are found in the second half of the second millennium. The Cairo Hymn to Amun in Egypt (c. 1500/1400 BC) portrays Amun as the sole deity before he created the other deities. Much closer to the belief in a single, unique god is the teaching of Akhenaten. For this fourteenth-century BC pharaoh, the worship of Aten alone was necessary.<sup>89</sup>

Ostensibly aimed at illuminating Egyptian *practice*, the discussion begins with exclusive focus on a belief, *monotheism*,<sup>90</sup> which raises another dichotomy that has heavily distorted the analysis of ancient Israel and early Judaism, namely the monotheism/polytheism dichotomy.

### *Monotheism/Polytheism*

In the ancient world, the dividing and hierarchizing of cults according to whether they reflected a belief in the existence of one sole deity or of more than one likely would have been considered laughably arbitrary, and in no small part because the prioritization of the *beliefs* manifested by the cult would have been a flagrant category error. That does not seem to be how they organized

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<sup>88</sup> Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 14–15.

<sup>89</sup> Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 91–92.

<sup>90</sup> Hess moves on to discuss the attestation of prophecy and the “earliest substantial written evidence for many of the towns that the Bible associated with Israel in the subsequent centuries” (Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 92).

knowledge. The concept is, like religion itself, a modern one: the first known use of the word “monotheism” comes from 1660 in Cambridge Platonist Henry More’s treatise *The Grand Mystery of Godliness*.<sup>91</sup> And yet, despite increasingly widespread contemporary knowledge of the concept’s seventeenth century CE origins, there has been a great deal of debate in the last few decades aimed at identifying the threshold of monotheism in ancient Israel and fleshing out its precise nature and function in early Judaism. A helpful corrective has been provided in Nathan MacDonald’s 2003 *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*,<sup>92</sup> which examined the development of the concept of monotheism in its Enlightenment context and argued, among other things, that the “intellectualization implicit in the use of ‘monotheism’ is not found in Deuteronomy.”<sup>93</sup> His text did not engage Deutero-Isaiah, but others have arrived at similar conclusions about that text. This increased scholarly engagement with the possibility that the monotheism/polytheism dichotomy fails as an adequate framework for analyzing the Hebrew Bible and literature of early Judaism may help mitigate the imposition of modern frameworks onto ancient texts about deity, but the question is still most commonly couched in terms of “religion” and it remains deeply embedded.<sup>94</sup>

Two patterns stand out to me as reflecting pretty clear attempts to shoehorn the modern dichotomy into the ancient texts where they best serve the rhetorical needs of contemporary scholarship. The first pattern pertains to scholars of the Hebrew Bible, for whom Deutero-

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<sup>91</sup> Henry More, *The Grand Mystery of Godliness; or, A True and Faithfull Representation of the Everlasting Gospel Of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Onely Begotten Son of God and Sovereign over Men and Angels* (London: F. Fleisher, 1660). “Atheism” and “atheist” are known from a century earlier (Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 6, n. 4).

<sup>92</sup> MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 5–52.

<sup>93</sup> MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 210.

<sup>94</sup> For instance, James S. Anderson acknowledges in *Monotheism and Yahweh’s Appropriation of Baal* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) that the term first appeared in 1660 (citing MacDonald) and even goes on to say that Hebrew Bible scribes “most likely had no word nor any clearly defined concept for a monotheism which implies the denial of any other gods’ existence but one’s own,” but on the very next page states that Isaiah 45 “can be considered monotheistic in the modern sense of the term” (pp. 1–2). The book concludes with an argument for considering Israel to have become a “properly monotheistic religion” in the Achaemenid period (pp. 117–18). See also Mark S. Smith, “Monotheism and the Redefinition of Divinity in Ancient Israel,” *JISMOR* 9 (2014): 3–19.

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Isaiah most commonly represents the threshold of the modern concept of monotheism, which they almost unilaterally define as belief in the existence of a single deity (there's that "belief" again).<sup>95</sup> The "no other god" rhetoric of Deutero-Isaiah represents, for these scholars, the breakthrough to the rejection of the existence of other gods, and therefore the threshold of monotheism. This interpretation is rightly challenged by a number of scholars, most effectively on the grounds that the rhetoric appearing in Deutero-Isaiah is essentially no different from that of Deuteronomy, and does not deny the existence of the other gods, just their relevance and power compared to YHWH.<sup>96</sup>

The second pattern involves New Testament scholars looking at monotheism in early Judaism as a background for christology. These scholars still seem to presuppose that monotheism is to be found in their subject matter, but there are frequent and explicit references to other gods in Greco-Roman period Jewish literature, which forces them to rework the definition of monotheism into something more akin to what a Hebrew Bible scholar might call monolatry or henotheism<sup>97</sup>—the worship of one God alone without the concomitant denial of

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<sup>95</sup> This list could go on for pages, but some representative examples are Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 207; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10; Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 435; John Day, *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 340; Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 79; André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007), 8; Hywel Clifford, "Deutero-Isaiah and Monotheism," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 267; Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> See P. de Boer, *Second Isaiah's Message* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), 47; James Barr, "The Problem of Israelite Monotheism," *TGUOS* 17 (1957–58): 52–62; Ulrich Mauser, "One God Alone: A Pillar of Biblical Theology," *PSB* 12.3 (1991): 259; R. W. L. Moberly, "How Appropriate is 'Monotheism' as a Category for Biblical Interpretation," in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North (London: T&T Clark, 2004): 229–31; Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18.1 (2008): 9–15; cf. Saul M. Olyan, "Is Isaiah 40–55 Really Monotheistic?" *JANER* 12 (2012): 190–201.

<sup>97</sup> See Juha Pakkala, *Intolerant Monolatry in the Deuteronomistic History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 53–54; Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism*, 9; Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 166–69; Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?"; Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 147–48; Ellen White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 146.

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the existence of other gods.<sup>98</sup> Larry Hurtado, one of the most prominent advocates for this approach, has stated that “monotheism does not involve denying the *existence* of such beings, only that they properly cannot be compared with the one deity in status and significance, and even in nature.”<sup>99</sup>

This represents a radical departure from both the contemporary notion of monotheism and the conceptualization applied to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Hurtado, however, declares that if this “causes problems for some modern expectations that ‘pure’ monotheism should entertain no such beings . . . the real problem is in imposing such expectations.”<sup>100</sup> In both patterns, what we have is the accommodation of the concept of monotheism to the literature in which it is presupposed. Abjuring the presentistic application of an incommensurate category in favor of some other more accurate descriptor—monolatry, for instance—seems wholly unacceptable for these scholars, which suggests to me the use of “monotheism” primarily functions as an act of identity construction meant to assert theological continuity with the objects of study.

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<sup>98</sup> See also Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *JJS* 42.1 (1991): 1–15; Paul Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article,” *NovT* 33.1 (1991): 83; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Worship and Monotheism in the Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 86–89; William Horbury, “Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age,” in Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, 16–44; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 13–16.

<sup>99</sup> Larry Hurtado, “Monotheism,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 961; cf. Hurtado, “Monotheism, Principle Angels, and the Background of Christology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546–64.

<sup>100</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 120. Regarding the acknowledgement of the other gods, Hurtado seems to me to argue that because Jewish worship was aimed at one single deity, the references to other gods can be dismissed as not compromising monotheism: “scholars argue largely about whether ancient Jews conceived of more than one figure as divine, and they seek to answer the question almost entirely on the basis of semantic arguments about the meaning of honorific titles or phrases, without always studying adequately how ancient Jews practiced their faith. But in the same way that modern principles of linguistics persuasively teach us that the particular meaning of a word in any given occurrence is shaped crucially by the sentence in which it is used . . . so it should be recognized as a basic principle in the analysis of religious traditions that the real meaning of words, phrases, and statements is always connected with the practice(s) of the religious tradition” (p. 116).

*Scripturalism*

Another frequently employed conceptual framework in the study of religion in general and the Hebrew Bible more specifically is the notion that sacred or authoritative texts play a central role in governing and codifying religion.<sup>101</sup> This framework is primarily a product of the centralization and prioritization of the Bible within Reformation and post-Reformation Christian ideology. It is not difficult to adduce evidence for this perspective as a yardstick for civilization and a facilitator of colonial ideologies—often masked as proselytism or liberation—in early comparative religion. Richard King calls this “scripturalism,” and he provides the following description:

Scripturalism: that each (‘world’) religion is fundamentally grounded in ‘scripture’ and a closed canon, and that such texts—treated primarily in terms of their cognitive meaning rather than as ritual artefacts—constitute the primary authoritative yardstick by which the beliefs and practices of each tradition are to be evaluated.<sup>102</sup>

Understanding a community or culture’s foundational or shared texts as “scripture” immediately imports a host of European/American and largely Protestant presuppositions about the origins, forms, and functions of those texts. For most early traditions, however, texts were simply a means of facilitating memorization—the oral recitation and/or aural consumption were the primary loci of significance, which was fundamentally phenomenological.<sup>103</sup> Colonial India and Hinduism present one of the most fascinating

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<sup>101</sup> See Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 110–13.

<sup>102</sup> Richard King, “Colonialism, Hinduism and the Discourse of Religion,” in *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*, ed. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde (London: Routledge, 2010), 105.

<sup>103</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued that a more fundamentalist type of scripturalism is at work in Islam. He notes, “Many years ago I advanced the view that the notion of a parallel between the Muslim Qur’ān and the Christian Bible, as two instances of the genus scripture, is of course a first approximation, but only that; closer to the truth of the two situations is an analogy between the role of the Qur’ān in Islamic life and thought, and the role in Christian life and thought of the figure of Christ. For Christians, God’s central revelation is in the person of Christ, with the Bible as record of that revelation” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World,” in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed.



examples of the distorting effects of this framework. “Hindu” was a regional/cultural designation until it became reified in the nineteenth century as a religion.<sup>104</sup> As this process began, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were distinguished from Hinduism as religions “of the book.” Through Max Müller’s sweeping efforts to gather and translate the literature of the East, the *Rig-Veda* and later the *Upanishads* were translated and framed as the Hindu “scriptures” or “Bible.”<sup>105</sup> This syncretism served to consolidate a variety of traditions and practices under a single scriptural heading and also gave Hinduism a place at the religious table.<sup>106</sup> Regarding this “booking” of Hinduism, Gregory Price Grieve has commented that,

Through orientalism, scripturalism was imported from Europe and America to South Asia. For instance, as Joanne Waghorne has shown, when European ‘orientalist’ scholars first encountered Indian religions they forced the diverse traditions and practices into a Procrustean Bed of scripture. As Richard King has argued, such scripturalism has forced Indian religions into a ‘world religions’ echo of Christian theology.<sup>107</sup>

Similar issues plague our study of the Hebrew Bible. As “scripture,” it is viewed by many as a repository for ancient Israelite and Jewish belief or doctrine, but just as map is not territory,

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Miriam Levering [New York: State University of New York Press, 1989], 30). It could certainly be argued that Islamic scripturalism has influenced popular conceptualizations of the nature of scripture in contemporaneity. On the development of prose narrative within the traditions that would form the earliest texts of the Hebrew Bible, and the significance of orality and memory in that process of textualization, see Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose*.

<sup>104</sup> Nongbri records a fascinating breakdown in communication between an employee of the British East India Company named Malcolm Lewin and the House of Commons. During this testimony, Lewin objected to the characterization of “Hindoos” as “heathens” and explained that a Hindoo could also be a Christian. He appears to have been using the term as a cultural or nationalistic marker, but then goes on to explain that “a Hindoo is a person of the Hindoo faith.” The term seems to have been in the process of transitioning from a cultural designation to a religious one. See Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 109–10, quoting “First Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories; Together with the Minutes of Evidence,” in *Reports from Committees* (London: House of Commons, 1853), 281–82.

<sup>105</sup> Max Müller, ed. and trans., *Rig-Veda-Sanhita: The Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans*, 4 vols. (London: William H. Allen and Co., 1849–1862); Max Müller, ed. and trans., *The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 1: The Upanishads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879).

<sup>106</sup> Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “Background Books: Hinduism and the Fate of India,” *WQ* 15.3 (1991): 51–52.

<sup>107</sup> Grieve, “Symbol, Idol and *Mūrti*,” 61, citing Waghorne, “Hinduism and the Fate of India”; and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (New York: Routledge, 1999); cf. Gregory A. Barton, “Abolishing the East: The Dated Nature of Orientalism in the Definition and Ethical Analysis of the Hindu Faith,” *CompS* 29.2 (2009): 182–90.

scripture is not devotee.<sup>108</sup> There likely never existed a single Israelite, Judahite, or Jewish person who understood their social identity in precisely all the terms prescribed in the Hebrew Bible (at least as we interpret it). Despite this, numerous publications purport to evaluate and uncover the theology of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.<sup>109</sup> In each instance, what is being accomplished is an artificial reconstruction that would have had little relationship to the ways individuals lived and perceived their traditions, even if it were not more than two millennia removed from the composition of the texts it is evaluating.<sup>110</sup> Now, strides have been made in recent years in loosing the scholarship from its textual moorings so that it can explore other approaches to understanding the worldviews and lived experiences of ancient Israelite and Jewish communities, but these concerns are primarily coming out of archaeology, anthropology, and even the cognitive sciences, and are still struggling for space to extend their theoretical roots within biblical studies proper.<sup>111</sup> There is a great deal of work left to be done.

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<sup>108</sup> The observation that “map is not territory” has a long history that begins in mathematics and physics in the 1930s, but was adopted into the study of religion most conspicuously with Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Bd. I, *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957); Murray H. Lichtenstein, “An Interpersonal Theology of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 61–82; Graham Davies, “‘God’ in Old Testament Theology,” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 175–94; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> Obviously, to some degree I am doing the same in this thesis with my focus on the conceptualization of deity in the Hebrew Bible, although two considerations support the value of its contribution: (1) I openly acknowledge the artificial locus of meaning reified at the level of the text, and (2) the grounding of my approach in the cognitive sciences is intended to facilitate looking behind the curtain to some degree to consider the relationship of the textual reflections of deity and divine agency to their perception on the personal and material level. In other words, instead of claiming to uncover the theology of the Hebrew Bible, I am claiming to uncover the ways deity and divine agency would have been conceptualized by Israelites and Judahites, as well as the way the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible worked with or against those conceptualizations in the service of their own rhetorical goals.

<sup>111</sup> Ellen van Wolde, for instance, has published numerous explorations of the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of CL, but the largest impact her work has achieved was primarily negative when her analysis of the Hebrew ברא was ludicrously sensationalized in British media (*The Telegraph* ran the headline “God is not the Creator, claims academic,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/6274502/God-is-not-the-Creator-claims-academic.html>) and was not favorably reviewed by scholars. On that controversy, see Ellen van Wolde, “Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean ‘To Create’ in Genesis 1.1–2.4a,” *JSOT* 34.1 (2009): 3–23; Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, “To Create, To Separate, or To Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of ברא in Gen 1:1–2:4a,” *JHS* 10.3 (2010), article 9; Ellen van Wolde and Robert Rezetko, “Semantics and the Semantics of ברא: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel,” *JHS* 11.9 (2011), article 3; John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5–6. On her application of cognitive linguistics to biblical studies, see Ellen van Wolde, ed., *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (Leiden: Brill,

*Implications*

The study of religion has long been hindered by the frameworks that have developed to systematize both our understanding of conceptual categories in general and the concept of religion more particularly. Biblical studies has lagged even further behind because of additional theological commitments and the methodological frameworks that have developed to serve the interests of those commitments for so many generations. These stultifying conventions cannot be overcome through the continued application of the same theoretical models that have for so long fostered and nurtured them. Rather, what is required is the imposition of outside methodologies, and that imposition has demonstrated the reified nature of the category of religion. If it is to be gainfully studied going forward, it must be as a modern social construct and not as a transhistorical and transcultural constant.

In light of all this, the category of “religion,” irrespective of the specific framework or definitional approach, fails entirely as a heuristic or organizing principle for the study of the ancient world. Not only are the central principles of that framework incommensurate with the priorities and ideological foci of individuals living in first millennium BCE Southwest Asia, but the division of their world into domains, of which religion is simply one, sits at odds with the worldviews of non-European/American and non-modern peoples. As Ittai Gradel has remarked in his analysis of emperor worship in the Roman world, “even our view of religion as a dimension, or aspect of the human spirit, separable from other spheres of human experience and common to all mankind, is ultimately christianizing and directly relevant only to a

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2003); Ellen van Wolde, “Cognitive Linguistics and Its Application to Genesis 28:10–22,” in *One Text, A Thousand Methods: Studies in Memory of Sjef van Tilborg*, ed. Patrick Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125–48; Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Ellen van Wolde, “Cognitive Linguistics: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of the Concept of Defilement in Ezekiel 22:1–16,” in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. Katherine J. Dell and Paul M. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 257–71; Ellen van Wolde, “Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah,” in Howe and Green, *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, 193–222.

Christian cultural sphere, or such as are influenced by it.”<sup>112</sup>

In the context of my analysis of divine agency, perhaps the most damaging distortions would be the subjugation of practice and materiality to texts and mythologies, as well as the strict boundaries that would be presupposed to separate the sacred from the profane and the divine from the human. Other fields with closer methodological links to anthropology and other disciplines are beginning to exploit the cracks in the foundations of those presuppositions. To return to Gradel, close methodological examinations of the rituals and cults associated with emperor worship,

illustrate the fallacies of interpreting traditional religious practice in the light of philosophical or mythological texts or arguments. . . . For divine cult was an honour, differing in degree but not in kind from ‘secular’ honours; and this by itself implies that there is something wrong with our usual and ingrained oppositions, of religion versus politics, of man versus god, when applied to pagan practice.<sup>113</sup>

Gradel asserts that a dichotomous framework is distorting, and that ancient Romans conceptualized of the divine and the human rather in terms of a continuum or spectrum, which allowed for concentration at the poles, but also overlap and integration near the center.

## The Cognitive Science of Religion

The cognitive science of religion, or CSR, is a relatively new and developing interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion that incorporates methods, theories, and principles from the cognitive sciences as well as religious studies, anthropology, philosophy, and other related fields of study.<sup>114</sup> One of the most distinctive features of CSR is that it is more concerned with

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<sup>112</sup> Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, 2–3.

<sup>114</sup> For helpful introductions to the field see Ilkka Pyysiäinen, “Introduction: Cognition and Culture in the Construction of Religion,” in *Current Approaches in the Cognitive Science of Religion*, ed. Pyysiäinen and Veikko Anttonen (London: Continuum, 2002), 1–13; Luther H. Martin, “The Cognitive Science of Religion,” *MTR* 16

*explaining* religion than with *describing* it, and it is that feature that is largely responsible for catalyzing the field’s early development. While the term “cognitive science of religion” was first used in 2000 to describe a discrete discipline within the broader cognitive sciences, a modern cognitive *approach* to religion is generally thought to have begun in 1975 with Dan Sperber’s *Rethinking Symbolism*,<sup>115</sup> which outlined a theory of symbolism that took as a point of departure the anthropological view that “human learning abilities are phylogenetically determined and culturally determinant.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, evolutionary biology determines human learning abilities, which themselves contribute to the shaping and constraining of culture. Because *Homo sapiens sapiens* (modern humans) are a single subspecies, those abilities are determined by the same basic biology for all members. An adequate understanding of religion should thus include careful analysis of the contributions of that biology. This principle would form the conceptual foundation of CSR’s search for the cognitive architecture underlying widespread patterns of thought and behavior commonly identified as religious.<sup>117</sup>

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(2004): 201–04; Justin L. Barrett, “Cognitive Science of Religion: What Is It and Why Is It?” *RC* 1.6 (2007): 768–86; István Czachesz, “The Promise of the Cognitive Science of Religion for Biblical Studies,” *BSR* 37.4 (2008): 102–05; Ilka Pyysiäinen, “Cognitive Science of Religion: State-of-the-Art,” *JCSR* 1.1 (2012): 5–28; Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 13–32; István Czachesz and Risto Uro, “The Cognitive Science of Religion: A New Alternative in Biblical Studies,” in Czachesz and Uro, *Mind, Morality and Magic*, 1–14; Ilka Pyysiäinen, “The Cognitive Science of Religion,” in *Evolution, Religion, and Cognitive Science: Critical and Constructive Essays*, ed. Fraser Watts and Léon P. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21–37; Jennifer Larson, *Understanding Greek Religion: A Cognitive Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 379–84.

<sup>115</sup> Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, trans. Alice L. Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). First published in French as *Le symbolisme en général* (Paris: Hermann, 1974). For a discussion of even earlier methodological forerunners, see Stewart Guthrie, “Early Cognitive Theorists of Religion: Robin Horton and His Predecessors,” in *Mental Culture: Classical Social Theory and the Cognitive Science of Religion*, ed. Dimitris Xygalatas and William W. McCorkle Jr. (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 33–51.

<sup>116</sup> Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, x.

<sup>117</sup> Drawing from recent cognitive theorizing related to dual-process cognition (e.g., Jonathan St. B. T. Evans, “Heuristic and Analytical Processes of Reasoning,” *BJP* 75 [1984]: 451–68), memory (e.g., Endel Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983]), and mentalization (“theory of mind,” or ToM; e.g., Simon Baron-Cohen, “Precursors to a Theory of Mind: Understanding Attention in Others,” in *Natural Theories of Mind: Evolution, Development and Simulation of Everyday Mindreading*, ed. Andrew Whiten [Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991], 233–51), a small number of scholars in the 1990s began to develop broad explanatory models that framed religion in terms of anthropomorphism (Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*. See also Guthrie, “A Cognitive Theory of Religion,” *CA* 21.1 [1980]: 181–203), of ritual (E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]), and of the cultural transmission of mental representations (Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]; Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994]; Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and*

Sperber’s model was in part a reaction against the traditional functionalist approach to the anthropological study of religion. That functionalist approach was itself intended as a solution to the inadequacies of substantivist approaches to describing religion, and its end goal was a unifying description of the sociocultural function of religion. Theories of social cohesion—which held that religion promoted prosociality by providing mechanisms for displays of group fidelity and membership<sup>118</sup>—were preeminent at the time, but cognitivists like Sperber began to challenge the primacy of functionalism and to ask how cognition might contribute to the development of these cultural phenomena.<sup>119</sup>

Early responses to this question coalesced around two broad evolutionary models.<sup>120</sup> One repurposed the functionalist approach and viewed religion primarily as a facilitator of prosocial behavior. According to the most salient versions of this model, the behavioral features of religion provide mechanisms for hard to fake signals of commitment to social groups, which mitigates the prevalence of free-riding and promotes prosociality. Religion thus has an adaptive function and is evolutionarily selected.<sup>121</sup> The second and more prevalent model first deconstructs religion—with most scholars viewing it as a “heuristic term that refers to a fuzzy

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*Transmission in Papua New Guinea* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995]).

<sup>118</sup> The most influential has likely been Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Paris: Alcan, 1912), but see also Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (New York: E.P Dutton & Co., 1922); Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses* (London: Cohen and West, 1952); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); George W. Stocking, Jr., *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

<sup>119</sup> See Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>120</sup> For a helpful overview of how the two models discussed below function within the broader field of evolutionary psychology, see David M. Buss et al., “Adaptations, Exaptations, and Spandrels,” *AmPsy* 53.5 (1998): 533–48.

<sup>121</sup> William Irons, “Religion as a Hard-to-Fake Sign of Commitment,” in *Evolution and the Capacity for Commitment*, ed. Randolph M. Nesse (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 292–309; David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Richard Sosis, “Religious Behaviors, Badges, and Bans: Signaling Theory and the Evolution of Religion,” in *Evolution, Genes, and the Religious Brain*, ed. Patrick McNamara, vol. 1 of *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter our Understanding of Religion*, ed. Patrick McNamara (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 61–86; Joseph Bulbulia, “Why ‘Costly-Signalling’ Models of Religion Require Cognitive Psychology,” in *Origins of Religion, Cognition and Culture*, ed. Armin Geertz (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 71–81. See also Ara Norenzayan et al., “The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” *BBS* 39 (2016): 1–65, doi:10.1017/S0140525X14001356, including the twenty-seven responses.

set of beliefs and behaviors without any clear boundaries”<sup>122</sup>—and then interprets its constituent parts as evolutionary by-products of cognitive features originally adapted to other functions.<sup>123</sup> The main three cognitive features involved in this model, according to the most popular iterations, are mentalization, teleological reasoning, and mind/body dualism.<sup>124</sup> These three features will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 2, but the basic idea is that they converge to predispose the human mind to intuitively produce and foster mental representations of supernatural agents, which form the foundation of religion in most CSR models.<sup>125</sup>

More recently, many scholars have taken to merging these two models, promoting a “coevolutionary” model of cognition and culture.<sup>126</sup> According to this approach, broadly speaking, the cognitive predispositions that promote the mental representations considered prototypical of religion are indeed evolutionary by-products, but they contribute to thought and

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<sup>122</sup> Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Marc Hauser, “The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or By-product?” *TCS* 14.3 (2009): 105.

<sup>123</sup> Among the most prominent publications espousing this model are Pascal Boyer, “Religious Thought and Behavior as By-product of Brain Function,” *TCS* 7 (2003): 119–24;

<sup>124</sup> See, for instance, Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 15–19.

<sup>125</sup> Because of the contemporary popular as well as academic conceptualization of “religion” as fundamentally centered on (1) beliefs related to (2) supernatural agents, one of the primary emphases of CSR since its inception has been understanding the mental representation of deities. “The essence of many religions is that they involve a belief in spiritual beings or supernatural agents” (Wieteke Nieuwboer, Hein T. van Shie, and Daniël Wigboldus, “Priming with Religion and Supernatural Agency Enhances the Attribution of Intentionality to Natural Phenomena,” *JCSR* 2.2 [2014]: 97). This essentialist definition of religion has come under intense scrutiny within the broader study of religion. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>126</sup> For early discussions of the intersection of these two models, see the six essays in Part II of Joseph Bulbulia et al., *The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, & Critiques* (Santa Margarita, CA: Collins Foundation Press, 2008); Benjamin Grant Purzycki and Richard Sosis, “The Religious System as Adaptive: Cognitive Flexibility, Public Displays, and Acceptance,” in *The Biological Evolution of Religious Mind and Behavior*, ed. Eckart Voland and Wulf Schiefenhövel (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 243–56; Ricahrd Sosis, “The Adaptationist-Byproduct Debate on the Evolution of Religion: Five Misunderstandings of the Adaptationist Program,” *JCC* 9 (2009): 315–32. For more developed models, see Russell Powell and Steve Clarke, “Religion as an Evolutionary Byproduct: A Critique of the Standard Model,” *BJPS* 63.3 (2012): 457–86; Scott Atran, “Psychological Origins and Cultural Evolution of Religion,” in *Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences*, ed. Ron Sun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 209–38; Ilkka Pyysiäinen, “Putting Cognition and Culture Back Together Again: Religion in Mind and Society,” *MTSR* 24.1 (2012): 29–50; Ilkka Pyysiäinen, “Religion: From Mind to Society and Back,” in Sun, *Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences*, 239–64; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*; Francesco Ferretti and Ines Adornetti, “Biology, Culture and Coevolution: Religion and Language as Case Studies,” *JCC* 14.3–4 (2014): 305–30; Benjamin Grant Purzycki, Omar Sultan Haque, and Richard Sosis, “Extending Evolutionary Accounts of Religion beyond the Mind: Religions as Adaptive Systems,” in Watts and Turner, *Evolution, Religion, and Cognitive Science*, 74–91. For a recent critique of this approach, see Ilkka Pyysiäinen, “God is Great—But Not Necessary? On Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods* (2013),” *Religion* 44.4 (2014): 638–44.

behavior that is culturally adaptive.<sup>127</sup> The cultural salience and transmission of that thought and behavior is also largely contingent on sociocultural dynamics rather than on individual psychology.

The concept of cultural evolution has some important differences from biological evolution.<sup>128</sup> In the latter, genetic mutation is random, while cultural change may be accidental, incidental, or intentional. Cultural adaptations, additionally, may have nothing to do with fitness. Cultural innovation is not always the product of extensive testing and trial and error. Authority, tradition, conformism, stress, and other influences may compel the adoption, proliferation, and/or perpetuation of a less efficient or effective tool, process, or practice, and insulate it from experimentation or testing. The dynamics are thus very different, and a coevolutionary approach is certainly more complex, but integrating concern for sociocultural influence allows CSR to begin to connect the cognitive universals it has identified to the culturally idiosyncratic manifestations of thought and behavior we label religious.<sup>129</sup> Because this thesis' evidence is limited to the material remains of ancient Israelite and Judahite representations of and discourse about deities and their relationships, this coevolutionary model will provide the most robust framework for reconstructing those “very fundamentals of ancient thought.”

One critical assumption that is made in this thesis must be addressed before continuing. For our study of the shared cognitive features of living informants to be relevant to the cognition of those responsible for the production of the material remains contemporary with, and

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<sup>127</sup> On the intersection of culture and evolution, see Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On cultural evolution as a framework, see Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Alex Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution: How Darwinian Theory can Explain Human Culture and Synthesize the Social Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>128</sup> This section draws in part from Stephen Shennan, “An Evolutionary Perspective on Agency in Archaeology,” in *Agency Uncovered: Archaeological Perspectives on Social Agency, Power, and Being Human*, ed. Andrew Gardner (London: UCL Press, 2004), 21–25.

<sup>129</sup> It also provides a helpful corrective to the purely “internalist” orientation that CSR has sometimes been accused of fostering. See below for more discussion of criticisms of CSR.



including, the biblical texts, we must assume that the differences between the fundamental cognitive architecture of the human minds of the first millennium BCE and that of the minds of living informants accessible for study by scholars today are negligible, at least insofar as that architecture is relevant to this thesis. No available empirical data falsify or verify this assumption as of yet, but several considerations lend support to it. For instance, the main cognitive features that will be identified as central to the development of my thesis are understood to be products of evolutionary adaptations from very early in, and even prior to, the evolutionary history of *homo sapiens*. Additionally, many of the widespread mental outputs identified by scholars today as culturally mediated products of the relevant shared cognitive features are abundant in the material remains of first millennium BCE Southwest Asia, at least provisionally suggesting the presence and influence of those features. As Luther H. Martin has observed, “Given the scale of evolutionary time and change, it is reasonable to conclude that our cognitive capacities, like our behavioral biases, have remained significantly unaltered since the emergence of modern humans by the late Pleistocene Era, some 60,000 to 50,000 years ago.”<sup>130</sup>

Many of the more particular theories and models of CSR will be discussed in the second chapter, but the remainder of this chapter will be divided into two segments that will first discuss the importance of dual-process models of cognition for this thesis and then address and respond to some prominent criticisms of CSR that have arisen over the years.

### *Dual-Process Cognition*

According to “dual-process” models of cognition, human cognition can be roughly divided into two types.<sup>131</sup> The first type—which I will call “intuitive cognition”—is more closely linked to

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<sup>130</sup> Martin, “Past Minds,” 16.

<sup>131</sup> I refer to the two processes as “types” of cognition to avoid the notion that they represent two separate cognitive modules or systems. On this model, see Jonathan St. B. T. Evans, “Heuristic and Analytical Processes

the human mind’s “default settings” regarding its perception of the world around it, although environment and conditioning can certainly influence it.<sup>132</sup> The second type—which I will call “reflective cognition”—functions more slowly, deliberately, and rationally. These two types of cognition serve to account for the “multiplicity of tasks that require different processing formats, timings and abilities.”<sup>133</sup>

Early iterations of this model developed within cognitive psychology dichotomized the two types of cognition as discrete and competing cognitive modules or systems, but criticisms and more recent experimental research have led to more nuanced views that support seeing both types as functioning along a spectrum or continuum. The model continues to mature and may certainly be further nuanced,<sup>134</sup> but my primary concern is for the way the model illustrates two broad levels of cognition and their interactions, with two types of interaction being particularly relevant: rationalization and decoupling.<sup>135</sup> Rationalization follows the detection of conflict between the two types of cognition and is the process by which the person applies

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of Reasoning”; Jonathan St. B. T. Evans, “In Two Minds: Dual Process Accounts of Reasoning,” *TCS* 7.10 (2003): 454–59; Wim De Neys, “Dual Processing in Reasoning: Two Systems but One Reasoner,” *PS* 17.5 (2006): 428–33; Valeria A. Thompson, “Dual-Process Theories: A Metacognitive Perspective,” in *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond*, ed. Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith Frankish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171–95; Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich, “Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate,” *PPS* 8.3 (2013): 223–41; Wim De Neys, “Conflict Detection, Dual Processes, and Logical Intuitions: Some Clarifications,” *T&R* 20 (2014): 167–87; Jonathan Morgan, “Religion and Dual-process Cognition: A Continuum of Styles or Distinct Types?” *RB&B* (2014): 1–18; Lluís Oviedo, “Religious Cognition as a Dual-Process: Developing the Model,” *MTSR* 27.1 (2015): 31–58; Gordon Pennycook, Jonathan A. Fugelsang, and Derek J. Koehler, “What Makes Us Think? A Three-Stage Dual-Process Model of Analytic Engagement,” *CogPsych* 80.1 (2015): 34–72; Romain Bouvet and Jean-François Bonnefon, “Non-Reflective Thinkers Are Predisposed to Attribute Supernatural Causation to Uncanny Experiences,” *PSPB* 41.7 (2015): 955–61; Onurcan Yilmaz, Dilay Z. Karadöller, and Gamze Sofuoglu, “Analytic Thinking, Religion, and Prejudice: An Experimental Text of the Dual-Process Model of Mind,” *IJPsychRel* 26.4 (2016): 360–69.

<sup>132</sup> This concept is related to the notion of a heuristic. Cf. Gerd Gigerenzer and Wolfgang Gaissmaier, “Heuristic Decision Making,” *AnnuRevPsych* 62 (2011): 451–82, who describe heuristics as “efficient cognitive processes, conscious or unconscious, that ignore part of the information” (p. 451).

<sup>133</sup> Oviedo, “Religious Cognition as a Dual-Process,” 33. Oviedo explains, “system 1, the non-conscious fast system, appears to be older, arising in a pre-human stage of development, emotionally driven, and thereby shared with other animals. Its functionality has clearly to do with more elementary activities and contexts related to enhancing one’s own survival in a wild environment. System 2, the conscious slower system, emerges later and appears more related to complex tasks in an evolutionary stage in which the increase of possibilities constrains more choices, and the multiplicity of available courses of action demands more abstract calculation. System 2 clearly provides a higher computational tool, fitted for more demanding reasoning and difficult decision-making” (pp. 36–37).

<sup>134</sup> See Morgan, “Religion and Dual-process Cognition,” for a good discussion of current debates and some of the model’s complexities.

<sup>135</sup> See Pennycook, Fugelsang, and Koehler, “What Makes Us Think?” 38–40.

*reflective* reasoning to the justification, explanation, or elaboration of the *intuitive* response. Decoupling is the process by which an *intuitive* response is constrained or overridden by *reflective* reasoning.

While not developed within CSR, dual-process models of cognition have influenced several theories of religious thought and behavior,<sup>136</sup> and they will be critical to this thesis' navigation of both nativist and scholarly accounts of deity concepts. The majority of emic explanations of deity—past and present—represent reflective explanations, whether rationalized or decoupled. Such reasoning, however, may not have anything to do with the actual origins of the concept.<sup>137</sup> Until reflective explanations become salient, deity concepts tend to develop on the “folk” level and operate independently of conscious or consistent explanation. To uncritically assign the most salient *reflective* explanations responsibility for production of the concept is to put the cart firmly before the horse. CSR approaches, on the other hand, have been more concerned with uncovering the *intuitive* explanans. These are thought to hit closer to the cognitive roots of cross-cultural patterns of thought and behavior, rather than privilege the far more culturally contingent structuring of knowledge. While both types of cognition—as well as other sociocultural dynamics—contribute to the development and transmission of phenomena labelled “religious,”<sup>138</sup> intuitive accounts here will be of more explanatory value than the highly

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<sup>136</sup> For instance: Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA; Altamira Press, 2004); Ilka Pyysiäinen, *Magic, Miracles, and Religion: A Scientist's Perspective* (Walnut Creek, CA; Altamira Press, 2004); Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Will Gervais and Ara Norenzayan, “Analytic Thinking Promotes Religious Disbelief,” *Science* 336 (2012): 493–96.

<sup>137</sup> Pascal Boyer, “Cognitive Predispositions and Cultural Transmission,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and J. V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 288–319.

<sup>138</sup> In addition to the discussion in Chapter 2 below, see the three papers in Part IV of Sun, ed. *Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences*. Note also that the production and transmission of deity concepts are most closely linked to imitative behaviors like rituals that are *teleologically opaque*, or “not causally linked to the pursuit of a given ultimate intention” (Susan Gelman and Cristine H. Legare, “Concepts and Folk Theories,” *ARA* 40 [2011]: 385. See also Harvey Whitehouse, “Ritual, Cognition, and Evolution,” in *Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences*, 265–84).

variable rationalizations to which nativist accounts of deity so often appeal.<sup>139</sup>

Recent research conducted by Deborah Kelemen and her colleagues has demonstrated cognitive conflict and decoupling vis-à-vis the teleological orientation of the human mind—its tendency to interpret events and entities as existing for a purpose.<sup>140</sup> They published research in 2013 that demonstrated that highly educated individuals like humanities scholars and physical scientists displayed a similar and significant tendency to endorse inaccurate teleological explanations for natural phenomena when not given adequate time for cognitive processing.<sup>141</sup> Another series of studies published in 2015 evaluated intuitive beliefs about nature as intentionally created.<sup>142</sup> In the latter, the authors conducted three online studies for participants in the United States and Finland that involved speeded and non-speeded sentence judgment tasks. The participants first filled out questionnaires about levels of belief in God, gods, or other kinds of higher powers or supernatural agents. They were then shown 120 pictures (consisting of 40 test pictures and 80 control pictures<sup>143</sup>), and asked with each picture

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<sup>139</sup> Ilkka Pyysiäinen sees ancient nativist accounts of the divine as reflective rationalization: “when a believer wants to take rational argumentation seriously, (s)he will need to reinterpret his or her religious beliefs in some such way that both belief and rationality are maintained. Such combination of the mythical agent-God with the latest achievements of reflective thought of the time is found as early as in Hellenistic Judaism, particularly in Philo” (Pyysiäinen, “God: A Brief History with a Cognitive Explanation of the Concept,” *Temenos* 41.1 [2005]: 83). This principle is expanded in Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 107–12.

<sup>140</sup> Deborah Kelemen and Evelyn Rosset, “The Human Function Compunction: Teleological Explanation in Adults,” *Cognition* 111.1 (2009): 138–43; Deborah Kelemen, Joshua Rottman, and Rebecca Seston, “Professional Physical Scientists Display Tenacious Teleological Tendencies: Purpose-Based Reasoning as a Cognitive Default,” *JEPG* 142.4 (2013): 1074–83; Elisa Järnefelt, Caitlin F. Canfield, and Deborah Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever: Intuitive Beliefs about Nature as Purposefully Created Among Different Groups of Non-Religious Adults,” *Cognition* 140.1 (2015): 72–88.

<sup>141</sup> Kelemen, Rottman, and Seston, “Professional Physical Scientists Display Tenacious Teleological Tendencies,” 1080. The results showed that, for both groups, “A broad teleological tendency . . . appears to be a robust, resilient, and developmentally enduring feature of the human mind that arises early in life and gets masked rather than replaced, even in those who scientific expertise and explicit metaphysical commitments seem most likely to counteract it” (p. 1081). One of the purposes of these studies was to determine if specialized scientific training mitigated the prevalence of teleological reasoning beyond that of equally highly educated scholars in non-scientific fields. The authors explain: “although their bias is reduced relative to less schooled populations, their specialized scientific training and substantial knowledge base does no more to ameliorate their unwarranted teleological ideas than an extended humanities education. This suggests that there is a threshold to the conceptual revision of teleological ideas—one that even accomplished physical scientists do not breach” (p. 1081).

<sup>142</sup> Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever.”

<sup>143</sup> The 40 test pictures were of living and non-living natural phenomena like trees, mountains, or hurricanes. The control pictures were of three types. 10 were “no-bias control” pictures of things like balloons or scissors, intended to determine how well the participants could recognize intentionally created entities. To produce a high frequency of “no” responses, 60 “yes-bias control” pictures of geometrical shapes were included, and participants were told to always answer “no” when they saw those shapes. Finally, 10 “cognitive load control” pictures were

to respond “yes” or “no” to the question of whether the thing in the picture had been intentionally created. The participants were divided into two groups, with one group asked if “any being” had made the thing in the picture, and the other asked if a “human” had made it.<sup>144</sup> The first study included “religious” and “nonreligious” participants, while the second and third only included those who reported the lowest levels of belief in supernatural agents (“nonreligious” participants).

For the first study, the mean percentage of “test item endorsement”—the attribution of purposeful creation to natural phenomena—increased for “nonreligious” participants in the “being-made” group from 22% in unspeeded conditions to 38% in speeded conditions. In the “human-made” group, it only increased from 7% to 9%. In Studies 2 and 3, test item endorsement in the being-made group increased from 3% to 16% and from 12% to 22%, respectively.<sup>145</sup> While those who espoused beliefs in supernatural agents were more likely to attribute purposeful creation to nature than those who did not, across all studies, “nonreligious” participants “increasingly defaulted to understanding natural phenomena as purposefully made in the being-made group when they did not have time to censor their thinking.”<sup>146</sup> The studies’ careful controls showed the results were not attributable to factors such as a “no-bias” resulting from a desire to “beat the test.” The results lend significant support to the existence of some manner of dual-process cognition; the human mind appears predisposed on the intuitive level to understand natural phenomena as intentionally created.<sup>147</sup> Chapter 2 will discuss the significance of these intuitions to the conceptualization of agency, personhood, and deity.

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included that involved “human-made artifactual representations of living things, specifically cartoon characters (e.g., Eeyore, Spiderman)” (Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever,” 75).

<sup>144</sup> This allowed the authors to show that test item endorsement “did not simply result from overall confusion or general response sets” (Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever,” 76).

<sup>145</sup> Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever,” 75–82. In the human-made group, endorsement increased from 1% to 4% and from 3% to 8%.

<sup>146</sup> Järnefelt, Canfield, and Kelemen, “The Divided Mind of a Disbeliever,” 77.

<sup>147</sup> A further study published in 2019 demonstrated the same bias among adults in China. See Elisa Järnefelt et al., “Reasoning about nature’s agency and design in the cultural context of China,” *Religion* 9.2 (2019): 156–78.

*Criticisms of the Cognitive Science of Religion*

Before concluding this section, I briefly discuss some criticisms that have been raised with CSR, as well as responses that have been published. Broadly speaking, early CSR research was primarily concerned with challenging the predominance of cultural relativism in then-salient models for religious phenomena. Sociological research in the mid-to-late twentieth century CE was focused primarily on religion as a product of environmental frameworks, as well as on the cross-cultural diversity and variability of that product. By contrast, cognitivists sought to identify the contributions of the human mind to the production and transmission of religious phenomena, focusing more on cross-cultural consistency and the putative universals of religion. This confrontation with the broader study of religion resulted in some push-back that has distilled around three main concerns with a cognitive approach that are relevant to this thesis.

One early criticism was reductionism. CSR takes a “bottom-up” approach to understanding religion, reducing the conceptual “package” of the contemporary notion of religion down to constituent elements that can be subjected to empirical analysis.<sup>148</sup> This has been criticized on numerous grounds, not the least of which is the fact that it tends to overlook native accounts of the nature and function of religion. According to some scholars, however, much of that criticism comes down to special pleading or dissatisfaction with the field’s chosen scope and foci.<sup>149</sup> These concerns have been addressed many times over by scholars of CSR, and

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<sup>148</sup> Some have been suspicious that this approach vouchsafes an anti-religious agenda, while others have been concerned it may be used to legitimize and validate religious belief. For an example of the former, see James W. Jones, *Can Science Explain Religion: The Cognitive Science Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For the latter, see John Teehan, “Cognitive Science and the Limits of Theology,” in *The Roots of Religion: Exploring the Cognitive Science of Religion*, ed. Roger Trigg and Justin L. Barrett (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 167–87.

<sup>149</sup> For a detailed critique of the charge of reductionism, see Robert N. McCauley, “Explanatory Pluralism and the Cognitive Science of Religion: Why Scholars in Religious Studies Should Stop Worrying about Reductionism,” in Xygalatas and McCorkle, *Mental Culture*, 11–32. See also, Edward Slingerland, “Who’s Afraid of Reductionism? The Study of Religion in the Age of Cognitive Science,” *JAAR* 76.2 (2008): 375–411.

reductionism is, after all, an indispensable part of the scientific method.<sup>150</sup>

Another common criticism has been the predominantly “internalist” nature of CSR. Because CSR arose as a challenge to social constructionist explanations of religion, it has often given priority to the cognitive component and is sometimes accused of ignoring or marginalizing the role of historical and sociocultural context. According to this criticism, CSR offers little in the way of explanatory power for particular religious expressions. It is true that the focus has often been primarily on the cognitive roots of religious phenomena, and this criticism has helped swing the pendulum in the other direction. In more recent treatments, the role and function of not only sociocultural, but also *material* context, is often central.<sup>151</sup> As Cohen et al., have stated,

CSR offers explanations of both patterns of recurrence *and* variation in religious thinking and behavior in terms of the interactions among cognitive processes and environmental variables. Such explanations necessarily entail the position that just as culture does not hover above cognition, so cognition is not somehow insulated from culture.<sup>152</sup>

Later, they continue: “without systemic investigation of the complex ways in which human minds interact with one another and with their environments, we risk mistaking predictable particulars for arbitrary idiosyncrasies.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Emma Cohen, Jonathan A. Lanman, Harvey Whitehouse, and Robert N. McCauley have argued, “No heuristic of discovery has been more effective in the history of modern science than the search for mechanisms at a lower level of analysis to explain patterns that we have discovered at a higher level of analysis, whether it is explicating the patterns of inheritance that Mendel discovered in terms of the machinations of DNA in meiosis or deploying psychological mechanisms for the purposes of explaining recurrent religious forms. The idea that reductionism is always a vice is simply mistaken” (Cohen et al., “Common Criticisms of the Cognitive Science of Religion—Answered,” *BSR* 37.4 [2008]: 113).

<sup>151</sup> As Claire White has stated, CSR has been, “from the beginning, cognition *and* culture—never cognition *not* culture” (Claire White, “What the Cognitive Science of Religion Is (and Is Not),” in *Theory in a Time of Excess: Beyond Reflection and Explanation in Religious Studies Scholarship*, ed. Aaron W. Hughes [Sheffield: Equinox, 2017], 104).

<sup>152</sup> Cohen et al., “Common Criticisms of the Cognitive Science of Religion—Answered,” 113. The authors also highlight a number of CSR studies of specific manifestations of religious phenomena, such as Afro-Brazilian spirit possession, the ancient Roman Mithras cult, and North American fundamentalism.

<sup>153</sup> Cohen et al., “Common Criticisms of the Cognitive Science of Religion—Answered,” 113.

A final criticism that will require a bit of attention has to do with the concept of “religion” as a *sui generis* conceptual package. As discussed in the previous section, all disciplines engaged in the study of religion acknowledge the difficulty of attempting a definition or delineation of the concept.<sup>154</sup> The entities that have been labeled “religion” cannot be easily reduced to a short list of necessary and sufficient features, which raises the question of what, precisely, the term indexes.<sup>155</sup> What is the essence of religion? Does it have one? Most scholars currently engaged in the broader study of religion have arrived at the conclusion that “religion” is a cultural reification. According to this line of argumentation, the conceptual package of “religion” is not something that occurs discretely in nature or that exists apart from our discourse; rather, it is an artificial and modern framework for organizing data that serves certain configurations of power and values. Significant concerns could be raised with some of the findings of the cognitive science of religion if the discipline’s explicitly named object of study is a social construct and not a naturally delineated set of cognitive features.

CSR has struggled for some time with this concern, although the field is far from unified. While scholars like Pascal Boyer have asserted that “the very existence of some thing called ‘religion’ is largely an illusion,”<sup>156</sup> he and others have also argued that CSR has made it possible to essentialize religion as beliefs and practices related to “counter-intuitive agents.”<sup>157</sup> Elsewhere, for instance, Boyer has stated that “religion is about the existence and causal powers of nonobservable entities and agencies.”<sup>158</sup> Stewart Guthrie argued in the 90s that, “All

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<sup>154</sup> See above, pages 50–54, note 67.

<sup>155</sup> As was discussed above, CL shows the practice of definition imposes a conceptual framework that is alien to the natural formation and usage of conceptual categories. This will be discussed further below, but in the meantime, the discussion will engage the concerns as they have been expressed within the broader study of religion.

<sup>156</sup> Pascal Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion: Science and the Dissolution of Religion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 9.

<sup>157</sup> Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion’?” 3–27. Ilkka Pyysiäinen has tended in this direction as well. See Ilkka Pyysiäinen, “Buddhism, Religion, and the Concept of ‘God,’” *Numen* 50 (2003): 147–71; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 137–72.

<sup>158</sup> Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 7. This comment occurs in a paraphrase of findings from the field of anthropology, but it fits comfortably



religions do share a feature: ostensible communication with humanlike, yet nonhuman, beings through some form of symbolic actions.”<sup>159</sup> According to Ilka Pyysiäinen,

‘Religion’ is a concept that identifies the personalistic counter-intuitive representations and the related practices, institutions, etc. that are widely spread, literally believed, and actively used by a group of people in their attempts to understand, explain and control those aspects of life, and reality as a whole, that escape common sense and, more recently, scientific explanation.<sup>160</sup>

Juraj Franek contends that these definitions and many others from CSR contribute to an empirically testable theory of religion that makes it possible to posit a definition of religion (based on “minimally counter-intuitive agents”) that resolves the methodological problems inherent in previous attempts. Franek identifies four main issues this definition would have to address: The definition must (1) be sufficiently differentiated from Tylorian definitions to avoid the charge of naïve essentialism; (2) account for pre-theoretically “religious” traditions that do not entertain concepts of spiritual or supernatural beings; (3) overcome the social-constructionist critique; and (4) avoid the charge of structuring power and values.<sup>161</sup>

Addressing issues (1) and (3), Franek attempts to sidestep the accusation of theoretical essentialism by making a case for religion as an innate universal principle, appealing first to Kant regarding the existence of *a priori* knowledge “to which all objects of experience necessarily conform,”<sup>162</sup> and then to Chomsky regarding linguistic modularity and the existence of “cross-cultural universals.”<sup>163</sup> He concludes:

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and consistently with his descriptions elsewhere in *Religion Explained* as well as the more recent *The Fracture of an Illusion*.

<sup>159</sup> Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 197.

<sup>160</sup> Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works*, 227.

<sup>161</sup> Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion?’” 19–20.

<sup>162</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B XVII–XVIII. The translation is Norman Kemp Smith, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 23, quoted in Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion?’” 21.

<sup>163</sup> “[D]omain-specific intuitive principles constitute *cross-cultural universals*” (Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994],

In a sense, the CSR is set to replace the false dichotomy of naïve essentialism on the one hand and free-for-all social constructionism on the other with a synthetic approach recognizing the relatively stable sets of constraints, which are generated by our cognitive architecture designed during the evolutionary history of our species, as well as deep intercultural variation among religious concepts, beliefs and practices.<sup>164</sup>

Issue (2) is resolved with the concept of minimally counter-intuitive agents, an empirically established principle that solves previous concerns with the use of problematic categories like “gods,” “spiritual,” “supernatural,” “sacred,” etc., as well as the exclusion of ostensibly atheistic traditions like Theravada Buddhism (which can include some concepts of counter-intuitive entities).<sup>165</sup> Regarding issue (4), Franek argues that CSR minimizes the risk of abuse by relying on critical scientific methodologies, particularly by focusing primarily on processes related to intuitive beliefs rather than reflective ones. According to Franek, it is the latter that tend to be more firmly associated with “the conscious manipulation of religious concepts (e.g., to fulfill political needs or strengthen the existing or desired power distribution).”<sup>166</sup>

Some significant concerns can be raised with Franek’s case. The concept of counter-intuitiveness is certainly more empirically grounded than “sacred” or “spiritual,” but while it solves certain issues of exclusiveness, it creates others. Although ostensibly accounting for so-called “atheistic” traditions like Buddhism, I would suggest that the framework still problematically reduces religion to codifications of doctrine, which is a modern notion that does not even necessarily reflect the contemporary experiences of individual adherents.<sup>167</sup> Certainly many Buddhists do acknowledge a variety of counterintuitive agents, but it is just as certain that many entirely reject them—at least insofar as they are distinguishable from

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111, emphasis in original). For more on these “universals,” see Ara Norenzayan and Steven J. Heine, “Psychological Universals: What Are They and How Can We Know?” *PB* 131.5 (2005): 763–84.

<sup>164</sup> Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion?’” 24.

<sup>165</sup> See Pyysiäinen, “Buddhism, Religion, and the Concept of ‘God,’” 147–71; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57–172.

<sup>166</sup> Franek, “Has the Cognitive Science of Religion (Re)defined ‘Religion?’” 26.

<sup>167</sup> CSR scholarship absolutely wanders into “power distribution” if it begins to insist certain kinds of adherence to religious traditions constitute more or less pure, pious, or legitimate devotion.

“secular” concepts of counterintuitive agents. Religious traditions are performatively constituted by their adherents, not by the formulation of doctrines, and they are not monolithic in terms of supernatural agents, irrespective of the tradition.<sup>168</sup> Pew’s “2014 Religious Landscape Study” found that 17% of self-identified Jewish respondents, 27% of self-identified Buddhist respondents, 10% of self-identified Hindu respondents, and even 3% of self-identified Orthodox Christian respondents *do not believe in God or a universal spirit*.<sup>169</sup> In those cases of religious traditions that may hold to concepts of supernatural agents, but rather marginally, the broadened concept of “counterintuitive agents” employs the feature on which Protestantizing concepts of religion ostensibly pivot to cleverly draw into the net traditions that pivot on other concepts, but luckily happen to include “ours.” This still assimilates religious traditions to a Eurocentric framework. While other cultures may have adopted that framework through the machinations of colonialism or because of their own interests in structuring power, an essentialist definition that succeeds by conquest is, for lack of a better phrase, a bad idea.<sup>170</sup>

Additionally, counterintuitive agency creates other concerns with *inclusiveness*. The principle fills a conceptual category that extends well beyond what is conventionally

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<sup>168</sup> See, for example, Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>169</sup> To contextualize this a bit, only 92% of self-identified atheists reported not believing in God, up from 73% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, Nov. 3, 2015, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious,” 48 [[http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/11/201.11.03\\_RLS\\_II\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_full_report.pdf)]). The objection might potentially be raised that atheist Jews and Christians are simply cultural or ethnic participants in these traditions, but the counter-objection might also be raised that blithely asserting they “don’t count” seems to rather arbitrarily beg the question. If we insist religion has existed as long as human society has existed, more or less all religious participation has been cultural/ethnic.

<sup>170</sup> For more on that process of assimilation to European/American conceptualizations of religion, see Timothy Fitzgerald, “Critical religion and critical research on religion: Religion and politics as modern fictions,” *CRR* 3.3 (2015): 303–19; Warren S. Goldstein, Rebekka King, and Jonathan Boyarin, “Critical theory of religion vs. critical religion,” *CRR* 4.1 (2016): 3–7; Timothy Fitzgerald, “Critical religion and critical research on religion: A response to the April 2016 editorial,” *CRR* 4.3 (2016): 307–13. For an interesting discussion regarding how this secular/religious dichotomy catalyzed the transformation of Shinto into a religion in nineteenth century Japan, see Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). Cf. Sarah Thal, “A Religion That Was Not a Religion: The Creation of Modern Shinto in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” in *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, ed. Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 100–14; Okot p’Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religion: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Brooklyn: Diasporic African Press, 2011); Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 116–18; James L. Cox, *The Invention of God in Indigenous Societies* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2014).

recognized as religion, and this is acknowledged by, for instance, Boyer, who states, “*Religious agency (gods, spirits, ancestors, etc.) belongs to a larger repertoire of ‘supernatural agents’ defined as violations of intuitions about agents.*”<sup>171</sup> Since hyperactive agency detection and counterintuition are thought to be universal cognitive predispositions, non-religious reifications of counterintuitive agents will also occur, such as imaginary companions, ghosts, Bigfoot, the “invisible hand” of the market, or naïve personifications of Science, Evolution, Justice, the State, the Universe, and even Religion or Christianity.<sup>172</sup> Whether or not religious manifestations of these features of our cognitive architecture are “spandrels,” “byproducts,” or “parasitic,”<sup>173</sup> those broader features can hardly suffice to define those more limited manifestations.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion*, 74, emphasis in original.

<sup>172</sup> For a few examples of scholarly treatments of the notion that conventionally “secular” frameworks can be argued to constitute religion, see Mariano Artigas, *The Mind of the Universe: Understanding Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000); Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears* (London: Routledge, 2002); Mika Luoma-aho, “Political Theology, Anthropomorphism, and Personhood of the State: The Religion of IR,” *IPS* 3.3 (2009): 293–309.

<sup>173</sup> On the spandrel metaphor, see Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme,” *PRSL B205* (1979): 581–98; Buss et al., “Adaptations, Exaptations, and Spandrels,” 533–48. The debate on the parasitic nature of religious belief is divided between advocates of the “byproduct” and “adaptation” models. See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 311; Joseph Bulbulia, “The Cognitive and Evolutionary Psychology of Religion,” *BP* 19 (2004): 655–86; Jesse M. Bering, Katrina McLeod, and Todd K. Shackelford, “Reasoning about Dead Agents Reveals Possible Adaptive Trends,” *HN* 16.4 (2005): 360–81; Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 43–72; Jesse M. Bering, “The Cognitive Psychology of Belief in the Supernatural,” *AmSci* 94 (2006): 142–49; Pyysiäinen and Hauser, “The Origins of Religion,” 104–09; Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion*, 73–75; Joseph A. Bracken, “Actions and Agents: Natural and Supernatural Reconsidered,” *Zygon* 48.4 (2013): 1001–13.

<sup>174</sup> While the universality of the cognitive features of which religion appears to be a byproduct is largely accepted, I would challenge the use of the modularity framework, which comes from generative linguistics. According to cognitive linguistics, our general cognitive abilities arise not from an innate and discrete linguistic module, but from embodied experience. “This view is that general cognitive abilities, like our kinesthetic abilities, our visual or sensorimotor skills, and above all, our typically human categorization strategies, especially our tendency to construct categories on the basis of prototypical basic-level subcategories or exemplars jointly account, together with cultural, contextual and functional parameters, for the main design features of languages and for our ability to learn and use them. The so-called ‘language faculty’ is, thus, claimed to be a product, or rather a specialization, of general cognitive abilities” (Antonio Barcelona and Javier Valenzuela, “An overview of cognitive linguistics,” in *Cognitive Linguistics: Convergence and Expansion*, ed. Mario Brdar, Stefan Th. Gries, and Milena Žic Fuchs [HCP 32; Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011], 19). For a recent book-length treatment of the problems with a modular model of linguistics, see Vyvyan Evans, *The Language Myth: Why Language is not an Instinct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

*Implications*

While CSR is a relatively nascent field, it has produced a number of important insights into the socio-material origins and functions of deity that will be critical to this thesis' research agenda. Debate and criticism have helped the field refine and nuance its methodologies and its theoretical models, and that process is obviously ongoing. (Indeed, I hope to spur that process on a bit myself with this thesis.)

## The Hebrew Bible

Because the latter chapters of this thesis will directly engage the biblical literature and the contexts of its development, I think it is necessary to include some comments about terminology and a brief outline of my source-critical approach. Some comments about terminology have already been made above, but common terms from the world of biblical studies that will reoccur frequently in this thesis will need some additional description. By “early Israel and Judah,” I refer to the polities that developed in the regions of the coastal plains and hill countries on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and existed in some form or another until the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE. There is a small complication here, as the two polities seem to have maintained discrete identities until the Assyrian destruction of Israel in 722 BCE, after which the southern kingdom of Judah incorporated the literature and history of Israel into their own, effectively appropriating the Israelite identity. To refer separately to each kingdom prior to 722 BCE, I will use “early Judah” and “early Israel.” In place of the somewhat problematic terms “Ancient Near East,” “Southern Levant,” and “Syria-Palestine,” I have been using and will continue to use the phrase “Southwest Asia” in reference to the regions extending from Egypt up through the Negev, the coastal and hill countries to Syria, and over to Mesopotamia. When referring specifically to the areas

understood to have been occupied by early Israel and Judah, I will generally use the Negev, the central hill country, and the northern hill country.

For chronology, I use Finkelstein’s “low chronology,” placing the transition from Late Bronze III/Iron Age I in the late twelfth century BCE, the transition from Iron Age I/IIA in the mid-tenth century BCE, and the Iron Age IIA/B transition in the early eighth century BCE.<sup>175</sup> In place of “exilic period,” I will use “Neo-Babylonian period” (587–515 BCE), although I will refer to the experience of exile. The following period will be referred to as the “Achaemenid period” (515–330 BCE), then the “Greco-Roman period” (330 BCE until the Common Era).

As it is not my intention to forward any new theoretical models related to source criticism or the dating of the biblical texts, the following outline will largely draw from existing models that are broadly representative of the state of the field. The texts of the Hebrew Bible generally recognized by scholars as the earliest are comparatively short poetic texts like Genesis 49, Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, and Judges 5.<sup>176</sup> These texts reflect rather idiosyncratic deity concepts and social configurations, and they contain what appear to be early iterations of themes and motifs that elsewhere appear in much more elaborate form.<sup>177</sup> These texts also betray high concentrations of a number of features thought to be diagnostic of what has become known as Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH).<sup>178</sup> Some have dated the original cores of some of

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<sup>175</sup> See Israel Finkelstein and Eli Piasezky, “Radiocarbon-Dated Destruction Layers: A Skeleton for Iron Age Chronology in the Levant,” *OJA* 28.3 (2009): 255–74.

<sup>176</sup> Frank M. Cross and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 46–63; Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56–62; Tania Notarius, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Poetry: A Discursive, Typological, and Historical Investigation of the Tense System* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 73–208; Alice Mandell, “Biblical Hebrew, Archaic,” *EHL* 1:325–29; Agustinus Gianto, “Archaic Biblical Hebrew,” in *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 1, *Periods, Corpora, and Reading Traditions*, ed. W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 19–29; Ronald Hendel and Jan Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 45–46.

<sup>177</sup> Deuteronomy 32:8–9 seems to distinguish between Elyon and YHWH, for instance (see pp. 252–53, and n. 59), while Judges 5 only recognizes ten social groups (it may be premature to refer to the poem’s subjects as “tribes”), omitting Judah and Benjamin, and referring to two tribes by different names. The earliest core of the poem also does not seem to reference Israel or YHWH. The defeat of Pharaoh in the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 does not match the narrative from the rest of the book of Exodus, while Genesis 49:24–26 seems to describe an ancestral deity closely connected with agrarian ideals.

<sup>178</sup> See Gary A. Rendsburg, “Northern Hebrew through Time: From the Song of Deborah to the Mishnah,” in *Diachrony and Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,

these poems to as early as the thirteenth or twelfth centuries BCE, but I feel most comfortable simply acknowledging that some of these poems, such as Genesis 49 or Judges 5, may predate the rise of an Israelite monarchy. The contexts for the composition of these texts will be addressed in more detail in later chapters as they become relevant.

While early Semitic poetry has an obscure *terminus post quem*, the preponderance of evidence suggests that narrative prose developed in the regions around the highlands of Israel and Judah no earlier than the mid-ninth century BCE, which suggests that texts employing narrative prose to describe events preceding that period were committed to writing in a later period.<sup>179</sup> That is not to say they cannot reflect historical events from earlier periods, only that their textualization must have followed a period of oral/material transmission during which there would have been a higher chance of revision (despite some degree of constraint imposed by different social and material dynamics).<sup>180</sup> Additionally, the commitment to writing of

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2012), 343; William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 71–72; Notarius, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Poetry*, 125–50; Mandell, “Biblical Hebrew, Archaic,” 325–29; Gianto, “Archaic Biblical Hebrew,” 19–29; Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 101–04. Ian Young and Robert Rezetko have been the dominant opponents of the linguistic dating of biblical texts (e.g., Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, with the assistance of Martin Ehrensverd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, 2 vols [London: Equinox, 2008]), but for a strong critique, see Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 135–44 (cf. Na’ama Pat-El and Aren Wilson-Wright, “Features of Archaic Biblical Hebrew and the Linguistic Dating Debate,” *HS* 54 [2013]: 387–410). On the isolation of Hebrew as a discrete language—that is, one that could be used to mark social/national identity—see Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2010), 103–55.

<sup>179</sup> The Mesha Stele is the earliest example of narrative prose writing in the regions of and around early Israel and Judah. See Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 113–14: “The first extended linear alphabetic texts each lay out their territories, regimes, and languages at a stroke, on a single iconic monument. The speaker is the king, who identifies himself and recounts the battles he has won and the lands he has rescued from unjust foes with the mandate of his patron god. Remarkably, we can tell with some precision where the kings got this idea. The first narratives of historical events—indeed, the first narratives of any sort—in the local languages of the Levant are vernacular versions of the conquest narratives that Mesopotamian kinds had been telling about themselves for almost two thousand years.” Sanders also highlights the innovation of first-person speech in these inscriptions. Previously, inscriptions were written in the third person (i.e., “This is the stele of PN”), but the Mesha Stele begins, “I am Mesha . . .” Sanders states, “The inscription presents royal power by making the king present in language, ventriloquizing Mesha as if he were standing in front of us” (page 114). It should be noted that the reference on the Mesha Stele to Omri’s oppression of Moab prior to Mesha suggests that Omri’s kingdom had administrative structures at least as developed as Moab’s, and therefore may have been capable of producing narrative prose itself around the same time period, though nothing survives.

<sup>180</sup> By “oral/material” I refer not only to orally transmitted stories, but also to the association of mnemohistory with material media, such as cultic objects, buildings, geography, and even ruins. A wonderful discussion of mnemohistory, materiality, and the early Hebrew Bible is Daniel D. Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose: Studies in Epistemology, Hebrew Scribalism, and the Biblical Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Ian D. Wilson, “History and the Hebrew Bible: Culture, Narrative, and Memory,” *BRPBI* 3.2 (2018): 1–69.

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earlier traditions would have been refracted through the lenses of the sociocultural contexts and concerns of the later authors and editors.<sup>181</sup> What this means for this thesis is that I will consider historical narratives describing periods preceding the Mesha Stele and the rise of an Israelite monarchy to have been committed to text in a later period, and therefore to have in some way reflected the rhetorical goals of later authors and editors. The growth of the Omride kingdom in the ninth century would have provided ample administrative support for the development of royal histories—and scholars have long pointed to indications of northern origins for several traditions<sup>182</sup>—but with the destruction of the Omride kingdom (as it was referred to by the Assyrian kingdom) in 722 BCE, and the subsequent maturation of the Judahite kingdom under Assyrian hegemony, any such literature was appropriated by whatever scribal structures were in place among officials in Jerusalem.<sup>183</sup>

The traditions of early Israel thus come down to us through the scribal filters of various cult centers and the Judahite royal court (which, however, did not always impose a heavy editorial hand).<sup>184</sup> Some of the earliest of these likely include the charter myths of the

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<sup>181</sup> See Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose*, 80: “as older memories aggregate within a stream of oral tradition, they often, by necessity, adapt and cohere to ‘new social and symbolic structures’ within a community so that this remembered past retains its meaning and significance for those listening to a past they never experienced themselves.”

<sup>182</sup> See, for instance, Gary A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990); Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 141–51.

<sup>183</sup> Note Daniel D. Pioske’s observation that “when reading stories about the early Iron Age period we find that it is events and figures associated with the central hill country, from Shechem in the north to Hebron in the south, that are most often within the purview of the biblical writers. When we move outside of these bounds the picture presented becomes somewhat more murky” (Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose*, 216).

<sup>184</sup> On these structures and their contexts, see William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Hebrew: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111–73; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 85–135. Thomas C. Römer notes that, “For Palestinian scribes from the eighth to the fourth century BCE no clear distinction between author and redactor can be made” (Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* [London: T&T Clark, 2007], 49). For the broader discussion, see pages 47–49. I will primarily refer to “authors and editors,” while recognizing these designations represent a spectrum within which an individual could move from one end to the other at any given point.



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patriarchal and exodus narratives,<sup>185</sup> traditions associated with the conquest narratives,<sup>186</sup> portions of the book of Judges (scholars frequently refer to the collection in this phase as the books of the Saviors),<sup>187</sup> some prophetic literature,<sup>188</sup> and traditions regarding the rise of Saul.<sup>189</sup> Judah produced its own literature between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, as well, which likely included early editions of prophetic texts and its own regnal histories.<sup>190</sup> An additional editorial filter for many of these texts is that of the so-called “Deuteronomistic school,” which refers to authors and editors who were responsible for the composition, compilation, and/or redaction of Deuteronomy (D) and the Deuteronomistic literature (Dtr), which runs from Deuteronomy through to 2 Kings.<sup>191</sup> The preeminent product of this school is the book of Deuteronomy, the earliest edition of which I date to the late Neo-Assyrian period of the seventh

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<sup>185</sup> See Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 141–51. Hosea 12 reflects knowledge of a pre-Pentateuchal Jacob tradition, which—if the text dates to the eighth century BCE—suggests the Jacob cycle does as well (see Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, “Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis,” *ZAW* 126.3 [2014]: 321–22). Indeed, the Jacob cycle, located primarily in the north, seems to have been the oldest and the most important to the Northern Kingdom, but upon assimilation to the Jerusalemite tradition was subordinated to later traditions involving Isaac and Abraham, whose traditions orbit around the south. On this, see Konrad Schmid, “The Biblical Writings in the Late Eighth Century BCE,” in *Archaeology and History of Eighth-Century Judah*, ed. Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018), 491–92.

<sup>186</sup> See Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 81–90.

<sup>187</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 90–91; Ernst Axel Knauf, “History in Judges,” in *Israel in Transition: From Late Bronze II to Iron IIa (c. 1250–850 B.C.E.). Volume 2. The Texts*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 140–49; Israel Finkelstein, “Major Saviors, Minor Judges: The Historical Background of the Northern Accounts in the Book of Judges,” *JSOT* 41.4 (2017): 431–49.

<sup>188</sup> Hosea, for instance. See Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984); Erhard Blum, “Hosea 12 und die Pentateuchüberlieferungen,” in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn und Henrik Pfeiffer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 291–321. While some argue for a much later date (Henrik Pfeiffer, *Das Heiligtum von Bethel im Spiegel des Hoseabuches* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999]; James M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2013]), the predominant view seems to be that at least portions of the text date to the eighth century BCE.

<sup>189</sup> Sometimes referred to as the HSR, or “History of Saul’s Reign/Rise.” See Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Jacob L. Wright, *David, King of Israel, and Kaleb in Biblical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 35–50.

<sup>190</sup> See, for instance, Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017);

<sup>191</sup> See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Konrad Schmid and Raymond F. Person Jr., eds., *Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and the Deuteronomistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Diana V. Edelman, ed., *Deuteronomy–Kings as Emerging Authoritative Books: A Conversation* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

century BCE.<sup>192</sup> Reconstructions propose this first edition began with Deuteronomy 6:4–5, included portions of Deuteronomy 12–13 and 21–25 as its core, and concluded with the curses of chapter 28.<sup>193</sup>

The Deuteronomistic school during the Neo-Assyrian period also produced portions of what would become the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. While all these books drew in part from earlier literary traditions, and were also later edited within Babylonian and Achaemenid phases of Deuteronomistic production, their compilation was initiated by royal scribes working in Jerusalem under the reign of Josiah. Several prophetic books were composed or expanded upon between the late seventh century and the Babylonian period, including Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, Habakkuk, and others.<sup>194</sup>

Another widely acknowledged source for the biblical literature is the Priestly source, or P.<sup>195</sup> This source is characterized by a transcendent view of deity and by concern for genealogy, authority, purity, and ritual law.<sup>196</sup> Understood to begin with the creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:4a, the earliest version of P is also thought to include a genealogy of Adam and of Shem, a flood account, the table of nations, portions of the books of Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus (including another source comprising Leviticus 17–16 known as the Holiness Code, or H), and portions of the book of Numbers (and perhaps Joshua). An original P corpus likely circulated

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<sup>192</sup> The reconstruction I adopt here is based on Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 45–106.

<sup>193</sup> See Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 78–81.

<sup>194</sup> See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*; Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Bob Becking and Dirk Human, eds., *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa. OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>195</sup> Some recent treatments of P include Philippe Guillaume, *Land and Calendar: The Priestly Document from Genesis 1 to Joshua 18* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden, eds., *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009); Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 169–213; Jason M. H. Gaines, *The Poetic Priestly Source* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015); Roy E. Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen, eds., *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015);

<sup>196</sup> The concern for the temple cult is understood by many to have been introduced in a later phase of P. In this view, P “provided the chronological and narrative thread of the compilation of the Torah” (Ernst Axel Knauf and Philippe Guillaume, *A History of Biblical Israel: The Fate of the Tribes and Kingdoms from Merneptah to Bar Kochba* [Sheffield: Equinox, 2016], 183).

independently,<sup>197</sup> perhaps during the sixth or early fifth century BCE,<sup>198</sup> but at some point was brought together with D and other narrative stands to produce the macronarrative of the Pentateuch.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the development of biblical literature I will address is the question of the Yahwist (J) source. According to the classical form of the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), J and E (the Elohist source) were two of the earliest documentary sources for the Pentateuch, and many theoretical models attribute the initial combination of the patriarchal and exodus narratives to J.<sup>199</sup> They have been unstable sources in some ways, however, and questions regarding their relationship to each other and to the broader Pentateuchal macronarrative have occupied the attention of source critics for some time.<sup>200</sup> Many—particularly German—scholars have recently forwarded the theory that the two corpora operated as independent traditions of Israelite origins until initially joined by P.<sup>201</sup> This would confine J to the early patriarchal narratives and render it less of a discrete documentary source and more of a collection of Yahwistic fragments. I think the arguments in favor of this view

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<sup>197</sup> For an English translation of one proposed original P document, see Guillaume, *Land and Calendar*, 13–30. A somewhat related attempt to delineate P is William H. C. Propp, “The Priestly Source Recovered Intact?” *VT* 46.4 (1996): 458–78.

<sup>198</sup> For an argument for a pre-exilic context for P, see Jacob Milgrom, “The Antiquity of the Priestly Source: A Reply to Joseph Blenkinsopp,” *ZAW* 111.1 (1999): 10–22; Faust, “The World of P,” 173–218. Cf. Sias Meyer, “Dating the Priestly text in the pre-exilic period: Some remarks about anachronistic slips and other obstacles,” *VEE* 31.1 (2010): 1–6.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Christian Römer, “The Elusive Yahwist: A Short History of Research,” in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 24–25.

<sup>200</sup> Recent concerns about J are usually traced to Rolf Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976) and Rolf Rendtorff, “The ‘Yahwist’ as Theologian? The Dilemma of Pentateuchal Criticism,” *JSOT* 3 (1977): 2–10 (see, for instance, Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 45; cf. Römer, “The Elusive Yahwist,” 19). For a timeline of J’s recent troubles, see Römer, “The Elusive Yahwist,” 9–27.

<sup>201</sup> See Jan Christian Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, eds., *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Composition des Hezateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); Jan Christian Gertz, “The Transition between the Books of Genesis and Exodus,” in Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*, 73–87; Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010); Konrad Schmid, “Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel,” *Biblica* 93.2 (2012): 187–208 (in response to Joel S. Baden, “The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus,” *Biblica* 93.2 [2012]: 161–86). Some retain J as a source by simply moving the date of J to the Babylonian period (e.g., John Van Seters, “Dating the Yahwist’s History: Principles and Perspectives,” *Biblica* 96.1 [2015]: 1–25).

are strong, and so in this thesis I adopt the convention of referring to D, P, and either pre- or post-P sources.

I understand the rest of the biblical literature to have been composed between the Neo-Babylonian and Greco-Roman periods, with Daniel being the last, written around 164 BCE.<sup>202</sup> Some of these texts preserve traditions from earlier time periods, and I will address them as the discussion warrants, but for the most part, I understand them to primarily reflect the social and ideological circumstances of the periods in which they were finalized. Because these later texts will not be particularly germane to my discussion, I will address any questions of dating or sources as, again, the discussion warrants.

One main motivation for the ongoing revision, expansion, rearrangement, and reinterpretation of the texts of the Hebrew Bible in these periods is particularly relevant to this discussion, and that is the exigencies of social memory. The redaction of old material, the composition of new material, and the reconfiguring or reinterpreting of both, socially narrativizes the circumstances and experiences of the group. This contributes to the making of meaning by renegotiating the past in light of the present, emplotting the group within the broader historical macronarrative, which reinforces identity and orients members towards desired values and goals. As Jan Assmann has put it, “Memory enables us to orient ourselves in time and to form out of the stuff of time a ‘diachronic identity.’ Political myths are about forming a collective or political identity, and they achieve this by giving time the form of a narrative structure and charging this structure with values, emotions, and ideals.”<sup>203</sup> Controlling

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<sup>202</sup> Although the traditions still circulated separately, continued to be edited, and were characterized by a great deal of textual fluidity, as demonstrated by the disparities between MT, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint. It is not until around the second century CE that the texts are systematically standardized. See Emanuel Tov, *The Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Revised and Expanded (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012).

<sup>203</sup> Jan Assmann, “Memory, Narration, Identity: Exodus as a Political Myth,” in *Literary Constructions of Identity in the Ancient World*, ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 14, quoted in Wilson, “History and the Hebrew Bible,” 29. Wilson continues, “Social remembering, then, functions primarily within narrative frameworks of thought, which have structured plots, inherent understandings of causality, and preconceived ideas about social praxis (i.e., ideologies)” (page 32).

that narrative emplotment also facilitates the structuring of values and power. As will become clear, the conceptualization of deity and divine agency is deeply entangled in those dynamics of power, values, and identity.

## Conclusion

The cognitive sciences provide some of the most promising theoretical frameworks available today for plumbing the fundamentals of ancient thought. Two of these frameworks in particular, namely prototype theory and the dual process model of cognition, will help to avoid many of the methodological stumbling blocks, and bridge many of the gaps in the data, that have undermined previous approaches. The first, prototype theory, will facilitate a clearer understanding of the contours and boundaries of the category of deity. It obviates the need for dichotomous approaches to delineating the category of deity through necessary and sufficient features, which did not contribute to the development of the category and do not govern its usage. Breaking down these binaries helps to account in non-dogmatic ways for the conceptual overlap between deity and categories like cultic objects and humans that is attested in the literature.

The dual process model of cognition undergirds many of the important insights of CSR regarding the development, transmission, and perseverance of deity concepts. Perhaps most importantly, understanding the intuitive reasoning undergirding the manifestations of deity concepts in material media from early Israel and Judah, including the biblical and other texts, makes it unnecessary to conduct the interrogation at the level of the rationalizing discourse, which frequently has more to do with structuring values and power than with the way individuals and groups conceptualized deity and divine agency. In this way, the methodological stumbling blocks and the gaps in the data that have complicated the previous scholarship are mitigated. One of the central methodological stumbling blocks of most of the scholarship that

## CHAPTER 1 – Methodological Considerations

has treated the question of deity and divine agency has been the imposition of the contemporary concept of religion. As mentioned above, the *sui generis* nature of religion is a bit of a sticking point within CSR. The notion that religion is a domain of human culture that is trans-cultural and trans-historical has become so embedded in the foundation of the study of the Hebrew Bible that it is no longer questioned. As this chapter has demonstrated, however, the category is a modern reification that has no analytical value for the interrogation of the ancient world. As a result, I do not use the concept of “religion” as a framework going forward.

## CHAPTER 2

# Agency and Personhood

## Introduction

This chapter will conduct an interdisciplinary interrogation of the concepts of agency and personhood. Its goal is a clearer picture of the way (arguably) panhuman cognitive constraints and biases interact with ecological and socio-cultural structures, to produce the conceptualizations of agency observable around the world today, and that contributed to the production of concepts of personhood found today and detectable within the material remains of past societies.

Rather than start with an attempt to define agency or personhood, I begin with cognitive research that has attempted to better understand the intuitive perception of what is conventionally referred to as agency, and particularly its evolutionary origins.<sup>1</sup> One key observation will be that our intuitive perception of agency is not constrained by the conventional boundaries separating the animate from the inanimate—human persons can and do attribute agency to the material world. While scholars have acknowledged at least since

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<sup>1</sup> While human evolution is my focus, the discussion will also include non-human primates. Social, material, and other frameworks will be introduced after this methodological groundwork has been laid.

## CHAPTER 2 – Agency and Personhood

Marcel Mauss that the boundaries of personhood are situated, emergent, and negotiable, and that persons have social relationships with things,<sup>2</sup> a tension exists today within the fields of archaeology and anthropology regarding whether, to what degree, and how, precisely, to synthesize the frameworks of materiality and agency. After discussing scholarly debate about this tension, I will interrogate two frameworks for reconciling the cognitive and the material that have been influential in recent years, namely those of Alfred Gell and Lambros Malafouris. I will draw important insights from these two approaches that will be critical for the interrogation of material remains moving forward, but will ultimately conclude that neither succeeds in completely resolving the tension.

The second part of the chapter will engage conceptualizations of personhood, focusing ultimately on those of early Israel and Judah. Because the scholarly debate related to this topic is exceptionally broad and complex, traversing issues like gender, ethnicity, and status, I will focus primarily on themes directly relevant to the development of concepts of deity. In the first section, I briefly outline some of the ways intuitive cognition and the symbolic framing of personhood function in modern societies' conceptualizations of the person, ultimately focusing on the person in the afterlife. A few considerations are responsible for this focus. First, conceptualizations of deity overlap significantly with those of deceased agents, and are intuitively linked to them. Next, the partibility of the person and the autonomy of its constituent elements becomes far more salient after the body begins to decompose and disintegrate. Finally, the accident of preservation famously privileges elite mortuary remains, particularly in early Southwest Asia, which will be the focus of the chapter's final section and will occupy the majority of the space. The material remains from that region also frequently provide us with texts that allow us to reconstruct not only the conceptualization of the person in the afterlife,

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1966).



but also their relationship to the living and the responsibilities of the latter to the former.<sup>3</sup> This will help set the stage for Chapter 4’s discussion.

## Agency in Cognition and Evolution

### *Agency in Early Childhood*

The seminal research responsible for the current cognitive models regarding the perception of agency was published in 1944 by Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel,<sup>4</sup> and it problematizes the restriction of models of agency to humans and animals. In that research, Heider and Simmel showed three groups of adult participants an animated film in which three geometrical figures—a large triangle, a small triangle, and a disc—moved within and around a rectangle that had a section that opened and shut like a door. Following the film, the first group (34 subjects) was simply asked to describe the film, while the other two groups (36 and 44 subjects, respectively) were asked to interpret the movement of the shapes as if they were persons, and then answer questions about why they moved the way they did. Across all three groups, all participants except for one from the first group interpreted the shapes as animate beings, and primarily as persons. We may say these shapes had *agency*, according to the majority of conceptualizations of the concept. Participants who ascribed agency to the shapes attributed goals and motivations based on the nature of their movement, and even developed narratives to account for the behavior.

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<sup>3</sup> Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz note that “Burials have more to do with the living than with the dead. Burial expresses the feelings and attitudes of individuals, families and communities toward the dead and death” (Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz, “The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change,” *IEJ* 58.2 [2008]: 150). See also Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 2–3: “Whether expressed in terms of memory, community, tradition, kinship, status, identity or any other means of articulating a sense of social ‘collectivity’ or ‘community’, the grave keeps alive the ongoing relationship between and among the living and the dead.”

<sup>4</sup> Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel, “An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior,” *AJPpsych* 57.2 (1944): 243–59.

Similar research has been repeated many times over the years in a variety of ways and contexts in an effort to tease out a more detailed understanding of the responsible cognitive processes,<sup>5</sup> and the preponderance of evidence indicates that basic intuitive reasoning about what counts as an agent and what does not emerges in early infancy, well before any social conditioning influences perception.<sup>6</sup> The development of this cognitive capacity can be broadly divided into three general phases:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) Bias toward intentional agents
- (2) Understanding goal- and object-oriented action
- (3) Understanding internal mental states

In the first of these phases, infants show an attentional bias toward intentional (primarily human) agents. The earliest evidences of this bias are associated with visual stimuli like motion cues (such as biomechanics)<sup>8</sup> and surface features (such as face-like images).<sup>9</sup> Studies have

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Brian J. Scholl and Patrice D. Tremoulet, “Perceptual Causality and Animacy,” *TCS* 4.8 (2000): 299–309; Fulvia Castelli et al., “Autism, Asperger Syndrome and Brain Mechanisms for the Attribution of Mental States to Animated Shapes,” *Brain* 125.8 (2002): 1839–49; Justin L. Barrett and Amanda Hankes Johnson, “The Role of Control in Attributing Intentional Agency to Inanimate Objects,” *JCC* 3.3 (2003): 208–17; Brian J. Scholl and Tao Gao, “Perceiving Animacy and Intentionality: Visual Processing or Higher-Level Judgment?” in *Social Perception: Detection and Interpretation of Animacy, Agency, and Intention*, ed. M. D. Rutherford and Valerie A. Kuhlmeier (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 197–229; Chris Fields, “Motion, Identity and the Bias toward Agency,” *FHN* 8.597 (2014): 1–13.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the discussion below, see Susan C. Johnson, “Detecting Agents,” *PTRSLB* 358 (2003): 557: “[T]he representational system underlying the infants’ attributions is not open to revision. If it were adults would have long since revised it out of existence. By implication then, the system is not a constructed one.”

<sup>7</sup> These phases are borrowed from Henry M. Wellman, *Making Minds: How Theory of Mind Develops* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 170–171. Other frameworks for understanding the intuitive perception of agency within CSR generally rely on the same cognitive processes, but arrange them in different ways. See, for instance, Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 12–22; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 3–53; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 15–23. For a theoretical model that suggests the ToM is pre-linguistic and innate, see Marie Legerstee, *Infants’ Sense of People: Precursors to a Theory of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Psychologists understand biomechanics to refer to the patterns of torso and limb movement in terrestrial vertebrates. See Gunnar Johansson, “Visual Perception of Biological Motion and a Model for Its Analysis,” *PerPsych* 14.2 (1973): 201–11; Bennett I. Bertenthal and Jeannine Pinto, “Global Processing of Biological Motions,” *PS* 5.4 (1994): 221–25; Francesca Simion, Lucia Regolin, and Hermann Bulf, “A Predisposition for Biological Motion in the Newborn Baby,” *PNAS* 15 (2008): 809–13; M. D. Rutherford, “Evidence for Specialized Perception of Animate Motion,” in Rutherford and Kuhlmeier, *Social Perception*, 116; Elena Mascalzoni et al., “The Cradle of Causal Reasoning: Newborns’ Preference for Physical Causality,” *DevSci* 16.3 (2013): 327–35.

<sup>9</sup> The imagery need not represent human faces. Scholars employed face-like stimuli consisting of geometric shapes and scrambled faces to demonstrate that the perceptual preference is oriented toward a more broad and general set of structural properties, such as higher stimulus density in the upper part of a geometric configuration and visual symmetry across a central vertical axis (Viola Macchi Cassia, Chiara Turati, and Fancesca Simion,

detected the bias in infants as young as two days old, and a recent study found that even fetuses in the womb displayed a preference for “face-like images.”<sup>10</sup> This bias is not human-specific, but concerned more broadly with basic perceptual features that are associated with intentionality, causal motion, and self-propelledness. Experience and interaction with stimuli in the species-typical environment further develops, stabilizes, and specializes the brain’s systems for organizing knowledge about those agents.<sup>11</sup> These experiences and organization of knowledge also contribute to the development of many image schemata. Causal motion, for instance, contributes to the COMPULSIVE FORCE schema, while our upright orientation contributes to the UP-DOWN schema.<sup>12</sup>

The second phase is undergirded by a developing teleological outlook, or a perception that there is purpose or intention underlying conditions, events, and entities. This outlook leads to the understanding of agents and their actions as oriented toward some kind of object or goal. As infants continue to have experiences and learn about their bodies and their material entanglement in the world, they begin to perceive certain entities as “like me,”<sup>13</sup> leading to the

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“Can a Nonspecific Bias Toward Top-Heavy Patterns Explain Newborns’ Face Preference,” *PS* 15.6 [2004]: 379–83).

<sup>10</sup> Vincent M. Reid et al., “The Human Fetus Preferentially Engages with Face-like Visual Stimuli,” *CB* 27 (2017): 1825–28. The authors used lights to project basic face-like imagery through the uterine wall and assessed fetal behavior with 4D ultrasound technology (the imagery constituted sets of three dots in a “face-like” arrangement [∴] and an “inverted face-like” arrangement [∴]).

<sup>11</sup> Szilvia Biro and Alan M. Leslie, “Infants’ Perception of Goal-Directed Actions: Development through Cue-Based Bootstrapping,” *DevSci* 10.3 (2007): 379–81; Scholl and Gao, “Perceiving Animacy and Intentionality”; Fields, “Motion, Identity and the Bias toward Agency.”

<sup>12</sup> (Here I employ the convention of putting the names of image schemata in small caps.) A fascinating discussion of how normal upright orientation embeds certain perceptual structures in our minds is found in V. S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Quest for What Makes Us Human* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 51–54. Ramachandran illustrates the “shape-from-shading” phenomenon, which employs groups of circles shaded light on one side and dark on the other. It is illusory when the shading is orientated right-to-left, because we can perceive the circles either as bumps or as cavities. If a row of circles is shaded light on the right and dark on the left, and another row just below is shaded light on the left and dark on the right, they will always be perceived oppositely—one row as bumps and the other as cavities. They can alternate, but they can never appear to constitute the exact same shapes when juxtaposed. When the orientation is shifted ninety degrees, though, the flexibility of the illusion all but vanishes. When the dark shading is on top, the circles almost always appear as cavities, while when the dark shading is on the bottom, they almost always appear as bumps. This is the result of the “canonical” orientation of light sources within the mind as coming from above our eyeline. In the vast majority of people’s experiences, light sources come down from above, conditioning our brain to intuitively perceive the circles with the dark shading on the bottom as convex bumps casting a shadow downward.

<sup>13</sup> “The mirror system consolidates during the first few months of life through a combination of genetic

cognitive mapping of the bodies of others onto their own and the concomitant imitation of others' actions.<sup>14</sup> (The mirror neuron system responsible for this mapping is powerful enough that persons born without certain limbs have experienced phantom sensations in certain contexts and with enough experience observing others using those limbs.)<sup>15</sup> Infants also map the relationship between their bodily actions and their mental experiences back onto the actions of others and begin to develop the ability to attribute intention to those actions.<sup>16</sup> This may begin to happen as early as three months of age,<sup>17</sup> and it contributes to the development of social cognition, to the enculturation of domain general abilities,<sup>18</sup> and to other features of infants' "naïve psychology"<sup>19</sup> (intuitive reasoning about intentional agents) and "naïve sociology" (intuitive reasoning about social groups).<sup>20</sup> Within the first year of life, infants

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predisposition, pre- and postnatal self-interactions (i.e., infants' observing and touching their own limbs as they move), and interactions with primary caregivers. The basic neural underpinnings of Self and Other emerge within this timeframe, and it is crucial that this process involves body, action, perception, and goal-directed experience" (Gregory J. Wightman, *The Origins of Religion in the Paleolithic* [Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015], 61).

<sup>14</sup> "The plasticity of the MNS [mirror neuron system] on its input side enables the bias toward agency by enabling the mapping of observed non-biological motions to representations of 1st person actions and their typically-accompanying intentions, and hence the representation of inanimate non-agents as agents. It is this mapping that presumably implements the 'irresistible' perception of certain motions as indicative of agency, even if they are executed by animated geometrical shapes" (Fields, "Motion, Identity and the Bias toward Agency," 7–8). For more on the mirror neuron system, see Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, "The Mirror-Neuron System," *ARN* 27 (2004): 169–92; Lindsay M. Oberman and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, "The Simulating Social Mind: The Role of the Mirror Neuron System and Simulation in the Social and Communicative Deficits of Autism Spectrum Disorders," *PsychBullRev* 133.2 (2007): 310–27.

<sup>15</sup> Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and Diane C. Rogers-Ramachandran, "Synaesthesia in Phantom Limbs Induced with Mirrors," *PRSL* 263 (1996): 377–86; Wightman, *The Origins of Religion in the Paleolithic*, 61–62.

<sup>16</sup> Ildikó Király et al., "The Early Origins of Goal Attribution in Infancy," *CC* 12 (2003): 752–69; Birgit Elsner, "Infants' Imitation of Goal-Directed Actions: The Role of Movements and Action Effects," *ActaPsych* 124 (2007): 44–59; Biro and Leslie, "Infants' Perception of Goal-Directed Actions"; Andrew N. Meltzoff, "Social Cognition and the Origins of Imitation, Empathy, and Theory of Mind," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development. Second Edition*, ed. Usha Goswami (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 52–54; Eun Young Kim and Hyun-joo Song, "Six-Month-olds Actively Predict Others' Goal-Directed Actions," *CD* 33 (2015): 1–13. 8-month-olds can even perceive intended goals when agent actions are unsuccessful or disrupted (Vincent M. Reid, Gergely Csibra, Jay Belsky, and Mark H. Johnson, "Neural Correlates of the Perception of Goal-Directed Action in Infants," *ActaPsych* 124 [2007]: 129–38).

<sup>17</sup> Yuyan Luo, "Three-Month-Old Infants Attribute Goals to a Non-Human Agent," *DevSci* 14 (2010): 453–60.

<sup>18</sup> This refers to the development of widespread cognitive abilities through shared patterns of practice and experience. Cross-cultural consistency in cognitive biases may be misinterpreted as an indication of innateness where it may rather result from patterns of experience common to infants that condition the development of neural processes. See Andreas Roepstorff, Jörg Niewöhner, and Stefan Beck, "Enculturing Brains through Patterned Practices," *NN* 23 (2010): 1051–59.

<sup>19</sup> Gergely Csibra, "Teleological and Referential Understanding of Action in Infancy," *PTRSLB* 358 (2003): 447–58; Michael Tomasello, Malinda Carpenter, Josep Call, and Tanya Behne, "Understanding and Sharing Intentions: The Origins of Cultural Cognition," *BBS* 28.5 (2005): 675–91.

<sup>20</sup> See Wellman, *Making Minds*, 196–210.

begin to attribute goals to unfamiliar and inanimate objects and infer unseen and unknown causes and agents based on the perception of intentionality in a variety of environmental cues and conditions.<sup>21</sup>

In the third phase, which begins around the end of the first year of life, infants begin to intuitively perceive that thoughts and motivations are different from things, that people have different mental attitudes, and that those mental attitudes can be hidden and can differ from bodily states and behaviors.<sup>22</sup> The result is the perception that psychological agents are “in here,” while physical objects are “out there.”<sup>23</sup> These intuitions interact with socio-cultural frameworks and influences to reify a variety of entities associated with cognition (e.g., “mind”), emotion (e.g., “heart”), animacy (e.g., “spirit,” “life force”), and identity (e.g., “soul,” “Ego”).<sup>24</sup> As children begin to be able to engage in contemplation and imagination about the nature of these loci of agency—unobservable as they are—they also contemplate and imagine their

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<sup>21</sup> Susan C. Johnson, Amy Booth, and Kirsten O’Hearn, “Inferring the Goals of a Nonhuman Agent,” *CogDev* 15 (2001): 637–56; Y. Alpha Shimizu and Susan C. Johnson, “Infants’ Attribution of a Goal to a Morphologically Unfamiliar Agent,” *DevSci* 7.4 (2004): 425–30; Yuyan Luo and Renée Baillargeon, “Can a Self-Propelled Box Have a Goal? Psychological Reasoning in 5-Month-Old Infants,” *PS* 16.8 (2005): 601–08; Amanda L. Woodward, “Infants’ Grasp of Others’ Intentions,” *CDPS* 18.1 (2009): 54; Yusuke Moriguchi and Ikuko Shinohara, “My Neighbor: Children’s Perception of Agency in Interaction with an Imaginary Agent,” *PLoS ONE* 7 (2012): 1–6; Paul Muentener and Laura Schulz, “Toddlers Infer Unobserved Causes for Spontaneous Events,” *FiP* 5 (2014): 1–9.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to naïve psychology and sociology, human’s also possess intuitive knowledge regarding how objects function, or “naïve physics.” We may also appear to have naïve biology, naïve mathematics, and other intuitive domains of knowledge. The brain structures each domain of knowledge differently, although there can be significant overlap. See Katherine D. Kinzler and Elizabeth S. Spelke, “Core Systems in Human Cognition,” *PBR* 164 (2007): 257–64; Emma Cohen and Justin L. Barrett, “In Search of ‘Folk Anthropology’: The Cognitive Anthropology of the Person,” in *In Search of Self: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Personhood*, ed. Wentzel van Huyssteen and Erik Wiebe (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 108–11; Wellman, *Making Minds*, 195–203; Pascal Boyer and H. Clark Barrett, “Intuitive Ontologies and Domain Specificity,” in *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology. Volume 1: Foundations. Second Edition*, ed. David M. Buss (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 161–79; Frederik S. Kamps et al., “Dissociating Intuitive Physics from Intuitive Psychology: Evidence from Williams Syndrome,” *Cognition* 168 (2017): 146–53.

<sup>23</sup> Wellman, *Making Minds*, 266.

<sup>24</sup> This will be discussed in more detail below, but within the context, see Cohen and Barrett, “In Search of ‘Folk Anthropology,’” 114–17. Elements associated with organs, such as “mind” and “heart,” are generally distinguished from the physical organs and associated loosely with that internal region of the body. See Carl Nils Johnson and Henry M. Wellman, “Children’s Developing Conceptions of the Mind and Brain,” *ChildDev* 53.1 (1982): 222–34; Carl Nils Johnson, “If You Had My Brain, Where Would I Be? Children’s Understanding of the Brain and Identity,” *ChildDev* 61.4 (1990): 962–72; Kara Weisman, Carol S. Dweck, and Ellen M. Markman, “Rethinking People’s Conceptions of Mental Life,” *PNAS* 114.43 (2017): 11,374–79.

constraints, and particularly the degree to which they are confined to the body and continue to exist after death.<sup>25</sup>

A result of this final developmental phase that appears to remain throughout adulthood is the partibility of these internal components of ambiguous materiality from the observable body as a whole.<sup>26</sup> As a result of the Western reification of the mind as the locus of cognition, this is generally referred to as “mind/body dualism” in the cognitive sciences, but this is an imprecise and infelicitous term that is too often equated with a Cartesian dichotomy.<sup>27</sup> The basic idea is that the loci of agency are not intuitively coterminous with the observable body and are usually conceived as privately held. This can be refracted through different sociocultural lenses to produce a wide variety of conceptualizations of different loci of cognition, emotion, identity, and animacy, and their relationship to the body. I suggest the designation “body/agency partibility” better reflects the observations that these loci are

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<sup>25</sup> Research has demonstrated that children that are too young to become enculturated to religious teaching are likely to attribute mental states to all kinds of dead agents, while their later enculturation will usually limit that attribution to human agents, depending on the ideologies of their particular social groups. See, for instance, Jesse M. Bering and David F. Bjorklund, “The Natural Emergence of Reasoning about the Afterlife as a Developmental Regularity,” *DevPsych* 40 (2004): 217–33; Paul L. Harris and Marta Giménez, “Children’s Acceptance of Conflicting Testimony: The Case of Death,” *JCC* 5.1 (2005): 143–64; Rita Astuti and Paul L. Harris, “Understanding Mortality and the Life of the Ancestors in Rural Madagascar,” *CogSci* 32.4 (2008): 713–40. As Bering notes, “religious or eschatological-type answers (e.g., Heaven, God, spirits, etc.) among the youngest children were extraordinarily rare” (Jesse M. Bering, “The Folk Psychology of Souls,” *BBS* 29 [2006]: 454). Some research has produced conflicting results regarding the immortality of psychological properties, although it usually does not directly address mental states. See, for instance, Devereaux A. Poling and E. Margaret Evans, “Are Dinosaurs the Rule or the Exception? Developing Concepts of Death and Extinction,” *CogDev* 19.3 (2004): 363–83; H. Clark Barrett and Tanya Behne, “Children’s Understanding of Death as the Cessation of Agency: A Test Using Sleep versus Death,” *Cognition* 96 (2005): 93–108. Cf. Vera Pereira, Luís Faisca, and Rodrigo de Sá-Saraiva, “Immortality of the Soul as an Intuitive Idea: Towards a Psychological Explanation of the Origins of Afterlife Beliefs,” *JCC* 12.1–2 (2012): 101–27.

<sup>26</sup> Maciej Chudek et al., “Do Minds Switch Bodies? Dualist Interpretations across Ages and Societies,” *RBB* (2018): 366. See also Henry M. Wellman and Carl N. Johnson, “Developing Dualism: From Intuitive Understanding to Transcendental Ideas,” in *Psycho-Physical Dualism Today: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Alessandro Antonietti, Antonella Corradini, and Jonathan Lowe (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 3–36; Edward Slingerland and Maciej Chudek, “The Prevalence of Mind-Body Dualism in Early China,” *CogSci* 35 (2011): 997–1007; Tapani Riekkki, Marjaana Lindeman, and Jari Lipsanen, “Conceptions about the Mind-Body Problem and Their Relations to Afterlife Beliefs, Paranormal Beliefs, Religiosity, and Ontological Confusions,” *ACP* 9.3 (2013): 112–20; Matthias Forstmann and Pascal Burgmer, “Adults are Intuitive Mind-Body Dualists,” *JEPG* 144.1 (2015): 222–35.

<sup>27</sup> The Cartesian echoes of this terminology are frequently lamented and often distort discussion of these findings. On the problems with this conceptualization of this distinction, see K. Mitch Hodge, “Descartes’ Mistake: How Afterlife Beliefs Challenge the Assumption that Humans Are Intuitive Cartesian Substance Dualists,” *JCC* 8 (2008): 387–415.

frequently identified with parts of the body, are not coterminous with the observable body as a whole, are unseen, generally have spatiality, and, in certain circumstances, have autonomy and partibility from the body, particularly after death.

The existence of phantom sensations (mentioned above) demonstrates, among other things, that the mind mediates our experiences in and with the world, and has more influence over those experiences than is often assumed. Research suggests that our minds produce and maintain a “body schema,” or a spatial model of our own body that is built up from the mirror neuron system and other inputs the brain receives regarding the extent of the body (proprioception). In the last few decades, research has demonstrated that this schema is quite elastic in response to habituation with tools and other objects.<sup>28</sup> One review of research found that “tools, by enabling us to extend our reaching space, can become incorporated into a plastic neural representation of our body.”<sup>29</sup> This is particularly true when our attention shifts from the tool to the task.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that the concept of the extended and/or distributed person is not simply a theoretical shoehorn, but something innate to the way we perceive ourselves and others.

Research with subjects with brain or other injuries has revealed additional details about the function of this body schema. As an example, people who lose limbs often report phantom pain where their missing limbs would be, indicating the brain has not revised the body schema and is for some reason indicating the reception of pain signals. Some have reported the sensation that a missing hand is clenched in an excruciatingly tight fist. Neuroscientists have used boxes

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<sup>28</sup> See Angelo Maravita and Atsushi Iriki, “Tools for the Body (Schema),” *TCS* 8.2 (2004): 79–86; Lambros Malafouris, “The Brain-Artifact Interface (BAI): A Challenge for Archaeology and Cultural Neuroscience,” *SCAN* 5 (2010): 264–73; Solaiman Shokur, et al., “Expanding the Primate Body Schema in Sensorimotor Cortex by Virtual Touches of an Avatar,” *PNAS* 110.37 (2013): 15,121–26; Luke E. Miller, Matthew R. Longo, and Ayse P. Saygin, “Tool Morphology Constrains the Effects of Tool Use on Body Representations,” *JEPHPP* 40.6 (2014): 2,143–53; Matteo Baccarini, et al., “Tool Use Imagery Triggers Tool Incorporation in the Body Schema,” *FiP* 5 (2014): 1–8.

<sup>29</sup> Maravita and Iriki, “Tools for the Body (Schema),” 85.

<sup>30</sup> Yuki Sato, Hiroyuki Iizuka, and Takashi Ikegami, “Investigating Extended Embodiment Using a Computational Model and Human Experimentation,” *CF* 9.1 (2013): 73–84.

with mirrors inside to “trick” such individuals’ brains into thinking the reflection of their existing hand is their missing hand. When the individuals clench their existing hand into a tight fist and watch the reflection of their fist unclench, they have felt their phantom hand unclench immediately.<sup>31</sup>

As an example of the opposite, one 73-year-old woman suffered a right-hemisphere stroke that left her left arm paralyzed.<sup>32</sup> The injury also disassociated her left arm from her body schema, and she was convinced that her left arm was not hers, but belonged to someone else. Rings long worn on her left hand were also not recognized as hers, but when they were removed and placed on her right hand or placed in front of her, she immediately recognized them and could recall a great deal of autobiographical information about them. The researchers concluded that the disassociation of her left arm also disassociated the rings, which her brain had incorporated into its body schema—they were a part of her, as far as her brain was concerned.

Other types of loss can also take time to be incorporated into the mind’s mediation of our experience of the world. Bereavement, for instance, is an experience “grounded in body and action.”<sup>33</sup> For one who experiences the loss of a loved one,

the most potent memories are not ‘snapshots’ but video-style vignettes of the departed *doing* and *saying* things; they are essentially performative memories. They have the potential to provoke strong emotional responses. Later in the grieving process, the mind tries to ‘re-presence’ the lost individual by synthesizing fragments of memory. These latter are likewise focused on having the departed perform in the kinds of situations that the survivor regards as most emblematic of their relationship.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> V. S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1998), 52–53; Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, 24–40.

<sup>32</sup> Giovanni Berlucchi and Salvatore Aglioti, “The body in the brain: neural bases of corporeal awareness,” *TINS* 20.12 (1997): 561–62.

<sup>33</sup> Wightman, *The Origins of Religion in the Paleolithic*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> Wightman, *The Origins of Religion in the Paleolithic*, 62–63.



## CHAPTER 2 – Agency and Personhood

Material objects associated with the memories of the departed and experiences with them—and particularly photos and objects created by the departed—become triggers for that sense of presence, and can be intentionally employed for that purpose. This is not mere memory, but the mind actually producing the sensation of presence that it produced when that individual was present. The cognitive processes associated with this phenomenon are related to those that produce phantom sensations. The perception of agency in the world around us can be particularly acute and powerful in contexts of loss, bereavement, and others associated with emotional vulnerability.

The universality of experiences of loss is likely to have been quite influential in the development and cross-cultural prevalence of concepts of souls, ghosts, spirits, invisible companions, and other unseen entities that can operate independent of the rest of the body and even inhabit and possess other bodies. The number, nature, and function of these entities is, of course, largely a product of cultural factors and counterintuitive properties that still require much further study.<sup>35</sup> Because of evolutionary developments that will be discussed below, we are intuitively hypersensitive to the presence of these agents, wherever they may be. This is not to say we maintain a consistently high degree of awareness of and sensitivity to the possibility of agents around us, however. The cognitive cost would be prohibitively high. Rather, a combination of “top-down” expectations regarding the presence of agents (such as just described) and “bottom-up” sensory input contribute situationally to heightened sensitivity and the false perception of agency.<sup>36</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Pascal Boyer, “Are Ghost Concepts ‘Intuitive,’ ‘Endemic’ and ‘Innate?’” *JCC* 3.3 (2003): 233–43; Chudek et al., “Do Minds Switch Bodies?” 354–68.

<sup>36</sup> Marc Anderson et al., “Agency Detection in Predictive Minds: A Virtual Reality Study,” *RBB* (2017): 1–13. See also Michiel van Elk, “Paranormal Believers are More Prone to Illusory Agency Detection than Skeptics,” *CC* 22 (2013): 1041–46; Michiel van Elk et al., “Priming of Supernatural Agent Concepts and Agency Detection,” *RBB* 6.1 (2016): 4–33.

*Agency in Evolution*

Stewart Guthrie's 1993 *Faces in the Clouds* represents the first real cognitive theory of religion, and in it Guthrie proposes that the evolutionary roots of humanity's sensitivity to the presence of agency ("animism" is his term) are to be found in a specific "perceptual strategy" adopted by our evolutionary ancestors: "when in doubt whether something is alive, assume that it is."<sup>37</sup> In short, distinguishing the animate from the inanimate is critical to an organism's survival and success, and it is less costly to always assume an unknown or unexpected event or circumstance is caused by something that is alive and has intentionality and be wrong than to always assume it is something inanimate and be wrong. The more sensitive to agency in the environment, the greater the evolutionary fitness of the species. What is more, the most important organisms to a human's survival and procreation are other humans, and so anthropomorphism—seeing "the world not only as alive but also as humanlike"<sup>38</sup>—became salient within this perceptual strategy. Hypersensitivity to the presence of agency in the world around us, and particularly human agency, was thus evolutionarily selected and undergirds our cognition to this very day, according to Guthrie's model.<sup>39</sup>

While this model likely accounts in large part for our teleological reasoning and our hypersensitivity to the presence of agency,<sup>40</sup> it does not fully account for the nature and complexity of humanity's Theory of Mind (ToM), which is generally understood as the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others. Many species are highly sensitive to spatiotemporal cues of agency like eyes and biomechanics, as Guthrie himself notes.

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<sup>37</sup> Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Modular theoretical models refer to a "Hyperactive Agency Detection Device," or HADD (coined in Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *TCS* 4.1 [2000]: 31).

<sup>40</sup> A recent study of the boundaries of humanity's hypersensitivity to agency is David L. R. Majj, Hein T. van Shie, and Michiel van Elk, "The Boundary Conditions of the Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device: An Empirical Investigation of Agency Detection in Threatening Situations," *RBB* (2017): 1–29. The authors determined that participants largely assumed the absence of agency during mild to moderate impressions of threat, but the presence of agency was assumed proportionate to the ambiguity or absence of information regarding the threat.

Cognitivists have demonstrated, however, that while nonhuman primates like apes and chimpanzees have been shown to have a limited ability to draw conclusions about the basic psychological states of others (first order ToM), they lack anything approximating a complex and predictive ToM (second order and beyond), which is unique to modern humans.<sup>41</sup> Something specific to humanity's evolutionary past is more directly responsible for its complex ToM, and recent models suggest the selective pressures associated with the dynamics of group living, and the development of human language, are the best candidates.<sup>42</sup>

According to these models, group-living significantly improved the ability of early primates to find food and avoid predators, which gave those living in groups a selective advantage and greater access to brain-building protein, contributing to an increase in brain size.<sup>43</sup> That increase in brain size then facilitated an expansion of cognitive capacities and increased the group's fitness.<sup>44</sup> Larger groups made up of smarter members brought with it

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<sup>41</sup> In experiments utilizing competitive contexts involving food, nonhuman primates showed moderate competence regarding goal-directed action and knowledge/ignorance, drawing conclusions largely from surface cues like attention and demeanor, but in cooperative-communicative situations, they failed to show any awareness of the internal mental states of others. See Michael Tomasello, Josep Call, and Brian Hare, "Chimpanzees Understand Psychological States—The Question is Which Ones and to What Extent," *TCS* 7.4 (2003): 153–56; Alexandra G. Rosati, Laurie R. Santos, and Brian Hare, "Primate Social Cognition: Thirty Years after Premack and Woodruff," in *Primate Neuroethology*, ed. Michael L. Platt and Asif A. Ghazanfar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117–43; Wellman, *Making Minds*, 212–21; Katie Hall et al., "Chimpanzee Uses Manipulative Gaze Cues to Conceal and Reveal Information to Foraging Competitor," *AJPrim* (2016): 1–11.

<sup>42</sup> This is one thesis of Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, although the primary aim is the development of "big gods." Cf. the extensive reviews consolidated in Michael Stausberg et al., "Review Symposium on Ara Norenzayan: *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (2013)," *Religion* 44.4 (2014): 592–683; Norenzayan et al., "The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions," 1–65. A similar model is promoted in Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 25–41. See also Boyer, *The Fracture of An Illusion*, 32–33. Against these, see Ioannis Tsoukalas, "Theory of Mind: Towards an Evolutionary Theory," *EPS* (2017): 1–29, who argues that perceptual processing of the human face is the primary internal catalyst for humanity's complex ToM.

<sup>43</sup> Tremlin notes that there is a correlation between brain size and social organization, although the relationship is specifically with the size of the neocortex (Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 30; cf. Robin Dunbar, "Neocortex Size as a Constraint on Group Size in Primates," *JHE* 20 [1992]: 469–93). The neocortex is the most recently evolved portion of the brain linked with cognition, language, sensory perception, and spatial reasoning. See also Robin Dunbar, "Coevolution of Neocortical Size, Group Size and Language in Humans," *BBS* 16.4 (1993): 681–735; Robin Dunbar, "On the Origin of the Human Mind," in *Evolution and the Human Mind: Modularity, Language, and Meta-Cognition*, ed. Peter Carruthers and Andrew Chamberlain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 238–53.

<sup>44</sup> While primates are humanity's closest ancestors, highly developed social cognition is found among dolphins, whales, and even dogs. See Juliane Kaminski, Josep Call, and Julia Fischer, "Word Learning in a Domestic Dog: Evidence for 'Fast Mapping,'" *Science* 304.5677 (2004): 1682–83; B. Hare and Michael Tomasello, "Human-like Social Skills in Dogs?" *TCS* 9 (2005): 439–44; Kieran C. R. Fox, Michael Muthukrishna, and Susanne Shultz, "The Social and Cultural Roots of Whale and Dolphin Brains," *NEE* (2017): 1–7.

additional pressures, however. The success of such a group demands greater cognitive capacity for monitoring increased numbers of members and for greater strategic thinking for meeting the challenges of increased competition for food and mates as well as for maintaining inner-group cohesion.<sup>45</sup> While competition is a frequently cited selective pressure that demands the ability to reason about the intentions of others, recent research has also identified a central role for empathy and cooperation. Empathizing and cooperating with others demands a sophisticated understanding of the mental states of others,<sup>46</sup> but it also develops stronger social bonds and enhances reproductive success. Natural selection thus favored individuals that not only understood what others were thinking, but could also intuitively relate to, empathize, and cooperate with them.<sup>47</sup> The added dynamic of needing to be able to determine when to cooperate and when to compete further selected for an increasingly sophisticated ToM.<sup>48</sup>

The development of human speech is thought by many cognitivists to mark an evolutionary breakthrough that exponentially advanced humanity's cognitive and social capacities.<sup>49</sup> With

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<sup>45</sup> Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 31–37. Norenzayan highlights Hamilton's rule (Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 5), which is a theorem that suggests cooperation in social interactions is predicated upon the formula  $rb - c > 0$ , where  $r$  = relatedness,  $b$  = mutual benefit, and  $c$  = cost. The more closely related two individuals are, the less mutual benefit is required for cooperation to outweigh the cost, but the less closely related, the more mutual benefit is demanded. For a recent empirical test of Hamilton's rule, see Andrew F. G. Bourke, "Hamilton's Rule and the Causes of Social Evolution," *PTRSLB* 369 (2014): 1–10.

<sup>46</sup> Adam Bear, Ari Kagan, and David G. Rand, "Co-Evolution of Cooperation and Cognition: The Impact of Imperfect Deliberation and Context-Sensitive Intuition," *PTRSLB* 284.1851 (2017): 1–12.

<sup>47</sup> "[N]atural selection favored individuals that were motivated to attend to other individuals' social interactions and empathize with them. These skills were favored by selection because they are essential to forming strong, enduring social bonds, which in turn have been shown to enhance reproductive success" (Robert M. Seyfarth and Dorothy L. Cheney, "Affiliation, Empathy, and the Origins of Theory of Mind," *PNAS* 110 [2013]: 10349). For a fascinating discussion of a Pacific island culture in which persons fiercely guard their internal mental states and emotions, treating empathy as a ritual performance, see Maria Lepowsky, "The Boundaries of Personhood, the Problem of Empathy, and 'the Native's Point of View' in the Outer Islands," in *The Anthropology of Empathy: Experiencing the Lives of Others in Pacific Societies*, ed. Douglas W. Hollan and C. Jason Throop (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 43–65.

<sup>48</sup> For recent studies that find support for this hypothesis, see Henrike Moll and Michael Tomasello, "Cooperation and Human Cognition: The Vygotskian Intelligence Hypothesis," *PTRSLB* 362 (2007): 639–48; Luke McNally, Sam P. Brown, and Andrew L. Jackson, "Cooperation and the Evolution of Intelligence," *PTRSLB* 279 (2012): 3027–34; David G. Rand and Martin A. Nowak, "Human Cooperation," *TCS* 17.8 (2013): 413–25; Marie Devaine, Guillaume Hollard, and Jean Daunizeau, "Theory of Mind: Did Evolution Fools Us?" *PLoS ONE* 9.2 (2014): 1–12; Michael L. Platt, Robert M. Seyfarth, and Dorothy L. Cheney, "Adaptations for Social Cognition in the Primate Brain," *PTRSLB* 371 (2016): 1–12.

<sup>49</sup> Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 35–37; Ian Tattersall, "Human Evolution: Personhood and Emergence," in *The Emergence of Personhood: A Quantum Leap?*, ed. Malcolm Jeeves (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 44–47.

the development of the supralaryngeal vocal tract and adequate cognitive and motor capacities, likely around 50,000 BP,<sup>50</sup> human speech achieved a degree of sophistication that allowed humans to far more efficiently stay informed about one another and maintain social bonds, but also to communicate about interior mental states and—perhaps most importantly—symbolically structure the world around them.<sup>51</sup> This “symbolic faculty” is thought by many to be an evolutionary exaptation or spandrel, but also to sit at the root of our modern sense of self.<sup>52</sup> This will be discussed in further detail below.

### *Implications*

Dependent as it is on stable patterns in our cognitive architecture and development, and in the social experiences of early infancy, the construction of concepts of agency in childhood are cross-culturally quite consistent and quite embedded by the time enculturation processes begin to set in. While brain plasticity allows for a degree of variability as experiences diverge and reflective reasoning becomes more salient, there is a short tether to these deeply entrenched evolutionary roots regarding the presence of agency in the world around us. This will become apparent in our discussion of the development of concepts of personhood, which are more socioculturally subjective, but still build upon intuitive foundations. The next section will discuss debates about agency within archaeology and examine a couple of frameworks for agency that have been developed by anthropologists working with cognitive principles. The goal is to show how principles related to those discussed above have been integrated into

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<sup>50</sup> Philip Lieberman et al., “The Evolution of Human Speech: Its Anatomical and Neural Bases,” *CA* 48.1 (2007): 39–66. Note Lieberman rejects modular theories of language. For other models, see James R. Hurford, *The Origins of Grammar: Language in the Light of Evolution II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Robert C. Berwick, “Me Tarzan, You Jane: Review of Hurford, *The Origins of Grammar*,” *Science* 336.6078 (2012): 158.

<sup>51</sup> Cognitive linguists have demonstrated that metaphor and types of symbolic meaning are embedded in the body and other material objects and relationships in prelinguistic infants, indicating that the symbolic faculty most likely preceded the development of human language (see below, p. 120, n. 89). Human language would have revolutionized it (see below, p. 120, n. 90).

<sup>52</sup> Ian Tattersall, “Origin of the Human Sense of Self,” in van Huyssteen and Wiebe, *In Search of Self*, 47.

heuristics that can be applied to the study of material remains.

## Agency in Archaeology and Anthropology

Questions regarding the nature and function of agency have been central to the theoretical models that have had the greatest influence within the fields of archaeology and anthropology since the “material turn” of the 1980s. This “turn” has been described as the result of an attempt to integrate the study of the material with the study of the socio-cultural (or overcome the dichotomization of the two domains),<sup>53</sup> which resulted in a greater focus on materiality, on structure, and on the decentering of the human in discussions of agency. One of the fulcra of that integration was the heuristic of placing the role of the animate and the inanimate on equal footing.<sup>54</sup> This was not done solely for the purposes of methodological integration, however; there was also a desire to overcome the virtually unilateral analytical privileging of human agency over and against the influence of the material in history’s playing out.<sup>55</sup> Leveling the two sides out was intended to dismantle that distorting privileging and stimulate and provoke debate that could garner new insights and theoretical models.<sup>56</sup> One sticking point for this shift,

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<sup>53</sup> For a history of the background of this “turn,” see Dan Hicks, “The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25–98. For some of the theoretical underpinnings, see Daniel Miller, “Materiality: An Introduction,” in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–50; Bjørnar Olsen, “Scenes from a Troubled Engagement: Post-Structuralism and Material Culture Studies,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley et al. (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 85–103.

<sup>54</sup> One version of this leveling has come to be known as “symmetrical archaeology,” the name of which is supposed to reflect the view of the animate and the inanimate as two equal sides of the same methodological coin. A common misunderstanding of symmetrical archaeology is that it seeks to entirely erase the distinction between the animate and the inanimate. For a response to this and other misunderstandings, see Bjørnar Olsen and Christopher Witmore, “Archaeology, Symmetry and the Ontology of Things. A Response to Critics,” *AD* 22.2 (2015): 187–97.

<sup>55</sup> See Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, “Material and Nonhuman Agency: An Introduction,” in *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*, ed. Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris (New York: Springer, 2008), ix–xix.

<sup>56</sup> For some examples of new insights and approaches arising from this project, see Knappett and Malafouris, eds., *Material Agency*; Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010); Lambros Malafouris and Colin Renfrew, eds., *The Cognitive Life of Things: Recasting the Boundaries of the Mind* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2010); Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); John C. Barrett, “The Material Constitution of Humanness,” *AD* 21.1 (2014): 65–74; Weismantel and Meskell, “Substances,” 233–51. For an insightful critique of some of these trends, see Tim Ingold,

however, has been intentionality, which, as was discussed above, is central to the intuitive perception of agency. Is intentionality a necessary feature of agency? This section will discuss intentionality in recent scholarly debate about agency and then examine two frameworks that have been suggested to reconcile these seemingly incommensurate approaches to agency.

### *Intentionality*

If intentionality is required for agency to be identified, then the ascription of agency to the inanimate—which has long been recognized in a variety of cultures and circumstances—is problematized, since, as Lambros Malafouris observes, “things cannot exhibit intentional states.”<sup>57</sup> Be that as it may, some things can inarguably be *perceived* as having intentional states, even if only intuitively. This is the stance of many scholars within the cognitive sciences, as is highlighted by Torill Christine Lindstrøm in a 2015 *Archaeological Dialogues* article that challenges some principles of symmetrical archaeology:

To sum up: certain characteristics of human perception, projection and cognitive attribution processes, along with the strong human tendency to form relationships, make ‘animacy’ and ‘agency’ in inanimate objects very likely to be perceived and experienced—by hunter-gatherers, ancient Greeks, and modern university professors alike.<sup>58</sup>

Lindstrøm, however, dismisses the relevance of this perception because it “does not mean, or prove with *any* scientific meaning, that objects actually and factually have ‘animacy’ or ‘agency’ resembling that of living beings.”<sup>59</sup> She is not concerned with perception, but with

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“Materials against Materiality,” *AD* 14.1 (2007): 1–16.

<sup>57</sup> Lambros Malafouris, “At the Potter’s Wheel: An Argument for Material Agency,” in Knappett and Malafouris, *Material Agency*, 28. Malafouris attempts to “dissociate agency from intentionality . . . by clarifying first the important difference between *prior intention* and *intention in action*” (p. 28, emphasis in original).

<sup>58</sup> Torill Christine Lindstrøm, “Agency ‘in Itself’. A Discussion of Inanimate, Animal and Human Agency,” *AD* 22.2 (2015): 215.

<sup>59</sup> Lindstrøm, “Agency ‘in Itself,’” 214. When it comes to the linguistic attribution of agency to inanimate objects (“kettles ‘boil’ water,” “basket’s ‘hold’ provisions”), she is equally dismissive: “These are metaphorical

ontology, and the thesis of her essay is that the concept of a “literal” material agency ought to be abandoned.<sup>60</sup> “Only animals and humans have agency proper.”<sup>61</sup> This exalts reflective scientific knowledge to the degree that it becomes the only legitimate object of study or framework for study, relegating all other knowledge to secondary and marginal status.<sup>62</sup>

In a 2016 response to Lindstrøm’s article, Tim Flohr Sørensen calls out this brand of scientism, using the Eucharist and the concept of consubstantiation as an illustration of a contemporary practice structured upon intuitive reasoning about agency. He observes, “The question is, then, whether the aim of a cultural analysis is to highlight the transubstantiation as delusion and deception, or to try to unravel what this practice means for our understanding of materiality, senses, divinity, presence, worship and so on.”<sup>63</sup> I agree with Sørensen that it must surely be the latter, but although he asserts the importance of intuitive knowledge, he still insists on grounding his case in definitions, asserting that, “In fact, symmetrical archaeology can be

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manners of speech, and should be recognized as such” (p. 216). She later states, however, that “[t]he human perception and cognitive processing of the world are filtered and expressed through language” (217). Surely recognizing that perception is filtered and expressed through language raises concerns with dismissing the most basic and common ways of speaking about action as nothing more than metaphor. It is how we perceive the world around us.

<sup>60</sup> This is a project of symmetrical archaeology, which seeks new insights and theoretical models from the treatment of the animate and inanimate worlds as two equal sides of the same methodological coin. For a response to critics and some clarifications of the field, see Olsen and Witmore, “Archaeology, Symmetry and the Ontology of Things,” 187–97.

<sup>61</sup> Lindstrøm, “Agency ‘in Itself,’” 227. She qualifies this somewhat by concluding, “At best one may say that things have a ‘secondary,’ ‘reactive,’ or ‘distributed’ agency. Or, one can use ‘agency’ *metaphorically* as ‘object agency,’ ‘inanimate agency,’ ‘network agency,’ or ‘assemblage agency,’ thereby indicating the mixed composition of different entities in processes. But used *non-metaphorically* it implies an attribution of agency to things and matter that is scientifically incorrect” (Lindstrøm, “Agency ‘in Itself,’” 227–28, emphases in original). Other scholars have asserted that, “the only true agents in history are human individuals” (Anthony Giddens and Christopher Pierson, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 89; quoted in Knappett and Malafouris, “Material and Nonhuman Agency,” x). Knappett and Malafouris continue, “Whether this individual is conceived through a Cartesian or an existential lens makes no important difference. What is important is that when we speak about agents proper, we are referring to human individuals, and preferably of the modern Western-type. In short, agency is an attribute of the human substance.”

<sup>62</sup> An approach to the interrogation of material agency that does allow intuitive data to govern the model is the examination of culturally mediated boundaries between persons and objects. In many cultures personhood may be constituted, at least in part, by substances and objects that may be possessed and exchanged. In such contexts, object agency is possible even while intentionality is maintained.

<sup>63</sup> Tim Flohr Sørensen, “Hammers and Nails: A Response to Lindstrøm and to Olsen and Witmore,” *AD* 23.1 (2016): 124.



said to return to the ordinary definition of agency as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>64</sup> That definition, he points out, excludes intentionality.<sup>65</sup>

Still another response written by Artur Ribeiro in defense of portions of Lindstrøm’s thesis expresses concern for Sørensen’s appeal to the *OED*, as its definition of “agency” differs in no appreciable way from its definition of “cause,” rendering the two “virtually synonymous.”<sup>66</sup> This displays a reflective concern for clear demarcations of conceptual categories, however, not a desire to avoid the prescriptive distortions of the definitional enterprise. In fact, he insists that part of the shortcoming of Sørensen’s response is precisely the lack of concise definitions of the terms he employs in defending symmetrical archaeology’s view of agency as situationally reified:

By stating that agency is something that issues forth within specific contexts, Sørensen is not actually providing a more concrete understanding of what agency actually is, given that even if a ‘context’ is necessary to recognize it, agency remains nevertheless a one-size-fits-all concept, i.e. agency can be perceived in *any* and *every* context which contains humans and/or non-human objects. In order to make things clear, Sørensen needs to provide a concise definition of ‘context’ and explicit examples of contexts in which the *interaction* of humans and objects *does not produce agency*.<sup>67</sup>

Reflective knowledge and definition sit in the driver’s seat of all these engagements with the concept of agency and the role of intentionality, which subjugates to those frameworks any scholarly attempts to understand the conceptualizations of agency held by those persons who

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<sup>64</sup> Sørensen, “Hammers and Nails,” 118. As cited by Sørensen, the definition reads, “Agency: 2. [mass noun] action or intervention producing a particular effect: Canals carved by the agency of running water. [count noun] a thing or person that acts to produce a particular result: The movies could be an agent moulding the values of the public.”

<sup>65</sup> Denying the relevance of intentionality has been another approach to expanding the concept of agency to material objects and social frameworks. A brief discussion of the history of these dynamics is found in Andrew Gardner, “Introduction: Social Agency, Power, and Being Human,” in *Agency Uncovered: Archaeological Perspectives on Social Agency, Power, and Being Human*, ed. Andrew Gardner (London: UCL Press, 2004), 1–15. See also Jennifer L. Dornan, “Agency and Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future Directions,” *JAMT* 9.4 (2002): 303–29.

<sup>66</sup> Artur Ribeiro, “Against Object Agency. A Counterreaction to Sørensen’s ‘Hammers and Nails,’” *AD* 23.2 (2016): 230.

<sup>67</sup> Ribeiro, “Against Object Agency,” 229–30, emphases in original.

are ostensibly the objects of their study. Other models of agency have attempted to grant the intuitive perception of agency a bit more influence, and it is to two of those approaches to which I now turn.

### *Alfred Gell*

The first model is Alfred Gell's anthropological theory for material agency, formulated in his posthumously published *Art and Agency*, which made use of some early articulations of the cognitive insights discussed above.<sup>68</sup> Gell's thesis was that "works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an *anthropological* theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency."<sup>69</sup> In short, Gell proposed that insofar as art is captivating or otherwise effective in achieving the artist's goals, it is perceived to carry out the intentions of the artist, and thus to be endowed with that artist's intentionality/agency, "extending" or "distributing" their person through the material medium.

Gell proposed to resolve the "paradox" of attributing agency to the material world (styled the "social other") in a couple of ways. First, he insisted that agency can only be reified via the mediation of the physical world. In other words, because the physical world acts as the medium and facilitator for all reifications of agency, it cannot be divorced from agency.<sup>70</sup> "[I]t is not paradoxical to understand agency as a factor of the ambience as a whole, a global characteristic of the world of people and things in which we live, rather than as an attribute of the human psyche, exclusively."<sup>71</sup> This resolution involves identifying agency that is distributed through the inanimate as "secondary" agency (although Gell was quick to point out he was not insisting

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<sup>68</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*.

<sup>69</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 96 (emphasis in original).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Jean-Pierre Marnier, "A Praxeological Approach to Subjectivation in a Material World," *JMC* 6.1 (2001): 6: "is not material culture the indispensable and unavoidable mediation of correlate of all our motions and motor habits? Are not all our actions, without any exception whatsoever, proper up by or inscribed in a given materiality?"

<sup>71</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 20.

that agency is merely symbolic), as well as distinguishing externalist and internalist models for agency. The former model conceives of agency according to structures, relationships, and entanglements (a more anthropological framework), while the latter is concerned with intentions and mental states (a more cognitive framework). Neither, according to Gell, fully accounts for agency, but with a nod to cognitive science and early models of the ToM, he suggested that because those mental states are intuitively perceived as physically interior and invisible, imposing features of concentricity and/or containment upon inanimate objects—i.e., producing a hollow idol or putting one inside a box—reflects a species of body/agency partibility that may help trigger the perception of interior mental states, providing a point of overlap for the two models.

Gell posits that his externalist model for agency, derived from reflective reasoning and heuristic concerns, happens to have identified the “bottom-up” sensory input (here structural relationships like concentricity and/or containment) that interacts with our “top-down” expectations to contribute to the intuitive attribution of agency of unseen, unknown, or inanimate entities. The research, however, does not suggest those structural relationships are the cues to which our intuition responds. Rather, the research is uncovering the central role of the brain’s expectations about agency and its predictive capacities in the perception of agency. For example, Marc Andersen et al. write in a 2017 article that,

perception is normally dominated by bottom-up sensory input when reliability of sensory input is high and by top-down expectations when reliability of sensory input is low. Human perception, then, is not a direct reflection of the world, but the brain’s best guess at what *ought* to be out there in the world, given the brain’s prior expectations combined with the reliability of the sensory evidence available.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Marc Andersen et al., “Agency Detection in Predictive Minds,” 3. Cf. Adam Waytz, Nadav Klein, and Nicholas Epley, “Imagining Other Minds: Anthropomorphism is Hair-Triggered but Not Hare-Brained,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Development of Imagination*, ed. Marjorie Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 272–87; Nicholas Epley, Juliana Schroeder, and Adam Waytz, “Motivated Mind Perception: Treating Pets as People and People as Animals,” in *Objectification and (De)Humanization*, ed. Sarah J. Gervais (New York: Springer, 2013), 127–52.

There is a give and take, then, between the brain's conditioning and the reliability of its perception of its environment. There is also no indication concentricity or a hollow interior is related to the attribution of agency to divine images. In light of this, while Gell's attempt to integrate the reflective and externalist anthropological model with the intuitive and internalist cognitive model inarguably catalyzed new discussions and important new ways to think about agency, its applicability is limited.

*Lambros Malafouris*

Lambros Malafouris has recently articulated a theoretical framework he calls Material Engagement Theory, or MET, that shifts focus from cognitive biases to the material constitution of cognition.<sup>73</sup> This theory, in a sense, subsumes the internalist model of agency within the externalist, proposing that cognition is not limited to within the skull or the skin, but is constituted by, extends throughout, and cannot exist without, interactions with things.<sup>74</sup> Malafouris is sympathetic to arguments for the abandonment of the concept of "mind," but he ultimately finds, "the concept of mind is too important to throw out."<sup>75</sup> Accepting the partibility of mind and body, Malafouris hypothesizes that "*material culture is potentially co-extensive and consubstantial with mind.*"<sup>76</sup> He quips, "the archaeologist who is searching for the ancient mind *behind* the artifact is committing the same 'category mistake' as the foreign visitor to

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<sup>73</sup> Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Cf. Sophie A. de Beaune, Frederick L. Coolidge, and Thomas Wynn, eds., *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David B. Konenfeld et al., eds., *A Companion to Cognitive Anthropology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Maurice Bloch, *Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> For some related theories, see Carl Knappett, "Photographs, Skeuomorphs and Marionettes: Some Thoughts on Mind, Agency and Object," *JMC* 7.1 (2002): 97–117; Rosemary A. Joyce and Jeanne Lopiparo, "PostScript: Doing Agency in Archaeology," *JAMT* 12.4 (2005): 365–74; John Sutton, "Material Agency: Skills and History: Distributed Cognition and the Archaeology of Memory," in Knappett and Malafouris, *Material Agency*, 37–55; Veronica Strang, "Fluid Consistencies. Material Relationality in Human Engagements with Water," *AD* 21.2 (2014): 133–50, 165–74 (responses on pp. 133–165).

<sup>75</sup> Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 77, emphasis in original.

Cambridge or Oxford who, having seen the colleges, the libraries, and the departments, asks to be shown the university.” According to MET, the artifact is the very enactment of cognition—it is part of the mind.

MET has significance for a variety of objects of study, including texts. Malafouris uses Linear B tablets as a case study for a “distributed-cognition” approach to ancient texts. This approach suggests that the linguistic system and the materials with which and upon which these texts were inscribed were not merely passive receptors for mental representations, but active participants in their formulation. The size, shape, consistency, integrity, and other spatio-temporal properties of the script, the implements, and the surface upon which the text is ultimately written participate in the choice of the symbols used, their shape, their arrangement, and, ultimately, the formulation of the text.<sup>77</sup> In this way, the material objects become participants in the cognitive act and thus, according to this model, extensions of cognition. “Cognition and action arise together, dialectically forming each other.”<sup>78</sup>

On a personal note, I have never handled or closely examined an ancient text without aspects of its materiality flooding my mind with thoughts of the agents responsible for the text and their interactions with it: how the grain of the papyrus influenced the direction of the strokes; how the ink flowed or dried; how layers of ink reveal correction or overwriting; how the writing implement interfaced with the surface; how the scribe’s proficiencies or preferences shaped the script; how the appearance or sound of the word at the end of one line resulted in haplography or dittography in the next line; how a fingerprint on a clay tablet revealed where

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<sup>77</sup> This extends even to the language itself. A way to imagine this canalization is to think of someone learning another language. As they begin to be able to formulate basic sentences in that other language, what they are able to articulate to a native speaker of that language is limited to their grasp of the lexicon and the grammatical and syntactical patterns associated with meaning in that language. As a result, they will have to significantly revise the concepts they wish to communicate to fit the semantic strictures their grasp of the language affords them. The same is true of all spoken and written language, as no language is capable of pure isometry with our conceptualizations. This is why we often struggle to find the words to best articulate semantic content we want to communicate.

<sup>78</sup> Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 74.

and how it was touched. In the University of Oxford’s Bodleian Library, I was once privileged to closely examine a text personally written and signed by Moses Maimonides, which left me with the impression I had been in the presence of one of Judaism’s great historical figure. These are, in my mind, experiences with the intuitive perception of distributed agency.

Now, critical to Malafouris’ model is the dismantling of anthropocentrism in favor of anthropomorphism, which he argues, citing Guthrie, is “a central characteristic of human projection and material engagement that demands attention and understanding.”<sup>79</sup> It cannot be abandoned, it is the *centering* of human agency that is methodologically problematic, and here Malafouris critiques Gell’s category of “secondary agency.” To treat object agency as “secondary” is to view intentionality as primarily constitutive of agency and thus to understand object agency not on its own terms, but in terms of human agency, begging the methodological question.<sup>80</sup> Regarding the question of who or what is causing an act, Malafouris has written, “Attempting to answer that by taking agency as a fixed human property it [*sic*] is to take as the starting point of analysis what should have been its end.”<sup>81</sup>

Malafouris does not entirely deny the role of intentionality, but similarly to Gell, he understands it as inseparable from the material. Drawing from philosopher John Searle,<sup>82</sup> Malafouris distinguishes mental representations of intentions (“prior intention”) from the actual execution of actions (“intention-in-action”).<sup>83</sup> There are three reasons to insist agency is only meaningful when understood as the latter. First, most intention-in-action is not preceded by prior intention, but is the reactive product of “online” responses to the physical world.

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<sup>79</sup> Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> Malafouris later comes back to Gell to suggest that artificial dichotomy should not distract from Gell’s insight that, “‘primary agents’ and ‘secondary agents’ do not refer to persons and things as entities but instead refer to the states of agent and patient as ontological moments or ingredients that persons and things share” (Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 145).

<sup>81</sup> Malafouris, “At the Potter’s Wheel,” 23.

<sup>82</sup> John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>83</sup> One may potentially interpret “intention-in-action” to refer to active intention as opposed to intention “at rest,” but I believe Malafouris’ discussion suggests it be understood to refer to intention *reified in action*.

## CHAPTER 2 – Agency and Personhood

Agency is commonly reified in the absence of prior intention. Second, prior intention does not necessarily match intention-in-action. An infinite number of conditions or events within the body or the rest of the material world can intervene between the prior intention and the intention-in-action that may influence, alter, reverse, or even entirely prevent the execution of the intention. I may intend to strike the golf ball with my 6-iron so that it travels exactly 195 yards on line with the right edge of the green with a little baby draw that carries it just to the edge of a hill that feeds it down to the hole on the left side of the green, but two times out of three (or maybe 99 times out of 100), that is not what happens. This is especially the case if there is water off the right side of the green, which brings up the third reason to insist agency is only meaningful when understood as intention-in-action: the “Background.” All prior intention is predicated upon “preintentional” consideration of the physical world and its affordances, from the body to the environment.<sup>84</sup> Prior intention is *largely* predicated upon the affordances of the material, but intention-in-action is *entirely* predicated upon them. It cannot be disentangled from materiality. In light of these considerations, “intentionality cannot be considered as an internal and purely mental property.”<sup>85</sup>

### *Implications*

Malafouris’ theory gets us much closer to an integration of reflective anthropological models and intuitive cognitive models, but the result is still a heuristic that serves primarily reflective interests. If the goal is to illuminate how agency is perceived by humans, an intuitive model must take priority. Subjugating the intuitive to the reflective serves the scholarly dialectic reflected in the debate from *Archaeological Dialogues* shared above, but it also capitulates to Lindstrøm’s assertion that there is some objectively measurable “agency” out there in the world,

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<sup>84</sup> Malafouris is actually critical of Searle’s ontological framework here, but the details of his critique are not particularly relevant to my discussion.

<sup>85</sup> Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*, 144.

rather than just a conceptual category that human beings have reified to index an evolutionarily determined sensitivity we all feel to one degree or another. In that sense, these models are far more map than territory, but they do serve to illustrate the need to construct theoretical models of agency that acknowledge and can accommodate the partibility of agency and its communicability into the material world that is around the person and that constitutes the person. This facilitates the more insightful and sensitive interrogation of material remains, which will be critical to the next chapters' discussions of deity concepts and their materialization in Iron Age Israel and Judah.

Finally, both Gell and Malafouris emphasize the importance of the material constitution of agency, though Malafouris' theoretical model elaborates much more on the implications of granting an equal hearing to the reality of our material embeddedness. Our identities, our societies, our values, our memories, and our perceptions of the world around us are shaped by our dialectic entanglement with materiality. If we hope to approximate a clearer understanding of those fundamentals of ancient thought, the sociality of the material world and the potential for the perception of embedded intentionality must be constitutive frameworks in our theoretical model.

## Personhood in Today's Societies

This brings us to the conceptualization of the person. The concept of the person ultimately derives from our sense of self and our sense of others, which means it is fundamentally social, relational, and materially embedded.<sup>86</sup> Our relationship with the world around us and others in it determines how we understand ourselves and others. The projection of the self onto the other begins in infancy as a product of the mirror neuron system, which is responsible for recognizing

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<sup>86</sup> As Chris Fowler has argued, "personhood is always relational" in some form or another (Chris Fowler, "Relational Personhood Revisited," *CAJ* 26.3 [2016]: 397).



congruity and for processing information about the actions, mental states, and emotions both of oneself and of others. We build our cognitive and motor skills upon experiences with the observation that there are others out there who are like us and that we are like others out there. In this way, psychological concepts of the self and of personhood emerge in tandem from social relationships.<sup>87</sup> Of course, all organisms, to one degree or another, are able to distinguish themselves from their environments and other entities within it, but humans experience themselves and others in ways that are largely unique (though with fuzzy boundaries). Most notably, we understand that we and others have privately held and complex internal mental states that may not be reflected in our appearances, actions, or words.<sup>88</sup> There is an unseen dimension to our mental states. We also think and communicate in complex and symbolic ways about those mental states<sup>89</sup>—a capacity that no doubt contributed to the development of human speech and was also significantly accelerated by it.<sup>90</sup> This symbolic structuring of the self, of

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<sup>87</sup> Christian Keysers, Marc Thioux, and Valeria Gazzola, “Mirror Neuron System and Social Cognition,” in *Understanding Other Minds: Perspectives from Developmental Social Neuroscience. Third Edition*, ed. Simon Baron-Cohen, Helen Tager-Flusberg, and Michael V. Lombardo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233–63. This heightened sense of social self-awareness is observable, although not nearly as complex, in nonhuman species that display high degrees of sociality. The mirror neuron system, for instance, is known to be operative in nonhuman primates (Rizzolatti and Craighero, “The Mirror-Neuron System”). Mirror self-recognition [MSR], which Darwin understood to delineate humans from non-humans, even occurs among some of these species, although it is limited. Ian Tattersall comments, “Only in the human-great ape case does it seem plausible that MSR abilities are homologous, the greater facility shown by humans being due to some additional neural structure or function that was acquired subsequent to the ancestral split” (Tattersall, “Origin of the Human Sense of Self,” 37, and see 33–49).

<sup>88</sup> The ability to contemplate one’s own internal mental states is often called metacognition. For more, see Janet Metcalfe and Hedy Kober, “Self-Reflective Consciousness and the Projectable Self,” in *The Missing Link in Cognition: Origins of Self-Reflective Consciousness*, ed. Herbert S. Terrace and Janet Metcalfe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57–83.

<sup>89</sup> This is referred to as the symbolic faculty, and some consider it to be the defining feature of humanity. The symbolic faculty likely began developing millions of years prior to the isolation of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (Kristen Gillespie-Lynch et al., “Gestural and Symbolic Development among Apes and Humans: Support for a Multimodal Theory of Language Evolution,” *FiP* 5 [2014]: 1–10; cf. Stephen C. Levinson and Judith Holler, “The Origin of Human Multi-Modal Communication,” *PTSLB* 369.1651 [2014]: 1–9), artifactual evidence for symbolic communication is first detectable in basic engravings and other artworks from between around 120,000 to 75,000 years BP, flourishing with intricate carvings and cave paintings around 35,000 years BP. See Tattersall, “Origin of the Human Sense of Self,” 44–47; cf. Colin Renfrew, “Personhood: Toward a Gradualist Approach,” in Jeeves, *The Emergence of Personhood*, 62–64. Lambros Malafouris believes these artifacts do not indicate symbolism as much as an extended self-awareness (Lambros Malafouris, “Beads for a Plastic Mind: The ‘Blind Man’s Stick’ (BMS) Hypothesis and the Active Nature of Material Culture,” *CAJ* 18 [2008]: 401–14).

<sup>90</sup> “The intellectual resources that allows us to have such knowledge is our symbolic cognitive style, whereby we mentally dissect the world around us into a huge vocabulary of intangible symbols that we can then combine and recombine in our minds, according to rules that allow an unlimited number of statements to be formulated from a finite set of elements. Using these rules we are able to generate alternative versions or explanations of the

others, and of our mental states (which informs the entire spectrum of intuitive to reflective reasoning) undergirds all conceptualizations of personhood. This section will discuss these conceptualizations as they occur in the discourse of contemporary societies.<sup>91</sup>

### *North America*

The easiest societies for me to interrogate are those in which I most frequently move, which are those of contemporary North America that are descended from the scientific and philosophical frameworks of the Reformation, Renaissance, and Enlightenment. These frameworks are themselves descended from classical Greek and early and Medieval Christian literature and praxis.<sup>92</sup> The conceptualizations of the person in these societies run the gamut of

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world—and of ourselves. It is this unique symbolic ability that underwrites the internalized self-representation expressed in the peculiarly human sense of self” (Tattersall, “Origin of the Human Sense of Self,” 33–34). Cf. Clive Gamble, *Origins and Revolutions: Human Identity in Earliest Prehistory* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 87–110; Ian Tattersall, “Language and the Origin of Symbolic Thought,” in *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution*, ed. Sophie A. de Beaune, Frederick L. Coolidge, and Thomas Wynn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109–16; Marc Kissel and Agustín Fuentes, “Semiosis in the Pleistocene,” *CAJ* 27.3 (2017): 398.

<sup>91</sup> Note that there are a number of intuitive conceptualizations of personhood that are not salient in reflective accounts of personhood, but are nonetheless socioculturally normative. For example, there is an economic dimension of personhood within which individualism is proportional to the salience of concepts of ownership (Ian Hodder, “An Archaeology of the Self: The Prehistory of Personhood,” in van Huyssteen and Wiebe, *In Search of Self*, 52). Jack Martin and Mark H. Bickhard insist an adequate concept of personhood requires the combination of psychological, biological, spiritual, and other dimensions (Jack Martin and Mark H. Bickhard, “Introducing Persons and the Psychology of Personhood,” in *The Psychology of Personhood: Philosophical, Historical, Social-Developmental, and Narrative Perspectives*, ed. Jack Martin and Mark H. Bickhard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 1–3), but the cognitive effort required to hold multiple different dimensions in tension at the same time restricts the applicability of that requirement to reflective domains like scholarly literature. Concepts of personhood are situationally emergent, and so in considering sociocultural outputs we must acknowledge the load limit that our conceptual metaphors have. We do not have psychological, biological, spiritual, and other dimensions in mind with every engagement with the concept, and I am not so much concerned with a full and complete discussion of the person as with those aspects of personhood that are most relevant to the intuitive construction of deity.

<sup>92</sup> For some highlights in that historical trajectory, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 7–32; Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2000); Sarah Broadie, “Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes,” *PAS* 101.3 (2001): 295–308; Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9–28; Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth and John M. Dillon, eds., *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Jan N. Bremmer, “The Rise of the Unitary Soul and Its Opposition to the Body. From Homer to Socrates,” in *Philosophische Anthropologie in der Antike*, ed. Ludger Jansen and Christoph Jedan (Frankfurt: ontos verlag, 2010), 11–29; Peter King, “Body and Soul,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 505–24; Oliver J. T. Harris and John Robb, “Multiple

intuitive to reflective, and there are multiple dimensions and modes that are contextually emergent, but the main concepts I wish to highlight are the fundamental relationality of personhood, its biological dimension, the association of certain internal regions and organs with certain loci of cognition, emotion, and animacy, and, finally, the partibility of these constituent elements of personhood, particularly after death.

Because of our philosophical and scientific heritage, members of the societies described above, when discussing personhood explicitly, will generally stress “a persistent personal identity . . . over relational identities,”<sup>93</sup> and often preferring ontological dimensions; but in everyday engagements and communications about persons, conceptualizations move within a variety of dimensions of personhood that are fundamentally relational. Even concepts of individuality and ontology are built on a foundation of relationships.<sup>94</sup> Chris Fowler identifies several of the many salient tensions that function as axes within the multidimensional conceptualizations of the person, including indivisible/divisible, inalienable/alienable, fractal/monadic, fixed/mutable, singular/plural, independent/interdependent, individualist/collectivist, egalitarian/heterarchical, essential/contextual, and others.<sup>95</sup> “The emphasis on plural intersecting axes of analyses allows for further diversity in considering social organization and power relations as important factors in personhood.”<sup>96</sup> There is no single concept of the person, but a variety of modes and dimensions that emerge contextually and relationally.

To reduce cognitive effort in construing the person in our minds, we have developed a

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Ontologies and the Problem of the Body in History,” *AA* 114.4 (2012): 673–74; Kurt Danziger, “Historical Psychology of Persons: Categories and Practice,” in Martin and Bickhard, *The Psychology of Personhood*, 59–80; A. A. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Lisa Raphals, “Body and Mind in Early China and Greece,” *JCH* 2.2 (2015): 132–38, 155–82.

<sup>93</sup> Chris Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.

<sup>94</sup> “Modern Western ontology may not privilege relationality, but it nonetheless consists of relations” (“Relational Personhood Revisited,” 405).

<sup>95</sup> Fowler, “Relational Personhood Revisited,” 402.

<sup>96</sup> Fowler, “Relational Personhood Revisited,” 403.

number of different image schemata that serve as conceptual proxies for these modes and dimensions. While mechanical conceptualizations of the body's various systems have been salient in European societies since before the Enlightenment,<sup>97</sup> the body, bound as it is by the skin, hair, and other protrusions, has most consistently been metaphorized in North America as a container for organs, systems, substances, as well as the conceptual "self," which is not generally considered coterminous with that container. I recognize there is risk in using the word "container" the way I will throughout this chapter, but I do not use it to refer to ontological binaries or other Cartesian frameworks. I use it to refer to the conceptual metaphor (THE BODY IS A CONTAINER) that structures the notion of internal and external spaces mediated by a boundary that can have varying degrees of permeability and extension inward and/or outward. Cognitive research suggests the CONTAINER image schema naturally develops in preverbal infant cognition.<sup>98</sup> The application to the body is no doubt a very intuitive and natural one as a person develops an understanding of the body's organization and function, and engages discourse about both. Things are put *into* the body and things come *out of* the body. The skin functions as a boundary, keeping the things inside on the inside and things on the outside on the outside.<sup>99</sup>

The life of the person is less threatened by injury to the surface of the body or to certain extremities than it is by injury to the organs of the abdomen, the chest, or the head, and this has contributed in different societies to the identification of organs like the liver, the heart, and the brain with the internal loci of cognition, emotion, and animation that were discussed in the

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<sup>97</sup> This has in large part been the result of technological advancements. More recently, the mind has been cast as a computer. On this development, see Margaret A. Boden, *Mind as Machine: A History of Cognitive Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> Jean M. Mandler, "How to Build a Baby: II. Conceptual Primitives," *PsychRev* 99.4 (1992): 587–604; Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundations of Biblical Metaphors* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 17, 23.

<sup>99</sup> This conceptual metaphor overlooks the body's thorough integration into its environment, of course. The body is continually taking in oxygen and expelling carbon dioxide, consuming food and water and expelling waste, and even participating with the surrounding environment in a process of cooling whereby the body excretes sweat to the surface of the skin to cool it and to then to have it evaporate into the air, taking additional heat with it.

previous chapter.<sup>100</sup> In “Greek-based West Asian, European and North African cultures,”<sup>101</sup> the medical and philosophical developments of the Renaissance and Enlightenment perpetuated a dualism between the heart as the seat of emotion and the brain/head as the seat of intellect.<sup>102</sup> The autonomy of these regions and their compartmentalized faculties are commonly reflected in North American societies through ubiquitous references to conflict between the emotional heart and the analytical head (Fig. 2.1).<sup>103</sup> That these independent parts could reify the presence of the person as a whole in certain circumstances is reflected in stories like those of deceased organ donors’ loved ones feeling reunited with the deceased by meeting with the recipients of the organs (almost always the heart).<sup>104</sup> The easy ability to feel another’s heartbeat provides a sensory reinforcement of the identification of the organ as a primary locus

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<sup>100</sup> Recent CL research examining culturally salient loci of faculties of feeling, thinking, and knowing in languages from around the world grouped the conceptualizations of those loci into abdominocentric, cardiocentric, and dualistic cephalocentric/cardiocentric models (Farzad Sharifian et al., eds., *Culture, Body, and Language: Conceptualizations of Internal Body Organs across Cultures and Languages* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008]). Abdominocentrism predominates in Southern Asia, Polynesia, and other scattered cultures. In Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, however, the heart seems to have predominated (Ning Yu, *The Chinese HEART in a Cognitive Perspective: Culture, Body, and Language* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009]; Slingerland and Chudek, “The Prevalence of Mind-Body Dualism in Early China,” 997–1007). More recently, however, the Japanese language has reflected a “dichotomy between brain/head and heart” that may be the result of engagement with the conceptual metaphors of the English language and the related cultural frameworks (Farzad Sharifian et al., “Culture and Language: Looking for the ‘Mind’ inside the Body,” in Farzad Sharifian et al., *Culture, Body, and Language*, 5). Cf. Erich A. Berendt and Keiko Tanita, “The ‘Heart’ of Things: A Conceptual Metaphoric Analysis of *Heart* and Related Body Parts in Thai, Japanese and English,” *ICS* 20.1 (2011): 65–78.

<sup>101</sup> Farzad Sharifian et al., “Culture and Language,” 5–7.

<sup>102</sup> On the early Christian manifestations of this dualism, see David Bradshaw, “The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West,” *F&P* 26.5 (2009): 576–98. The brain was not commonly associated with mind until the fifth century BCE Greek physician Alcmaeon of Croton identified, through dissection, “passages” leading from the eyes to the brain (Theophrastus, *De sensibus* 26; cf. Hippocrates, *De morbo sacro* 17, 20).

<sup>103</sup> See Nick Seluk’s popular internet cartoon “Heart and Brain” (inspired by Sigmund Freud’s framework for the psyche), in which Heart (the Id) and Brain (the Superego) personify the cognitive and emotion seats of Lars, a large blue “awkward yeti” (the Ego). The comics are published on TheAwkwardYeti.com. The body itself could be conceptualized as a seat of desire or pleasure, with its own degree of autonomy. In “Heart and Brain,” this locus of pleasure is Tongue, although that pleasure is primarily gustatory. The locus of sexual pleasure in the contemporary West is almost always the genitals. In an episode of the 1990’s American sitcom “Seinfeld” (NBC) called “The Nose Job” (air date: 20 November, 1991) Jerry is struggling with dating a sexually attractive woman whom he perceives to be intellectually inferior, and describes the struggle as a chess match between his brain and his penis. His friend George explains that the penis “wins ‘till you’re forty.” Jerry asks, “And then what?” George responds, “He still wins, but it’s not a blowout.”

<sup>104</sup> For instance, 20-year-old organ donor Abbey Connor’s heart was given to 21-year-old Loumonth Jack, Jr. Abbey’s father, Bill, met Loumonth and, after listening to his heartbeat with a stethoscope, commented, “Abbey is alive inside of him—it’s her heart having him stand up straight. I was happy for him and his family, and at the same time, I got to reunite with my daughter” (Jennifer Earl, “Dad bikes 1,400 miles to hear deceased daughter’s heartbeat on Father’s Day,” *CBS News*, June 21, 2015 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dad-bikes-1400-miles-to-hear-deceased-daughters-heartbeat-on-fathers-day/>]).

of identity. Even though the conceptual loci are not exactly coterminous with the related organs, our material entanglement strongly links the two, and they are not easily separated.



Fig. 2.1. From the “Heart and Brain” comic by Nick Seluk at TheAwkwardYeti.com.

The unseen dimension of personhood is focused in most contemporary North American societies on concepts related to the English categories of mind, soul, and spirit.<sup>105</sup> While these concepts overlap to different degrees and are variously associated with different capacities, functions, and impulses, there are some patterns that emerge in cross-cultural comparison. One set of studies examined North American, Brazilian, and Indonesian conceptualizations of the concepts and the effects of their hypothetical transfer to other persons.<sup>106</sup> Indonesian and North American participants tended to understand a transfer of mind as displacing cognitive attributes,

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<sup>105</sup> “The soul terms can be thought of as placeholders for that something which people attribute agentic properties. It is not the nature and qualities of this something that are important but its functional role: even though no specific entity corresponds to the word ‘I,’ for example, this word served a necessary function in human understanding of personal agency” (Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 67).

<sup>106</sup> Maira Roazzi, Melanie Nyhof, and Carl Johnson, “Mind, Soul and Spirit: Conceptions of Immaterial Identity in Different Cultures,” *IJPsychRel* 23 (2013): 75–86. Cf. Rebekah A. Richert and Paul L. Harris, “Dualism Revisited: Body vs. Mind vs. Soul,” *JCC* 8.1 (2008): 99–115.

while North American participants additionally associated the transfer of soul and spirit with displacements of social and moral attributes. Brazilian participants made no such distinctions regarding social, moral, or cognitive attributes, but all three groups associated a transfer of spirit with a displacement of passions or desires rather than abilities.

Notions about these entities departing the body, entering other bodies, and existing autonomously are themselves widespread and have been the subject of a great deal of cognitive and anthropological research.<sup>107</sup> Likely arising as sociocultural elaborations on intuitions about agency and the continuation of some unseen locus of identity after death,<sup>108</sup> concepts of disembodied spirits,<sup>109</sup> spirit possession,<sup>110</sup> out-of-body experiences,<sup>111</sup> and reincarnation<sup>112</sup> have long been salient in North America and within societies around the world.<sup>113</sup> These are reflective ways to employ unseen agency—which is conceptually flexible precisely because it cannot be observed—to account for otherwise unknown phenomena associated with illness, behavioral changes, and the many different ways we perceive agency to inhabit and influence

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<sup>107</sup> See Chapter 3 of Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 57–94, entitled “Souls, Ghosts, and Shamans.”

<sup>108</sup> Jesse M. Bering, “Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents’ Minds: The Natural Foundations of Afterlife Beliefs as Phenomenological Boundary,” *JCC* 2.4 (2002): 263–308; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 68–73; Pereira, Faisca, and de Sá-Saraiva, “Immortality of the Soul as an Intuitive Idea,” 101–27.

<sup>109</sup> Richert and Harris, “Dualism Revisited,” 99–115.

<sup>110</sup> Emma Cohen and Justin Barrett, “When Minds Migrate: Conceptualizing Spirit Possession,” *JCC* 8.1 (2008): 23–48; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 75–94.

<sup>111</sup> Pieter F. Craffert, “When is an Out-of-Body Experience (Not) an Out-of-Body Experience? Reflections about Out-of-Body Phenomena in Neuroscientific Research,” *JCC* 15.1–2 (2015): 13–31.

<sup>112</sup> Claire White, “Establishing Personal Identity in Reincarnation: Minds and Bodies Reconsidered,” *JCC* 15.3–4 (2015): 402–29; Claire White, “The Cognitive Foundations of Reincarnation,” *MTSR* 28.3 (2016): 264–86.

<sup>113</sup> For instance, Afro-Brazilian cults in South America: Emma Cohen, *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); the Pacific islands: Jeanette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard, eds., *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Zambia: Robert Badenberg, *The Body, Soul and Spirit Concept of the Bemba in Zambia* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2002), 72–89; Niger: Susan J. Rasmussen, *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Zimbabwe: Peter Fry, *Spirits of Protest: Spirit-Mediums and the Articulation of Consensus among the Zezuru of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 30–53; Laos: John Clifford Holt, *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 15–75; Northern Philippines: Henrik Hvenegaard Mikkelsen, “Chaosmology: Shamanism and Personhood among the Bugkalot,” *HJET* 6.1 (2016): 189–205; Contemporary Greece: Eugenia Roussou, “When Soma Encounters the Spiritual: Bodily Praxes of Performed Religiosity in Contemporary Greece,” in *Encounters of Body and Soul in Contemporary Religious Practices: Anthropological Reflections*, ed. Anna Fedele and Ruy Llera Blanes (New York: Berghan Books, 2011), 133–50; Contemporary Denmark: Ann Ostfeldt-Rosenthal, “Reenchanted Bodies: The Significance of the Spiritual Dimension in Danish Healing Rituals,” in Fedele and Blanes, *Encounters of Body and Soul in Contemporary Religious Practices*, 151–67.

the world around us. While there is a great deal of variability in the reflective accounts of the nature and function of these entities and their interactions with embodied persons, some broad patterns are discernible as well that demonstrate their anchoring to intuitive reasoning. Emma Cohen, for example, has worked extensively with cross-cultural concepts of spirit possession,<sup>114</sup> and she identifies two generalized types of possession arising from “recurrent features of evolved human cognition that guide perception, representation, thought and action”:<sup>115</sup> executive, during which a spirit takes over control of the host’s cognition, and pathogenic, during which the possession is manifested in contamination or illness. Claire White, who has focused on reincarnation, finds that persons across many cultures tend to focus on shared physical characteristics and retained autobiographical memories in identifying reincarnated agents, even when reincarnation beliefs conflict with the notion of such biological and psychological continuity.<sup>116</sup>

Our intuitive predisposition to conceptualize the dead as continuing on in some form, as well as to maintain relationships with them, has conflicted with the reflective and individualistic doctrines of twentieth-century European/American psychology, which viewed successful grief processes as the severing of those relationships.<sup>117</sup> More recent approaches have held that “it is both normal and healthy for the living to maintain their relationship with the deceased after death. The task of grieving is to renegotiate a relationship that changes but continues after death.”<sup>118</sup> According to Arnar Árnason, “It is the continuing presence of the

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<sup>114</sup> Emma Cohen, “What is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing, and Explaining Two Possession Forms,” *Ethnos* 73.1 (2008): 101–26.

<sup>115</sup> Cohen, “What is Spirit Possession?” 103.

<sup>116</sup> White, “The Cognitive Foundations of Reincarnation,” 264–86.

<sup>117</sup> “The model of grief that began with Freud is based on a view of the world that stresses how separate people are from each other. . . . This model is an artifact of Western modernity, and is not the operant model in human societies in other times and places. A central feature in the modern Western world view is the value placed on autonomy and individuation” (Phyllis R. Silverman and Dennis Klass, “Introduction: What’s the Problem?” in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, ed. Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman [Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1996], 14). Cf. Glennys Howarth, “Dismantling the Boundaries between Life and Death,” *Mortality* 5.2 (2000): 127–38; Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers*, 20–21.

<sup>118</sup> Arnar Árnason, “Individuals and Relationships: On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Presence,” in *Emotion, Identity and Death: Mortality Across Disciplines*, ed. Douglas J. Davies and Chang-Won Park



deceased in the lives of the living that calls for the idea of continuing bonds.”<sup>119</sup> This continuing sense of presence is a well-documented phenomenon that undergirds a broad spectrum of experiences related to coping with death.<sup>120</sup> Two of the most salient loci for the presence of the deceased are photographs and the grave.<sup>121</sup> Even in thoroughly secularized societies, people regularly speak with the dead, and the gravestone in particular can play a central role in facilitating these discussions. In this view, it can be “animated as the body of a person in that it is washed, cared for, gazed at, dressed with flowers, offered drinks, and surrounded by household and garden ornaments.”<sup>122</sup> That a gravestone serves to index or house the unseen agency of the deceased is a natural product of our intuitive reasoning about the loci of agency of deceased persons, although this has not, to my knowledge, been extensively studied by cognitive scientists.<sup>123</sup>

### *Contemporary Melanesia*

In societies where the biological dimension of personhood is less salient than other relational dimensions, the person is more reflectively reified by material and social relationships, less restrained by the container of the body, and less socially diminished in death. The classic

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(Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 59.

<sup>119</sup> Árnason, “Individuals and Relationships,” 66.

<sup>120</sup> Gillian Bennett and Kate Mary Bennett, “The Presence of the Dead: An Empirical Study,” *Mortality* 5.2 (2000): 139–57; Catherine Keen, Craig Murray, and Sheila Payne, “Sensing the Presence of the Deceased: A Narrative Review,” *MHRC* 16.4 (2013): 384–402.

<sup>121</sup> Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 129–54; Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou, “The Cemetery: The Evidence of Continuing Bonds,” in *Grief, Mourning, and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz, and Neill Small (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), 226–36; Dorthe Refslund Christensen and Kjetil Sandvik, “Death Ends a Life, Not a Relationship: Objects as Media on Children’s Graves,” in *Mediating and Remediating Death*, ed. Dorthe Refslund Christensen and Kjetil Sandvik (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 251–71; Anne Kjærsgaard and Eric Venbrux, “Still in the Picture: Photographs at Graves and Social Time,” in *Materialities of Passing: Explorations in Transformation, Transition and Transience*, ed. Peter Bjerresgaard, Anders Emil Rasmussen, and Tim Flohr Sørensen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 85–110.

<sup>122</sup> Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 151. Cf. Christensen and Sandvik, “Death Ends a Life, Not a Relationship,” 251–71.

<sup>123</sup> There is some discussion in the context of conceptual blend theory in Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 204–10.

example of such societies is that of Melanesia, as discussed by Marilyn Strathern in her seminal work, *The Gender of the Gift*.<sup>124</sup> As with all societies, Melanesian societies hold both dividual and individual conceptualizations of the person in tension, with priority emerging situationally.<sup>125</sup> Practices and beliefs related to the body are quite variable, but in broad terms, the body is conceptualized as the observable embodiment of the relationships with the food, the people, and the spirits responsible for its development and state, with illness reflecting deficiency somewhere among those relationships.<sup>126</sup>

Gift exchange is a formative aspect of these societies, and it can serve as a means of remedying those deficiencies. The gifts that are exchanged can themselves take on gender, agency, and a biography according to the social relations they produce. They are not commodities that one possesses, but partible aspects of one's personhood they employ in the creation and maintenance of relationships and power structures that constitute identity. In marriage, for example, each partner brings their parents' two bloodlines together for a total of four distinct lines, with no redundancies allowed in the union. In the case of redundancies, the exchange of pigs and other goods facilitates the return of the secondary bloodlines to the clans of their origin, detaching each partner from the bloodline. At death, this process of "deconception" is repeated at a mortuary feast, but now with permanent effect, dissolving the

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<sup>124</sup> Melanesian persons, she states, "are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them" (Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, 13). As an example, different parts of the body are gendered differently in these societies, meaning persons are thought to be dual-gendered, or "cross-sex," at least internally. Gender is not essentialized, but is often situationally revealed in one's actions, interactions, and transactions, and may thus change in response to the context. Mark Mosko has recently published research that has challenged the contention that the influx of Christianity into these societies has resulted in a more individualist conceptualization of the person. See Mark Mosko, "Partible Penitents: Dividual Personhood and Christian Practice in Melanesia and the West," *JRAI* 16.2 (2010): 215–40; Mark Mosko, "Unbecoming Individuals: The Partible Character of the Christian Person," *HJET* 5.1 (2015): 361–93.

<sup>125</sup> According to Susan Hemer, who conducted extensive research in the Lihir Islands of Papua New Guinea, individualism could be inscribed directly upon the body, either through particular physical characteristics or through tattoos. The Lihirian body was composed of the outer skin and other visible characteristics, as well as the heart, the liver, the intestines, and the brain, with the latter representative of the capacity for thought (Susan Hemer, *Tracing the Melanesian Person: Emotions and Relationships in Lihir* [Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2013], 92–93).

<sup>126</sup> Bruce Knauft, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia & Anthropology* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 26–28.

individual identity of the deceased into the clan identity.<sup>127</sup> Endocannibalism (mortuary cannibalism) took place in some societies, which facilitated the further distribution of the person's partible substances to their kin.<sup>128</sup> This postmortem dissolution of the individual into a corporate ancestral identity is a widespread feature of societies where relational personhood, and particularly kinship, is more salient.<sup>129</sup> The person in these societies is much more thoroughly integrated into, and constituted by, the broader material environment.

### *Contemporary South India*

Another example of a society where the frameworks of the Renaissance and Enlightenment are not as normative is that of the fishing village of Marianad in South India, where Cecilia Busby employed Strathern's framework in her analysis of gender and body.<sup>130</sup> Exchange there is still critical to personhood according to Busby's analysis, but gender is more fixed and essentialized; substances like semen and breastmilk are gendered, with the genitals signaling

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<sup>127</sup> See Mark S. Mosko, "Motherless Sons: 'Divine Kings' and 'Partible Persons' in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Man* 27.4 (1992): 703–04; Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood*, 15–16. In the nineteenth century, when Melanesian men died, their dissolution took with them so much of their wives' partible personhood that the latter were compelled by custom to beg to be strangled so they could follow close behind. Custom did not compel men to do the same. See Lamont Lindstrom, "Agnes C.P. Watt and Melanesian Personhood," *JPH* 48.3 (2013): 263–64. Simon Stoddart compares the notion of "deconception" to the past mortuary practices in Malta (Simon Stoddart, "Mediating the Dominion of Death in Prehistoric Malta," in *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: "Death Shall Have No Dominion"*, ed. Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Boyd, and Iain Morley [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016], 133–34).

<sup>128</sup> "The diverse Melanesian endocannibalism systems expressed a variety of cultural meanings, but they tended to share in two main ideas: the assumption that cannibalism primarily benefits those who consume human substance; and the notion of an economy of biosocial substance in which cannibalism serves as a means of acquiring body substances, vital energies, or personal attributes contained in the dead person's corpse and of transferring them to those who eat it" (Beth A. Conklin, "'Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom': Mortuary Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society," *AE* 22.1 [1995]: 77). Cf. Knauft, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia & Anthropology*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> A period of individual burial followed by a secondary commingled burial is understood by many anthropologists to reflect this concept of dissolution into a generic ancestral group after the memory of the individual *qua* individual had faded (Melissa S. Cradic, "Embodiments of Death: The Funerary Sequence and Commemoration in the Bronze Age Levant," *BASOR* 377 [2017]: 219–48). A variation of this is the creation of hybrid bodies by combining parts from one body with those of another, which is thought to reflect the partibility of the person (cf. William N. Duncan and Kevin R. Schwarz, "Partible, Permeable, and Relational Bodies in a Maya Mass Grave," in *Commingled and Disarticulated Human Remains: Working Toward Improved Theory, Method, and Data*, ed. Anna J. Osterholtz, Kathryn M. Baustian, and Debra L. Martin [New York: Springer, 2014], 149–70).

<sup>130</sup> Cecilia Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons: A Comparative Analysis of Gender and Body in South India and Melanesia," *JRAI* 3.2 (1997): 261–78; Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood*, 19.

the substances that the person will produce and transmit. The mother's relationship to the child is forged through the womb and through breastmilk, while the father's relationship is forged through semen and blood. Thus two brothers may each have children that have the same blood and are considered siblings, too closely related for marriage. The children of two sisters are also considered siblings and unsuitable for marriage.<sup>131</sup> A woman's children will have different blood from her brother's children, on the other hand, and are thus suitable, and perhaps even ideal, for marriage.

The role of exchange is illustrated in the practice of married couples eating from the same plate, which facilitates the sharing of saliva and demonstrates, as does their sexual relationship, the willing exchange of bodily fluids, reflecting the salient concept of being "one body."<sup>132</sup> Busby finds in these conceptualizations of personhood and relationships a more essentialized and ontological notion of gender and exchange.<sup>133</sup> South Indian persons, according to Busby, are thus "co-extensive with their skin boundary," although they are not "rigidly contained":<sup>134</sup> "As ethnosociological accounts of the person in India have made clear, the boundary of the body is considered *permeable*, so that substance can flow between persons, and connexions

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<sup>131</sup> Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons," 262–63.

<sup>132</sup> Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons," 267–69. Busby's informants insist this is not the result of Christianity's influence—she points out the concept is also found in Hindu ideology (p. 276, n. 4)—but it is certainly recognized as agreeing with the concept from Genesis of "one flesh."

<sup>133</sup> "For South Indian persons are not totally separate, bounded individuals, but engage with others and are connected to them through flows of substance which they exchange with each other. Such substances, however, always refer to the persons from whom they originated: they are a manifestation of persons rather than of the relationships which they create" (Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons," 273).

<sup>134</sup> The Kayapo people of the Amazon maintain a related but more gradient and socially contingent understanding of the skin as the boundary of the container of the body: "The Kayapo say that the skin of newborn infants is 'soft' *rerek*, meaning that it is a permeable membrane that does not yet constitute a definite boundary either of physical bodiliness or social identity. At this early stage the infant is still completely dependent on its parents, incapable of locomotion, feeding itself, or speech, and thus relatively undifferentiated as an individual from them. Mothers of infants typically cover their bodies with very elaborate painted designs, which carry the symbolic connotation of conferring on them a socialized identity, or in so many words a 'social skin.' When the young child becomes able to walk, take solid food, and in general relate to others as a distinct social individual, its skin is said to become 'strong' *tàych*" (Terence Turner, "BODILINESS: The Body Beyond the Body: Social, Material and Spiritual Dimensions of Bodiliness," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, ed. Frances E. Mascia-Lees [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011], 105).

can be made. The Indian person is not partible in any salient sense, but can be called ‘permeable,’ having ‘fluid boundaries.’”<sup>135</sup>

### *Implications*

While there is a great deal of disparity within and between these different societies’ conceptualizations of personhood, the underlying conceptual foundations are not irreconcilable. All can be understood against a backdrop of relationality and can be plotted against conceptual spectra such as partible to holistic, biological to psychological, seen to unseen, or essentialist to social. Different societies and the persons within them also engage in different degrees of rationalization and/or decoupling where intuitive knowledge feeds into and/or conflicts with reflective knowledge. It is the contextual and reflective negotiation of the tensions within and between these spectra that account for the wide cross-cultural and intercultural variability regarding personhood.<sup>136</sup> The patterns that arise in the symbolic structuring of the body and the internal loci of cognition, emotion, and animation, including their capacity for leaving bodies and possessing other bodies, are attributable to innate cognitive frameworks, shared embodied experience, and conceptual metaphors that emerge from them, particularly in the context of reasoning about the afterlife.

## Personhood in Ancient Southwest Asia

This section will examine personhood in the societies of ancient Southwest Asia, beginning

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<sup>135</sup> Busby, “Permeable and Partible Persons,” 275. For other engagements with Busby and Strathern’s work that focus on other societies, see the several essays in Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern, eds., *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), as well as Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sabine C. Hess, *Person and Place: Ideas, Ideals and the Practice of Sociality on Vanua Lava, Vanuatu* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Udeni M. H. Appuhamilage, “A Fluid Ambiguity: Individual, Dividual and Personhood,” *APJA* 18.1 (2017): 1–17.

<sup>136</sup> This is Edward LiPuma’s contention in “Modernity and Forms of Personhood in Melanesia,” in Lambek and Strathern, *Bodies and Persons*, 53–79. Cf. Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood*, 20–22.

with the earliest recoverable indications of sedentism in Southwest Asia, but primarily focusing on Iron Age II. The main points I would like to emphasize in this section are that the person was commonly conceptualized in those societies, as in contemporary societies, as an assemblage of parts and entities with different roles and functions and varying degrees of autonomy, operating within a body most often conceptualized as a container of some kind. The unseen entities that were more central to identity and personhood in these societies were also consistently thought to survive the death of the body and function for some time with some degree of freedom from the body that was usually mitigated during life. Ancient persons also lived in a world inhabited by other unseen agents that were capable of permeating their own bodies and either causing illness or overtaking their agency. These conceptualizations of the person, and particularly the deceased person, I will argue in the next chapter, sit at the root of the most salient conceptualizations of deity from early Southwest Asia.<sup>137</sup>

### *Neolithic Southwest Asia*

Around 12,000 years BP, a stabilizing climate and other factors contributed to the emergence and consolidation in Southwest Asia of the world's first sedentary societies.<sup>138</sup> The earliest of these societies subsisted on cultivation and hunting, with animal domestication emerging in fits and starts after around 8,800 BCE.<sup>139</sup> Social aggregation (the cohabitation of different

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<sup>137</sup> As I explained in the Introduction, biblical studies maintain an outdated and methodologically problematic notion of the divine as *das ganz andere*, or “the wholly other” (see Introduction, n. 22). As this and the next chapter will show, the divine is extrapolated from conceptualizations of the human.

<sup>138</sup> See Jacques Cauvin, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*, trans. Trevor Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Peter J. Richerson, Robert Boyd, and Robert L. Bettinger, “Was Agriculture Impossible during the Pleistocene but Mandatory during the Holocene? A Climate Change Hypothesis,” *AmAnt* 66.3 (2001): 387–411; Ian Kuijt and Nigel Goring-Morris, “Foraging, Farming, and Social Complexity in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Southern Levant: A Review and Synthesis,” *JWP* 16.4 (2002): 361–40; Emma Guerrero, Stephan Naji, and Jean-Pierre Bocquet-Appel, “The Signal of the Neolithic Demographic Transition in the Levant,” in *The Neolithic Demographic Transition and its Consequences*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bocquet-Appel and Ofer Bar-Yosef (New York: Springer, 2008), 57–80.

<sup>139</sup> L. K. Horwitz et al., “Animal domestication in the southern Levant,” *Paléorient* 25.2 (1999): 63–80. For a helpful corrective against the assumptions that domestication and sedentarism were easier than and preferable to nomadic pastoralism, and that societies strived for the former, see James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

communities) also appears for the first time in this period.<sup>140</sup> Increased and sustained reliance on and entanglement with non-kin and with new and changing technologies no doubt transformed relationships between humans and their homes, their lands, their food, their animals, their neighbors, their deceased, and even their memories, which would have introduced new ways to conceptualize the person and the socio-material ecologies in which they lived.<sup>141</sup> For instance, the different early brands of domestication, according to James C. Scott, “rearranged the natural world in a way that vastly reduced the radius of a meal.”<sup>142</sup> Much less time, stress, and cognitive effort would have been dedicated to finding, producing, planning, or rationing food, allowing that time and energy to be distributed among other endeavors. Among the more marked of the changes brought about by these shifting entanglements was likely a more robust sense of property and identity, as evinced, for example, in the increasing presence of pendants, beads, bracelets, and other bodily adornments in burial goods.<sup>143</sup> A more partible sense of self may have also developed in concert with behaviors associated with exchange of such property. Ian Hodder provides the following summary of this transitional stage in the development of personhood:

it is possible to argue that as humans came to be more and more entangled with things through the Pleistocene and into the early Holocene, and as their relations with things turned toward an increased sense of exclusive property, so the sense of self became more marked, both personally, in terms of bodily decoration and burial, and collectively, as in communal ritual enclosures. At the same time, that sense of self may have become very tied to things and to other humans. As gift exchange increased, the human person may increasingly have been seen as partible and distributed. As people became more

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<sup>140</sup> Ian Kuijt, “Negotiating Equality through Ritual: A Consideration of Late Natufian and Prepottery Neolithic A Period Mortuary Practices,” *JAA* 15 (1996): 313–36; Nigel Goring-Morris and Anna Belfer-Cohen, “Different Strokes for Different Folks: Near Eastern Neolithic Mortuary Practices in Perspective,” in *Religion at Work in a Neolithic Society: Vital Matters*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 48–50.

<sup>141</sup> For a critique of the notion of a Neolithic “Revolution” on the grounds that it constitutes “the modern project of European history and culture that gained definition by opposing and containing the Orient,” see Gamble, *Origins and Revolutions*, 3–32 (the quote is from p. 32).

<sup>142</sup> Scott, *Against the Grain*, 17.

<sup>143</sup> Hodder, “An Archaeology of the Self,” 63.

entangled with things, so the tensions between self and other in human relations with things may have been more marked.<sup>144</sup>

We can really only speak about possibilities regarding the conceptualization of the living person, but we do have a bit more data regarding the person in death and the intentional perpetuation of the social lives of the deceased through material media. Burials across this period could take place within living quarters, usually under a plastered floor. Retrieval of the skeletal remains was not infrequent, as well as disarticulation (particularly decapitation), suggesting not only close relationships between the deceased, the home, and kin, but also the partibility of the person as their relationship with the living was transformed and renegotiated.<sup>145</sup> Death does not appear to have represented an end of life for these communities, but just a transition to another phase or mode.<sup>146</sup> This is consistent with most all societies around the world and down through time. The various reflective filters of each society refract the intuitive perception that the agency of the deceased continues on in some manner, resulting in differing approaches to and rationalizations of the curation of socio-material relationships with the deceased. These approaches generally fall somewhere along a spectrum of care and memory.<sup>147</sup> In many societies, those relationships are understood to benefit the deceased and their agency, thus providing care, while in others, they are understood solely to evoke memories of the deceased whose agency no longer exists outside of that memory. The same

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<sup>144</sup> Hodder, “An Archaeology of the Self,” 56.

<sup>145</sup> The inclusion and even incorporation of animal bones may suggest blurred divisions separating human from non-human animals, or at the very least the salience of certain animals to the memory of the identity of the deceased. See A. Nigel Goring-Morris, “Life, death and the emergence of differential status in the Near Eastern Neolithic: evidence from Kfar HaHoresh, Lower Galilee, Israel,” in *Archaeological Perspectives on the Transmission and Transformation of Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Joanne Clarke (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 95–98

<sup>146</sup> See Karina Croucher, “Keeping the dead close: grief and bereavement in the treatment of skulls from the Neolithic Middle East,” *Mortality* 23.2 (2018): 103–20.

<sup>147</sup> See Tony Walter, “How the Dead Survive: Ancestors, immortality, memory,” in *Postmortal Society: Towards a Sociology of Immortality*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (New York: Routledge, 2017), 19–39, esp. 26–27. Walter also includes the notion of immortality.



behaviors may be plotted in different places along that spectrum within a society or between societies, depending on the reflective restraints of the person rationalizing them.

One of the most striking features from Southwest Asia in this period is the well-known practice of making, displaying, and “using” plastered crania.<sup>148</sup> About 90 such crania have been excavated from Neolithic Southwest Asian contexts, primarily in Pre-Pottery Neolithic A and B periods, but extending down into the Pottery Neolithic. Primary burials in the house floors would be left for years and then dug up for the removal of the crania, which would then be prepared and displayed or “used” for a period before reburial. The preparation could include painting and/or plastering with layers of lime, gypsum, or mud plaster that was often used to create the appearance of flesh. The eyes were frequently emphasized through outlining or the insertion of shells.<sup>149</sup> Clay bases indicate the crania were intended to be displayed in an upright position, while wear on the prepared crania indicate that they were not simply displayed and left alone, but used in some manner. Some crania display signs of multiple preparations or alterations, which may suggest preparation was a part of their use, perhaps as part of a performance or ritual of some kind.<sup>150</sup>

According to Croucher, “Death did not mark the end of the body’s engagement with the living world, but rather marked a new phase of activity and interaction with the living.”<sup>151</sup> We may note that the life cycle in these societies was intimately connected with the home. Even in death, individuals remained for a time within the home, with their bodies curated in ways that allowed them to remain part of the household and to engage in continued social engagement.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> I opt to refer to these artifacts as crania rather than skulls because they prototypically did not include the mandible, which would have separated from the cranium with composition. There are exceptional examples where the mandible is included in the plastered skull, but for the most part, it is either simulated or omitted entirely (Karina Croucher, *Death and Dying in the Neolithic Near East* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 94–97).

<sup>149</sup> Croucher, *Death and Dying in the Neolithic Near East*, 94–95.

<sup>150</sup> Croucher, *Death and Dying in the Neolithic Near East*, 143.

<sup>151</sup> Croucher, *Death and Dying in the Neolithic Near East*, 143.

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of personhood in Neolithic homes, with a focus on Çatalhöyük (and some discussion of plastered crania), see Hodder, “An Archaeology of the Self,” 50–69.

If the presence of the agency of the deceased was a salient aspect of these acts and practices, they may have functioned to materially presence that agency. Upright display could endow a prepared cranium with a sense of intention and agency in two ways. First, an upright position is more intuitively associated with life and health—it is not the way lone crania occur in nature. They may initially and intuitively be perceived as alive. Reflective reasoning would cue a viewer to the deceased and prepared status of the cranium, but residual intention and agency could still be activated by the (unnatural) upright position of the material object, similar to the way we might immediately become sensitive to the presence of an agent if we stumble across a snare set in the forest, or a recently doused campfire. These are clear signs of the activity of an agent. Intention-laden configurations of plastered crania may have been intended to cue members of the social group to the intuitive perception of agency and thus facilitate the desired social engagements.

Not all burials took place within the home, though. In fact, the number of human remains found in most settlements throughout the Neolithic is lower than the estimated populations in those settlements. There could be many reasons for this, but the existence of mortuary sites at a distance from habitations with cached burials extending over long periods of time indicates a pattern of secondary burials at communal mortuary sites (with wide latitude regarding the specific form and function of those burials).<sup>153</sup> Part of the renegotiation of memories of the deceased as they were effaced by time or other factors may have included the possibility of assimilation into a generic group of “ancestors.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Goring-Morris, “Life, death and the emergence of differential status in the Near Eastern Neolithic,” 89–105. Monumental shrines and tumuli began to proliferate in the southern Negev in the sixth millennium BCE, likely reflecting developing pastoralism in the desert and resulting concerns for territoriality. See Steven A. Rosen, “Cult and the rise of desert pastoralism: a case study from the Negev,” in *Defining the Sacred: Approaches to the Archaeology of Religion in the Near East*, ed. Nicola Laneri (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), 38–47.

<sup>154</sup> Kuijt, “Negotiating Equality through Ritual,” 313–36. Cf. Walter, “How the Dead Survive,” 21, 26–27.

Burials were also occasionally accompanied by stelai, which in the earliest periods seem to have been used to mark the locations of inhumations.<sup>155</sup> Over time, however, this indexing function may have shifted to one of presencing, as indicated by later intentional configurations of stelai more commonly dislocated from inhumations and associated with sites of ritual. Mortuary feasting also seems to have taken place at these sites, and there are indications of overlap with the treatment of “deities” in this time period.<sup>156</sup> A recent analysis of sites from the fifth to third millennia BCE identified two different arrangements of stelai that the authors concluded represented two different groups:<sup>157</sup> larger stones arranged in standardized numbers and groupings were thought to represent deities, while smaller stones arranged individually and arbitrarily were thought to represent ancestors.<sup>158</sup> In some mortuary locations, as well, stelai set up near the perimeter of tombs were understood to represent protective deities, while the stelai in the interior were understood to presense deceased kin.<sup>159</sup> The appropriation of older material media for new purposes illustrates a central feature of socio-material ecologies: as the identities and the meanings of objects and behaviors fade from communal memory or

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<sup>155</sup> Goring-Morris, “Life, death and the emergence of differential status in the Near Eastern Neolithic,” 94. For the use of stelai in the area during the Early Bronze Age, see Ann Andersson, “Thoughts on material expressions of cultic practice. Standing stone monuments of the Early Bronze Age in the southern Levant,” in Laneri, *Defining the Sacred*, 48–59.

<sup>156</sup> Goring-Morris, “Life, death and the emergence of differential status in the Near Eastern Neolithic,” 100; Uzi Avner and Liora Kolska Horwitz, “Animal sacrifices and Offerings from Cult and Mortuary Sites in the Negev and Sinai, 6<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> Millennia BC,” *ARAM* 29.1–2 (2017): 35–70.

<sup>157</sup> Reuma Arav et al., “Three-Dimensional Documentation of *masseboth* Sites in the ‘Uvda Valley Area, Southern Negev, Israel,” *DAACH* 3 (2016): 9–21. The authors noted that while ancient and modern societies around the world treated stelai as representing ancestors, the desert stelai of the Negev have always been treated as representative of deities. The authors refer to KTU 1.17 I:26–27, which describes establishing a stele for ancestors. See also Uzi Avner, “Studies in the Material and Spiritual Culture of the Negev and Sinai Populations, During the 6<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> Millennia B.C.” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2002), 65–92; Uzi Avner, “Protohistoric Developments of Religion and Cult in the Negev Desert,” *TA* 45.1 (2018): 23–62.

<sup>158</sup> Arav et al., “Three-Dimensional Documentation of the *masseboth* Sites in the ‘Uvda Valley Area,” 20: “It is most likely that in sites of this group there is a combination of stones for deities and stones for ancestors. In ancient records and anthropological studies ancestors are perceived as sitting and dining in communion with the gods.”

<sup>159</sup> “In tombs, two types of *masseboth* were set. Those incorporated in the tomb’s perimeter, mostly on the eastern side and facing east, are explained as representing the deities that guard the tombs and the deceased. *Maşseboth* set within tombs are usually narrow, set separately and face north; these are interpreted as representing the ancestors” (Avner and Horwitz, “Animal Sacrifices and Offerings from Cult and Mortuary Sites in the Negev and Sinai,” 35–70).

lose salience, the objects and the behaviors often remain to be repurposed for use in new contexts and in the service of new exigencies.

### *Ancient Egypt*

The elite mortuary remains from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period (c. 1070–664 BCE)<sup>160</sup> carry on the previous periods' fundamental concerns for the integrity of, and provisioning for, a variety of constituent elements of the person, both seen and unseen.<sup>161</sup> During life, the importance of the integrity of the person is reflected in the view of the body and certain regions as containers for the vulnerable interior and its constituent parts. The mouth, ears, and other orifices or ruptures in the skin functioned as access points to the interior that could afford entrance for demons and other contaminating entities. Women were particularly susceptible and were expected to perform purifying rituals following events like menstruation.<sup>162</sup> The torso, or *ht*,<sup>163</sup> was one of the main constituent containers of the body, and it housed the *ib* (usually translated “heart”), the seat of intelligence.<sup>164</sup> The *ib* overlapped conceptually with the *h3ty*, the

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<sup>160</sup> This period presents unique methodological concerns. After about 850 BCE, Egypt was characterized by political fragmentation, and simplified mortuary practices combined with an increase in plundering and an imbalance in the archaeological record make the interrogation of concepts of the person and of the afterlife in this period particularly fraught (John H. Taylor, “Changes in the Afterlife,” in *Egyptian Archaeology*, ed. Willeke Wendrich [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 223; Stephen Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015], 222–28). The provisioning of the corpse with papyri containing selections from the *Book of Going Out by Day* and other compositions, for instance, stalls between 850–700 BCE (Taylor, “Changes in the Afterlife,” 235–36). Non-elite burials during the Third Intermediate Period, as with earlier periods, manifest a lack of mummification or other preparation, apart from wrapping and in some occurrences the packing of the thoracic and pelvic cavities (Taylor, “Changes in the Afterlife,” 233).

<sup>161</sup> See Emma Brunner-Traut, “Der menschliche Körper—eine Gliderpuppe,” in *Der ganze Mensch: Zur Anthropologie der Antike und ihre europäischen Nachgeschichte*, ed. Bernd Janowski (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 25–34; Nicola Harrington, *Living with the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 1–27; Jan Assmann, “Konstellative Anthropologie: Zum Bild des Menschen im alten Ägypten,” in Janowski, *Der ganze Mensch*, 35–55.

<sup>162</sup> See Lucia Gahlin, “Private Religion,” in *The Egyptian World*, ed. Toby Wilkinson (New York: Routledge, 2007), 337–38; Paul John Frandsen, “The Menstrual ‘Taboo’ in Ancient Egypt,” *JNES* 66.2 (2007): 81–106.

<sup>163</sup> Lynn M. Meskell describes the *ht* as “the locus of inner life, the location of thoughts, feelings and memories” (Lynn M. Meskell and Rosemary A. Joyce, *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience* [London: Routledge, 2003], 18, citing Herman te Velde, “Some Remarks on the Concept ‘Person’ in the Ancient Egyptian Culture,” in *Concepts of Person in Religion and Thought*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg, Yme B. Kuiper, and Andy F. Sanders [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990], 89).

<sup>164</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 21; Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 102–04. Cf. Heinz-Josef Fabry, “*ḥt* *l3ḥ*,” *TDOT* 7:401–02.

“heart” qua organ, but is probably better understood as the region within which the *h3ty* was located.<sup>165</sup>

The practices associated with mummification show a commitment to extending the integrity of the partible person as far into the afterlife as possible.<sup>166</sup> According to the written sources, death fractured the relationship of the constituent elements of the person, and reintegration was critical to transformation into an entity capable of a successful afterlife. The most popular iconography and texts incorporated into the mortuary remains of the Third Intermediate Period describe several *kheperu* (*hprw*), or “manifestations,” as central to personhood.<sup>167</sup> Among these are the *akh* (*3h*), the spirit of the deceased that could aid the living,<sup>168</sup> the *ib* (“heart”), which was the locus of intelligence and morality that testified for or against the person in the afterlife,<sup>169</sup> and the *rn*, or “name,” which represented the reputation of the person, was materially manifested in the cartouche, and took on a life of its own, particularly in the afterlife.<sup>170</sup> Critical to the survival of the person was the *ka* (*k3*), an animating

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<sup>165</sup> Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 55–68.

<sup>166</sup> This commitment appears to have taken on increased significance for elite burials in the Third Intermediate Period. The body was stuffed with packing material to restore shape to the limbs, internal organs were returned to the body instead of kept in canopic jars, and cosmetic treatments became more elaborate (Taylor, “Changes in the Afterlife,” 231–32). The earlier periods’ *Pyramid Texts* and *Coffin Texts* gave way to the production of *The Book of the Dead*, or the *Spells for Going Forth by Day*, which performed largely the same functions, but were written on papyri. See Raymond O. Faulkner and Ogden Goelet, Jr., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day. Second Edition* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998); John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 196–98.

<sup>167</sup> Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, 16; Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 18–21, 67–70; Christopher B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 76–77. For a detailed discussion of ancient Egyptians’ approaches to learning about the nature and function of the body, see Andrew H. Gordon and Calvin W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead: Biomedical Theory in Ancient Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>168</sup> Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 76.

<sup>169</sup> The heart exercised a degree of autonomy that was sometimes a source of anxiety for the person. As Jan Assmann notes, “the coherence of the person during life-time is problematic because of the heart’s unsteadiness, its susceptibility to leap from its place, to flutter, to scurry away under the influence of strong emotions and passions like fear, terror, erotic desire, and yearning” (Assmann, “A Dialogue between Self and Soul: Papyrus Berlin 3024,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Jan Assmann, and Guy G. Stroumsa [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 385). In the afterlife, the heart had to be persuaded to support the interests of the decedent and judge in their favor. The Coffin Texts spelled out a variety of rituals intended to “restore the heart to its former place and to awaken it, so that it could again assume its centralizing and organizing functions” (Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 29).

<sup>170</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 69–70; Ronald J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 5–7; Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs. Third Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101; Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 55–56. Successful navigation of the afterlife required knowing the

force or “twin” that could exist on in a deceased person’s statue once their corpse had disintegrated.<sup>171</sup> Mortuary cults were essential to the perpetuation of a person’s *ka*, so those who could afford them in earlier periods included inscriptions calling for the provision of food and the invocation of the name of the deceased, which ensured the *ka* was adequately fed and the memory of the person lived on.<sup>172</sup> In later periods, this was achieved through secondary memorials like stelai, *shabtis*, or ex-voto statues set up in cultic installations or temples.<sup>173</sup>

The *ba* (*b3*)<sup>174</sup> might be described as the most dynamic element of personhood that survived the body, but in our period, primarily for the society’s elite. It was a flexible concept that referred in earlier periods to the manifestation of a deity,<sup>175</sup> later to a king’s endowment with divine powers in the afterlife,<sup>176</sup> and by the time of the New Kingdom, to any (properly buried) deceased person’s unseen locus of agency. A plural form, *b3w*, could be used to refer to a divine agency with which events, celestial bodies, and everyday objects could be endowed.<sup>177</sup> During

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names of the gods, having one’s name known to them, and keeping one’s name from the knowledge of demons that might seek to harm them. Knowing one’s name granted a degree of control over a person, and destroying one’s name could eradicate one’s identity. Coffin Text 411 illustrates the importance of the name as well as its corporeal location: “O Re-Atum, O Khepri / I am the one who was born on the New Year Festival / and I know my name. / This is my name which is in this my belly is a god. / He who would take my name and my heart in his hand is cut off for me / I will not forget this my name beside the lord of judgment” (Nyord, *Breathing Flesh*, 396).

<sup>171</sup> Alan B. Lloyd, “Psychology and Society in the Ancient Egyptian Cult of the Dead,” in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. William Kelly Simpson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 119; Andrew A. Gordon, “The K3 as an Animating Force,” *JARCE* 33 (1996): 31–35; Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, 18–20; Gordon and Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead*, 82–86; Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 96–102.

<sup>172</sup> Taylor states, “the continued survival of the dead depended largely on the maintenance of a mortuary cult. This would ensure that the deceased was nourished by a supply of offerings in perpetuity, presented in the prescribed context of the funerary ritual, and involving the pronouncement of the name of the dead” (Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, 174.).

<sup>173</sup> Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, 182–85.

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, 20–23; Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 69; Lynn M. Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 59–60; Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, 90–96; Jiri Janak, “A Question of Size. A Remark on Early Attestations of the Ba Hieroglyph,” *SAK* 40 (2011): 143–53; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 77. It was translated as ψυχή by early Greek authors, but many scholars today are reticent to use “soul” to gloss the word (see Janak, “A Question of Size,” 143). Alan Gardiner suggested “external manifestation” is “longer, but more precise” (Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar. Third Edition* [Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957], 173). James P. Allen described the *ba* as “everything that makes a person an individual except for the body,” but also carries a separate sense of “personality” (Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 100; cf. ). Louis V. Žabkar, on the other hand, suggested the *ba* constitutes “the man himself, the totality of his physical and psychic capacities” (Louis V. Žabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968], 3).

<sup>175</sup> Žabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, 11–15.

<sup>176</sup> Žabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, 51–89.

<sup>177</sup> Leprohon, *The Great Name*, 6–7.

life, the *ba* was largely dormant; at death it was endowed with divine abilities and could travel freely during the day, but had to return to the corpse by night.<sup>178</sup> This mobility was expressed in the iconographic representation of the *ba* as a saddle-billed stork or a bird with a human head.<sup>179</sup> A second millennium BCE text preserved in *Papyrus Berlin 3024* and usually entitled “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba” narrates a debate between a man contemplating suicide and his *ba*.<sup>180</sup> The man fears his *ba* will abandon him, causing him to face dissolution after death instead of personal reintegration and transformation. Initially supportive of the act, the *ba* realizes it will be deprived of the requisite food and provisions in the afterlife if the man takes his own life, so it urges the man to enjoy his life and emphasizes the sadness and dreariness of death. As these concepts are most clearly represented in elite burials, they may not have been in wide circulation in the lower strata of Egyptian society.

### *Ancient Mesopotamia*

The Mesopotamian person is described by Beate Pongratz-Leisten as “a multifaceted assemblage of parts: the organic body, names, roles, and image, even his or her seal, which in specific contexts could operate as an independent center for activities that were normally performed by the individual him/herself.”<sup>181</sup> At least three loci for agency or animacy are

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<sup>178</sup> Janak, “A Question of Size,” 144–45. According to Othmar Keel, the *ba* cared for the body and was able to leave the tomb in order to provide the corpse, “which remains in the depths, with every good thing” (Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 64–65). On the anxiety regarding the potential for the *ba*’s return to the body to be disrupted, see Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 128–62; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 51–53.

<sup>179</sup> Janak, “A Question of Size,” 146–53; Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 56.

<sup>180</sup> See Assmann, “A Dialogue between Self and Soul,” 384–403; James P. Allen, *The Debate between a Man and His Soul: A Masterpiece of Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>181</sup> Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 139. Pongratz-Leisten is quick to reject the mind/body dichotomy, but I would argue a body/agency partibility model fits quite well. Note also that the cognitive sciences propose a variety of loci of cognition, emotion, and animacy, not just “mind” (cf. Ulrike Steinert, *Aspekte des Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamien: Eine Studie zu Person und Identität im 2. Und 1. Jt. V. Chr.* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 296–98). Cf. C. R. Hallpike, *The Foundations of Primitive Thought* (Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1979), 408, who, states regarding contemporary conceptualizations, “we find that the person is comprehended not as mind/body duality but rather synthetically, as a fusion of the psychical

identified in the epigraphy of ancient Mesopotamia, including the *eṭemmu* (body spirit/ghost),<sup>182</sup> the *napištu* (animating force),<sup>183</sup> and the *zaqīqu* (breath/wind/spirit).<sup>184</sup> These overlapped in nature and in function (similar to contemporary concepts of mind, soul, and spirit), but the *eṭemmu* was central to the identity of the deceased and appears in a variety of contexts and ways.<sup>185</sup> It frequently represented the spirit of a deceased person that could leave the underworld and invade the bodies of the living (usually through the ear).<sup>186</sup> This possession

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and the physical, such that organs and members of the body have psychical attributes, and the result is a physiological psychology” (cited in Julia M. Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body,” *G&H* 9.3 [1997]: 456, nn. 20–22). For a broader discussion of personhood in Mesopotamia, see Benjamin R. Foster, “The Person in Mesopotamian Thought,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 117–39. Cf. Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 115–18; Annette Zgoll, “Der oikomorphe Mensch: Wesen im Menschen und das Wesen des Menschen in sumerisch-akkadischer Perspektive,” in Janowski, *Der ganze Mensch*, 83–105; Renata MacDougal, “Remembrance and the Dead in Second Millennium BC Mesopotamia” (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2014), 107–10.

<sup>182</sup> The earlier Sumerian word was GIDIM. On the *eṭemmu*, see Tzvi Abusch, “Etemmu אֵתֵמֻ,” in *DDD*, 309–12; Steinert, *Aspekte des Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamien*, 295–384; Gebhard J. Selz, “Composite Beings: Of Individualization and Objectification in Third Millennium Mesopotamia,” *AO* 72 (2004): 40–41; MacDougal, “Remembrance and the Dead in Second Millennium BC Mesopotamia,” 110–12; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 43–44.

<sup>183</sup> Cognate with the Hebrew נַפֵּשׁ. The Sumerian was ZI.

<sup>184</sup> Conceptually related to the Hebrew רוּחַ. The Sumerian was LIL. On the *zaqīqu*, see JoAnn Scurlock, “Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 1892; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 44. There are also several terms for the body in Akkadian: *zumru* (the external body), *karšu* and *libbu* (originally “heart,” it could refer to the whole body, internal and external, reflecting the notion that the heart was the core of the self), and *binātu* and *binūtu* (“creature,” reflecting humanity’s creation by deities). For more, see Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 432–61. Benjamin Studevent-Hickman, among many others, suggests this notion of returning from the underworld served as conceptual roots for the later notion of resurrection from the dead (Benjamin Studevent-Hickman, “Mesopotamian Roots for the Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead,” *RC* 3.4 [2009]: 524–36).

<sup>185</sup> The Mesopotamian anthropogonies all included clay as a fundamental element of the creation of humanity, but the Akkadian tradition includes the spit from the *igigi* and the flesh and blood of the slaughtered deity, Wē-ila. From that blood is drawn the *tēmu*, or “intelligence,” and from the flesh is drawn the *eṭemmu*, the “ghost/spirit” (see Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 447–52; Tzvi Abusch, “Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature,” in Baumgarten, Assmann, and Stroumsa, *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, 363–83; Johannes J. W. Lisman, *Cosmogony, Theogony and Athropogony in Sumerian Texts* [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013]; Michaela Bauks, “‘Soul-Concepts’ in Ancient Near Eastern Mythical Texts and Their Implications for the Primeval History,” *VT* 66 [2016]: 186–89).

<sup>186</sup> Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 88–89; Marten Stol, “Psychosomatic Suffering in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives*, ed. Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn (Groningen: STYX Publications, 1999), 57–68; Lorenzo Verderame, “Demons at Work in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period*, ed. Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 61–78. Interestingly, the ear was the part of the body most closely connected with intelligence and wisdom (Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 434; Steinert, *Aspekte des Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamien*, 385–86). On the body as a house, see Zgoll, “Der oikomorphe Mensch,” 83–106.



seems primarily to be pathogenic (to borrow Emma Cohen’s framework).<sup>187</sup> This ghost/spirit was also associated with ideologies related to mortuary practices, and as with the Egyptian *ba*, the Akkadian *eṭemmu* could remain bound postmortem to the corpse’s bones,<sup>188</sup> suggesting the *eṭemmu* functioned more like a “body-soul” than a “free-soul” (which seems to align more with the *zaqīqu*).<sup>189</sup> Much like the *ka*, the *eṭemmu*, which was often marked with the divine determinative DINGER,<sup>190</sup> could be petitioned for help and had access to strategic information.<sup>191</sup>

Some elite practices suggest the relationship of these loci of agency to the deceased individual did not necessarily require a *biological* body. Julia M. Asher-Greve asserts that “The self is located in the inseparable unity of body and spirit,” but goes on to note that the self,

can replicate itself in other manifestations such as statues or monuments which are more than symbolic proxies but less than distinct duplicates. The spirit, not a replica but a unique entity, can apparently inhabit several objects simultaneously. In a sort of reciprocal interaction the deity bestows life not only on the human individual but also on all its subsequent images (such as statues or monuments) and these in turn can independently and eternally converse or negotiate with the deity.<sup>192</sup>

Such objects helped facilitate the *kispu* ritual, or the “post-funerary ritual meal that called forth the deceased from the netherworld to eat and drink with the living.”<sup>193</sup> This rite, according to

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<sup>187</sup> See the discussion above on page 127 and n. 114. For the large corpus of texts related to combatting the witchcraft with which this possession was associated, see Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Ant-Witchcraft Rituals. Volume One*, AMD 8/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>188</sup> Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 447.

<sup>189</sup> On the *zaqīqu* as a “free-soul” that may have been conceptualized as a bird, see Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 44; Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 56–57.

<sup>190</sup> Abusch, “Etemmu אֵטֵמּוּ,” 309; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 45.

<sup>191</sup> Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 43.

<sup>192</sup> Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 452. Cf. JoAnn Scurlock, “Soul Emplacements in Ancient Mesopotamian Funerary Rituals,” in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, ed. Leda Ciruolo and Jonathan Siedel (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–6. Asher-Greve notes that while the *eṭemmu* can thus inhabit other “bodies” in life and in death, reifying the “body and spirit” pairing, it is never associated with intelligence or “mind.” For this reason, she asserts the “mind/body dichotomy was absent” (Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 453) from early Mesopotamia. Ulrike Steinert points out that there are texts which discuss thought and emotion among the dead, but more directly related to the heart (*karšu* and *libbu*) (Steinert, *Aspekte des Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamien*, 337–40).

<sup>193</sup> MacDougal, “Remembrance and the Dead in Second Millennium BC Mesopotamia,” 121–90 (149).

Nicolas Wyatt, “involved three features, a communal meal, *šuma zakāru*—‘remembering the name’, and *mē naqû*—‘pouring the water.’ The dead were represented by statues called en-en-ku-ku—‘lords who are sleeping.’”<sup>194</sup>

### *Sam'al*

This notion of a separable vehicle of a person’s agency or identity inhabiting material objects after death was by no means confined to Mesopotamia. One of the most striking examples of this comes from an inscribed basalt mortuary stele known as the Katumuwa Stele, discovered in situ in the Syro-Hittite town of Zinçirli and dated to the eighth century BCE.<sup>195</sup> The Katumuwa Stele depicts a figure seated before a table, holding a cup and a pinecone. The table has a duck, a vessel, and a stack of pita-like bread. The negative space is expertly filled with an inscription that prescribes meal offerings for Katumuwa’s *nbš* (“self” or “life”),<sup>196</sup> which “(will be) in this stele” (*bnšb.zn*).<sup>197</sup> Scholars are in widespread agreement that the small room in which the stele was set up constituted a “mortuary chapel,”<sup>198</sup> which would have provided a

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<sup>194</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, “After Death Has Us Parted: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in the Ancient Semitic World,” in *The Perfumes of Seven Tamarisks: Studies in Honour of Wilfred G. E. Watson*, ed. Gregorio del Olmo Lete, Jordi Vidal, and Nicolas Wyatt (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 261. Wyatt continues, “The *kispum* appears to have been primarily a royal practice, perhaps in part a legitimisation procedure for dynastic claims . . . though it appears that non-royal analogues were also widely practised.” Cf. Renata MacDougal’s summary: “We do know from texts that *kispum* entailed three actions: performing the care of the dead ritual (*kispa kasāpu*), pouring water (*mē naqû*), and invoking the name (*šuma zakāru*) of the dead” (MacDougal, “Remembrance and the Dead in Second Millennium BC Mesopotamia,” 149). MacDougal also points out that figurines or statues may have been linked with a chair during the ritual as the “locus for the soul during the rituals. It is possible that images were employed to house the transitory spirit of the family deceased, just as a magic figurine for an unsettled *eṭemmu* was made to receive *kispum*” (p. 183).

<sup>195</sup> See Eudora J. Struble and Virginia Rimmer Herrmann, “An Eternal Feast at Sam'al: The New Iron Age Mortuary Stele from Zinçirli in Context,” *BASOR* 356 (2009): 15–49; Virginia Rimmer Herrmann and J. David Schloen, eds., *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 128–31.

<sup>196</sup> On the relationship of *nbš* to Hebrew שפן, see Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 137–39. Note also Yitzhaq Feder’s conclusion that extra-biblical evidence “corroborates the view, suggested by numerous biblical texts, that the *nepeš* refers to the soul of the deceased which resides in the grave after death” (Yitzhaq Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution: The Meaning of the Expression *īāmē' la-nepeš*,” *VT* 69.3 [2019]: 408–34).

<sup>197</sup> The transcription and translation are from Dennis Pardee, “A New Aramaic Inscription from Zinçirli,” *BASOR* 356 (2009): 53–54. The rather unique inscription is written in a local Northwest Semitic dialect called Sam'alian that has been notoriously difficult to interpret. On these difficulties, see Pardee, “A New Aramaic Inscription from Zinçirli”; Seth L. Sanders, “The Appetites of the Dead: West Semitic Linguistic and Ritual Aspects of the Katumuwa Stele,” *BASOR* 369 (2013): 35–41; Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 150–62.

<sup>198</sup> See Struble and Herrmann, “An Eternal Feast at Sam'al”; Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 148–50.

space and means for the provision of food for the deceased's designated locus of identity, which, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, was understood to be able to inhabit material objects.

The Katumuwa Stele and its mortuary chapel represent one of the most pristine examples of a setting for funerary/mortuary food offerings, a significant feature of the sociocultural matrix of early Southwest Asia.<sup>199</sup> This practice, associated with primary burial/memorialization and repeated at intervals, provisioned the dead with needed sustenance and perpetuated their afterlife through their ritual memorialization. Where the remains were inaccessible or buried at a distance, stelai or other ritual objects could host the deceased's locus of agency.<sup>200</sup> Katumuwa's patron, Panamuwa, for instance, had the following inscribed on a statue of Hadad that was discovered at a cultic installation in Sam'al (*KAI* 214:17): "May the *nbš* of Panamuwa eat with you, and may the *nbš* of Panamuwa drink with you."<sup>201</sup> Matthew J. Suriano states, "The establishment of Panamuwa's *mqm* for his name and soul right beside (and along with) Hadad's stele insured that his defunct-soul would be fed so long as the storm god received food and drink offerings."<sup>202</sup> This is related to the concern manifested in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian rituals for the provision of food and the invocation of the name, which facilitated the continued memory, and therefore existence, of the deceased's loci of

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<sup>199</sup> E. F. Maher and J. S. Lev-Tov, "Food in Late Bronze Age Funerary Offerings: Faunal Evidence from Tomb 1 at Tell Dothan," *PEQ* 133 (2001): 91–110; Rüdiger Schmitt, "Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family," in *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*, ed. Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 2012), 455–59; Wyatt, "After Death Has Us Parted," 259–84; Theodore J. Lewis, "Feasts for the Dead and Ancestor Veneration in Levantine Traditions," in Herrmann and Schloen, *In Remembrance of Me*, 69–74; Catherine M. Draycott and Maria Stamatopoulou, eds., *Dining and Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the 'Funerary Banquet' in Ancient Art, Burial and Belief* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016). The archaeological data suggest this practice began as early as the Neolithic (Nigel Goring-Morris and Liora Kolska Horwitz, "Funerals and Feasts during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B of the Near East," *Antiquity* 81.314 [2007]: 902–19).

<sup>200</sup> In later periods in ancient Egypt, bust portraits kept in residences may have served to facilitate the dead's participation in family feasting at any time. See Barbara E. Borg, "The Dead as a Guest at Table? Continuity and Change in the Egyptian Cult of the Dead," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. Morris L. Bierbrier (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 26–32.

<sup>201</sup> See "The Hadad Inscription," trans. K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 2.36:156–58). See Herbert Niehr, "The Katumuwa Stele in the Context of Royal Mortuary Cult at Sam'al," in Herrmann and Schloen, *In Remembrance of Me*, 57–60.

<sup>202</sup> Matthew J. Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:4, and the Early History of the Soul," *JAOS* 134.3 (2014): 403.

## CHAPTER 2 – Agency and Personhood

agency.<sup>203</sup> The dependence on kin and on others for provisioning that would ensure a lengthy and successful afterlife punctuates the fundamentally relational as well as material nature of personhood within these societies.

### *First Millennium BCE Israel and Judah*

The bulk of the material remains that bear on the question of the conceptualization of the person in life come from the texts of Israel and Judah, including the Hebrew Bible, so I begin with what can be recovered from that literature.<sup>204</sup> The person in the texts of ancient Israel and Judah was consistently portrayed as a composite of multiple constituent elements.<sup>205</sup> In Genesis 2:7, the first human is a composite being, created through the formation (יצר) of the human from dust (עפר), which then had the נשמת חיים, “breath of life,” breathed into its nostrils. Throughout the biblical texts, the most important constituent elements were the בשר, “flesh,” לב, “heart,”<sup>206</sup> the רוּחַ, “spirit,” and the נפש, “soul,”<sup>207</sup> with different socio-material dimensions no doubt influencing the situationally emergent structuring of the person.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Because of spatial and the diachronic distance, I do not discuss the evidence from Ugarit, but see Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 105–22 and the bibliographic information there. For a discussion on the relationship of funerary/mortuary drinking bowls to materiality and memory, see Marian H. Feldman, *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity, and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 119–37. On the innovations in the relationships of the dead to the living, see Seth L. Sanders, “Naming the Dead: Funerary Writing and Historical Change in the Iron Age Levant,” *MAARAV* 19.1–2 (2012): 11–36.

<sup>204</sup> Most of the texts that reflect more directly on the person as an individual come from exilic and later periods. For an insightful study of the self in the biblical literature of these periods, see Susan Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Robert A. di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” *CBQ* 61.2 (1999): 217–38; Bernd Janowski, “Konstellative Anthropologie: Zum Begriff der Person im Alten Testament,” in Janowski, *Der ganze Mensch*, 109–28; Robert A. di Vito, “Transparenz und Heteronomie: Zur Konstruktion personaler Identität im Alten Testament,” in Janowski, *Der ganze Mensch*, 129–51.

<sup>206</sup> The לב in many contexts is not to be identified with the organ of the heart so much as with the region of the body, which can sometimes be as general as the torso.

<sup>207</sup> While “soul” is admittedly a loaded term, I use it here for as shorthand for the concept of a person’s primary vehicle of agency and/or identity that continues to exist after death. I use it in large part for the sake of consistency with scholarship I will be interrogating that uses this traditional terminology. I certainly do not mean to assert conceptual contiguity with the modern concept of the soul. Cf. Bauks, “‘Soul-Concepts’ in Ancient Near Eastern Mythical Texts and Their Implications for the Primeval History,” 181–84.

<sup>208</sup> The “corporate personality” has long been the focus of studies of the person in the Hebrew Bible. See, for instance, H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964); Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1995); di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” 221–25. One of the first sustained

The לב was the central and most dynamic locus of agency, representing vitality, affection, cognition, and will.<sup>209</sup> Proverbs 4:23 states that life springs from the לב,<sup>210</sup> while food strengthens and restores the לב in Genesis 18:5 and Judges 19:5, 8, 22. From this sense of vitality develops an emotional dimension, and particularly intense emotions like excitement, fear, and grief (cf. Pss 4:8; 13:3; 34:19).<sup>211</sup> The author of Psalm 38:9 groans because of the נמס בתוך לב, “tumult of my heart,” while in Psalm 22:15, the author’s לב is like wax, and מעי, “is melted within my breast.” A cognitive dimension is also salient. Deuteronomy 29:3 refers to YHWH’s provision of a לב לדעת, “heart to know,”<sup>212</sup> while in 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon requests from YHWH a לב שמע, “hearing heart,” in order to govern the people. Because it was unobservable and interior, the לב was also “deep” (עמק; Ps 64:7) and “unsearchable” (אין חקר; Prov 25:3). This relationship to the inner person facilitated the use of the heart as a locus of identity (Pss 22:15; 27:3; Gen 18:5; Exod 19:4). After Saul’s anointing as king at the hands of Samuel, YHWH gives him לב אחר, “another heart” (1 Sam 10:9), which likely serves a function similar to the promise in verse 6 that YHWH’s רוח would על צלחה, “force entry into” Saul, turning him into איש אחר, “another person.”<sup>213</sup> This story also illustrates the permeability of the person, as well as the communicable nature of רוח in the biblical conceptualizations.

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examinations of the constituent elements of the person in the Hebrew Bible was Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974). For a recent treatment of Wolff’s model in light of Assmann’s constellative anthropology, see Bernd Janowski, “Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Grundfragen – Kontexte – Themenfelder,” *ThLZ* 139.5 (2014): 535–54.

<sup>209</sup> Heinz-Josef Fabry, “לב *lēb*,” *TDOT* 7:412–34; Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 42–44. For a look at the symbolic function of לב in rabbinic Judaism, see Reuven Kiperwasser, “Matters of the Heart: The Metamorphosis of the Monolithic in the Bible to the Fragmented in Rabbinic Thought,” in *Judaism and Emotion: Texts, Performance, Experience*, ed. Sarah Ross, Gabriel Levy, and Soham Al-Suadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 43–59. On the relationship and overlap between the לב and the כבד, “liver,” see Mark S. Smith, “The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions: Notes from Anthropology and Psychobiology,” *JBL* 117.3 (1998): 427–36; Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom*, 8–9.

<sup>210</sup> ממנו תוצאות חיים, “from it springs life.” NRSV renders, “from it flow the springs of life.”

<sup>211</sup> Proverbs 14:30 reflects this relationship: חיי בשרים לב מרפא, “a calm heart enlivens flesh” (NRSV renders “A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh”).

<sup>212</sup> NRSV renders “a mind to understand,” accommodating the metaphor to contemporary frameworks.

<sup>213</sup> See *HALOT* 2:1026. Cf. Lucerne J. Hausmann, “צלח *ṣālāh*,” *TDOT* 12:382–84.

Additionally, this episode reflects the activation of the “container” schema, which is elsewhere demonstrated in the frequent references to the נפש and the רוח as located inside the person. Isaiah 26:9, for instance, refers to רוחי בקרבו, “my רוח, which is inside me.”<sup>214</sup> 1 Kings 17:22 narrates a child’s revivification at the hands of Elijah, explaining that his נפש returned על־קרבו, “to his inside.” Scholars have long been opposed to understanding the נפש or the רוח as aspects of personhood that could depart from the body in the Hebrew Bible, but Richard C. Steiner’s recent monograph on the נפש, *Disembodied Souls*, has adduced strong evidence that the conceptualizations of these elements in the Hebrew Bible were much more closely related to those of the broader Southwest Asian cultures than has been previously recognized.<sup>215</sup>

Steiner’s argument first focuses on the nature of the unusual practice described in Ezekiel 13:18 (NRSV):<sup>216</sup>

הוי למתפרות כסתות על כלאצילי ידי ועשות המספחות על־ראש כלאקומה לצודד נפשות

Woe to the women who sew bands on all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every height, in the hunt for human lives!

The NRSV rendering makes little sense in the context of this discussion, but Steiner argues for turning to Mishnaic Hebrew rather than Akkadian for understanding the enigmatic words כסתות and מספחות, which he reads as references not to bands and veils, but to pillow cases and pillow filling.<sup>217</sup> The women were not “hunting lives,” but נפשות that had departed from the body

<sup>214</sup> See Sven Tengstöm et al., “רוח *rûah*,” *TDOT* 13:375 for more examples of passages showing the רוח was always conceptualized as internally located.

<sup>215</sup> Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 43–92; see also Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution,” 408–34.

<sup>216</sup> This practice also appears to be referenced in Proverbs 6:26.

<sup>217</sup> Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 28–54. Following his argument, the verse would read, “Woe to the women who sew pillow cases on all wrists, and make filling for the heads of persons of every height, in the hunt for souls!” As Steiner notes, similar readings go back over a century (Adolphe Lods, *La croyance a la vie future et le culte des morts dans l’antiquité israélite* [Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1906], 71). For other similar approaches to this pericope, see H. W. F. Saggs, “‘External Souls’ in the Old Testament,” *JSS* 19.1 (1974): 1–12; Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Avian Spirits in Ugarit and in Ezekiel 13,” in *Ugarit, Religion, and Culture. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Ugarit, Religion, and Culture, Edinburgh, July 1994: Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John C. L. Gibson*, ed. Nick Wyatt, Wilfred G. E. Watson, and J. B. Lloyd (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 99–

during sleep: “dream-souls.”<sup>218</sup> The filling functioned as a decoy worn on the head, which would attract these airborne dream-souls (perhaps via a spell) that could then be captured in the pillow cases. Once captured, the נפש could be held for ransom, giving the owner a limited amount of time before its absence resulted in their death. Steiner highlights similar predatory practices in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as in some societies within modern West Africa.<sup>219</sup>

Steiner also adduces evidence to show the נפש could be conceptualized as capable of flight. The representations of the Egyptian *ba* and the Mesopotamian *zaqīqu* as birds provide important comparative context,<sup>220</sup> but the biblical texts themselves also make use of this conceptual metaphor:<sup>221</sup>

Psalms 11:1

איך תאמרו לנפשי נודי הרכם צפור

. . . how can you say to my נפש, “Flee like a bird to the mountains . . .”

Psalms 124:7

נפשנו כצפור נמלטה מפח יוקשים

Our נפשות have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers

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113; Jonathan Stökl, “The מתנבאות in Ezekiel 13 Reconsidered,” *JBL* 132.1 (2013): 61–76; Esther J. Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy, Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 167–83.

<sup>218</sup> JoAnn Scurlock describes the Mesopotamian *zaqīqu* as a dream-soul (Scurlock, “Soul Emplacements in Ancient Mesopotamian Funerary Rituals,” 1). Steiner cites Josephus and a number of rabbinic sources in support of early Jewish concepts of a dream-soul (Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 47–49). It seems safe to assume the concept of the נפש departing the body during dreams had circulation, whether or not it was normative (cf. Isa 8:19). The fact that prophecy and interaction with YHWH occurred frequently during dreams is not insignificant.

<sup>219</sup> Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 49–53.

<sup>220</sup> Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 55–58.

<sup>221</sup> I have adapted the NRSV for each verse, which renders נפש as a reference to the self: “. . . how can you say to me . . .” and “We have escaped . . .” Steiner attributes the two references to Daniel Lys, *Nèphèsh: Histoire de l’âme dans la revelation d’Israël au sein des religions proche-orientales* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 161.

Isaiah 8:19 also describes the spirits of the dead (see below) chirping and cooing like birds.<sup>222</sup>

Much like the Egyptian *ba*, the Hebrew נפש could also be addressed by its owner in the vocative.

Psalm 42:12 is one of the most explicit examples:

מה־תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה נַפְשִׁי וּמִה־תִּהְיֶה עָלַי

Why are you cast down, O my נפש, and why are you disquieted within me?

In multiple other places in the Psalms, the נפש is called upon in the vocative to bless YHWH (Pss 103:1, 2, 22; 104:1, 35).

As Steiner argues, this partible conceptualization of the נפש calls into question the traditional understanding of the word as a synonym for חיים, “life.”<sup>223</sup> The contexts associated with each suggest the נפש is something more discrete and partible.

Perhaps we should also take a second look at the expressions ואתה צדה את־נפשי לקחתה “but you are lying in wait for my נפש to take it” (1 Sam 24:11 [12]) and ויבקשו את־נפשי לקחתה “they have sought my נפש to take it” (1 Kgs 19:10, 14), together with the many other examples of נפש as the object of ל-ק-ח “take” and/or ב-ק-ש (*pi’el*) “seek.” Even if these expressions are metaphorical, the metaphors may well have a nonfigurative origin—one that assumes the existence of a free, separable soul.<sup>224</sup>

Steiner also argues for a separate component of the נפש, namely the נפש הבשר, which was physically located in the blood (Lev 17:11). This concept is similar to that of the “body soul,” or the animating element that is native to the body and remains with it until decomposition.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> The two verbal roots are  $\sqrt{\text{צפף}}$  and  $\sqrt{\text{הגה}}$ , which appear in Isaiah 38:14 associated with birds: “Like a swallow or a swift, so I chirped [אֶצְפֹּף], I cooed [אֶהַג] like a dove” (NRSV has “Like a swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove”).

<sup>223</sup> Steiner here cites Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 19–20.

<sup>224</sup> Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 72. Of course, there is no “nonfigurative” conceptualization of the נפש.

<sup>225</sup> JoAnn Scurlock describes the Mesopotamian *etemmu* as a body-soul (Scurlock, “Soul Emplacements in Ancient Mesopotamian Funerary Rituals,” 3), which may find support in the reference with in the Atrahasis to the *etemmu* originally being drawn from the flesh and the blood of the deceased deity (Atr. 1.2.215, 217). Cf. Abusch, “Ghost and God,” 372. For a review of the different typologies of the soul within a cognitive context, see Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 58–68.



This, according to Steiner, is to be distinguished from the animating רוח which departed the body at death.<sup>226</sup> The נפש, the נפש הבשר, and the רוח appear to have survived the death of the body. Later texts that elaborate on these concepts suggest the רוח returned to the deity (Eccl 12:7), the נפש הבשר remained with the body, while the נפש continued on as the deceased’s primary locus of agency and identity. Job 19:26 likely invokes the latter concept when it states, “After my skin is thus shredded, without my flesh I will see God.”<sup>227</sup>

Whether or not one accepts all of Steiner’s arguments, he has marshaled overwhelming support for recognizing a significant degree of autonomy and partibility in biblical representations of the נפש and the רוח that have long been obscured by otherwise well-meaning attempts to steer clear of the gravitational pull of Cartesian dualism. Those representations show much closer relationships to the concepts of the person found in the other Southwest Asian societies discussed above than more conservative commentators have been willing to acknowledge. There are, of course, important differences between Israelite and Judahite conceptualizations of the person and those of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia, but they draw from a shared cultural matrix, and there is considerable conceptual overlap.

This can be further established through an interrogation of the ancient Israelite and Judahite conceptualizations of, and interactions with, the dead.<sup>228</sup> (In much of the scholarship, deceased

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<sup>226</sup> Steiner also finds this concept of a distinct πνεῦμα and ψυχή within the writings of Philo of Alexandria (Philo, *Who Is the Heir* §55) as well as Josephus (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.1.2 §34). See Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 84–85.

<sup>227</sup> Feder states, “it seems reasonable to infer that the spirit’s power to animate the body was considered to gradually leave the body at the time of decomposition. According to this understanding, some of the *nepeš* was assumed to disseminate from the corpse immediately following bodily death, constituting the difference between the animating spirit activating the living person and the inactive shadow existence of the resting spirit in the grave” (Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution,” 421).

<sup>228</sup> My primary sources for this discussion of personhood in death, which will subsequently incorporate textual data, are Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 206–35; Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996); Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “Death in the Life of Israel,” in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 139–44; Wayne T. Pitard, “Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel,” in Gittlen, *Sacred Time, Sacred Place*, 145–68; Theodore J. Lewis, “How Far Can Texts

kin—genetic or socially reified—are commonly referred to as “ancestors,” particularly those given cultic attention.) A broader spectrum of material remains are available for this interrogation, and I begin with mortuary remains. By the time of the eighth century BCE, bench tombs had become characteristic of the burials of the highlands of Iron Age Israel and Judah.<sup>229</sup> These tombs facilitated multiple close burials and included a repository for secondary burials when additional space was required.<sup>230</sup> Commentators are in wide agreement that such tombs supported the integrity and continuity of the household and its territory.<sup>231</sup> Archaeologists have even noted the bench tomb and the four-room house share similarities in design and in their multigenerational use.<sup>232</sup> To be “cut off” (כרת) from one’s family ties appears to have been one of the more dreaded threats of death. The preferred outcome was to be “gathered” (אסף), but this depended in large part upon the living.<sup>233</sup>

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Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead,” in Gittlen, *Sacred Time, Sacred Place*, 169–217; Saul M. Olyan, “Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology,” *JBL* 124.4 (2005): 601–16; Stephen L. Cook, “Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel,” *RC* 1.6 (2007): 660–83; Alexander Fantalkin, “The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation,” in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. Alexander Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17–36; Stephen L. Cook, “Death, Kinship, and Community: Afterlife and the *חסד* Ideal in Israel,” in *The Family in Life and in Death. The Family in Ancient Israel: Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Dutcher-Walls (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 106–21; Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers*; Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 429–73; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 147–53; Matthew Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution,” 408–34.

<sup>229</sup> Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, “The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains,” *JBL* 111.2 (1992): 215–16. As has been noted by multiple commentators, such burials almost exclusively served the elite. Most were buried in simple pit graves, leaving no archaeological trace (Fantalkin, “The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation,” 20; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 148).

<sup>230</sup> See Eric M. Meyers, “Secondary Burials in Palestine,” *BA* 33.1 (1970): 1–29; Cradic, “Embodiments of Death,” 219–48; Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 45–53. As these sources argue, secondary burial facilitated inclusion in a generic ancestral identity. Secondary burials in Southwest Asia date back to the Neolithic (Croucher, *Death and Dying in the Neolithic Near East*, 7–8 and throughout).

<sup>231</sup> “The protective ties of extended family and kin-group are literally cut into the rock of ancient Israel’s family tombs, built to symbolize the protective huddle of kinfolk that one hoped to join in the Hereafter” (Cook, “Death, Kinship, and Community,” 113). Cf. Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 471–73; Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 200–16. On the territorial function of family tombs, see Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of our Fathers*.

<sup>232</sup> Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 93–95 and note 150.

<sup>233</sup> Cook, “Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel,” 672–78. The nature of the death and a proper burial were also determinative, but not most salient here. For more, see Katharina Teinz, “How to Become an Ancestor—Some Thoughts,” in *(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Peter Pfälzner et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 235–44; Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution,” 411–17.

## CHAPTER 2 – Agency and Personhood

The dead were dependent on the living for the continued remembrance of their name, which could be facilitated by stelai that materialized the name and that were the responsibility of the deceased's offspring to erect and attend. According to 2 Samuel 18:18, David's son Absalom is left without a son of his own to guarantee the perpetuation of his memory, so he commissioned a stele himself.<sup>234</sup>

ואבשלם לקח ויצב־לו בחיו את־מצבת אשר בעמק־המלך כי אמר אין־לי בן בעבור הזכיר שמי ויקרא למצבת  
על־שמו ויקרא לה יד אבשלם עד היום הזה

And during his lifetime, Absalom took and erected for himself a stele that is in the Valley of the King, because he said, “I have no son to cause my name to be remembered.” And he called the pillar by his own name, so it is called the Monument of Absalom to this day.<sup>235</sup>

The “name” here seems to function as a locus of identity, not just a facilitator of simple memorialization.<sup>236</sup> This practice is strikingly similar to those attested at Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Sam'al, but we have precious little data to cast light on the specific conceptualizations of the stelai's reflective functions.<sup>237</sup> Intuitively speaking, however, there can be no doubt that for many there was an element of the deceased's presencing associated with such memorials. A firm line of division could not have been maintained between memorialization and the more

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<sup>234</sup> 2 Samuel 14:27, of course, mentions three sons born to Absalom.

<sup>235</sup> Note “monument” renders the Hebrew יד, “hand,” perhaps suggestive of some kind of conduit for agency or power (cf. 2 Sam 8:3; 1 Chr 18:3). In Isaiah 56:4–5, YHWH promises to the eunuchs who keep the sabbaths, “I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument [יד] and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” Cf. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 208.

<sup>236</sup> For a wonderful discussion of the power of one's “name” in ancient Southwest Asia, and particularly in Mesopotamian contexts, see Karen Radner, *Die Macht des Namens: Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005). For an argument that “the equation of name, personal identity, and embodied statue” originates in the Sargonic period, see Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “*Damnatio Memoriae*: The Old Akkadian Evidence for Destruction of Name and Destruction of Person,” in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 89–104.

<sup>237</sup> Stavropoulou notes, “The extent to which standing stones are seen to manifest, deify, or merely symbolize or represent the dead is uncertain—and likely dependent on the (changing) context-specific particularities of the stones themselves, including, perhaps, the perspective of the viewer before whom the stone is exhibited” (Stavropoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers*, 15).

intuitive presencing without leaving any trace in the normalizing literature. Absent regulation, the trend will be in the direction of the more intuitive conceptualization.

The notion that the dead live on in some manner—perhaps via their נפש—but require support from the living, is further manifested in the provisioning of the deceased with “items of personal adornment, lamps, cosmetic containers, cooking pots, bowls, and jugs with food.”<sup>238</sup> There is a great deal of overlap between burial assemblages and those of domestic settings, suggesting some continuity between the needs of the living and those of the dead.<sup>239</sup> Lamps, for instance, are frequently left in burials, perhaps to provide light in the dark underworld.<sup>240</sup> Vessels with small amounts of animal bones have been found in many burials that likely reflect food offerings for the dead, very much in line with—if not as elaborate and explicit as—the funerary and mortuary feeding of the dead in the societies discussed above.<sup>241</sup> Textual data can be brought to bear on this question, although the Hebrew Bible is notoriously reticent regarding such practices.<sup>242</sup> What little is in the texts is largely proscriptive or polemical, but several references are made to feeding the dead in ways that presuppose its

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<sup>238</sup> Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 457; Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 51–53, 154–76. On burial goods more generally, see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 61–108; Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 438–49; Cook, “Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel,” 678–79.

<sup>239</sup> “Based solely on archaeological evidence, it is not possible to reconstruct death cult rituals in tombs; identical finds in both tombs and houses and public buildings preclude identifying distinctive mortuary practices” (E. Bloch-Smith, “From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life,” in Dutcher-Walls, *The Family in Life and in Death*, 126).

<sup>240</sup> See, for instance, Psalm 88:6; 143:3; Lamentations 3:6. As Suriano notes, many lamps were found placed next to the head of the deceased, sometimes lacking any indication of soot, indicating they were never lighted and must have been intended for the use of the dead (Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 47–48, and n. 27 [Suriano describes their function as “symbolic”]).

<sup>241</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 122–26; Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 457–59; Wayne T. Pitard has been skeptical about many of the data that have been adduced for such practices: “Is the deposited food intended for the dead, or is it the leftovers of the mourning feast of the survivors, which is mentioned several times in the Bible? Does it therefore indicate that the dead were thought to need sustenance after death, or does it actually say nothing about such matters? Even less can the presence of food help us interpret the Israelite understanding of the nature of the deceased’s existence in the afterlife” (Pitard, “Tombs and Offerings,” 150).

<sup>242</sup> See Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky Overton, “Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity 4. Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection in the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, ed. Alan J. Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 35–59; Lewis, “How Far Can Texts Take Us?” 169–217.

ubiquity, if not its normativity.<sup>243</sup> Deuteronomy 26:14, for instance, calls upon those offering their tithes to declare the following regarding tithed food:

לֹא־אֲכַלְתִּי בְאֵנִי מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא־בִעֲרַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ בְטֵמֵא וְלֹא־נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ לַמֵּת

I have not eaten of it while in mourning; I have not removed any of it while I was unclean; and I have not offered any of it to the dead.

This text appears to address both commemorative meals as well as meal offerings to the dead, without appearing to prohibit either in and of themselves. Rather, the sense appears to be that food offered to the dead is to be kept separate from food offered to YHWH.<sup>244</sup> Note, however, the overlap in the treatment of deceased kin and of YHWH, as if they share an origin. Seth Sanders has observed, “many West Semitic gods have had tribal groups as their kin. Indeed, R. Smith already argued well over a century ago that kinship bonding through a shared meal may have been the most essential role of sacrifice in ancient Semitic cultures.”<sup>245</sup>

The dead also appear to have been in need of protection, primarily through provision with apotropaic and prophylactic beads and amulets, which have been found in numerous burials.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger notes that cultic practices among the societies surrounding and preceding early Israel and Judah involved ritual slaughter of a sacrifice followed by a communal meal shared among the worshippers. “It is this communal meal and its ritual accoutrements, rather than the feeding of the gods known from Mesopotamian cult, that are central to the meaning of West Semitic sacrifices” (Mettinger, *No Graven Image?*, 192). Israelite and Judahite cult practices would come to explicitly feature the feeding of the deity, but it is unclear at what point that divergence from broader West Semitic cultic practices described by Mettinger occurs. It may derive directly from cultic practices associated with the dead.

<sup>244</sup> In Psalm 106:28, the psalmist decries the eating of “sacrifices to the dead” (זִבְחֵי מֵתִים) while the people of Israel had “attached themselves to the Baal of Peor” (NRSV). Schmitt notes that Isaiah 65:3–5, while being quite late, may refer to an actual practice in its polemicizing of those who spend the night in tombs and eat the flesh of swine, since pig bones have been found in two Iron Age IIC graves in Lachish (Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 459, citing Olga Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* [London: Oxford University Press, 1953], 187, 193). According to Schmitt, the practice of engaging in those taboos was meant to blur the lines of distinction between the living and the dead by temporarily assuming the unclean status of the latter. The apocryphal book of Tobit, on the other hand, tells the reader, “Place your bread on the grave of the righteous, but give none to sinners” (Tobit 4:17).

<sup>245</sup> Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 82–83, note 62 (I assume he is referring to W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1889]).

<sup>246</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 81–86; Brian B. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 124–28. Egyptian influence is particularly salient. Scarabs, wedjat-eye, Pataeque, and Bes amulets are the most common (cf. Rainer Albertz, “Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings,” in *Household and Family*

The most well-known are the two tightly rolled silver scrolls discovered in 1979 in the repository of a bench tomb in Ketef Hinnom.<sup>247</sup> The scrolls, which were designed to be threaded on a necklace and worn for protection, had inscribed upon them a version of the “Priestly Blessing” from Numbers 6:24–26 that praises YHWH’s power to deliver from evil. An inscription that can be read as a similar prayer for protection was etched in the rock of a multi-chambered tomb from Khirbet el-Qôm:<sup>248</sup>

1. 'ryhw . h 'šr . ktbh	Uriyahu the notable has written it
2. brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh	Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH,
3. wmsryh . l 'šrth . hws 'lh	Now from his enemies, by Asherah, <sup>249</sup> deliver him
4. (hand) l 'nyhw	(hand) by Oniyahu
5. wl 'šrth	. . . and by Asherah
6. wl 'šrth	[. . . and by Ash]erah . . .

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*Religion in Antiquity*, ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], 101). For the most thorough analysis, see Christian Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*. 3 vols. (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag/ Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994–2006); Christian Herrmann, “Egyptian Amulets from Tell Jemmeh,” in *The Smithsonian Institution Excavation at Tell Jemmeh, Israel, 1970–1990*, ed. David Ben-Shlomo and Gus W. Van Beek (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2014), 970–76.

<sup>247</sup> Gabriel Barkay, “The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem,” *TA* 19.2 (1992): 139–92; Jeremy Smoak, “Amuletic Inscriptions and the Background of YHWH as Guardian and Protector in Psalm 12,” *VT* 60.3 (2010): 421–32; Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 123–44; Jeremy D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12–42; Jeremy D. Smoak, “From Temple to Text: Text as Ritual Space and the Composition of Numbers 6:24–26,” *JHS* 17.2 (2017): 1–26; Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 123–26. There has been some debate over the dating of the scrolls (Nadav Na’aman, “A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,” *IEJ* 61.2 [2011]: 184–95; Shmuel Ahituv, “A Rejoinder to Nadav Na’aman’s ‘A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,’” *IEJ* 62.2 [2012]: 223–32), but recent analyses support a late-preexilic dating (cf. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 129–32; Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*, 13–16), making them the earliest known version of any text from the Hebrew Bible (cf. Angelika Berlejung, “Der gesegnete Mensch: Text und Kontext von Num 6,22–27 und den Silberamuletten von Ketef Hinnom,” in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments. Rüdiger Lux zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl [Freiburg: Herder, 2008], 37–62, who dates the scrolls to the sixth or fifth century BCE).

<sup>248</sup> See Ziony Zevit, “The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess,” *BASOR* 255 (1984): 39–47; Judith M. Hadley, “The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription,” *VT* 37.1 (1987): 50–62; Baruch Margalit, “Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm,” *VT* 39.3 (1989): 371–78; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., eds., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 408–14; Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 139–40. On the material context of the inscription, see Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak, “Reading and Writing in the Dark at Khirbet el-Qom: The Literacies of Ancient Subterranean Judah,” *NEA* 80.3 (2017): 188–95.

<sup>249</sup> The transcription is from André Lemaire, “Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy,” in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 231. The translation is adapted from Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 139. I depart from Schmidt’s translation by rendering “Asherah” rather than “His Asherah.” For the argument for this reading, see below, pages 208–09 and note 140. Another possibility is to read the *lamed* as a *lamed* of interest/advantage, which would result in “for Asherah.”

A downward oriented hand was incised under the third line, which could be interpreted to identify the inscription as Uriyahu's  $\gamma$ , “monument,” or perhaps as a reference to the underworld.<sup>250</sup>

The concern in these texts may be for robbers or desecrators of graves,<sup>251</sup> but if the biblical literature reflects salient beliefs about the underworld, its inhabitants may also be in view. The texts refer to the  $\text{מתים}$ , “dead,”<sup>252</sup>  $\text{אוב}$ , traditionally “medium,” but perhaps “ancestor, image,”<sup>253</sup>  $\text{ידענים}$ , “knowing ones,”<sup>254</sup>  $\text{אטים}$ , unknown, but almost certainly cognate with Akkadian *eṭemmu* (body spirit/ghost),<sup>255</sup> and  $\text{רפאים}$ , “benefactors.”<sup>256</sup> While there was likely a broad spectrum of conceptualizations of these entities, where they came from, and any threat or benefit they posed to the dead, they appear only in reference to their relationship to the living,<sup>257</sup> and most frequently in the rhetorical denigration or marginalization of their power over or within the

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<sup>250</sup> Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 140, citing Silvia Schroer, “Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm,” *UF* 15 (1983): 191–99; Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 117.

<sup>251</sup> The Royal Steward Inscription from the Silwan Necropolis (*Silw* 1), inscribed upon the lintel above the entrance to the steward's sepulcher, expresses this concern: “This is the [sepulcher of PN-]jah, the royal steward. There is neither silver nor gold [he]re, / [but] only [his bones] and his concubine's bon[es] w[ith] him. Cursed be the one who / opens this (sepulcher)” (Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible*, 103–05). Feder argues, “the existence of apotropaic objects and amulets in Judean burial contexts from the pre-exilic period and later reveals a concern that can only vaguely be inferred from biblical texts, namely the fear of the threat posed to the spirit of the dead by disturbances and looting” (Feder, “Death, Afterlife and Corpse Pollution,” 422). Feder also argues that the mourning practices of the living were aimed at “placating the spirit of the deceased who was assumed to be still present. From a cross-cultural perspective, a fear of antagonism from deceased relatives is probably the rule rather than the exception” (p. 432).

<sup>252</sup> Isaiah 26:14; Ezekiel 24:17; Psalm 106:28.

<sup>253</sup> Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:3, 7–9; 2 Kings 23:24; Isaiah 19:3; 29:4. The “ancestor, image” gloss comes from the etymological connection with Egyptian *ḥwt* made in Christopher B. Hays and Joel M. LeMon, “The Dead and Their Images: An Egyptian Etymology for Hebrew *’ob*,” *JAEL* 1.4 (2009): 1–4; see also Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 171–73.

<sup>254</sup> It always appears in conjunction with  $\text{אוב}$  (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:11; 1 Sam 28:3, 9; 2 Kgs 23:24; Isa 8:19; 19:3).

<sup>255</sup> Isaiah 19:3 is the only occurrence.

<sup>256</sup> Isaiah 14:9; 26:14; Psalm 88:11; Proverbs 9:18. The Masoretic pointing *rop'im* may suggest a perpetual *qere* deriving from  $\text{רפה}$ , “to sink down, be weak.” This would fit with the general biblical denigration of the efficacy of the dead. Cf. J. C. De Moor, “Rapi'uma – Rephaim,” *ZAW* 88 (1976): 340; van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 231–32; Mark S. Smith, “Rephaim,” *ABD* 5:674–76; Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 167–68. Brian B. Schmidt argues for two referents for the  $\text{רפאים}$ : “On the one hand, the Rephaim as the autochthonous populations of Palestine are depicted in narrative texts of the Pentateuch and the DtrH. On the other hand, the prophetic, psalmic, and wisdom texts portray those Rephaim who were shades of the dead inhabiting the netherworld. . . . The consensus is that the traditions concerning the ‘ethnic’ Rephaim informed those reflective of the netherly Rephaim. What were once living entities, died, and then inhabited the netherworld” (Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 267).

<sup>257</sup> See Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 183–84.

world of the living.<sup>258</sup> This oft-repeated refrain suggests not-insignificant portions of ancient Israelite and Judahite societies believed they exercised precisely such power.<sup>259</sup> If the etymological roots of רפאים and ידענים are any indication, for instance, the dead, and particularly one's ancestors, may have been thought to have special access to healing powers and to strategic knowledge. Regarding the former, the clearest example is perhaps the corpse that is hastily thrown into Elisha's tomb and is revived upon contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kgs 13:20–21). While this reflects the perception of the capacity of Elisha's bones to retain divine agency and its healing power, the will of the deceased does not appear to have played a role in the narrative, indicating unseen agency may operate independently of intention.<sup>260</sup>

Full access to strategic knowledge is the only faculty belonging to the deceased with any significant representation in the biblical text.<sup>261</sup> Multiple texts prohibit seeking out the dead for information (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11). An intermediary for the dead is described in Deuteronomy 18:11 as שאל (consulter) of אוב and ידעני, as well as דרש אליהמתים, “seeker of the dead.” The most well-known example of this practice is that of Saul's visit to a necromancer (Hebrew: בעלת-אוב, “mistress of אוב”) at Endor in 1 Samuel 28:3–25.<sup>262</sup> In the narrative, Saul

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 121–22.

<sup>259</sup> Leviticus repeatedly prohibits consulting the dead (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27). Isaiah 18:11–12 condemns anyone who “consults [שאל] אוב,” or “inquires [דרש] of the מתים.” Ecclesiastes 9:5 asserts that the dead know nothing.

<sup>260</sup> Another possible example is Hosea 11:2–3, which laments Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH, pointing out, “they kept sacrificing to the Baals [בעלים] . . . but they did not know that I healed them [רפאתם].” There may be a veiled allusion to the רפאים in this passage. The two most common explanations of the plural בעלים hold either that it refers to different manifestations of Baal or that it refers generically to other deities. Hosea 9:10 refers to Baal-Peor, who is attached to sacrifices to the dead in Psalm 106:28 (cf. Nick Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* [London: Equinox, 2005], 77; John Day, “Hosea and the Baal Cult,” in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day [New York: T&T Clark, 2010], 206). Even if there is an allusion in Hosea, little else can be gleaned from it.

<sup>261</sup> “The exception to the apparent weakness of the dead in the Hebrew Bible is necromancy; the idea that the dead are a source of divinatory knowledge is richly attested” (Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 168). YHWH is sovereign over powers to heal in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deut 32:39).

<sup>262</sup> On this pericope in general, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Saul and the Mistress of the Spirits (1 Samuel 28.3–25),” in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll*, ed. Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 49–62; Christophe L. Nihan, “1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud,” in *Magic in the Biblical world: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. Todd Klutz (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 23–54; Bill T. Arnold, “Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel,” *CBQ* 66.2 (2004): 199–213; Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*, 105–30; Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 187–90. Note Brian B. Schmidt rather arbitrarily asserts the foreignness of the necromancer in Brian B. Schmidt, “The ‘Witch’ of Endor, 1 Samuel 28, and Ancient Near



is unable to get a response from YHWH regarding what to do about the armies of the Philistines,<sup>263</sup> so in disguise he visits a necromancer—a profession he had banned—asking her to bring up the deceased prophet, Samuel.<sup>264</sup> She does, and the sight of the deceased prophet somehow tips her off to Saul’s identity. When Saul asks what she sees, the necromancer explains, אלהים ראיתי עלים מן-הארץ, “I see a deity rising up from the underworld.”<sup>265</sup> Saul explains why he has come, and Samuel—directly or through the necromancer, we are not told—explains that on the following day, YHWH would give Saul into the hands of the Philistines, and he and his sons would be joining Samuel. The pericope thus appropriates a practice the authors view as marginalized or inappropriate in order to convey the prophecy concerning Saul’s death, rhetorically illustrating YHWH’s ultimate sovereignty over the dead and their access to prophetic knowledge.<sup>266</sup>

Another potential channel for consulting the deceased that is represented in the Hebrew Bible is that of the תרפים, “teraphim.”<sup>267</sup> They are mentioned in 1 Kings 23:24 in a list of

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Eastern Necromancy,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 111–29.

<sup>263</sup> It is not insignificant that 1 Samuel 28:6 mentions Saul’s failed use of אורים, “Urim,” to divine YHWH’s will. These were divinatory objects that overlapped in nature and function with other prohibited methods of divination, but because they were means YHWH had prescribed for priestly divination (Num 27:21), they were appropriate (see below, Chapter 5). Note that they are mentioned in connection with the priestly ephod in Exodus 28:4–30, while in Judges 17–18, Micah has idols and an ephod which he uses for ostensibly elicit purposes. On the different terms for “idols” employed in this pericope, see Don Salger, “How Many Idols Did Micah Have? (Judges 17.1–18.31),” *BT* 65.3 (2014): 337–48.

<sup>264</sup> ויאמר קסמיינא לי באוב והעלי לי את אשר-אמר אליך, “And he said, ‘Consult a spirit [אוב] for me, and bring up for me the one whom I name to you.’”

<sup>265</sup> The morphologically plural אלהים occurs here with the masculine plural participle עלים, but Saul immediately asks מה-תארו, “what is *its/his* form?” A few solutions are possible. It is not unlikely the plural participle is a phonetic harmonization with אלהים (cf. David P. Wright, *Inventing God’s Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 256 and n. 78), but some have suggested Saul’s question refers to the appearance of the scene (Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 187–90). Another options is textual corruption, but there is little on which to base such a case. Whatever the case, the deceased Samuel is described as an אלהים.

<sup>266</sup> Compare the prophecy of Ahab’s death in 1 Kings 22:1–37, where the pericope suggests the king’s retinue of prophets were indeed receiving information from the divine world, but intentionally misleading information. Both pericopae appropriate what are asserted to be corrupt channels of communication with the divine in order to show they are ultimately under the control of YHWH.

<sup>267</sup> It occurs fifteen times: Genesis 31:19, 34, 35; Judges 17:5; 18:14, 17, 18, 20; 1 Samuel 15:23; 19:13, 16; 2 Kings 23:24; Ezekiel 21:26; Hosea 3:4; Zechariah 10:2. The association with deceased ancestors is defended in Karel van der Toorn, “The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence,” *CBQ* 52.2 (1990): 203–22; Karel van der Toorn and Theodore J. Lewis, “תרפים *ṭrāpîm*,” *TDOT* 15:777–89. On etymology, see Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “Hittite *tarpiš* and Hebrew *terāpîm*,” *JNES* 27 (1968): 61–68. On the prominence of women in pericopae involving the תרפים, see Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature*, 189–202.

“abominations” purged by Josiah which included ידענים and אבות, in addition to גלולים, a pejorative reference to divine images that could be translated “shit-gods.” Zechariah 10:2 dismisses the תרפים as having “spoken iniquity,” parallel to the diviners who have “seen false visions.” The king of Babylon is mocked in Ezekiel 21:26 as one who “consults” (שאל) the תרפים, and Hosea 3:4 lumps the תרפים together with the אפוד, “ephod,” as well as זבח, “sacrifice,” and מצבה, “stele.” The term is perhaps best known, however, from the story of Rachel’s theft of her father Laban’s תרפים (Gen 31:19–35), which, in the narrative, he calls his אלהים.<sup>268</sup>

This identification of the תרפים with אלהים merits further discussion. When the Danites steal Micah’s ephod, idol, and תרפים in Judges 18, he appears to identify them collectively as his אלהים.<sup>269</sup> These pericopae from Genesis 31 and Judges 18 put the identification of the תרפים as אלהים in the mouths of those who are rhetorically asserted to have a corrupt understanding of deity. To this we might add Isaiah 8:19, which appears to put המתים, “the dead,” in apposition to אלהים, “deities,” in characterizing the speech of others:

וכי־יאמרו אליכם דרו אליהאבות ואליהידענים המצפצפים והמהגים הלוא־עם אלי־אלהיו ידרש בעד החיים  
אליהמתים

Now if people say to you, ‘Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter, should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living . . .’

There are other passages within the biblical texts that appear to identify the dead with or as אלהים that are not polemicizing someone else’s understanding of deity.<sup>270</sup> One may compare,

<sup>268</sup> As has been noted by many commentators, תרפים must have existed in a variety of sizes if Rachel could hide them by sitting on them while Michal could also use one to mimic her sleeping husband (1 Sam 19:13–16). The latter pericope also suggests they were, or at least could be, anthropomorphic in shape.

<sup>269</sup> Karel van der Toorn suggests the referent is singular, namely the פסל (cf. vv. 17, 18, 20; van der Toorn, “The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence,” 210–11). The silversmith made the פסל, however, (Judg 17:4). Micah is only said to have himself made the ephod and the teraphim (Judg 17:5). This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>270</sup> I may highlight here 2 Samuel 14:16, in which a widow complains that is attempting to cut her and her son of from the נחלת אלהים, which is conceptually parallel to נחלת אבות, and understood by many scholars to refer to an ancestral estate. See, for instance, Theodore J. Lewis, “The Ancestral Estate (נחלת אלהים) in 2 Samuel 14:16,” *JBL* 110.4 (1991): 597–612; Karel van der Toorn, “God (I) אלהים,” in *DDD*, 364; Smith, *God in Translation*, 13.

for instance, Psalm 106:28, which condemns Israel for having eaten “sacrifices to the dead” (זבחי מתים) while yoked (צמד) with the Baal of Peor, with Numbers 25:2, which condemns Israel for having eaten at the sacrifices to the אלהים of Moab when they yoked (צמד) themselves with the Baal of Peor.

The divine nature of the dead is suggested by significant overlap in the conceptualization, function, and treatment of both deities and the dead in Iron Age Israel and Judah. For example, both deities and the dead could be represented and presenced by the same cultic objects. Absalom’s יד (also called a מצבת) and the stele set up by Jacob at Rachel’s tomb (Gen 35:20) demonstrate the association of stelai with the deceased in early biblical narratives. Isaiah 56:4–5 even provides a post-exilic suggestion that such monuments might be located within the temple:<sup>271</sup>

4 כי-כה אמר יהוה  
 לסריסים אשר ישמרו את-שבתותי  
 ובחרו באשר חפצתי ומחזיקים בבריתי  
 5 ונתתי להם בביתי ובחומתי  
 יד ושם טוב מבנים ומבנות  
 שם עולם אתן-לו אשר לא יכרת

- 4 For thus says YHWH:  
 To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,  
 who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,  
 5 I will give, in my house and within my walls,  
 a monument and a name better than sons and daughters;  
 I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.<sup>272</sup>

Stelai are also directly associated with deities in biblical narratives as well as in other

<sup>271</sup> Rüdiger Schmitt suggests such stelai served exclusively as landmarks or materials memorials (Rüdiger Schmitt, ““And Jacob Set Up a Pillar at Her Grave . . .”: Material Memorials and Landmarks in the Old Testament,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort*, ed. J. T. A. G. M. Ruiten and Cor Vos [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 389–403). He has elsewhere argued against the existence of any ancestor cults (Rüdiger Schmitt, “The Problem of Magic and Monotheism in the Book of Leviticus,” *JHS* 8.11 [2008]: 9–10).

<sup>272</sup> Note, again, that “name” here seems to function as a locus of agency. To have an everlasting name that shall not be cut off would have been to have perpetual existence through the locus of the name.

material remains.<sup>273</sup> While many authors polemicized the cultic use of stelai, they are favorably or neutrally associated with El and/or YHWH in the Jacob cycle (Gen 28:22; 35:14–15) and by Isaiah (Isa 19:19–20) and perhaps even Hosea (Hos 3:4).<sup>274</sup> The Judahite temple excavated at Arad boasted at least one Yahwistic stele in its inner sanctuary,<sup>275</sup> and some 450 stelai have been identified by archaeologists around the Negev. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith has recently commented:

Given the dead’s divine status, marked by the designation *elohim* and the receipt of tithes, standing stones erected for the dead also localized (lesser) divinities (Deut 26:12–14; 1 Sam 28:13). Recognizing a divine association for all stones, either through a deity or the divinized dead, contrasts with earlier categorizations of *massebot* that restricted divinity to solely those stones explicitly identified with a god.<sup>276</sup>

Deities and the deceased were also provisioned with the same offerings. Food offerings for YHWH as well as for the dead are attested in the archaeological record and the biblical texts. As mentioned above, Deuteronomy 26:14 even prohibits offering to YHWH food from which the dead have also been provisioned. Making an offering is ultimately conceptualized within the biblical literature as signaling a willingness to sacrifice, but there can be little doubt that

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<sup>273</sup> Criteria for identifying Israelite stelai are set forth in Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “*Maššēbôt* in the Israelite Cult: An Argument for Rendering Implicit Cultic Criteria Explicit,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 28–39. See also Bloch-Smith, “Will the Real *Massebot* Please Stand Up: Cases of Real and Mistakenly Identified Standing Stones in Ancient Israel,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 64–79.

<sup>274</sup> On this disagreement, see Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 15–17; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “*Massebot* Standing for Yhwh: The Fall of a Yhwistic Cult Symbol,” in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. John J. Collins, T. M. Lemos, and Saul M. Olyan (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 106–10. See also Elizabeth C. LaRocca-Pitts, *‘Of Wood and Stone’: The Significance of Israelite Cultic Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

<sup>275</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, “Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple,” *BA* 31.1 (1968): 2–32; Ze’ev Herzog, “The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report,” *TA* 29.1 (2002): 3–109; Matthias Köckert insists the two stelai that were discovered occupied two distinct strata, and that “in Arad there was never more than one *massebah* in use” (Matthias Köckert, “YHWH in the Northern and Southern Kingdom,” in *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives*, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010], 378); cf. Mettinger, *No Graven Images?*, 143–49; Bloch-Smith, “*Massebot* Standing for Yhwh,” 112–15; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 58–59.

<sup>276</sup> Bloch-Smith, “*Massebot* Standing for Yhwh,” 111.

requirements to provide food of various kinds on a daily basis stem essentially from the perception that the recipient is in need of it and cannot access it independently. The most likely source of this perception is the identical perception of the dead.

Deities and the deceased were also both consulted for their access to strategic information, as will be further discussed below.<sup>277</sup> While the biblical authors frequently polemicized necromancy and rejected its efficacy (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11), it appears to have been common in Iron Age Israel and Judah. That access to strategic information would become one of the most salient features of deity in later texts. Deutero-Isaiah, for instance, asserts full access to strategic information as an essential feature of divinity (Isa 41:23a): הגידו האתיות לאחור: “Announce what is to come hereafter, so we may know that you are deities.”

Personal names also reflected the overlap of deities and the deceased. Kinship terms are often used in personal names where theophoric elements usually appear. In fact, those terms occur more frequently in the Hebrew onomastica than even Yahwistic theophoric elements.<sup>278</sup> Karel van der Toorn highlights the correspondence between Abinadab (אבינדב), Ahinadab (אחינדב), and Jonadab (יהונדב).<sup>279</sup> Referring to parallels in Amorite anthroponymics, he notes,

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<sup>277</sup> I respond here to Rüdiger Schmitt’s rejection of the view that the deceased were perceived as in some way divine. He gives three reasons for his position: “First, West Asian kinship names mostly refer to gods. . . . not to ancestors. Second, there is no clear indication in any biblical text that the ancestors were worshiped as gods. . . . Third, there is no evidence that ancestors were considered able to transform themselves into divine beings, and thereby requiring (as in many cultures) ritual support by the living” (Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 433). He concludes, “the use of Elohim in 1 Sam 28:12 and Isa 8:19–20 is perhaps best understood as ascribing special status to the dead as preternatural beings . . . who thereby possessed qualities not shared by the living, especially knowledge of things to come. This preternatural status should not, however, be confused with the status of divine or semidivine beings” (“Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” 433). Numerous objections may be raised. I work backwards from the conclusion, in which Schmitt denies the status of the deceased as deities despite the Hebrew Bible’s explicit reference to them using a word in the Hebrew language that only means “deity” or “divine.” In essence, Schmitt presupposes what a deity is in order to assert that the text cannot mean what it says. The third reason retrojects flatly anachronistic notions of divine ontology, and Schmitt appears to neglect the later portions of his chapter that address precisely ritual support by the living in the form of feeding (see pages 455–57). Schmitt’s second reason begs the question, as the biblical texts nowhere circumscribe the features of ritual engagement with deities. They merely prescribe approved means of ritual engagement specifically with YHWH. (In response to his first argument, see below.)

<sup>278</sup> Rainer Albertz, “Personal Names and Family Religion,” in Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*, 350–51. The next chapter will discuss in greater detail the use of *’el* elements in personal names from the second and first millennia BCE.

<sup>279</sup> For this discussion, see van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 225–31.

“The theophoric use of kinship terms was apparently common in West Semitic name-giving.”<sup>280</sup> He concludes that this phenomenon points to an early and ubiquitous ancestor cult that treated the deceased as gods:

The divine nature of the ancestor is made explicit in the name Ammiel: ‘My Ancestor is god’ (עמיאל, cf. אליעם, Eliam, ‘My god, the Ancestor’). A similar significance is to be attributed to the name Ammishaddai (עמישדאי), which proclaims the ancestor to be one of the Šadday gods, chthonic deities that were credited with powers of protection.<sup>281</sup>

Even the structures that housed deities and the deceased, or the loci of their agency, shared features of form and function. For instance, the use of lamps in burial contexts aligns with the use of the lampstand within the temple (Exod 27:20).<sup>282</sup> Some kind of chair or throne is also often represented in the depictions of both (see the Katumuwa Stele discussed above). Altars are so parallel in form and function to offering tables that archaeologists often disagree about their identification.<sup>283</sup> Isaiah 56:4–5 mentions an eternal name within YHWH’s temple, which

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<sup>280</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 226. See also Albertz, “Personal Names and Familial Religion,” 340, who identifies “five divinized designations of kinship, including ‘*āb* ‘father,’ ‘*āḥ* ‘brother,’ ‘*am* ‘uncle,’ ‘*ḥam* ‘father-in-law,’ and probably also ‘*ēm* ‘mother.’ Names containing these units amount to 13.1% of all theophoric names and 12.1% of all instances.”

<sup>281</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, 230.

<sup>282</sup> Lamps are known from cultic settings in the second and first millennia BCE from around ancient Southwest Asia. See Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003). Rachel Hachlili notes that “candelabra were used for illumination in cultic settings, as indicated by their location at the time of discovery, be it in a temple, tomb, or palace” (Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form & Function* [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 11–16).

<sup>283</sup> For instance, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith refers in her description of Arad’s strata IX and X to “Two carved limestone incense altars or offering tables with burnt organic remains on top” (Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh,” 101). Herzog identifies them as incense altars (Ze’ev Herzog, “Perspectives on Southern Israel’s Cult Centralization: Arad and Beer-sheba,” in Kratz and Spieckermann, *One God – One Cult – One Nation*, 174), while Haran identified them as offering tables (Menahem Haran, “‘Incense Altars’ – Are They?” in *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990: Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, June–July 1990*, ed. Avraham Biran, J. Aviram, and Alan Paris-Shadur [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1993], 237–47). Note also Mary Douglas’ comment regarding prescriptions in Jewish law: “a very strong analogy between table and altar stares us in the face” (Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology. Second Edition* [London: Routledge, 1999], 241). Ziony Zevit notes that distinguishing altars from tables by the use of a solid base instead of legs is problematized by the excavated artifacts, observing that, “solid-based structures were used for display while non-solid-based ones were used for burning” (Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallax Approaches* [London: Continuum, 2001], 276). He also dedicates some space to the theory that the First Temple contained a small horned altar that later became a small offering table (Zevit, *The Religions of*

reflects the hope mentioned in 2 Samuel 18:18 that one’s name be remembered after their death. This resonates with the Jerusalem temple’s function as a place for YHWH’s name (יְהוָה).<sup>284</sup> In her discussion of the rhetorical role of the temple in Jerusalem in *Land of Our Fathers*, Francesca Stavrakopoulou observes,

in its very claim to perpetuate life in spite of death, the temple exhibits a function akin to that performed by the tomb: both represent and materialize the ongoing perpetuation of existence in the face of death—and the illustrations given in this discussion of a reciprocal appropriation of imagery and ideology between temple and tomb display this shared role. Both temple and tomb mark the interconnectedness of life and death, rather than their separateness.<sup>285</sup>

Stavrakopoulou goes on to identify two more important functions of the temple that are relevant to our discussion going forward. First, the Jerusalem temple, in its resonances with the territorializing function of the tomb, marks the land as belonging to YHWH. She states, “the territorialism of the dead was perpetuated in the appropriation and adaptation of symbols and aspects of their veneration, care and social function within the land claims of the accepted members of Yehudite Jerusalem.”<sup>286</sup> This facilitated the second function: polemicizing and displacing the veneration of the dead, one of the primary objects of YHWH’s jealousy.

### *Implications*

The goal of this section was to illustrate conceptualizations of the person that were shared amongst some of the societies of ancient Southwest Asia, both to identify points of overlap with contemporary societies and their roots in our cognitive predispositions as well as to contextualize the interrogation of data related to ancient Israel and Judah, which has been

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*Ancient Israel*, 295–98).

<sup>284</sup> For a more detailed discussion of “name theology,” see below, pages 421–27.

<sup>285</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 129.

<sup>286</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 133.

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plagued by a tendentious brand of exceptionalism. While there are certainly important differences between the way the different societies examined in this section understood the nature and function of the person, there are even more important areas of overlap that have been neglected for too long in the scholarship. Here I return to Benjamin Sommer's comment from *The Bodies of God*:

In some cultures we find a belief in possession or out-of-body experiences (especially mystic unity with a divinity), albeit as exceptional experiences noteworthy precisely because the human goes beyond the bounds of the normal human body. In any event, the ancient Near Eastern cultures under discussion here do not evince such beliefs, so that they posit the fundamental contrast between human and divine bodies.

This section will have made clear that the early cultures of Southwest Asia absolutely evinced precisely those beliefs, which were not exceptional, but were perfectly intuitive and common. The person was a partible assemblage of different socio-materially determined loci of agency, animacy, emotion, cognition, and identity. These loci were generally confined to the body in life, but in death, those loci enjoyed differing degrees of independence from the body and could even inhabit and be presenced by cultic objects. There was not a fundamental contrast between human and divine bodies (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

### Conclusion

The primary goal of this chapter has been to construct a framework for understanding the fundamentals of conceptualizations of agency and personhood that can be applied to our interrogation of the material remains of ancient Southwest Asia with as little distortion as is possible. The evolutionary origins of concepts of agency have embedded rather firm patterns into the development of the perception of agency in early infancy, and these patterns can be safely assumed to have been a part of infant development in first millennium BCE Southwest



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Asia, and therefore to have contributed to the sociocultural conventions that developed within their own cognitive ecologies.<sup>287</sup> Based on the observation that our shared symbolic structuring of ourselves and the world around us—reflected in our texts and other material media—indicates shared conceptual metaphors and image schemata, we can also posit a number of more socially contingent conceptualizations of agency and personhood shared between contemporary societies and first millennium BCE Southwest Asia.

For instance, the self is commonly conceptualized contemporaneously as in past societies as to some degree located internal to the body. The BODY IS A CONTAINER conceptual metaphor obtains almost universally. Even more critical to this thesis is the identification of multiple loci of agency that distinguish centers of cognition, emotion, identity, animation, and other features of personhood. These loci are associated in different ways and degrees with regions or parts of the body, with some autonomy granted in certain situations that contributes to a degree of partibility and permeability, depending on the degree of relationality of the broader and emergent concept of personhood. Universal intuitions about agency contribute to the perception of some of these loci as outliving the body and continuing to exist in some form or another. Some iterations of these concepts see the loci of agency as linked with the integrity of the body, and tethered to it, while others see them as more clearly partible, autonomous, and/or immortal. In certain cases, and always dependent upon the agency of the living, those partible loci of agency can inhabit other material articles of special provenance or that have been specially prepared. The same features are attributed to unseen agents perceived in the world around us.

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<sup>287</sup> “Cognitive ecology” is a concept that refers not just to the social and material contexts within which our minds operate and into which they are distributed, but also to the social and material constitution of our minds. See Hutchins, “Cognitive Ecology,” 705–15; Evelyn B. Tribble and Nicholas Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: Religion, Education and Memory in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

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What the final section has endeavored to illustrate is just how grounded the first millennium BCE Israelite and Judahite conceptualizations of the person were in the same patterns of intuitive knowledge that undergirded the symbolic structuring of the person in the societies surrounding them and in societies even today. I have also emphasized the overlap that is observable between conceptualizations of the dead in ancient Israel and Judah and those of deity. In the next chapter, the contribution of those shared symbolic structures to the development of concepts of deity will be more fully unpacked.

# PART TWO

## CHAPTER 3

# Deity and Divine Agency

## Introduction

Drawing from the insights of the cognitive and evolutionary sciences, the previous chapter laid a conceptual foundation and began erecting a framework for reconstructing the development of deity and divine agency in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this chapter is now to add conceptual flesh to that skeleton (or, if I must be consistent with my metaphors, do the plumbing, electrical, insulation, drywall, and finishing work). As with agency and personhood, concepts of deity and divine agency develop within complex cognitive ecologies. This interrogation will proceed against the backdrop of that interface between cognitive ecologies and deity concepts. The following section will construct a cognitive model for the origins and development of deity concepts. Then it will discuss the ways materiality facilitated encounters

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<sup>1</sup> As with most of the technical terms in this thesis, I use “deity” as a gloss for a conceptual category with quite fuzzy boundaries and significant overlap and integration with other categories. I will also occasionally use “supernatural agent,” and here I adopt Ilkka Pyysiäinen’s description of this term: “I speak of supernatural agents whenever a person or persons think or feel an agent’s agency to be somehow detached from a biological body and cannot give a natural explanation about the mechanism by which this agency is supposed to work” (Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 98). This latter term will primarily be used when the independent agency of the deceased or other agents not commonly conceptualized as divine are also in view. In the interest of consistency, I will avoid the word “god,” which may make translations of epithets and some biblical passages sound a little peculiar, but I do not want to give the impression there is a separate semantic load I am communicating.

with deity and divine agency in ancient Southwest Asia, beginning beyond Israel and Judah, but ultimately focusing on them. The fourth section will interrogate the origins and development of deity in ancient Israel and Judah. It may seem the discussion in this chapter is taking the scenic route, but this is not arbitrary—one goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the analytical value of CSR to interrogating biblical conceptualizations of deity by showing that the prosocial dynamics described independently within CSR are strongly associated with the representations of deity and its development in early Israel and Judah.

## Deity and Divine Agency in the Cognitive Science of Religion

The primary insight that CSR brings to the interrogation of deity concepts is that they originate in reflective elaborations of the same intuitive reasoning that is employed in the perception and conceptualization of agency and personhood in the world around us.<sup>2</sup> While cognitive scientists are in pretty general agreement that our sensitivity to the presence of agency plays a critical role in the initial production of deity concepts, and in the continued perception of their presence, that is only one piece of a much larger puzzle.<sup>3</sup> There are a number of other dynamics, about which there is still considerable debate, that contribute to the development, transmission, and perseverance of those concepts.<sup>4</sup> Cognitive models for deity have tended to take shortcuts in certain areas because of a lack of experimental results,<sup>5</sup> but more recently the maturation of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, “Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model,” *CDPS* 22.4 (2013): 295–300.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Will M. Gervais et al., “The Cultural Transmission of Faith: Why innate intuitions are necessary, but insufficient, to explain religious belief,” *Religion* 41.3 (2011): 389–410.

<sup>4</sup> This section draws from Tremplin, *Minds and Gods*; Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*; Jeffrey Schloss and Michael J. Murray, eds., *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Bertolotti and Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings,” 239–62; Boyer, *The Fracture of an Illusion*; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*; Stausberg et al., “Review Symposium on Ara Norenzayan,” 592–83; Norenzayan et al., “The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” 1–65.

<sup>5</sup> Purzycki and Willard note, for instance, that MCI theory relies on four central propositions, including the notions that “Ideas central to religious traditions largely consist of minimally counterintuitive concepts” and that “The cultural ubiquity of religious concepts can be explained in part by virtue of their relatively higher retention rates.” The former concept is not particularly amenable to experimentation, however, and the latter has not been adequately demonstrated, but they are both largely accepted because experimentation has been able to demonstrate

CSR has provided us with quite a lot more data than have been available in previous years, and we can begin to fill in some of those gaps in the models. This section will start from the intuitive roots of deity concepts and attempt to map out a more methodologically careful route from those intuitions to the reflective elaborations that result in the institutionalized and large-scale divine profiles and histories with which we are more familiar today.

### *Deity Concepts in Human Cognition*

Deity concepts originate in large part as natural byproducts of the mind's ToM and its abductive teleology, or the inferences it draws about the unknown causes (and specifically agents) of the sensory inputs it receives.<sup>6</sup> While the theoretical models that have had circulation within CSR are in agreement that deity concepts are in some way developments or elaborations of the false positives of our faculty for agency detection,<sup>7</sup> there is more unpacking that needs to be done regarding the nature and role of that faculty and the processes that take over once initial creation of the concept has taken place.

Several different approaches have been taken by scholars in the past. Scott Atran argues that “natural selection has trip-wired cognitive schema for agency detection in the face of uncertainty.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, when our knowledge of the environment around us is limited, we default to a higher degree of sensitivity to agency. The nature of the supernatural agents that develop out of this uncertainty depends, for Atran, on whether the circumstances engender

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another proposition, namely that minimally counterintuitive concepts are easier to remember than those that are entirely intuitive or are highly counterintuitive (Purzycki and Willard, “MCI Theory,” 1–2).

<sup>6</sup> See Bertolotti and Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings,” 243–48.

<sup>7</sup> Although see Aiyana K. Willard, “Agency Detection is Unnecessary in the Explanation of Religious Belief,” *RBB* (2017): 32–34, who argues that focusing on the origin of the detection of agency is of no help in explaining why deity concepts exist and are prevalent. Willard suggests that deity concepts are “inferentially rich. We give things minds to explain unexplained phenomena because mental states are compelling explanations that help us feel like we have some ability to effect change in the world.”

<sup>8</sup> Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71.

feelings of fear or hope.<sup>9</sup> Stewart Guthrie’s model holds that all perception is framed by what matters most to humans, and so anthropomorphism is a universal lens that results in fundamentally anthropomorphic supernatural agents.<sup>10</sup> Justin Barrett, the originator of the modular theory of a “Hyperactive Agency Detection Device” (HADD), suggests personal experience contributes to predispositions towards certain developmental trajectories, but that our sensitivity ultimately correlates to the survival instinct.<sup>11</sup> These models all predict that in experimental contexts, ambiguity or noise level will result in a bias toward false positives in agency detection primarily, but the experimental data have not demonstrated this.

Marc Anderson and his colleagues have recently published experimental results regarding the link between agency detection and deity concepts that find support in the application of a theoretical model known as “predictive coding,”<sup>12</sup> according to which the brain is “a statistical organ that constantly tests its own hypotheses about the world through an ongoing process of error minimization.”<sup>13</sup> In a manner similar to Bayesian inference, predictive coding suggests the mind’s experiences in the past inform expectations (or predictions) regarding the sensory input most likely to come from its environment. When the reliability of the sensory input is low, such as in darkness, prior expectations will dominate perception, while the sensory input will dominate when it is more reliable and precise.<sup>14</sup> The mind’s model of its environment,

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<sup>9</sup> “People interactively manipulate this universal cognitive susceptibility so as to scare or soothe themselves and others for varied ends” (Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, 78).

<sup>10</sup> Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds*, 177–204; Stewart Elliott Guthrie, “Religion Explained? Some Variants of Cognitive Theory,” in *Religion Explained? The Cognitive Science of Religion after Twenty-Five Years*, ed. Luther H. Martin and Donald Wiebe (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 77–80.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Anderson et al., “Agency Detection in Predictive Minds,” 1–13. The model is more fully articulated in Jakob Hohwy, *The Predictive Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), but see also Andy Clark, “Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science,” *BBS* 36 (2013): 181–253 (which includes several responses); Michiel van Elk and Rolf Zwaan, “Predictive Processing and Situation Models: Constructing and Reconstructing Religious Experience,” *RBB* 7.1 (2017): 85–87; Michiel van Elk and André Aleman, “Brain mechanisms in religion and spirituality: An integrative predictive processing framework,” *NBR* 73 (2017): 359–78; Hans Van Eyghen, “Predictive coding and religious belief,” *UJP* 19.3 (2018): 302–10.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Anderson, “Predictive Coding in Agency Detection,” *RBB* 9.1 (2017): 71.

<sup>14</sup> One important contribution this theoretical model makes is the promotion of domain-general cognitive processes instead of domain-specific, or modular, processes (Anderson, “Predictive Coding in Agency Detection,” 74). CL largely developed out of opposition to the modular theories of generative grammar (see Chapter 1), so the modularity of CSR has long problematized the integration of the two approaches.

seen and unseen, and expectations going forward, are revised and corrected in accordance with the input received. Anderson et al. found that heightened expectations increase the false detection of intentional agency when the sensory input is ambiguous.<sup>15</sup> The ambiguity of that sensory input also perpetuates those heightened expectations by limiting the availability of corrective data.<sup>16</sup> This is a promising theoretical model that offers answers to problems other models have not been able to solve, but it is still in the early stages of application to CSR.

Predictive coding may have application both to the formulation of deity concepts as well as to their initial sociocultural proliferation.<sup>17</sup> The latter will be discussed in the next section, but regarding the former, inferring the nature of hidden or unknown causes in our environment most often involves projecting known patterns and values. These inferences are likely to include agents where the available stimuli are symptomatic, according to our experiences, of their presence. Because our minds are prepared to encounter previously unknown entities, however, they can revise expectations based on variations in the stimuli related to scale, intensity, distance, and other properties. As an example, Tommaso Bertolotti and Lorenzo Magnani suggest the following thought process could underlie the intuitive response to a person seeing some rocks falling:<sup>18</sup>

1. An animal climbing on a cliff causes some gravel and rocks to move and fall when it treads over them
2. *Hence, falling rocks are likely to be symptomatic of an animal stepping up hill*
3. I notice rocks falling down
4. *Therefore, I must be in presence of an animal stepping uphill*

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<sup>15</sup> See Anderson et al., “Agency Detection in Predictive Minds,” 1–13.

<sup>16</sup> “[F]alse positives in agency detection should mostly transform into stable and lasting experiences of supernatural agency in situations where the individual is either unmotivated to explore the environment, unable to or inhibited from exploring the environment, or when the perceived agent is expected to only be perceptible for a short period of time” (Anderson, “Predictive Coding in Agency Detection,” 78).

<sup>17</sup> Recent scholarship has argued that overreliance on content biases and not context has distorted the findings of CSR (for instance, Will M. Gervais and Joseph Henrich, “The Zeus Problem: Why Representational Content Biases Cannot Explain Faith in Gods,” *JCC* 10.3–4 [2010]: 383–89).

<sup>18</sup> Tommaso Bertolotti and Lorenzo Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings: An Abductive Approach,” in *Model-Based Reasoning in Science and Technology: Abduction, Logic, and Computational Discovery*, ed. Lorenzo Magnani, Walter Carnielli, and Claudio Pizzi (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2010), 253.



A similar physical event, but with a significant shift in magnitude, may be interpreted according to this experience, but with a similar shift in magnitude. Without a strong reflective framework for experimentation or investigation, we will intuitively reach into our experiential repertoire for the closest conceptual match. If we are unfamiliar with the processes responsible for, say, boulders careening down a mountainside, we may produce novel agent concepts, such as enormous or enormously powerful humans (or perhaps animals).<sup>19</sup> Similar inferences drawn from the many and varied experiences of early humans within their cognitive ecologies likely contributed to the initial production of a variety of novel agents.

This reasoning has long been identified by CSR scholars as sitting at the root of the production of deity concepts, and because such reasoning can be remarkably varied, so too can the resulting deity concepts. There is a specific type of deity I am interested in better understanding, however, and that is what some refer to as the “Big Gods,” or deities of larger societies that are concerned for the prosocial behavior of the society and are willing and able to punish. I will discuss these features further below. However such deities are unlikely to have developed *ex nihilo*, but rather required a preexisting conceptual foundation on which to elaborate. The most likely candidates for that foundation, in my view, are concepts regarding the agency of the deceased.<sup>20</sup> The developmental process I find most likely begins with the perception that deceased kin who are concerned about their living kin continue to exist in some

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<sup>19</sup> Bertolotti and Magnani point to the tradition among the “Ashluslay Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco,” who attribute thunder and lightning to “birds who have long, sharp beaks and who carry fire under their wings. The thunder is their cry and lightning the fire which they drop over the earth” (Bertolotti and Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings,” 254, quoting Alfred Métraux, “South American Thunderbirds,” *JAF* 57.244 [1944]: 132).

<sup>20</sup> This is suggested also in Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2011), 103–04: “Many if not most of the world’s gods (broadly construed) bear some relation to deceased humans. Ancestor-spirits and ghosts were, at one time, humans. In small-scale and traditional societies, warding off ghosts and malevolent spirits, propitiating the ancestors, or garnering the support of (deceased) saints often takes on far greater importance in regular practice than concerns about creators or cosmic deities.” Pyysiäinen notes, “the ideas of an individual afterlife and of gods tend to develop together in religious history (Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 68). He also suggests that “people can have beliefs about gods without much interest in the afterlife of individuals, as in older Judaism or in the ancient Vedic religion,” but I will challenge that suggestion about “older Judaism.”

form or another and in some place or another.<sup>21</sup> As was discussed above, significant loss can take some time for the mind to fully incorporate into its predictive model of the world, and until that happens, it can reify, with certain triggers, the sense of an individual's presence.<sup>22</sup> If the deceased are perceived as present and/or able to interact with or influence the environment in which their descendants live, their hiddenness can facilitate their conceptualization as unseen agents, which helps feed the perception that the environment is potentially inhabited by a variety of unseen agents like ghosts and spirits, whether benevolent or malevolent.<sup>23</sup>

### *Deity Concepts in Socio-Material Contexts*

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on the intuitive and reflective processes that interact with cognitive ecologies to engender concepts of supernatural agents within the minds of individuals. These concepts are fleeting and ephemeral on the individual level, however, and the processes described cannot alone account for the development and transmission of more complex, durative, and prosocial concepts of deities. This subsection will address the transition from the cognition of the person to the social and material transmission of deity concepts.

As broad concepts of unseen agents in the world around us began to circulate within a social group, they would become more readily available and socially salient explanatory

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<sup>21</sup> See Walter, "How the Dead Survive," 20–22. This sense that the dead are present has been demonstrated to be present even among those who explicitly reject the reality of ghosts and spirits (Bering, "Intuitive Conceptions of Dead Agents' Minds," 263–308; Bering, "The Folk Psychology of Souls," 453–98; Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 104). Pyysiäinen reasons, "This feeling derives from the fact that social interaction among persons is largely governed by emotions; when a person dies, relatives and friends still have the same emotions toward her or him the emotions cannot just be switched off by the power of reason. The emotions continue to govern people's behavior toward the dead person. They treat the dead very carefully and remind themselves of what he or she might have wanted, needed, or wished to happen after dying. Humans just cannot help doing this" (Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 71). As deceased kin are, for the most part, the most minimally-counterintuitive of counterintuitive agents, and generally do not require counterintuitive properties for relevance and memorability to individuals, I suggest they represent the conceptual foundation of supernatural agent concepts. This will have particular relevance to my reconstruction in the next section of the development of concepts of deity in Iron Age Israel and Judah.

<sup>22</sup> See above, pages 103–04.

<sup>23</sup> Pyysiäinen suggests, "it seems that the view of the dead as free spirits whose existence is not constrained by the bounds of the grave is more natural than the idea of the dead living in their graves" (Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 72).

frameworks for the kinds of unknown and unexplained entities and phenomena described above.<sup>24</sup> In early human societies, social relationships with the deceased extended well beyond death, and their unseen agency would frequently have been assigned cognitive continuity with their living selves,<sup>25</sup> providing them with a personal history and with traits and characteristics, in addition to those that would have been reflective elaborations of their nature and function *qua* disembodied agents (for instance, the ability to covertly monitor others).<sup>26</sup> The agents formulated later in this developmental process could have been attributed abilities or character traits based on the phenomena or entities for which they account and/or through other more arbitrary or subjective accretions of properties. The development of their social structures and histories would provide ample opportunity for such elaborations, which would draw from existing socio-material frameworks.

Other entities with their own apparent agency, sociality, and unexplained abilities, such as birds that can fly through the air, animals that live underground or are enormously powerful, or celestial bodies that move in apparently intentional patterns, may become associated with these unseen ancestral agents or be elaborated on independently, resulting in the hybrid and

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<sup>24</sup> This theoretical framework is not novel, of course. Edward B. Tylor famously formulated a version of it, for instance, in the second volume of *Primitive Culture* (Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, vol. 2 [London: John Murray, 1871]). In 1965, E. E. Evans-Pritchard summarized Tylor's theory in this way: "The soul, being detachable from whatever it lodged in, could be thought of as independent of its material home, whence arose the idea of spiritual beings, whose supposed existence constituted Tylor's minimum definition of religion; and these finally developed into gods, beings vastly superior to man and in control of his destiny" (Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 25). Without the insights CSR facilitates regarding humanity's cognitive sensitivity to the presence of agency, however, Tylor's evolutionistic theory relied on rather fanciful assumptions about the origins of concepts of souls and spirits in dreams and elsewhere. It was also wildly ethnocentric, dividing cultures up into three evolutionary stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Evans-Pritchard's criticisms from some 53 years ago reflect similar problems: "In the absence of any possible means of knowing how the idea of soul and spirit originated and how they might have developed, a logical construction of the scholar's mind is posited on primitive man, and put forward as the explanation of his beliefs" (p. 25).

<sup>25</sup> Walter notes that in some societies, inactivity and a need to assimilate the deceased into authority structures associated with the generic "ancestors" facilitates the detachment of the deceased from their "pre-mortem unique personality" (Walter, "How the Dead Survive," 22).

<sup>26</sup> "[W]ith someone intimate, we know a lot about their tastes, desires, preferences, personalities, and the like; and upon death these mind-based properties remain untouched. Our theory of mind, informed by such information, continues generating inferences and predictions even after someone has died" (Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 104).

theriomorphic supernatural agents common to many societies.<sup>27</sup> These elaborations may start as reasoning between individuals or stories and behaviors shared among smaller social groups and societies, which takes us from individual reasoning to socio-material transmission, and from intuitive reasoning to reflective elaboration, all of which may be informed by predictive coding.<sup>28</sup> The transmission of supernatural agent explanations for phenomena or entities of unknown origin would increase estimations of the prior probability of the presence of those agents, proliferating their detection in low sensory input environments and thereby further multiplying and embedding those expectations.

At such a point, and particularly if aided by powerful sociocultural institutions,<sup>29</sup> reflective elaborations on deity concepts are likely to take priority over intuitions operating on the level of the individual—that is, the intuitive reasoning responsible for initial perceptions of unseen agency and agents in the world around us gives way to the socially mediated reflective conceptual packages that have the most salience for the social group. Semiotic anchoring in material media and cult would make more efficient the transmission of these elaborations and their accretion of further properties, as well as strengthen their relevance and resilience. Material media allow humans to “store” concepts in separable representations (among other functions, such as endowment with agency), and this is most helpful for concepts that are counterintuitive or require too much cognitive effort to maintain internally.<sup>30</sup> Material

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<sup>27</sup> A recent set of studies found that the perception of kinship best predicted the personification of animals, while the attribution of mentality best predicted the personification of nonliving entities and immaterial forces (Kathryn A. Johnson et al., “Fuzzy People: The Roles of Kinship, Essence, and Sociability in the Attribution of Personhood to Nonliving, Nonhuman Agents,” *PRS* 7.4 [2015]: 303).

<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, the mind’s use of past experience to inform predictions about the sensory input most likely to come from its environment.

<sup>29</sup> Bertolotti and Magnani note that “It requires a powerful institutional agent such as a scientific enterprise to transcend the dimension of the singular observer and break our intuitive pre-assumptions, that is our non-reflective beliefs about the world” (Bertolotti and Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings,” 253).

<sup>30</sup> See Steven Mithen, “The Supernatural Beings of Prehistory and the External Storage of Religious Ideas,” in *Cognition and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Symbolic Storage*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Chris Scarre (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 1998), 97–106. Cf. E. J. Lowe, “Personal Experience and Belief: The Significance of External Symbolic Storage for the Emergence of Modern Human Cognition,” in Renfrew and Scarre, *Cognition and Material Culture*, 89–96.

representation externally indexes the concept and supplements the mind’s effort at production, memory, and maintenance, similar to the way writing out a note might help us remember a task or responsibility, both by externalizing the information for later reference and by the physical articulation of the concept through the body’s engagement with material artifacts. This likely contributed to facilitating the longer-term transmission of more counterintuitive agents like theriomorphic or hybrid deities, but it also aids in their continued development. Material representation makes the imagined real, but also facilitates a “dramatic increase in *manipulability*.”<sup>31</sup> A half human/half lion figure carved from mammoth ivory from 32,000 years BP, for instance, may have served to externalize a counterintuitive deity concept that could now be handled, passed around, examined, and, importantly, elaborated upon.<sup>32</sup> The plaster crania from the Neolithic period similarly facilitated the material constitution of the deceased precisely for handling, passing around, examining, and, no doubt, elaboration.

While agency detection may be responsible for initial intuitions about the presence of unknown and unnatural agents in the world around us, reflective elaborations and socio-material structures are likely significant contributors to the production, development, and transmission of more enduring and salient deity concepts. Agency detection remains relevant, however, as the material representation of deities would provide members of the social group with material anchors for the conceptualization of the presence, nature, and activity of deities.<sup>33</sup> The material mediation of divine agency would become another explanatory framework for unknown and unexplained phenomena, and the more divine material media were a part of a

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<sup>31</sup> Bertolotti and Magnani, “The Role of Agency Detection in the Invention of Supernatural Beings,” 259.

<sup>32</sup> One example of an apparent hybrid entity that may or may not be preserved in material media is the cherub, which is most frequently represented in the plural כְּרוּבִים, “cherubim.” It is mentioned in several texts, but its exact appearance and function is unknown (see Raanan Eichler, “Cherub: A History of Interpretation,” *Biblica* 96.1 [2015]: 26–38). An important contributor to elaboration was the ratchet effect, which refers to the way the externalization of conceptual innovation mitigates the loss of that innovation and allows cognitive effort to be reallocated to tasks such as further elaboration, cumulatively building upon the innovation. See Claudio Tennie, Josep Call, and Michael Tomasello, “Ratcheting up the ratchet: on evolution of cumulative culture,” *PTRSLB* 364 (2009): 2405–15.

<sup>33</sup> Below I discuss the ways the biblical texts in their various manifestations were used to fill this socio-material role.

social group's experiences and discourse, the stronger their explanatory power and their embeddedness in the group's prior expectations.<sup>34</sup> Once they become firmly embedded socio-materially, other prosocial functions can become more salient (although rituals and traditions associated with roles that become obsolete can certainly be perpetuated).

### *Deity Concepts in Cultural Evolution*

A number of scholars whose work intersects with CSR in some fashion have observed that there is a spectrum of deity types that appears to be quite consistent trans-historically and trans-culturally. This spectrum runs from concepts of spirits, ghosts, and other types of unseen agents and agency that are less concerned about human affairs and less likely to intervene in them, all the way to spirits, ghosts, and other types of unseen agents and agency that are very concerned about human affairs and very likely to intervene in them.<sup>35</sup> Those scholars have also observed that the types of deities closer to the former end of the spectrum are predominant within smaller subsistence-based societies that often lack in technologies and access to resources, while those concentrated on the latter end of the spectrum tend to predominate within moderately complex large-scale societies that tend to be more rich in technologies and access to resources.<sup>36</sup> (Significantly, after societies grow beyond a certain point in complexity and size, the prominence of those deities begins to drop off slightly.)<sup>37</sup> No doubt a multidimensional suite

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<sup>34</sup> “[S]trong accessibility breeds believability” (Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 105).

<sup>35</sup> While degree of concern about human affairs and interventionism are really two separate axes, they tend to correlate around the poles of the spectrum described above.

<sup>36</sup> This is not to say ghosts and spirits are not a common part of large and complex urban societies, only that they tend not to be the predominant agents on the broader social level. Frans L. Roes and Michel Raymond, “Belief in moralizing gods,” *EHB* 24.2 (2003): 126–35; Stephen K. Sanderson and Wesley W. Roberts, “The evolutionary forms of the religious life: A cross-cultural, quantitative analysis,” *AA* 110.4 (2008): 454–56; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 126–30; Quentin D. Atkinson and Pierrick Bourrat, “Beliefs about God, the afterlife and morality support the role of supernatural policing in human cooperation,” *EHB* 32.1 (2011): 41–49; Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, “Explaining moral religions,” *TCS* 17.6 (2013): 272–80.

<sup>37</sup> A leading explanation for this phenomenon is that stable government frameworks facilitate the cooperation and prosocial behavior previously facilitated by socializing deities. See Aaron C. Kay et al., “For God (or) Country: The Hydraulic Relation between Government Instability and Belief in Religious Sources of Control,” *JPS* 99.5 (2010): 725–39. This is just one factor in a complex web of dynamics, and there is always potential for

of socio-material factors interacts in a variety of ways within the cognitive ecologies of these societies to influence their capacity for complexity and size, but in this subsection I would like to interrogate one recent theoretical framework that addresses the potential contribution of those socially concerned and interventionist deities to prosociality.

The problem this theoretical framework seeks to address is that of maintaining social cohesion as a society's size and complexity grows beyond the evolutionarily selected prosocial capacities of kinship, reputation, and reciprocity.<sup>38</sup> As growing and diversifying populations increased anonymity, and people were more and more likely to interact with and rely on strangers, additional frameworks were needed for mitigating competition and increasing cooperation and social cohesion.<sup>39</sup> Technological advances are one example of a partial solution. As an early example, commerce in smaller communities was governed by public agreements witnessed by individuals who knew both parties, whereas the development of writing could facilitate the documentation of more private transactions between more or less anonymous people.<sup>40</sup> The mutual benefits of commerce between otherwise heterogenous social groups are a relatively weak prosocial force, however. Leveraging writing to forge a shared language that was distinguishable from those of other social groups was an effective means of

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overlap between these cultural domains. After all, the secular/religious dichotomy is neither trans-cultural nor trans-historical.

<sup>38</sup> The significant scaling up of human societies began after a stabilizing climate catalyzed an agricultural revolution beginning roughly 12,000 years BP (see Richerson, Boyd, and Bettinger, "Was Agriculture Impossible during the Pleistocene but Mandatory during the Holocene?", 387–411). For an influential—but not unproblematic—take on how this related to the development of deity concepts, see Cauvin, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*.

<sup>39</sup> See the discussion in Peter Richerson et al., "Cultural group selection plays an essential role in explaining human cooperation: A sketch of the evidence," *BBS* 39 (2016): 1–68. See also Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, "The Evolution of Reciprocity in Sizable Groups," *JTB* 132.3 (1988): 337–56; Donald Tuzin, *Social Complexity in the Making: A Case Study among the Arapesh of New Guinea* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Karthic Panchanathan and Robert Boyd, "A Tale of Two Defectors: The Importance of Standing for the Evolution of Indirect Reciprocity," *JTB* 224 (2003): 115–26; Frans B. M. de Waal, "Putting the Altruism Back in Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy," *AnnuRevPsych* 59 (2008): 279–300. This fragility is particularly acute in societies that occupy regions with poor water supplies. See John Snarey, "The Natural Environment's Impact upon Religious Ethics: A Cross-Cultural Study," *JSSR* 35.3 (1996): 85–96; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 128–29.

<sup>40</sup> See Walter E. Aufrecht, "Urbanization and the Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages," in *Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete*, ed. Walter E. Aufrecht, Neil A. Mirau, and Steven W. Gauley (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 123–24.

reifying a superordinate identity, which was a stronger force. This, however, was usually the much later work of more developed government entities attempting to consolidate regional urban centers.<sup>41</sup> Other prosocial forces may have been operative in the expansion of early human societies.

Ara Norenzayan and several other scholars contend across multiple publications that “moralizing deities”—deities concerned with the morality of the societies with which they have relationships—either provided or developed prosocial mechanisms that made significant contributions to maintaining social cohesion within growing societies.<sup>42</sup> According to this theoretical model, as unseen agents gained salience and influence within societies, they became more reliably linked with morality. Morally concerned deities with greater access to strategic information and greater abilities to covertly monitor and to punish developed the most fitness within such ecologies. Regarding the mechanism for the origins of these deities, Norenzayan et al. state, “They arise from modifications of preexisting beliefs and practices that over historical time become targets of cultural evolutionary selection pressures.”<sup>43</sup> More recent research suggests such deities follow after rapid increases in a society’s size and complexity, but at a certain size (researchers suggest a population of around a million), they help to sustain and expand both.<sup>44</sup> Deceased kin would make particularly fit candidates for such deities, given the high salience of their existing socio-material relationships with the living and the higher likelihood of the perception of their concern for the social well-being of the living. As societies

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<sup>41</sup> Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 114–20; Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 72–73 (cf. Bruce Routledge, “Learning to Love the King: Urbanism and the State in Iron Age Moab,” in Aufrecht, Mirau, and Gauley, *Urbanism in Antiquity*, 130–44).

<sup>42</sup> Edward Slingerland, Joseph Henrich, and Ara Norenzayan, “The Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” in *Cultural Evolution: Society, Technology, Language, and Religion*, ed. Peter J. Richerson and Morten H. Christiansen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 335–48; Norenzayan, *Big Gods*; Norenzayan et al., “The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” 1–19, 43–65 (Norenzayan’s co-authors are Azim F. Shariff, Will M. Gervais, Aiyana K. Willard, Rita A. McNamara, Edward Slingerland, and Joseph Henrich). See also Purzycki, Haque, and Sosis, “Extending Evolutionary Accounts of Religion beyond the Mind,” 74–91.

<sup>43</sup> Norenzayan et al., “The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” 46.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Watts et al., “Broad supernatural punishment but not moralizing high gods precede the evolution of political complexity in Austronesia,” *PRSB* 282 (2015): 1–7; Harvey Whitehouse et al., “Complex societies precede moralizing gods throughout world history,” *Nature* (2019): 1–18 [epub ahead of print].



stratified and elite groups emerged, elevating their own deceased kin over the broader social group would initially grant them unique access to and, as populations continued to grow, control of cultic authorities. In this way, the framework of kinship is maintained for elite groups while others engage with a high deity that may or may not have been perceived as kin.

The emergence of these high deities—I refer to them as “socializing” rather than “moralizing” deities—also appears to follow after more organized and regular ritual performance. From the perspective of Harvey Whitehouse’s “modes of religiosity” framework,<sup>45</sup> low-frequency, high-arousal “imagistic” ritual tends to give way with increased social size and complexity to high-frequency, low-arousal “doctrinal” ritual, which supports cohesion through that growth.<sup>46</sup> Higher-frequency ritual performance tends toward greater standardization and less tolerance for deviation, increasing the function of the rituals as credibility-enhancing displays (CREDS),<sup>47</sup> or demonstrations of commitment to the social group and its standards and values.<sup>48</sup> This reinforces identity while also transmitting and embedding ideologies associated with that identity. The cognitive, emotional, and physical

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<sup>45</sup> Harvey Whitehouse, “Memorable Religions: Transmission, Codification and Change in Divergent Melanesian Contexts,” *Man* (N.S.) 27.4 (1992): 777–97; Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult*; Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion*, 45–59; Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Harvey Whitehouse, “Explaining Religion and Ritual,” in *Religion: Perspectives from the Engelsberg Seminar 2014*, ed. Kurt Almqvist and Alexander Linklater (Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015), 261–70.

<sup>46</sup> For a case study involving Çatalhöyük, see Harvey Whitehouse and Ian Hodder, “Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük,” in *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122–45. See also LeRon Shults, “Spiritual Entanglement: Transforming religious symbols at Çatalhöyük,” in Hodder, *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, 73–98; Yorke M. Rowan, “Sacred Space and Ritual Practice at the End of Prehistory in the Southern Levant,” in *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*, ed. Deena Ragavan (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2013), 259–83; Christina Tsoraki, “The Ritualization of Daily Practice,” in *Religion, History, and Place in the Origin of Settled Life*, ed. Ian Hodder (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2018), 238–62.

<sup>47</sup> “Credibility enhancing displays” was coined in Joseph Henrich, “The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Their Implications for Cultural Evolution,” *EHB* 30.4 (2009): 244–60. See also Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 31–32, 96–105; Zoe Liberman, Katherine D. Kinzler, and Amanda L. Woodward, “The Early Social Significance of Shared Ritual Actions,” *Cognition* 171.1 (2018): 42–51; cf. Purzycki, Haque, and Sosis, “Extending Evolutionary Accounts of Religion beyond the Mind,” 78–80.

<sup>48</sup> Harvey Whitehouse and Ian Hodder explain, “High-frequency ritual performances allow complex networks of ideas to be transmitted and stored in memory as relatively schematized encyclopedic knowledge, leading to the standardization of teachings in collective memory. Unauthorized deviations from the standard canon thus become easy to identify” (Whitehouse and Hodder, “Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük,” 123).

costs associated with such rituals could also vary depending on competition and pressures, such as times of war.<sup>49</sup> There is an important balance to strike with the deployment of “doctrinal” ritual over and against “imagistic,” however. The subordination of high-arousal and low-frequency ritual to more routinized ritual can increase oversight, but it can also increase boredom and reduce motivation, which can result in revolt and campaigns to increase in “imagistic” practices. Both ritual modes thus tend to occur in states of flux within individual social groups.<sup>50</sup>

As increased anonymity made the monitoring of ritual performance more difficult, socially concerned deities may have ultimately filled that role.<sup>51</sup> These innovations could have contributed to increased social cohesion in large and complex societies in different ways. Unseen agents thought to be able to covertly monitor everyone’s actions may exploit the tendency for people who believe they are being watched to engage in more prosocial behavior.<sup>52</sup> This is particularly true if they are agents also thought to be willing and able to inflict punishment.<sup>53</sup> Growing urbanism would increase population density and socio-material

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Sosis, Howard C. Kress, and James S. Boster, “Scars for War: Evaluating Alternative Signaling Explanations for Cross-Cultural Variance in Ritual Costs,” *EHB* 28.4 (2007): 234–47.

<sup>50</sup> Whitehouse and Hodder, “Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük,” 123–25.

<sup>51</sup> The monitoring of ritual performance by socially concerned deities in smaller societies likely developed in the interest of “stimulating and rationalizing (i.e. explaining costly behaviours with appeals to unverifiable agents) religious ritual” (Purzycki, Haque, and Sosis, “Extending Evolutionary Accounts of Religion beyond the Mind,” 81).

<sup>52</sup> Melissa Bateson, Daniel Nettle, and Gilbert Roberts, “Cues of being watched enhance cooperation in a real-world setting,” *BL* 2 (2006): 412–14; Melissa Bateson et al., “Do Images of ‘Watching Eyes’ Induce Behaviour That Is More Pro-Social or More Normative? A Field Experiment on Littering,” *PLoS ONE* 8.12 (2013): 1–9. It should be noted, however, that prosocial behavior and normative behavior are not the same thing. Because lying and cheating could have prosocial functions within a society, even if they do not align with normative behavior, cues of being watched tend not to mitigate that behavior. See Ryo Oda, Yuta Kato, and Kai Hiraishi, “The Watching-Eye Effect on Prosocial Lying,” *EP* 13.3 (2015): 1–5; Wei Cai et al., “Dishonest behavior is not affected by an image of watching eyes,” *EHB* 36.2 (2015): 110–16; Stefan Pfattheicher, Simon Schindler, and Laila Nockur, “On the impact of Honesty-Humility and a cue of being watched on cheating behavior,” *JEP* (2018), 159–74.

<sup>53</sup> Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 150–60; Tremplin, *Minds and Gods*, 113–117; Dominic D. P. Johnson, “God’s Punishment and Public Goods: A Test of the Supernatural Punishment Hypothesis in 186 World Cultures,” *HN* 16 (2005): 410–46; Ara Norenzayan and Azim F. Shariff, “The Origin and Evolution of Religious Prosociality,” *Science* 322 (2008): 58–62; Dominic Johnson and Jesse Bering, “Hand of God, Mind of Man: Punishment and Cognition in the Evolution of Cooperation,” in Schloss and Murray, *The Believing Primate*, 26–43; Joseph Henrich et al., “Markets, Religion, Community Size, and the Evolution of Fairness and Punishment,” *Science* 327.5972 (2010): 1480–84; Pierrick Bourrat, Quentin Atkinson, and Robin I. M. Dunbar, “Supernatural Punishment and Individual Social Compliance across Cultures,” *RBB* 1.2 (2011): 119–34; Atkinson and Bourrat,

interactions, which would include material media related to deity, contributing to a heightened sense of divine monitoring, particularly if sociocultural institutions were in place to enforce mores and even administer public punishment on behalf of the socially concerned deity.<sup>54</sup> An increased capacity to monitor would likely increase the perceived access to strategic information.<sup>55</sup> These features could contribute to the mitigation of the occurrence of freeriding and other violations of norms, as well as to the reinforcement of the monitoring and punitive features of the deities.<sup>56</sup>

While prosocial behaviors in complex anonymous societies are not exclusively facilitated by the conceptualization of deities as socially concerned unseen agents, a strong correlation has been shown by a wide array of experimental data. This prosociality, however, is

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“Beliefs about God, the Afterlife and Morality Support the Role of Supernatural Policing in Human Cooperation,” 41–49; Jeffrey P. Schloss and Michael J. Murray, “Evolutionary Accounts of Belief in Supernatural Punishment: A Critical Review,” *RBB* 1.1 (2011): 46–99; Azim F. Shariff and Ara Norenzayan, “Mean Gods Make Good People: Different Views of God Predict Cheating Behavior,” *IJPsychRel* 21 (2011): 85–96. See also Dominic Johnson, *God is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and the book symposium in *Religion, Brain & Behavior*:

<sup>54</sup> Ian Hodder states, “as people, society and crafted materials increasingly became entangled and codependent, so the codependent material agents were further enlisted and engaged in a social world in which spirits were involved” (Ian Hodder, *The Leopard’s Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Çatalhöyük* [New York: Thames & Hudson, 2006], 195; see also Hodder, “An Archaeology of the Self,” 50–69; Ian Hodder, “The role of religion in the Neolithic of the Middle East and Anatolia with particular reference to Çatalhöyük,” *Paléorient* 37.1 [2011]: 111–22). Urbanism contributed to conversion to what F. LeRon Shults and Wesley J. Wildman refer to as a “high social investment lifestyle.” This involves, “agricultural settlements with higher levels of entanglement with the vital forces of their environment, including people, animals, plants, objects, and culturally postulated spirits” (F. LeRon Shults and Wesley J. Wildman, “Simulating Religious Entanglement and Social Investment in the Neolithic,” in Hodder, *Religion, History, and Place in the Origin of Settled Life*, 39).

<sup>55</sup> Pascal Boyer defines strategic information as “the subset of all the information currently available (to a particular agent, about a particular situation) that activates the mental systems that regulate social interaction” (Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 152, emphasis in original). See Benjamin G. Purzycki et al., “What Does God Know? Supernatural Agents’ Access to Socially Strategic and Non-Strategic Information,” *CogSci* 36.5 (2012): 846–69.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Pyysiäinen, “God is Great—But Not Necessary? On Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods* (2013),” *Religion* 44.4 (2014): 638–39. This extends, of course, beyond simple free-riding to any kind of moral violation the proliferation of which could threaten the cohesion of the group. Deities were particularly useful where no witnesses or evidence were available to determine guilt or innocence. In *Big Gods*, Norenzayan highlights the trial by ordeal, which was a means of extracting confessions by threatening the suspected party with some kind of divine punishment if they lied about their innocence (Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 13–14). It could take the shape of tossing the party into a river, with the expectation that drowning indicated their guilt while survival indicated their innocence, or simply an oath or ritual of some kind in the presence of the deity that prescribed certain horrific punishments should the oath-taker dishonestly asserted their innocence. The former was particularly widespread in the Medieval periods. See Colin Morris, “*Judicium Dei*: The Social and Political Significance of the Ordeal in the Eleventh Century,” *SCH* 12 (1975): 95–112; Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books, 1986). See below for discussion of ordeals in the Hebrew Bible.

predominantly parochial, or “in-group” in orientation.<sup>57</sup> That is, the sociocultural mores and ritual practices established, promoted, and enforced by deities tend to benefit those within the boundaries of a given social group while increasing antisocial behavior towards out-groups. A review of studies conducted in 2010 found conflicting evidence for religious prosociality, but when the authors distinguished between *religious* principles (which they understood as relating to the broader “package” of practices and beliefs conventionally associated with a given faith community) and *supernatural* principles (understood as relating specifically to deity), the picture became clearer. They found that “religious” principles were associated with in-group-specific prosociality (i.e., protection of in-group values, antisocial behavior toward outgroup members), while the latter was associated with outgroup prosociality. They concluded that belief in an omniscient, omnipresent, and benevolent deity may promote inclusion of all peoples within the boundaries of the social group over which the deity is thought to preside.<sup>58</sup> Such deity profiles are quite complex philosophical elaborations, however, and though they are common today, the story is much more nuanced for first millennium BCE Southwest Asia.

### *Implications*

Cognitive scientists have made great strides in recent years in answering lingering questions related to the production, transmission, and perseverance of deity concepts, although there is still much work to do (for instance, almost no experimental data are available regarding the use of divine images to presence deities). While hypersensitivity to agency in the world around us

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<sup>57</sup> Some of the criticism leveled at the theoretical model of Ara Norenzayan et al. is based precisely on the observation that the prosociality facilitated by “Big Gods” tends to be oriented exclusively in-group. See Luke W. Galen, “Big Gods: Extended prosociality or group binding?” *BBS* 39 (2016): 29–30; Nicholas M. Hobson and Michael Inzlicht, “Recognizing religion’s dark side: Religious ritual increases antisociality and hinders self-control,” *BBS* 39 (2016): 30–31; Ryan McKay and Harvey Whitehouse, “Religion promotes a love for thy neighbor: But how big is the neighbourhood?” *BBS* 39 (2016): 35–36.

<sup>58</sup> See Jesse Lee Preston, Ryan S. Ritter, and J. Ivan Hernandez, “Principles of Religious Prosociality: A Review and Reformulation,” *SPPC* 4.8 (2010): 574–90; Jesse Lee Preston, Ryan S. Ritter, “Different Effects of Religion and God on Prosociality with the Ingroup and Outgroup,” *PSPB* 39 (2013): 1471–83.

can in many instances constitute a conceptual spark for deity concepts, a variety of other dynamics are critical to their development, sociocultural transmission, and survival. I suggest the shared conceptualizations of the presence of deceased kin were a main catalyst for the development of conceptual and behavioral conventions related to unseen agents in the world around us. These conventions underwent further elaborations as social groups expanded beyond kinship ties and their social cohesion demanded more complex and robust regulatory and explanatory frameworks. Those elaborations that attributed social concern and a capacity for monitoring behavior and for punishing violations would have emerged as the most persevering.

It should be noted that deity concepts cannot be limited to the domain of “belief” in any of the dimensions described above. As has been stated by many scholars (here by Gabriel Levy), “the only real sense in which beliefs exist is in the context of situations.”<sup>59</sup> Situationally emergent *beliefs* alone cannot produce or maintain socioculturally salient and consistent deity concepts, they can only briefly appear and then disappear. While the roots of such concepts may reach deep down to the intuitive perception of agency, and may be bolstered by such perceptions from time to time, socio-material media were (and are) required for the reification and semiotic anchoring of these conceptualizations, which is what made possible their sociocultural transmission, salience, and perseverance.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Levy, “‘Be Careful, or You’ll Act Corruptly and Make a Carved Image for Yourself, in the Form of a Figure, the Likeness Male or Female’ (Deut. 4:16): A Commentary on Norenzayan’s *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (2013),” *Religion* 44.4 (2014): 619. Cf. David Morgan, “Introduction: *The Matter of Belief*,” in Morgan, *Religion and Material Culture*, 1–17; Julius J. Bautista, “Tracing the Centrality of Materials to Religious Belief in Southeast Asia,” *ARIWP* 145 (2010): 3–21; Pascal Boyer, “Why ‘Belief’ is Hard Work: Implications of Tanya Luhrmann’s *When God Talks Back*,” *HJET* 3.3 (2013): 349–57; Vittorio Grotto, Telmo Pievani, and Giorgio Vallortigara, “Supernatural Beliefs: Adaptations for Social Life or By-Products of Cognitive Adaptations?” *Behaviour* 151.2–3 (2014): 385–402. Cf. Connors and Halligan, “A cognitive account of belief: a tentative road map,” 1–14.

<sup>60</sup> David Collard recently examined continuity and change in the development of ritual activity in Late Bronze Age Cyprus (between 1700 and 1050 BCE), concluding that increased socio-economic activity and complexity, as well as dislocation from ancestral rural settlements, catalyzed the expansion of the traditional mortuary cult beyond mortuary contexts and kinship ties (David Collard, “When Ancestors Become Gods: The Transformation of Cypriote Ritual and Religion in the Late Bronze Age,” in *Ritual Failure: Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Vasiliki G. Koutrafoura and Jeff Sanders [Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2013], 109–29). That cultic activity became increasingly urban and public, subjugating kin-based identity to socio-economic identity and incorporating foreign

## Encountering Deity in Ancient Southwest Asia

This brings us to the question of how the theoretical model described above bears on our understanding of deity concepts in Iron Age Israel and Judah. If the cognitive predispositions discussed above were salient among Iron Age Israelites and Judahites, including those who composed, edited, and transmitted the earliest literary strata of the Hebrew Bible—and the data suggest they were—then the representations of, and interactions with, deity and divine agency recoverable from the textual and other artifactual remains should display strong associations with the prosocial dynamics, the intuitive conceptualizations of divine agency, and the material representation of deity all described in the previous section.

This section will examine the ways in which persons in ancient Southwest Asia interacted with deity and divine agency, with a focus on the material presencing of deity and the prosocial functions of that presencing. That presencing would have been critical to the ability of deities to function in the roles they were intended to fulfill. A deity without some means of material presencing, mediation, or direct representation on earth would have been of little value or utility. Based on the framework developed above and in the previous chapter regarding the intuitiveness and ubiquity of the perception of unseen agency in the world around us, as well

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iconography and deities. Many more material aspects of the ancestor cult were repurposed rather than abandoned, however, leading Collard to further conclude, “If ritual practice is inscribed onto and guided by material culture, then it may in fact be more enduring than beliefs that rely on imperfect human memory for their reproduction” (p. 123). Cf. Ioannis Voskos and A. Bernard Knapp, “Cyprus at the End of the Late Bronze Age: Crisis and Colonization or Continuity and Hybridization?” *AJA* 112 (2008): 659–84. For an extended discussion of mortuary ritual and its changes in LB, see Priscilla Keswani, *Mortuary Ritual and Society in Bronze Age Cyprus* (London: Equinox, 2004), 84–159. This process is not generalizable, though. In Neolithic North China, for instance, the development of greater social stratification within more egalitarian societies accustomed to generic ancestor worship resulted in a shift from the worship of collective ancestors that benefitted the whole community to the worship of specific ancestors with high social status that benefitted primarily small privileged groups within a specific lineage (Liu Li, “Ancestor Worship: An Archaeological Investigation of Ritual Activities in Neolithic North China,” *JEAA* 2.1–2 [2000]: 129–64). Regarding Neolithic Çatalhöyük, Ian Hodder states, “in particular, the ancestors and the wild bull were the foci around which social groups formed and developed relations with each other. But around 6500 BC, this system became restrictive and constraining, preventing change. The social focus on wild bulls and ancestors worked well for a long time. It allowed resilience and flexibility in a society based on a diversity of resources. But around 6500 BC, as society became more dependent on the more intensive herding of sheep and domestic cattle, the older system broke down” (Ian Hodder, “The Vitalities of Çatalhöyük,” in Hodder, *Religion at Work in a Neolithic Society*, 3).

as the prosocial leveraging of that perception in the development and transmission of deity concepts, I suggest that any object that cued a person who encountered it to divinity (whether a specific deity or generic divine agency) could have potentially been understood by members of the social group in which it functioned to presence deity or otherwise channel divine agency. Those objects associated with divinity that also performed or directly facilitated social functions, and particularly ritual functions—whether or not formally dedicated to such purposes—were even more likely to be understood to presence deity.<sup>61</sup> In short, I contend that any objects confidently identified as representative of deity had the potential to be interpreted as least by some as conduits for divine agency.<sup>62</sup> The data will bear this out more clearly for some cultic objects than others.

### *Encountering Deity in Ancient Southwest Asia*

One of the most explicit examples of agency inhabiting a cultic object is that of the mortuary stele of Katumuwa from Sam'al, which describes Katumuwa's *nbš* ("soul," "self," or "personhood") as located *bnšb.zn*, "in this stele."<sup>63</sup> For the inhabitation of cultic objects by members of the pantheon, the clearest examples come from Mesopotamia and Egypt, where numerous texts preserve descriptions of special rituals referred to as the *mīs pī*, "washing of the mouth," and the *pīt pī*, "opening of the mouth," that transformed humanmade divine images

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<sup>61</sup> Caution should still obviously be exercised regarding the association of certain structures or objects with deity. A very helpful example of this caution is Bloch-Smith, "Maššēbôt in the Israelite Cult," 28–39; Bloch-Smith, "Will the Real Massebot Please Stand Up," 64–79. Stephen L. Herring and Garth Gilmour note Carl Graesser's clear four-part delineation of the function of stelai (Carl F. Graesser, "Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine," *BA* 35.2 [1972]: 33–63) and comment, "the nice distinction between cultic and non-cultic stones that emerges in Graesser's categorization is not easily maintained, nor are the categories mutually exclusive, but frequently overlap" (Herring and Gilmour, "The Image of God in Bible and Archaeology," 69).

<sup>62</sup> Even texts could be understood as media for divine agency, as demonstrated by the Ketef Hinnom amulets (see above, p. 157 and n. 247, as well as Chapter 7 below). For amulets within early Christianity, see Theodore de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>63</sup> See above, pages 150–52. The term used here to refer to the stele, *nšb*, is cognate with the Hebrew מצבה, which derives from נצב, "to stand, set up." Multiple Aramaic funerary stelai from the mid-first millennium BCE are known that bear inscriptions identifying themselves as the 𐤏𐤍 of their owners, although the term is usually translated "tomb" in these contexts. See, for instance, Klaus Beyer and Alasdair Livingstone, "Die neuesten aramäischen Inschriften aus Taima," *ZDMG* 137.2 (1987): 288–90.

into heaven-born deities. As with Israel and Judah, there was significant overlap between the treatment of the deceased and the divine, and this overlap was more than just conceptual; it was reified in practice in a variety of ways. Mesopotamian kings, for instance, could be deified after their deaths, which often included cultic images that were produced and enlivened through *mīs pī* and *pīt pī* rituals.<sup>64</sup>

While there are many references to these rituals across the Akkadian corpora, the prescriptive ritual texts themselves are limited to a few surviving Akkadian fragments that all date to the first millennium BCE.<sup>65</sup> The number and order of the incantations and the ceremonies differ between the surviving fragments, but the core of the process was the ceremonial washing of the mouth, which purified the image for contact with the deity,<sup>66</sup> and the ceremonial opening of the mouth,<sup>67</sup> which actually enabled the image to breathe, smell, eat, and drink.<sup>68</sup> Both the secondary references to the ritual and the ritual texts themselves use language related to gestation and birth, as well as manufacturing, as part of a two-day ritual

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<sup>64</sup> See Irene J. Winter, “‘Idols of the King’: Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *JRS* 6.1 (1992): 13–42. As an example, Sumerian texts from the late-third millennium BCE discuss the provision of goods for the performance of the opening of the mouth ritual for the statue of Gudea of Lagash, which was erected around 2150 BCE (Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 58). Peter Machinist argues that this divinity was considered secondary to that of the full-fledged members of the pantheon (Peter Machinist, “Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria,” in Beckman and Lewis, *Text, Artifact, and Image*, 152–88). See also Claudia E. Suter, “Gudea’s Kingship and Divinity,” in *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. S. Yona et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 499–523.

<sup>65</sup> See Peggy Jean Boden, “The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (*mīs pī*) Ritual” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1998); Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder*; Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*; Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia”; Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of mīs pī pīt pī and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 43–116. For ceremonial mouth washing unrelated to the *mīs pī*, see Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 10–12.

<sup>66</sup> This was basically a purification ritual that could be performed on a variety of objects and agents, animate and inanimate.

<sup>67</sup> The opening of the mouth could also be performed for images representing living kings and other persons (see Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 13).

<sup>68</sup> On lines 43 and 44 of a text known as the STT 200 Incantation, we read, “This statue without its mouth opened cannot smell incense, cannot eat food, / nor drink water” (Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 99). Lines 70ab–71ab of Incantation Tablet 3 state, “This statue cannot smell incense without the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ceremony. It cannot eat food nor drink water” (Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 151; quoted in McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 44). While the opening of the mouth seems more critical to the process of enlivenment, according to Walker and Dick, the opening of the mouth “was evidently subordinated in the first millennium to the concept of mouth-washing” (Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 71).



process that transitioned the deity into the cultic image.<sup>69</sup> According to the version of the ritual from Babylon, on the first day, the image is set within an orchard while a tamarisk trough representing the divine womb (the *buginnu*) was filled with water (representing Ea’s semen), gold, silver, oil, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and tamarisk.<sup>70</sup> After a series of “mouth washings,” the image and the *buginnu* were left to “gestate” overnight. The mouth, ears, heart, and mind were understood to be to some degree operative at this point, but on the second day, the *buginnu* was placed on a birthstone before a panel of artisan deities who were petitioned to enable the image to eat, hear, and breath.<sup>71</sup> According to the text, after reciting an incantation that includes, “Go, do not tarry,” the performer “makes (him) enter the form.”<sup>72</sup> The Ninevite Ritual Text has the artisan whisper in the ear of “that god,” [*itti ilāni*] *aḥḥēka manāta*, ““You are counted among your brother gods.””<sup>73</sup> When the rituals associated with the liminal phase were complete, the image was installed in its temple and given its first meal. At this point, according to Pongratz-Leisten, “the divine statue was perceived as a self-propelled agent.”<sup>74</sup> Rather than treat such an agent as “secondary,” however, we may more accurately think of it as an extension of the

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<sup>69</sup> Hurowitz and McDowell agree with Jacobsen and Boden against Berlejung and, to some degree, Walker and Dick, that birth provides an overarching conceptual framework for the rituals, although manufacturing terminology also features prominently. See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb,” *JAOS* 123.1 (2003): 150–53; cf. Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder*, 137–41; Boden, “The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (*mīs pī*) Ritual,” 101–05; “Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 21 (cf. 29); McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 69–80.

<sup>70</sup> A separate “holy-water basin of mouth-washing” was filled with “an assortment of precious metal, gems, oils, wood, salt, syrup, and ghee” (McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 55). McDowell criticizes Berlejung’s rejection of the birthing framework on the grounds that she conflates this basin with the *buginnu* (McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 74–80).

<sup>71</sup> McDowell comments, “Its creation is attributed, ultimately, not to human craftsmen but to a group of creator-gods who, through a collaborative effort, form the divine embryo which then gestates overnight while divine powers are transferred to the materials collected in the tamarisk ‘womb.’ On the following day, the god is ‘born’ on the brick of *Bēlet-ilī* and its mouth is washed a final time, allowing for its initial life-giving breath. With its sensory organs activated and functioning, the image is clothed, installed in its temple, and fed its first meal” (McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 72).

<sup>72</sup> As Walker and Dick note, this may indicate the deity is compelled to inhabit the image (see Winter, “‘Idols of the King,’” 23), but the Sumerogram *GIŠ.ĪUR.ME* could also be read as the Akkadian *gišhuru*, which would be “magic circle,” reflecting the notion of the “magic circles of the gods” (Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 81–82, note 81).

<sup>73</sup> Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 94–95 (the restored portions are from two copies of *mīs pī* tablet 3, Sm 290 [see p. 94, note 95]).

<sup>74</sup> Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 149.

deity's self, with more detailed accounts of the relationship of the agent to the deity contingent upon rhetorical context and exigencies.

Two aspects of these rituals to highlight were the material used and the role of the artisan. Only certain materials were considered to have qualities that were appropriate for washing the image or that could facilitate the process of enlivenment.<sup>75</sup> Even in their raw state, for instance, pure gold and silver do not oxidize, but maintain their color and shine. This quality could very easily become associated with the brilliance and glory of deity, and thus be conceptualized either as coming from divine realms or as a more pure or suitable habitation or conduit for divine agency/presence. This may account for the inclusion of gold and silver in the *buginnu*, and the use of gold and silver plating over cultic images. While the core of the image was composed not of precious metals but of wood, specific types of wood were still preferred. The tamarisk, called *ešemti ilī*, “bone of the gods,” was probably most prominent.<sup>76</sup> If so, the use of a tamarisk *buginnu* and the inclusion of tamarisk in the mixture placed within it may have been intended to materially link the cultic image with the womb in which the precious materials gestated overnight.

While these materials could be considered divine in origin or especially suited to transmitting or housing divinity, whether inherently or otherwise, certain acts were required to commission them for divine inhabitation. The washing and opening of the mouth ceremonies transitioned the image from an earthly creation to a self-created divine entity, and some concomitant ritual was needed to signal the dissociation of the image from its natural/human

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<sup>75</sup> See Victor A. Hurowitz, “What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues,” in Beckman and Lewis, *Text, Artifact, and Image*, 3–23; Kim Benzel, ““What Goes In Is What Comes Out”—But What Was Already There? Divine Materials and Materiality in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, 89–118.

<sup>76</sup> Hurowitz, “What Goes in Is What Comes Out,” 5–6. McDowell summarizes, “The tamarisk from which the *buginnu* was made . . . may have been understood both as a component of the divine statue's formation, perhaps its skeletal system, and as a cleansing and purifying agent, possibly for the womb and the gestating divine embryo” (McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 75).

origins.<sup>77</sup> This would have amplified the perception of the image as inhabitable by divine agency and was accomplished through the ritual amputation of the artisan’s hands and declarations such as *anāku lā ēpu[šū . . .]*, “(I swear) I did not make (the statue).”<sup>78</sup> An additional reason for this dissociation may have been to rhetorically undercut the criticism of attributing deity to the products of human industry—a criticism well-known from the Hebrew Bible.<sup>79</sup>

A similar “opening the mouth” ritual is attested in texts from across the history of Egypt. Its full name was “Performing the Opening of the Mouth in the Workshop for the Statue of PN,” but it could also be referred to as the “Opening of the Mouth and the Eyes,” or just “Opening of the Mouth” (*wpt-r* or *wn-r*).<sup>80</sup> As with the *pīt pī*, the *wpt-r* ceremony was a ritual of animation that could be used to cultically enliven a variety of inanimate entities (which included the mummies of certain deceased agents), demonstrating the similar conceptual and cultic overlap of the deceased and the divine in Egypt.<sup>81</sup> Similar to the rituals in Mesopotamia, the instruments and terminology of the *wpt-r* reflect its conceptual undergirding by the frameworks of both birth and manufacturing.<sup>82</sup> The materials used were also critical to the

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<sup>77</sup> Note the following comments from Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik: “The Greek term *archeiropoieta* . . . identifies miraculous portraits or representations that were ‘not made by any [human] hand,’ encompassing in the Christian tradition such images as the Mandylion (Image of Edessa). The *archeiropoieta* are not limited to this context, however; ancient Greek sources include various accounts of divine images that had miraculously *appeared*, having fallen perhaps from the heavens or yielded by the seas, and that were understood as products of the divine rather than human agency” (Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, “Between Cognition and Culture,” 8).

<sup>78</sup> Walker and Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 94–95.

<sup>79</sup> See Hurowitz, “The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb,” 153–55; Michael B. Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” in Dick, *Born in Heaven Made on Earth*, 16–45; Mark S. Smith, “The Polemic of Biblical Monotheism: Outsider Context and Insider Referentiality in Second Isaiah,” in *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) Held at Leiden, 27–28 April 2000*, ed. T. L. Hetteema and A. van der Kooij (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2004), 208–22.

<sup>80</sup> For this ritual, see McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 85–109, and the bibliographic data there.

<sup>81</sup> McDowell notes that the majority of references to the ritual in ancient Egyptian literature is funerary in nature. “The earliest mortuary attestation comes from the tomb of Metjen, a prominent Old Kingdom official from Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2600 B.C.E.). The ritual is also mentioned in the earliest edition of the Pyramid Texts (PT), the PT of Unas (ca. 2375–2345 B.C.E.) from the Fifth Dynasty and in the PT from the Sixth Dynasty” (McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 87).

<sup>82</sup> For instance, funerary texts describe two blades being used to open the mouth of the mummy, which may reflect the use of two fingers to clear mucus from the mouth of newborns, enabling it to breathe. Additionally, the enlivened entity is immediately breastfed. See McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 104–09,

success of the endeavor—gold and silver again figure prominently, as well as lapis lazuli and other precious stones—but the role of the human artisan was not repudiated in Egypt.<sup>83</sup>

There is also a relevant Hittite text from the late fifteenth or early fourteenth century BCE that prescribed an eight- or nine-day regimen for commissioning a satellite cult installation for the “Deity of the Night” (in the case of this text, the goddess Pirinkir).<sup>84</sup> The deity itself was to be made from gold, decked out in accoutrements of a variety of precious stones. The process for installing the deity is long and complex, but on the fifth day, before leaving the old temple behind, the text in section 22 prescribes the following utterance: “Honoured deity! Preserve your being, but divide your divinity! Come to that new house, too, and take yourself the honoured place!”<sup>85</sup> As with the Akkadian rituals described above, once the statue is installed in the cult place, sacrifices are made to facilitate the deity’s first meal. Gary Beckman points out that communal meals are the most frequent rituals described in the Hittite temple texts.<sup>86</sup> He also highlights “the frequent attribution of the construction to deities rather than the actual human builders.”<sup>87</sup>

These rituals represent the most explicit reflective practices associated with the intuitive conceptualizations of divine agency as communicable, and of certain inanimate objects and

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following Ann Macy Roth, “The *Psš-ḫf* and the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth,” *JEA* 78.1 (1992): 113–47.

<sup>83</sup> For a comparison of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian rituals, see McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 109–15.

<sup>84</sup> Jared L. Miller, *Studies in the Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Kizzuwatna Rituals* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 259–311. See also Gary Beckman, “Temple Building among the Hittites,” in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 80–85.

<sup>85</sup> The translation is from Miller, *Studies in the Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Kizzuwatna Rituals*, 290. Beckman renders, “O esteemed deity, guard your person, but divide your divinity!” (Beckman, “Temple Building among the Hittites,” 83). For a specific discussion of the verb “divide,” see Richard H. Beal, “Dividing A God,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 197–208. For a broader discussion of the Hittite conceptualization of the divine, see Ada Taggar-Cohen, “Concept of the Divine in Hittite Culture and the Hebrew Bible: Expression of the Divine,” *JISMOR* 9 (2013): 29–50.

<sup>86</sup> Beckman, “Temple Building among the Hittites,” 88.

<sup>87</sup> Beckman, “Temple Building among the Hittites,” 89.

substances as animable by that agency.<sup>88</sup> The variations in details, including the degree of independence of the image, the number of manifestations, the associations between the deities and the locations, and the types of materials used are all products of diverse reflective considerations taking place within different socio-material ecologies.<sup>89</sup> What is consistent is the intuitive perception of agency as communicable, and of personhood as partible and permeable. These intuitions need not be explicitly manifested in praxis or in reflective rationalizations of that praxis in order for them to be influential, of course. Related rituals and conceptualizations of enlivened statues from other societies around the world and down to the present time demonstrate the trans-cultural and trans-historical intuitiveness of this approach to divine agency.<sup>90</sup> These conceptualizations do not stand in contrast or contradiction to intuitive notions of human personhood and agency, but rather represent more flexible and dynamic elaborations on both.<sup>91</sup> Their general intuitiveness and broad consistency across ancient Southwest Asia, along with significant overlap in rituals and traditions associated with deity, support the preliminary application of the same conceptual frameworks to the interrogation of the way deities were encountered in Iron Age Israel and Judah.

*Encountering Deity in Iron Age Israel and Judah*

We have no direct attestation of prescriptions for any rituals in the material remains from the regions inhabited by earliest Israel and Judah, including those intended to enliven divine

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<sup>88</sup> Herbert Niehr notes related features of some Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions: “After a Phoenician temple had been built or restored, the divine statue had to be erected in the sanctuary. This is referred to with the phrase ‘I/we caused the deity to dwell in it’ (*yšb yipihil*). In a Punic inscription, a god’s entrance into a sanctuary is indicated by the verb *bw*’ without mentioning the statue, but by stating the divine name only. Several Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions mention votive statues or stelae placed in front of the divine statues in the temples” (Herbert Niehr, “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple,” in van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book*, 78).

<sup>89</sup> The question of whether or not the image is a “full” or “partial” deity would have emerged situationally and would have been addressed within the relevant rhetorical contexts. There is no need to impose a systematic ontology on the discussion.

<sup>90</sup> For further discussion of several examples, see the references on page 5, notes 15–21.

<sup>91</sup> *Contra* Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 195, n. 145 (see pp. 12–16).

images,<sup>92</sup> but there is a rich tradition in the region of materially representing deity that reaches back into Neolithic<sup>93</sup> periods and drew in the Bronze and Iron Ages from the same conventions and intuitive concepts of deity in circulation in the surrounding cultures.<sup>94</sup> Finds from Iron I–IIA that depict deity include stelai, metal statuary (with a caveat), objects in stone, terracotta cult stands, model shrines, shrine plaques, anthropomorphic terracotta vessels and figurines, worship scenes depicted on seals, and depictions of deity in or on clay.<sup>95</sup> Metal statuary depicting male deities does not appear to have been produced—or at least not widely—from the tenth century BCE on, which has been taken as a sign of programmatic aniconism, but is more likely a shift in preference governed by the markets and available resources. Mettinger convincingly argues that Israel and Judah were initially simply carrying on a “*de facto*

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<sup>92</sup> According to Herbert Niehr, this is also a feature of Phoenician and Aramean societies. He states, “This is due to the epigraphic character of the Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions; they are neither literary nor ritual texts” (Niehr, “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple,” 78).

<sup>93</sup> Indications that both deceased kin and deity were presented via cultic objects is evident in the use of stelai in burials and cultic installations that correspond with the rise of pastoralism in the Neolithic Negev (Avner, “Studies in the Material and Spiritual Culture of the Negev and Sinai Populations,” 65–92; Arav et al., “Three-Dimensional Documentation of the *masseboth* Sites in the ‘Uvda Valley Area,” 9–21; Avner and Horwitz, “Animal sacrifices and Offerings from Cult and Mortuary Sites in the Negev and Sinai,” 35–70; Avner, “Protohistoric Developments of Religion and Cult in the Negev Desert,” 23–62). As noted in the previous chapter, standardized arrangements of two, three, five, seven, or nine stelai were thought to represent deities, while individual and arbitrarily arranged stelai were thought to represent deceased kin. In some mortuary locations, as well, stelai set up near the perimeter of tombs were understood to represent protective deities, while the stelai in the interior were understood to presence deceased kin. “In tombs, two types of *masseboth* were set. Those incorporated in the tomb’s perimeter, mostly on the eastern side and facing east, are explained as representing the deities that guard the tombs and the deceased. *Masseboth* set within tombs are usually narrow, set separately and face north; these are interpreted as representing the ancestors” (Avner and Horwitz, “Animal sacrifices and Offerings from Cult and Mortuary Sites in the Negev and Sinai,” 35–70).

<sup>94</sup> According to Keel and Uehlinger, the material representation of deity in the highlands in the Late Bronze Age reflected heavy Egyptian influence, particularly in the prevalence of enthroned male Egyptian deities, and especially those who represented political domination and war (Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 96). Bull imagery was particularly prominent, but while in earlier periods it could represent either fecundity or ferocity, by the Iron Age, it almost exclusively reflected the latter. The role of the goddess was diminished in Egypt, but highland artisans appear to have carried on a simplified version of a popular “naked goddess” motif through the production of much more inexpensive terracotta plaques (pp. 97–108). The effacement of Egyptian influence meant the similar withdrawal of the wealth and markets it facilitated, so locally produced plaques, statuettes, stelai, and cult stands became less expertly and more inexpensively produced. By Iron Age I, the fertility aspects of the divine were depicted primarily through symbols and “substitute entities” like a tree, a scorpion, or a suckling mother animal (p. 128).

<sup>95</sup> See Christoph Uehlinger, “Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh’s Cult Image,” in van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book*, 102–12. The Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions contain the most explicit depictions of deity on clay (see, recently, Ryan Thomas, “The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: A Reassessment,” *JANER* 16 [2016]: 121–91), but see also Garth Gilmour, “An Iron Age II Pictorial Inscription from Jerusalem Illustrating Yahweh and Asherah,” *PEQ* 141.2 (2009): 87–103.

aniconism” that had long been current throughout the broader West Semitic cultural milieu. This aniconism was not “the result of theological reflection. Instead, it must be seen as an inherited convention of religious expression which only later formed the basis for theological reflection.”<sup>96</sup> The more widespread use during this period of symbols and substitute entities suggests the notion that the cultic image need at all approximate the ostensible appearance of the deity itself was no longer particularly salient (if it ever was). The priority was presencing the deity, not looking like it.<sup>97</sup>

While some of the depictions mentioned above may have had primarily commemorative or dedicatory functions, many would have been widely understood to presence the deity or channel/transmit divine or otherwise supernatural agency, particularly if erected in a public setting and assigned a specific socio-material role in the functioning of the society. These depictions no doubt represented a spectrum of deities running the gamut from deceased kin to socializing high deities. Among social elites, ancestral connections may have been asserted for those high deities. The archaeological bias towards the state and its elites has weighted our data overwhelmingly in favor of the few deities who predominated on a national or dynastic level, of course, so this interrogation cannot comment on the full range of divine images. Naturally, there will be more variability in the depictions of deity utilized privately by individuals of family units, as they generally do not answer to broader prosocial forces.

Several considerations support interpreting stelai in Iron Age Israel and Judah as presencing whatever deities they indexed.<sup>98</sup> It has already been shown that they presenced the dead in

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<sup>96</sup> Mettinger, *No Graven Image?*, 195.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Tallay Ornan, “Idols and Symbols: Divine Representation in First Millennium Mesopotamian Art and Its Bearing on the Second Commandment,” *TA* 31 (2004): 90–121.

<sup>98</sup> In addition to the stele at Arad, Iron Age stelai have been found in cult installations and other contexts in Tel-Dan, Hazor, Bethsaida, Lachish, Tirzah, Tel-Rehov, Beth-Shemesh, Tel-Qiri, Timna, Shechem, Khirbet Qeiyafa, and in other locations (Mettinger, *No Graven Image?*, 149–68; Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh,” 100; Alexander Zukerman, “A Re-Analysis of the Iron Age IIA Cult Place at Lachish,” *ANES* 49 (2012): 41–43; Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David: Revelations from an Ancient Biblical City* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 131–34). See also Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 53–63.

funerary and mortuary rituals, particularly related to funerary/mortuary meals. The word *מַצְבָּה*, meaning “stood up,” or “erected,” reflects the upright orientation of the stones, which stands out within the environment and indicates intentionality to viewers.<sup>99</sup> Stone was also likely perceived as one of the more suitable materials for hosting the agency of the deceased/divine in light of its durability. Unworked stone may have boasted the additional feature of a more natural state (perhaps the state in which a deity left it), rather than one forced on the stone by human industry. Flat stones placed horizontally before stelai to function as offering tables suggest rituals similar to those performed for the deceased were likely performed for the deities the stelai indexed.<sup>100</sup> For instance, two open air sanctuaries at Hazor dating to the eleventh century BCE prominently featured stelai and included cultic assemblages. The stele at Area A was surrounded by three offering tables.<sup>101</sup> At Khirbet Qeiyafa, three tenth century BCE cult rooms featuring stelai were discovered. Room J in Building D and Room G in Building C3 each featured large stelai with stone offering tables at their bases and benches adjacent to them.<sup>102</sup> The former appears to have been a public cult installation, while the latter was found among a row of houses, and was likely private. Similar private installations dating to the end of the second millennium BCE have been found at Lachish and Tel Qiri.<sup>103</sup> A ninth century

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<sup>99</sup> See the discussion above on pages 136–37 regarding the upright orientation of plastered crania.

<sup>100</sup> See Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 131–32 (see also Fig. 51 on p. 135). According to Mettinger, stelai functioned primarily to facilitate sacrifices and shared communal meals (Mettinger, *No Graven Image?*, 191–92). Note the communal meal mentioned in Exodus 24:11 after the elders of Israel *יראו את אלהי ישראל*, “saw the God of Israel.” Mark Smith elaborates on the importance of the communal meal to covenant ritual in Smith, *God in Translation*, 58–61.

<sup>101</sup> Doron Ben-Ami, “Early Iron Age Cult Places—New Evidence from Tel Hazor,” *TA* 33.2 (2006): 123–27.

<sup>102</sup> Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 134–46. A recently excavated Judahite temple from Tel Moza features a room near the entrance with five stelai at the base of a bench (Shua Kisilevitz, “The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza,” *TA* 42 [2015]: 51).

<sup>103</sup> See Amnon Ben-Tor and Y. Portugali, *Tell Qiri, A Village in the Jezreel Valley: A Report of The Archaeological Excavations 1975–1977* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987), 82–90 (the authors note the abundance of animal bones, and particularly right forelimbs, which they suggest indicate their use in cultic activity [pp. 89–90]); Zukerman, “A Re-Analysis of the Iron Age IIA Cult Place at Lachish,” 24–60; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 144–45, and notes 9–11 (I exclude Megiddo room 2081 [see Bloch-Smith, “*Maṣṣēbôt* in the Israelite Cult,” 33–35]). Some refer to these installations as “cult corners” (see Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 123; Louise A. Hitchcock, “Cult Corners in the Aegean and the Levant,” in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 321–45).



BCE open air sanctuary is known from Tel Reḥov that featured a raised platform with two stelai, an offering table, a pottery altar, and a large number of animal bones.<sup>104</sup> The offering of food and the ritual sharing of meals before these stelai suggest the presence and participation of the entities they indexed.<sup>105</sup>

Another consideration is the terminology used in comparative texts to refer to stelai. In addition to the upright and intentional posture of מַצְבֵּה, the Ugaritic and Akkadian words for “stele”—*skn* and *si-ik-ka-num*—appear to derive from a verbal root meaning “to inhabit.”<sup>106</sup> This terminology resonates with Jacob’s designation in Genesis 28:22 of a stele he set up and anointed with oil as the בֵּית־אֱלֹהִים, “house of God.” Anointing with oil likely represented a commissioning of sorts (see also Gen 35:14–15), although significantly—and perhaps deliberately<sup>107</sup>—less elaborate than the complex rituals of Mesopotamia and Egypt.<sup>108</sup> The shortened form, בֵּית־אֵל, would later become a designation for “stele” that would be adapted in Greek as βᾰίτυλος, “betyl.” By the seventh-century BCE, Assyrian sources identify a West

<sup>104</sup> Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Reḥov,” 27–28.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Samuel 9:12–13, in which Saul seeks a seer to aid in the recovery of lost donkeys, provide a biblical perspective on this context: “They answered, ‘Yes, there he is just ahead of you. Hurry; he has come just now to the town, because the people have a sacrifice [זֶבֶח] today at the shrine [בְּמִזְבֵּחַ]. As soon as you enter the town, you will find him, before he goes up to the shrine to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, since he must bless [יְבָרֵךְ] the sacrifice; afterward those eat who are invited. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.’”

<sup>106</sup> See Jean-Marie Durand, “Le culte des bétyles en Syrie,” in *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand and Jean-Robert Kupper (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1985), 79–84; Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Walter Mayer, “Sikkanum ‘Betyl,’” *UF* 21 (1989): 133–39; van der Toorn, “Worshipping Stones,” 7–10; Daniel E. Fleming, *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner’s Archive* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 82–87; Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 28–29; Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 356–58; Assaf Yasur-Landau, “The Baetyl and the Stele: Contact and Tradition in Levantine and Aegean Cult,” in *Metaphysics: Ritual, Myth and Symbolism in the Aegean Bronze Age*, ed. Eva Alram-Stern et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 416–17; Nicola Scheyhing, “Fossilising the Holy. Aniconic Standing Stones of the Near East,” in *Sacred Space: Contributions to the Archaeology of Belief*, ed. Louis Daniel Nebelsick, Joanna Wawrzyniuk, and Katarzyna Zeman-Wisniewska (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018), 95–112.

<sup>107</sup> We already know certain idiosyncrasies were adopted as identity markers to distinguish Israel and Judah from the societies surrounding them, and this certainly may have been an additional way to distinguish themselves in their relationship to their deity/ies.

<sup>108</sup> Sommer rhetorically asks, “Is it possible that, in these passages, anointing transforms the stele and thus functions in a manner comparable to the *mīs pī* ritual in Mesopotamia? (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 49). As Sommer notes in a footnote (note 67, p. 207), several midrashim insist the oil that anointed these stelai came down directly from heaven, which is reminiscent of the insistence at the end of the Mesopotamian ritual that the stele was not made by human hands.

Semitic deity named Bethel who also appears in later Aramaic and Greek texts.<sup>109</sup> In his first century CE text, *Phoenician History* (preserved in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*), Philo of Byblos describes the betyls as λίθοι ἔμψυχοι, “enlivened stones.”<sup>110</sup> The concept of the divine animation of stelai enjoyed wide circulation around ancient Southwest Asia.

Another means of presencing divine agency that has long eluded scholarly consensus is the use of clay figurines known today as Judean Pillar Figurines, or JPFs.<sup>111</sup> As the name suggests, these figurines were most prominent in Judah, and were particularly prolific from the eighth through the sixth centuries BCE. They were small (13–16 cm) free-standing figurines that depicted a female with hands holding or supporting the breasts and a pillar base extending from below the breasts.<sup>112</sup> The figurines had heads made of two types: a hand-made type that was executed by pinching the clay to roughly form a nose and eye sockets, and a molded type connected to the body by a clay tang. According to Erin Darby, “these most commonly wear a short wig covering the ears and have almond-shaped eyes, smiling mouths, eyebrows, and noses.”<sup>113</sup>

JPFs were long assumed to represent the deity Asherah and to facilitate fertility and successful childbirth, but the lack of any representation of the genitals complicates the assumption. Darby's recent reanalysis of the archaeological contexts and the comparative data suggests they exercised somewhat generic apotropaic and healing functions (perhaps

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<sup>109</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 28–29.

<sup>110</sup> Philo of Byblos, *Phoenician History* 810:28 (see Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* [Leiden: Brill, 1981], 16, 202–03).

<sup>111</sup> See are John S. Holladay, Jr., “Religion in Israel and Judah under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 249–99; Raz Kletter, *The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah* (Oxford: Tempvs Reparatum, 1996); Ryan Byrne, “Lie Back and Think of Judah: The Reproductive Politics of Pillar Figurines,” *NEA* 67.3 (2004): 137–51; Ian Douglas Wilson, “Judean Pillar Figurines and Ethnic Identity in the Shadow of Assyria,” *JSOT* 36.3 (2012): 259–78; Rüdiger Schmitt, “Elements of Domestic Cult in Ancient Israel,” in Albetz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*, 57–219; Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*; Shawna Dolansky, “Refiguring Judean ‘Fertility’ Figurines: Fetishistic Functions of the Feminine Form,” in Miller, *Between Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology*, 5–30.

<sup>112</sup> There have been around 1,000 JPFs discovered in the region. Some are also depicted holding a disc or a child (Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 2).

<sup>113</sup> Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 2.

associated with deceased kin), and show no signs of identification with specific deities.<sup>114</sup> They may have primarily functioned to facilitate access to divine agency for those excluded from participating in—or who otherwise lacked access to—temple ritual.<sup>115</sup> With their form likely developing from the earlier naked goddess plaques,<sup>116</sup> goddess appliqués from model shrines and cult stands, and Phoenician and Israelite pillar-based figurines, their function appears to have been influenced by “magico-medical, apotropaic, and exorcistic figurine rituals” to which Judahites were exposed by their Assyrian vassalage.<sup>117</sup>

Passages in the Hebrew Bible related to the production of idols do not appear to make any reference whatsoever to JPFs, which may bear on their ubiquity in pre-exilic Judah. Analyzing the terminology used to refer to idols and their production, Darby argues that the prohibitions common to exilic and postexilic texts used terminology suggesting broad and generic concern with the production of any image that could function as an idol, while the terminology used in earlier texts specifically reflect concern with the materials from which the images were constructed, with metal, stone, and wood being the primary offenders.<sup>118</sup> Clay is not addressed, and Darby understands that omission to perhaps have exempted producers and consumers of

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<sup>114</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou suggests they were tied in domestic contexts to lactation rituals, and signaled the transformation of the personhood of the mother/feeder and the child. See Francesca Stavrakopoulou, “Religion at Home: The Materiality of Practice,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel*, ed. Susan Niditch (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 356–57.

<sup>115</sup> Darby appeals to Hector Avalos’ analysis of healing ritual, favorably summarizing: “The sick may have originally travelled to shrines where rites took place. At some point, perhaps as early as the Iron IIB, the sick were excluded from temple space; and healing rituals must have taken place in the home” (Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 390; cf. Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1995]).

<sup>116</sup> Two figurines discovered at Tel Rehov may represent a transitional phase between the plaques and the JPFs. According to Amihai Mazar, they “comprise a strange combination of a mold-made plaque figurine and a standing ‘pillar figuring;’ each has a broad base, enabling it to stand on its own” (Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov,” 39).

<sup>117</sup> Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 393. Darby goes on to discuss the possible role of the figurines in developing national identity or resisting Assyrian hegemony.

<sup>118</sup> “Thus, it is possible that by the exilic and postexilic periods, the biblical authors (particularly the Deuteronomist and Ezekiel) prohibited images much more broadly than did earlier biblical commentators, a position consistent with Trygve Mettinger’s theory that Israel moved toward iconoclasm in the postexilic period. Many of the earlier texts that prohibit images do not comment on the particular iconography of the image but the materials from which the images were made. Only late in Israel’s history did the prohibition extend to include any type of image and to consider its iconography” (Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 295–96).

clay figurines from bans on idol production (at least in their minds). Because the earliest texts are also primarily concerned with foreign deities and foreign means of worship, the JPFs' ostensible indigeneity to Judah, as well as the lack of association with specific deities, may account for their exclusion from the Hebrew Bible's idol polemics.<sup>119</sup>

The significance of the use of clay in the production of JPFs does not end there. Humanity itself was created from clay according to many Southwest Asian societies, including those of Israel and Judah. Darby argues that clay seems to have been perceived as an effective conduit for purity/holiness as well as for impurity.<sup>120</sup> For example, rituals in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 5 prescribe earthen vessels (כלי־חרש) to facilitate the transmission of impurities away from (or to) individuals in need of healing (or cursing). Prescriptions from Leviticus 11 show that an earthen vessel coming in contact with unclean animals renders unclean any food or water it touches, and therefore must be shattered. The idea here seems to be that the clay vessel was charged with, or stored, impurity, which could only be dispelled through the shattering of the vessel.<sup>121</sup> This could easily extend to removing other contaminants thought to operate on the level of communicable agency. As with stone, fired clay did not naturally deteriorate, and that permanence may have subtly influenced its suitability as a host for divine agency. Its fragility, however, allowed for the deliberate breaking of clay objects to take on significance of its own. Not only could it dispel impurity, execration rituals meant to curse a specific target could involve the deliberate breaking of clay. The ability to conduct/transmit purity and impurity

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<sup>119</sup> Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 300. For a theological perspective on the Hebrew Bible's rationale for its idol polemics, see Manoja Kumar Korada, *The Rationale for Aniconism in the Old Testament: A Study of Select Texts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017).

<sup>120</sup> Another way of understanding the function of fired clay was that whatever quality it had absorbed could be transmitted, but could not be removed. Thus, pottery that becomes impure must be destroyed, as it could never be purified. See Avraham Faust, "The World of P: The Material Realm of Priestly Writings," *VT* 69.2 (2019): 186–90. Faust notes that many Iron Age four-room homes that have been excavated contained rooms devoid of pottery, which he interprets as an indication people needed a location free from pottery for the process of purification. (His paper argues for a preexilic context for the composition of the majority of P.)

<sup>121</sup> Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 277–83. Ritual and contamination have been important frameworks within the cognitive science of religion. See, for instance, McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, 177–82.

could have served a wide array of domestic functions related to exorcism, apotropaism, as well as execration, which would account for their presence in domestic contexts. Darby concludes,

it is tantalizing to hypothesize that the preference for pillar figurines might relate to their ability to stand guard unaided in open and liminal areas, such as windows and doorway, much as pillar-based females do on the Yavneh fenestrated stands. Additionally, free-standing figurines could be configured in any number of ways, including being stationed around the body of a sick individual. . . . Finally, the base of a pillar figurine might be wielded by hand during a ritual.<sup>122</sup>

While Darby does not address the concept of agency, her discussion of purity/impurity reflects the same conceptual frameworks with different terminology. JPFs represent humanmade objects intended to store and/or transmit unseen forces that could travel between, inhabit, and influence persons as well as inanimate objects. They could be called cultic objects to the degree we understand the term to refer to the employment or manipulation of unseen agency.

The model shrine may have been another means of presencing deity in ancient Southwest Asia. These shrines have been discovered in many locations in and around Israel and Judah, including Dan, Tel Rekhes, Tel Rehov, Tirzah, Megiddo, Jerusalem, Khirbet Qeiyafa, and elsewhere.<sup>123</sup> Temples were not as scarce in Iron Age Israel and Judah as previously thought, but the discovery of model shrines in a variety of context suggests there was a desire to localize or perhaps mobilize the access to the divine that temples were thought to facilitate. Following patterns found in surrounding cultures, they were usually modeled from clay (sometimes stone), had large openings often flanked by pillars, held doors at one time, and included space

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<sup>122</sup> Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 394. On a personal note, one night in 2017 while I was contemplating the apotropaic function of pillar figurines, my then-five-year-old daughter came to me and announced that she had arranged her dolls in a perimeter around her bed to protect her from monsters while she slept. Surely the intuitions undergirding these ancient practices live on.

<sup>123</sup> See Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 328–43; Amihai Mazar and Nava Panitz-Cohen, “To What God? Altars and a House Shine from Tel Rehov Puzzle Archaeologists,” *BAR* 34.4 (2008): 40–76; Yosef Garfinkel and Madeleine Mumcuoglu, “A Shrine Model from Tel Rekhes,” *SBA-IAS* 33 (2015): 77–87; Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov,” 36–38; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 146–55.

likely for the placement of a figurine or some representation of a deity, whether anthropomorphic or otherwise, iconic or otherwise. This is supported by the discovery of a Middle Bronze IIB clay model shrine in Ashkelon that housed a bronze calf figurine covered in silver plating, as well as by carved ivory representations of receding frames around a woman's face (either royalty or a deity).<sup>124</sup> The temple space may have been a means of more fully facilitating access to divine agency, it may have allowed the image to be carried in processions throughout the community, or it may have “democratized” access to temple worship.<sup>125</sup> The use of clay and stone may reflect the perception that both substances are efficient or effective means of channeling unseen agency.

The Taanach cult stand, dated to the tenth century BCE, likely overlapped in function with model shrines, although it is not prototypical of them.<sup>126</sup> The terracotta stand features four vertically arranged friezes that, beginning from the bottom, depict (1) a nude female with outstretched arms touching the ears of lions on each side of her (the depictions of the flanking animals continue along the sides of the stand); (2) sphynx figures on each side of an empty space; (3) a stylized tree with feeding caprids flanked by lions; and (4) a horse below a sun disk, flanked by outward facing volutes.<sup>127</sup> Above the top register are a row of clay circles likely representing roof beams. The four registers may vertically arrange the rooms of the

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<sup>124</sup> Lawrence E. Stager, “The Canaanite Silver Calf,” in *Ashkelon I*, ed. Lawrence E. Stager et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008): 577–80; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 152.

<sup>125</sup> Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel suggest the ark of the covenant may have functioned as a model shrine (Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel, *In the Footsteps of King David*, 155).

<sup>126</sup> Paul W. Lapp, “The 1968 Excavations at Tell Ta’anek,” *BASOR* 195 (1969): 2–49; Ruth Hestrin, “The Cult Stand from Ta’anach and Its Religious Background,” *Studia Phoenicia V: Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean in the First Millennium B.C.*, ed. E. Lipiński (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 61–77; Pirhiya Beck, “The Cult Stands from Taanach: Aspects of the Iconographic Tradition of Early Iron Age Cult Objects in Palestine,” in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na’aman (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994), 352–81; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 154–60; Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169–79; Brian R. Doak, *Phoenician Aiconism in Its Mediterranean and Ancient Near Eastern Contexts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 129–32.

<sup>127</sup> There has been some debate about these representations, and particularly regarding the animal in the upper register. Early interpreters understood it as a bull, perhaps as a result of the interpretation of the stand as Yahwistic in orientation. On the protective role of the naked female and her attendant animals on cult stands, see Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 330–38.

shrine, rather than depict concentric entryways (“recessed doorframes”) surrounding the image in the inner sanctuary, as in other model shrines.<sup>128</sup> If this is the case, the empty space between the sphynx figures may represent the entrance to the shrine (rather than aniconically signaling YHWH’s presence between הכרובים, “the cherubim”).

Brian R. Doak contends that several observations support interpreting the stand as entirely devoted to a goddess.<sup>129</sup> First, the clearest indications of the stand’s referent are the bottom and third friezes, which depict a goddess anthropomorphically and as a tree. The other two friezes have the empty space—perhaps representing the entryway—and the equid underneath the sun disc. Next, the equid is used predominantly to represent Anat and Astarte, as noted by Keel and Uehlinger.<sup>130</sup> They also note that Early Iron Age terracotta figures predominantly represent female agents.<sup>131</sup> The multiple manifestations of the goddess may have been intended to increase the accessibility or potency of her agency. Model shrines were generally too elaborate for widespread private use, but local cult installations carrying them could increase access to the agency of the (primarily female) deities they indexed for those living nearby.

In connection with female deities, we must consider that most vilified of cultic objects from

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<sup>128</sup> See Yosef Garfinkel and Madeleine Mumcuoglu, “Triglyphs and Recessed Doorframes on a Building Model from Khirbet Qeiyafa: New Light on Two Technical Terms in the Biblical Descriptions of Solomon’s Palace and Temple,” *IEJ* 63.2 (2013): 135–63.

<sup>129</sup> Doak, *Phoenician Aniconism in Its Mediterranean and Ancient Near Eastern Contexts*, 129.

<sup>130</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 160. “It is much more likely that the striding horse is to be interpreted, in light of the Late Bronze and early Iron Age iconographic tradition . . . as an attribute animal of Anat-Astarte” (p. 160). See also p. 141: “We encounter the *war horse* in the Late Bronze Age as an attribute animal upon which the warrior goddess Anat stands. . . . The horse appears as the animal on which the goddess rides on Iron Age IIA seal amulets. . . . But consistent with the tendency to avoid using anthropomorphic images, the attribute animal replaces the goddess altogether.” On the relationship of Astarte and Asherah, see Stéphanie Anthonioz, “Astarte in the Bible and her Relation to Asherah,” in *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar – Astarte – Aphrodite*, ed. David T. Sugimoto (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 125–39.

<sup>131</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 160. Erin Darby also notes that “almost every cult stand combines female figurines with zoomorphic images” (Darby, *Reinterpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 333). The 57 clay figurines and zoomorphic vessels discovered at Tel Rehov further support this observation. Almost half of the figures were anthropomorphic, and almost all were female. 10 of the 29 zoomorphic figurines and vessels depicted equids. See Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov,” 38–39.

the Hebrew Bible, the *'asherah*.<sup>132</sup> The Hebrew term occurs 40 times in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes in reference to the deity (1 Kgs 18:19), and sometimes in reference to a cultic object (2 Kgs 13:6; 17:10, 16). Keel and Uehlinger have argued that worship of Asherah was waning by the Iron Age,<sup>133</sup> which has led many scholars to prefer understanding most uses of *'asherah* from Iron Age Israel and Judah to refer to the cultic object. The use of the roots  $\sqrt{\text{עמל}}$  and  $\sqrt{\text{נצב}}$  (both roughly meaning “to stand”) in connection with the installation of the cultic object suggests it was something erected (similar to JPFs and stelai), and the use of the roots  $\sqrt{\text{כרת}}$  (“to cut”) and  $\sqrt{\text{שרף}}$  (“to burn”) in connection with their destruction (2 Kgs 18:4; 23:4) suggests the *'asherah* was made of wood. A number of Israelite and Phoenician seals depicting sacred trees—in isolation or flanked by hybrid or other creatures, as in the Taanach cult stand and the illustration on Pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud<sup>134</sup>—have been marshalled as evidence the *'asherah* was a special tree or wooden pole of some kind.<sup>135</sup>

Judahite inscriptions dating to the eighth century BCE from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm attribute blessings *lyhwh*, “to YHWH,” and *l'srth*, “to Asherah”:<sup>136</sup>

## Khirbet el-Qôm

1. <i>'ryhw . h 'sr . ktbh</i>	Uriyahu the notable has written it
2. <i>brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh</i>	Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH,
3. <i>wmsryh . l'srth . hwš 'lh</i>	Now from his enemies, by Asherah, deliver him
4. (hand) <i>l'nyhw</i>	(hand) by Oniyahu
5. <i>wl'srth</i>	. . . and by Asherah

<sup>132</sup> See Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 44–49; Thomas, “The Meaning of *asherah* in Hebrew Inscriptions,” 157–218.

<sup>133</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 229. Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Ze'ev Meshel note “Asherah’s name had even vanished in Phoenicia in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. It is not mentioned in the whole corpus of Phoenician inscriptions, not even as a theophoric element in personal names” (Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Ze'ev Meshel, “The Inscriptions,” in *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*, ed. Ze'ev Meshel [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012], 131).

<sup>134</sup> See Pirhiya Beck, “The Drawings and Decorative Designs,” in Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, 143–56.

<sup>135</sup> See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 233–36; cf. Ruth Hestrin, “The Lachish Ewer and the 'Asherah,” *IEJ* 37.4 (1987): 212–23.

<sup>136</sup> On the dating of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions to the early eighth century BCE, see Israel Finkelstein and Eli Piasezky, “The Date of Kuntillet 'Ajrud: The <sup>14</sup>C Perspective,” *TA* 35 (2008): 175–85; Israel Carmi and Dror Segal, “<sup>14</sup>C Dates from Kuntillet 'Ajrud,” in Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*, 61–62; but cf. Lily Singer-Avitz, “The Date of Kuntillet 'Ajrud: A Rejoinder,” *TA* 36 (2009): 110–19, who dates the main phase to the end of the eighth century BCE.



6. *wl'šrth* [. . . and by Ash]erah . . .

Kuntillet 'Ajrud, Inscription 3.6

5. *brktk.ly*

6. *hwh tmn*

7. *wl'šrth.yb*

8. *rk wyšmrk*

I have blessed you by Y-

HWH of Teman

and by Asherah. May he bl-<sup>137</sup>

ess you and protect you

Kuntillet 'Ajrud, Inscription 3.9

1. . . .] *lyhwh . htmn wl'šrth.* . . .] by YHWH of Teman and by Asherah.

It has become quite common to see the final *he* of *'šrth* interpreted as the third masculine singular pronominal suffix “his.” Because that pronoun cannot appear attached to personal names, the argument goes, the term must be understood to refer to a cultic object.<sup>138</sup> The interpretation that predominated through the end of the twentieth century CE held that the sacred tree would have lost associations with the inactive goddess and would have been appropriated as a Yahwistic cult symbol. The inscriptions would then represent extra-biblical witnesses to the cultic objects decried in the Hebrew Bible. This would be an attractive example of a cult object channeling divine agency, but the situation is not so cut and dry. As Richard Hess has demonstrated, the epigraphic corpus consistently shows final *he* for the spelling for the goddess’ name.<sup>139</sup> The Hebrew Bible’s spelling without final *he* is absent from the inscriptions, suggesting it may not be as simple as a pronoun.

A more helpful explanation is that of Josef Tropper, who published research in 2001 that sought to reconstruct the development of the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, through Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period onomastic data. He notes that the name

<sup>137</sup> The verb here is singular, which is a datum that is sometimes marshalled in support of the interpretation of *'šrth* as a cultic object, but it may indicate nothing other than YHWH’s priority. Asherah may still be understood as a vehicle for YHWH’s agency without being rendered a cultic object.

<sup>138</sup> For instance, J. A. Emerton, “‘Yahweh and His Asherah’: The Goddess or Her Symbol?” *VT* 49.3 (1999): 315–37; Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 44–49; Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel, “The Inscriptions,” 130–32. Cf. Peter Stein, “Gottesname und Genitivattribut?” *ZAW* 131.1 (2019): 1–27.

<sup>139</sup> Richard Hess, “Asherah or Asherata?” *Orientalia* 65.3 (1996): 209–19. See also Ryan Thomas, “The Meaning of *asherah* in Hebrew Inscriptions,” *Semitica* 59 (2017): 157–218.

consistently ends in *-a* when it occurs in the final position of a name, but with *-ú* when occurring medially. This final *-a* he ultimately interprets as an absolutive case ending that was indicated in Hebrew with *he* as a *mater lectionis*. This accounts for the biblical YHWH, and when this case ending is applied to *'šrh*, the final *he* converts to *taw*, resulting in *'šrth*.<sup>140</sup> If Tropper's reconstruction is accurate, all three inscriptions would refer to the goddess, whose worship was retained at least into the eighth century BCE in Judah.

### *Implications*

This brief interrogation of some of the means of materially facilitating encounters with deity demonstrates that, consistent with the discussions above, Iron Age Israelites and Judahites understood unseen agents like deities to potentially pervade the material world around them via the loci of their agency, identity, cognition, and so on. Reflection on that pervasiveness could have helped account for their ability to covertly monitor. While reflective rationalizations of the nature and function of this agency were more common in the larger and more complex nations surrounding Israel and Judah, they were not necessary for the underlying conceptual frameworks to be operative. The sharing of a ritual meal with *stelai*, and other social interactions with the object, whether they were commissioned with complex rituals, a simple anointing, or without any ritual at all, would have facilitated the perception of presencing the divine for the majority of sympathetic participants. While this section has focused on the most

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<sup>140</sup> Josef Tropper, “Der Gottesname *\*Jahwa*,” *VT* (2001): 81–106. The paper was recently translated into English and published as Josef Tropper, “The Divine Name *\*Yahwa*,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017], 1–21. The argument proceeds as follows: when the divine name appeared as the first component of a name, it is written *ia-a-ḥu-ú*, while it is written as *ia-a-ma* when the theophoric element occurs at the end (the sign MA is not at issue—Tropper points out that it is unproblematic to assign the phonetic value *wa6*). The *-a* ending indicates the absolutive case, representing */ya(h)wa/*, while the non-final syllabic form *ia-a-ḥu-ú* would represent the unexpanded */yāhû/*, derived from *\*yahw*. He suggests the “Judean” theophoric element *yhw* (later *yh*) and the “Israelite” theophoric element *yw* would both derive from */yāhû/* through the loss of the final vowel (*/yāhû/ > /yāh/*) and the diminution of */h/* (*/yāhû/ > /yaw/*), respectively. This would undermine the derivation of YHWH from the root  $\sqrt{hwy}$ , and while Tropper leaves the etymological question open, he concludes the basic form was *\*yahw*, with the expanded absolutive form *\*yahwa*. The latter's short case vowel */a/* was subsequently preserved through *plene* spelling with *h*, resulting in the consonantal *yhw*.

explicit manifestations known from the worlds of Iron Age Israel and Judah of the notion of divine presencing, any degree of the deity's agency could potentially be facilitated through appropriate media, from a portion of its power or authority all the way up to the very loci of the deity's identity itself.

The perception of clay/terracotta as particularly effective conduits for divine agency helps explain the ubiquity of divine images crafted from the material during the early first millennium BCE. The abandonment of metal and other costlier materials and complex processes around the tenth century BCE was likely the result of market forces, which would have increased the salience of clay as a medium for the production of divine images, as well as the perception of its suitability and effectiveness. The decreased threat of theft could also have contributed to this perception. JPFs show more signs of having been conceptualized as channeling divine agency than model shrines and cult stands, but the presence of the latter in cultic installations strongly indicates divine presencing, and if they did mobilize the deity for processions, that case is even stronger. This will have more relevance in the discussion of the ark of the covenant in chapter 7, but now I move on to the development of the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in Iron Age Israel and Judah.

### Deity and Divine Agency in Iron Age Israel and Judah

This section will propose a reconstruction of the development of concepts of deity and divine agency in Iron Age Israel and Judah. In it, I will address the role of El as patron in premonarchical Israel, the transition to YHWH as patron in monarchical Israel, and the deity as social monitor. In light of the overlap in terminology, treatment, and roles related to deities and the deceased in the material remains, it is tempting to try to trace the diverging conceptualizations back to their shared socio-material ancestors, but those processes of divergence and elaboration took place millennia before the coalescence of a social entity

calling itself Israel. Nonetheless, understanding the origins of deity concepts clarifies the nature and function of divine agency in these later periods, and some observations regarding the rhetorical utilization of the framework of kinship in relation to deity in the interest of structuring power hierarchies will still be made throughout the discussion. I begin in this introduction, however, with a brief overview of the social circumstances that contributed to the emergence of Israel and likely influenced the way deity concepts were employed in the polity's infancy.

The sociocultural milieu out of which Israel initially emerged is generally thought to be the product of local societies jostling for power and influence in the thirteenth century BCE in response to Egypt's shifting hegemonic grip. There had been mutual cultural influence back and forth between the two regions for several centuries prior, and this sociocultural continuum would extend down into the first millennium BCE, so Israel's earliest conceptualizations of and interactions with deity were entangled with those of that continuum.<sup>141</sup> When the convergence of different factors in the twelfth century BCE contributed to the collapse of imperial rule in the area and the destruction of some prominent local cities,<sup>142</sup> some of those that remained rushed to consolidate and expand into the resulting power vacuum.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 17: "One can justify beginning our survey at this point, when the urban culture in Palestine begins to flourish, because from this point on we can deal with a cultural continuum in Palestine that extends all the way to the time of the emergence of the Hebrew Bible. It is true that there will be a major gap once again when the Egyptians colonized Palestine during the time of the Egyptian New Kingdom that lasted from 1550 and 1150. But the effect is considerably minimized because both the Canaanite and the Egyptian cultures had begun to exert considerable influence *on each other* already during the Middle Bronze Age. It is also likely that the same ethnic groups continued to maintain their cultural system from the Middle Bronze Age right into the Iron Age" (emphasis in original). On the influence of Egypt, which is most relevant to the development of Israel, see, among many others, Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 49–108; Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100 B.C.E.* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 21–92; Daphna Ben-Tor, "Egyptian-Canaanite Relations in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages as Reflected by Scarabs," in *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature: Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Haifa, 3–7 May 2009*, ed. Shay Bar, Dan'el Kahn, and J. J. Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23–43; Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 13–61; Emanuel Pfoh, *Syria-Palestine in the Late Bronze Age: An Anthropology of Politics and Power* (London: Routledge, 2016), 19–29.

<sup>142</sup> Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>143</sup> As Israel Finkelstein once put it, "the peasants of Canaan continued their age-old routine only a few miles away from the ruined cities" (Israel Finkelstein, "City-States to States: Polity Dynamics in the 10th–9th Centuries B.C.E.," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from*

The territorial polities that emerged from the periods of urbanization that extended down to the ninth century BCE likely constituted an amalgamation of local communities controlled by elite “strongmen” supplementing local sociocultural patterns of behavior with the trappings of empire.<sup>144</sup> The imperial façade provided by those trappings was concentrated at border sites, suggesting it was largely an attempt to outwardly signal strength and legitimization, likely against outside challengers. The largest cities occupied during this period were dominated by public buildings and spaces, with only limited space for domestic habitation. While elite groups at population centers were attempting to project power and legitimacy, the majority of inhabitants remained in rural settlements perpetuating the same socio-material conventions they had inherited from their predecessors, including those associated with deity as well as with the deceased.<sup>145</sup> Whatever innovations related to concepts of deity and socio-material interactions with them that came out of the process of the coalescence of these polities—which included Philistia, Israel, Moab, and others—were most likely directed at advancing the interests of the elite classes looking to consolidate and structure territorial power.

### *Deity and Prosociality in Iron Age Israel and Judah*

#### El Contends

The name “Israel,” meaning “El contends,” is found as the personal name *Iš-ra-ilu* at Ebla

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*the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003], 75–83).

<sup>144</sup> Alexander H. Joffe, “The Rise of Secondary State in the Iron Age Levant,” *JESHO* 45.4 (2002): 425–67. Joffe describes the nature of these “secondary states” in the following way: “polities emerged by interacting with more developed neighbors but employed new methods of integration based on collective identity which combined elite and local concepts” (p. 425). William G. Dever distinguishes the phenomenally rare “pristine states” that arose independently (Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley Civilization, the Han Dynasty, the Maya-Aztec, and the Inca), from “secondary states,” which “are usually imposed by force on neighboring peoples” (William G. Dever, “Archaeology, Urbanism, and the Rise of the Israelite State,” in Aufrecht, Mirau, and Gauley, *Urbanism in Antiquity*, 173). See also Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

<sup>145</sup> “Social organization and local religious ideology appear unchanged, with kin networks, and household cult and small open-air shrines directed at the same Canaanite deities as before. . . . In a sense the 10th century state was a fragile and perishable Potemkin Village, with a royal establishment that was not especially powerful” (Joffe, “The Rise of Secondary State in the Iron Age Levant,” 445).

from around 2500 BCE, and as *yšr'il* at Ugarit from around the thirteenth century BCE (KTU 4.623.3).<sup>146</sup> The name follows a standard *yaqtul*-DN pattern, which is common in personal names but, as Seth Sanders has recently observed, is rare as the name of a social group.<sup>147</sup> The designation most likely referred originally to an individual whose name was later extended over a polity of some kind. The polity's adoption of this name suggests that its patron deity (or at least its most authoritative or prominent outward-facing deity) was El, the well-known high deity over the West Semitic pantheon.<sup>148</sup> "Israel" is first attested in reference to a polity in the late-thirteenth century BCE Merenptah Stele (discovered in Thebes), which refers to *ysryšr* and marks the name with the determinative for a people.<sup>149</sup> While this determinative has long been understood to indicate Israel was seen as an ethnic group, this is unlikely in light of the fact that the features of material culture commonly understood as markers of Israelite *ethnicity* do not seem to have functioned as such until well after Merenptah's reference. The avoidance of pork, for instance, seems to have been a *de facto* practice for several groups around the time of

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<sup>146</sup> A complication that will be addressed further below is the fact that El functions both as a DN and as a generic noun meaning "deity." It is not always clear which sense is intended.

<sup>147</sup> Sanders, "When the Personal Became Political," 74–75. He states, "This suggests that there was a distinctive, though not unique, connection between personal names and political units already at work in the name Israel in the Late Bronze Age" (p. 75). As a personal name, *Iš-ra-ilu* is found at Ebla from around 2500 BCE, and *yšr'il* is found at Ugarit (KTU 4.623.3) from around the thirteenth century BCE (Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, ca. 1300–1185 B.C.* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 195).

<sup>148</sup> See Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1955); Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 65–96; Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 41–66, 135–48; Adrian H. W. Curtis, "Encounters with El," in *"He unfurrowed his brow and laughed": Essays in Honour of Professor Nicolas Wyatt*, ed. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 59–72. According to Genesis 33:20, Jacob erected an altar in Shechem and gave it the name *אל אלהי ישראל*, "El, the Deity of Israel." This text constitutes the only explicit reference to El as "the God of Israel." (In the interest of consistency, I will use traditional transliterations of divine names from broader ancient Southwest Asian cultures, such as El, Baal, and Asherah.)

<sup>149</sup> Hasel, *Domination and Resistance*, 194–200; Anson F. Rainey, "Israel in Merenptah's Inscription and Reliefs," *IEJ* 51.1 (2001): 57–75; William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 201–08; Michael G. Hasel, "Merenptah's Reference to Israel: Critical Issues for the Origin of Israel," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 47–59; Meindert Dijkstra, "Origins of Israel Between History and Ideology," in *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Old Testamentisch Werkgezelschap Lincoln, July 2009*, ed. Bob Becking and Lester L. Grabbe (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 47–56; William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 191–94; cf. Peter van der Veen, Christoffer Theis, and Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (Long) before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687," *JAET* 2.4 (2010): 15–25.

Merenptah, but did not become “totemic” for Israel until several centuries later.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, the four-room house begins appearing in the late thirteenth century and early twelfth century BCE, but does not become uniform and predominant in settings understood as Israelite until the eleventh century BCE at the earliest.<sup>151</sup>

A better model for understanding the Merenptah Stele’s determinative comes from more recent theories of Israelite ethnogenesis that see Israel initially developing as a coalition or federation of both sedentary and non-sedentary groups engaged in large-scale renegotiations of land and relationships.<sup>152</sup> Brendon C. Benz’s 2016 book, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, employs such a theory in describing thirteenth century BCE Israel as a “multiplicity decentralized land,” drawing this framework from the sociopolitical structures reflected in the Amarna correspondences.<sup>153</sup> According to Benz, this model fits some depictions of Israel in

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<sup>150</sup> Lidar Sapir-Hen et al., “Pig Husbandry in Iron Age Israel and Judah: New Insights Regarding the Origin of the ‘Taboo,’” *ZDP-V* 129 (2013): 1–20; Lidar Sapir-Hen, “Pigs as an Ethnic Marker? You Are What You Eat,” *BAR* 42.6 (2016): 41–43, 70; Liora Kolska Horwitz et al., “A Contribution to the Iron Age Philistine Pig Debate,” in *The Wide Lens in Archaeology: Honoring Brian Hesse’s Contributions to Anthropological Archaeology*, ed. Justin Lev-Tov, Paula Hesse, and Allan Gilbert (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2017), 93–116.

<sup>151</sup> Avraham Faust, *Israel’s Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Equinox, 2006), 35–40, 82–84; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel’s History,” *JBL* 122.3 [2003]: 401–25. Whether or not these patterns actually delineate ethnicity in any way is a separate question entirely. As should be clear by now, attempts to use necessary and sufficient features to delineate socially constructed categories are monumentally problematic. William G. Dever recognizes that the determinative makes reference to “a socioeconomic group who are not centrally organized,” and “loosely affiliated peoples,” but he nonetheless, and rather arbitrarily, appositively designates them an “ethnic group” (Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, 191–92), asserting later, “Merenptah’s Israelites must have been recognized as an ethnic group by circa 1230 at the latest” (p. 204).

<sup>152</sup> Ann E. Killebrew, for instance, calls early Israel a “mixed multitude,” stating, “the disintegration of the Bronze Age empires during the thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C.E. triggered wide-scale cultural, political, and social fragmentation in the Levant, resulting in the assertion of local identities and the establishment of new social boundaries” (Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, 149). William G. Dever calls his model “agrarian reform,” and refers to a “motley crew” of dissident groups consolidating into a “proto-Israelite” ethnic group (Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, 222–33). For related models, see Eveline J. van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories in Transition: The Central East Jordan Valley in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages: A Study of Sources* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na’aman, “Shechem of the Amarna Period and the Rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel,” *IEJ* 55 (2005): 172–93; Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>153</sup> Brendon C. Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel: A History of the Southern Levant the People Who Populated It* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 81–82, 95–110, 366–400. An example of such a collective is the Amorite kingdom of Amurru, “which consisted of the residents of such cities as Irgata, Ammiya, and Šumur, as well as a large contingent of ‘*apirū* and *Suti*’” (Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 344). Benz leans frequently on a similar model articulated by Fleming, but the latter finds a different precedent in “the peoples of the Binu Yamina confederation as found in the early second-millennium archives from Mari. These groups considered themselves to be ruled by kings, the accepted leadership title for standing as a full-fledged polity, yet their actual populations straddled more than one large kingdom” (Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in*

## CHAPTER 3 – Deity and Divine Agency

Judges and 1 Samuel that preserve fragmentary but accurate memories of premonarchic Israel as “a political coalition consisting of various populations and polities that preserved their individual identities and sociopolitical structures.”<sup>154</sup> The collective would have been marshalled primarily in response to military needs, whether protective or expansionist.<sup>155</sup> Earliest Israel was thus not a state or an ethnic group, but a “*political* entity that was made up of a variety of populations who maintained their own variegated identities and local political structures.”<sup>156</sup> The “people” determinative thus likely reflected Israel’s nature as a confederation (or collective), not an ethnicity or a state.

The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) may reflect memories of such social circumstances. Widely considered among the oldest—if not the oldest—literature in the Hebrew Bible, the poem tells of a battle in the Jezreel Valley between Canaanite forces (led by a general named Sisera) and a handful of social groups traditionally identified with the tribes of Israel.<sup>157</sup> Six of these groups are praised in verses 14–15a and 18 for answering the call to battle: Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (Manasseh?),<sup>158</sup> Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali, while verses 15b–17 scold Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher for neglecting the call.<sup>159</sup> Interestingly, verse 14 seems to

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*Judah’s Bible*, 22). A related model is constructed in Finkelstein and Na’aman, “Shechem of the Amarna Period and the Rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel,” 172–93; cf. Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 13–36.

<sup>154</sup> Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 367.

<sup>155</sup> In discussing the Song of Deborah’s early origins in the premonarchic or early monarchic period, Ronald Hendel and Jan Joosten describe its reflection of the socio-political makeup of Israel as follows: “In sum, far from a political-cultic unity, Israel is a diffuse network of autonomous tribes who may or may not join together for common interests against a common enemy” (Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 104).

<sup>156</sup> Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 363 (emphasis in original). Theories like this one reach back into the twentieth century. See, for instance, J. David Schloen, “Caravans, Kenites, and *Casus belli*: Enmity and Alliance in the Song of Deborah,” *CBQ* 55.1 (1993): 37–38: “The highland population that became Israel was probably a mixture of indigenous hill country inhabitants, lowland peasant farmers from the west, and pastoralists from the south and east. Rather than attempting to tease these groups apart with the blunt instrument of archaeology, it is better to ask how these disparate groups worked out a *modus vivendi*.”

<sup>157</sup> As Mark Smith highlights, the word for “tribe” is nowhere used in the poem (Mark S. Smith, “What is Prologue is Past: Composing Israelite Identity in Judges 5,” in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, ed. John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 50).

<sup>158</sup> Lawrence E. Stager, “The Song of Deborah—Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not,” *BAR* 15.1 (1989): 53.

<sup>159</sup> Verses 6–11 are commonly read to indicate that coastal groups were attacking caravans or disrupting trade routes through the highlands, which could have drawn a more committed response from the groups immediately affected than from those on the periphery or outside of the highlands (thus Gilead was in the trans-Jordan, Dan was with the ships, and Asher was on the coasts). Reuben staying among the sheepfolds is unclear, but the groups



reference Amalekite roots among Ephraim, which may link this northern society with groups from much further south.<sup>160</sup> Verse 23 curses the otherwise unknown Meroz for failing to come to YHWH's aid. The southern groups of Judah and Simeon are not even mentioned, which many have interpreted as an indication the list preserves a memory of the northern hill country's nascent collective identity before the rise of Judah.<sup>161</sup>

Verses 2–13 introduce the core of the poem in a way that suggests the groups are constituents of both Israel and the עם יהוה, “people of YHWH,” which rhetorically frames the failure to join battle as a violation of both their Israelite identity and their commitment to YHWH. This could signal YHWH's early role as a facilitator of social cohesion, but there are indications this framing is redactional in origin. For instance, verse 23's cursing of Meroz is uncharacteristically harsh compared to the mild finger-wagging of verses 16 and 17. Verse 23 is likely a secondary frame, along with verse 31, around the Jael narrative, which itself is incongruent with the poem's core in light of the description of Sisera already being swept away in the torrent (vv. 20–21). Outside of verses 23 and 31, the name “YHWH” is entirely confined to verses 2–13, and occurrences of “Israel” are confined to verses 2–11.<sup>162</sup> It is unclear if the poem's lengthy introduction ends with verse 11, 12, or 13,<sup>163</sup> but whatever the case, the communal lists themselves offer no clues regarding the social structures tying them together. The only divine power mentioned between verses 14 and 22 is הכוכבים, “the stars,” which in verse 20 fought in their courses.<sup>164</sup> If verses 14–22 date to the mid-tenth century BCE or earlier,

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that join the battle are generally described as coming down from the highlands (e.g., Ephraim, Benjamin, and Machir). See Lawrence E. Stager, “Archaeology, Ecology, and Social History: Background Themes to the Song of Deborah,” in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 221–34.

<sup>160</sup> See, for instance, Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 145.

<sup>161</sup> Few take seriously Johannes C. De Moor's attempt to read all twelve tribes into the poem (Johannes C. De Moor, “The Twelve Tribes in the Song of Deborah,” *VT* 43.3 [1993]: 483–94).

<sup>162</sup> See below for YHWH's accession within Israel in the late tenth or early ninth centuries BCE.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Smith describes a “double introduction in vv. 2–9 and 10–13” (Smith, “What is Prologue is Past,” 43–44). Israel Finkelstein suggests the “original North Israelite Song of Deborah” included verses 2a, 3a, 6–8, 9a, 10 and 12 (Israel Finkelstein, “Compositional Phases, Geography and Historical Setting behind Judges 4–5 and the Location of Harosheth-ha-goiim,” *SJOT* 31.3 [2017]: 31).

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 316–23; Ida Zatelli, “Astrology and the Worship of the Stars in the Bible,” *ZAW* 103.1 (1991): 86–99; Sang Youl Cho, *Lesser Deities*

YHWH was likely not a factor, and the introduction is later. It is possible they predate the collective Israelite identity, but they may also have been composed by someone unconvinced of the salience of that identity.<sup>165</sup> Either way, they witness to early concern for the integrity of a loose confederation of social groups with varying interests that were later consolidated within the nation of Israel.<sup>166</sup>

The choice of El as patron over the Israelite collective may have been intended to motivate social cohesion among groups with few other incentives outside of shared defense. The member polities no doubt acknowledged and interacted with ancestral, personal, and other international deities, but the high deity was unlikely to have been the tutelary deity of any constituent member, meaning El's patronage would not have afforded any member of the collective special access to the deity. Benz interprets the apparent lack of an administrative center or a centralized cultic location in the relevant biblical passages as an indication the collective was also avoiding a centralized hierarchy in its early years precisely to mitigate the potential for infighting and disintegration. By not exalting one member of the collective and their shrine over the others, "Israel significantly reduced the risk of the officiants at these locations institutionalizing their authority and monopolizing access to the divine patron of the collective."<sup>167</sup> Instead, the collective mustered at different locations and called upon the patron deity at different cultic installations. These installations may have been dedicated to the

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*in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study of Their Nature and Roles* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 16–18; Jeffrey L. Cooley, "Astral Religion in Ugarit and Ancient Israel," *JNES* 70.2 (2011): 281–87; Francesca Rochberg, "The Heavens and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia: The View from a Polytheistic Cosmology," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, 117–36; Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," 137–87. Cf. Judith M. Hadley, "The Deification of Deities in Deuteronomy," in *The God of Israel*, ed. Robert P. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172.

<sup>165</sup> Several analyses identify some of the most archaic features of Biblical Hebrew across all three textual divisions. See, for instance, Rendsburg, "Northern Hebrew through Time," 343; Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew*, 71–72; Notarius, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Poetry*, 125–50; Hendel and Joosten, *How Old is the Hebrew Bible*, 101–04. Some scholars have argued for thirteenth century BCE dates for the core of the poem, and redactional phases as early as the tenth century.

<sup>166</sup> Although the inclusion of all of these groups in Israel could be a literary fiction retrojected into the nation's past and unwittingly perpetuated by later generations.

<sup>167</sup> Benz, *The Land before the Kingdom of Israel*, 396.

localized presence of the deity, as we see in the later Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions mentioning YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman.<sup>168</sup> Successes in battle would have strengthened the social bonds of the group and influenced the perception of the patron deity’s access to strategic information, increasing the salience of the member polities’ subordination to and reliance on the patron deity. This egalitarianism may also have complicated the centralization of authority, however, which could explain YHWH’s accession over the polity, which will be discussed shortly.

The most dynamic representations of El from the period of Israel’s initial constitution come from the Ugaritic literature, where El was the divine progenitor, alongside Athirat, the *qnyt ’ilm* (“Creatress of the Deities”), of a pantheon of their offspring.<sup>169</sup> In KTU 1.10.iii.5–6, Baal states, *k qnyn ’l[m ] // k drd[r] d yknn[ ]*, “Indeed, our progenitor is eter[nal] // Indeed, agele[ss] is our creator[ ].”<sup>170</sup> Elsewhere, in relation to Baal, El is described as *tr ’il abh / ’il mlk d yknnh*, “Bull El, his father / King El, who created him” (KTU 1.3.v.35–36). The title *tr*, “bull,” seems to have more to do with fecundity than ferocity. KTU 1.4.iv:39, for instance, reads, *hm yd ’il mlk yhssk / ’ahbt tr t’rrk*, “Does the hand of El the king reawaken you? / The love of the bull

<sup>168</sup> These “localized” deities are known from all around Southwest Asia.

<sup>169</sup> See Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 58–61. Lowell K. Handy prefers to frame the pantheon using the concept of bureaucracy (Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*). On Athirat as creatress, see KTU 1.4.i:22; iii:26, 30, 35; iv:32; 1.8.ii:2 and Aicha Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, trans. J. N. Ford (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 275–77. The pantheon in Ugarit was called the *bn ’il*, “children of El,” the *mphrt bn ’il*, “assembly of the children of El,” and the *dr bn ’il*, “circle of the children of El” (KTU 1.40:41–42).

<sup>170</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 15. El was frequently depicted as a wise, bearded, enthroned figure. In KTU 1.4.V:3–4, El’s consort, Athirat (*qnyt ’ilm*, “Creatress of the Deities,” in KTU 1.4.I:22; III:26, 30, 35; IV:32; 1.8.II:2) proclaims, *rbt ’ilm lhkmt šbt dqnk ltsrk*, “You are great, O El! The greyness of your beard does indeed make you wise” (For this translation, see N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit. Second Edition* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 101). This imagery is attested in multiple iconographic representations in which they are wearing a headdress for deity descended stylistically from the Egyptian *šf* (or *atef*) crown. This crown—and particularly the style featuring horns—would become closely associated with specific deities (and frequently goddesses) in ancient Southwest Asia, and particularly among the Ammonites. Canonical crowns also appear as a feature of the iconography of deity. Cf. P. M. M. Daviau and Paul E. Dion, “El, the God of the Ammonites? The Atef-crowned Head from Tell Jawa, Jordan,” *ZDP-V* 110 (1994): 28–34; Bugosław Dąbrowski, “Terracotta Head in ‘Atef-Crown from Tell Jawa (South), Transjordan,” *SAAC* 7 (1995): 43–50; Uehlinger, “Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh’s Cult Images,” 121; Izak Cornelius, “The Headgear and Hairstyles of Pre-Persian Palestinian Female Plaque Figurines,” in Bickel et al., *Bilder als Quellen, Images as Sources*, 247–49.

arouse you?”<sup>171</sup> El is also referred to as a bull in connection with their parentage of humanity, as in KTU 1.14.i:41: *mlk[.] tr 'abh y'arš / hm drk[t] k 'ab 'adm*, “Does he [Kirta] desire the kingship of the bull, his father, / or the authority of the father of mankind?”<sup>172</sup>

An association between the archaic notion of the ancestral אֵל אב, “deity of the father,” and bull imagery may be preserved in the early blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49:24–25, which also refers to the deity as the אבִיר יַעֲקֹב, “bull of Jacob.”<sup>173</sup> A more direct link to the Ugaritic imagery is preserved in Deuteronomy 32:6, which refers to YHWH (here conflated with El) as אבִיר קִנָּךְ אבִיר קִנָּךְ וְיִכְנֹנְךָ, “your father, who begot you, who made you and established you.”<sup>174</sup> Of particular interest here is קָנָה, which means something like “to acquire” or “to produce,” but appears to take on a specifically procreative nuance in certain contexts (e.g., Gen 4:1; Prov 8:22).<sup>175</sup> In Genesis 14:19–22, אֵל עֵלְיוֹן, “El Elyon,”<sup>176</sup> is linked with the title שְׂמִימֵי וְאֶרֶץ, “El Elyon,”

<sup>171</sup> “Hand” here is likely to be understood here as a euphemism for “penis.”

<sup>172</sup> For the translation, see Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, 320.

<sup>173</sup> For this interpretation, see Patrick D. Miller, “Animal names as designations in Ugaritic and Hebrew,” *UF* 2 (1970): 177–86; Meindert Dijkstra, “El, The God of Israel—Israel, the People of Yhwh: On the Origins of Ancient Israelite Yahwism,” in *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah*, ed. Bob Becking et al. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 107; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 38; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 147 and note 308; Jason S. Bray, *Sacred Dan: Religious Tradition and Cultic Practices in Judges 17–18* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 76–77; cf. Curtis, “Some Observations on ‘Bull’ Terminology in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Old Testament,” in *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature and Prophetism*, ed. A. S. van der Woude (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 17–31.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *The Early History of God*, 41. The conclusion that YHWH was initially distinct from the highest deity of the pantheon is supported not just by the explicit attempt to conflate the deity of the exodus with the deity of the patriarchal narrative in Exodus 6:3, but within Deuteronomy 32 itself. Verses 8–9 describe the Most High (Elyon) distributing the nations to the deities, with YHWH among them, receiving as their “inheritance” the nation of Israel (see below, pp. 291–92 and n. 57). Deuteronomy 32:7 introduces the statements in verses 8–9 as reported speech coming down from the elders. That reported speech was likely reinterpreted quite early in its reception history, but the early distinction between the two deities is preserved quite well in the text (although see the text-critical comments below on p. 253, n. 59).

<sup>175</sup> See Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*, 278–79; David Bokovoy, “Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh? A Grammatical and Contextual Reassessment of קָנָה in Genesis 4:1,” *VT* 63.1 (2013): 19–35; cf. Ryan Thomas, “אל־קָנָה אֶרֶץ: Creator, Begetter, or Owner of the Earth,” *UF* 48 (2018): 451–521. Johannes de Moor translated the phrase, “Is he not your Father, your progenitor; He your Maker who created you?” (Johannes de Moor, “El, the Creator,” in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. Gary Rendsburg et al. [New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980], 173). One might translate, “your father, who begot you,” which parallels the Akkadian *abi wa-li-di-ka*, “the father who begot you,” used several times in reference to divine as well as human fatherhood (RA 46.94.69; VAB 4.100.2.27; CT 34.36.3.70).

<sup>176</sup> The Semitic divine names *ʾl* and *ʾlyn* elsewhere designate distinct but associated deities. They are listed beside each other in the Aramaic Sefire inscription (J. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995], 42). In Philo of Byblos’ *Phoenician History*, Elioun is the grandfather of El, whose mother is “Earth” and father is “Heaven” (Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.10.14–30). Cf. G.

which occurs in several inscriptions from surrounding societies and could be interpreted as “Begetter of Heaven and Earth.”<sup>177</sup> Certainly any direct kinship ties would have reached far back into hoary antiquity, and likely would have only been attached to elite families, but a conceptualization of El as progenitor of humanity would have fit comfortably into early Israelite tradition, particularly given the importance attributed to divine aid in conception, childbirth, and rearing. The early (El) Shadday profile occurs frequently in contexts associated with precisely that aid.<sup>178</sup>

While the Merenptah Stele indicates that some manner of society called “Israel” existed at the end of the thirteenth century BCE, the events of the early twelfth century likely put a great deal of stress on that group’s coalitional ties. Archaeological data indicate a significant reduction in settlements in the northern hill country in the early tenth century BCE, as well, which scholars frequently associate with the military campaign of the Egyptian pharaoh Sheshonq. It is in the late tenth century BCE that settlements bearing signs of administrative oversight begin to proliferate again in the northern hill country. It is this period of growth and urbanization, characterized by superficial signals of strength and legitimization (as described above), that is most likely to be identified with the more secure establishment of Israel as a centralized state.

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Della Vida, “El ’Elyon in Genesis 14:18–20,” *JBL* 63.1 (1944): 1–9; Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 49–58; Norman C. Habel, “‘Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth’: A Study in Tradition Criticism,” *JBL* 91.3 (1972): 326–32.

<sup>177</sup> Elkunirša is mentioned in a thirteenth-century BCE Hittite myth (*CTH* 342; “Elkunirša and Ašertu,” trans. Gary Beckman [*COS* 1.55]), while an eighth-century BCE Phoenician inscription from Karatepe (known as the Azatiwada Inscription) mentions *’l qn ’rs* (*KAI* 26A.3.18; Aaron Schade, “A Text Linguistic Approach to the Syntax and Style of the Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada,” *JSS* 50.1 [2005]: 53–54). A Hebrew ostrakon from the eighth or seventh century BCE was discovered in 1971 that refers to [ *’qn ’rs* (Patrick D. Miller Jr, “El, The Creator of Earth,” *BASOR* 239 [1980]: 43–46; N. Avigad, “Excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, 1971 (Third Preliminary Report),” *IEJ* 22.4 [1972]: 195–96). See also William A. Irwin “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?” *JBL* 80.2 (1961): 133–42; John G. Gammie, “Loci of the Melchizedek Tradition of Genesis 14:18–20,” *JBL* 90.4 (1971): 386; Habel, “‘Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth,”” 326–32. The Tetragrammaton in verse 22 is a late interpolation. It is absent from early Septuagint manuscripts.

<sup>178</sup> See, for instance, Aren M. Wilson-Wright, “The Helpful God: A Reevaluation of the Etymology and Character of (‘ēl) šadday,” *VT* 69.1 (2019): 149–66.

The Rise of YHWH

By the ninth century BCE, Israel had coalesced into a nation and was capable of consolidating rule and developing a more robust framework of identity. It is during the Omride dynasty in the mid-ninth century BCE that the name Israel again appears in the epigraphic record.<sup>179</sup> An inscription from the Moabite king Mesha, dated to around 840 BCE, refers to Omri as the king of Israel (עמר/י מלך ישראל) and references his building activities extending into Moabite territory. The inscription also refers to Omri's son, Ahab (although not by name), during whose reign Mesha claims to have carted off the “vessels of YHWH” (כ[נ]/לי יהוה).<sup>180</sup> This reference suggests that at some point between the erection of the Merenptah Stele and that of Mesha, Israel's divine benefactor changed from El to YHWH. The following will posit an explanation for this change.

If the onomastic data from Israel and Judah are representative, this shift likely took place somewhere in the early ninth century, when Israel was growing in size and complexity, and Yahwistic theophoric elements were eclipsing El theophoric elements.<sup>181</sup> Other onomastic data may further contextualize this shift, but they are complicated by the fact that the personal name of the patriarchal deity, El, is also the generic word for “deity” in Northwest Semitic

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<sup>179</sup> The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, who ruled from 858–824 BCE, referred to Omri's son, Ahab, as *Sir'alāia*, “the Israelite,” in the Kurkh Inscriptions. See “Kurkh Monolith,” trans. K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 2.113A:263–64); K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Neo-Assyrian and Israelite History in the Ninth Century: The Role of Shalmaneser III,” in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, ed. H. G. M. Williamson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243–77.

<sup>180</sup> See “The Inscription of King Mesha,” trans. K. A. D. Smelik (*COS* 2.23:137–38); Andrew Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); André Lemaire, “The Mesha Stele and the Omri Dynasty,” in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 135–44.

<sup>181</sup> See Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 85, though Sanders does note the only two names with theophoric elements discovered at Tel Rehov were El names: *ʾlšd[q]* (“Elišedek”) and *ʾlyš'* (“Elisha”). See Shmuel Ahituv and Amihai Mazar, “The Inscriptions from Tel Rehov and their Contribution to the Study of Script and Writing during Iron Age IIA,” in “*See, I Will Bring a Scroll Recounting What Befell Me*” (*Ps* 40:8): *Epigraphy and Daily Life from the Bible to the Talmud*, ed. Esther Eshel and Yigal Levin (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 39–68; Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov,” 25–55.

languages.<sup>182</sup> When *'ēl* occurs within personal names, it is not always clear which sense is intended. In his comprehensive study, Rainer Albertz looked for comparative help to the Aramaic onomastica, where *'ēl* is generally the divine name and *'ilāh* the appellative. There the latter occurs at roughly 10% the rate of the former, suggesting the trend (at least with Aramaic) is toward reference to the deity El.<sup>183</sup> Based on broader comparative data, he further suggests that the appellative sense was likely intended in Hebrew where the *'ēl* element occupied the first position in the nominal statement, while in the second position, it likely referred to the deity El. So, for example, אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה, *'Ēlīyāhū*, would be understood as “My Deity is YHWH,” whereas אֲחִי אֱלֹהֵי, *'Āhī 'ēl*, would be “My Brother is El.”<sup>184</sup> If this holds for the biblical onomastica, it would suggest names like יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, *Yō 'ēl* (1 Sam 8:2), would have functioned to identify YHWH with El: “YHWH is El.” As Albertz also notes, “equating names” with YHWH make up a small portion of the onomastica, but the use of such names does attest to the assertion of YHWH’s equation with known quantities.<sup>185</sup> In other words, YHWH was being assimilated, at the time of their initial occurrence, to the existing structures of divinity.

In the Ugaritic literature, El was the benevolent king over the gods and the head of the pantheon, but the younger storm-deity Baal was the center of attention in the more prominent narratives. By the first millennium BCE in ancient Southwest Asia, second-tier warrior deities like Baal, Hadad, and Shamash seem to have eclipsed El in political importance, even though tradition facilitated El’s retention of rule over the pantheon as a figurehead. As warrior functions became more salient on the national scale, El’s mercy and compassion became more central to personal devotion. Across Aramaic and Ammonite onomastica (but *not* Phoenician

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<sup>182</sup> Personal names with El theophoric elements are attested at Ebla, Mari, and Amarna, as well as in contexts contemporaneous with earliest Israel (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 135). Mark Smith refers to “the development of the name El (*'ēl*) into a generic noun meaning ‘god’” (Smith, *The Early History of God*, 33–34), but offers no argument for this view. It appears to be by analogy with the ostensible secondary generic use of the divine name *'šrh*, “Asherah.”

<sup>183</sup> Rainer Albertz, “Personal Names and Family Religion,” 354.

<sup>184</sup> Albertz, “Personal Names and Family Religion,” 356.

<sup>185</sup> Albertz, “Personal Names and Family Religion,” 356.

or Hebrew), *'ēl* elements represent the greatest share of personal names of thanksgiving, suggesting a greater role in personal devotion.<sup>186</sup>

While the second-tier deity YHWH also eclipsed El in importance in the ninth century BCE Israelite pantheon, Yahwistic theophoric elements remained dominant among the personal names of thanksgiving in Hebrew. This may have primarily to do, however, with a unique feature of early Hebrew personal naming conventions. According to Seth Sanders, national/dynastic deities from the cultures of this period in ancient Southwest Asia tended not to be the most prominent deities represented in the onomastica. In other words, the people did not commonly name their children after the distant national or dynastic deities, but more frequently after personal deities. He states, “This difficulty suggests that rather than the majority of the onomastically attested Iron Age Israelite and Judahite population choosing names based on the royal dynasty, the initial move was the opposite. The king adopted the god who was already the most popular with the people.”<sup>187</sup>

While the reconstruction further above suggests El was imported as Israel’s initial patron deity in an effort to avoid power asymmetries, that configuration, which promoted cohesion for the smaller collective, may have limited Israel’s potential for growth by complicating attempts to centralize power in a single leader like a king. Israel may have started to outgrow the prosocial value of their patron deity. The onomastic data suggest YHWH’s accession to divine patronage coincided roughly with Israel’s transition to a kingdom, but it may have even facilitated it. Sanders suggests the king adopted the deity most popular among the people, but

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<sup>186</sup> Citing Ingo Kottsieper, Albertz states, “Kottsieper concludes that during the 1st millennium El was still regarded as a high-god, but his activity was seen to be particularly focused on the protection of individuals, whereas Hadad, Baal, and other deities gained more prominence in political realms. The Hebrew Bible presents a similar picture, in that El or Elyon could still be considered the head of the divine assembly (Deut 32:8–9; Psalm 82), but he was also described as being particularly intimately involved in familial realms in the patriarchal stories (Gen 16:13; 21:33), while YHWH predominated in the political sphere” (Albertz, “Personal Names and Family Religion,” 354–55, citing Ingo Kottsieper, “El—ferner oder naher Gott? Zur Bedeutung einer semitischen Gottheit in verschiedenen sozialen Kontexten im 1. Jtsd.v.Chr.,” in *Religion und Gesellschaft: Studien zu ihrer Wechselbeziehung in den Kulturen des Antiken vorderen Orients*, ed. Rainer Albertz [Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1997], 25–74).

<sup>187</sup> Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 81.



I think it a more likely possibility that the leader of the group associated with the suddenly popular deity was able to leverage that popularity to accede to the throne—precisely what the collective sought to prevent when it lacked the social cohesion to survive such maneuvers. Rather than replace El, however, conflating the two allowed the patron to consolidate the power and influence of both roles.

The circumstances surrounding the rise of Judah also suggest a close relationship between YHWH and kingship. The earliest mention we have in the epigraphic record of the kingdom of Judah does not actually mention Judah by name. Rather, the mid-ninth century BCE Tel Dan Stele (likely written by the Aramean king Hazael) refers in Aramaic to a dynasty (lines 7–9):<sup>188</sup>

. . . [qtl. 'yt.yhw]rm.br.[ 'h 'b.]  
 mlk.yśr 'l.wqtl[t. 'yt. 'hz]yhw.br[.yhwrm.ml]  
 k.bytdwd. . . .

. . . [I killed Jeho]ram, son of [Ahab]  
 king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu, son of [Jehoram, kin-]  
 g of the House of David. . . .

Judah's earliest collective identity appears to have been more saliently linked to the Davidic monarchy than to a shared ethnic identity or to a loose multiplicity. As with Israel, the features of ethnic identity most strongly associated with Judah do not appear until later periods.<sup>189</sup> David's conquests and rule, rather, seem to be the unifying framework of the early Judahite

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<sup>188</sup> Transcription and translation are from Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment," *IEJ* 45.1 (1995): 12–13. For context, see William M. Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," *BASOR* 302 (1996): 75–90; Paul E. Dion, "The Tel Dan Stele and Its Historical Significance," in *Michael: Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies In Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer*, ed. Yitzhak Avishur and Robert Deutsch (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999), 145–56; Andrew R. Davis, *Tel Dan in Its Northern Cultic Context* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Some scholars have challenged the reading of *bytdwd* as "House of David," preferring to render *dwd* as a divine name or generic noun, but this has not become widely accepted. For the primary challenge to the "House of David" reading, see George Athas, *The Tel Dan Inscription: A Reappraisal and a New Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>189</sup> See, for instance, Fantalkin, "The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation," 17–44.

kingdom. Highlighting the structural and thematic parallels between the Mesha Inscription and core narratives from the books of Samuel related to David’s battles with the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:1–5; 2 Samuel 5:17–25; 8:1), Omer Sergi makes the compelling case that the two rhetorically functioned in parallel to “establish a collective identity needed to knit together an emerging political entity.”<sup>190</sup> He states, “the accounts of David’s battles with the Philistines establish the notion of a socially and culturally unified community in the Judahite hill country and the eastern Shephelah, a community that through David’s deeds is also politically unified against a common enemy.”<sup>191</sup> As with Israel, the common defense was the prosocial spark that ignited the process of unification, but here YHWH seems to have been at the helm.

If the reconstruction above of lines 7–8 from the Tel Dan inscription is accurate, the king of the House of David in the mid-ninth century BCE had a Yahwistic name. This accords with the narrative in the books of Kings, where Ahaziah’s mother Athaliah (the Omride princess),<sup>192</sup> and grandfather, Jehoshaphat, also had Yahwistic names. The names of kings are among the most reliable historical data from this period,<sup>193</sup> and so we may safely assume YHWH was Judah’s divine patron from a very early period. YHWH’s patronage and role as divine king also would have been critical elements in the rhetorical unification mentioned above. Elevating the king’s tutelary deity over the political institutions of the polity would have aided the consolidation of king, people, deity, land, and even script. Echoing Omer Sergi, Sanders notes, the Mesha Inscription “does not reflect the existence of a unified state, people, and written

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<sup>190</sup> Sergi, “State Formation, Religion and ‘Collective Identity’ in the Southern Levant,” 76.

<sup>191</sup> Sergi, “State Formation, Religion and ‘Collective Identity’ in the Southern Levant,” 73.

<sup>192</sup> See Omer Sergi, “Queenship in Judah Revisited: Athaliah and the Davidic Dynasty in Historical Perspective,” in *Tabou et transgressions: Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 11–12 avril 2012*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand, Michaël Guichard, and Thomas Römer (Fribourg: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 99–112; Omer Sergi, “The Omride Dynasty and the Reshaping of the Judahite Historical Memory,” *Biblica* 97.4 (2016): 503–26.

<sup>193</sup> See Nadav Na’aman, “The Temple Library of Jerusalem and the Composition of the Book of Kings,” in *Congress Volume: Leiden 2004*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 134–38; Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 106–08; Christopher Rollston, “Scripture and Inscriptions: Eighth-Century Israel and Judah in Writing,” in Farber and Wright, *Archaeology and History of Eight-Century Judah*, 469–72.

language so much as make an argument for one.”<sup>194</sup> He suggests the rise of Hebrew concurrently in Israel and Judah shortly after the Mesha Inscription may have been an attempt to “instrumentalize a single dynastic god alongside a script-language and people.”<sup>195</sup> Sanders refers to this consolidation under a primary dynastic deity in order to “represent one’s culture as singular and unified” as “pantheon reduction,” and notes it appears to have taken place among Ammonites, Moabites, Arameans, and others.<sup>196</sup>

While El was able to hold together the Israelite collective long enough to ensure its perpetuation (in some form) through the sociocultural convulsions of the twelfth through tenth centuries BCE, YHWH was ultimately the patron deity that facilitated its establishment as a kingdom. The fact that Judah appears to have shared the same deity and language suggests strong connections of some kind between the two kingdoms already in the ninth century BCE. One recent theoretical model that could account for this is that of Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, who contends that a fledgling “House of David” sought the Israelite throne, but failed, subsequently moving south to establish an offshoot kingdom in Jerusalem that later became known as “Judah.”<sup>197</sup> They would have taken the already-established worship of YHWH with them.

This brings us back to the role of kinship in the development of Israelite identity. El’s kin-based profile and cultic overlap with ancestor practices may have helped perpetuate a kin-based conceptualization of the deity—or at least perpetuated the framework of kinship just under the surface—long enough to be appropriated by the storm-deity YHWH and then embedded within the framework of kinship developed to reinforce Israel/Judah’s claim to the land and claim to

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<sup>194</sup> Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 72.

<sup>195</sup> Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 73.

<sup>196</sup> Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 73–82.

<sup>197</sup> “This story provides a scenario by which two kingdoms are created, in which the House of David is envisioned as a small political break-off from Israel, newly based in Jerusalem” (Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David: Between Political Formation and Literary Revision* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016], 215).

their common ancestry.<sup>198</sup> Alternatively, YHWH may have developed from a kin-based deity and exploited the kinship framework within El's divine profile while also appropriating the storm-deity profile.

As Israel/Judah grew and developed, however, that broad concept of divine kinship would be renegotiated in service of the interests of territory and cultic exclusivity. The land was given Israel/Judah as an inheritance from YHWH, and so YHWH was framed as predominant ancestor. Jeremiah 3:19 attests to this framework:

ואנכי אמרתי איך אשיתך בבנים  
ואתגילך ארץ חמדה  
נחלת צבי צבאות גוים  
ואמר אבי תקראיילי  
ומאחרי לא תשובי

I thought to myself how I would set you among my children,  
and give you a pleasant land,  
the most beautiful heritage of all the nations.  
And I thought you would call me, My Father,  
and would not turn from following me.

Stavropoulou comments, “to render Yhwh the ancestor of Israel is to endorse the deity’s enduring territoriality in the most persuasive of terms – those of the territorial dead.”<sup>199</sup> This was not to place YHWH’s claim to the land parallel to that of the ancestors, however, it was to shove the latter’s aside, which pitted YHWH against Israel/Judah’s deceased kin. The land was YHWH’s to partition, and this rhetorical campaign was helped along by the severing of cultic ties to the dead in their territory-marking mortuary contexts. Deuteronomy 14:1, for instance,

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<sup>198</sup> It is important to remember that kinship is *the* fundamental framework for cooperation in human societies, and thus is one of the most effective prosocial tools. On the historical employment of fictive kin for prosocial purposes, see Slingerland, Henrich, and Norenzayan, “The Evolution of Prosocial Religions,” 344–45

<sup>199</sup> Stavropoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 145. See further: “Within its biblical, ‘covenantal’ context, the divine gifting of land from a figure designated אב may well mimic the familial framing of West Asian suzerains’ land grants, but the language of an inherited plot (נחלה), so closely related in the Hebrew Bible to the ancestors, is in the context of Jer. 3:19 more indicative of the ancestralization of Yhwh” (p. 145).

appears to assert the priority of YHWH’s ancestry precisely so it can proscribe those cultic activities that were exclusively associated with ancestor worship: בנים אתם ליהוה אלהיכם לא תתגדדו ולא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם למת “You are descendants of YHWH your deity. You must not cut yourselves or shave your foreheads bald for the dead.”<sup>200</sup> In a sense, YHWH vacates the ancestors’ stations as beneficiaries of ritual acts. As Stavrakopoulou argues, “Yhwh is pitched here as the only ancestor for whom cult should be performed.”<sup>201</sup>

The framework of kinship would have to share the stage with that of covenant as the exodus tradition became Israel/Judah’s central charter myth. Exodus 6:3 (attributed to P) gives priority to the latter by framing YHWH’s revelation to Moses at Sinai as the fuller revelation of their nature:<sup>202</sup>

וארא אל־אברהם אל־יצחק ואל־יעקב באל שדי ושמי יהוה לא נודעתי להם

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shadday, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them.<sup>203</sup>

As Schmid has recently observed, it is unlikely this text is identifying YHWH with El Shadday for the first time, or that it indicates YHWH was absent from existing patriarchal traditions.<sup>204</sup> Rather, it arranges the two traditions consecutively and accounts for the differences in divine names in a way that exalts the revelation at Sinai. A similar value judgment is detectable in

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<sup>200</sup> Stavrakopoulou argues “That בנים here in this verse should be appropriately rendered ‘descendants’ (rather than ‘sons’) is evident in the clear contrast drawn between Yhwh and the dead” (Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 144). The translation here is my own.

<sup>201</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 144. She goes on to describe the ways the dead were conceptually and physically distanced from deity as a part of this rhetorical campaign. See pp. 142–48.

<sup>202</sup> As Stavrakopoulou observes, “in several biblical recapitulations of the past, the patriarchal period is passed over altogether, giving way instead to the exodus, wilderness and conquest traditions as the origins of Israel’s particular story” (Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 45).

<sup>203</sup> For a thorough interrogation of this verse, see W. Randall Garr, “The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3,” *JBL* 111.3 (1992): 385–408.

<sup>204</sup> “The use of the name YHWH in Genesis and Exodus shows that P does not present the ancestors in Genesis as YHWH worshipers, even though there were lines of tradition presumably before and alongside P that identified God and YHWH in the primal and ancestral history” (Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 82; see also n. 202).

Hosea 12:13–14, where Jacob is derided as one who fled to Aram and guarded sheep in exchange for a wife, which stands in sharp and explicit contrast to Moses, who was the prophet that YHWH brought up from Egypt to be guard over Israel. From a prosocial point of view, prioritizing the framework of covenant over kinship facilitated the incorporation of other peoples into Israel and also increased the importance of allegiance to Israelite/Judahite social conventions.<sup>205</sup> The general immutability of kinship no longer guaranteed membership in good standing. The role of the deity in enforcing that allegiance also took on new significance in these later periods, particularly in the Deuteronomistic and Priestly sources.<sup>206</sup>

### Social Monitoring

The last prosocial framework to consider in this subsection is social monitoring. While full access to strategic information is fundamental to socially-concerned deity concepts, for the framework to be salient, a deity must be perceived to have an interest in the affairs of humans, and there must be a need for social monitoring. There is precious little artifactual data outside the Hebrew Bible to help clarify reflective reasoning about it or how it influenced praxis in the earliest phases of Israelite society. It does not seem to be directly represented in the earliest texts. The earliest core of the Song of Deborah, for instance, does not seem to directly concern itself with social monitoring. The deity's full access to strategic knowledge was not necessary to know that certain groups did not participate in battle, and the only appeal to the deity for punishment is the curse in the late addition of verse 23. The literary tools to employ it as an effective rhetorical device may not have yet been available, or it may not have been a part of

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<sup>205</sup> For a discussion of covenantal fidelity in Deuteronomy as “love,” see MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of “Monotheism”*.

<sup>206</sup> YHWH's divine profile developed a high degree of functional flexibility, perhaps as a result of its early hybridization and the nature of the terminology for deity (more on that in the next chapter), that allowed it to respond to different concerns and contexts, maximizing the deity's prosociality. YHWH became the utility deity par excellence.

the earliest authors' particular rhetorical goals. The Song of Deborah is primarily a victory hymn, after all, much like the similarly early Song of the Sea in Exodus 15.

It may also be the case that the frameworks of monarchy were the primary means of social monitoring when these traditions were committed to text, with the deity only taking over after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the loss of that framework of authority. Kingship in this early period in the deity's history may have functioned as a temporary caesura for the deity's role as social monitor. With the loss of the Northern Kingdom, something needed to fill the void. Note the comments of Konrad Schmid in relation to "theologizing" the Covenant Code:

It is quite reasonable to assume that this shift towards 'theologizing' the law resulted in the aftermath of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The law became detached from the traditional royal authority and was, so to speak, 'excarnated' into written form. The legislative norm was no longer the king, but a book. For that reason, about half of all Hebrew Bible statements of law are equipped with an introduction containing an explanation of the law's origins, a promise for those who keep this law, a reason for it, a threat, or a clarification of its meaning. This can be explained by the fact that these laws no (longer) had an authority that would see to it that they were carried out. Instead, they apparently rest on their authority as *divine* law alone.<sup>207</sup>

With the rise of prose literature in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, that role as social monitor would have become more deeply embedded in social memory and thus entangled with the ideology of kingship, rather than replaced by it.

There are a number of places in later texts where appeals to the intervention of deity are prescribed in order to deploy their full access to strategic information to determine guilt or innocence where insufficient evidence is available. Numbers 5:11–31, for instance, prescribes an ordeal for women suspected of adultery if there is no witness against her.<sup>208</sup> Through the

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<sup>207</sup> Schmid, "The Biblical Writings in the Late Eighth Century BCE," 494, emphasis in original.

<sup>208</sup> Attempts are frequently made by scholars to find some rational basis for the process described (e.g., Nissim Amzallag and Shamir Yona, "The Kenite Origin of the Sotah Prescription (Numbers 5.11–31)," *JSOT* 41.4 [2017]: 383–412), or to suggest the editors of the Hebrew Bible disapproved of the practice (e.g., Richard S. Briggs,

ordeal, which requires the accused take an oath before the deity in the temple and drink water mixed with dust from the floor, the deity—through the presencing media of their written name and the dust of the temple floor—exposes a guilty woman by making her loins “drop” (נפל) and her womb swell, or blesses an innocent woman by making her more fertile. Similarly, Exodus 22:8 describes a process for adjudicating cases of disputed ownership. Both parties are to come עד האלהים, “unto the deity/ies”—referring likely to a cultic object that presenced deity—and the text declares that, אשר ירשיען אלהים ישלם שנים לרעהו, “the one whom the deities condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.”<sup>209</sup> The method of condemnation is not made explicit, but v. 10 explains that in cases of animals delivered to another for safe keeping, but then injured or lost, the “oath of YHWH” will determine if the one to whom the animal was delivered is guilty of foul play.<sup>210</sup> The oath was likely a test of the swearer’s belief in their own innocence. One who had the courage to swear an oath before the deity or deities, or who could do so without divine intervention, must be innocent. On the other hand, one who knew their own guilt would (hopefully) fear the consequences of swearing falsely before the deity or deities. The individual would be condemned by their own fear, or, if they managed to swear the oath, by the deity’s swift and decisive punishment (such as described above in Numbers 5).

The sustained imposition of the divine moral-monitoring framework on the observation

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“Reading the *Sotah* Text (Numbers 5:11–31): Holiness and a Hermeneutic Fit for Suspicion,” *BI* 17.3 [2009]: 288–319.

<sup>209</sup> The verb here is vocalized as a plural in the Masoretic tradition, but it is likely to be understood as singular. A singular sense for אלהים with plural verbal elements, pronouns, or adjectives is not unheard of (cf. Gen 20:13; 31:53; 35:7; Exod 32:4, 8; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 28:13–14; 2 Sam 7:23), and the context clarifies the prescribed process. For further discussion, see Brevard Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1962), 34–37; Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*, 113 n. 43; Wright, *Inventing God’s Law*, 255–56; Michael S. Heiser, “Should אלהים (’ĒLŌHĪM) with Plural Predication Be Translated ‘Gods’?” *BT* 61.3 (2010): 123–36.

<sup>210</sup> As David P. Wright argues, the casuistic laws of the Covenant Code seem to have borrowed directly from Akkadian legal texts—and particularly those of Hammurabi—with very similar oath requirements (Wright, *Inventing God’s Law*, 230–85). Some additional detail may be gleaned from those texts. According to section 120 of Hammurabi’s laws, if a man stores grain with another, and somehow the amount of grain is reduced, the former may declare the original amount “before the god” ([*ina*] *maḥar ilim*) and be restored double that amount. According to section 249, if a man rents an ox, and it dies through no fault of the renter (literally, *ilum imḥašma imtūt*, “a god strike it and it die”), he may go free if he swears an oath “before the god” (*nīš ilim*) that he was not at fault (cf. M. E. J. Richardson, *Hammurabi’s Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* [London: T&T Clark, 2004], 110–11).



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that there does not seem to be correspondence between fidelity to moral standards and a person's successes or failures resulted in later periods of literary expression in lament over the deity's apparent failure to adequately monitor moral behavior, or at least punish immoral behavior.<sup>211</sup> Jeremiah 12:1, for instance, makes the following case against YHWH:

צדיק אתה יהוה  
כי אריב אליך  
אך משפטים אדבר אותך  
מדוע דרך רשעים צלחה  
שלו כל-בגדי בגד

You will be just, O YHWH,  
When I lodge a complaint against you;  
Nevertheless, I present my case to you.  
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?  
Why do all the works of the treacherous thrive?

Job 21:7–9 expresses similar concerns:

מדוע רשעים יחיו 7  
עתקו גם-גברו חיל  
זרעם נכון לפניהם עמם 8  
וצאצאיהם לעיניהם  
בתיהם שלום מפחד 9  
ולא שבט אלוה עליהם

7 Why do the wicked survive,  
Reach old age, even grow more powerful?  
8 Their seed is established in their presence,  
And their descendants before their eyes.  
9 Their households are safe from fear,  
And there is no rod of Deity upon them.

This observation that the wicked did not seem to be under increased, or even as much, divine

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<sup>211</sup> A wonderful reflection on the development of a literary sense of self in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, which includes the personal lament, is Niditch, *The Responsive Self*.

scrutiny as the righteous became a central concern for authors of lament and wisdom literature. The literature does not call into question the deity's awareness of wrongdoing (their full access to strategic information is presupposed), or their ability to punish (that ability is also presupposed), but reflects on the ostensible refusal of the deity to engage in overt punitive action. In this way, the deity is failing to perform one of their central functions and is not making clear exactly why.

A final note on the significance of social monitoring to our readings of the Hebrew Bible: the intersection of the intuitive perception of deities as full-access strategic agents and the potential for unseen agency to manifest itself in virtually any socio-material environment sits at the root of later reflective notions of omnipresence. On the intuitive level, these two notions pose no threat to the simultaneous conceptualization of deity as corporeally located in a single location and potentially ignorant of events taking place at a distance from its presence, which can be entered and left. These intuitive conceptualizations of deity only became contradictions to resolve when theological reflection began to prioritize consistency and systematization.<sup>212</sup> As stated above, beliefs are situationally emergent. Without the heavy reflective cloak of systematic theology or theological authority, our intuitions will generally emerge without concern for that consistency. There is no need to attempt to reconcile these conflicting conceptualizations of deity in order to understand Iron Age Israelite and Judahite worldviews. In fact, we frequently do violence to those worldviews when we attempt to subjugate them to our own reflective sensitivities.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> See Justin Barrett, "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *MTSR* 11 (1999): 325–39. Barrett comments, "what we say we think and know and what we think and know in real-time problem solving sometimes are two entirely different things" (p. 325).

<sup>213</sup> "[T]heology is often the least systematic characteristic of a source. That is, the authors of the Pentateuchal sources were not systematic theologians seeking to present a coherent and logical theology, and thus we cannot expect the theological implications of their compositions to maintain a high level of consistency" (Anne K. Knafel, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014], 49).

*Implications*

As this section has demonstrated, the prosocial dynamics described within CSR are indeed strongly associated with the representations of deity and its development in earliest Israel and Judah. The theoretical framework described in the second section provides significant insight regarding the intuitive processes and frameworks governing these early periods. The choice to designate the early multipolity collective “Israel,” and adopt the high deity El as its patron deity, was most likely made in an effort to offer divine patronage that would not grant one member of the collective a controlling interest in access to the deity and the cultic installations associated with it. That role had a shelf life, however, and as El-type deities began to lose ground to Baal-type storm deities on the international scene, YHWH acceded to the role of patron deity, likely as a tutelary deity of one of the constituent social groups that could now arrogate enough cultic and political power to catalyze Israel’s maturation into a kingdom. They may have brought the storm-deity profile with them or appropriated it during their campaign of dethronement.

The role of kinship in worship showed itself to be more resilient in Israel than elsewhere, likely initially because of the salience of kinship to El’s divine profile, the overlap in the cultic treatment of deities and the deceased, and the role of kinship in the developing national identity. The conflation of YHWH and El’s divine profiles allowed the former to exploit the kinship framework in later propaganda. Social monitoring also became more conspicuous in later literature, and particularly in the exile as the full repertoire of cultic practices were no longer available. The deity’s full access to strategic information is presupposed throughout. It does not appear to be questioned in any corner of the literature, suggesting it was universally presupposed from the very foundation of Israel and Judah as discrete polities. We may consider this the most prototypical feature of Iron Age Israelite and Judahite conceptualizations of deity.

## Conclusion

This chapter has built upon the consensus view in CSR that the roots of deity concepts are found in the mind's abductive teleology and theory of mind. These roots only account for the situational emergence of the perception of unseen agency and supernatural agents in the world around us, however, not their development, transmission, or perseverance. The theory of predictive coding helps to account for some of the methodological gaps in those models, resulting in the theory that socially concerned deities are socio-materially-mediated elaborations on the intuitive conceptualization of the presence of deceased kin. Drawing from existing theoretical models within CSR, it further argues their transmission and perseverance are products of the prosocial functions of rituals associated with them and their social monitoring. That is, deities with full access to strategic information, the ability to covertly monitor any member of a society, and the willingness and capacity to punish (via established bodies of authority), effectively reduce free-riding in large anonymous societies and increase cooperation and trust, thereby increasing the fitness of the social group. Rituals also provide context for credibility enhancing displays and the regular reification of the sense of divine oversight.

The material remains from Israel and Judah, including the Hebrew Bible, demonstrate that the same intuitive frameworks were active in that time and place, and facilitated and influenced the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in those societies. These frameworks, when considered in concert with the relevant historical and sociocultural contexts, productively account for the development of deity concepts, the salience of their prosocial functions, the features of their presencing through material media, and the renegotiation of that presencing for prosocial purposes. The development of deity concepts like those undergirding YHWH's divine profile are not unique in this regard, but build upon intuitive foundations common to all human societies. CSR thus facilitates a robust theoretical framework for the interrogation of

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the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in the Hebrew Bible, and it is to that interrogation that I now turn.

## CHAPTER 4

# Deity in the Hebrew Bible

## Introduction

To this point we have seen that the person is intuitively partible and permeable, that the deceased are perceived to continue on as (mostly) unseen agents,<sup>1</sup> that large-scale deity concepts likely elaborate upon the perception of that unseen agency, becoming embedded in socio-material ecologies to the degree they serve prosocial functions, and that the material world around humans is potentially inhabitable by the same agency. While the previous chapter applied those frameworks to encounters with deity in early Israel and Judah, and to a reconstruction of the development of deity within those societies, this chapter applies them to an interrogation of the category of generic deity as preserved in the texts of the Hebrew Bible and related inscriptions. What conceptual structures were conjured for early Israelites and Judahites by the terms for deity, and how did those conceptual structures influence the material remains? I have no living informants to interview, of course, so there will be significant gaps in my ability to reproduce a representative sample of the entire spectrum of lived experiences

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<sup>1</sup> Their agency can be reified by a variety of material media, which aids in the continued and reinforced perception of their presence.

that would have been brought to bear on the full conceptualization of deity. For instance, these are textual artifacts, which were not the primary media for communicating or thinking about deity anciently. It privileges the modern prioritization of text to ground the interrogation in the written word, and particularly when the relationship to the written was so distinct for ancient Israelites and Judahites. The theoretical frameworks so far developed for the intuitive conceptualization of deity, however, will aid in giving structure to the extant data, and in mitigating the degree to which contemporary philosophical frameworks and scholarly assumptions govern their construal.

From the discussion in Chapter 1, we know that constructing meaning from a given lexeme requires several components: a conceptual base against which it may profile,<sup>2</sup> image schemata to aid in the efficient and consistent construal of those profiles, as well as an arrangement of semantic domains to aid in the configuration of meaning most likely intended by the lexeme's use in its particular context. The same lexeme can mean different things depending on the configuration of semantic domains indicated by their different contexts.<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew words for “deity” could activate a variety of different domains and a variety of configurations, and to approximate the ways consumers of the Hebrew Bible conceptualized deity, we must be able to identify some of the more salient of these. This also aids in the identification of the more and less prototypical features of deity.

A note of caution, however: any attempt to discern the conceptualization of generic deity in the Hebrew Bible is complicated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of references to deity in the texts are to YHWH, the deity of Israel. While conceptualizations of YHWH in

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<sup>2</sup> Recall that we cannot know what a *radius* is unless we know what a *circle* is.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Chapter 1 I highlighted the example of “mother” and the different domains that its use can activate (i.e., [1] birth domain; [2] genetic domain; [3] nurturance domain; [4] marital domain; [5] genealogical domain). A *birth mother* may not raise her child or be married to the father, thus only activating domains (1), (2), and (5), with domain (1) prioritized. A *donor mother* does not give birth to her child, and may only activate domain (2). A *foster mother* will not have given birth to the child or have contributed genetic material, activating only domains (3) and (4), with the former taking priority.

the earliest periods of their worship were more directly influenced by the features of more generic conceptualizations in circulation within other social groups, by the time of the rise of the biblical texts, YHWH had developed, through generations of curation in competition with other nations and their deities, a more distinctive profile. In an effort to mitigate the potential for inadvertently reading uniquely Yahwistic features into my reconstruction of the generic concept of deity, my primary data set will be those texts from the Hebrew Bible and other inscriptions that refer (or most likely refer) specifically to deities other than YHWH (or to the abstract concept of divinity).<sup>4</sup> There obviously remained a significant degree of overlap between conceptualizations of YHWH and those of other deities, but even where Yahwistic conceptualizations diverged into unique roles and features, and reflective frameworks imposed themselves more heavily on the intuitions discussed in the previous two chapters, the prototypical features of deity and divine agency will show themselves to have been remarkably resilient.<sup>5</sup> In other words, YHWH's divine profile did not escape the gravitational pull of prototypical features of deity—it remained cognitively anchored to prototypical functions and

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<sup>4</sup> This distinguishes my approach from another study of the conceptualization of deity in the Hebrew Bible from a cognitive perspective, namely Terrance R. Wardlaw's *Conceptualizing Words for "God"* (see page 34, n. 27 for bibliographic data). Wardlaw's interrogation was primarily concerned with how contemporary Bible translators ought to translate the terms יהוה, אלהים, and אל, so it was aimed explicitly at the final canonical form of the text. Since there was a concern for scope, Wardlaw also limited his interrogation to the Pentateuch. I will draw insights from this study where applicable, but other methodological differences will limit that applicability. For instance, Wardlaw's principles of narrative linearity and cumulative reading knowledge bring all preceding scriptural texts to bear on each semantic unit, and he emphasizes the contextual dominance of very early themes like creation and covenant (e.g., "in Genesis אלהים is the Creator who is sovereign over the heavens and the earth, omnipotent, and purposes to work that which is good [Gen 1:1–2:3]. This is likely a macroproposition within the text-base" [Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for "God"*, 279]). Note, finally, that the likely abstract plural origins of the use of singular אלהים indicate the existence of an abstract concept of divinity.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Hayman's comments on the resilience of archaic traditions about deity are instructive: "In some cases, we can see the old Canaanite gods still there in rabbinic Judaism, even retaining their old titles. Prince Yam, for example, lives on in the Babylonian Talmud and in some of the midrashim, and his opposition to Israel is located precisely where we should expect it: at the Sea of Reeds . . . The mythological overtones of the crossing of the ים סוף are thus preserved in rabbinic Judaism as are numerous other remnants of older Canaanite beliefs. . . . There are rich, as yet unexplored, pickings in rabbinic midrash for scholars interested in the Canaanite background to Israelite religion" (Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" 8; cf. Jonathan Ben-Dov, "The Resurrection of the Divine Assembly in the Divine Title El in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Submerged Literature in Ancient Greek Culture: The Comparative Perspective*, ed. Andrea Ercolani and Manuela Giordano [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016], 9–31).



features of generic deity. (Those features and elaborations on them will be discussed in the next two chapters.)

This chapter’s interrogation will begin with a brief look at the terms used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to deity. It will demonstrate that those terms were applied to a wider array of entities than is commonly recognized. Most scholarship dismisses these broader references as honorific, metonymic, or metaphorical, but these are reflective rationalizations that derive from the imposition of contemporary assumptions regarding the nature of deity, not from inductive interrogations of the usage of the terms in the Hebrew Bible. Following that interrogation, I will propose a semantic base for the concept and then discuss salient conceptual domains, profiles, image schemata, and prototype effects associated with references to deity in different literary strata within the Hebrew Bible. The result will be a much fuller picture of what early hearers/readers of the Hebrew Bible thought of when they thought of deity.

## Terms for Deity in the Hebrew Bible

The three primary terms used to refer generically to deity across the Hebrew Bible are אלהים,<sup>6</sup> אל,<sup>7</sup> and אלוה.<sup>8</sup> The most basic form from which these derive is אל, and Marvin H. Pope’s

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<sup>6</sup> אלהים occurs about 2,600 times. I include all uses of the term that may be classified as the adjectival genitive (I do not consider אלהים to appear in a “superlative” sense; cf. Joel S. Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 57–60; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 106–07). Wardlaw identifies 2,602 (p. 97). Several scholars count 2,570 occurrences (Karel van der Toorn, “God (I) אלהים,” *DDD* 352; Davies, “‘God’ in Old Testament Theology,” 178; Andrew J. Schmutzer, “Did the Gods Cause Abraham’s Wandering? An Examination of התעו אתי אלהים in Genesis 20.13,” *JSOT* 35.2 [2010]: 151, n. 3; Máire Byrne, *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* [London: Continuum, 2011], 27). Excepting the adjectival genitive (as in Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7, etc.), I count 227 occurrences not in reference to YHWH, or in references that may include YHWH but also other deities or the generic concept (11.26%). Following NRSV and others, I interpret the occurrences of אלהים and of אל in Ezekiel 28:2 as generic nouns, rather than designations for YHWH (or the Phoenician El).

<sup>7</sup> אל occurs 237 times, with 31 occurrences that are not in reference to YHWH (7.65%): Exodus 15:11; 34:14; Deuteronomy 32:12, 21; Isaiah 9:6; 31:3; 43:10, 12; 44:10, 15, 17 (2x); 45:20; 46:6; Ezekiel 28:2 (2x), 9; 32:21; Micah 7:18; Malachi 2:11; Psalms 29:1; 44:21; 58:2; 77:14; 81:10 (2x); 82:1; 89:7; Job 41:25; Daniel 11:36 (2x). In the full tally of 237 occurrences I include Ezekiel 32:21 and Psalms 58:2, and omit Deuteronomy 33:2 (see Patrick D. Miller, “Two Critical Notes on Psalm 68 and Deuteronomy 33,” *HTR* 57.3 [1964]: 240–43 [but cf. IQM xv:14]) and Genesis 31:29 (cf. Frank Moore Cross, “אל ’ēl,” *TDOT* 1:260–61. Related phrases occur in Deut 28:32; Mic 2:1; Prov 3:27; Neh 5:5).

<sup>8</sup> אלוה occurs 58 times, with the following eight not in reference to YHWH (7.25%): Isaiah 44:8; Habakkuk 1:11; Psalms 18:32; Daniel 11:37, 38 (2x), 39; 2 Chronicles 32:15.

conclusion from over sixty years ago will be our point of departure regarding its etymology: “the problem is philologically insoluble on the basis of the materials now at our disposal. The word *ilu*, *’ēl* is simply a primitive noun and as such cannot be further analyzed.”<sup>9</sup> These terms were lexicalized well before the isolation of Hebrew as a discrete language and their textualization in the traditions that would become the Hebrew Bible.<sup>10</sup>

All three terms are used primarily with an appellative sense, which means they function as common nouns applicable to any member of a given class. This can include a generic use (e.g., a president, her mother) or a titular sense (e.g., the President, Mother).<sup>11</sup> While YHWH is by far the most common referent of all three terms, and particularly when the titular sense is activated, the perpetuation of the generic sense is demonstrated by the regular use of אלהים with pronominal suffixes in reference to YHWH.<sup>12</sup> All three are also used in roughly synonymous ways in reference to the generic concept of deity.<sup>13</sup> For instance: אלהי נכר, “foreign deities”

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<sup>9</sup> Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 19. See also Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 2, note 4; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 92–97, note 4. The root \*W/YL, meaning “to be in front” (and by semantic extension, “to be strong”), was most commonly cited in early scholarship in light of the conceptual proximity to איל (“leader,” “chief,” or “ram”), but the explanation has no evidentiary support and has little to no explanatory power for the term in the other Semitic languages (cf. Helmer Ringgren, “אלהים *’lōhīm*,” *TDOT* 1:273; cf. Frank Zimmermann, “*’El* and *Adonai*,” *VT* 12.2 [1962]: 190–95).

<sup>10</sup> On this isolation, see Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 103–55. There may have been some traditions recorded in the Hebrew Bible that predate the development of Hebrew as a distinct language, but the earliest narrative passages, based on linguistic dating, date to around this period of distinction. The Hebrew of this period is generally called Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH). See Alice Mandell, “Biblical Hebrew, Archaic,” *EHL* 1.325–29; Giano, “Archaic Biblical Hebrew,” 19–29. Hendel and Joosten locate archaic Biblical Hebrew in “premonarchical and early monarchical poetry” (Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 121). Ian Young and Robert Rezetko have been the dominant opponents of the linguistic dating of biblical texts (Young and Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, but for a strong critique, see Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 135–44).

<sup>11</sup> I would suggest the most precise construal of this semantic field in English is the spectrum from concrete to abstract: God ↔ deity ↔ divinity. Any point along this spectrum may be profiled by a given contextual use of the relevant terms.

<sup>12</sup> In total, 984 of the 2,600 occurrences of אלהים have a PNS (roughly thirty-eight percent of occurrences; 273 of those 984 occur in Deuteronomy alone). Fifty-seven of those occurrences refer to deities other than YHWH: Genesis 31:30, 32; Exodus 23:24, 32, 33; 32:4, 8; 34:15 (2x), 16 (2x); Numbers 25:2 (2x); 33:4; Deuteronomy 7:16, 25; 12:2, 3, 30 (2x), 31 (2x); 20:18; 32:37; Joshua 23:7; Judges 2:3; 3:6; 9:27; 16:23 (2x), 24 (2x); 18:24; 1 Samuel 6:5; 17:43; 2 Samuel 7:23; 1 Kings 11:2, 8; 12:28; 20:23 (2x); 2 Kings 17:29, 33; 19:18; Isaiah 21:9; 37:19; 42:17; Jeremiah 2:28 (2x); 11:13; 46:25; Nahum 1:14; Ruth 1:15; Daniel 11:8; Ezra 1:7; 1 Chronicles 10:10; 14:12; 2 Chronicles 32:21. אל occurs twelve times with a PNS, or in roughly five percent of occurrences. Nine occurrences are in the Psalms, and the only use in reference to a deity other than YHWH is in the exilic Isaiah 44:17: ויתפלל אליו ויאמר הצילני כי אלי אתה ושאריתו לאל עשה לפסלו יסגדו וישתחו: “The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bow down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, ‘Save me, for you are my god.’” אלוה occurs once with a PNS in reference to generic deity (אלוה, Hab 1:11).

<sup>13</sup> See Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 54–57.

(Deut 31:16; Josh 24:20; Jer 5:19); אל נכר, “a foreign deity” (Deut 32:12; Mal 2:11; Ps 81:10); אלוה נכר, “a foreign deity” (Dan 11:39); אלהים אחרים, “other deities” (Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7);<sup>14</sup> אל אחר, “another deity” (Exod 34:14);<sup>15</sup> לא אלהים, “not deity” (Hos 8:6); לא־אל, “not deity” (Deut 32:21; Isa 31:3).<sup>16</sup> Note, however, that many of the parallel constructions employing אל and אלוה in ways that suggest interchangeability with אלהים occur primarily in texts dating to the Babylonian exile and later, which suggests either their semantic harmonization in later periods, or a growing concern for lexical variation in the relevant constructions.<sup>17</sup> In the earlier periods, אלהים is almost always the noun of choice, and particularly when used with a proper noun.<sup>18</sup> The frequent references to “other deities,” “foreign deities,” “their deities,” and “deity of GN,” as well as אל/אלהי (ה)אלהים, “deity of deities” (Deut 10:17; Josh 22:22; Ps 84:8; 136:2) demonstrate that YHWH was conceptualized as one member of a generic class that had many other members.

Much has been made of the morphologically plural form of אלהים used with singular referents, including YHWH (Gen 1:1; 1 Kgs 11:33; 18:27).<sup>19</sup> The most common explanation

<sup>14</sup> Sixty-three total occurrences.

<sup>15</sup> This is the only occurrence.

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 32:17 is an interesting case. It refers to worship of demons (שדים) as לא אלוה, which is frequently translated as “not deity,” but the appositional clause that immediately follows refer to them as אלהים לא ידעום, “deities they did not know.” In agreement with Michael S. Heiser, I would argue אלוה is to be understood in the titular sense: “not the Deity” (Michael S. Heiser, “Does Deuteronomy 32.17 Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods?” *BT* 59.3 [2008]: 137–45).

<sup>17</sup> For example, all three terms occur with the same general sense in Daniel 11:36–38.

<sup>18</sup> There are eighteen occurrences of the plural “deities of [PROPER NOUN]” (Exod 12:12; Josh 24:15; Judg 6:10; 10:6 [5x]; 2 Kgs 17:31; 18:34 [2x]; 2 Chr 25:20; 28:23 [2x]; Isa 36:19 [2x]; Jer 43:12, 13), and an additional seven occurrences of the singular “deity of [PROPER NOUN]” (1 Kgs 11:33 [3x]; 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16), and all utilize אלהים. “Deity of Israel” (אלהי ישראל) occurs 196 times, with the highest frequency of occurrence in Ezra (1.68 per 1,000 words), Jeremiah (1.49 per 1,000 words), and 2 Chronicles (1.03 per 1,000 words). There are no occurrences in Leviticus or Deuteronomy.

<sup>19</sup> Sometimes plural verbs occur alongside what appear to be singular referents. Discussing Exodus 22:8–9, David Wright calls this an “emphatic formulation,” citing in addition, Gen 20:13; 31:53; 35:7; Josh 24:19; 2 Sam 7:23 (Wright, *Inventing God’s Law*, 256, n. 78). Several other Semitic languages attest to the morphologically plural use of words for “god” with singular referents. Extensive coverage is found in Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 7–53. Two representative examples include a letter from Taanach roughly contemporary with the Amarna correspondences (Anson F. Rainey, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by the Scribes from Canaan* [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 1:147; Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 9): EN DINGIR.MEŠ-nu / ZI-ka lí-iš-šur; bēlu ilānū / napištaka liššur, “May the lord, the god, protect your life!”; and a portion of the Phoenician Azatiwada inscription (KAI 26 C iii:15–16; Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 27): wyšb / ’nk h’lm z b’al krntryš, “And I caused this deity, Ba’l-KRNTRYŠ, to dwell (in the city).”

has for some time been the notion of a “plural of majesty,” which views the plural as honorific or intensifying.<sup>20</sup> Three observations complicate that explanation, however: (1) the plural אלהים appears in pejorative references to individual foreign deities,<sup>21</sup> (2) אל and אלהים are used interchangeably in many places (e.g., Exod 20:3//34:14; Deut 32:21//Hos 8:6; Ezek 28:2//9), and (3) no heightened sense of honor or majesty is demonstrable in any occurrence of אלהים.<sup>22</sup> The difference seems to be one of style, not sense.<sup>23</sup>

The most compelling explanation of this phenomenon is that of Joel S. Burnett, who argues that the most common use of אלהים is as a “concretized abstract plural.”<sup>24</sup> That is, the abstract plural אלהים had the sense of “divinity,” but became concretized in reference to actual manifestations of divinity, and over time came to mean “deity.”<sup>25</sup> This final sense is synonymous with the primary senses of singular אל and אלה, but as Burnett notes, an abstract nuance was preserved for אלהים and is evoked in some places.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in 1 Kings 11:33 the masculine plural אלהים appears in reference to a feminine singular deity. The abstract sense

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<sup>20</sup> Gesenius, *GKC* §124g; Aaron Ember, “The Pluralis Intensivus in Hebrew,” *AJSLL* 21.4 (1905): 195–231; Waltke and O’Connor, *IBHS* 7.4.3a–f; Joüon and Muraoka, *GBH* §136d; Byrne, *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 28; John C. Beckman, “Pluralis Majestatis: Biblical Hebrew,” in *EHL* 3.145–46.

<sup>21</sup> For example, 1 Kings 11:33; 2 Kings 1:2–3, 6, 16. This demonstrably non-honorific usage of the “plural of majesty” is found in other Semitic literature as well. For instance, a “plural of majesty” in the Amarna correspondences is particularly undermined by the occurrence of the morphologically plural IR.MEŠ (“servant”) with a singular referent in EA 47:11. Franz Böhl tried to harmonize the grammatical explanations by suggesting “Plurales modestiae” for this occurrence (Ranz M. Th. Böhl, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1909], 36; cf. Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 19, 23), which would indicate the “intensification” is contingent upon the sense of the word. It is not “honorific,” or “majestic,” it just highlights whatever abstract semantic qualities the word evokes. In other words, it derives directly from the abstract plural (This is actually Gesenius’ explanation of the plural of majesty: “the *pluralis excellentiae* or *maiestatis* . . . is properly a variety of the abstract plural, since it sums up the several characteristics belonging to the idea” [Gesenius, *GKC* §124g]). Wardlaw’s defense of the plural of majesty on the grounds that it is “at least attested in Amarna Akkadian” is thus undermined (Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 98).

<sup>22</sup> The notion of intensification seems to sit at the root of most arguments for the plural of majesty (Waltke and O’Connor, *IBHS* §7.4.3a–b; Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 104), with contradictory data dismissed as “exceptions” (Waltke and O’Connor, *IBHS* §7.4.3b n. 16). The predominance of the plural in reference to YHWH over and against other deities, however, is the incidental product of the paucity of references to individual foreign deities.

<sup>23</sup> That is, the words are synonyms, alternated for stylistic rather than semantic reasons. See Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 7–53.

<sup>25</sup> In essence, the abstract sense expressed the salient abstract qualities associated with the noun. Concretization took place through the firm or repeated association of those qualities with some entity. Burnett cites as another example of a concretized abstract plural the word בתולים (Deut 22:15), meaning “evidences of virginity,” rather than the abstract “virginity” (Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 22).

<sup>26</sup> Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 57–60.

of “deity” is gender neutral, while non-abstract “god” is masculine. While Biblical Hebrew does not explicitly attest to a word for “goddess”—leaving the author little choice<sup>27</sup>—the masculine plural *’lm* in reference to singular feminine deities is also found in Phoenician, which does have a word for “goddess” (*’lt*).<sup>28</sup> This is not definitive proof of the same usage in Hebrew, but it is suggestive, and it demonstrates the same construction in a cognate language that is not accounted for by the plural of majesty.

This theory also makes better sense of the use of אלהים as the *nomen rectum* in construct phrases. Rather than conjuring a superlative sense for the term, we may understand it as the adjectival genitive.<sup>29</sup> Thus חרדת אלהים (1 Sam 14:15) is not “a very great panic” (NRSV), but “divine panic,” or a panic caused by divine activity.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, בני אלהים, traditionally “sons of God” (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), is not necessarily a reference to the offspring of אלהים, but to members of the class of deity, and could therefore be glossed as “deities” or “divine beings” (by analogy with, for example, בני הנביאים, “sons of the prophets” or “prophets” [1 Kgs 20:35], or בני־אדם, “son of a human” or “human” [Ezek 8:5]). This reading is supported by the grammatically parallel use of בנות האדם, “daughters of the human,” or “women,” in Genesis 6:2. This reading harmonizes with the variant construction בני אלים, “deities,” in Psalm 29:1 and 89:7.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> William F. Albright suggested the Hebrew אלה, “terebinth,” derives from a feminine form of Canaanite *’lt*, “goddess” (William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* [London: Athlone Press, 1968], 165).

<sup>28</sup> Burnett quotes two such texts (Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 27): *bbt ’lm ’štrt*, “in the house of the deity Ashtart”; *lrbty l’lm ’drt š ’lm ’štrt w’lnm* š, “to my Lady, to the majestic deity Isis, the deity Ashtart and the deities who . . .” Note the use of the variant plural form *’lnm* following the occurrences of the singular *’lm* in the latter text.

<sup>29</sup> These are not included in my tally of occurrences of אלהים not in reference to YHWH.

<sup>30</sup> Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 57–59; cf. Joüon and Muraoka, *GBH* §141*n*.

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that בני עליון, “children of Elyon,” in Psalm 82:6 suggests a change in the sense of the offspring of the high deity, possibly under the influence of the broader Semitic tradition of the divine council inhabited by the offspring of El (E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980]; Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*; Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 54–66). This text is quite late, however (see Daniel McClellan, “The Gods-Complaint: Psalm 82 as a Psalm of Complaint,” *JBL* 137.4 [2018]: 833–51).

The primary sense of אלהים, אל, and אלוה is thus the appellative sense “deity,” with אלהים carrying an additional abstract sense of “divinity” that could also be used in the adjectival genitive.<sup>32</sup> This does not tell us much about what was understood by the term “deity,” though. To begin to fill out this picture, we may add the observations from Chapter 3 regarding the use of אלהים in reference not only to the dead, but also to cultic objects (e.g., למה גנבת את־אלהי, “why did you steal my deities?” [Gen 31:30]; אלהי זהב, “deities of gold” [Exod 32:31]; את־אלהים אשר־, “You take the deities that I made?” [Judg 18:24]; יפעל־אל וישתחו, “he makes a deity and worships it” [Isa 44:15]).<sup>33</sup> While the use of terms for deity in reference to cultic objects was frequently sarcastic or intentionally attributed to foreign or less pious individuals, there are multiple references to cultic objects as אלהים without any hint of polemic or irony.<sup>34</sup> We cannot so easily dismiss this usage. The term was also occasionally used in reference to humans with special authority or relationships with deity, as in Exodus 4:16 (ואתה תהיה־לו לאלהים), “and you will be a deity to him”),<sup>35</sup> Exodus 7:1 (נתתיך אלהים לפרעה), “I have made you a deity to Pharaoh”), Isaiah 9:5 (ויקרא שמו פלא יועץ אל גבור), “his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Deity”), and the vocative references to the king as אלהים in Psalm 45:7–8. The

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<sup>32</sup> The definite article is understood by some to be an element of the development of a divine name (“deity” > “The Deity” > “Deity” [DN]). See, for instance, Arnold and Choi, *GBHS*, 30–31: “The definite article can mark a common noun as a proper noun. . . . Related to this category is the solitary use of the definite article . . . in which appellatives referring to unique persons, places, or things are on their way to becoming a name: הָאֱלֹהִים, ‘God [literally: *the* God].’” Cf. Gesenius, *GKC* §125f: “In a few instances original appellatives have completely assumed the character of real proper names, and are therefore used without the article; thus הָאֱלֹהִים *God*.” This development is not linear, though, and the sense of the definite article is not so clear. I agree with Wardlaw that “arthrous” and “anarthrous” are preferred over “definite” or “indefinite,” in light of the many different semantic senses carried by the definite article (Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 99, note 41). See James Barr, “‘Determination’ and the Definite Article in Biblical Hebrew,” *JSS* 34.2 (1989): 307–35.

<sup>33</sup> In light of this, the references in Exodus 21:2–6 and 22:7–8 to appearing before האלהים may have reference to stelai located at city gates or by the entry to a house. While these references were frequently sarcastic in the exilic literature, they reflect the disputed boundaries of the concept. The prototype effects of “deity” will be discussed further below.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, Genesis 35:2, 4 have Jacob and the narration itself refer to cultic objects as אלהי הנכר, “foreign deities.”

<sup>35</sup> Lest the *lamed* prefix be interpreted to be qualifying the divinity attributed to Moses, note that YHWH frequently promises their devotees to be לך לאלהים, “a deity to you.” This suggests deity can be prototypically understood as a relational designation rather than an ontological one. Wardlaw’s contention that the passage metaphorically insists Moses “will be like God in the sense that he will either speak to Aaron or through Aaron as an intermediary to Pharaoh” (Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 108) is based on theologically motivated assumptions about deity.

conceptualization of “deity” could thus extend to include cultic objects, the dead, and even some humans. We do no justice to the literature to impose on the texts our own theologically-driven prescriptiveness regarding what the word “deity” is allowed to mean. A clearer understanding of how these entities fit into the conceptual category of deity demands a careful interrogation of the conceptual structures that constituted and shaped the category, and it is to that interrogation that I now turn.

## The Conceptual Structures of Deity

This section will interrogate the conceptual structures of deity, whether linguistically or materially manifested. In it, I will propose a semantic base for deity, identify the main conceptual domains and profiles that would have been activated in the minds of hearers/readers when the concept of deity was evoked, and identify two of the central image schemata that aid in the construal of deity. Identifying these structures, in a sense, separates the different interpretive lenses through which deity was conceptualized, allowing a more careful interrogation of the category and its constituent elements. Because the conceptual domains, profiles, and image schemata discussed in this section will be among the most broadly representative of deity, they stretch across the full chronological range of the Hebrew Bible, but I will discuss dating and change where relevant.

### *The Conceptual Base of Deity*

The discussion to this point provides a much broader semantic range for the concept of deity than is generally recognized by scholars, but not every occurrence of the word evoked that entire semantic range. Different semantic fields within it would have had different degrees of salience depending on the region, the time period, and the contexts of the usage. Those contexts

signaled to the hearer/reader which profiles were activated, which semantic domains were to be prioritized, and how they were to be configured. That process must build on a conceptual base, and here I propose that base derived from the intuitive frameworks outlined in the previous chapter. That chapter established that the early Israelites and Judahites, including those involved in the composition, editing, and transmission of the biblical texts, indeed conceptualized deity according to human and social intuitive frameworks operative still today, which allows us to establish a semantic foundation on which to reconstruct the specific conceptualizations preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

I identify [UNSEEN AGENT] as the semantic base for deity.<sup>36</sup> I consider this domain to operate within the broader domain of [UNSEEN AGENCY], which could itself potentially be identified as a semantic base. From an intuitive point of view, after all, the entire universe is potentially saturated with, and under the influence of, unseen agency. However, given the prototypical understanding of deities as discrete intentional agents, [UNSEEN AGENT] is the proximate activated base. Other conceptualizations of more generic divine agency can and do operate independent of the [UNSEEN AGENT] domain. In other words, agency does not always have to be identified with, and thought to originate from, a specific agent. It can be conceptualized as generic agency, as appears to have been the case with the use of JPFs, for example, or generic concepts of purity and impurity. Such contexts would prioritize the [UNSEEN AGENCY] base. These references, however, are not prototypical of the Hebrew Bible's representations of deity and divine agency, which tends to be drawn to specific identifiable agents. The use of terms for deity to refer in some cases to deceased humans and other unseen agents supports this conceptual foundation.

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<sup>36</sup> In keeping with the orthographic conventions that are common in the scholarly discussions about these categories, I will use bracketed caps to identify bases and domains, and small caps to identify profiles.



*The Conceptual Domains and Profiles of Deity*

[DEITY]

I identify both a domain in reference to the generic notion of [DEITY], and a profile in reference to its instantiation: a DEITY. YHWH was the prototype for both in the Hebrew Bible, and particularly when used in the titular sense, but because there were other appellative senses so closely related to the titular sense, there would naturally have been fuzzy occurrences that were not easily identified. One example is Exodus 22:28: אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך לא תאר, which NRSV renders, “You shall not revile God, or curse a leader of your people.” KJV, on the other hand, renders, “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.” Burnett renders, “You shall not revile a deity nor curse a ruler among your people.”<sup>37</sup> While a hearer/reader closer to the text’s composition might have an easier time, our expertise is not native enough to be able to arrive at a firm conclusion with the available contextual clues.

This fuzziness would have provided for some flexibility as pantheons were being renegotiated, allowing for earlier references to deities other than YHWH, or even to cultic objects, to be accommodated to an increasingly narrowed Yahwistic worldview. All that would have been required for those engaged in renegotiating the pantheon was the conventionalization of a Yahwistic interpretation of a given passage.<sup>38</sup> This could happen through discourse,<sup>39</sup> through interpolation,<sup>40</sup> or through the production of parallel or allusive traditions that more explicitly identify a deity as YHWH.<sup>41</sup> This also allowed authors to play with the boundaries

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<sup>37</sup> Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*, 60–61. Given how Burnett’s rendering achieves better parallelism with the second half of the verse, I am inclined to prefer it.

<sup>38</sup> See Exodus 22:8–9, for instance, in David Wright’s analysis (see above, p. 231–32, n. 210).

<sup>39</sup> This would be difficult to identify, but later traditions of vocalization might indicate such discursive re-readings of a passage. For perhaps the clearest example of this phenomenon, see below, pages 342–43 and notes 17 and 18.

<sup>40</sup> For example, YHWH is entirely absent from Genesis 14:19–22 in the earliest Septuagint manuscripts, but is added to verse 22 by the time of MT, likely to more directly identify El Elyon as YHWH.

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 6:3 is the most explicit example of this: וארא אל-אברהם אל-יצחק ואל-יעקב באל שדי ושמי יהוה לא נודעתי להם, “And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shadday, but by my name YHWH I was not known to them.”

of the category and deny that entities commonly referred to as deities actually were deities. The use of substitutions in order to avoid using terms for deity became conventional for many authors, as well.<sup>42</sup>

[PATRONAGE]

Next, note that roughly half of all the occurrences of terms for deity occur in the construct, mostly marking a genitive relationship with individuals, groups, or territories, as in the following: אלהי העמים/הגוים, “deities of the peoples/nations” (Deut 6:14; 29:17; 2 Kgs 18:33; Ps 96:5); אלהי הנכר, “foreign deities” (Gen 35:2, 4);<sup>43</sup> בעל זבוב אלהי עקרון, “Baal Zebub, the deity of Ekron” (2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16); אלהי אברהם ואלהי נחור ישפטו בינינו, “Let the deity of Abraham and the deity of Nehor judge between us” (Gen 31:53).<sup>44</sup> Except for certain references to cult objects (e.g., Gen 31:30), the genitive here does not indicate possession, but rather patronage, as demonstrated in Judges 11:24:<sup>45</sup>

הלא את אשר יוריִשך כמוֹש אלהיך אותו תירש ואת כל־אשר הוריִש יהוה אלהינו מפנינו אותו נירש

Should you not possess what your deity Chemosh has conquered? And should we not possess all that our deity YHWH has conquered before us?<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Particularly in the idol polemics and parodies of texts like Ezekiel and Isaiah. On this, see Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” 16–45; Smith, “The Polemic of Biblical Monotheism,” 208–22; Nathaniel B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 40–85

<sup>43</sup> Note these passages refer to cultic objects. They are not owned by foreign peoples, rather they index deities understood to be patrons of foreign nations.

<sup>44</sup> While the first part of this passage refers to YHWH, the translatability of the ability of the two different deities to judge between Jacob and Laban displays the generic conceptualization of deity underlying the passage. The same is true of quotation of Judges 11:24.

<sup>45</sup> There is an overlapping but not quite isometric sense of the local manifestation of a deity, but this is rare. It usually involved formulae that used the deity’s personal name (e.g., *yhwh šmrn*, “YHWH of Samaria,” from Pithos A at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud), which was more common in other Southwest Asian literature, but there are some occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Mark Smith identifies אלה(י) ירושלם, “deity of Jerusalem” in Ezra 7:19 and 2 Chronicles 32:19 as a “DN of GN” reference to the location of the deity’s manifestation. Similarly, the DN *b*-GN formula occurs in Psalm 65:1; 84:7: אלהים בציון, “deity-in-Zion.” For a detailed discussion of these formulae in biblical and cognate literature, see Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 71–77.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Smith notes that while Judges and Kings are traditionally characterized as “Deuteronomistic,” this example and others that demonstrate translatability in discourse about deity “may be reasonably situated largely in the monarchic period. While some of the examples . . . could have been composed or redacted later . . . it would seem that their tradition, if not their basic composition, dates to the period of the monarchy. Moreover, despite

This is the [PATRONAGE] domain, or the notion that deities were stewards over specific social or geographical divisions. This is remarkably widespread in Southwest Asian discourse about deity. For instance, the inscription of Eshmunazar from Sidon refers to Dor and Joppa as the “lands of Dagan.”<sup>47</sup> The Yehawmilk inscription mentions “the deities of Byblos,”<sup>48</sup> while the Sefire inscription is presented as a treaty between “the deities of KTK and the gods of Arpad.”<sup>49</sup> Esarhaddon’s vassal treaty calls upon the respective gods of Ashur, Ninevah, Calah, Arbela, Kalzi, Harran, Assyria, Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, Sumer, and Akkad, in addition to “all the deities of every land” and “the deities of heaven and earth,” to act as witness.<sup>50</sup> With multiple different dimensions of stewardship and systematically organized hierarchies, these conceptualizations all represent rather complex stages in the change of socializing deities.

Parallel references to “your deity” and “our deity” in the Hebrew Bible suggest the underlying patron/client relationship was embedded in the generic and trans-cultural understanding of deity.<sup>51</sup> Mark Smith uses the term “translatability” to refer to this trans-cultural sharing of superordinate conceptualizations of the nature and function of deity.<sup>52</sup> The fact that almost half of occurrences of words for deity are found within constructions that

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instances of later rewriting or additions, the information about translatability in these texts suits a pre-exilic milieu” (Smith, *God in Translation*, 102–03 and n. 36). On translatability in Judges 11 specifically, see pp. 110–12.

<sup>47</sup> *KAI* 14:19.

<sup>48</sup> *KAI* 4:4, 7; “The Inscription of King Yahimilk,” translated by S. Segert (*COS* 2.29).

<sup>49</sup> *KAI* 222 B:5–6; “The Inscriptions of Bar-Ga’yah and Mati’el from Sefire,” translated by J. A. Fitzmyer (*COS* 2.82).

<sup>50</sup> “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon,” translated by D. J. Wiseman (*ANET* 534–35).

<sup>51</sup> Thus the Israelite king Ahaziah instructs his messengers in 2 Kings 1 to enquire of Baal Zebub in Ekron regarding injuries he sustained. Elijah’s confrontation with the king tacitly acknowledges the parallelism of the two deities’ roles (2 Kgs 1:3): “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” See Smith, *God in Translation*, 114–16.

<sup>52</sup> While there is much that was shared, the biblical authors also sometimes used distinct language and frameworks when representing non-Israelites’ discourse about the patronage of deities. This was always in the service of the (usually polemical) rhetorical purposes of the author. For instance, in 2 Kings 20:23, after the Arameans suffer defeat at the hands of Israelites, the author has the servant of the Aramean king state that regarding the next battle in the valleys, where mountain deities would be at a disadvantage. Of course, to prove the Arameans wrong, and show YHWH’s broader purview, a representative is sent to the Israelite forces to declare on YHWH’s behalf, “החמון הגדול הזה בידך וידעתם כי־אני יהוה ונתתי את־כל, “I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am YHWH” (1 Kgs 20:28). See also Gary A. Rendsburg, “Foreigner Speech: Biblical Hebrew,” *EHL* 1.903–04.

indicate such relationships indicates that the [PATRONAGE] domain is phenomenally widespread, and should be considered one of the prototypical features of deity in the Hebrew Bible. Deities were patrons over peoples and lands.

Of course, there was no single conceptualization of patronage. The specific nature of the relationship was construed according to socioculturally salient frameworks and a society's mnemohistory. Where an ancestor or ancestral deity may have been understood to have purview over a smaller kinship unit (as assumed of premonarchical periods, for instance), that patronage could be construed according to a specific conceptualization of kin, such as the patriarchal household.<sup>53</sup> Here the profile may be FATHER and/or PATRIARCH. In the patriarchal tradition, reflected primarily in Genesis, a similar relationship was established by covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 17:1–14; 22:15–18) and affirmed by the males of later generations through circumcision. These texts reflect a specific framing of social circumstances that served certain rhetorical goals. In the exodus tradition, on the other hand, the covenant was established with the people of Israel through Moses (Exod 20:1–23:19) and affirmed through obedience to the Law of Moses. Conceptualizations of divine patronage were cumulative as they accreted to the changing traditions underlying the Hebrew Bible. Thus, in Exodus 3:6, editors integrate the two traditions by identifying YHWH as יצחק ואלהי יעקב, “the deity of your fathers, the deity of Abraham, the deity of Isaac, the deity of Jacob.”

A larger nation would likely construe patronage according to whatever frameworks for authority were most salient among elites, such as the [KINGSHIP] domain.<sup>54</sup> In such cases, the profile KING obtains. The frequent use of the word אדני, “lord, master,” in reference to deities (particularly YHWH) and the root עבד, “to serve,” in reference to worship also evokes the [SLAVERY] domain, activating the MASTER profile (Exod 4:10; Deut 3:24; 10:12, 20; Josh

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<sup>53</sup> This is the metaphor Mark Smith suggests governed the conceptualization of the divine council for early Israel (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 54–66).

<sup>54</sup> For instance, Lowell K. Handy identifies government bureaucracy as the governing metaphor for the divine council in the West Semitic world (Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*).

5:14).<sup>55</sup> In the case of textual conflation and change, as in the Hebrew Bible, different conceptualizations could be held in tension, achieving salience in different contexts or among different segments of the society. In the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid phases of Deuteronomy, for instance, Assyrian treaty language was combined with the Abrahamic covenant, the Covenant Code, and the concept of “devoted love” in the construction of a more complex framework for Israel’s patron/client relationship with YHWH. This framework included a SUZERAIN profile (Deut 13:6–11; 17:14–20; cf. Judg 2:1–2) and embedded the husband/wife metaphor, giving us a more salient HUSBAND profile (see Isa 54:5; Ezek 6:8–14; Hos 2:1–20).<sup>56</sup>

[NATIONAL DEITY]

We might identify an additional domain of [NATIONAL DEITY], which was slightly more specialized than [PATRONAGE], and reflected the superordinate notion of a patron deity over each nation or people of the earth and their relationships to each other.<sup>57</sup> This framework is put on clearest display in Deuteronomy 4:19 and 32:8–9:

Deuteronomy 4:19<sup>58</sup>

וּפְרִי־תֵשֶׁא עֵינֶיךָ הַשְּׁמִימָה וּרְאִית אֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶת־הַיָּרֵחַ וְאֶת־הַכּוֹכָבִים כֹּל צִבְאֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנִדְחַת וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִית  
לָהֶם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֲשֶׁר חָלַק יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֹתָם לְכָל הָעַמִּים תַּחַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם

Lest you look up toward the heavens and see the sun, and the moon, and the stars—all the host of the heavens—and are led astray and worship them and serve them, which your deity YHWH has allotted to all the peoples under all the heavens.

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of “slave” as a metaphor in the Hebrew Bible, see Edward J. Bridge, “The Metaphoric Use of Slave Terms in the Hebrew Bible,” *BBR* 23.1 (2013): 13–28.

<sup>56</sup> On “devoted love,” see MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 97–123. For an outline of the development of Deuteronomy, see Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*. For a summary of the influence of the Covenant Code and Assyrian treaty formulae, see Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert, “Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty,” *JAJ* 3 (2012): 123–40.

<sup>57</sup> On the notion of national patron deities, see Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Theology. Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> On the astralization of deity in Israel and Judah, see page 217, note 164. On the de-personification of these deities in the interest of promoting YHWH’s incomparability, see Hadley, “The De-deification of Deities in Deuteronomy,” 157–74.

Deuteronomy 32:8–9<sup>59</sup>

בהנחל עליון גוים בהפרידו בני אדם	8
יצב גבלת עמים למספר בני אלהים	
ויהי חלק יהוה עמו	9
יעקב חבל נחלתו	

- 8 When the Most High distributed the nations,  
when he divided humanity,  
he set the boundaries of the peoples  
according to the number of the deities;  
9 and YHWH’s own portion was his people,  
Jacob, the lot of his inheritance.

Deuteronomy 4:19 is the later of the two texts, and it reinterprets Deuteronomy 32:8–9 by putting YHWH in the position of distributing the deities to the nations, rather than Elyon distributing the nations to YHWH and the other deities. The earlier text understands YHWH’s purview to be limited to the nation of Israel—a pre-exilic concept reflected in multiple passages<sup>60</sup>—and it distinguishes the high deity from YHWH, but both reflect divine patronage over each nation.<sup>61</sup> Daniel 10:13–21 reflects a second century BCE iteration of this conceptualization of divine patronage. The text refers to “princes” (שרים) of Israel, Persia, and Greece, framing these “princes” as angelic figures who battle on behalf of their client nations.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> NRSV emends the end of verse 8 to reflect the reading suggested by LXX Deuteronomy 32:8 and attested in 4QDeut<sup>f</sup>. See Patrick W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut. 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954): 12–15; Eugene Ulrich et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4.IX: Deuteronomy to Kings*. DJD XIV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 90. See also Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Michael Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32 and the Sons of God,” *BibSac* 158.1 (2001): 52–74; Innocent Himbaza, “Dt 32,8, une correction tardive des scribes Essai d’interprétation et de datation,” *Biblica* 83.4 (2002): 527–48; Ronnie Goldstein, “A New Look at Deuteronomy 32:8–9 and 43 in the Light of Akkadian Sources,” *Tarbiz* 89.1 (2010–2011): 5–21 [Hebrew]. For a provocative alternative reconstruction, see Jan Joosten, “A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy xxxii 8,” *VT* 57.4 (2007): 548–55. I also amend the beginning of verse 9 to replace the perhaps intentionally obscuring כִּי with ויהי following the Septuagint’s rendering καὶ ἐγενήθη, which does not render כִּי, but overwhelmingly renders ויהי.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, Deuteronomy 32:8–9; 1 Samuel 26:19; 2 Kings 3:27; 5:15–17.

<sup>61</sup> On YHWH’s territoriality, see Saul M. Olyan, “The Territoriality of YHWH in Biblical Texts,” in *Strength to Strength: Essays in Appreciation of Shaye J. D. Cohen*, ed. Michael L. Satlow (Providence, RI: Brown Judaica Studies, 2018), 45–52.

<sup>62</sup> The chief angel is called Michael, who is an angelic being in the literature contemporary with Daniel (*I Enoch* 20; 89:55–90:19; *Jubilees* 10:22–23; *Sirach* 17:17; *Testament of Naphtali* 8–10; 4Q403 1.i:1–29). On the development of an angelic interpretation of patron deities in the Greco-Roman period, see Darrell D. Hannah, “Guardian Angels and Angelic National Patrons in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity,” in *Yearbook 2007. Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings – Origins, Development and Reception*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer,

This takes us to the [DIVINE WAR] domain.

[DIVINE WAR]

The responsibility to fight on behalf of one's constituency is a prototypical feature of the patron deity across the biblical and non-biblical literature, and it also extends from the earliest down to the latest texts.<sup>63</sup> The profile is that of the WARRIOR, and it gains significance within the [DIVINE WAR] semantic domain, which projects the most salient features of human conflict onto the divine realm.<sup>64</sup> An example of its activation that includes a deity other than YHWH is found in 2 Kings 3, which describes an Israelite/Judahite/Edomite coalition against Moab. YHWH promised to deliver Moab into the coalition's hands (vv. 18–19), and it enjoys marked success until it reaches Kir-hareseth. Before the coalition is able to breach the city wall, the king of Moab offered his son as a burnt offering, catalyzing a קצף־גדול, “great fury.” The text explains that Israel ויסעו מעליו וישבו לארץ “withdrew from against him and returned to the land” (verse 27).<sup>65</sup> In light of the consistent use of קצף in reference to divine fury,<sup>66</sup> the text can only be interpreted to be indicating (rather reticently) that the sacrifice successfully invoked

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Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 413–36; cf. Smith, *God in Translation*, 201–02. On the dating, see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, HCHCB (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 24–33.

<sup>63</sup> The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 is among the earliest biblical witnesses to this semantic domain. See Judges 11:24 above, but also 2 Kings 19:10, 12, in which the Assyrian king Sennacherib's chief eunuch, Rabshakeh, taunts Hezekiah by using the notion of the translatability of the notion of the divine warrior patron: אל־ישאך אלהיך אשר אתה בטח בו לאמר לא תנתן ירושלם ביד מלך אשור “Do not let your deity on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria,” and ההצילו אתם “Have the deities of the nations delivered them, the nations that my predecessors destroyed?” (For the case that Rabshakeh was a Judahite, see Yigal Levin, “How Did Rabshakeh Know the Language of Judah?,” in Yona et al., *Marbeh Hokmah*, 323–37.)

<sup>64</sup> For the frameworks of divine warfare, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Some may insist this terminology suggests a peaceful departure, but note they are the same two verbs used to refer to Sennacherib's retreat in 2 Kings 19:36 after the messenger of YHWH decimated his troops to the tune of 185,000 casualties.

<sup>66</sup> There are twenty-eight occurrences: Numbers 1:53; 17:11; 18:5; Deuteronomy 29:27; Joshua 9:20; 22:20; 2 Kings 3:27; Isaiah 34:2; 54:8; 60:10; Jeremiah 10:10; 21:5; 32:37; 50:13; Zechariah 1:2, 15; 7:12; Psalms 38:2; 102:11; Ecclesiastes 5:16; Esther 1:18; 1 Chronicles 27:24; 2 Chronicles 19:2, 10; 24:18; 29:8; 32:25–26. All but two refer to divine wrath. There are only two references outside the context of divine anger (Eccl 5:17; Esth 1:18). For a strained apologetic overinterpretation of קצף־גדול, see Scott Morschauser, “A ‘Diagnostic’ Note on the ‘Great Wrath upon Israel’ in 2 Kings 3:27,” *JBL* 129.2 (2010): 299–302.

the intervention of the Moabite patron deity (Chemosh), which forced the retreat of the Israelite forces.<sup>67</sup> YHWH, in other words, was out of their purview and was expelled from Moab by that nation's own divine warrior patron.

[ACCESS TO STRATEGIC INFORMATION]

Another trans-cultural feature of the [NATIONAL DEITY] domain highlighted in the episode in 2 Kings 3 relates directly to one of the central prosocial functions of deity. It relates there to YHWH, but this domain is ubiquitous around ancient Southwest Asia and in the Hebrew Bible in relation to other deities, including cultic objects and the dead.<sup>68</sup> After initial setbacks, the Judahite king Jehoshaphat asks if a prophet is around through whom they might seek YHWH's direction. A servant of the Israelite king Jehoram directs them to Elisha, who reluctantly inquires of YHWH and then promises them victory. This evokes the [ACCESS TO STRATEGIC INFORMATION] domain. Humans operate with limited access within this conceptual domain, but because full-access is central to the prosocial functioning of deities, the FULL-ACCESS STRATEGIC AGENT profile is prototypical of deity in the Hebrew Bible.

The most explicit example involving a deity other than YHWH is that of Saul's interaction with the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28.<sup>69</sup> As with 2 Kings 3, the concern was to determine

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<sup>67</sup> See Burke O. Long, "2 Kings III and Genres of Prophetic Narrative," *VT* 23.3 (1973): 337–48; Baruch Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *BAR* 12.6 (1986): 62–63; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 40–52; John Barclay Burns, "Why Did the Besieging Army Withdraw? (II Reg 3,27)," *ZaW* 102.2 (1990): 187–94; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1993), 14–17; Hans-Peter Müller, "Chemosh כְּמוֹשׁ," *DDD* 189; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 176–77; Raymond Westbrook, "Elisha's True Prophecy in 2 Kings 3," *JBL* 124.3 (2005): 530–32; Smith, *God in Translation*, 116–18; Thom Stark, *The Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (and Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It)* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 91–92.

<sup>68</sup> Full access to strategic information has already been discussed in connection with material engagements with the dead and in connection with the prosocial development of deity concepts in Israel and Judah. The fullest textual corpora from ancient Southwest Asia reflecting means of accessing the information provided by these agents is the divination literature of ancient Mesopotamia. For bibliographic information, see notes 71 and 74 below.

<sup>69</sup> See pages 159–60 above.



strategy related to warfare (cf. 2 Sam 2:1; Jer 21:1–7), but this was not the only reason full-access strategic agents were consulted. They were also sought after for help judging difficult legal cases (Num 5:11–31), determining succession of leadership (Num 27:18–21; 1 Sam 10:20–22), resolving illnesses (2 Kgs 1:2), and for numerous other reasons not clearly reflected in the Hebrew Bible. A variety of tools were available to facilitate divination, including the אורים ותמים, “Urim and Thummim” (Num 27:21; Deut 33:8–10; 1 Sam 14:41), the אפוד, “ephod” (1 Sam 23:9–10; Judg 17:5), גורלות, “lots” (Lev 16:7–8), תרפים, “teraphim” (Ezek 21:26; Zech 10:2), and other cultic items.<sup>70</sup> In the broader world of ancient Southwest Asia, the natural world was saturated with clues about strategic information, and accessing that information was primarily a matter of adequate education in the significance of dreams, the configuration of the stars, the shape of clouds and livers, the flight of birds, and numerous other phenomena.<sup>71</sup>

Necromancy may have been the most accessible, natural, and ubiquitous form of divination available to Israelites and Judahites, and perhaps because of the easy overlap with engagement with YHWH’s own agency. Threats to YHWH’s monopoly on the FULL-ACCESS STRATEGIC AGENT profile, however, were a concern for later cultic authorities (cf. Deut 18:13).<sup>72</sup> As a

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<sup>70</sup> In Judges 17:4–5, Micah makes an ephod and teraphim and has a hoard of silver made into a pair of divine images by a silversmith. His mother had given him the silver, stating she was consecrating (קדש) it to YHWH, from her hand to her son (see Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature*, 197–202). A Levite later joins his house and becomes his priest, inquiring at one point of YHWH (presumably through one or more of Micah’s cultic objects) regarding the mission of visitors (Judg 18:5–6). When those visitors later invite the Levite to come be a priest “to a tribe and clan in Israel,” he abandons Micah, taking the cultic objects with him. Micah calls after them, asking, למה גנבת את־אלהי, “why did you steal my gods?”

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, C. L. Seow and Robert K. Ritner, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Martti Nissinen, “What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. John Kaltner and Louis Stulman (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 17–37; Amar Annus, ed., *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010); Kim Beerden, *World Full of Signs: Ancient Greek Divination in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>72</sup> While this distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned divination ultimately served the myopic institutional goals of Israel and Judah’s monarchies, the effects would reverberate down through history, facilitating the artificial bifurcation between magic and prophecy developed in the “world religions” school in the nineteenth century CE. Much like religion and politics, both concepts were generated within the rhetorical contrasts originally drawn up to serve struggles for power. Jacob Milgrom identifies P as the root of this bifurcation, but also appears to endorse it: “The basic premises of pagan religion are (1) that its deities are themselves dependent on and influenced by a metadivine realm, (2) that this realm spawns a multitude of malevolent and benevolent entities, and (3) that if humans can tap into this realm they can acquire the magical power to coerce the gods to do their will . . . The Priestly theology negates these premises. It posits the existence of one supreme God who contends neither with a higher realm nor with competing peers” (Jacob Milgrom,

result, many of these channels and means for divination were portrayed in later periods as outlawed in monarchic Israel and Judah, with access to this divine agency rhetorically restricted to an authorized school of Yahwistic prophets.<sup>73</sup> Although these prophets still utilized some of the tools mentioned above, unauthorized, foreign, and non-Yahwistic forms of divination were literarily condemned, particularly if involving the deceased (Exod 22:17; Lev 19:26; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:9–14; 1 Sam 28:3–25; cf. Num 23:23).<sup>74</sup>

[SOCIAL MONITORING] and [PUNISHMENT]

Patronage and full access to strategic information also cued the hearer/reader to the [SOCIAL MONITORING] domain (one of the fundamental prosocial functions of deity), which must also be construed according to culturally-salient conceptual frameworks. JUDGE

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*Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3.1 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 42–43, quoted in Rüdiger Schmitt, “The Problem of Magic and Monotheism in the Book of Leviticus,” *JHS* 8.11 [2008]: 3). If we accept that P “posited” such a worldview, it ultimately failed, since resolving the problem of evil still required an antagonistic divine power and the authority leveraged by the supporters of P could not overrule or eradicate the intuitive cognitive processes described in Chapters 3 and 4. Indeed, the products of those processes continue to provide both the motivations for the major “monotheistic” traditions as well as their primary antagonisms. Note Jonathan Stökl’s contention that “Prophets and magicians do different things for different ends. One speaks for a deity, the other changes the physical environment” (Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 8). The Hebrew Bible, of course, is replete with authorized prophets who change the physical environment (e.g., Moses, Elijah, and Elisha). That the distinction still traces the conflict between institutional and individual interests is reflected in Émile Durkheim’s observation that “A magician has clients, but not a church” (Émile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981], 72, also quoted in Schmitt, “The Problem of Magic and Monotheism in the Book of Leviticus,” 4).

<sup>73</sup> “The difference between the religious phenotypes *’iš hā’ēlōhīm* and *ašipu* lies in their dissimilar sources of legitimacy: The *’iš hā’ēlōhīm* got his legitimacy through his special man-god relationship while the *ašipu* from his year-long specialist education standing in a tradition centuries-old. What they are actually doing—praying, performing ritual acts, and the like—is basically the same” (Schmitt, “The Problem of Magic and Monotheism in the Book of Leviticus,” 6–7). See also Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Exclusivity of Divine Communication in Ancient Israel: False Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,” in *Mediating between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East*, ed. C. L. Crouch, Jonathan Stökl, and Anna Elise Zerneck (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 67–81.

<sup>74</sup> See Frederick H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11–35; Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*; Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*. On celestial divination in Israel, see Jeffrey L. Cooley, “Celestial Divination in Ugarit and Ancient Israel: A Reassessment,” *JNES* 71.1 (2012): 21–30. Female prophecy was not stereotypical, but is represented in the biblical texts. See, for example, H. G. M. Williamson, “Prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible,” in Day, *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*, 65–80; Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho, eds., *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature*.

was one of the primary profiles in the Hebrew Bible, which was activated most clearly when the root  $\sqrt{\text{שפט}}$  (“to judge”) occurred in some way in reference to a deity’s activities (e.g., Gen 18:25; Isa 2:4; 11:4; Ezek 7:8). This could represent a range of conceptualizations of judgment and the conventions associated with them that frequently bled into other notions of authority and governance. For instance,  $\text{שפט}$  is used in some texts to refer to the activity of kings, prophets, and even high priests (1 Sam 4:18; 7:16–17), suggesting it was associated somewhat generically with authority, as in 1 Samuel 8:5:  $\text{שימה־לנו מלך לשפטנו ככל־הגוים}$ , “give us a king to judge us like all the nations.” The deity could even be cast as prosecutor or plaintiff, and particularly in the  $\text{ריב}$  (roughly “lawsuit”) type-scene.<sup>75</sup>

Another salient domain subordinate to [SOCIAL MONITORING] was [PUNISHMENT], which was most commonly reflected in the judgments against Israel and the nations for their disobedience and iniquity. Because of the Yahwistic orientation of the vast majority of the biblical literature, punishment is generally exercised *on* the deities of the nations, rather than exercised *by* them. A non-Yahwistic example from the cognate literature, however, is found in the Mesha Stele, which asserts in lines 5–6 that the king of Israel was able to oppress Moab because  $y'np \underline{kmš} b' ršh$ , “Chemosh was angry with their land.”<sup>76</sup> The Hebrew Bible reflects the same perspective in several locations where YHWH allows foreign powers to oppress Israel because of their iniquity or cultic infidelity. In fact, 2 Kings 17:18 insists that the fall of the Northern Kingdom was the work of YHWH:  $\text{ויתאנף יהוה מאד בישראל ויסרם מעל פניו}$ , “YHWH was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight.” This reflectively employs the [SOCIAL MONITORING] and [PUNISHMENT] domains to rationalize another nation’s victory over Israel without acknowledging the failure of YHWH to fulfill their duties as

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<sup>75</sup> See Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib Pattern)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978); Michael de Roche, “Yahweh’s *Rib* against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called ‘Prophetic Lawsuit’ in the Preexilic Prophets,” *JBL* 102.4 (1983): 563–74.

<sup>76</sup> For the text of the Mesha inscription, see Kent P. Jackson and J. Andrew Dearman, “The Text of the Mesha Inscription,” in Dearman, *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, 93–95.

## CHAPTER 4 – Deity in the Hebrew Bible

PATRON DEITY and as WARRIOR by protecting their people. Later authors would repeatedly invoke this domain of [FAILURE TO ACT] in attempting to compel the deity to ease the suffering they felt was unmerited.

### [DIVINE COUNCIL]

The [NATIONAL DEITY] and [SOCIAL MONITORING] domains could also be activated within the broader domain of the [DIVINE COUNCIL], which represented another one of the projections of human institutions onto the divine realm.<sup>77</sup> Profiles operative within the [DIVINE COUNCIL] domain, depending on the context, include HIGH DEITY, PATRIARCHAL DEITY, SECOND TIER DEITY, and in later periods, PROPHET. The WARRIOR and JUDGE profiles were salient within this domain in the cognate literature, but the latter primarily obtains in the Hebrew Bible, and specifically in reference to YHWH.<sup>78</sup> The other deities of the divine council could be called upon as witnesses within legal proceedings, however, but only oblique references to such traditions appear to have slipped by editors of the Hebrew Bible who were carefully curating the category of divinity. Amos 3:13, with its plural imperatives שמעו והעידו, “Hear and testify,” may be an example of one of those oblique references.<sup>79</sup> One of the overarching functions of the divine council was to oversee cosmic order and social justice.<sup>80</sup> The manifestations of this conceptual domain in the Hebrew Bible show very close connections with the comparative literature, and particularly that of Ugarit, but resonances with

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<sup>77</sup> On the divine council type-scene and its conventions, see Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*; David M. Fleming, “The Divine Council as Type Scene in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *JOT* 31 (2007): 259–73; White, *Yahweh’s Council*.

<sup>78</sup> Battles between deities were frequently a priority for the divine council in the Ugaritic literature. See, for instance, Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume I. Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> See David Bokovoy, “שמעו והעידו בבית יעקב: Invoking the Council as Witnesses in Amos 3:13,” *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 37–51.

<sup>80</sup> Patrick D. Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol,” *HBT* 9.2 (1987): 53–78.

Mesopotamia are also manifested in iterations from the Babylonian and later periods.<sup>81</sup>

[INCOMPARABILITY]

A conceptual domain frequently asserted for the patron deities of many nations in Southwest Asia was [INCOMPARABILITY]. This was the rhetorical assertion that a given deity was so authoritative and/or transcendent that other deities could not compare to them.<sup>82</sup> This rhetoric commonly extended to asserting the deity’s military dominance or, in the case of deities associated with creative acts, their preexistence before all other deities and creation of all things (including the other deities). While the Hebrew Bible never asserts the incomparability of deities other than YHWH, it occurs frequently enough in other societies that we are safe identifying it as common to the Southwest Asian concept of deity.<sup>83</sup> For instance, an Akkadian hymn to the moon deity Sin began, “O Lord, chief of the gods, who alone is exalted on earth and in heaven.”<sup>84</sup> At Ugarit, Baal was commonly exalted in this manner (KTU 1.3.v:32–33): *mlkn. ’al ’iyn. b ’l. tptn / ’in. d ’lnh*, “Our king is Mightiest Baal, Our ruler, with none above him.”<sup>85</sup> Even more elaborately, “The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re” described Amun-Re as ‘Unique One, like whom among the gods?,’ “Sole One, who made all that exists, One, alone, who made that which is,” and “Father of the fathers of all the gods, Who suspended heaven, who laid down the ground. Who made what exists, who created that which is.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

<sup>82</sup> The seminal work on this concept is C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). On the notion that the Homeric epics’ refusal to use simile to describe Zeus constitutes the same rhetorical device, see Jonathan L. Ready, “Zeus, Ancient Near Eastern Notions of Divine Incomparability, and Similes in the Homeric Epics,” *ClassAnt* 31.1 (2012): 56–91.

<sup>83</sup> For several other examples, see Ready, “Zeus, Ancient Near Eastern Notions of Divine Incomparability, and Similes in the Homeric Epics,” 69–72.

<sup>84</sup> Robert William Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1912), 141.

<sup>85</sup> Text and translation are from Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 327.

<sup>86</sup> “The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re,” trans. Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 1.25.i and iii).

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An interesting example from Sumer is the following, from the “Hymn to Nanše” (lines 250–254; the term transliterated *me* refers to divine powers or stewardships):<sup>87</sup>

*d*nanše *me-zu me-maḥ-àm* [*me-a di*]ri-ga-àm  
[*an*] *lugal-e igi-ḥúl-la-ni my-un-ši-bar-bar-re*  
*d*en-líl-da *bará-nam-tar-re-da mu-un-da-an-tuš-a*  
*a-a d*en-ki-ke<sub>4</sub> *nam i-ri-in-tar*

My lady, your *me* are mighty *me*, surpassing other *me*.  
Nanshe, your *me* cannot be matched by any other *me*.  
An, the king, looks upon them with joy.  
With Enlil he lets you sit on the throne of fate.  
Father Enki has fixed your fate.

The hymn clearly subordinates Nanše to her father and to the divine king Enlil, but still exalts the divine powers she possesses over those of any other deity. The rhetoric of comparability could be directed by the same text or the same authors at multiple different deities, indicating it did not constitute a particularly consistent praise indicative of consistent and clear divine hierarchies,<sup>88</sup> though there were a limited number of deities at whom this rhetoric could be directed.<sup>89</sup>

### [HOLINESS]

Connected with the concept of incomparability was that of holiness, which has two general meanings in the Hebrew Bible. According to the more generic and broader usage widely attested in cognate literature, an entity that is holy is an entity that inspires awe, strikes fear, and commands respect. Mark Smith describes deities as “generally marked for holiness (*qdš*),

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<sup>87</sup> Text and translation are from W. Heimpel, “The Nanshe Hymn,” *JCS* 33.2 (1981): 98–99.

<sup>88</sup> Labuschagne comments, “It was typical of the polytheistic world that expressions of incomparability were used not in respect of one god only, but of several gods irrespective of their position in the pantheon” (Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, 33).

<sup>89</sup> Ready, “Zeus, Ancient Near Eastern Notions of Divine Incomparability, and Similes in the Homeric Epics,” 68.

as can be inferred from the general designation of deities as ‘holy ones.’”<sup>90</sup> As he notes, the Ugaritic literature frequently employs the epithet “sons of *qdš*” in reference to the collective deities of the pantheon.<sup>91</sup> El is referred to on a few occasions in the Ugaritic literature as *ltpn w qdš*, “sagacious and holy one” (KTU 1.16.i:11, 21–22; ii:49).<sup>92</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the other deities of the divine council can be referred to as קדשים, “holy ones,” as in the following iteration of the rhetoric of incomparability in reference to YHWH in Psalm 89:6–8:

וידו שמים פלאך יהוה	6
אף־אמונתך בקהל קדשים	
כי מי בשחק יערך ליהוה	7
ידמה ליהוה בבני אלים	
אל נערץ בסוד־קדשים רבה	8
ונורא על־כל־סביביו	

- 6 Let the heavens praise your wonders, O YHWH,  
Even your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.
- 7 For who in the skies compares to YHWH,  
Or among the children of deities is like YHWH?
- 8 A deity dreaded among the council of holy ones,  
Great and awesome above all who surround him?

We may consider the designation קדשים here to reflect this more generic notion of inspiring awe and fear, particularly in light of the rhetorical emphasis of YHWH’s inspiration of greater dread and awe. The designation appears to be used in later texts somewhat euphemistically to refer obliquely to subordinate divine beings without acknowledging their deity, as in Zechariah 14:5, which asserts, ובא יהוה אלהי כל־קדשים עמך, “And YHWH, my deity, will come, all the holy ones with him.”<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 93.

<sup>91</sup> KTU 1.2.i:20–21, 38; 1.17.i:3, 8, 10–11, 13, 22.

<sup>92</sup> See Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts*, 207–09. Smith suggests the second element of this epithet may refer to El’s consort, Athirat (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 93), but see Rahmouni’s discussion on pages 208–09.

<sup>93</sup> These vague references to “holy ones” may have been reinterpreted in later years as references to humans in light of the post-exilic emphasis on Israel becoming holy, which is discussed further below.

The cognate and biblical literature both identify a close conceptual relationship between this awe and fear and the radiance of those entities understood to be “holy.”<sup>94</sup> The Akkadian literature makes this relationship the most clearly, using several terms to refer to the brilliance of divine bodies and the fear and dread they inspired. The Akkadian words *pulhu* and *melammu* referred to the awesome radiance which with deities were adorned.<sup>95</sup> This radiance could be transferred to anything it endowed with their agency, including kings, temples, and cultic objects.<sup>96</sup> The fear it engendered was related to the divine power it signified rather than to any danger that radiance posed in and of itself. This notion of communicable divine radiance may be reflected in the episode of Moses’ shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 (provided one interprets קרן to refer to the shining of Moses’ face).<sup>97</sup> This reading would closely approximate the notions of an authorized divine agent clothed with *melammu* as well as the fear that *melammu* engendered among those who saw it.

Other terms point us to the conceptual overlap with a second sense manifested in the Hebrew Bible’s use of “holy,” that of separation and consecration. This overlap occurs at the relationship of brilliance to cleanliness, which was a state desired for materials involved in cultic and ritual processes. The Akkadian term *ellu*—glossed by CAD as “clean, pure,” “holy, sacred,” and “free, noble”<sup>98</sup>—occurs frequently in reference to precious stones and even the sky in contexts that dictate it be understood to have reference to radiance and brilliance. The

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<sup>94</sup> The connection between cleanliness and shine/radiance may sit at the root of the use of these terms in reference to divine bodies.

<sup>95</sup> *Pulhu*: CAD P, 503–04 (“1. terror, fearsomeness, awesomeness, 2. fear, respect”). *e*: CAD M2, 9–12 (“radiance, supernatural awe-inspiring sheen [inherent in things divine and royal]”). The *Enuma Elish* even states that the endowment with *melammu* turns the endowed into a deity (*Enuma Elish* I.138, II.24).

<sup>96</sup> An early treatment of the two terms is A. L. Oppenheim, “Akkadian *pul(u)ḥ(t)u* and *melammu*,” *JAOS* 63.1 (1943): 31–34; but see also Elena Cassin, *La splendeur divine: introduction à l’étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968); George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 52–53; Vladimir V. Emelianov, “On the Early History of *melammu*,” in *Language in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Vol. 1, Part 1*, ed. Leonid E. Kogan et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 1109–19. See also Shawn Zelig Aster, “Ezekiel’s Adaptation of Mesopotamian *Melammu*,” *DWDO* 45 (2015): 10–21.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Joshua M. Philpot, “Exodus 34:29–35 and Moses’ Shining Face,” *BBR* 23.1 (2013): 1–11.

<sup>98</sup> CAD E, 102.



closest biblical parallel is the Hebrew adjective טהר, which can refer to ceremonial purifying, but occurs in Exodus 24:10 in reference to the clarity and purity of the pavement of sapphire over which the deity appeared to the elders of Israel: כעצם השמים לטהר, “like the very heavens in clarity.” The brilliance resulting from clarity, purity, and cleanliness, and the antithetical concept of uncleanness and pollution, appear to constitute the root metaphors for conceptualizing ritual/moral purity and sin, which was extended to the rhetorical contrast of the nature of deity over and against that of humanity.<sup>99</sup> Items purified for ritual use were marked for that use, often with קדש ל-, “holy to” or “consecrated for.” This was a way to indicate the setting apart of those items specifically and exclusively for use in cultic contexts. Two burnished plates discovered by the altar at the temple at Arad were inscribed with what appears to be קך, which most scholars understand as an abbreviation for קדש כהנים, “holy for priests,” indicating their designation for exclusive use by the temple’s priesthood (cf. Num 6:20).<sup>100</sup> Similar inscriptions are known from finds at Beer-sheba, Beit Mirsim, Hazor, Tel Migne, and Masada.<sup>101</sup>

Holiness, then, was likely a conceptual extension from more “profane” contexts, but was considered prototypical of the generic concept of deity in the Hebrew Bible, even as it was communicable to humanity and to architecture and cultic objects. The Hebrew Bible’s use of “holiness” in reference to separation or consecration may derive from the expectation that humanity somehow participate in the holiness of deity and the observation that humans rarely radiate their own inherent luminosity. The sense of separation is clearly intended in Leviticus 20:26:

והייתם לי קדשים כי קדוש אני יהוה ואבדל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Yitzhaq Feder, “The Semantics of Purity in the Ancient Near East: Lexical Meaning as a Projection of Embodied Experience,” *JANER* 14 (2014): 87–113.

<sup>100</sup> See Aharoni, “Arad,” 20.

<sup>101</sup> See Karel J. H. Vriezen, “Archaeological Traces of Cult in Ancient Israel,” in Becking et al., *Only One God?*, 48.

You shall be holy to me, for I, YHWH, am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples to be mine.<sup>102</sup>

The cultic prescriptions associated with Israel’s achieving holiness indicate cleanliness and purity, and are also included in the conceptualization of “holy,” and perhaps even constitute the means of facilitating it.

[IMMORTALITY]

We may propose [IMMORTALITY] as another semantic domain for deity. One reflection of this domain is found in Psalm 82:6–7, where the deity status of the members of the divine council is contrasted with their condemnation to mortality:

אני־אמרתי אלהים אתם 6  
ובני עליון כלכם  
אכן כאדם תמותון 7  
וכאחד השרים תפלו

- 6 I declare, “You are deities,  
and children of the Most High, all of you.”  
7 Nevertheless, like humans, you will die,  
And as one of the princes, you will fall.

These verses evoke the prototypical understanding of the immortality of deity, even though this late text makes effective rhetorical use of its revocation.<sup>103</sup> Several other texts reflect the same understanding of deity. In Genesis 3:22, for instance, upon acknowledging the humans’ possession of “knowledge of good and evil” (likely a merism for full access to strategic

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<sup>102</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2 quote this statement, adding the designation סגולה, “treasured possession.”

<sup>103</sup> The counterintuitive notion of dying gods actually has some purchase in the ancient literature. See, for instance, Machinist, “How Gods Die,” 189–240. On the notion of “dying and rising gods,” see Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 110–20.

information), the deity cuts off access to the tree of life so that the humans do not eat from it and live forever.

Because of its vulnerability, human flesh is used in multiple places as a symbol of mortality over and against the longevity and invulnerability of רוח.<sup>104</sup> (Here the reference is not to the contemporary notion of an immaterial body, but to air, wind, or breath—an indestructible, unseen, and animating agentive force. This is particularly salient when contrasted with vulnerable flesh.) When YHWH limits human life to one hundred twenty years in Genesis 6:3, they state, הוא בשר לא־יִדוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם לְעֹלָם בְּשָׂגֵם, “My spirit will not remain with humans forever, since they are flesh.” The withdrawal of YHWH’s sustaining spirit allows the flesh to decompose as expected. Similarly, Isaiah 31:3 asserts:

ומצרים אדם ולא־אל  
וסוסיהם בשר ולא־רוח

Now Egyptians are human,  
and not divine  
And their horses are flesh,  
and not spirit.

The idea here is that the Egyptians and the symbols of their military might are still vulnerable flesh, while Israel’s deity is not. Despite some attempts to leverage these contrasts to define deity according to contemporary notions of immateriality,<sup>105</sup> there is no indication any such concept was in circulation at the time, much less a necessary and sufficient feature of deity.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> The connection of flesh with mortality is further elaborated on in later texts like Job 19:26, where Job proclaims that he will see the deity even after his flesh has disintegrated. This is another witness to the notion that there is a locus of identity apart from the flesh that is considerably more durative.

<sup>105</sup> See, for instance, Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 33, note 8: “All spiritual beings are, in biblical usage, labeled *elohim*.”

<sup>106</sup> R. Renehan argues that the concept of immateriality is a philosophical innovation arising in Classical Greece (R. Renehan, “On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality,” *GRBS* 21.2 [1980]: 105–38).

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We are on much safer methodological ground observing that spirit was unseen, could not be destroyed, but could animate and even be destructive itself. Because of its conceptual derivation from the frameworks of unseen agency and deity, which is immortal—or at least considerably more enduring than flesh—there is a perception of comparative invulnerability.<sup>107</sup>

### [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY]

A feature of deity frequently reflected in the Hebrew Bible’s rhetoric about deities (and particularly deities other than YHWH) is their material representation and presencing, which I suggest is the operative concept within the domain of [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY]. The main profile associated with this domain would be DIVINE IMAGE. On the reflective level, there may be any one of a number of rationalizations for the use of cultic objects and other materials to presence deity, but the underlying cognitive framework would be the intuitive perception of unseen agency as communicable and potentially able to inhabit a variety of material entities. While the Hebrew Bible’s rhetoric takes on a markedly polemical tone in Neo-Babylonian- and Achaemenid-period literature, and frequently placed the terminology for the material mediation of deity in the mouths of foreigners and apostate Israelites, some earlier references to cultic objects as deities seem natural and uncontroversial (e.g., Gen 35:4; Exod 20:23; 34:17; Judg 17:5[?]). We would expect such references to be edited or removed as such practices were polemicized by cultic elites, but in some cases the natural semantic fuzziness of the terms for deity may have made reinterpretation a rather simple matter. For instance, Exodus 22:8–9 (discussed in the previous chapter) likely uses אלהים to refer to a cultic object (or objects) before which parties involved in a dispute regarding property would swear oaths. These references

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<sup>107</sup> Deceased kin were understood to perdure as long as their names and memories survived. Transition to full deity status may have been a way of ensuring a much longer postmortal tenure. Assimilation to generic “ancestor” status could be understood as a transitional phase.

could be rather naturally reinterpreted to refer to YHWH, however, thus escaping theologically sensitive editorial hands.

#### [ANTHROPOMORPHISM]

The biblical literature repeatedly refers to YHWH's anthropomorphic corporeality (Gen 3:8; Exod 24:10; 33:11, 22–23; Isa 6:1; cf. Ezek 8:2) as well as to other human social and psychological attributes (Exod 15:3; 32:9–10; 33:11; Jer 8:18–9:3).<sup>108</sup> While such descriptions of other deities are rare in the Hebrew Bible, when they are referenced, it is generally within the same conceptual frameworks used to describe YHWH's own anthropomorphic activity, as in, for instance, Psalm 82. Additionally, although they could be represented in cult and in discourse as manifested through a variety of more and less observable forms—depending on the restrictions of the media or an author's particular rhetorical goals<sup>109</sup>—deity was prototypically anthropomorphic in the Hebrew Bible and the material media of surrounding societies.<sup>110</sup> Because the deity's activity as an agent was its most salient reflective function,

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<sup>108</sup> On anthropomorphism and the body of the deity, see James Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," in *Congress Volume Oxford 1959* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 31–36; Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds*; Stephen D. Moore, "Gigantic God: Yahweh's Body," *JSOT* 70 (1996): 87–115; Ronald S. Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Karel van der Toorn (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 205–28; Esther J. Hamori, "When Gods Were Men": *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); Sommer, *The Bodies of God in Ancient Israel*; Esther J. Hamori, "Divine Embodiment in the Hebrew Bible and Some Implications for Jewish and Christian Incarnational Theologies," in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 161–83; Howard Schwartz, "Does God Have a Body? The Problem of Metaphor and Literal Language in Biblical Interpretation," in Kamionkowski and Kim, *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 201–37; Knafl, *Forming God*; Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 13–45; Izak Cornelius, "The Study of the Old Testament and the Material Imagery of the Ancient Near East, with a Focus on the Body Parts of the Deity," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016*, ed. Louis C. Jonker, Gideon R. Kotzé, and Christl M. Maier (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 195–227; Wagner, *God's Body*.

<sup>109</sup> A wonderful discussion of non-anthropomorphic conceptualizations of deity in early Mesopotamia is Porter, "Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum," 153–94.

<sup>110</sup> The Ugaritic literature is perhaps the most thoroughly anthropomorphic (e.g., KTU 1.4.iv:9–39), but we find similar conceptions in Mesopotamian, Hittite, Egyptian, and other literature. See Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds*; Richard H. Wilkinson, "Anthropomorphic Deities," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles, 2008), 1–9; Hundley, "Here a God, There a God," 68–107; cf. Hundley, "The God Collectors," 176–200: "As in Mesopotamia, the anthropomorphic model is primary" (p. 177). See also Tallay Ornan, "In the Likeness of Man: Reflections on the Anthropocentric Perception of the Divine in Mesopotamian Art," in Porter, *What Is a God?*, 93–151 (here 93): "conceptualization of the divine remained anthropocentric throughout Mesopotamian history."

and because that activity had to be construed according to existing and salient agentive frameworks (until elaborations could be developed and embedded), human form and function was overwhelmingly reflected, even when they were unseen.

### *Schematizing Deity*

With these conceptual domains and their profiles identified, we can interrogate individual passages from the Hebrew Bible and begin to reconstruct a rough approximation of a contemporary hearer or reader’s conceptualization of deity and divine agency. A helpful case study that is among the most thorough engagement with deities other than YHWH is Psalm 82.<sup>111</sup> This text is additionally instructive because of its renegotiation of the role and function of those deities. I quote the psalm in full and follow with a cognitive-semantic interrogation of the conceptualizations of deity it likely evoked.<sup>112</sup>

1	מזמר לאסף אלהים נצב בעדת־אל בקרב אלהים ישפט
2	עד־מתי תשפט־עול ופני רשעים תשא־סלה
3	שפט־דל ויתום עני ורש הצדיקו
4	פלט־דל ואביון מיד רעים הצילו
5	לא ידעו ולא יבינו בחשכה יתהלכו ימוטו
6	כל־מוסדי ארץ אני־אמרתי אלהים אתם ובני עליון כלכם

<sup>111</sup> On Psalm 82 as a rejection of trans-cultural translatability, see Smith, *God in Translation*, 131–39.

<sup>112</sup> It is impossible to reproduce all the various experiences and contexts that likely would have governed the construal of these domains in the different minds of early hearers or readers. On Psalm 82, see Matitiah Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 40 (1969): 123–37; Hans-Winfried Jüngling, *Der Tod der Götter: Eine Untersuchung zum Psalm 82* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969); Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, 226–44; Simon B. Parker, “The Beginning of the Reign of God—Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” *RevBib* 102.4 (1995): 532–59; Peter Machinist, “How Gods Die, Biblically and Otherwise: A Problem of Cosmic Restructuring,” in Pongratz-Leisten, *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, 189–240; James M. Trotter, “Death of the אלהים in Psalm 82,” *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 221–39; Brent A. Strawn, “The Poetics of Psalm 82: Three Critical Notes along with a Plea for the Poetic,” *RevBib* 121.1 (2014): 21–46; McClellan, “The Gods-Complaint,” 842–51.

אכן כאדם תמותון	7
וכאחד השרים תפלו	
קומה אלהים שפטו הארץ	8
כי־אתה תנחל בכל־הגוים	

- 1 The deity takes his place in the divine council;  
in the midst of the deities he judges:
- 2 “How long will you judge corruptly  
and show favoritism to the wicked? *Selah*
- 3 Render justice for the weak and the orphan;  
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
- 4 Rescue the weak and the needy;  
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”
- 5 They have neither knowledge nor understanding,  
they walk around in darkness;  
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- 6 I declare, “You are deities,  
and children of the Most High, all of you.”
- 7 Nevertheless, like humans, you will die,  
And as one of the princes, you will fall.
- 8 Rise up, O Deity, judge the earth;  
For you will inherit all nations!

The first verse sets the stage by describing the deity taking its position among the deities of the divine council (עדת־אל) to render judgment.<sup>113</sup> This imagery immediately invokes the [DEITY] and [DIVINE COUNCIL] domains, as well as the YHWH profile. The use of שפטו profiles JUDGE against these domains, which itself activates the [SOCIAL MONITORING] domain associated with it. This is a divine council court scene, and someone has been naughty. Whatever experiences the hearer or reader has with these domains will be the context within which the rest of the psalm will be interpreted. Verse 2 begins with the question עד־מתי, “how long?,” which is prototypically associated elsewhere in the Psalms with the complaint, a motif

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<sup>113</sup> עדת־אל is literally, “council of El,” but by this period this was likely a frozen form wherein the *nomen rectum* would be understood as the adjectival genitive (thus “divine council”). Additionally, the Septuagint’s συναγωγῆ θεῶν suggests an original עדת־אלים, “council of gods” (A. Gonzalez, “Le Psaume LXXXII,” *VT* 13.3 [1963]: 299; Marvin Tate, “‘Arise, O God, Judge the Earth!’ (82:1–8),” in *Psalms 51–100, Volume 2, Word Biblical Commentary* [Dallas: Word Books, 1990], 329, n. 1.d; cf., with some reservation, Oswald Loretz, *Psalmsstudien: Kolometrie, Strophik und Theologie ausgewählter Psalmen* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002], 259).

within the lament genre.<sup>114</sup> The divine council type-scene appears to be conflated with a complaint, which may be an innovative way to frame the divine or prophetic lawsuit known as the ריב. Seth Sanders has suggested “judicial complaint” as a description of this hybrid genre.<sup>115</sup>

The deities of the divine council seem to be addressed with the second person plural verbs that follow, describing unjust judgment, favor toward the wicked, and neglect of the weak, the low, and the orphan. Verses 2–4 read as charges against the deities. [SOCIAL MONITORING] comes into greater focus at this point, and the failure to uphold the social standards being described by the ruling deity likely begins to activate the [PATRON DEITY] and [FAILURE TO ACT] domains in reference to the responsibilities of the other deities of the divine council. Interestingly, the same domains are activated by several other psalms from around this time period that are directed at YHWH’s own perceived neglect, so there is clear conceptual overlap between YHWH and the deities of the divine council.

The references to the דל (“weak”), יתום (“orphan”), עני (“lowly”), רש (“destitute”), and אביון (“needy”), evoke conventionalized symbols of social justice and the related notion of cosmic stability, which are most directly associated with the [KINGSHIP] and [DEITY] domains.<sup>116</sup> Isaiah 1:17 uses שפט in describing YHWH’s pleading to their own people for the יתום, as well as for the חמוץ (“oppressed”), and the אלמנה (“widow”). The victims here and in Psalm 82 were “much less real-world social groups than intellectual constructs. That is, the terms refer to the

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<sup>114</sup> See, for instance, Psalm 74:10; 80:5; 90:13. On the complaint, see Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989). On the lament, see Carleen Mandolfo, “Language of Lament in the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 114–30. Susan Niditch includes an insightful discussion of the autobiographical dimensions of the lament in Niditch, *The Responsive Self*, 55–63. On genre in the psalms more broadly, see Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998); Harry P. Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition and the Post-Critical Interpretation of the Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>115</sup> Personal communication. For my description of Psalm 82 as a complaint put in the mouth of YHWH and directed at the deities of the nations, see McClellan, “The Gods-Complaint,” 833–51.

<sup>116</sup> See F. Charles Fensham, “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern and Wisdom Literature,” *JNES* 21.2 (1962): 129–39.



*ideal victim.*”<sup>117</sup> For the societies that produced the Hebrew Bible, social monitoring was rationalized as a matter of cosmic stability. Social injustices were conceptualized as manifestations of the chaos which deities, rulers, and cultic specialists were responsible to mitigate. The reference to the inhabitants of earth wandering in darkness and the foundations of the earth shaking (verse 5) demonstrates the failure of the council to uphold the cosmic order, of which social justice was a weight-bearing pillar. By this point, [FAILURE TO ACT] comes front and center. The deities are failing to live up to their primary responsibilities as deities.

Verses 6 and 7 represent the sentence passed on the deities. Verse 6 first affirms the divine status of the deities of the council as בני עליון and אלהים, which places the most common term for deity in the Hebrew Bible parallel to a unique phrase that appears to be a variation on the somewhat more common בני אלהים, “divine sons” or “deities” (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). עליון is particularly prevalent in the psalms, and here it invokes the HIGH DEITY profile (and perhaps PATRIARCHAL DEITY) within the [DIVINE COUNCIL] domain.<sup>118</sup> It is possible, given the Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid context of the psalm, that this verse serves to clear up any misunderstanding about the divinity of the members of the council, but the main function is to set up a contrast for the deities’ consignment to mortality in verse 7 (activating the [PUNISHMENT] domain). This effectively rescinds their responsibilities over the nations and expels them from the divine council. This act again invokes the [DIVINE COUNCIL] domain, but specifically to renegotiate it. This would have been a significant paradigm shift for someone experiencing this upheaval of the structures of deity for the first time.

In the final verse, the psalmist calls upon אלהים to rise up and inherit (נחל) all the nations. The use of the verb נחל, particularly in connection with עליון, alludes to the description in

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<sup>117</sup> Morris Silver, “Prophets and Markets Revisited,” in *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, ed. K. D. Irani and Morris Silver (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 182–83.

<sup>118</sup> עליון is not explicitly identified with the ruling אלהים, but their conflation by this time with YHWH was likely established enough to be understood without contextual nudges.

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Deuteronomy 32:8–9 of the people/nation of Israel as YHWH’s נחלה, “inheritance.”<sup>119</sup> This would activate [PATRONAGE] and [PATRON DEITY]. While the SECOND-TIER DEITY profile should also be activated, since YHWH receives that inheritance from עליון, the two were fully conflated by this period, and that profile had little currency in connection with YHWH. Whether or not it was activated vis-à-vis the other deities is a question of how far back into hoary antiquity the authors were reaching for this motif. It is likely there were some for whom the notion of second-tier deities would have been activated, even if others had long consigned them to a conceptual grab-bag of demons or idols or some other diminutive category. The suggestion that YHWH will now directly rule over all nations also fronts the HIGH DEITY profile (cf. Ps 83:19). The psalm thus combines the divine council type-scene with the complaint genre to rhetorically effect the deposition of the deities of the nations and YHWH’s usurpation of their purviews, entirely restructuring the divine council.

Because Psalm 82 consolidates so many different domains and profiles of deity, it will be instructive to schematize its representation of deity. We might describe the base, profiles, and domains evoked by Psalm 82 in the following way. The [UNSEEN AGENT] base is presupposed, as are the domains of [DEITY] and [PATRONAGE], and likely [KINGSHIP]. [SOCIAL MONITORING] and [PATRON DEITY] are somewhat salient in the psalm, but [DIVINE COUNCIL] and [FAILURE TO ACT] are front and center. The DEITY and YHWH profiles were surely activated by the psalm, but as part of the Elohist Psalter, אלהים was given preference at some point during the editorial process.<sup>120</sup> אלהים feels to us a bit redundant in

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<sup>119</sup> See Harold O. Forschey, “The Construct Chain *naḥal*at YHWH/’*lōhīm*,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 51–53; Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, 368–69.

<sup>120</sup> On the problem of the Elohist Psalter, see Matthias Millard, “Zum Problem des elohistischen Psalters: Überlegungen zum Gebrauch von יהוה und אלהים im Psalter,” in *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Erich Zenger and Norbert Lohfink (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 75–110; Laura Joffe, “The Elohist Psalter: What, How and Why?” *SJOT* 15.1 (2001): 142–69; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, “The So-Called Elohist Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem,” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 35–51; Joel S. Burnett, “Forty-Two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Near Eastern Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the Elohist Psalter,” *JSOT* 31.1 (2006): 81–101.

verse 1, which has compelled some scholars to posit that it replaces an original יהוה.<sup>121</sup> Whether the psalm was composed by those giving preference to אלהים or at some earlier point is unclear from the available data (the redundancy is not determinative), but YHWH is no doubt the active deity.<sup>122</sup> JUDGE also appears to be activated within the juridical context, as well as HIGH DEITY (as part of the divine council framework, but not particularly salient in the psalm). SECOND TIER DEITY is activated in reference to the deities being condemned.

Figure 4.1 represents the schematization of the base, profiles, and domains activated by Psalm 82. It should be noted that this is a static reflection of the conceptualization of generic deity after exposure to the whole psalm. It thus includes both YHWH and the other deities. The rectangle represents the semantic base, [UNSEEN AGENT], while the lettered circles represent DEITY (A), YHWH (B), JUDGE (C), HIGH DEITY (D), and SECOND-TIER DEITY (E). I have rather arbitrarily varied their sizes to indicate that different profiles have different degrees of salience within a particular frame (this is not even remotely a precise reflection of the comparative salience of these specific profiles). The larger shaded circles represent the domains, with the salience receding with the darkness of the circle. The darkest circles represent the most salient domains of [DIVINE COUNCIL] and [FAILURE TO ACT], with [SOCIAL MONITORING], [PATRON DEITY], [PATRONAGE], [ANTHROPOMORPHISM], [IMMORTALITY], and perhaps [KINGSHIP] fading into invisibility.

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<sup>121</sup> For instance, see Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14.1 (1939): 30, and note 1.

<sup>122</sup> The titular use of אלהים was likely close enough to lexicalization in reference to YHWH in this period that it could function in the volume (a bit idiosyncratically) as a substitution for it.

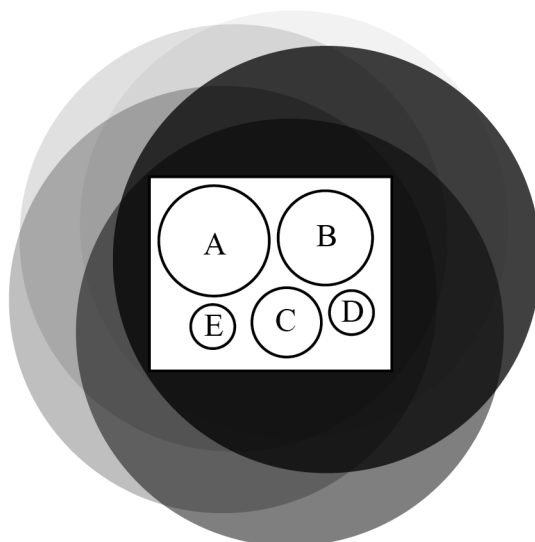


Fig. 4.1

A quite different story that will also be helpful to schematize is that of Micah in Judges 17 and 18. Here the referents of the terms for deity are cultic objects produced by Micah and commissioned by his mother. (These objects are associated in the story with YHWH, but are referred to as deities in their own right.) The story is too lengthy to quote in full, but there are a handful of passages directly relevant to the conceptualization of deity that can be quoted. Here are Judges 17:3–5:

3 וישב את־אלף־ומאה הכסף לאמו ותאמר אמו הקדש הקדשתי את־הכסף ליהוה מידי לבני לעשות פסל ומסכה ועתה אשיבנו לך 4 וישב את־כסף לאמו ותקח אמו מאתים כסף ותתנהו לצורף ויעשהו פסל ומסכה ויהי בבית מיכיהו 5 והאיש מיכה לו בית אלהים ויעש אפוד ותרפים וימלא את־יד אחד מבניו ויהי־לו לכהן

3 And when he had returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, his mother said, “I fully consecrate the silver to YHWH, from my hand to my son, to make a hewn image and a molten image. Therefore, I restore them to you.” 4 But he returned the silver to his mother, so his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made a hewn image and a molten image, and it was in the house of Micah. 5 And the man Micah had a house of deities, and he made an ephod, and teraphim, and he consecrated one of his sons, and he became his priest.

Again, the [UNSEEN AGENT] base is presupposed, although [UNSEEN AGENCY] may also be in view, depending on how directly the hearer/reader identifies YHWH's agency with the cultic objects. The *בית אלהים*, “house of deities,” here should be understood as a shrine, temple, or cultic installation that housed cultic objects—the ephod, teraphim, the hewn image, and the molten image—with at least the silver images, and possibly all of them, referred to as deities. This activates the [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY] domain, which is the domain responsible for the perception that the deity and their agency may inhabit almost any part of our material environment. As we have seen, reflective reasoning had rendered certain materials more prototypical of divine inhabitation, and this story's description of the images having been produced from silver coins aligns with that conceptualization. The cultic objects mentioned are also associated elsewhere in the biblical texts with [PATRONAGE], although the early setting for the story and a private installation suggest a smaller scale for that patronage. The text seems to suggest that YHWH is being indexed by the objects, but rather than functioning as a dynastic national deity, they seem to be functioning primarily as patron directly to Micah and his household. It is not unlikely this serves as an analogy or parable for Israel's own relationship to their temple and deity. The reference to YHWH may have activated the [PATRON DEITY] domain and the YHWH profile for a hearer/reader. The references to the cultic objects as distinct icons may indicate a later period for the story's composition, when a higher degree of compartmentalization between the deity and the vehicles of their agency was more common. If so, this story may represent a much earlier tradition accommodated to a later Yahwistic context (thus the activation of the otherwise muted [PATRON DEITY] domain).

After ordaining his own son as priest, Micah hosts an itinerant Levite who agrees to stay on and take over as priest. Later, a group of Danites scouting for land for their community to occupy lodges at Micah's house, which leads to the following exchange in Judges 18:5–6:

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5 ויאמר לו שאל-נא באלהים ונדעה התצליח דרכנו אשר אנחנו הלכים עליה 6 ויאמר להם הכהן לנו לשלום נכח יהוה דרככם אשר תלכו-בה

5 And they said to him, “Please ask the deity so we may know if the path we follow will be prosperous.” 6 And the priest said to them, “Go in peace. The path in which you walk is acceptable to YHWH.”

We may assume the text elides the priest’s inquiring of the deity through the cultic media, but the request invokes the [ACCESS TO STRATEGIC INFORMATION] domain in reference to the divine images and the deity they presence.

The Danite scouts travelled on, but they notified a body of six hundred Danite warriors of the presence of the Levitical priest and the cultic objects, suggesting they collude to help themselves (Judg 18:14). The two parties met at Micah’s house, and while the war party occupied Micah at the gate, the scouts took the cultic objects and convinced the priest to join them and become priest to a tribe and a clan of Israel. As they made their escape, Micah and his neighbors mustered to confront the Danites, who sneer, מה-לך, “What’s wrong with *you*?” In response, Micah complains, את-אלהי אשר-עשיתי לקחתם ואת-הכהן ותלכו ומה-לי עוד ומה- זה תאמרו אלי מה-לך, “You took my deities that I made, as well as my priest, and what do I have left? So how can you say to me, ‘What’s wrong with *you*’?!?” (As an analogy for the Babylonian exile, this “godnapping” may cue one to the destruction of Israel’s temple, precipitated by the production and use of illicit divine images.) The Danites then threatened Micah and his militia, who recognized they were outmatched and promptly left.

Micah’s referring to “my deities that I made” may refer to the silver images he commissioned, to the ephod and teraphim that the text indicates he himself made, or to all of them. The cultic objects are treated as Micah’s possessions, and no indication is given that Micah or anyone else thinks them capable of exercising any influence themselves over who handles them or how. In the text’s final positioning, this may pejoratively contrast the presencing capabilities of the ark of YHWH from several chapters earlier with those of Micah’s

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own unsanctioned and privately produced and operating Yahwistic cult objects. The [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY] domain is thus more limited in this pericope, suggesting either rhetorical denigration and/or a late enough date of composition that material media was more fully compartmentalized from the identity of the patron deity. If a hearer/reader expected a cultic object to act against theft, as in the ark narrative, the [FAILURE TO ACT] domain may also be activated at the end of the pericope.

Figure 4.2 schematizes a likely conceptualization of deity invoked by this pericope. The [UNSEEN AGENT] base is presupposed, but [UNSEEN AGENCY] may also be in view, depending on the degree to which a hearer/reader would have understood the objects to index YHWH versus an unnamed divine agency. The use of the Tetragrammaton activates the YHWH profile (B), but the DIVINE IMAGE profile (A) is more prominent. [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY] undergirds the simultaneous activation of both profiles, so it is at the fore. [PATRONAGE] and [PATRON DEITY] are both activated, but the latter is likely to be backgrounded. The PATRON DEITY profile (C) barely obtains. The one time the cultic objects performed a function (in response to the scouts' query), the [ACCESS TO STRATEGIC INFORMATION] domain was activated. [FAILURE TO ACT] may be in the background with [PATRON DEITY]. This results in a simpler schematization for a number of reasons. For instance, cultic objects are not prototypical of the Hebrew Bible's representation of deity outside of polemics about them. The texts therefore do not describe them nearly as richly or frequently, limiting the development of a complex literary profile. This story also did not attempt to bring about a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of deity, as Psalm 82 did, and so there was no need to highlight both their existing nature as deities and their altered nature.

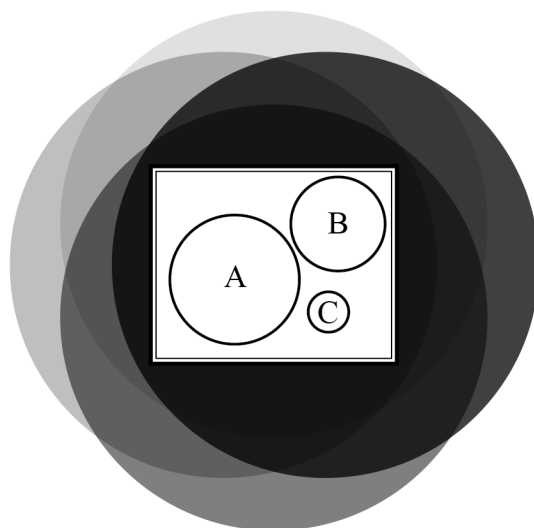


Fig. 4.2

*Image Schemata for Deity*

The two main and most basic image schemata associated with deity in the Hebrew Bible are the UP-DOWN and the CENTER-PERIPHERY schemata. The first is used primarily to construe the power and authority of deity, while the second is associated with the conceptual location of deity in relation to civilization and to cosmic order. The clearest manifestation of the UP-DOWN schema in relation to deity is the title עליון, “Most High,” frequently attributed to YHWH (e.g. Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22; Deut 32:8; Ps 83:19). In the earliest literary strata of the Hebrew Bible, עליון seems to be more closely associated with the high deity El, and so it may have been appropriated by YHWH at their conflation (see Chapter 6). The title reflects the conceptualization of sovereignty and power as “up” in contrast to subjugation and weakness as “down.” The schema is used not just to refer to YHWH, as well. Psalm 8:6 construes humanity along the same vertical axis:

ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים  
 וכבוד והדר תעטרהו

You made them a little lower than the deities,



But with glory and honor you crowned them.

The Hebrew Bible employs the same schema in rebuking those who would assert divine status. Ezekiel 28:8 condemns the deity-arrogating ruler of Tyre, insisting, לשחת יורדוך ומתה, ממותי חלל בלב ימים, “They will drag you down to the pit, and you will die a violent death in the heart of the seas.” The seas, which were a chaotic realm prototypically distant from the direct purview of the deity, represented some of the lowest regions of the cosmos. Similarly, Isaiah 14 condemns the king of Babylon for exalting himself as a deity, and the appeal to the UP-DOWN schema is more emphatic here (Isa 14:13–15):

13 ואתה אמרת בלבבך השמים אעלה  
 ממעל לכוכבי־אל ארים כסאי  
 ואשב בהר־מועד ביאכתי צפון  
 14 אעלה על־במתי עב  
 אדמה לעליון  
 15 אך אל־שאול תורד  
 אל־ירכתי־בור

- 13 And you said in your heart,  
 “To the heavens I will ascend,  
 Above the stars of El  
 I will exalt my throne  
 I will sit on the mount of assembly,  
 on the heights of Zaphon.  
 14 I will ascend above the tops of the cloud,  
 I will be as the Most High.”  
 15 But to Sheol you will be dragged down,  
 to the depths of the pit.

For the author of this passage, the power and sovereignty of deity are up, while the king’s hubris will ultimately result in his being brought low, into the pit, signaling his humiliation and subjugation. Figure 4.3 illustrates this schema.

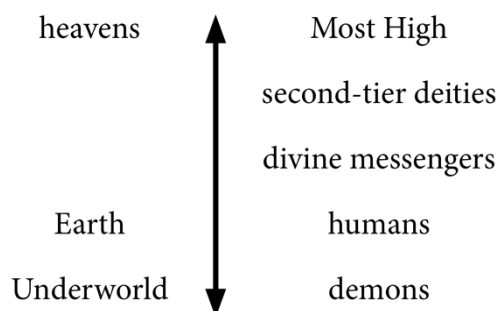


Fig. 4.3

The CENTER-PERIPHERY schema is rooted in the experience of the body as central to some value that decreases with distance.<sup>123</sup> In other words, what is closest to me most directly affects me, is most directly under my influence, and is therefore most important to me. What is far from me is less important and can be construed as dangerous or useless if rhetorically necessary or strategic. This schema is activated in the Hebrew Bible in relation to deity in conceptualizations of the lands of Israel and Judah as the center of civilization (cf. Ezek 5:5), of temples as the center of a city, and of Jerusalem as the center of holiness over and against the peripheries of wilderness and sea.<sup>124</sup> Note the centrality of the promised land in Isaiah 43:5b–6, written in Babylon:

5b ממזרה אביא זרעך וממערב אקבצך  
6 אמר לצפון תני ולתימן אל־תכלאי  
הביאי בני מרחוק ובנותי מקצה הארץ

5b From the east I will bring your offspring,  
And from the west I will gather you.

<sup>123</sup> It is closely linked with the CONTAINER and NEAR-FAR schemas. See Michael Kimmel, “Culture Regained: Situated and Compound Image Schemas,” in *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. Beate Hampe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 289.

<sup>124</sup> An insightful discussion of this schema as it relates to biblical and broader Southwest Asian conceptualizations of deity is found in Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 88–91. In several places this centrality is manifested in “Zion Theology,” or the notion of Jerusalem (Zion) as the deity’s chosen holy city. This guaranteed YHWH’s protection and favor. The destruction of the temple in the early sixth century BCE dealt a significant blow to this ideology, and much of the exilic literature grapples with the implications. See Craig Broyles, *Psalms: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 24–25; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 133, 157, 294.

- 6 I will say to the north, “Give them up,”  
and to the south, “Do not restrain.  
Bring my sons from afar,  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”

While the periphery in this mapping was linked with the borders of Israel and the other nations of the earth, the beyond—the antithesis to the center—was represented by the concept of wilderness, which was harsh and barren (Job 38:26), and was inhabited by marginalized/reviled peoples (Gen 21:20–21; Jer 3:2; 9:26) and undomesticated animals (Isa 34:14–15).<sup>125</sup> Some texts reflect the wider Southwest Asian concept of the wilderness as the realm of demons and ghosts (Lev 16:8, 10, 26; Isa 13:21; 34:14; Jer 50:39).<sup>126</sup> The wilderness was so antithetical to the values of developed Israel that the threatened demise of cities like Jerusalem and Edom were described with images of desiccation and a lack of civilization, concepts drawn from the wilderness (Isa 13:19–22; 34:9–15). Shemaryahu Talmon summarizes this “*midbār* motif” in the following way:

[T]he predominant aspects of *midbār*-wilderness in the Bible bear witness to the unfamiliarity with and the loathing of the desert which were typical of the ancient Israelites. They reflect the attitude of the city-dweller, the farmer, the semi-sedentary shepherd, even the assnomad, who may traverse the desert on beaten tracks, but would not venture into its depths by free choice.<sup>127</sup>

The location of Israel’s main cultural institutions in the mountains and valleys, over against the harsh conditions of the wilderness, led quite naturally to the mapping of cultural ideals against this same conceptual space. In these cases, geography’s symbolic rather than physical sense

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Laura Feldt, “Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion—Fertility, Apostasy, and Religious Transformation in the Pentateuch,” in *Wilderness in Mythology and Religion: Approaching Religious Spatialities, Cosmologies, and Ideas of Wild Nature*, ed. Laura Feldt (Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 55–94.

<sup>126</sup> Henrike Frey-Anthes, “Concepts of ‘Demons’ in Ancient Israel,” *DWDO* 38 (2008): 43–48.

<sup>127</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “Har and Midbār: An Antithetical Pair of Biblical Motifs,” in *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Mindlin, M. J. Geller, and J. E. Wansbrough (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 114.

becomes salient.<sup>128</sup> Sedentary culture is the ideal in this map,<sup>129</sup> over and against nomadism (which is negatively stigmatized) and the complete lack of civilization in the wilderness.<sup>130</sup> The institutions of the center are the pillars of ancient civilization: the temple, the palace, and the household. Biblical tradition preserves rhetoric attempting to exalt either temple or palace over the other, but both perspectives are undergirded by the concept of kinship and the household.

The material symbol of the presence of deity in Israel—the medium for their dwelling amidst Israel—was the temple. As the house of deity and the source of divine guidance, the temple took on functions as the “central, organizing, unifying institution in ancient Near Eastern society.”<sup>131</sup> It could represent the cultic, economic, judicial, and royal core of a city or nation. Often this conceptual centrality was accompanied by physical centrality: the temple would occupy the center of a city or fortress, both for the building’s protection and for symbolic reasons.<sup>132</sup> A cult structure of some kind or another was important in early Israel and Judah to a city’s independent identity. Despite the ultimately successful Deuteronomistic campaign to centralize worship in one single temple in Jerusalem (aided by the occasional foreign raid that destroyed other temples),<sup>133</sup> early Israel commonly offered worship in a number of different

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<sup>128</sup> See Feldt, “Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion,” 58: “What is so interesting about the Hebrew Bible desert wilderness is exactly that it oscillates between a real and a fantasmatic presentation, in between cosmology, literary motif, spatial practice and geography.”

<sup>129</sup> According to A. de Pury, the “promise of the land” was “a promise of sedentarization” (A. De Pury, “The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch,” in Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*, 53). Nomadism was frequently an unwanted state that the relationship with YHWH remedied.

<sup>130</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, citing Talmon, asserts there is no “nomadic ideal” in the Hebrew Bible (Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs, Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966], 34–38; Nicolas Wyatt, “Sea and Desert: Symbolic Geography in West Semitic Religious Thought,” in *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* [London: Equinox, 2005], 47–48).

<sup>131</sup> John M. Lundquist, “What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 212.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. J. Cornelis de Vos, “‘Holy Land’ in Joshua 18:1–10,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort*, ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 61–72. De Vos argues that the “divine presence” in Shiloh was the “holy centre,” laying between the land of Joseph and of Judah, surrounded by the lands of the other tribes.

<sup>133</sup> That campaign would not be universally successful until around the turn of the era. Archaeological and textual data assert the existence of Jewish cultic installations at Elephantine and Leontopolis from the Achaemenid and Greco-Roman periods: Bezalel Porten, “The Structure and Orientation of the Jewish Temple at Elephantine—

cultic structures.<sup>134</sup> The biblical texts describe several encounters with deity in the patriarchal and later narratives that were commemorated with the construction of an altar or stele (Gen 12:7; 28:18, 22; 31:13; 33:20; 35:1, 7), meant to delineate space that had been the site of the divine presence. Settlements would accrete around these cultural and cultic foci (or so the traditions go),<sup>135</sup> most significantly at Mount Moriah, where the messenger of YHWH—“standing between the earth and the heavens”<sup>136</sup>—designated the place where an altar (and ultimately the “house of YHWH, the deity”) was to be built (1 Chr 22:1). That temple would become the center of Jewish cultural identity.

As the creator of, and provider for, humanity, the deity of Israel was conceptualized as the patron of humanity’s agricultural and familial reproductivity, cultural institutions, and physical security. They were the fount from which prosperity and safety flowed. In addition to their conceptual centrality as provider and protector, they were conceived of as dwelling בתוך, “in the midst” of Israel (Exod 25:8; 29:45–46; 1 Kgs 6:13). The temple as a symbol of the cosmic mountain also provides a convenient physical manifestation of the conceptualization of the blended CENTER-PERIPHERY and UP-DOWN schemata. As one moves towards the core of the temple, where the deity’s presence is located, they usually also ascend, climbing the cosmological hierarchy toward the “Most High.” Alternatively, as one distances themselves

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A Revised Plan of the Jewish District,” *JAOS* 18.1 (1966): 38–42; Abraham Wassertstein, “Notes on the Temple of Onias at Leontopolis,” *IllClassStud* 18 (1993): 119–29.

<sup>134</sup> In addition to the previous chapter, see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985); Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 123–266.

<sup>135</sup> Early Israelite cultural centers included Bethel, Shechem, Gibeon, and Shiloh. Cf. G. Wright, “The Mythology of Pre-Israelite Shechem,” *VT* 20.1 (1970): 75–82; Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, 49–52; Nadav Na’aman, “Beth-Aven, Bethel, and Early Israelite Sanctuaries,” *ZDP-V* 103 (1987): 13–21; Donald G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 185–200; Karel van der Toorn, “Saul and the Rise of Israelite State Religion,” *VT* 43.4 (1993): 519–42; Jules Francis Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 62–140.

<sup>136</sup> 1 Chronicles 21:16: עמד בין הארץ ובין השמים. Like the Garden of Eden, these points of contact between the celestial and terrestrial worlds took on particular significance in antiquity as the localization of the *axis mundi*, or center of the world, holding together the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. The temple was both a microcosm and the “navel of the universe” (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* [Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1959], 35–37, 52–54; Dan Liroy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture* [New York: Peter Lang, 2010], 5–15; Nicolas Wyatt, “The Significance of the Burning Bush,” in Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind*, 14–15).

from the *axis mundi*, they descend through decreasingly holy territory until they cross the boundaries of the civilized world into the wilderness or into the sea, which is the realm of chaos and of strange and dangerous divine beings with no connections to the civilized world.

### *The Prototypes of Deity*

Mark S. Smith's description of divinity and humanity as falling into "two generally incommensurate categories" seems to represent a consensus regarding the dichotomous nature of the two categories.<sup>137</sup> That view prioritizes a focus on the boundaries of the category, treating delineation as a point of departure for better understanding. As was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, however, conceptual boundaries are reflective considerations that generally are not based on the development and use of conceptual categories. To carve out boundaries for a concept as a starting point for better understanding the concept is to presuppose a conclusion, and a prescriptive one at that. The development and usage of conceptual categories is focused internally on the cognitive exemplars and prototypes, with boundaries only developing reflectively and secondarily as needs to distinguish between separate categories arise.

This section interrogates prototype effects associated with deity in the Hebrew Bible, beginning with the cognitive exemplars and then moving outward toward the fuzzy boundaries where membership in the category was challenged and debated. Rather than attempt to be comprehensive, I will demonstrate the main features of the core of the category and then its extension outward into other categories, as well as the negotiation of boundaries as they became more salient to the prosocial exigencies of those who exercised influence over the curation of concepts of deity in early Israel and Judah. Viewing deity as a neatly delineated

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<sup>137</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 7. For a more recent discussion that is less prescriptive, see Smith, *God in Translation*, 11–15.

category may represent a convenient scholarly heuristic, but it does considerable violence to the way the category was used in the biblical texts and in the socio-material ecologies that produced those texts. The effect of that violence is exponentially increased by the utility of this particular conceptual category to the structuring of power and values in the worlds of early Israel and Judah and in those contemporary societies for whom their writings still exercise influence.<sup>138</sup>

Now, if my purpose in this section was only to identify the divine prototype for early Israel and Judah, I could type “YHWH” and go play golf—believe me, nothing would make me happier—but simply identifying the prototype does not tell us much about why they were the prototype or what relationship they may have had with other deities, and this chapter, after all, is aimed at understanding the generic concept of deity. YHWH was not the prototypical deity simply because they were YHWH or because they asserted features that were entirely unique to them. Rather, they were the prototype precisely because they fit a broader template for deity while also asserting a configuration of largely typical features that answered the specific needs of the societies over which they functioned as patron. A not-insignificant amount of the polemics aimed at other deities that threatened YHWH’s relationship with Israel acknowledged—usually only tacitly—the parallel natures and functions of those other deities. To insist that YHWH out-deitied the other deities required appeal to cognitive exemplars regarding what a deity could be and was supposed to be, and it is that conceptual ideal that is in view in this section.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Biblical studies has long struggled under heavy theological constraints. An observation regarding deity in the Greco-Roman world from over seventy years ago demonstrates how long these insights have been held back from the field: “Men and gods were not on two completely separate and differentiated levels, the one on the natural, the other on the supernatural, plane. They occupied either end, as it were, of a sliding scale” (J. M. C. Toynbee, “Ruler-apotheosis in ancient Rome,” *NC* 7 [1947]: 126–27). See also Arthur Darby Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 145: “To the ancients the line of demarcation between god and man was not as constant and sharp, or the interval as wide, as we naturally think.”

<sup>139</sup> In addition to the discussion in Chapter 1, see the Jonathan Z. Smith’s classic discussion on comparison: “the statement of comparison is never dyadic, but always triadic; there is always an implicit ‘more than,’ and there is always a ‘with respect to’” (Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On Comparison of Early Christianities and*

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As a result, we must engage the profiles of both YHWH and the other deities to tease out those features considered most prototypical of generic deity. I began this section with the proposition that the cognitive exemplars of deity in the Hebrew Bible were built on a foundation of the prosocial functions that facilitated the development, socio-material transmission, and perseverance of deity within the societies represented therein. Based on the discussion to this point, these would be socially concerned deities with full access to strategic information who nurtured patron/client relationships with individuals or social groups whose behavior they monitored and whose social frameworks they were thought to enforce. The prototype of this kind of deity according to the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible was obviously YHWH, but there are multiple other deities mentioned that seem to have matched the same profile for their respective constituencies, including Asherah, Baal, Chemosh, Milcom, Astarte, and others. The significant degree of translatability across these various deities indicates their production and curation were based at least in part on conceptual templates shared across a broader socio-material matrix.<sup>140</sup> Some of the features of these templates have been discussed above, and they include patronage over a nation (and often a monarch), social concern and a capacity for punishment, kingship, warrior status, immortality, incomparability, presencing within cultic objects and temples, associations with urban centers, anthropomorphism, and, likely, local manifestations at various cultic installations. In order to ensure my focus remains on the cognitive exemplars and not solely on YHWH's profile, I will discuss only those features that are reflected also in the representation of other deities and/or the generic concept of deity.

Those features explicitly described in the Hebrew Bible as diagnostic of deity status should be considered most prototypical from a reflective point of view. Two such features (discussed

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*the Religions of Late Antiquity* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990], 51). It is the “with respect to” on which this section is focused.

<sup>140</sup> Again, see Smith, *God in Translation*, 37–130.



above) are referenced on multiple occasions in the biblical literature. The first is full access to strategic information, which we find reflected, for instance, in the serpent’s statement in Genesis 3:5 that the humans would be כאלהים ידעי טוב ורע, “as deities, knowing good and evil.”<sup>141</sup> Isaiah 41:23a, which challenges the deities of the nations to prove their divinity, is even more explicit: הגידו האתיות לאחור ונדעה כי אלהים אתם, “Declare what is to come hereafter so we may know that you are deities.” In 2 Kings 1:3, the relevance of full access to strategic information to deity status undergirds the rhetorical question, המבלי אין־אלהים בישראל אתם, לדרש בבעל זבוב אלהי עקרונ, “Is it because there is no deity in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebul, the deity of Ekron?” Beyond these explicit appeals to that access as central to deity, the feature is widely represented in the literature, particularly relating to YHWH. Saul’s visit to the necromancer at Endor, however, demonstrates that even a deceased human could display this prototypical feature. While Isaiah seems to insist full access to strategic information was a necessary and sufficient feature, that is more a rhetorical flourish than a reflection of full access to strategic information as essentializing deity. The example with Samuel demonstrates a gradient view of the category; YHWH was a prototypical example of deity, while the post-mortem Samuel occupied the fuzzy boundaries.

The other feature that occurs repeatedly in rhetoric about classification as deity is immortality.<sup>142</sup> Perhaps the most explicit identification of this feature as constitutive of deity is found in Psalm 82:6 (see above), but the contrasting of the deity of YHWH and the humanity of the Egyptians in Isaiah 31:3 also appeals to that immortality, or at least relative invulnerability, as representative of deity status. (Death could be experienced by deities, but as with some humans, it was not always permanent.) Ezekiel 28:9 similarly contrasts mortality against deity status, rhetorically asking the ruler of Tyre, האמר תאמר אלהים אני לפני הרגך, “Are

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<sup>141</sup> See Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 244, note 5: “‘Good and evil’ constitute a merism, sc. ‘everything.’”

<sup>142</sup> Both of these prototypical features of deity derive from the intuitive reasoning related to the development and transmission of deity concepts.

you really going to say ‘I am a deity’ to the ones who are killing you?’” The steps taken by the deity in Genesis 3:22–24 to ensure that the humans could not eat the fruit of the tree of life and live forever reflect the rhetorical leveraging of immortality as an additional constitutive feature of deity.<sup>143</sup> They were already כאלהים, “as deity,” in one sense, and had they eaten the fruit and become immortal they would have arrogated the second of the two main features of deity. The deity prevented that, so humanity remained *like* deity, but still lacking a prototypical feature. One of the primary struggles for the deity within the Primeval History appears to be protecting the integrity of the porous boundaries that separated deity and humanity.<sup>144</sup>

Patronage was another prototypical feature of deity, but rather than aimed at determining if an entity possessed a faculty that was diagnostic of deity, the rhetoric associated with patronage in the Hebrew Bible was more directly concerned with demonstrating which deity was the true patron over the people, and therefore the rightful object of worship and fidelity. In this context, the lexeme “deity” primarily designated a relational status.<sup>145</sup> The one who had sovereignty over a region or people was authoritative over that region or people—they were *the* deity.<sup>146</sup> We see this rhetoric most clearly in the story of Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal. In 1 Kings 18:23–24, Elijah described the contest, which was simply a matter of calling

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<sup>143</sup> The salience of immortality to the concept of deity is reflected in many non-biblical texts. As just a single example, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the protagonist—already part deity—seeks to achieve immortality, Gilgamesh laments, “When the gods created mankind, / Death for mankind they set aside, / Life in their own hands retaining” (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 10.3.3–5, trans. E. A. Speiser [*ANET*, 90]).

<sup>144</sup> See, for instance, W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 59–61.

<sup>145</sup> It is this sense that is frequently used in contemporary rhetoric (usually pejorative, but not always) about prioritizing commitment to certain entities or ideologies. People do not accuse others of making alcohol or nationalism or some other vice their “god” to indicate they think alcohol or nationalism has full access to strategic information, they level those accusations to reflect the perception of dogmatic and unwavering commitment. As a non-pejorative example, in 1998, a friend commented to me that if Dave Matthews and Jewel had a baby, it would be his new god.

<sup>146</sup> This is not monotheism; it is just a question of whose authority takes priority and who is owed allegiance. Rhetoric associated with this patronage and with incomparability, however, would facilitate the development of concepts of divine exclusivity that would contribute to the innovation of the concept of monotheism in the eighteenth century CE, although that monotheism was quite distinct from its contemporary iterations. See MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 5–58.

upon their respective divine patrons to light the fire of a burnt offering. Elijah stated in verse 24,

וּקְרַאתֶם בְּשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֲנִי אֶקְרָא בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה וְהָיָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲנֵה בְּאֵשׁ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

So you call on the name of your deity, and I will call on the name of YHWH, and the deity that answers with fire *is* the deity.<sup>147</sup>

Patron status here was demonstrated through the performance of an act associated with the shared natures of the two as storm-deities, namely sending down fire (lightning) to light the sacrifice. YHWH's victory should not be understood to indicate that Baal was not thought to exist, but that the nation was YHWH's purview, therefore they were the only storm-deity authorized to exercise their divine power therein.

Communicable agency was not a rhetorically useful diagnostic for deity, although it was absolutely prototypical of deity (more clearly prior to the Babylonian period). As stated in the previous chapter, a deity without some means of material presencing, mediation, or representation on earth would have been of little value or utility. The references to such media used in the worship of other deities are ubiquitous, but the Hebrew Bible is also littered with references to material media used to presence YHWH or to transmit their agency (Exod 3:2–4; 32:4; Num 21:4–9; Deut 4:12; 12:5–7; 1 Sam 5:2–4; 1 Kgs 12:27–29; Hos 3:4). Many of these references became increasingly pejorative in later periods, however, as YHWH's rhetorical differentiation from and exaltation over the deities of the nations joined with concern for the vulnerabilities of socio-material media to incentivize the restriction of that media to the proprietary modes of the priesthood's literate elite. Stelai, asherahs, and other cult objects appear to have been common to YHWH's material presencing, if the polemicizing references

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<sup>147</sup> Here I translate הוּא as an emphatic copula, but it may alternatively be understood according to its primary function as a pronoun, indicating a *casus pendens*, thus, “the deity that answers with fire—he is the deity.”

to their ubiquity and their removal from the Jerusalem temple approximate historical realities (2 Kgs 17:9–12; 18:4; 21:7; 23:6). These media were frequently described as dedicated to the deities of other nations (Judg 6:25–26; 2 Kgs 10:26–27; 23:13), although that may be largely editorial in origin.<sup>148</sup> Worshipping YHWH the way other nations worshipped their deities became explicitly prohibited (e.g., Deut 12:31). The vilification of these media relied on their prototypicality to the conceptualization of deity—in a sense, the prohibition was acknowledging that everyone else did it, but demanding devotees of YHWH resist the natural urge to do it themselves. This prototypicality is further supported by the preservation of certain sanctioned forms of those media for use only by the appropriate authorities.

One final feature of deity that was not rhetorically leveraged as diagnostic of deity, but that was certainly common enough to identify as firmly prototypical of deity was social organization around human authority structures, whether related to kingship, the military, the patriarchal household, or a council. The clearest example is again found in Psalm 82, in which YHWH acts as prosecutor of the deities over the nations within a divine council court scene, but several other passages manifest this projection of human social structures onto the sociality of deity. For instance, Deuteronomy 32:8–9 reflects the notion of a patriarchal high deity distributing stewardships over the nations to the members of the divine council. The motif of YHWH as divine king surrounded by the heavenly hosts who serve them is reflected in 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, Job 1–2, Daniel 7, and other passages.<sup>149</sup> That host could also be represented in military terms, as well, as found in Joshua 5:14–15 and Isaiah 13:4, for example. Even Genesis

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<sup>148</sup> Note Rainer Albertz's comments regarding Hosea's denigration of the Baal cult: "Virtually everything that Hosea dismisses as Baal worship, the cultic high places (4:13 ff.; 10:8), the massebas (3:4; 10:1 f.), the oracular trees (4:12), the divine images (3:1; cf. II Sam 6:19) and the slashing as signs of lament (7:14), had been an uncriticized ingredient of the cult of Yahweh for centuries" (Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israel Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, trans. John Bowden [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994], 173).

<sup>149</sup> צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם, "host of the heavens," is most frequently used in pejorative reference to the deities of the nations that date to the Babylonian period and later (Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5; Jer 8:2; 19:13).

6:2–6 describes the divine sons as roughly corresponding to human women and participating in human social conventions.<sup>150</sup> The familiarity of these social structures makes the narratives associated with the sociality of the heavens easier to relate to, to understand, to remember, and to imbue with more complexity and significance. The sociality of deities was constructed on a conceptual foundation that was human in orientation.

### *The Boundaries of Deity*

To begin the discussion of the boundaries of deity, I return to the creation of humanity in Genesis 2, and particularly to the observation that the humans in that chapter were formed (יצר) from the עפר מן־האדמה, “dust from the earth” (or clay), and had the breath of life breathed into their nostrils. The conceptual overlap of this creative act and the creation and enlivening of a cultic image has not gone unnoticed by scholars.<sup>151</sup> The humans’ partial deification may represent an attempt to rhetorically frame humanity as the deity’s divine image—thereby militating against the use of other cultic objects while also imposing an ethical mandate—without attributing full divine status to them. They thus approximate the fuzzy and debatable boundaries of deity, as similarly stated in Psalm 8:6: “You made them a little lower than the deities.” Certain members of the human category that were significantly elevated in life encroached upon the threshold of deity enough to have been referred to as אלהים in the Hebrew Bible, of course. Most notably, Moses and the Israelite and Judahite king. In death, there seems to have been a natural blurring of the boundaries separating humanity from deity, with ancestors and influential ritual specialists like the deceased Samuel referred to and cared for as

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<sup>150</sup> A wonderful discussion of the interpretation of these passages in early Judaism is Philip S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *JJS* 23 (1972): 60–71.

<sup>151</sup> See, particularly, Herring, *Divine Substitution*; McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*. See also Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity as God’s Image and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 112–28.

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deities, although none seem to have penetrated into the center of the category while maintaining association with their identity as humans.

The deities of other nations were most explicitly cast as peripheral members of the category of deity, if not existing entirely outside of it, and particularly in later periods. The example above of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal rhetorically marginalizes Baal by asserting they are not האלהים, “*the deity*.” Deuteronomy 32:16–17 is more explicit:

16 יקנאהו בזרים בתועבת יכעיסהו  
17 יזבחו לשדים לא אלה אלהים לא ידעום  
חדשים מקרב באו לא שערום אבתיכם

- 16 They made them jealous with strange ones,  
with abominations they provoked them.  
17 They sacrificed to *shaddays*, not the Deity,  
to deities they did not know,  
to new ones that showed up recently,  
that your ancestors did not fear.

Here the divinity of the *shaddays*, or foreign deities, is acknowledged, but their prototypicality is rejected in their identification as “strange ones” that were not familiar to them and that their ancestors had not worshipped. This same rhetoric takes a slightly more hyperbolic tone in Deuteronomy 32:21, where the divinity of those deities is ostensibly denied:

הם קנאוני בלא־אל  
כעסוני בהבליהם  
ואני אקניאם בלא־עם  
בגוי נבל אכעיסם

- They made me jealous with what is not a deity,  
they provoked me with their vanities.  
So I will make them jealous with what is not a people,  
with a worthless nation I will provoke them.

The parallel descriptions of the other deities and the other nation as “not a deity” and “not

a people” indicate the rhetorical exaggeration here.<sup>152</sup> The author was not denying their existence as a deity or a people, they were denigrating them as comparatively meaningless, or “vanities.” This kind of rhetoric was frequently deployed to marginalize and demean the deities of other nations and their misguided citizenry (Isa 44:9; Ps 96:5//1 Chr 16:26),<sup>153</sup> but it has frequently been misunderstood by scholars as an explicit assertion of philosophical monotheism.<sup>154</sup> The rhetoric of incomparability that described YHWH as deity of deities (Deut 10:17; Josh 22:22; Ps 136:2) and asserted them to be greater than all other deities (Exod 18:11; 1 Chr 16:25; Ps 95:3; 96:4; 97:9) permits a less rhetorically obscured picture of the relationship of YHWH to the other deities. The cultic objects associated with the deities of the nations were more “literally” decried as non-divine in later periods, and those who treated them as deities were also mocked (Deut 28:64; Isa 42:17; 43:10; 44:9–20; Ps 115:2–7; cf. Hos 8:4–6).<sup>155</sup>

The divine messengers of the Hebrew Bible also seem to occupy the periphery of the category. While these messengers operate in ways that indicate some kind of divine status, they are not divine patrons over social groups, they do not appear to deploy their own communicable agency through any material media, and while they are asserted to have access to strategic information, it seems to derive from YHWH.<sup>156</sup> In the Ugaritic literature, divine messengers

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<sup>152</sup> Similarly, other authors put the rhetoric of exclusivity into the mouth of the personified Babylon and Nineveh (Isa 47:8, 10; Zeph 2:15), who obviously do not consider themselves to be the only cities in existence, but just the only ones that matters to their constituencies (cf. MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 81–85).

<sup>153</sup> Note I understand the Hebrew אֱלִילִים, traditionally translated “idols,” to have meant something closer to “worthless things.” In other words, the text is not saying that all other deities are in reality just cultic objects incorrectly thought to be gods. Rather, the text is saying the deities of the nations are powerless, meaningless, irrelevant, etc. The same rhetoric could also be leveled, of course, at the cultic objects that were used to worship the deities.

<sup>154</sup> For some helpful correctives in this debate, see above, page 59–62, and note 96.

<sup>155</sup> On the emic nature of these authors’ understanding of the functionality of divine images, see Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” 16–45; Smith, “The Polemic of Biblical Monotheism,” 201–34; Levtow, *Images of Others*, 40–85.

<sup>156</sup> Compare, for instance, the parallelism between the knowledge of the messenger in 2 Samuel 14:17b (כי כמלאך) “Because as the messenger of the deity, so is my lord the king to understand the good and the evil”) and that in verse 20b (ואדני חכם כחכמת מלאך האלהים לדעת את כל אשר בראץ) “But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of the messenger of the deity, knowing all that is in the earth”). We might understand the reference to the king “understanding” or “hearing” the good and the evil—just like the messenger—to indicate the

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primarily communicated between one deity and another, and constituted a servile class of deity operating on the lowest tier of the pantheon.<sup>157</sup> And yet, in the Hebrew Bible they could be referred to as אלהים, as in the story of the annunciation of Samson’s birth to his parents in Judges 13:21–22:

21 ולא־יִסַּף עוֹד מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה לְהִרְאֹה אֶל־מְנוּחַ וְאֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ אִזְ יָדַע מְנוּחַ כִּי־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה הוּא 22 וַיֹּאמֶר מְנוּחַ אֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ מוֹת נָמוֹת כִּי אֱלֹהִים רָאִינוּ

21 The messenger of YHWH did not appear again to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the messenger of YHWH. 22 So Manoah said to his wife, “We will surely die, since we have seen deity.”

The received form of the text seems to refer to the messenger as a deity, so for communities in which that text circulated, the messenger would likely have been understood as a deity, although Chapter 7 will show that the textual situation is not so cut and dry.

Finally, we may highlight a collection of divine beings whose occupation of the periphery of the conceptual category of deity is largely a result of their distance from population centers, social groups, and human institutions. These were patronage-less divine entities, and they included the chaos monsters of the sea, such as לוֹיִתָן, “Leviathan” (Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14; 104:26; Job 3:8; 40:25), and the ghosts and demons thought to dwell in ruins and in the wilderness, such as the צִיִּים, “desert-demons(?)”, the אִיִּים, “howlers(?)”, the שְׁעִירִים, “goat-demons,” לִילִיָּה, “Lilith,” and עֲזַזְאֵל, “Azazel.”<sup>158</sup> These entities were not described with any appreciable degree

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messenger receives that knowledge from the deity. Note also the comparison of the king to the messenger: both operate above the level of humanity, but just shy of full deity.

<sup>157</sup> See Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 49–50; Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 149–54. Note Handy highlights the reference in the Ugaritic literature (KTU 1.3.iii:32) to the messengers (*mlak*, cognate with Hebrew מַלְאָךְ) as *ilm*, “deities” (p. 157). Cf. Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, 209–15.

<sup>158</sup> Most of these are mentioned only in Isaiah 13:21–22; 34:14; Jeremiah 50:39, but for Azazel, see Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26. See B. Janowski, “Azazel עֲזַזְאֵל,” in *DDD*, 128–31; B. Janowski, “Satyrs שְׁעִירִים,” in *DDD*, 732–33; M. Hutter, “Lilith לִילִיָּה,” in *DDD*, 520–21; Frey-Anthes, “Concepts of ‘Demons’ in Ancient Israel,” 43–48. See also Judit M. Blair, *De-Demonising the Old Testament: An Investigation of Azazel, Lilith, Deber, Qeteb, and Reshef in the Hebrew Bible* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). As Christopher B. Hays notes, there does not seem to be a connection between demons and the deceased (Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 184).



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of detail in the texts, which made them conceptually elastic, providing convenient conceptual canvasses for later periods. Perhaps they were understood zoomorphically or as hybrid entities, but the texts are usually not clear. They likely represented the mystery and the chaos of sea, desert, and separation from civilization.

As YHWH’s exclusive patronage over Israel became more and more critical to the survival and success of Israelite identity, the fuzzy boundaries of the concept of deity began to constrict around YHWH. This was not to say that other deities were no longer considered deities, only that the increased use and salience of the rhetoric of incomparability elevated YHWH to the degree that they alone represented the divine prototype, shoving other deities toward the periphery where they could be denigrated and dismissed. Psalm 82 represents the universalization of YHWH, which not only deposed the deities of the nations and condemned them to mortality, but also arrogated to YHWH direct political rule over the nations, a radical renegotiation of the heavens that had far-reaching implications that still have not been fully unpacked. Figure 4.4 illustrates this changing conceptualization of the category of deity.

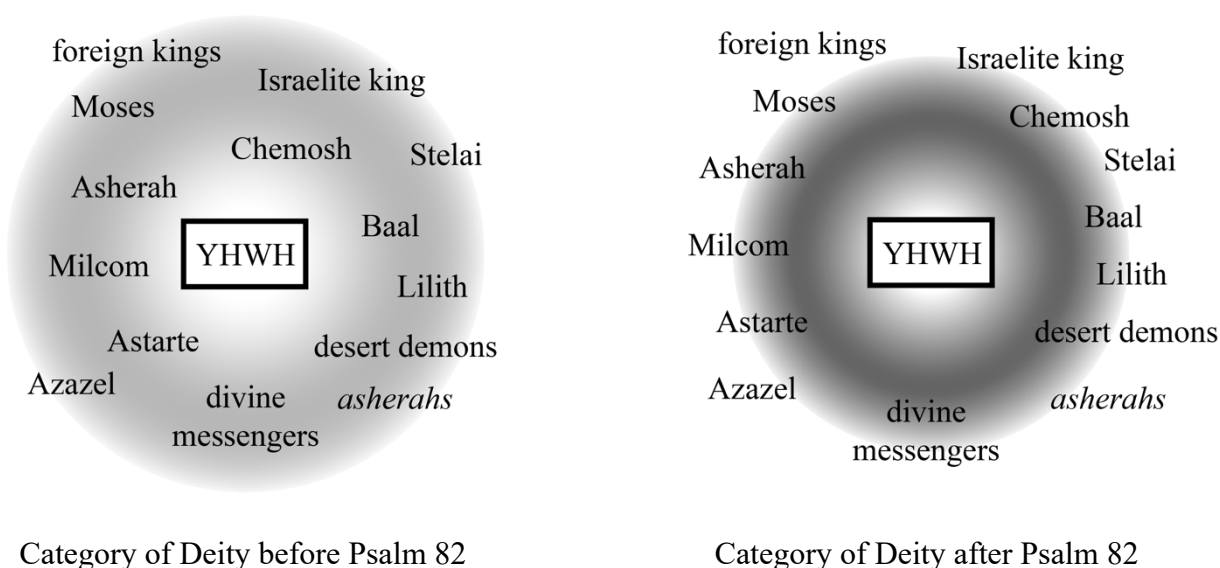


Fig. 4.4

*Implications*

Deity in the Hebrew Bible was not a binary conceptual category, and so better understanding its contours and extent is not a matter of delineating the boundaries and seeing what features were caught, but of identifying the conceptual bases on which the category was built, the main conceptual domains that colored the category, and those configurations of features that were most salient for its prototypical members—as well as those features, circumstances, and contexts that drove certain members of the category toward the periphery, or that drew members of other categories within its fuzzy borders. Above I identified underlying cognitive exemplars that formed a conceptual foundation for the category, but the features of those exemplars were by no means static or monolithic. They all had to be refracted through ongoing renegotiations between the received traditions and the rhetorical exigencies of the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible. There is, of course, a degree of consistency in these features that obtained even before the eclipsing of authoritative frameworks and theological correctness, but more than anything else this demonstrates the prosocial robustness of those cognitive exemplars and their constituent features. Over time, rhetorical exigencies incentivized the tightening of the category around YHWH—and most emphatically in Deutero-Isaiah—but this did not de-deify the other deities so much as subjugate and marginalize them. The continued and even expanded roles and functions of subordinate deities, deified humans, mediatory figures, and material media for divine agency into the Greco-Roman period and after (down to the present day) demonstrates that fully emptying the category of deity of all members except for YHWH was (and remains) a reflective bridge too far.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> See, for example, L. W. Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” *JSNT* 71 (1998): 3–26; John J. Collins, “Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 9–28. See also John J. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” in *Aspects of Monotheism: How God is One*, ed. Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1997), 81–105; and the several essays in Newman, Davila, and Lewis, *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*; Stuckenbruck and North, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*.

## Conclusion

It is tempting to conclude this chapter by asserting that I reconstructed the category of deity in the Hebrew Bible by allowing the texts to speak for themselves, but texts do not speak, nor do they have inherent meaning. I had to impose my own interpretive frameworks on the texts to construct my own meaning, as we all do to find meaning in human language. But one thing I did do that interrogations of the concept of deity frequently fail to do is begin from the conclusion that the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible used to terms for deity to refer to entities or influences that they understood to belong to the category of deity. I identified places where I understood those references to be ironic or to be intentionally placed in the mouths of impious or foreign speakers for rhetorical effect, but the previous two chapters have demonstrated that the concept of deity was constructed on a foundation of material media and human persons. As a result, including those entities in the category is not a matter of rhetorically extending the boundaries outward to where some may have thought they did not belong, but of acknowledging that the category always included them, even as some influential persons worked to shrink the category so as to expel them from it. Scholarship treating the concept of deity has carried rhetorical water for those persons for far too long, and in no small part because that scholarship is itself an outgrowth of the traditions those persons implemented. As we continue ourselves to renegotiate between that received tradition and the rhetorical exigencies that drive our own scholarship, we would do well to recognize and challenge our own situatedness.

The conceptualization of deity was constructed in the Hebrew Bible, as it is today, on a foundation of embodied engagement with specific socio-material ecologies, most of which are common to the human experience. There is no need to posit the influence of widespread sociocultural idiosyncrasies to which we no longer have access in order to reconstruct the main frameworks for the conceptualization of deity and divine agency in this period and for these

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groups. Nor is there a need to appeal to enigmatic concepts of being and non-being, to ineffability, to the putatively proprietary concerns of theology, or to the inadequacies of human language. The main conceptual filters through which the relevant cognitive processes were refracted to produce the kaleidoscope of divine features we find in the texts were the rhetorical interests and needs of historically situated persons with their own repertoires of experiences with preexisting concepts of deity within specific socio-material contexts. For scholars to continue to build on our understanding of the conceptual structures of generic deity and divine agency in preexilic Israel and Judah, we will need to engage each of those considerations independently and in concert with each other. This is precisely the goal of the next chapter vis-à-vis the conceptualization of YHWH as a member of the generic category of deity.

# PART THREE

## CHAPTER 5

# YHWH as Deity

## Introduction

This chapter will apply the frameworks developed in the previous two chapters to an interrogation of YHWH as represented in the biblical literature and in other material remains. It will begin with a discussion of the socio-material means of encountering YHWH that are known to us, then move on to the conceptual structures of their divine profile employed in the Hebrew Bible. The chapter will end with the conceptual frameworks that facilitated the conflation of YHWH and El, resulting in the hybrid divine profile we find throughout the Hebrew Bible. The purpose here is to expand on the observation that the central features of YHWH's divine profile are rooted in those of the generic conceptualization of deity. This further demonstrates the applicability of CSR to the interrogation of the conceptualization of deity, and particularly YHWH, in the Hebrew Bible. The aspects of YHWH's profile considered unique by scholars today were not conceptual revolutions introduced *ex nihilo* by the authors of Genesis, Exodus, or Deutero-Isaiah, they were simply incremental elaborations on more common themes. Indeed, perceptions of YHWH could have found no socio-material purchase without some relationship to existing conceptual frameworks; a foundation of social memory

must have existed upon which elaborations could be constructed. Across cultures, the process of renegotiation between any community's past and the rhetorical exigencies of its present is the engine that drives the production of its authoritative traditions. YHWH's changing conceptualization was no different.

## Encountering YHWH

If the theoretical frameworks formulated in Chapter 4 are an indication, encounters with YHWH's divine agency would have been relatively common within the socio-material ecology of Iron Age Israel and Judah. Finds from that region and period attest to a wide range of cultic imagery reflecting a spectrum of conventions running from local to imperial, and frequently combining and altering that imagery to serve specific needs and functions. Unfortunately, identifying the divine referents of cultic objects and images is fraught with uncertainty, so confident identifications of specific objects with YHWH cannot generally be made. This is not only a concern for the representation of YHWH, of course, and nor is it likely the product of a programmatic anti-iconic convention.<sup>1</sup> Tallay Ornan has investigated the representation of deity in first-millennium-BCE Mesopotamia, and particularly the diminution of anthropomorphic depictions, and has identified “a broader trend in the ancient Near East to transfer the sacredness of deities to symbols and objects.”<sup>2</sup> According to Ornan, this was a *de facto* aniconism and not a programmatic one.<sup>3</sup> Angelika Berlejung has observed, “there is a large number of deities known by name from Israel/Palestine whose specific iconography is unknown or of whom no clear representations are known, yet which are not immediately

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<sup>1</sup> A recent article has suggested stamp seals from Iron Age II attest to an increased aniconism in reference to YHWH. See Mitka R. Golub, “Aniconism and Theophoric Names in Inscribed Seals from Judah, Israel and Neighbouring Kingdoms,” *TA* 45.2 (2018): 157–69.

<sup>2</sup> Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representations of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Bane* (Fribourg: Academic Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 169.

<sup>3</sup> Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol*, 175

connected to aniconism.”<sup>4</sup> Berlejung identifies five conventional representations of deity that were common to the regions inhabited by Israel and Judah during the Iron Age and that could have been used to represent YHWH: the “smiting” Baal/Hadad type, the “enthroned” El type, bull iconography, stelai, and other symbols, such as solar discs, scorpions, or trees. There are examples of each of these that have been plausibly associated with YHWH, but uncertainty remains.<sup>5</sup>

The only example of Iron Age iconography accompanied by an inscription that explicitly references YHWH is the drawing on Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, but again, there is uncertainty regarding the referents of the iconography.<sup>6</sup> Several entities are represented on the pithos, including boars, lions, bulls, cows, calves, caprids, a stylized tree, and three anthropomorphic figures. The caprids feeding at the stylized tree are very similar to the imagery on the Taanach cult stand,<sup>7</sup> and may represent Asherah (whether or not they are thought to be related to the inscription).<sup>8</sup> One of the anthropomorphic figures is a seated lyre player, but the two standing figures immediately below the inscription mentioning YHWH have been the focus of the vast majority of the debate. They were initially identified as two male figures, based on the apparent presence of a penis and scrotum depicted between the legs of each. More recent analysis, however, has determined that the right figure does not have anything depicted

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<sup>4</sup> Angelika Berlejung, “The Origins and Beginnings of the Worship of YHWH: The Iconographic Evidence,” in van Oorschot and Witte, *The Origins of Yahwism*, 67. Cf. Youn Ho Chung, *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible’s Negative Attitude Toward the Golden Calf* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 10–11 (although contrary to Chung, I understand “aniconism” as it is used within biblical scholarship to refer most commonly to an intentional and programmatic rejection and avoidance of the use of symbols in worship).

<sup>5</sup> Some reviews of the relevant data are found in Uehlinger, “Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search of Yahweh’s Cult Images,” 99–152; Herring and Gilmour, “The Image of God in Bible and Archaeology,” 68–75; Berlejung, “The Origins and Beginnings of the Worship of YHWH,” 74–90. Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 133–281; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 123–266; Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects during the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov,” 25–54.

<sup>6</sup> On the Pithos A drawings, see Beck, “The Drawings and Decorative Designs,” 143–73. The inscriptions are discussed above, pages 207–09.

<sup>7</sup> See above, pages 205–06.

<sup>8</sup> See Beck, “The Drawings and Decorative Designs,” 152–56; cf. Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel, “The Inscriptions,” 136, note 15: “We suppose that this drawing is unrelated to the inscriptions and drawings on the other side of Pithos A. The person(s) who drew and/or wrote one side of the pithos, most probably did not bother to turn the heavy pithos to look at its other side.”



between the legs. This has most commonly been understood to suggest the two standing figures represent a male and female pair, which would much more conveniently fit the inscription's references to YHWH of Teman and to Asherah.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation has been popular, but has also been complicated by the not unreasonable suggestion that the figures represent the Egyptian protective deity Bes.<sup>10</sup> According to this interpretation, the physical proximity of the inscription to the figures—they actually overlap—is incidental and does not indicate their association.<sup>11</sup> This would suggest the pithos' collection of inscriptions and drawings are unrelated.

Ryan Thomas has more recently observed that imagery associated with Bes was frequently adopted outside of Egypt for use in reference to local tutelary deities.<sup>12</sup> He states, “we have several representations of Bes from Canaan that can be connected to an indigenous Horus-like deity whose cult and mythology lived on into Late Iron Age Israel.”<sup>13</sup> Scholars have iconographically and epigraphically linked Horus and Bes with YHWH, and so for Thomas, this imagery could have been used to represent YHWH and Asherah, and particularly in light of the association of Bes with blessing and protection in apotropaic contexts.<sup>14</sup> The cow and calf imagery that overlaps with the foot of the male standing figure may additionally evoke symbolism associated with fertility. Thomas' argument would read the blessing as an example of “sympathetic magic,” with the combination with divine imagery meant to perhaps maximize

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<sup>9</sup> Although see Tallay Ornan, “Sketches and Final Works of Art: The Drawings and Wall Paintings of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Revisited,” *TA* 43.1 (2016): 3–26, who argues that “all the pottery drawings were preliminary sketches to be applied as wall paintings” (p. 17). She identifies both figures as Bes, intended for two opposing doorjambes to function as protective entities.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Judith M. Hadley, “Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *VT* 37.2 (1987): 180–213; Uehlinger, “Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search of Yahweh's Cult Images,” 142–46; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 217–23; Beck, “The Drawings and Decorative Designs,” 165–69.

<sup>11</sup> Against this argument, see Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 39–54.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, “The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” 147.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, “The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” 149.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, “The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” 149–58. Note, however, that Zevit suggests Bes' association with a variety of deities may have led to the association of Bes with generic deity, meaning it was “a pictographic god symbol and not necessarily the representation of any given deity” (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 388; for Zevit's take on how Bes may represent YHWH, see pages 388–89).

the effect of the blessing articulated just above the figures.<sup>15</sup> If this is accurate, it certainly would have facilitated a more complex and rich socio-material encounter with YHWH’s divine agency than the one already achieved through the textual invocation of the divine name.<sup>16</sup>

The clearest example we have of the material presencing of YHWH from Israel or Judah prior to the Babylonian exile is the eighth-century BCE stele found in the inner sanctum of the temple structure within the fortress at Arad.<sup>17</sup> An inscribed reference to the “house of YHWH” found at Arad may refer to the Arad structure or to the temple at Jerusalem, but the onomastic data demonstrate a high concentration of theophoric names with Yahwistic elements (76%)<sup>18</sup> and mention priestly names paralleling some found in the Hebrew Bible. Letters to and from Arad also frequently invoke the name YHWH in blessing.<sup>19</sup> There is little reason to doubt the temple’s Yahwistic orientation. Judahites may have encountered the presence of YHWH there as a part of state-supported temple worship, which may be reflected in a temple-related duty referenced a handful of times in the Hebrew Bible. A representative example is Exodus 34:23: *שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל־זָכוֹר אֶת־פְּנֵי הָאֵדֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “Three time in the year, each of your males shall see the face of the Lord YHWH, the deity of Israel.” Some text-critical comments are necessary to explain my use of this passage, which is based on an amended text. MT vocalizes *יִרְאֶה* as a *niphal*, and most contemporary translations follow that reading—thus, “appear before the Lord YHWH”—but the consonantal text alone is not determinative.<sup>20</sup> Isaiah

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<sup>15</sup> Note Schmidt’s observation: “The convergence of these two media, script and symbol, in my estimation, was implemented for the specific effect of intensifying the divine empowerment and religious meaning, the numinous, conveyed in such exceptional display” (Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 40).

<sup>16</sup> Of course, other interpretations are possible. For instance, Jeremy Smoak and William Schniedewind have recently argued the texts are scribal exercises merely copying well known blessing formulae as practice (Jeremy Smoak and William Schniedewind, “Religion at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *Religions* 10.211 [2019]: 1–18).

<sup>17</sup> Aharoni, “Arad,” 2–32; Herzog, “The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad,” 3–109; Mettinger, *No Graven Images?*, 143–49; Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh,” 112–15; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 58–59.

<sup>18</sup> Mitka Golub, “The Distribution of Personal Names in the Land of Israel and Transjordan during the Iron II Period,” *JAOS* 134.4 (2014): 638.

<sup>19</sup> See Yohanan Aharoni, “Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple,” *BA* 31.1 (1968): 2–32.

<sup>20</sup> See also Deuteronomy 16:16; 31:11; 1 Sam 1:22 (here the verb is clearly in the *niphal*); Psalm 42:3; and Exodus 23:17. In the last example, the direct object marker *אֵל* is replaced with the preposition *אֶל*. Jan Joosten takes this as an indication the passive reading became common very early in the life of the construction (Jan Joosten, “To See God: Conflicting Exegetical Tendencies in the Septuagint,” *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten*, ed. Martin Karrer, Wolfgang Kraus, and Martin Meiser [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 289, n.

1:12 refers to the requirement as part of a subordinate clause, with  $\sqrt{\text{ראה}}$  in the infinitive, and the form there is clearly *qal* (לראות).<sup>21</sup>

1 Samuel 1:22 clearly has the verb in the *niphal*, which suggests theological sensitivities to the construction arose quite early in the life of the text, but a number of texts in the Psalms seem to refer to the practice it describes and to the notion of seeing the deity’s face in the temple. For instance, Psalm 17:15 places פניך, “your face,” parallel to תמונתך, “your likeness”: פניך, “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.” Psalm 42 asks, מתי אבוא ואראה, “When will I come to see the face of Deity?” Psalm 63:3 seems to put the experience in the past: כן בקדש הזיתך, “Thus in the temple I beheld you.” Whether we understand the commandment to specifically prescribe gazing upon the divine face or to simply enter the deity’s presence, we must understand the stele to have *presenced* YHWH in the view of these authors.<sup>22</sup> However the individual reflectively accounted for the experience—there may or may not have been authoritative rationalization(s)—YHWH’s divine agency was presenced by the stele. To stand before the stele was to be לפני יהוה, “before YHWH.”

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7). 1 Samuel 1:22 lends additional support to that conclusion, although the frequent reference to the “beatific vision” in the Psalms could be interpreted to indicate a literal reading also had currency.

<sup>21</sup> MT still imposes the *niphal* vocalization: לראות. See Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 199–205; Joosten, “To See God,” 288–90; cf. Shimon Gesundheit, *Three Times a Year: Studies on Festival Legislation in the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 17–19. The Peshitta retains the *qal* in rendering למחזה, as noted in Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament, vol. 2. Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 4. See also Hendel and Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible?*, 49 (cf. nn. 9–11): “This example has some historical linguistic relevance because the elision of the *he* in *niphal* infinitives is not usual in Biblical Hebrew but becomes more common in the postbiblical period.” Isaiah 1 is likely pre-exilic, and it appears to attest to the early practice of appearing “before YHWH” (לפני יהוה) in a cultic setting (cf. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, 26 and n. 24; Mervyn D. Fowler, “The Meaning of *lipnê* YHWH in the Old Testament,” *ZaW* 99.3 [1987]: 384–90).

<sup>22</sup> See Mark S. Smith, “‘Seeing God’ in the Psalms: The Background to the Beatific Vision in the Hebrew Bible,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 171–83; Niehr, “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple,” 83–85; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 53; Knafl, *Forming God*, 106–09. Friedrich Nötscher argued almost 100 years ago that this tradition derived from the broader sociocultural practice of court ceremonies before the king. See Friedrich Nötscher, *‘Das Angesicht Gottes schauen’ nach biblischer und babylonischer Auffassung* (Würzburg: Becker, 1924). Hosea 3:4 lists a stele among the accouterments of the temple that Israel will miss, but the inclusion of teraphim in the list suggests to some that the items are not being referenced favorably. For references, see Bloch-Smith, “Massebot Standing for Yhwh,” 107.

While the strongest evidence for the material presencing of YHWH is the stele from Arad, there can be little doubt that other objects and imagery were understood by their consumers to serve similar functions. Stelai are known from all over Iron Age Israel and Judah, and some portion of them undoubtedly represented YHWH. The Taanach cult stand and other model shrines known from Israelite/Judahite contexts also likely held images of the deity at some point. Sargon II's Nimrud Prism, which describes the destruction of Samaria in 721 BCE, asserts that he took as spoil "the gods in which they trusted."<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, without explicit designations regarding divine referents, there is little we can do to further clarify Sargon's statement. As several biblical texts suggest, other Yahwistic temples would have had their own stelai or other representations of the deity in their inner sanctums, but the accident of preservation has yet to supply us with further examples.<sup>24</sup> For example, the inner sanctum of the Judahite temple of Tel Moza has not yet been identified, but it may well have been plundered.<sup>25</sup> The cultic objects and vessels associated with the temple at Arad just happened to have been intentionally buried by its operators (if the common interpretation is correct) and preserved down to us. Apart from the Jerusalem temple—perhaps thought to be under special protection—most other cult sites under Israelite or Judahite authority seem to have been destroyed by the time of, or during, the siege of Sennacherib, effecting a sort of de facto cult centralization that may have contributed to (if not catalyzed) the centralizing rhetoric of the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE.<sup>26</sup> Cultic images would have been destroyed or carried off

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<sup>23</sup> ù DINGIR.MEŠ(*ilanī*) *ti-ik-li-šú-un šal-la-[ti-iš] / am-nu* (Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study* [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 28–29, lines 32–33).

<sup>24</sup> Avraham Faust has recently argued that Israelite temples were quite rare, and that cultic encounters with deity more commonly took place outside of them. He concludes, "No matter how the Israelites practiced their religion, the archaeological evidence suggests that it was not usually performed in temple or buildings erected for cultic purposes" (Avraham Faust, "Israelite Temples: Where Was Israelite Cult Not Practiced, and Why," *Religions* 10.106 [2019]: 1–26).

<sup>25</sup> See Kisilevitz, "The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza," 147–64.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Lisbeth S. Fried, "The High Places (*Bāmôt*) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 122.3 (2002): 437–65; Diana Edelman, "Hezekiah's Alleged Cultic Centralization," *JSOT* 32.4 (2008): 395–434, against Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, "Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology," *JSOT* 30.3 (2006): 259–85.

during such attacks, and without their return, the rebuilding or rededication of cultic sites was unlikely to take place.<sup>27</sup>

In light of these considerations, and others discussed in Chapter 4, we may conclude encounters with deity, socio-materially presenced by cultic objects, were commonplace in Iron Age Israel and Judah. YHWH was undoubtedly included in these encounters. The paucity of YHWH's explicit material representation in the material record is most likely a product of multiple incidental factors. Smaller and less complex socio-material ecologies in the "secondary states" of the Iron Age, restricted markets for anthropomorphic imagery, a de facto cult centralization resulting from frequent invasions, the accident of preservation, and our own inability to confidently identify the referents of divine imagery all combine to result in very few demonstrable Yahwistic cult images from Iron Age Israel and Judah. It was authors and editors from the Babylonian period and after, whose structuring of power benefitted from restrictions on divine imagery, that reflectively reframed these circumstances as prescriptive rather than incidental. There is nothing to suggest there was anything particularly unique—or immaterial—about socio-material encounters with YHWH in Iron Age Israel and Judah.

### The Conceptual Structures of YHWH's Divine Profile

A main contribution of the previous chapter was an interrogation of the structures of the generic concept of deity in the Hebrew Bible. In that section, I proposed that the semantic base of deity is [UNSEEN AGENT], with the broader domain of [UNSEEN AGENCY] activated in some circumstances. I identified twelve main conceptual domains commonly activated in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the generic concept of deity. I also identified a number of additional profiles, as well as prototypical features, boundaries, and image schemata associated with deity.

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<sup>27</sup> See Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 22–41; Fried, "The High Places (*Bāmôt*) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah," 460–61.

## CHAPTER 5 – YHWH as Deity

The focus was on the generic concept of deity and on deities other than YHWH, although there was some discussion of the relationship of these conceptual frameworks to YHWH, given how salient the latter was to the concept of deity within the sociocultural worlds that produced the biblical texts. In this section, I focus on the way YHWH is represented through these conceptual structures.

### *The Conceptual Base of YHWH's Divine Profile*

As a prototypical deity, YHWH was conceptualized according to the same base of [UNSEEN AGENT], although there is some unpacking to do regarding “unseen.”<sup>28</sup> In the biblical literature, the deity was repeatedly seen. Esther J. Hamori, for instance, has highlighted Hebrew Bible narratives (Gen 18:1–15; 32:23–33) in which the deity appears as an אִישׁ, “man,” to biblical figures, interacting in ways that suggest a fully visible and anthropomorphic deity. She calls this phenomenon the “’iš theophany,” and describes it as displaying “a radical degree of what might be called ‘anthropomorphic realism’—that is, realistic human presentation and action throughout the appearance in human form.”<sup>29</sup> More recently, Nevada Levi DeLapp has interrogated the theophanic types-scene in the Pentateuch, finding a variety of narrative frameworks that facilitated YHWH’s appearance to the people of Israel, including *kabod* theophanies and other mediated appearances.<sup>30</sup> These are manifestations of the salience of anthropomorphism in the conceptualization of unknown and unseen agents (as discussed in Chapter 3).

The deity was clearly thought to be *seen*, but these occurrences all remain confined to the

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<sup>28</sup> As YHWH is an agent, [UNSEEN AGENCY] does not obtain as a base independently of [UNSEEN AGENT].

<sup>29</sup> Hamori, “*When Gods Were Men*”, 3–4.

<sup>30</sup> Nevada Levi DeLapp, *Theophanic “Type-Scenes” in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). See also George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

biblical narratives. YHWH's appearances represented a potentiality that served paraenetic rhetorical functions and was also assigned strict boundaries. Exodus 33:20 asserted that a human could not see the deity's face and survive. At the same time, however, multiple figures still manage to encounter YHWH face-to-face (Gen 16:13; 32:31; Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10). All express fear, however, or surprise at their survival, which sends the message that YHWH's face may indeed be accessible in extraordinary circumstances and for extraordinary figures, but it was otherwise utterly devastating. (This rhetoric is to be distinguished from the rhetoric of many psalms, which express the joy of and yearning for seeing the deity's face.) The theophanies of the early biblical narratives are all reflective elaborations intended to serve specific rhetorical goals within given cognitive ecologies, but they do not fundamentally undermine the observation that deity concepts build on the conceptual base of [UNSEEN AGENT]. For those consuming the texts and doing the conceptualizing, the deity remained unseen.

There is a tension, however, between this observation and the commandment discussed above to see the face of YHWH three times a year. If we take seriously the theophanic dimension of cultic presencing that may be reflected in the motif in the Psalms regarding gazing upon the deity's face, the deity was to some degree *seen*, even if it was usually understood as an exception rather than the rule.<sup>31</sup> The use of non-anthropomorphic imagery may represent a prophylactic practice meant to shield the common viewer from the deity's anthropomorphic form.<sup>32</sup> It would have served the interests of those in positions of authority over the cult to limit the perception of access to the deity. Indeed, concerns about the degree to which a cultic object

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<sup>31</sup> Ornan's observations regarding cult images in Mesopotamia are relevant here: "Most men or women, therefore, rarely saw the anthropomorphic images of their deities in ninth–sixth-century Assyria and Babylonia. In their daily lives, Babylonians and Assyrians were not surrounded by figures of their prominent gods, but instead by clay statuettes of minor deities, by composite apotropaic creatures and by divine symbols engraved on seals. The ancients saw their prominent human-shaped gods on special occasions, such as cultic processions, but as a rule, cult statues in Mesopotamia were kept closed in shrines and temples, into which ordinary people could not have entered" (Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol*, 173).

<sup>32</sup> This is Ornan's explanation for the use of symbolic depictions outside of the temple in Mesopotamia.

facilitated that access may sit at the root of pre-exilic attempts to reflectively compartmentalize the loci of the deity's presence and identity. Asserting the deadly nature of the deity's face would address this (Exod 33:20), as would asserting the deity's location in the heavens (Deut 4:36). Restricting entry to the inner sanctuary to a single individual on a single day was one of many ways biblical authors and cultic authorities protected the privacy of the divine presence, and even for that single individual, there is a text that insists incense was required so that a cloud of smoke obscured the ark from view (Lev 16:13). Narratives suggesting a fundamentally anthropomorphic nature for the deity—a deity that that walks, talks, smells, and gets angry—also would have contributed to the perception that the cultic object (which did not do those things) afforded only partial access to the divine presence. So, while cultic objects were for a time understood under certain circumstances and by certain actors to make the deity in some sense visible, the [UNSEEN AGENT] conceptual base remained the foundation of the deity's cultural evolutionary fitness.

In contrast to the deadly nature of the deity's face and the compartmentalization of the loci of their identity, this narrative anthropomorphism was unlikely to have been a conscious and intentional rhetorical campaign. In Chapter 4, I discussed ways in which certain reflective elaborations on the conceptualization of unseen agents served to facilitate their socio-material transmission, relevance, and perseverance. These reflective elaborations included stories about socio-material interactions with humanity; after all, narratives assigning personhood and all its trappings to deity would be more intuitive and thus easier to visualize, to remember, and to recount. Anthropomorphism is included in the package with narrativization. Because cultic representations of deity are necessarily visible—even if access is restricted—they are a rich medium for further reinforcing those anthropomorphic literary features that facilitated transmission. Thus two common styles for metal statuary in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages were the “smiting” Baal/Hadad-type and the “enthroned” El-type. As mentioned above,



semiotic anchoring in material media and cult make the transmission and elaboration of properties much more efficient, but the proliferation of repetitive “doctrinal mode” ritual can serve the same function, removing some of the pressures from artistic representation where resources are scarce. This may account in part for the decrease in anthropomorphic representation and the increase in symbolic (that is not to say, aniconic) representation during the Iron Age in the regions occupied by Israel and Judah. In short, resources and the markets that supported them (and were supported by them) were scarce, but an increase in “doctrinal mode” ritual in concert with the centralization of authority within developing “secondary states” around the tenth century BCE could have stepped in to carry the weight of transmitting, elaborating on, and perpetuating features of the salient divine profiles. This could have reduced the demand for explicitly anthropomorphic statuary and helped proliferate so-called “aniconic” representations as these societies grew in size and complexity.

*The Conceptual Domains and Profiles of YHWH’s Divine Profile*

[DEITY]

In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH represents the indisputable prototype for the conceptual domain of [DEITY].<sup>33</sup> Thus, the most common profile for the terms for deity is YHWH. We see this demonstrated in places like Isaiah 13:19:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> An exception may be Genesis 33:20: אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, which may be translated “El, the deity of Israel,” or as a verbless clause: “El is the deity of Israel.” The former would represent the only El-oriented variation on the fixed formula יהוה אלהי ישראל, “YHWH, the deity of Israel,” which occurs 119 times, but nowhere in Genesis, suggesting its association with Israel’s national identity. This analogy also suggests אֱלֹהֵי is functioning as a DN and not the appellative “deity.” Wardlaw argues for the appellative use of אֱלֹהֵי in Genesis 33:20 on analogy with the arthrous האל אלהי אביך in Genesis 46:3, which he translates “God the God of your father.” While Wardlaw acknowledges that a [HIGH GOD] domain was likely associated with the lexeme אֱלֹהֵי in ancient Israel, he only identifies five passages where it is plausible (Gen 33:20; Deut 7:9, 21; 10:17; 33:26), and ultimately concludes that it is not used as a DN (Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God”*, 132–34).

<sup>34</sup> Above on page 36, note 32, I point out that a profile is not to be confused with an expression’s referent. Here the profile YHWH refers not to the (putative) real-world instantiation of the concept, but to the individual’s conceptualization of it. In other words, it refers to the conceptual package evoked by the lexeme, not to its actual referent.

והיתה בבל צבי ממלכות תפארת גאון כשדים  
כמהפכת אלהים את־סדם ואת־עמרה

And Babylon, the splendor of kingdoms,  
the beauty and pride of the Chaldeans,  
will be as when the Deity  
overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

The informed hearer/reader would be able to discern from the various contexts that אלהים is being used as a title that profiles YHWH. The most explicit contextual cue in this passage is the reference to the tradition regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 19:24–25, but the broader context of the author’s prophecies, as well as other more explicit references to YHWH as אלהים/אל/אלוה, would cue the reader to the same titular use, as would the location and situations attending the passage’s consumption in antiquity. The title borders on functioning as a name. Similarly, an informed person on the street today in Salt Lake City, Utah, would understand “the Church” to profile The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, while an informed person on the street in Rome would understand it to profile the Roman Catholic Church. A Latter-day Saint in Rome speaking with a local would know to qualify their references to “the Church” if they intended to refer to the one headquartered in Salt Lake City. Similarly, without a contextual cue to mute the YHWH profile, that would be one of the most intuitive and automatic profiles for the concept. This no doubt helped facilitate the renegotiation of some of the ambiguous uses of אלהים that likely referred to cultic objects in early literature (e.g., Exod 22:27).

All this is not to say that YHWH’s identification as the prototype of [DEITY] did not merit reinforcement at certain times and in certain circumstances. One of the most frequent objects of the biblical authors’ scorn was the tendency for the people of Israel and Judah to dedicate attention and resources to deities other than YHWH, and so asserting YHWH’s primacy was a frequent rhetorical expediency. One of the most explicit attempts to emphasize YHWH’s claim

to deity was Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal,<sup>35</sup> which was intended to demonstrate definitively that YHWH was אלהים בישראל, "Deity in Israel" (1 Kgs 18:36). After YHWH sent down fire from the heavens to burn up the sacrifice and the altar, the gathered people fell to their faces to emphatically acknowledge, יהוה הוא האלהים יהוה הוא האלהים, "YHWH is the deity! YHWH is the deity!"

[PATRONAGE] and [NATIONAL DEITY]

The previous chapter noted that about half of all biblical occurrences of the terms for deity occur in genitive relationships with individuals, groups, or territories. While a number of those occurrences refer to deities other than YHWH, the majority are direct references to YHWH, who was conceptualized within the exact same conceptual domains of [PATRONAGE] and [NATIONAL DEITY]. YHWH came off the same conceptual shelf as every other national deity. That YHWH was the national deity over Israel/Judah does not require argument, but there is change in this conceptualization that merits attention. The earliest texts reflecting YHWH's purview over Israel and Judah understood it to be restricted to those nations. YHWH's defeat at the hands of Chemosh in 2 Kings 3:27 is an example that was discussed in the previous chapter, but there are others. In 1 Samuel 26:19, David accuses Saul of chasing him out of the nation of Israel (נחלת יהוה, "YHWH's inheritance"), effectively forcing him to worship other deities. Similarly, in 2 Kings 5:17, the Syrian general, Naaman, after being healed of his disease, asks for two mule-loads of earth to facilitate the worship of YHWH in his home country. Finally, an exiled psalmist laments, איך נשיר את־שיר־יהוה על אדמה נכר, "How could we sing a song of YHWH on foreign soil?" The concept tacitly underlying all these passages is that deities are prototypically patrons over a nation and do not appropriately function, or are not accessible, outside that purview. While the relationship was fundamentally

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<sup>35</sup> See above, pages 289–90.

with the people, as a nation's identity was more saliently linked with territory, so too the conceptualization of that relationship. In this sense, YHWH operated no differently from the other deities of ancient Southwest Asia.

The paradigm shift in YHWH's territorialism came with their universalization in the exilic and/or post-exilic periods, which was discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to Psalm 82. Expanding the purview of the patron deity beyond national boundaries may have served the immediate rhetorical need of facilitating the perception of access and oversight to the diaspora populations of a splintered nation, but there were other unintended implications related to their conceptualization as PATRON DEITY. If all nations were now the purview of the deity of Israel/Judah,<sup>36</sup> on what grounds were Judahites to assert a unique or exclusive relationship with YHWH? One response was to emphasize Israel's "chosen" or "elected" status, realized either through their covenant relationship with the deity (Deuteronomic writings) and/or through their purity and holiness (Priestly writings).<sup>37</sup> Exodus 19:5–6 seem to recognize the need for such status in light of YHWH's purview over the whole earth, and consolidates the two ideologies:<sup>38</sup>

5 ועתה אִמְשָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ  
6 וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מַמְלַכַת קֹהֲנִים וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ

5 And now, if you carefully heed my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasure from among all peoples. For the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation.

There was thus an expansion of the limits of YHWH's patronage alongside a dichotomization of its nature. Judah/Israel remained a privileged social group, even as YHWH was assigned

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, by this time, the population was primarily Judahite, and identified itself as such, even if Israelite identity had been appropriated.

<sup>37</sup> The need to rationalize this exclusive relationship became the seedbed for the ideologies that are frequently identified by modern scholars as the necessary and sufficient features of monotheism. Cf. MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 151–81.

<sup>38</sup> See also Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4.

responsibility over all the nations of the earth.

[DIVINE WAR]

Some of the earliest texts in the Hebrew Bible present the deity of Israel as a WARRIOR. Exodus 15:1–12, the earliest portions of the Song of the Sea, represent perhaps the most archaic of these, describing YHWH’s defeat of Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt.<sup>39</sup> The text asserts in verse 3 that, יהוה איש מלחמה, “YHWH is a man of war.” The rest of the poem describes the Egyptian army being slung into the sea, having the sea piled up and then cast over them, and having the earth swallow them up. Similar to the Song of Deborah’s depiction of Sisera’s army being swept away by the river Kishon, the Song of the Sea describes natural phenomena under the control of the deity defeating the enemy, sidestepping the need to describe an individual warrior somehow singlehandedly annihilating an entire army—a counterintuitive narrative that would be cognitively costly to produce, remember, and transmit.<sup>40</sup>

The Song of the Sea’s description of the deity’s manipulation of the sea for destructive purposes seems to derive, at least in part, from the STORM-DEITY profile, which is known from across ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>41</sup> Generally speaking, the storm-deity was responsible for sustaining agriculture (and thus civilization and cosmic order) through the provision of rain

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<sup>39</sup> See Shawn W. Flynn, *YHWH is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 47–58. Ronald Hendel has recently suggested that the Song of the Sea represents the accretion of poetic tradition to social memories regarding the collapse of Egypt’s hegemony over the hill country in the Late Bronze Age. See Ronald Hendel, “The Exodus as Cultural Memory: Egyptian Bondage and the Song of the Sea,” in *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H.C. Propp (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 65–77.

<sup>40</sup> Although note Isaiah 63:1–6 describes the deity returning from battle, covered in blood, castigating those who failed to show up in support and boasting of their singlehanded victory. The actual means of the victory are elided, however, and the hearer/reader is left to imagine the scene themselves.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Metten Pantoja, *The Metaphor of the Divine as Planter of the People: Stinking Grapes or Pleasant Planting?* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 56–62. See also Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); Daniel Schwemer, “The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies. Part I,” *JANER* 7.2 (2008): 121–68; Daniel Schwemer, “The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies. Part II,” *JANER* 8.1 (2008): 1–44. On YHWH as storm-deity, see Paul E. Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god: The Double Legacy of Egypt and Canaan as Reflected in Psalm 104,” *ZAW* 103.1 (1991): 43–71; Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

and other terrestrial sources of water (as a result there was a natural conceptual overlap with fertility).<sup>42</sup> There was also a violent dimension to such deities, however, who could devastate peoples and/or their crops and animals through violent storms, lightning, hail, floods, and drought. These were the media for the storm-deity’s conceptualization as warrior, although the mythological narrativization of the deity’s battles with other deities also involved other more traditional weapons and warrior motifs.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from 2 Kings 3:27, the primary example of war between divine combatants in the Hebrew Bible is the so-called *Chaoskampf* motif, which pits YHWH against a divine sea monster of some kind that is generally thought to represent cosmic chaos or disorder.<sup>44</sup> The deity’s victory is symbolic of their sovereignty, often expressed as their kingship. Isaiah 27:1 represents a clear example of this motif:

ביום ההוא יפקד יהוה בחרבו הקשה והגדולה והחזקה על לוייתן נחש ברח ועל לוייתן נחש עקלתון והרג  
את־התנין אשר בים

In that day, YHWH will visit punishment, with his hard and great and strong sword, upon Leviathan, the wriggling serpent, and upon Leviathan, the writhing serpent; and he will kill the monster that is in the sea.

This account bears striking similarities to a passage from the Ugaritic KTU 1.5.i:1–3 that praises Baal for dispatching a creature named Lotan:<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In places like the Southwest Asian hill countries, where rainfall was the central lifeblood of agriculture and, thus, civilization, the balance between prosperity and destruction became increasingly delicate as the size and complexity of a society increased. It is no wonder the storm-deity began to predominate in these regions after the development of the secondary states of the tenth century BCE.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, in the Ugaritic stories of Baal’s battle with Yamm, the craftsman deity Kothar-wa-Hasis fashions two maces that Baal uses to defeat Yamm (KTU 1.2.iv:10–30). Mark S. Smith suggests, however, that these weapons represent Baal’s lightning (Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 2*, 57).

<sup>44</sup> Recall that the danger and chaos of the sea conceptually contrasts with the order and safety of civilization. On the use of “chaos” in the Hebrew Bible, see Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> This translation is my own, but cf. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 115; Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 2*, 252. The second and third lines appear almost identically in KTU 1.3.iii:41–42 (the verb at the beginning of line 2 is different [*mḥšt*], as well as being in the first person). Lotan is cognate with the Hebrew לוייתן

<i>k tmḥṣ.ltn.bṭn.brḥ</i> <i>tkly.bṭn.‘qltn.</i> <i>šlyṭ.d.šb ‘t.rašm</i>	When you struck Lotan, the wriggling serpent, you finished off the writhing serpent, the powerful one with seven heads.
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While the final passage refers to a powerful one with seven heads rather than to a תנין, “monster,” that lives in the sea, the epithet *šlyṭ* occurs elsewhere in connection with the Ugaritic *tnn* (KTU 1.3.iii:40), which is cognate with the Hebrew תנין and has similar reference to the notion of chaos and disorder.<sup>46</sup> There can be little doubt that a tradition genetically related to that underlying KTU 1.5.i:1–3 is reflected in Isaiah 27:1,<sup>47</sup> again demonstrating that the traditions undergirding YHWH’s divine profile were drawn from the broader conceptual matrices for deity. Psalm 74:12–14 similarly describes the deity’s defeat of תנינים and Leviathan, although in that exilic text the tradition begins to bleed into rhetoric about the deity’s creative prowess, particularly in verses 15–17.<sup>48</sup> In the Ugaritic literature, divine warfare is tied to rule over the pantheon, and not to creation, although the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* incorporates both.<sup>49</sup>

The figures prominent in the *Chaoskampf* motif are present in the Priestly account of creation, but those authors seem reticent to describe creation as a product of a battle against antagonistic divine forces, and so while the figures were retained, they were only conceptual husks, stripped of their agency and narratives.<sup>50</sup> *Enuma Elish*’s sea monster Tiamat appears to

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(see J. A. Emerton, “Leviathan and *ltn*: The Vocalization of the Ugaritic Word for the Dragon,” *VT* 32 [1982]: 327–31).

<sup>46</sup> See the discussion in Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 2*, 250–54.

<sup>47</sup> See David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 192–95.

<sup>48</sup> See David Toshio Tsumura, “The Creation Motif in Psalm 74:12–14? A Reappraisal of the Theory of the Dragon Myth,” *JBL* 134.3 (2015): 547–55, but cf. Nathaniel E. Greene, “Creation, Destruction, and a Psalmist’s Plea: Rethinking the Poetic Structure of Psalm 74,” *JBL* 136.1 (2017): 85–101. For this passage as an element of the complaint genre intended to remind the deity of past acts of salvation and rhetorically spur them to action, see McClellan, “The Gods-Complaint,” 841.

<sup>49</sup> For a brief outline of some different ways the Ugaritic and Akkadian literature treat the rise to divine kingship, see Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 2*, 16–19. David Tsumura argues that scholars have been too eager to find *Enuma Elish* in Genesis 1. See Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*. Cf. John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), but against Tsumura, see Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>50</sup> “Rather, their purpose was at once to allude to the world of the sea myth, not only to that of the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* but also more generally to that of the common sea myth tradition, so as to make it visible to the

be reflected in the inert תְּהוֹם, “deep” (Gen 1:2), while the great תַּיִם became the deity’s own creation, made to fill the waters of the sea (Gen 1:21).<sup>51</sup> Psalm 104:26 describes the deity having formed (יִצְרָה) Leviathan as a play-thing. None of these conceptualizations of YHWH or their relationship to the broader divine world was created *ex nihilo* within Judahite or Israelite society; they were negotiated from preexisting conceptual frameworks that were drawn from broader sociocultural contexts.

Returning to the Song of the Sea, we see in this poem an appeal to the deity as warrior in its description of YHWH’s harnessing the sea to defeat the Egyptian army, but this does not directly invoke the classical motifs of storms or flooding usually associated with the storm-deity as warrior. Rather, the references to the sea and its manipulation seem to allude obliquely to the mythological story of the storm-deity’s battle with, and victory over, the personified sea.<sup>52</sup> In the Ugaritic literature, this deity was El’s own son, Yamm (also called Nahar, “River”), and their defeat at the hands of the outsider Baal (referred to as the son of Dagan) secured the latter’s kingship over the deities.<sup>53</sup> The Song of the Sea may be recasting that battle, describing YHWH’s opponent as a human army and turning the sea into a de-deified weapon, with YHWH’s victory still securing sovereignty over all. The echo of the battle between deities is still heard in the rhetoric of incomparability from Exodus 15:11, מִי־כַמְכָה בְּאֵלֵי יְהוָה, “Who is like you among the deities, YHWH?”

Judges 5:4–5, a portion of the Song of Deborah, more directly draws from the classical imagery of the storm-deity as warrior vis-à-vis humanity:

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reader’s mind, but simultaneously to challenge and replace that world with a fresh vision of creation with YHWH, not Marduk, the god of their hated captors, enthroned in the cosmic temple” (Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, 78).

<sup>51</sup> See Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, 76–87.

<sup>52</sup> This story is known from Ugarit, involving Baal and Yamm, from Old-Babylonia, involving Haddu and Temtum, from Neo-Babylonia, involving Marduk and Tiamat, and from a variety of myths from Anatolia. See Schwemer, “The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East. Part II,” 24–27. See also Edward L. Greenstein, “The Snaring of Sea in the Baal Epic,” *MAARAV* 3.2 (1982): 195–216.

<sup>53</sup> See KTU 1.2.iv:32: *ym.lmt.b’lm. yml[k*, Yamm surely is dead! Baal rei[gns!(?)” (Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 1*, 319, 324). Note Smith’s discussion of the levels of kingship on pages 95–96.



4 יהוה בצאתך משעיר בצעדך משדה אדום  
 ארץ רעשה גם־שמים נטפו  
 גם־עבים נטפו מים  
 5 הרים נשלו מפני יהוה  
 זה סיני מפני יהוה אלהי ישראל

- 4 YHWH, when you went out from Seir,  
 when you marched from the fields of Edom,  
 The earth convulsed,  
 and the heavens poured,  
 Indeed, the clouds poured water!  
 5 Mountains quaked before YHWH,<sup>54</sup>  
 this Sinai, before YHWH,  
 the deity of Israel.

Similar imagery abounds in reference to YHWH’s military might. The psalmist in Psalm 18 cries to YHWH from the temple for help (Ps 18:7), using storm imagery to describe YHWH’s arrival.<sup>55</sup> The skies bowed and thick darkness was under the deity’s feet (v. 10). Their canopy was clouds dark with water (v. 12). Hailstones and coals of fire shot from the clouds (v. 13) as YHWH “thundered in the heavens” (וירעם בשמים) and Elyon “uttered his voice” (יתן קלו) in verse 14. Psalm 29 famously employs a sevenfold description of YHWH’s voice as lightning that shakes the wilderness and shatters trees.<sup>56</sup> Psalm 68:5 even applies to YHWH an epithet associated directly with Baal in the Ugaritic literature: רכב בערבות, “Rider of the Clouds.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> My translation follows the LXX reading of נזלו as the *niphal* of זלל, rather than MT’s reading of *qal* נזל.

<sup>55</sup> See Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, “A Royal Song of Thanksgiving: II Samuel 22=Psalm 18,” *JBL* 72.1 (1953): 15–34; Cross, *CMHB*, 158–62; Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 121–23; Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven*, 57–74; Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 269–71; Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 149–51; Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 74–83; Alison Ruth Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures: A Reading Through Metaphor* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> The majority of the scholarship on Psalm 29 addresses its unity and poetic structures. See Peter C. Craigie, “Psalm XXIX in the Hebrew Poetic Tradition,” *VT* 22.2 (1972): 143–51; David Noel Freedman and C. Franke Hyland, “Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis,” *HTR* 66 (1973): 237–56; John Day, “Echoes of Baal’s Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI,” *VT* 29.2 (1979): 143–51; Carola Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 13–124; Dennis Pardee, “On Psalm 29: Structure and Meaning,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 153–81; Dennis Pardee and Nancy Pardee, “Gods of Glory Ought to Thunder: The Canaanite Matrix of Psalm 29,” in *Psalm 29 through Time and Tradition*, ed. Lowell K. Handy (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2009), 115–25; Gianni Barbiero, “The Two Structures of Psalm 29,” *VT* 66.3 (2016): 378–92.

<sup>57</sup> In Ugaritic, *rkb ‘rpt* (KTU 1.2.iv:8, 29; 1.3.ii:40; iii:38//iv:4; see Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts*, 288–91). The resonance with Baal specifically is suggested by the Akkadian convention for the storm-deity to ride storms, not clouds (Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts*, 290, n. 7). On the interchange of *beth*

YHWH’s warrior status thus finds expression in a variety of ways that draw from and adapt features from the broader sociocultural matrix associated with divine war. The literary conventions associated with the storm-deity are among the most common means of reflecting that warrior nature, but battle can take place between deities, between YHWH and de-deified natural phenomena such as the sea or vague sea creatures like Leviathan, and between YHWH and human opponents. YHWH is also frequently called יהוה צבואת, “YHWH of Hosts,” a reference to their command of military hosts.<sup>58</sup> While the securing of sovereignty was certainly one of the central purposes of employing warrior motifs, they also functioned in later texts as conceptual channels for YHWH’s acts of creation and salvation.<sup>59</sup>

[ACCESS TO STRATEGIC INFORMATION]

Like other socially-concerned deities, YHWH was understood to have full access to strategic information. Rhetoric regarding this access finds expression in many different ways in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 40:13, for instance, uses rhetorical questions to assert YHWH’s incomparability regarding knowledge: ואיש עצתו יודיענו מי־תכן את־רוח יהוה, “Who has ordered the רוח of YHWH, and what person being his counselor has instructed him?” Other passages assert YHWH’s ability to monitor everyone’s actions, activating the [SOCIAL MONITORING] domain (Psalm 33:13–15):

13 משמים הביט יהוה  
ראה את־כל־בני האדם  
14 ממכון־שבתו השגיח

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and *pe*, cf. Isaiah 5:30, where ערפלים is used for “clouds.” For more detail in this title in Ugaritic, see N. Wyatt, *Word of Tree and Whisper of Stone, And Other Papers on Ugaritian Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 32–36.

<sup>58</sup> 260 occurrences, including 1 Samuel 1:3, 11; 2 Kings 23:5; Psalms 46:7; 84:12; Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; Judges 5:20.

<sup>59</sup> While I am referring to battle with various entities and forces, the relationship specifically between chaos and creation is not so clear. See Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 19–25; Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*. On the sea myth and its relationship to creation, see Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, 67–87. The convergence of divine battle, salvation, and creation occurs in Psalm 74:12–17 (cf. Flynn, *YHWH is King*, 71–73).

אל כל־ישבי הארץ  
15 היצר יחר לבם  
המבין אל־כל־מעשיהם

- 13 From heaven YHWH looks down,  
he sees all humanity.  
14 From where he sits enthroned  
he gazes upon all who dwell on earth,  
15 The one who fashions all their hearts  
observes all their works.

Still other texts escalate this rhetoric, asserting YHWH’s ability not only to observe actions, but to perceive the very thoughts and intentions of humanity (Psalm 139:1–4):

1 למנצח לדוד מזמור  
יהוה חקרתני ותדע  
2 אתה ידעת שבתי וקומי  
בנתה לרעי מרחוק  
3 ארחי ורבעי זרית  
וכל־דרכי הסכנתה  
4 כי אין מלה בלשוני  
הן יהוה ידעת כלה

- 1 For the director: A Psalm of David:  
O YHWH, you have searched me and you know.  
2 You know my sitting down and my getting up,  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
3 You measure out my journey and my lying down,  
and you are familiar with all my ways.  
4 For before a word is on my tongue,  
look, O YHWH, you know all of it.

One of the primary purposes of this access to strategic information was to benefit humanity by informing their decision-making. In the biblical literature, the terms דרש√, “inquire, search” (Gen 25:22; 1 Kgs 22:5–8; Ezek 20:1–3), and שאל√, “ask” (Judg 18:5; 20:18; 1 Sam 22:13, 15; Isa 7:11–12) are used to refer to the accessing that information.<sup>60</sup> There were a variety of means

<sup>60</sup> In many places, no method of inquiry is specified. For instance, in Judges 1:1–2, the author simply states that the Israelites asked YHWH (וישאלו בני ישראל ביהוה), and YHWH responded (ויאמר יהוה). The inquiry takes

available, some sanctioned by the authorities responsible for the biblical texts and some prohibited (although there was diachronic and synchronic variation on this). The previous chapter focused on some of the means of divination considered to be illicit by biblical authors and editors, but there were multiple cultic objects and agents that were considered sanctioned media for facilitating YHWH's full access to strategic information. In Numbers 27:21, for instance, Moses is instructed to have Aaron represent the concerns of the community before the high priest Eleazar, who would inquire (here שאל) by means of the אורים, "Urim," in the deity's presence (לפני יהוה). Judges 20:27 suggests the ark of the covenant facilitated an inquiry to YHWH. For Saul, it was YHWH's refusal to answer his inquiries through the Urim (1 Sam 28:6) or through dreams or prophets that compelled him to seek out the necromancer of Endor.<sup>61</sup> This convention of inquiring of YHWH seems to have conceptually broadened in some texts to a more generic notion of "seeking" YHWH for purposes of communion or increased righteousness (Isa 55:6; 58:2; Jer 29:13; Amos 5:4–6). This may have roots in the cultic service that was commonly conducted in association with facilitating access to the deity's knowledge.

Prophets represent perhaps the most well-known medium for consulting the deity found across the biblical literature. Essentially professional diviners—although lay practitioners were likely not uncommon—prophets are known from across ancient Southwest Asia, and in many ways their portrayal in the biblical texts fits broader patterns. Jonathan Stökl identifies three broad categories of prophet: the ecstatic prophet, the technical diviner, and the writing prophet. Ecstatic prophets and diviners are well represented in the cognate literature, though there is a great deal of overlap between the two in the Hebrew Bible. Stökl suggests the less stratified and diversified populations of Israel and Judah blurred the distinction between the roles, which contributed to a hybrid "messenger-type prophet," which is most clearly represented in the

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place after the death of Joshua, and they are asking who will function in Joshua's place, so the author may have needed to show the Israelites receiving divine guidance without acknowledging that they had no authorized means of doing so.

<sup>61</sup> Numbers 12:6 is an example of a connection between prophets and dreams.

“writing prophets” attested first in the writings of Jeremiah and the Deuteronomistic literature.<sup>62</sup>

The representation of prophets in the biblical texts is distinct in a variety of other ways.<sup>63</sup> For instance, the prophets of the Bible represent only a single deity, rather than an entire pantheon. How much of this exclusivity is editorial in origin is unclear, but a common accusation against prophets who utilized illicit means or consulted other deities was that they dealt in “false prophecy,” which represents a degree of innovation on the genre.<sup>64</sup> Next, while prophets outside of Israel and Judah tended to operate in groups and directly in the service of the crown and/or temple, the biblical prophets are frequently portrayed as operating alone, and often independently of and even antagonistically towards the royal court.<sup>65</sup> The contrast with the broader pattern is punctuated in the story of Micaiah’s prophecy regarding the death of Ahab, which rhetorically mocks and derides the king’s cadre of prophets as incompetent yes-men. The occasional antagonism towards specific kings (1 Kgs 21:17–22) and toward kingship more broadly (1 Sam 8:4–18) would have been rhetorically useful for criticizing past kings perceived to be impious or unjust, but more saliently for structuring values and power in the absence of kingship. A prophet who operates independently of the crown maintains access to the deity’s strategic information even in exile or under direct foreign rule.

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<sup>62</sup> Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 175–76.

<sup>63</sup> See the bibliographic data on page 266–68, notes 71 and 74. On the terms for “prophet,” see Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 155–200. Note, particularly, the following comment: “I have argued that *nabī* in Emar and Mari is related to some form of ancestor worship. If the word did not change its meaning in the process of borrowing, it would follow that the נביא was originally linked to some form of ancestor cult. A provisional, if very literal, translation of נביא is ‘the called’” (p. 167).

<sup>64</sup> See Huffmon, “The Exclusivity of Divine Communication in Ancient Israel,” 67–71. Huffmon describes the prophets’ fidelity to YHWH alone as a reflection of the vassal/king relationship (pp. 71–74).

<sup>65</sup> See Rainer Albertz, “Social History of Ancient Israel,” in Williamson, *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, 361: “Such fundamental prophetic opposition during the ninth century against the ruling king is a new phenomenon in Israel’s history. In the tenth century the prophets we hear about were ecstatic groups with no visible social function (1 Sam. 10.5–6, 10–12; 19.18–24), or court prophets like Nathan and Gad employed by the state, who predominantly functioned to stabilize the institution of monarchy (2 Sam. 7; 1 Kgs 1). Such prophets in the service of the kings are also mentioned later (1 Kgs 22). Only during the ninth century did individual prophets and prophetic groups with no ties to institutions emerge alongside these. Such prophets had largely detached themselves from ties of kinship and profession (1 Kgs 19.19–21) in order to earn their living as itinerant miraculous healers, exorcists, or oracle givers.”

## [SOCIAL MONITORING] and [PUNISHMENT]

Perhaps the clearest illustration of how social monitoring informed the representation of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible is the Neo-Babylonian- or Achaemenid-period story of Achan from Joshua 7.<sup>66</sup> In the story, Joshua’s troops are routed in what was expected to be an easy victory at Ai (Josh 7:4–5). Joshua complains to YHWH, who informs him that they abandoned the troops in battle because someone stole from the spoils of Jericho. These were supposed to be *herem* (הֶרֶם), or foreign spoils (or people) ritually devoted to destruction or to exclusively cultic use (Josh 7:11–12).<sup>67</sup> (This term occurs also on the Mesha Stele.)<sup>68</sup> YHWH instructs Joshua to muster all Israel the next day so they can identify the guilty party and excise the *herem*, which is framed as a contaminant that infects the whole Israelite camp.<sup>69</sup> When Achan is identified, he confesses, *חטאתי ליהוה אלהי ישראל*, “I sinned against YHWH, the deity of Israel” (Josh 7:20). Joshua then gathers at the Valley of Achor the recovered spoils, Achan, his family, and his possessions, and they are all stoned and burned, which satiates YHWH’s anger and enables the Israelites to take the city of Ai (Josh 8:1–29).

Achan here represents the quintessential free-rider, violating sociocultural mores in order to take advantage of resources facilitated by the broader cooperation of the social group. Achan’s transgression in and of itself has no direct effect on the success of the social group, but because YHWH imposes and enforces the *herem*, its violation results in YHWH’s withdrawal

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<sup>66</sup> On this dating, see Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 350–61. Cf Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 87–88, which refers to the story of Achan as a “later interpolation” to the Deuteronomistic account of the conquest of Ai.

<sup>67</sup> On *herem*, see Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel’s Religious Experience* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991); C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 174–89. Note Crouch highlights that a national context is more likely for the development of these features of “holy war” than a tribal one (p. 174–75). She also notes the “deuteronom(ist)ic” context for the majority of *herem* narratives (p. 177). On this last point, see MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 108–22.

<sup>68</sup> See Lauren A. S. Monroe, “Israelite, Moabite and Sabaeen War-*herem* Traditions and the Forging of National Identity: Reconsidering the Sabaeen Text RES 3945 in Light of Biblical and Moabite Evidence,” *VT* 57 (2007): 318–41. See also Giuseppe F. Del Monte, “The Hittite *Herem*,” in *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff. Babel und Bibel 2*, ed. L. Kogan et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 21–46.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 116–17.

of support from the siege of Ai, resulting in thirty-six deaths and Israel's defeat. Because Achan's sin is reflectively framed as a contaminant that must be rooted out from Israel, the punishment extends beyond the offender to all those within his household who stood to benefit, whether connected by kinship or servitude.<sup>70</sup> This fictive account rhetorically elevates the stakes vis-à-vis free-riding for those hearers for whom the story was authoritative (it is referenced in a later warning in Joshua 22:20).

The ritualization of this act of restraint by including it in the concept of חרם appropriates the powerful influences of divine scrutiny and punishment, as well as the CREDs (credibility enhancing displays) framework. The simple prohibition of taking the spoils of conquest on the grounds that leadership wants it, or that it advantages and disadvantages different groups and creates chaos, thereby undermining social cohesion and cooperation, would experience limited success. Framing the prohibition as a ritual act, however, endows it with increased social salience and brings YHWH and their oversight into play. Enforcement with the death penalty could take place without the deity, but their ability to covertly monitor all members of the group changes the dynamic considerably. YHWH was the only one who knew that Achan had taken from the spoils, indicating that there is no hiding from the divine monitor (cf. Psalm 139). The story additionally heightens the consequences of the violation of this putatively arbitrary ritual act by attributing to it the deaths of thirty-six Israelite troops and the melting of the hearts of the people. What is more, future military endeavors are threatened, not only by the deity's withdrawal of support, but also by the damage done to the reputation of Israel and its deity—this is not a victimless crime. The story of Achan presents one of the most unobstructed views in the Hebrew Bible of the conceptualization of YHWH as a prototypical socially concerned deity.

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<sup>70</sup> For a recent discussion of corporate punishment in Joshua 7, see Joshua Berman, "The Making of the Sin of Achan (Joshua 7)," *BI* 22.2 (2014): 115–31.

## [DIVINE COUNCIL]

Like the societies surrounding them, Israel and Judah structured their understanding of the pantheon's sociality and administration around the council.<sup>71</sup> The earliest iterations of this divine council appear to have been closely related to those of Ugarit, the coastal Syrian city that was destroyed around 1200 BCE, centuries before the establishment of an Israelite or Judahite national identity or literary tradition. Deuteronomy 32:8–9, for instance, preserves what may be the earliest biblical witness to the divine council, and in it, the high deity (Elyon) divides and distributes the nations to their offspring (the בני אלהים, “children of the Deity,” or “deities”) according to their number, with the nation of Israel assigned to YHWH, one of those offspring.<sup>72</sup> This not only distinguishes YHWH from Elyon, but also describes the divine council as composed of the high deity's offspring, which corresponds to the Ugaritic designations of the divine council as the *mḥrt bn 'il*, “assembly of the children of El” (KTU 1.65.3), and *dr bn 'il*, “circle of the children of El” (KTU 1.40.25, 33–34). The table of nations in Genesis 10 suggests there were understood to be seventy nations on earth, and this tradition appears in later literature in reference to seventy guardian angels over the nations of the earth (e.g., 1 Enoch 89:59; 90:22–25).<sup>73</sup> If this tradition of seventy nations was in circulation at the time of the composition of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, the number of nations would correspond with the number of the divine offspring, which would correspond with the Ugaritic literature's designation of the members of the divine council as the seventy offspring of Athirat, El's

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<sup>71</sup> As Robert P. Gordon notes, “Old Testament references to this Divine Council . . . are too widely distributed among the individual books and across the canonical divisions for them to be regarded as simple ‘vestigial’ and immaterial to the presentation of God in the Hebrew scriptures. The Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets, Psalms, Job and Daniel all draw directly on the concept of the DC in their portrayal of the God of Israel” (Robert P. Gordon, “Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God,” in *The God of Israel*, ed. Robert P. Gordon [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 190).

<sup>72</sup> The reading above comes from 4QDeut<sup>f</sup>. Jan Joosten reconstructs בני שר אל, “children of Bull El.” This would represent an even more direct borrowing from the traditions underlying the Ugaritic literature, as שר אל does not occur anywhere in the biblical literature, but occurs in the Ugaritic material as the cognate *ṣr 'il* (e.g., KTU 1.4.v:35–36; see Joosten, “A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy xxxii 8,” 551–52). While highly conjectural, the variant reading would easily account—through reduplication of the *yod* and respacing—for MT's variant בני ישראל, “children of Israel.”

<sup>73</sup> Using the number seventy was a conventionalized way to refer to a large number of something.



consort (KTU 1.4.iv:46).<sup>74</sup>

Two major changes may be noted regarding the conceptualization of YHWH between the early iteration of the divine council in Deuteronomy 32 and the much later iteration in Psalm 82. Perhaps the most significant the difference is that YHWH appears to direct the council in the latter witness, but is subordinate in the earlier. There has been a great deal of debate regarding the distinction of YHWH and El in Psalm 82, but if El is identifiable in the psalm, they are utterly inoperative, and the (post-)exilic dating of the psalm renders unlikely the preservation of a firm distinction. There may be a relic of YHWH's subordination preserved in the author's borrowing of a much older literary template, but YHWH is the only active deity in Psalm 82.<sup>75</sup>

The other significant change in the conceptualization of YHWH's divine council is the inclusion of human witnesses and participants.<sup>76</sup> Human witnessing of divine council deliberations is known from texts from Mari, Deir 'Alla, and Mesopotamia, although in the latter instances, the witnessing is usually secretive.<sup>77</sup> Several factors likely contributed to the adoption of this theme in the biblical texts, including a need to stock the council after the participation of other deities became problematic, a need to provide a context for human reporting on divine council proceedings, and perhaps a desire to structure power in favor of non-royal prophets. A detailed example of a prophet witnessing the divine council comes from 1 Kings 22:15–23, in which the prophet Micaiah is goaded into contradicting the king's court

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 41–43, 55–56.

<sup>75</sup> See McClellan, "The Gods-Complaint," 846. Ellen White suggests Psalm 82 narrates YHWH's demotion not just of the other deities of the divine council, but also of its leader, the high deity El: "Thus while Yahweh is a character in this divine council type-scene he is not the head of it (El is) until possibly the end of the psalm when he takes over the position of the council" (White, *Yahweh's Council*, 33).

<sup>76</sup> See Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 50–64, 221–72.

<sup>77</sup> Martti Nissinen, "Prophets and the Divine Council," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirñâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. U. Hübner and E. A. Knauf (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 4–19; Gordon, "Standing in the Council," 190–204; Alan Lenzi, "Revisiting Biblical Prophecy, Revealed Knowledge Pertaining to Ritual, and Secrecy in Light of Ancient Mesopotamian Prophetic Texts," in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, ed. Alan Lenzi and Jonathan Stökl (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 65–86.

prophets regarding the propriety of the king going to battle in Ramoth-gilead. Micaiah casts himself as witness to the divine council's deliberations in 1 Kings 22:19: רֵאִיתִי אֶת־יְהוָה יֹשֵׁב עַל־רֶגְלָיו, "I saw YHWH sitting upon his throne, and all the host of the heavens stood by him, on his right hand and on his left." He then goes on to describe YHWH asking which of the host of heaven in attendance would volunteer to go lie to the king's prophets in order to trick him into going into battle so he will be killed. Micaiah is punished for his insubordination, but his prophecy ultimately proves to be accurate. The sixth-century BCE prophet Jeremiah hints at his participation in the council itself when he rhetorically asks in Jeremiah 23:18, מִי עָמַד בְּסוּד יְהוָה, "Who has stood in the council of YHWH?" More explicitly, Isaiah 6:8–10 has Isaiah volunteer to carry a message on behalf of YHWH's council.<sup>78</sup> Prior to the request, a seraph purifies Isaiah with a coal from the altar of the temple (Isa 6:6–7), apparently to sanctify him so that he can be in the deity's presence and can participate in the council.

While these innovations show the creative work of the authors, editors, and authorities who influenced these traditions and the texts that transmitted them, the Hebrew Bible's representations of the divine council are clearly founded on broader Southwest Asian conventions and traditions adapted from human household and administrative institutions to structure and frame the conceptualization of divine sociality. YHWH's role fits this framing and this divine sociality in a way that demonstrates its rootedness in generic conceptualizations of deity.

[INCOMPARABILITY]

When directed at YHWH, the rhetoric of incomparability was generally brief, employing language closely parallel to that of surrounding societies:

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<sup>78</sup> See White, *Yahweh's Council*, 80–86.

## CHAPTER 5 – YHWH as Deity

Exodus 18:11

עתה ידעתי כי גדול יהוה מכל האלהים

Now I know that YHWH is greater than all the deities.

Deuteronomy 3:24b

אשר מי אל בשמים ובארץ אשר יעשה כמעשיך וכגבורתך

What deity is there in heaven or on earth that could act according to your deeds and your might?

Psalm 97:9

כי אתה יהוה עליון על כל הארץ מאד נעלית על כל האלהים

Because you, YHWH, are most high over all the earth. You are greatly exalted over all deities.

This conceptual domain was not an assertion of philosophical monotheism (though it is frequently misread as such),<sup>79</sup> but was a translatable feature of the generic concept of deity that was effectively and liberally employed by the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible in reference to their preferred deity. While generic might or greatness was the most basic theme of the rhetoric of incomparability, YHWH's creative acts and military prowess were also frequently employed as a part of that rhetoric, as with praise for warrior and creator deities from other societies in ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>80</sup> Isaiah 37:16 is representative of this rhetoric:

יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל ישב הכרבים אתה הוא האלהים לבדך לכל ממלכות הארץ  
אתה עשית את השמים ואת הארץ

YHWH of Hosts, Deity of Israel, who sits enthroned among the cherubim: You alone are the deity for all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth.

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<sup>79</sup> Despite the argument in Clifford, "Deutero-Isaiah and Monotheism," 267–89. Essentially, Clifford argues that Deutero-Isaiah is adopting conventional rhetoric of incomparability, but is using it to assert divine exclusivity, since the idol polemics elsewhere "encourages reading the exclusivity formulae with an absolute monotheism" (p. 276). His argument relies on Hans Rechenmacher, *"Ausser mir gibt es keinen Gott!": Eine Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaftliche Studie zur Ausschliesslichkeitsformel* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), but does not adequately engage the discussion regarding negating particles in MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, 82–85.

<sup>80</sup> The most explicit example is "The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re" (see above, p. 271).

[HOLINESS]

While the Hebrew Bible does use the lexeme קדוש in reference to deities other than YHWH, it reserves its most emphatic rhetoric regarding holiness for YHWH. A frequent title of YHWH is קדוש, “Holy One,” and particularly in Isaiah, where it occurs over two dozen times.<sup>81</sup> In several places, the concept of holiness is connected with the inspiration of awe and dread. For instance, Isaiah 29:23 asserts, והקדישו את־קדוש יעקב ואת־אלהי ישראל יעריצו, “They will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and they will dread the deity of Israel.”<sup>82</sup> 1 Samuel 6:20 asks rhetorically, מי יוכל לעמד לפני יהוה האלהים הקדוש הזה, “Who is able to stand in the presence of YHWH, this holy deity?” Isaiah 6 elaborates on this when, after the seraphs chant in verse 3, יהוה צבואת קדוש קדוש קדוש, “Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts!” Isaiah cries out,

אוי־לי כי־נדמיתי כי איש טמא־שפתים אנכי ובתוך עם־טמא שפתים אנכי יושב כי את־המלך יהוה צבאות  
ראו עיני

Woe is me! For I will be cut off, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the king, YHWH of hosts!

One of the seraphs then takes a coal from the altar of the temple and touches Isaiah’s lips with it, removing his sin and effectively rendering him “holy,” thus able to withstand the presence of the deity. The sense of holiness as overwhelming radiance is most frequently connected to the description of YHWH’s appearance as like fire, although apart from Ezekiel, there appears to be a reticence—whether original or constructed—to elaborate on the appearance of the divine. Exodus 24:17 refers to the appearance of YHWH’s כבוד, “glory,” as אש אכלת, “devouring fire.” Isaiah 10:17 refers to the קדוש־ישראל, “Holy One of Israel,” as a flame. YHWH appears to Moses in Exodus 3 in the midst of a fire (Exod 3:2). Even more explicitly,

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<sup>81</sup> Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11–12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14–15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14.

<sup>82</sup> NRSV here renders, “they will stand in awe of the God of Israel.”

YHWH appears as a עמוד אש, “pillar of fire,” in leading the Israelites through the wilderness during the night (Exod 13:21).

Rhetoric about holiness is also concentrated in P’s Holiness Code, which emphasizes YHWH’s holiness, but more saliently, the cultic and ritual requirements for Israel to become holy. Leviticus 19:2 states:

דבר אל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל ואמרת אליהם קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני יהוה אלהיכם

Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I, YHWH, your deity, am holy.”<sup>83</sup>

As noted in the previous chapter, the sense of “holy” here has to do with separation and cleanliness, which likely influenced the conceptualization of YHWH as holy, making their purity and cleanliness a more salient aspect of their divine profile.

#### [IMMORTALITY]

Immortality was generally assumed of deities, and was really only explicitly addressed in the context of rhetoric about humanity’s status as non-divine (as in Ezek 28:9) or the revocation and demotion of undesirable deities (as in Ps 82). YHWH’s immortality, a prototypical feature of generic deity, was most frequently framed in terms of their eternal nature,<sup>84</sup> as in Genesis 21:33, which appositionally refers to YHWH as אל עולם, “Eternal El/Deity.” Similarly, Exodus 15:18 asserts, יהוה ימלך לעלם ועד, “YHWH will reign forever and ever.” In Deuteronomy 32:40, the Song of Moses has the deity swear an oath on their own life: . . . חי אנכי לעלם, “As I live forever . . .” These descriptions of the deity’s eternal existence were most rhetorically useful

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Leviticus 11:44–45; 20:7.

<sup>84</sup> While I render “eternal” for עולם, the term’s sense does not match the contemporary notion of philosophical eternity. Rather, it referred to perpetuity or a duration with no perceptible end. This is also not to say deities could not die or be killed, whether with or without permanent effect. On this, see Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 104–31; Machinist, “How Gods Die,” 189–240.

## CHAPTER 5 – YHWH as Deity

in referring to the eternity of YHWH's covenants and promises (Gen 17:19; Exod 31:16–17; 32:13), and to YHWH's sovereignty over the heavens, the earth, and the inhabitants of both, evinced by their preexistence before the universe and before their antagonists. YHWH's role as creator takes center stage in much of this rhetoric. For example, Jeremiah 10:11 mocks as mortal those deities that were not involved in the creation of the earth:

כדנה תאמרון להום אלהיא די־שמיא וארקא לא עבדו יאבדו מארעא ומן־תחת שמיא אלה

Thus shall you say to them: The deities who did not make the heavens or the earth will perish from the earth and from under these heavens.

Similarly, Psalm 136 represents a lengthy hymn of praise to YHWH for their various creative and salvific acts, punctuating each of the twenty-six verses with *כי לעולם חסדו*, “For his *חסד* is eternal.”

### [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY]

As with other deities, YHWH's agency was conceptualized as communicable, and not uncommonly through material media. Within the Hebrew Bible, the Jerusalem temple and whatever cultic image was housed in the inner sanctum constituted the single most prominent means of presencing YHWH, but a number of cultic objects and other entities functioned to presence the deity's agency. The ark of the covenant and the messenger of YHWH are two examples that will be discussed in much greater detail below. Perhaps the most explicit example of a Yahwistic cult object facilitating YHWH's communicable agency is that of the bronze serpent created by Moses in Number 21:4–9. In verse 8, YHWH instructs Moses to produce a *שרף* (“seraph”) and set it on a pole to facilitate the healing of those Israelites suffering from the bites of “fiery serpents” (*נחשים השרפים*). In verse 9, Moses makes a bronze serpent (*נחש נחשת*), and those who look at it are healed. Attributing its construction to YHWH's

command sidesteps the prohibitions on such practices, but it also suggests it is YHWH's agency that is ultimately responsible for the healing, even though it is channeled through an explicitly human-made cultic object.<sup>85</sup>

The description in 2 Kings 18:4 of the later destruction of this object by Hezekiah on the grounds that incense offerings were being made to it (2 Kgs 18:4) may suggest the editors could tolerate the object's conceptualization as a Yahwistic tool, but not as an object of worship. It is possible they understood the icon to mediate worship directed ultimately at YHWH, or they may have understood that worship to suggest its independent divine status. In other words, directing worship at the object reified its status as "is not YHWH,"<sup>86</sup> which was unacceptable for an ideology that sought a monopoly on accessing divine agency. Its possession of what seems to be a personal name suggests its conceptualization as an agent.<sup>87</sup> Whatever the case, [COMMUNICABLE AGENCY] was clearly a salient semantic domain.

I suggest the entities that presenced that agency could be profiled along a spectrum from DEITY to DIVINE IMAGE, depending on how independently the hearer/reader understood the cultic object and the agency it presenced to be operating from the primary loci of the deity's identity. The rhetorical compartmentalization of those loci from the vehicles of the deity's agency subordinated and separated the latter, likely contributing to concern with worship directed at it. The more independent it was understood to be from the locus of divine identity, the more of a threat it may have been perceived to be. The next chapter will discuss some of the rhetorical methods authors and editors used to exploit that compartmentalization while

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<sup>85</sup> Jan Christian Gertz, "Hezekiah, Moses, and the Nehushtan: A Case Study for a Correlation between the History of Religion in the Monarchic Period and the History of the Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Formation of the Pentateuch*, 745–60. On the relationship of the sounds used in the story to broader sociocultural notions of the "magic" of words, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Healing and Hissing Snakes – Listening to Numbers 21:4–9," *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 278–87.

<sup>86</sup> This is in reference to Jacobsen's "is" and "is not" dichotomy (see Introduction).

<sup>87</sup> 2 Kings 18:4 concludes, ויקרא־לו נְהוּשְׁתָן, "And he called it Nehushtan." Whether Moses or Hezekiah called it Nehushtan, or whether it is to be understood passively ("it was called Nehushtan"), as many contemporary translations render, is unclear.

mitigating the potential threats.

[ANTHROPOMORPHISM]

Similar to the representation of other deities, YHWH is predominantly presented in the Hebrew Bible as thoroughly anthropomorphic. However, also similar to the representation of other deities, there was a concerted effort at times to mitigate or obscure that anthropomorphism. In the case of the other deities, this was usually part of a campaign of denying their relevance, influence, and access, but in the case of YHWH, it was usually a corollary to efforts to rhetorically exalt the deity and safeguard control of access to them. This rhetorical tug-of-war was a product of the conflict of intuitive and reflective reasoning about deity. A host of reflective conceptualizations served the structuring of power and values on the part of cultic authorities, while more intuitive conceptualizations based more directly on familiar anthropomorphic frameworks facilitated the more efficient transmission and perseverance of deity concepts. Curating a divine profile that maintains the fundamental invisible and non-anthropomorphic nature of a deity across all domains and dimensions cuts against the intuitive grain and would require intentional, authoritative, and sustained reflective reasoning that would be difficult to achieve outside of the frameworks of powerful sociocultural institutions.

Even then, however, unless a person is consciously subordinating their conceptualization of deities to those authoritative frameworks, they will frequently default to more intuitive conceptualizations. A number of experiments conducted by Justin Barrett and his colleagues in the 1990s and 2000s demonstrated that firmly held theological beliefs in all-present, all-powerful, nonanthropomorphic deities still gave way to thoroughly anthropomorphic



conceptualizations when those theological frameworks were not the active focus of cognition.<sup>88</sup> In the case of YHWH and the Hebrew Bible, the reflective conceptualizations of deity that served the authors' structuring of power opposed the gravitational pull of intuition, and so there was a need for constant curation.<sup>89</sup> Removing the deity from the narratives, however, created a disconnect from earlier narratives where the deity appears to interact directly with figures like Abraham and Moses. One tool for getting around this problem was the messenger of YHWH, whose literary utility will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

As with the representation of other deities in the cognate literature, YHWH's body was frequently portrayed as enormous in size and power.<sup>90</sup> Mark Smith notes that Baal was described in Ugaritic literature as "large as his own mountain, Saphan."<sup>91</sup> This is reflected in descriptions of the enormous size of the deity's temple/palace, but also their throne and footstool, which dwarf other deities, whose feet do not even reach the footstool. The 'Ain Dara temple, in Syria, reflects this enormous size by depicting in stone a series of one-meter-long footprints, representing the deity's stride toward the sanctuary.<sup>92</sup> A pair of them appear at the portico, with a single footprint representing a left foot immediately before the antechamber, and a single right foot several meters ahead before the main hall. While Isaiah 6:1 describes the train of YHWH's robe filling the whole Jerusalem temple (the enormous size of which is described in 1 Kgs 6), the rhetoric describing the exaggerated size of Baal's throne is amplified several times over in Isaiah 66:1's post-exilic description of the heavens as YHWH's throne

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<sup>88</sup> See Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, "Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *CogPsych* 31 (1996): 219–47; Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 325–39; Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*, 134–38.

<sup>89</sup> A convenient modern example of this conflict is the Roman Catholic concept of the Trinity, which is authoritatively maintained in the interest of specific rhetorical needs, but is difficult to reduce to cognitively efficient frameworks.

<sup>90</sup> See Wagner, *God's Body*; Cornelius, "The Study of the Old Testament and the Material Imagery of the Ancient Near East," 195–227; cf. Frances S. Reynolds, "Describing the Body of a God," in *Mining the Archives: Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday, 4 October 2002*, ed. Cornelia Wunsch (Dresden: Islet, 2002), 215–27.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 84.

<sup>92</sup> See Theodore J. Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel," *JAOS* 118.1 (1998): 40.

and the earth as their footstool. As with the representation of other deities in the cognate literature and material culture, the representation of the body and its parts was symbolically rich. The deity's body and its parts were not materially represented merely for the purpose of representing the deity's form; rather, over time, the intuitive impulse to conceptualize the deity as anthropomorphic was adorned with elaborations on the significance and symbolism of the various parts of the deity's body, which, like the deity itself, was unavailable for verification or falsification.<sup>93</sup>

### *Implications*

Conceptualizations of YHWH were rooted in the same intuitive dynamics responsible for the conceptualization of generic deity in ancient Southwest Asia. The direct genetic relationship with the broader ancient Southwest Asian conceptualizations is most evident in the cultic artifacts from pre-exilic Israel and Judah and in the oldest literary strata of the Hebrew Bible, but even the innovations of later periods clothed conceptual frameworks inherited from those earliest periods. Israel and Judah's rhetorical goals and needs, their socio-material circumstances, and the events of history drove change that nuanced and adapted older and more generic concepts, while the emerging technology of text facilitated the aggregation over time of these different approaches to deity, collapsing the diachronic and synchronic distance that had commonly separated these ideas and expanding the literary palette of those who came after. A very early example of how concepts were merged and adapted to respond to the rhetorical exigencies of cultic specialists and alter the conceptual foundation of deity for the generations that followed is the conflation of the divine profiles of YHWH and El. It is to this process that I now turn.

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<sup>93</sup> See Wagner, *God's Body*; Cornelius, "The Study of the Old Testament and the Material Imagery of the Ancient Near East," 195–227; cf. Reynolds, "Describing the Body of a God," 215–27.

## YHWH's Hybrid Divine Profile

Chapter 4 argued that Israel's first divine patron was the high deity El, but that by the ninth century BCE, the deity YHWH had become the primary or exclusive patron. The distinction of these two deities has long been recognized,<sup>94</sup> but because of gaps in the material record and in our methodologies, little attention has been committed to the means of their conflation.<sup>95</sup> This section will begin with a reconstruction of the independent divine profiles of YHWH and El. This builds on the observation that specific constellations of features appear not only to operate independently of each other in the Hebrew Bible's earliest representations of the deity of Israel, but also strongly resonate, respectively, with the El- and Baal/Hadad-type divine profiles more clearly preserved in Ugaritic and other cognate literature. Unpacking these representations will present a clearer picture of their relationships to those broader divine profiles. I will then discuss the salience of specific features shared by both profiles and how those features likely made the conflation of the two profiles more intuitive.

### *Conceptualizing the Patriarchal Deity*<sup>96</sup>

The portions of the biblical texts that most clearly preserve the profile of Israel's earliest divine patron are those of the patriarchal tradition, and particularly those associated with the patriarch Jacob (who seems to have played a more central role than Abraham in the earliest literary strata).<sup>97</sup> Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Genesis 49:24–25, for instance, is widely understood to represent some of the earliest poetry in the Hebrew Bible:

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<sup>94</sup> E.g., Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 13–17; Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 139–44.

<sup>95</sup> What little has been discussed has focused on the process of “fusion” in surrounding societies.

<sup>96</sup> Many of the features of this divine profile, particularly as found in the Ugaritic literature, were discussed in Chapter 3 above in relation to the conceptualization of El (see above, pp. 218–20). See also Curtis, “Encounters with El,” in Watson, *He unfurrowed his brow and laughed*, 59–72.

<sup>97</sup> This is not to say the patriarchal tradition predates the exodus tradition, only that Israel's first divine patron, El, is most clearly and independently represented in the patriarchal tradition.

24 ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרעי ידיו  
 מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל  
 25 מאל אביך ויעזרך ואל שדי ויברכך  
 ברכת שמים מעל ברכת תהום רבצת תחת  
 ברכת שדים ורחם

24 But his bow stayed taut,  
 and his arms and his hands were made agile  
 by the hands of the Bull of Jacob,  
 by the name of the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel,  
 25 by the deity of your father, who will help you,  
 and El Shadday,<sup>98</sup> who will bless you with blessings of the heavens above,  
 blessings of the deep lying beneath,  
 blessings of breasts and womb.

While a product of literary elites from a larger and more hierarchical society, the imagery here is closely linked to pastoralism, to divine patriarchy, and to the broader Southwest Asian notion of the ancestral deity, and especially their beneficence and influence over procreation and nurturance.<sup>99</sup> A recently proposed etymology for Shadday may provide further support for this. Aren M. Wilson-Wright suggests the epithet draws from the root *šdy* (“to help/encourage/sustain”), attested in other Semitic languages like Ethio-Semitic and Arabic.<sup>100</sup> This would suggest a sense approximating “El the helper,” and would primarily reflect the deity’s beneficent assistance with reproductive processes, the very context for many of the occurrences of the title (Gen 17:16; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). Most of these occurrences are in P, but if the reconstruction of אֵל is correct, Genesis 49 represents a much earlier witness. As Wilson-Wright suggests, “the name El Shadday is associated with an earlier El tradition in these texts.”<sup>101</sup> The

<sup>98</sup> Here I reconstruct אֵל for MT’s אֵת. The former is preserved in the Septuagint, the Peshitta, and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and it makes better sense of the phrase’s occurrence in parallel with מֵאֵל אֲבִיךָ. אֵת does not parallel the preposition מִן, and the conjunction suggests what follows is subordinated to מִן in the first clause.

<sup>99</sup> This is not to say the societies that produced this literature were not fundamentally agrarian. J. David Schloen states, “There was no significant urban-rural dichotomy, in my view, in this or any other aspect of Israelite society, which remained largely agrarian throughout the Iron Age” (J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001], 135).

<sup>100</sup> Wilson-Wright, “The Helpful God,” 149–66.

<sup>101</sup> Wilson-Wright, “The Helpful God,” 162–63. See also the comments of John Day: “the promises of progeny to the patriarchs bear comparison with the promise of progeny by the god El to Keret and Aqhat in the Ugaritic texts. Although no one can today maintain that the patriarchal narratives are historical accounts, there are

frequent appearance of this deity in the context of lineage and offspring in the patriarchal tradition reinforces the importance of the kinship network, and particularly the patriarchal household, to their conceptualization.<sup>102</sup>

El's role in facilitating procreation may have also had implications for creation. In the Ugaritic mythological texts, El is a particularly amorous and fecund deity,<sup>103</sup> and is responsible for siring the pantheon. The deities of the divine council are repeatedly represented as the offspring of El and Athirat.<sup>104</sup> While no creation myth is known from the Ugaritic literature, El is called *bny.bnwt*, “creator of creatures” (KTU 1.6.iii:5, 11; 1.4.ii:11; iii:11).<sup>105</sup> The title *ʾl qn ʾrṣ*, “El, Begetter of Earth,” hints at a theogony and is attested in inscriptions written in Hittite, Phoenician, and Hebrew, in addition to the expanded appositional reference in Genesis 14:19 to אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן as אֵל שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, “Begetter of the Heavens and the Earth.”<sup>106</sup> This early text may associate El, through procreation, with the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 14:18–22 may provide further insight regarding El's profile prior to conflation with YHWH.<sup>107</sup> Melchizedek's dual responsibilities there as priest to אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן, “the deity Elyon” or “the most high deity,” and as king of Salem may connect the deity with seniority and kingship.<sup>108</sup> This is clearly the case in the Ugaritic imagery, but kingship appears subordinate in the patriarchal tradition to smaller-scale communal hierarchies. In Genesis 49:24 the patriarchal deity is described as Shepherd, Rock, and Bull, which are titles suggestive of the salience of the agrarian ideal to the deity's constituency. There are different ways to account

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grounds for believing that their depiction of an El religion does at least in part reflect something of pre-monarchical religion, however much it has been overlaid by later accretions” (Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 16).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol*, 255–61; Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 52–61.

<sup>103</sup> For instance, KTU 1.23, “The Birth of the Gracious Gods,” narrates El's sexual exploits with two women he discovers while walking along the seashore. See “The Birth of the Gracious Gods,” trans. Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87).

<sup>104</sup> KTU 1.4.i:22; iii:26, 30, 35; iv:32; 1.8.ii:2; 1.40:41–42.

<sup>105</sup> On El as creator, see Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 49–55; Miller, “El, The Creator of the Earth,” 43–46.

<sup>106</sup> See above, pages 219–20, and note 175.

<sup>107</sup> The occurrence of YHWH in verse 22 is most likely a late interpolation.

<sup>108</sup> El's seniority in the Ugaritic literature is discussed above on page 218–20, note 170.

for this. The El/Elyon tradition may represent a communal ideal that predated the rise of a centralized state in Israel, it may represent a rhetorical jab at the framework of monarchy, or it may be aimed at appealing to the society's agricultural base. Whatever its origins, it does appear to function in its ultimate canonical context to support the critiques of the excesses and shortcomings of the monarchy.<sup>109</sup>

The role of the divine patriarch as legal mediator appears in the tradition of Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31:53, presenting a view of the deity as judge, though as a result of their seniority and exalted status rather than some formal assignment within a technical framework for legal judgment. The “king” and “judge” frameworks are sporadic, and do not appear to have been firmly embedded in the divine profile until the rise of the monarchy. This suggests a divine profile prior to conflation that was centered on the patriarchal household and its features, while including, peripherally, some of the roles and responsibilities of royalty, which corresponds to the representation of El in the Ugaritic literature. Mark S. Smith suggests it is specifically the royal iteration of the patriarchal household that functions as the conceptual model for that pantheon, and this may account for the associations with kingship. As Smith explains, this did not sever associations with agriculture:

The patriarch mediates internal, domestic conflict and protects against external threat. The ultimate goals of the patriarchal unit are to preserve the family line, its prosperity, land, and honor (reputation). This patriarchal unit is to be situated within its larger agrarian context. The unit maintained both animals and crops. By physical proximity to the elements and the need to cultivate both herds and crops, family units were highly attuned to the nuances of the seasons and the weather.<sup>110</sup>

The profile of El in its earliest and independent Israelite iteration was likely little altered from

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<sup>109</sup> Note Genesis 14 first narrates Abraham's routing of a coalition of kings who robbed Abraham of his family and property.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 58.

the deity as manifested in the larger societies from the closing centuries of the second millennium BCE. We may schematize this profile as follows:

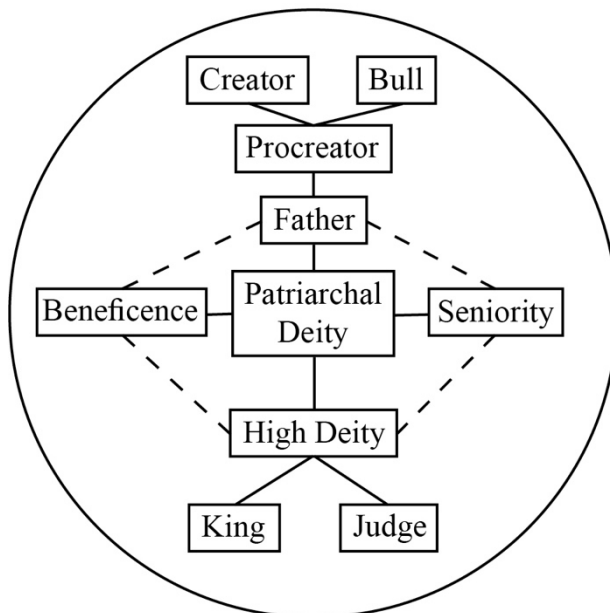


Fig. 5.1

In this schematization, the profile of the patriarchal deity builds upon four main features: the roles of the patriarchal deity as (1) “Father” and (2) “High Deity,” as well as their (3) seniority and (4) beneficence. These features are themselves all conceptually related, but from the notion of father derives the notion of procreation, which in places seems connected with theogonic notions of creation. The salience of procreation also facilitates the symbolic association with the fecund bull. From the role of high deity come the roles of king and judge, although these become more firmly embedded in the profile following the rise of a centralized state and the development of more formal frameworks for kingship and legalism.

*Conceptualizing the Storm-Deity*

Many features of the deity of Israel that are prominent in early texts accrete around a distinct

divine profile, namely that of the Northwest Semitic storm-deity.<sup>111</sup> The use of storm imagery to reflect YHWH's warrior status (discussed above) is a common literary motif from ancient Southwest Asia, and it occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible, including in Psalms 18, 29, 68, and 104.<sup>112</sup> The deity's warrior status was associated with accession to the divine throne, as well, which is also reflected in Psalm 29:10:

יהוה למבול ישב  
וישב יהוה מלך לעולם

YHWH, over the flood, sits enthroned,<sup>113</sup>  
and YHWH sits enthroned as king forever.

A similar text from Ugarit has the craftsman deity Kothar-wa-Hasis proclaim before Baal's battle with Yamm, *tqh.mlk. lmk / drktdtdrdrk*, "You will take your eternal kingship / your dominion will be forever and ever."<sup>114</sup> Psalm 29 praises the storm-deity for their power and for the provision of life-producing and -sustaining rain and the resulting cosmic order.

The juxtaposition of ferocity and fecundity in the divine profile of the storm-deity also made the association with the bull occasionally salient. The fertility aspects of the bull symbol were particularly dominant in northern Syria in the Early Iron Age.<sup>115</sup> In the Ugaritic literature, El is the only one who carries the title "Bull," but Baal is frequently associated with the animal

<sup>111</sup> See the section above on the [DIVINE WAR] conceptual domain (pp. 316–21).

<sup>112</sup> Drought as a weapon in the hands of the storm-deity is represented in Deuteronomy 11:17; 1 Kings 8:35; 17:1–18:2; Isaiah 5:6; Jeremiah 3:3; Zechariah 14:17–18; 2 Chronicles 6:26; 7:13.

<sup>113</sup> An alternative reading is "since the flood," based on Gary Rendsburg's argument for the Northern use of the inseparable prefix ל to mean "since" or "from" (Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, 36). In my opinion, "over the flood" resonates more clearly with the sea myth and the arrogation of kingship as a result of victory over the sea (cf. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, 70–71, and n. 7, 100–01).

<sup>114</sup> KTU 1.2.iv:10. Cf. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume 1*, 322.

<sup>115</sup> In the Sargonic period, the storm-deity's attendant animal began to shift from the lion-dragon to the bull. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 118–20; Tallay Ornan, "The Bull and Its Two Masters: Moon and Storm Deities in Relation to the Bull in Ancient Near Eastern Art," *IEJ* 51.1 (2001): 1–26; Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, 206–08; Schwemer, "The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East. Part I," 138; Schwemer, "The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East. Part II," 33–36.



and the fecundity it represents. Some artifacts hint at an early association between YHWH and bull imagery. The bronze bull figurine discovered at the Iron I open cult place—the so-called “Bull Site”—near Dothan may represent a very early Yahwistic cult object.<sup>116</sup> Similar associations are also detectable in the biblical material, but they are preserved primarily in polemic. YHWH’s association with the bull may be vestigially preserved in the pejorative references to the calves (used as a diminutive) constructed at Sinai (Exod 32:4) and at Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12:28–29) to cultically commemorate the event of the exodus. However, there seems to have come a point at which the association of bull imagery with Baal incentivized its rejection and denunciation.<sup>117</sup> This is clearest in the rhetoric of Hosea. Hosea 13:1, for instance, speaks of the fall of Ephraim as a result of associations with Baal. Verse 2 continues:<sup>118</sup>

ועתה יוספו לחטא  
ויעשו להם מסכה מכספם כתבונם עצבים  
מעשה חרשים כלה  
להם הם אמרים  
זבחי אדם עגלים ישקון

And now they continue to sin,  
and they make for themselves a molten image from their silver,  
according to their understanding;  
Idols, the work of craftsmen, all of them.  
They say about them,  
“The people who sacrifice are kissing calves!”

We may schematize YHWH as storm-deity in the following way:

<sup>116</sup> See Amihai Mazar, “The ‘Bull Site’—An Iron Age I Open Cult Place,” *BASOR* 24 (1982): 27–42.

<sup>117</sup> See Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 121–25.

<sup>118</sup> Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel*, 288–91; Smith, *The Memoirs of God*, 35; Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 53; cf. Stephen L. Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 251–59.

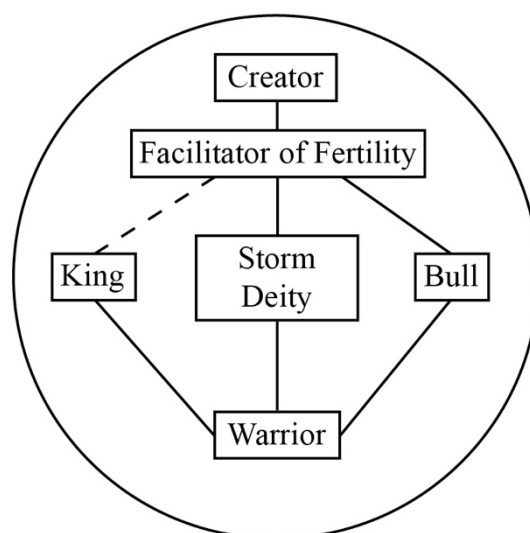


Fig. 5.2

In this schematization, the storm-deity's two main roles are as warrior and facilitator of fertility. (The storm-deity was also a second-tier deity, but I omit that feature for now.) Both roles make the symbol of the bull salient, and against the background of the victory over the sea, the deity's role as warrior makes possible their accession to kingship over the pantheon. There is also a sense in which the deity's role as facilitator of fertility maintains the cosmic order, which is also associated with kingship. Additionally, there is significant overlap with the concept of creation and that of fertility. Not only did the provision of rain and terrestrial water make the creation of life possible (see Gen 2:4b–14), it also sustained it.

### *Conflating YHWH and El*

From a historical perspective, the process of conflation of these profiles likely began at or following the accession of YHWH to patronage over Israel, and specifically among those interested in maintaining the high status of El. The conflation of deities was not uncommon in and around the regions inhabited by Iron Age Israel and Judah, but the processes and results differ significantly, and were often only temporary. Across ethnolinguistic boundaries, deities

that shared translatable characteristics or purviews could sometimes be equated, as in the “Syncretic Hymn to Marduk,”<sup>119</sup> which identifies Enlil as “Marduk of lordship and consultations,” and Nabû as “Marduk of accounting.” Spencer Allen highlights some of the different ways this may be interpreted. A metaphorical reading would understand the former identification to mean “Marduk reached what had been Enlil’s level of sovereignty among the gods, and not that the once-powerful Enlil is now nothing more than an aspect of Marduk.”<sup>120</sup> Alternatively, the other deities may be understood as “delegates of Marduk’s power.”<sup>121</sup> This identification did not end the independent existence of the constituent deities. As Allen notes,

it does not deny the continued existence of Šamaš or the others any more than the Sobek-Re, Khnum-Re, and Amun-Re syncretisms deny the continued existence of Sobek, Khnum, and Amun when they have been syncretized with Re; rather, they clarify the concepts surrounding Re.<sup>122</sup>

The conflation of YHWH and El does not quite fit with this pattern of identification. It was not simply about associating one deity with another in order to attribute features—it was most likely undertaken in an effort to consolidate power—and nor was it temporary. A YHWH-Baal syncretism seems like a more intuitive match, as both shared the same role of storm-deity. Indeed, some have suggested, based on the polemics against the deity Baal and the use of the title בעל in reference to YHWH (e.g., Hos 2:16; 1 Chr 8:33, 34), that the Omride dynasty may have attempted an equation of YHWH and Baal. In the fallout, however, the two deities appear to have become fierce competitors.<sup>123</sup> Of course, the possibility exists that YHWH only

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<sup>119</sup> KAR 25.ii:3–16.

<sup>120</sup> Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 52.

<sup>121</sup> Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 52.

<sup>122</sup> Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 53.

<sup>123</sup> See, for instance, Albertz, “Social History of Ancient Israel,” 359–63; Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 121–25; cf. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh’s Appropriation of Baal*.

arrogated storm-deity imagery after this association with Baal.<sup>124</sup> A similar conflation occurred in the equation of the divine name Hadad with the epithet Baal. As noted by Allen,

This Hadad, like Marduk in Babylon, had become the lord of the gods, so his epithet needed to reflect this rise to power. Eventually, after this Hadad, who would be identified as the mythical Baal who resides on Mount Şapun, successfully maintained his position as the head deity at Ugarit, the epithet Baal began to function with the force of a personal name rather than as a title or epithet.<sup>125</sup>

El could function as both a divine name and an epithet, so the equation with the divine name YHWH may represent, at least in part, a similar attempt to reflect the latter's rise to power.

Ultimately, however, any direct analogies or inspirations for the conflation are out of reach. Additionally, rather than represent the conflation of these deities as a single intentional event, I suggest it was a more complex process involving both reflective and intuitive reasoning that ebbed and flowed across communities and down through time. The fact that the two main divine profiles discussed above maintained some degree of compartmentalization down into the exile—to the degree that Priestly authors had to explicitly identify YHWH as the deity known to the patriarchs as El Shadday (Exod 6:3)—suggests circumstances and/or some degree of rhetorical value maintained the separate circulation of the foundational traditions associated with the individual profiles. My concern for the remainder of this subsection is the intuitive dynamics that may have made these two divine profiles particularly amenable to conflation.

My framework for interrogating the roots of this conflation is conceptual blend theory, which was discussed in Chapter 1. Conceptual blending is understood as a basic cognitive

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<sup>124</sup> The only texts that attribute storm-deity imagery to YHWH that could possibly predate this syncretism are the Bible's earliest poetic texts, but even they were most likely committed to writing after the ninth century BCE. The association of storm-deity imagery with the memory of YHWH's origins in the south would have to be accounted for within such a framework. Nissim Amzallag has argued for YHWH's original nature as a deity of metallurgy. See Nissim Amzallag, "Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?" *JSOT* 33.4 (2009): 387–404. Cf. Nissim Amzallag, "The Material Nature of the Radiance of YHWH and its Theological Implications," *SJOT* 29.1 (2015): 80–96.

<sup>125</sup> Allen, *The Splintered Divine*, 216.

mechanism that “involves the merger of two or more input spaces, which results in a blended space.”<sup>126</sup> The blend is usually governed by a “generic space” that cues one to correspondences in features across the two input spaces. The generic space governing the blending of our two deities is the early first millennium BCE Northwest Semitic pantheon. This pantheon was primarily patterned after the royal patriarchal household, with the divine council constituting the governing body. The high deity inhabited the top echelon of this council with their consort and ruled over the deities. In the Ugaritic and early biblical iterations of this type-scene, El stood at the head of the council.<sup>127</sup> Athirat was El’s consort at Ugarit, and likely filled the same role in the early Israelite pantheon as Asherah. The many offspring of the divine pair constituted a second tier of deities who had stewardships over cosmic and social processes.

The poorly attested third tier was inhabited, according to Mark Smith and Lowell Handy, by craftsperson deities who served the divine-royal family. The clearest inhabitant of this tier from ancient Southwest Asia is the Ugaritic Kothar-wa-Hasis, who created Baal’s weapons and built their palace (KTU 1.2.iv). While the biblical texts do not explicitly attest to this tier, YHWH is framed as a craftsperson, particularly in relation to the creation of the heavens and the earth (Isa 40:12; 42:5; Prov 8:22–30) and guidance for the building and outfitting of the tabernacle/temple (Exod 28:3; 36:1–2). Proverbs 8:30 has the deity’s personified “wisdom” refer to itself as an אֲמִן, “craftsperson.” This suggests the craft deity role was not abandoned, but simply assimilated to the profile of a higher-tiered deity and/or compartmentalized as a separable vehicle for their agency. The final tier is constituted by servant deities, who were most frequently deployed to carry messages between deities. We may schematize the divine council of this pantheon as follows:

<sup>126</sup> Li et al., “Goal-Driven Conceptual Blending,” 1. See above, pages 41–43.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. עֲדַת־אֱלֹהִים in Ps 82:1 and *dt ’ilm* in KTU 1.15.ii.7. LXX Ps 81:1 renders συναγωγῆ θεῶν, “assembly of the gods,” which may indicate עֲדַת־אֱלֹהִים in its *Vorlage*.

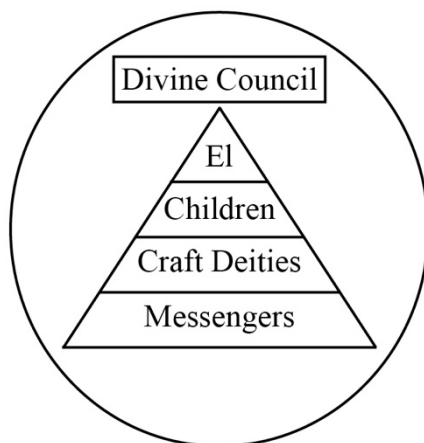


Fig. 5.3

A traditional conceptual structure approximating this one would have undergirded the conceptualization of the patriarchal and storm-deities. Fig. 5.3 may be adopted for our generic space. Figs. 5.1 and 5.2 represent our two input spaces, with corresponding features highlighted.

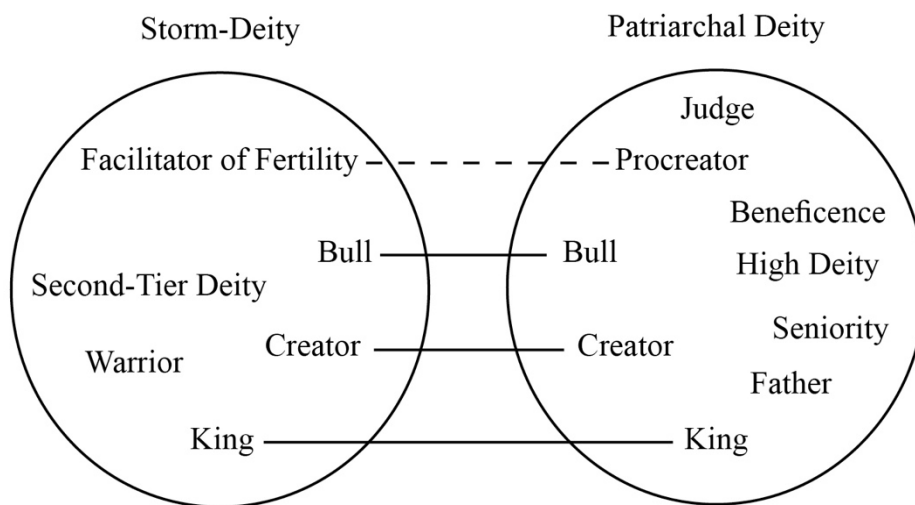


Fig. 5.4

Three elements of the respective divine profiles would have mapped quite naturally to each other upon their cultic and literary juxtaposition, with or without a programmatic attempt on the part of authorities to identify the two deities. Both deities had royal functions, were considered creators of some kind, and were associated with bull symbolism. Although the exact

nature of these elements, as well as their cultic and literary contexts, differed, the overlap certainly reduced the cognitive effort necessary not only for the comparison of the two deities, but for the conflation of the two input spaces.

Several elements from the divine profiles were not carried through to the resulting blend space. The earliest concepts jettisoned from YHWH's profile were subordinating roles, such as the "Second-Tier Deity" position held by the storm-god. Given the royal and patriarchal character of the high deity El, there was little conceptual space in the resulting composite divine profile for subordination; the driving concept was preeminence or supremacy. Other concepts seem to have grated against theological sensitivities that were gaining salience in certain circles. Primary among these were associations with procreation, a consort, and theriomorphic cult practices. The function of the Israelite divine consort Asherah, for instance, appears to have been assimilated to YHWH's profile by cultic authorities seeking to limit the deities to whom worshippers could offer devotion.<sup>128</sup> Without a consort, narratives of theogony and procreation also fell by the wayside, although the framework of divine parentage was too central to the divine profile of the high deity to be entirely abandoned, so it is preserved in many places (Deut 32:15; Prov 8:22–30; Ps 2:7).<sup>129</sup> The bull imagery associated with both input spaces was most saliently associated with the iconic representation of YHWH and would ultimately be marginalized and polemicized (Exod 32:4–20; 1 Kgs 12:28–30).<sup>130</sup> Some of these features were not entirely abandoned, but repurposed. The frozen epithet "Bull of Jacob," for instance,

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<sup>128</sup> Note the oath by Menahem in the name of the goddess Anat-YHW at Elephantine (cf. M. E. Mondriaan, "Anat-Yahi and the Jews at Elephantine," *JFS* 22.2 [2013]: 537–52). Van der Toorn asserts, "The concept of Anat-Yahu is an illustration of the cultural symbiosis which has marked the Israelites and the Aramaeans living in Egypt. The goddess must be regarded as an Aramaean creation" (Karel van der Toorn, "Anat-Yahu, Some Other Deities, and the Jews of Elephantine," *Numen* 39.1 [1992]: 97). For an approach to the materiality of potential worship of Anat-YHW at Elephantine, see Collin Cornell, "The Forgotten Female Figurines of Elephantine," *JANER* 18.1 (2018): 111–32.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures About the Fatherhood of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> Miller, *Israelite Religion*, 31–38.

remained in use in poetic texts, appearing to generically invoke the notion of power (Ps 132:2, 5; Isa 49:26; 60:16), thus the common rendering today, “Mighty One of Jacob.”<sup>131</sup>

Other points of contact would prove to be quite essential, and particularly the central and driving concept of God as king,<sup>132</sup> which was shared throughout ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>133</sup> That metaphor imports a broad conceptual matrix that not only contributes to the production of more extended metaphors, but also serves to conceptually link many of the independent concepts brought together for the first time in the blend space. The notion of kingship provided a conceptual vehicle for YHWH’s status as high god, ancestral deity, and as covenant-maker, among others.<sup>134</sup> The utility of the kingship metaphor in the blending of our two profiles was complemented by the combination of two quite distinct views of YHWH as king, which provided a richer palette for literary expression. According to the broader El profile, the deity’s kingship is a function of their patriarchy and consequent authority over the gods. This would become emphasized in YHWH’s sovereignty over the divine council/family (Deut 4:19; Ps 89:7–8; Job 1:6; 2:1).<sup>135</sup> By contrast, the storm-deity arrogated kingship through victory in battle with the sea. This promoted their role in the Northwest Semitic ideology of divine

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<sup>131</sup> Byrne, *The Names of God*, 39–41.

<sup>132</sup> This concept has been called a “root metaphor” in light of its foundational and generative nature (Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names*, trans. Frederick H. Cryer [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], 92; cf. Brettler, *God is King*, 17–28; Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 33–40, 146–48). We find the term “king” used in reference to Israel’s deity forty-three times. The word “kingdom” is associated with YHWH ten times, and “throne” eleven times. The verb “to be king” (מלך) occurs thirteen times, with eight occurrences of ממשל, “to rule, govern.” For scriptural references, see Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 116–17.

<sup>133</sup> Bernard Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History’s Transformation of Torah,” *VT* 51.4 (2001): 512–18.

<sup>134</sup> “It comprises the genetic code for a broad complex of ideas” (Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 92). The metaphoric nature of God’s kingship is addressed most thoroughly in Brettler, *God is King*, but cf. David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 33–40, who correctly argues that the deity as king is ascriptive rather than wholly metaphorical.

<sup>135</sup> Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, trans. John Bowden. 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 1.133: “First there was the more static notion of the kingship of El, the supreme god in the Ugartitic pantheon: he was called ‘king of eternity’ (*mlk ’lm*) and ‘Lord of the great gods’ (*’adn ’ilm rbm*), and as such was head of the divine assembly (*phr ’ilm*).” For further analysis of the Northwest Semitic notion of the divine council/family, see Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol*, 349–57.



warfare, which viewed military conflict between nations as divinely decreed and executed.<sup>136</sup> The storm-deity's role as king and warrior, and the conceptualization of violent weather as a manifestation of divine military aggression, thus found a means of conceptual continuity alongside YHWH's rule over the pantheon.

The role of creator is also carried through and developed via the concept of divine kingship. The oldest means of creation in ancient Southwest Asia was theogony, but for exilic and post-exilic Israel, creation was the prerogative of the ruling deity, who exercised dominion over the natural order and created by divine fiat. The deity who created the heavens and the earth also ruled over them as king. The divine council plays a role in the early iterations of this tradition, as we find echoed in the cohortative of Genesis 1:26, but exilic antagonism toward Neo-Babylonian deities soon lead to the assertion of YHWH's solitary role (Isa 37:16; 44:24; cf. Deut 32:12).<sup>137</sup> The gods of the divine council were recast in the prophetic and later literature as YHWH's "hosts" (צבאות), the very objects of their creative activity (e.g., Neh 9:6). The frequent intersection of YHWH's hosts, the Jerusalem temple, and royal imagery (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:19–22; Ps 24:10; Isa 6:5; 37:16) suggest the ideology of divine kingship provided the conceptual framework for the development of the notion of "YHWH of Hosts."<sup>138</sup>

Another responsibility of the ideal Northwest Semitic monarchy was the administration of justice, or judgment. In addition to secular responsibilities with the law, the generic notion of providing for the poor, the widowed, and the orphan was often assigned to the king.<sup>139</sup> This ideal was a conceptual extrapolation from the ideology of kingship, and more specifically the

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<sup>136</sup> See Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament*. An extension of this worldview is the idea that dispossession of foreign land is the work of the conquering nation's deity. The clearest indication of this is Judg 11:24: "Should you not possess what your god Chemosh gives you to possess? And should we not be the ones to possess everything that YHWH our God has conquered for our benefit" This possession is also conceptualized as an "inheritance" in Deut 4:21; 15:4; 26:1 (cf. Forshey, "The Construct Chain *nah'lat YHWH/ 'elohim*," 51–53).

<sup>137</sup> Indeed, the antagonism that resulted from the juxtaposition of Judahite and Babylonian theology spurred the most explicit rhetorical rejections of the efficacy of non-Israelite deities (Isa 43:10–12; 44:6–8; 45:5; Hos 13:4; cf. Isa 47:10; Zeph 2:15). See Smith, "The Polemic of Biblical Monotheism," 201–34.

<sup>138</sup> Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 123–42.

<sup>139</sup> See Silver, "Prophets and Markets Revisited," 182–83.

mediatory space the king occupied between the deity and the masses. The epilogue to Hammurabi's laws provides an example, asserting that the laws were erected, "in order that the mighty not wrong the weak, to provide just ways for the waif and the widow."<sup>140</sup> Of course, there is not a single law in his collection that actually provides for the widow or the orphan. Their provision arises out of the general cosmic order, which is maintained by Hammurabi's righteous administration and the oversight of the deities (cf. Ps 82:2–4). That oversight contributed to the notion of the sovereign deities as judges, and YHWH's profile drew heavily from that imagery. Not only were they responsible for rendering judgment in juridical processes (e.g., Exod 21:6; 22:8–11), but their relationship with Israel and the other nations of the earth was commonly conceptualized in terms of court proceedings, particularly in prophetic and poetic material. The "dispute" (רִיב) was a juridical term frequently associated with YHWH.<sup>141</sup> For instance, in 1 Samuel 24:16 David appeals to YHWH to judge the case between Saul and himself.<sup>142</sup> Elsewhere YHWH initiates court proceedings on behalf of Israel (Isa 19:20; Jer 51:36; Ps 74:22), and at times Israel found itself being conceptually served a lawsuit by YHWH (Isa 3:13; Jer 2:9, 29; Hos 12:2; Mic 6:2).

Although the primary goal of those who compelled the conflation of YHWH and El was likely the consolidation of political and cultic allegiances, the blending of the patriarchal and storm-deity profiles forever changed the shape of Israelite and Judahite ideology. The main areas of conceptual overlap between the input spaces facilitated the identification of the two deities and, with the exception of the bull imagery, became central to the conceptual framework of the blend. The conceptual foundation upon which the subsequent divine profile appears to have been built was kingship, which lends support to understanding the conflation of the two deities to date near to the establishment of an Israelite/Judahite state. That foundation

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<sup>140</sup> "The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by M. Roth (*COS* 2.131: 336, 351).

<sup>141</sup> De Roche, "Yahweh's *rib* Against Israel," 563–74; D. R. Daniels, "Is There a 'Prophetic Lawsuit' Genre?" *ZAW* 99.3 (1987): 339–60;

<sup>142</sup> There we find the cognate accusative "And dispute my dispute" (וִירֵב אֶת־רִיבִי).

undergirded the central concepts of YHWH as warrior, father, creator, and judge. The conceptual fertility of that foundation also contributed to the further development of those central concepts and other related concepts. The full conceptual blend of YHWH and El could be schematized as follows:

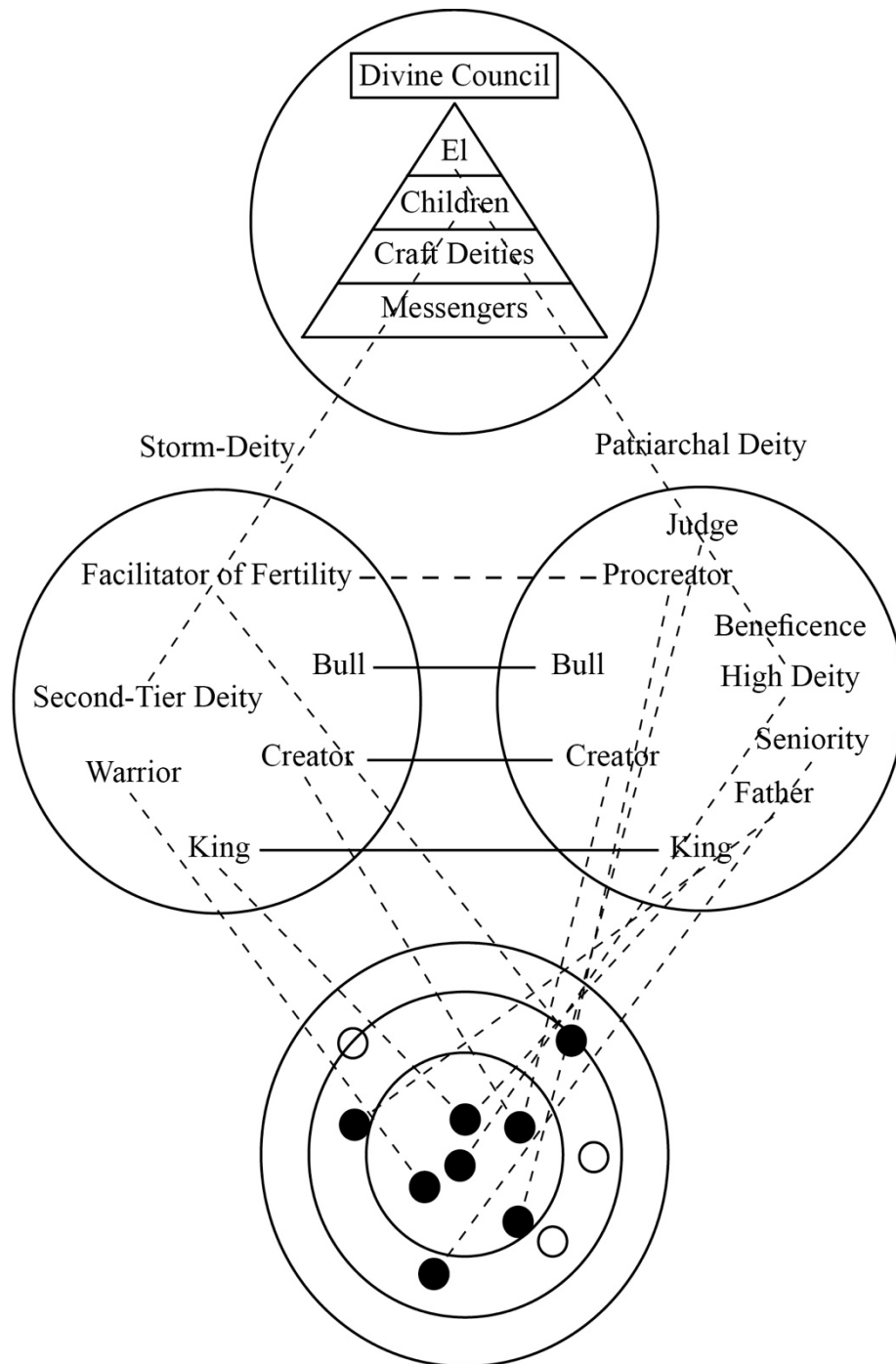


Fig. 5.5

In this schematization, the black dots in the blend space represent features carried over from the input spaces, while the empty dots represent new features developing within the resulting divine profile following the blend. The concentric circles represent gradient prototypicality, with the features in the center being more salient to the profile than those towards the periphery. Several shared features of the two divine profiles obtain within the blend space and become generative features of the resulting blend that lead to further development. Some other features unique to each blend space are carried through as well, depending on their rhetorical utility for the communities in which the blend finds circulation. Other features that are rhetorical liabilities, such as subordination or theriomorphic representation that fell under intense scrutiny in certain periods, are marginalized or abandoned in the blend. As the biblical literature expanded, YHWH's unique divine profile was not a product of "a unique idea of God, that is intrinsic to Israelite religion,"<sup>143</sup> but rather the interplay of more generic divine features with the rhetorical exigencies of the authorities of Israel and Judah within a variety of cognitive ecologies.

### *Implications*

Broad correspondences across the two divine profiles interrogated here helped facilitate the conflation of YHWH and El. This was not an efficient and clearly administered process, but a messy and convulsive process that likely ebbed and flowed over the years and across different regions as different authorities and those under those authorities wrestled over how their

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<sup>143</sup> This is a part of the question Tryggve N. D. Mettinger identifies as the "overarching problem" of his interrogation of Israelite religion: "We may formulate our overarching problem as one concerning the highly distinctive character of the Israelite Gottesbild around the exile and ask two questions: (a) was this due to a process that gradually leads from commonality to uniqueness or (b) is there from the very beginning a unique kernel of faith, a unique idea of God, that is intrinsic to Israelite religion?" (Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "The Elusive Essence: YHWH, El and Baal and the Distinctiveness of Israelite Faith," in *Reports from a Scholar's Life: Select Papers on the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Andrew Knapp [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 36).

interests would be affected by these innovations within their ever-changing cognitive ecologies. The conflation would have been less likely in the absence of a rhetorical desire and campaign to equate the two deities, but its long-term success would also have been mitigated in the absence of these conceptual correspondences. It is likely no coincidence that two of the shared features of these divine profiles, namely their roles as kings and creators, were central to the later hybrid profile. That profile was a far more rhetorically flexible and utilitarian one for later authors and editors than the patriarchal or storm-deity profiles on their own. A deity that could be framed as youthful or ancient, compassionate or violent, father or king, could deploy a far wider repertoire of prosocial functions and roles and respond to a far broader range of circumstances and needs. The conceptual roil of this hybrid divine profile would also have facilitated new and more distinctive combinations of features as literary production increased and authors and editors engaged with new rhetorical contexts and needs.

## Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to demonstrate the embeddedness of YHWH's divine profile in the same socio-material and conceptual structures as the generic concept of deity. The chapter started by interrogating the evidence for socio-material encounters with YHWH, arguing that, while there are few data directly connecting YHWH with known cultic objects, the data that *are* available demonstrate that deity was commonly socio-materially presented in Iron Age Israel and Judah, and there is nothing to indicate YHWH's representation was in any way unusual in that regard. The dearth of explicit identifications of divine imagery with YHWH is incidental, not programmatic.

The second section applied the conceptual structures of deity discussed in Chapter 3 to an interrogation of YHWH's conceptualization in the Hebrew Bible, demonstrating that YHWH's divine profile was thoroughly grounded in precisely the same conceptual domains that

## CHAPTER 5 – YHWH as Deity

governed generic deity in the Hebrew Bible. It also discussed some of the ways the conceptualization of YHWH departed from that generic foundation as rhetorical and socio-material circumstances incentivized change. As the socio-material contexts for the conceptualization of their identity and their relationship to deity changed, those people responsible for the composition and curation of the Hebrew Bible innovated new and different ways of arranging the conceptual repertoire of YHWH's divine profile.

The third section of this chapter applied conceptual blend theory to one of the earliest and most significant of these innovations, namely the conflation of the deities YHWH and El. While a variety of dynamics were at play in the conflation of these two deities, one of the most salient was likely a desire for the consolidation of cultic and political power at the rise of a centralized Israelite state. With that catalyst, some of the central conceptual correspondences between the divine profiles of the patriarchal high deity and the storm-deity—as well as features that were not shared, but complemented the shared features—would have facilitated the conceptual blend and increased the prosocial utility of the hybrid divine profile, contributing to its ongoing success. Deities thrive within communities to the degree that they promote prosociality and respond effectively to socio-material circumstances. The conflation of these two divine profiles, combined with the incidental and programmatic centralization of the cult, only expanded the deity's prosocial skill set.

Demonstrating the generic foundation of YHWH's conceptualization as a deity provides further support for employing the cognitive predispositions underlying deity concepts for the interrogation of YHWH and their relationship to their divine images and representatives. More specifically, it indicates that the frameworks developed in the previous chapters regarding communicable agency and deity are profitably applicable to the biblical representation of YHWH. The next three chapters will more directly interrogate the rhetorical employment of the intuitive concept of communicable divine agency in the biblical authors and editors'

## CHAPTER 5 – YHWH as Deity

innovation of new and different ways of conceptualizing YHWH's cult objects and representatives. This interrogation will begin in Chapter 6 with the ark of the covenant and the deity's כבוד, Kavod, or "glory."

## CHAPTER 6

# YHWH’s Divine Agents: The Ark of the Covenant and the כבוד

## Introduction

We have seen up to this point that the conceptualization of deity in Iron Age Israel and Judah, including the conceptualization of YHWH, was built upon the same cognitive foundations—or “fundamentals of ancient thought”—upon which the surrounding cultures constructed their own understandings of deity and of its socio-material presencing and accessibility. The Hebrew Bible’s oldest literary strata are more directly descended from the traditional and ritual conventions of those surrounding cultures. However, while the authors and editors responsible for the D, Dtr, and P strata (and the redaction of earlier strata) introduced innovations and changes in an effort to structure power in their favor, codify authoritative knowledge, and formulate a more clearly delineable and easily enforced identity for the followers of YHWH, the institutions they marshaled in support of those rhetorical campaigns were not robust or pervasive enough to escape the gravitational pull of those cognitive foundations and the associated conventions.<sup>1</sup> The socio-material presencing of deity is still clearly evident in those

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<sup>1</sup> I would argue, as well, that there is no indication they were trying to do so.



literary strata and is even *emphasized* in different ways in the literature of the Greco-Roman and later periods.<sup>2</sup> I find little evidentiary support for, or heuristic value in, the assertion of clear rejections of earlier conceptualizations of deity and communicable agency, including the rejection of a “fluidity” model,<sup>3</sup> the rejection of translatability,<sup>4</sup> or the rejection of polytheism in favor of a philosophical monotheism.<sup>5</sup> These are reflective frameworks that primarily serve contemporary scholarly exigencies, and there is much regarding the way the texts of the Hebrew Bible functioned to structure and negotiate social relationships that is obscured when viewed through such lenses.

This chapter interrogates two of the Hebrew Bible’s most prominent vehicles for divine agency, examining the ways the communicability of divine agency underlay the conceptualization of these vehicles as well as their manipulation and alteration by the authors and editors mentioned above. The interrogation begins with the ark of the covenant, the closest thing to a sanctioned Yahwistic cult image found in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> Discomfort with that closeness seems to have incentivized some authors and editors to renegotiate its conceptualization in other directions—for instance, it is within these traditions that the danger of the overwhelming radiance of the deity became particularly salient—but I will show that the relationship to earlier presencing functions was not so easily obscured or abandoned, despite the conclusions of some contemporary scholarship. Following the ark of the covenant, I will discuss the כבוד, or “glory,” of YHWH, which became the primary vehicle of divine identity in P and later in Ezekiel.

While the changes discussed in this chapter were primarily rooted in growing opposition to certain types and functions of cultic objects, the authors and editors did not reject them

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<sup>2</sup> Sommer notes that notions of divine fluidity and multiple embodiment, “recur in rabbinic literature, in various forms of Jewish mysticism, and in Christianity” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 126).

<sup>3</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 58–79.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *God in Translation*, 131–85.

<sup>5</sup> See Smith, “Monotheism and the Redefinition of Divinity in Ancient Israel,” 3–19.

<sup>6</sup> Although in Chapter 8 I will argue that the Torah should be understood to have functioned as a cult image.

outright, they simply introduced new ways of understanding and curating them. In short, the loci of the deity’s identity and of their agency were more explicitly compartmentalized. A cultic object could thus channel and presence the deity’s agency while the loci of their identity were asserted to be located elsewhere, such as in the heavens or exclusively in the Jerusalem temple. The authors/editors trod a precarious line, however, in light of the risk that this compartmentalization could incentivize worship of the loci of agency (as we saw with Nehushtan).<sup>7</sup> Those loci of agency endowed with qualities that mitigated that risk, such as inaccessibility outside of the texts, proved to be more effective and durative.<sup>8</sup>

### The Ark of the Covenant

While I will primarily gloss ארון with “ark,” the basic sense of the term is “box,” and it is used in the cognate literature mostly to refer to a sarcophagus or a chest of some kind or another.<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of the 202 uses of ארון in the Hebrew Bible refer to YHWH’s cultic object, but there are some more generic uses, such as Genesis 50:26, in which Joseph’s corpse was embalmed and placed in an ארון, and 2 Kings 12:10–11, in which Jehoiada placed an ארון alongside the altar for the collection of money (cf. 2 Chr 24:8, 10–11). Essentially, an ארון is a container. The referential sense predominant in the Hebrew Bible derives from this generic usage. In other words, ארון is not a technical term, in and of itself, as is demonstrated by its almost unilateral occurrence in the construct case when referencing the cultic object. While it is traditionally known as the ark *of the covenant* (ארן העדה, Exod 25:22; ארון הברית, Josh 3:6),

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<sup>7</sup> See pages 334–35 above.

<sup>8</sup> As Chapter 8 will show, there was an additional rhetorical campaign toward both the textualization of the vehicles of divine agency and the ritualization of the texts of the law.

<sup>9</sup> The term in cognate languages suggests closely related meanings. Issam H. K. Halayqa glosses “chest” for Ugaritic *arn*, “chest,” “box,” and “coffin,” for Phoenician *ʾrn*, “ossuary” and “coffin” for Punic *ʾrn*, and “sarcophagus” for Epigraphic Hebrew *ʾrn* (Issam H. K. Halayqa, *A Comparative Lexicon of Ugaritic and Canaanite* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 61; cf. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson. 2 vols. [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 1. 104). The Septuagint primarily renders κιβωτός, “box, chest, coffer,” although the translator of the 2 Chronicles passages (2 Chr 24:8, 10–11) rendered γλωσσόκομον, “box, money bag, coffin.”

it is also the ark *of YHWH* (ארון יהוה, Josh 3:13), or the ark *of Deity* (ארון אלהים, 1 Sam 3:3). While a subjective genitive relationship is generally assumed here (i.e., “the ark that belongs to YHWH”), an objective genitive relationship is also possible (i.e., “the ark that contains YHWH”).

The function of the ark of the covenant in the Hebrew Bible parallels those of divine images from broader ancient Southwest Asia. David H. Aaron, for example, has highlighted passages such as Exodus 25:16, 21 that preserve a peculiar construction in reference to the testimony and the ark.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to other passages where the testimony is put בארון, “in the ark” (Deut 10:2, 5; 1 Kgs 8:9), these passages command Moses to “give” (נתן) the testimony אל הארון, “to the ark.” This closely parallels Akkadian conventions about treaties being placed *before* divine images for approval/enforcement. These passages may preserve earlier language associated with the ark’s function as a divine image. The language is just fuzzy enough to be reinterpreted in harmony with the D/Dtr constructions, especially if much of the audience is unfamiliar with the technical sense of the phrase, and so it may have escaped excising editorial hands that may have removed other language that more explicitly framed the ark as a divine image.

In form and likely even function, however, the ark, as a container, most directly parallels the portable model shrines discussed above in Chapter 3.<sup>11</sup> The storage of those shrines in cult rooms parallels the ark’s storage in the cella of the tabernacle/temple, and their portability likely facilitated their use in processions, including before military forces, which would match the function of the ark in narratives like those of Joshua 6:4–11 and 1 Samuel 14:18. In ancient Egypt, model shrines took the form of boats that carried the divine image within a canopied throne. Some were even flanked by winged beings reminiscent of cherubim.<sup>12</sup> The more the

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<sup>10</sup> Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 172–75.

<sup>11</sup> See above, pages 204–06.

<sup>12</sup> See Scott B. Noegel, “The Egyptian Origin of the Ark of the Covenant,” in Levy, Schneider, and Propp, *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective*, 223–42, who argues the conceptual template for the ark of the covenant was borrowed from Egypt.

divine image was embedded within material relationships that evoked divinity and the themes and imagery of ritual, the more strongly the image could be perceived to presence deity. These variations on the same theme were meant for the transportation of a small-scale divine image within an object that could reify sacred space. If the image was to permanently remain in the cella or cult room, the secondary reification of that sacred space would have been redundant. There is no need for a small-scale reproduction of sacred space that remains embedded within sacred space—the model shrine was intended to render the divine image portable.

The biblical texts nowhere explicitly mention an anthropomorphic image associated with the ark, although its conceptualizations as a throne and even as a footstool evoke concepts of an enthroned person and fit with Southwest Asian conventions regarding divine images. There is a wall relief from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE) in Nimrud that depicts a procession of deities taken from a conquered cult precinct.<sup>13</sup> Three of the deities are unambiguously anthropomorphic (with two sitting upon thrones<sup>14</sup>), but one depicts what appears to be a box sitting on a throne, with what may be a small hand grasping a ring jutting out of the front of the box. This may depict a model shrine carrying a small divine image.<sup>15</sup> An anthropomorphic image is not necessarily required, however, for a throne or footstool to function as presencing media. Offerings to thrones are known from Akkadian ritual instruction texts. One such text from the Neo-Babylonian period instructs 12 loaves of bread to be prepared for the “Throne of Anu.”<sup>16</sup> The standard and the footstool of Shamash also had mouth-opening rituals performed for them at Mari.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, there is some evidence that non-anthropomorphic statuary presented the

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<sup>13</sup> The relief is in the British Museum (118931).

<sup>14</sup> The one standing image appears to be a horned storm deity in its standing pose.

<sup>15</sup> The anthropomorphic statue in front of the box is holding a ring out in its left hand. We would expect a model shrine to have a door on the front that could be closed, so the divine image should not project beyond the walls of the shrine, but there may be some artistic license being taken in order to depict a portion of the contents in relief.

<sup>16</sup> See Porter, “Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum,” 155–56.

<sup>17</sup> Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 13.

deity within the ark. It is not an enormous conceptual leap to link the tablets of the law with cultic stelai, particularly in light of the command to write the words of the law upon cultic stelai in Deuteronomy 27:1–10 and Joshua 8:32, 34–35. The tablets of the law are also rhetorically cast in Exodus 32 (P) as the authorized alternative to the golden calf—a sanctioned medium for divine presencing. Both entities function as cultic images in different ways. For instance, the golden calf and the stone tablets made use of materials traditionally associated with the divine. The divine production of the text of the tablets is emphasized in Exodus 32:16, while Aaron asserts in verse 24 that the golden calf just “came out” of the fire, as if it were not the work of human production. Both were smashed. A critical distinction was Aaron’s assertion that the calf actually presented the locus of the deity’s identity (Exod 32:4: “these are your deities, O Israel!”). This stands in contrast to the treatment of the tablets as a secondary divine agent.

If figurines such as the small bronze bull discovered near Dothan and the miniature anthropomorphic statue that may be jutting its hand out from the enthroned box in the Tiglath-pileser III relief discovered above are representative of the kind of media used in conjunction with model shrines, those media could have been miniature versions of full-scale divine images used in larger sites. The most explicit examples we have of full-scale divine images used in an Israelite/Judahite cultic site are the stelai that were located in the cella of the Arad temple. We have already seen that such stelai were ubiquitous across the regions inhabited by ancient Israel and Judah, and the biblical texts are replete with references to cultic stelai, so they are very likely to have been broadly representative of the type of divine image employed in Israel and Judah. Tablets would very easily function as miniature stelai, and here the presencing function of cultic objects and of text converge.<sup>18</sup> The significance of this will be discussed in greater

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<sup>18</sup> See James W. Watts, “From Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll: Ritualizing Israel’s Iconic Texts,” in *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism*, ed. Nathan MacDonald (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 21–34.

detail in Chapter 8, but given the ubiquity of stelai in and around Israel and Judah, and the general paucity of anthropomorphic statuary, the ark may have functioned at some point as a portable model shrine that housed one or more stelai that presenced the deity or the deity and their consort. By the time of the work of D/Dtr, this function seems to have given way to other conceptualizations that still served to presence the deity without appealing to more conventional imagery associated with cultic objects. One of the most sustained engagements with the function of the ark from that literature, however, shows the conventional imagery was still very relevant. With that, I turn to the so-called ark narrative of 1 Samuel 4–6.

### *The Ark Narrative*

As it now stands, the ark narrative in 1 Samuel 4–6 primarily represents a Deuteronomistic redaction of multiple literary layers, with bottom layers that may extend back to social memory regarding Shiloh, which was destroyed by the tenth century BCE.<sup>19</sup> Nothing survives from that period to help us better understand the ark’s function in that period, but D/Dtr emphasizes the ark’s function as a container for the tablets of the law (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:9).<sup>20</sup> Sommer explains, “It is no longer the footstool for God . . . Where other biblical texts put God, Deuteronomy puts words that came from God. The ark remains significant, but now it houses symbols rather than divinity.”<sup>21</sup> This is a peculiar assertion in light of the widespread use of symbols, words, and

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<sup>19</sup> Since Leonhard Rost’s 1926 monograph, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1926), scholars have identified the ark narrative as one of the oldest literary segments incorporated into Dtr. As lengthy narrative prose, the commitment of the story to text should be dated no earlier than the late-ninth century BCE, although the story may reflect memories from an earlier time (see Pioske, *Memory in a Time of Prose*, 126–27). Other more recent treatments of the narrative include Patrick D. Miller Jr. and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the “Ark Narrative” of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977 / Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); Levtow, *Images of Others*, 132–43; Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 101–07; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 67–73; Daniel Shalom Fisher, “Memories of the Ark: Texts, Objects, and the Construction of the Biblical Past” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2018), 126–49.

<sup>20</sup> It would shift again by the time of P. David H. Aaron refers to the ark being “remythologized by the post-exilic priesthood” (Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 171).

<sup>21</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 99–100.

even furniture to presence divinity throughout ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>22</sup> The dichotomization of the deity’s symbols from their agency and divinity should not be so casually assumed or asserted.<sup>23</sup>

Scholars have noted for some time that the nature and purpose of the ark are strikingly similar to those of divine images from elsewhere around ancient Southwest Asia, but there has been disagreement about the ways the consumers of the biblical texts, across their developmental phases, would have understood the ark, particularly in light of negative attitudes regarding cultic images.<sup>24</sup> This section will argue that the notion of divine presencing was never entirely abandoned, but was renegotiated in different ways as a part of the various rhetorical campaigns, undertaken by the authors and editors associated with D/Dtr, to compartmentalize YHWH’s communicable agency apart from the loci of their identity.<sup>25</sup> This served multiple rhetorical concerns, and ultimately improved YHWH’s fitness within the socio-material ecologies of later periods. Because the ark was no longer extant by the time of Dtr, there was no threat of worship being offered to it, and so there may have been less concern about employing it in rhetoric about divine presencing.<sup>26</sup>

1 Samuel 4–6 narrate the loss of the ark in battle with the Philistines at Ebenezer, its

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<sup>22</sup> See Porter, “Blessings from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum,” 153–94; Timothy Hogue, “Image, Text, and Ritual: The Decalogue and the Three Reembodiments of God” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, San Diego, CA, 26 November 2019), 1–23.

<sup>23</sup> As Aaron notes, “it was customary to deposit important documents (especially treaties) ‘before the god’ or ‘at the feet’ of the deity in a temple” (Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 172). In light of this, the ark’s role as a container for the law may still reflect the close proximity of the deity’s presence. D puts the locus of the deity’s identity in the heavens, but its agency and even voice are explicitly described as locatable within the temple. D does not entirely secularize the temple.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Sommer suggests that “1 Samuel 4 mocks the idea that God is really in the ark or on it,” while “later chapters seem to lend credence to such a theory” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 106). Jacob Milgrom insists that YHWH’s association with the ark was to be understood as “temporary, unpredictable, and symbolic” (Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPSTC [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990], 374). Hundley, promoting what I call an “ambiguity” approach, finds that the Priestly strata “take great pains not to define or limit Yhwh, even leaving the single form in which he interacts with humanity undefined” (Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 40).

<sup>25</sup> These campaigns were not monolithic, of course. Dtr authors and editors operating after the loss of the Jerusalem temple were engaged in far different campaigns than authors and editors of editions of Deuteronomy composed prior to that loss.

<sup>26</sup> Though the veneration of the sites of worship remained salient for some time. See, for instance, Psalm 99:5: והשתחוּוּ לְהַדָּם רַגְלָיו, “And worship at his footstool.”

recovery in Beth-shemesh, and its subsequent installation in Kiriath-Jearim. According to 1 Samuel 4, after its retrieval from Shiloh to accompany the troops into battle, the ark fails to secure victory for the Israelites. Benjamin Sommer sees this narrative as representing a clear rejection of the fluidity model he finds in earlier biblical literature. For Sommer, the ark’s failure directly challenges the view that the ark functioned as a channel for YHWH’s power. He highlights the initial expectation that “in the eyes of the elders Yhwh’s presence in or on the ark guarantees victory,” but then suggests the story is intended precisely to undercut that expectation: “But the narrative goes on to eviscerate this theology.”<sup>27</sup> He then quotes Shimon Bar-Efrat: “The ark has no intrinsic value; rather, it is only a symbol of God’s presence.”<sup>28</sup> So what of the ark’s displays of power after its installation in the Philistine temple? Sommer goes on to explain that the ark later in the narrative is “mysteriously powerful,” and describes a literary tension that likely resulted from the Deuteronomistic editors “front-loading” their critique of the ark as divine image, but not altering the rest of the earlier narrative. The rhetorical message, for Sommer, is that “Owning the ark is not the equivalent of owning God.”<sup>29</sup> Sommer describes all those who expect the ark to fight on Israel’s behalf as a proxy

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<sup>27</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 105–06.

<sup>28</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 106 (quoting Shimon Bar-Efrat, *1 Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* [Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Am Oved and Magnes Press, 1996], 88 [Hebrew]).

<sup>29</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 107. Certainly this rhetorical message was in play, but it does not require the rejection of the fluidity model to obtain. Rather, the authors/editors are utilizing divine fluidity to make the abandonment motif a faster and easier conclusion. The stealing or destroying of cultic statues functioned as a rhetorical denigration or humiliation of other deities in the eyes of those doing the stealing or the destroying, but for those worshippers of the cultic statues, their theft or destruction could be rationalized as a sign of the deity’s abandonment of the statue because of some transgression on the part of their community. Sommer acknowledges as much in his discussion of fluidity in Mesopotamia: “The *šalmu* . . . was itself a god, assimilated into the heavenly god yet physically a distinct thing that could lose its divine status at any moment, should the deity choose to abandon it” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 23). Given the fact that the communities in Mesopotamia could acknowledge the abandonment of the *šalmu* without rejecting the entire concept of divine fluidity (he shares a story about just such a situation on pp. 21–22), there is little reason to accept that the ark’s failure to secure a victory indicates a rejection of the very ideology present in the latter half of the narrative (and for which Sommer is at pains to account).

On the abandonment motif, see Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 9–21; Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 183–218; John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 104–23; Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 114–26; Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 54–55. The destruction of the temple at the hands of the Babylonians is also framed in terms of divine abandonment in Ezekiel.



for the deity as the corrupt and the uninformed, like Eli and his sons. And yet, when the narrator themselves presents the ark as defeating the Philistine divine image, Sommer’s framework no longer holds, and he is compelled to muddy the waters by appealing to mystery and to some rhetorical flourish.

Rather than flatly deny the presencing power of the ark, it is more likely that the ark’s apparent failure in battle is intended to highlight YHWH’s abandonment of the ark in light of the wickedness of Eli’s sons. (Sommer acknowledges this rhetorical option in his discussion of divine fluidity in Mesopotamia, but it is not addressed discussing this narrative.<sup>30</sup>) The comment in 1 Samuel 4:4 that Hophni and Phinehas (Eli’s sons) were with the ark in Shiloh connects the narrative with 1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–25, verses which themselves interrupt the Samuel narrative only to describe the two as corrupt priests whom YHWH intended to kill.<sup>31</sup> They ultimately meet their demise in 1 Samuel 4:11, after the ark fails to precipitate a victory over the Philistines (who are initially terrified at the ark’s presence). Eli then dies after hearing of the loss of the ark in verse 18. It is after the contaminating influence of the corrupt priests and their enabling father is removed from Israel’s midst that YHWH’s agency seems to return to the ark incrementally.<sup>32</sup>

The narrative represents this power in several different ways.<sup>33</sup> After the ark’s first night in the Philistine temple at Ashdod alongside their deity, Dagon, the latter’s image is knocked over. (Note the text refers to the cultic image simply as דגון, “Dagon,” reflecting—perhaps antagonistically—the identification of the image as the deity.) After the second night, it is

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<sup>30</sup> See previous note.

<sup>31</sup> Most scholars accept the identification of these passages with the core of the account that was integrated into 1 Samuel. See, for instance, Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 27–32, 37–41; Levtow, *Images of Others*, 135; Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 68.

<sup>32</sup> In attributing the loss at Ebenezer to YHWH’s scheme to kill Hophni and Phinehas, the authors appeal to the [MORAL MONITORING] and [PUNISHMENT] domains to blame the inability of the deity to protect their nation on their anger with that nation, or at least three of its most prominent leaders.

<sup>33</sup> Note that Sommer’s framework dismisses these representations of the return of the deity’s power to the ark as merely literarily vestigial, while my account not only gives them a rhetorical function, but rhetorically centers them.

knocked over and its head and hands are severed. As the head and hands are important symbols of perception and action, this severing rhetorically renders the Philistine deity ignorant and impotent. The city is then stricken with a plague, so the ark is sent to Gath and then Ekron, where similar events take place (1 Sam 5:6–10). The Philistines have no choice but to return the ark to Israel, so they put it on a cart pulled by two cows and set it loose. The text makes a point of highlighting that the cows set out directly for Beth-shemesh and stopped upon arrival, as if guided by some agency (or driven like a chariot by the storm deity). At this point, the presencing function of the ark again takes center stage. After the residents set up the ark next to (or upon) a אבן גדולה, “great stone,” they offer burnt offerings and sacrifices ליהוה, “to YHWH.” The use of “great stone” here suggests some kind of literary veiling of what may have been an existing altar or stele. It is either this “great stone” or the ark itself that presences the deity to facilitate the offerings. Following this, in 1 Samuel 6:19, YHWH is said to kill the family of Jeconiah “because they looked in the ark of YHWH” (כי ראו בארון יהוה), which (if the text is not corrupt) may allude to the belief that humanity cannot see the face of the deity and live.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, we may understand the rhetorical point to be that uninvited gazing upon the deity is deadly.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps only the deity may initiate the beatific vision.

Several aspects of the ark narrative employ themes that characterize the ark as a typical divine image, parallel to the function of the Philistines’ own image of Dagon and understanding

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<sup>34</sup> This appears to be reflected in the Priestly requirement that the ark be shrouded in smoke when the high priest enters its presence. Note Miller and Roberts’ comments about the reason for the death of Jeconiah’s family: “Verse 19b is well nigh hopelessly corrupt in the MT, and it is probably not possible to restore the text with any certainty. Most commentators have regarded the LXX as closer to the original text at several points. The most plausible reconstruction of the text in our judgment—and the one we shall operate with—is that proposed in the textual notes to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (NAB) translation and translated in the text . . . The descendants of Jeconiah did not join in the celebration with the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the Lord, and seventy of them were struck down” (Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 77).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Simeon Chavel, “The Face of God and the Etiquette of Eye-Contact: Visitation, Pilgrimage, and Prophetic Vision in Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Imagination,” *JSQ* 19.1 (2012): 1–55.

of divine presencing.<sup>36</sup> First, when the Israelites initially decided to retrieve the ark from Shiloh, they spoke of the ark as facilitating YHWH’s presence (1 Sam 4:3):

נקחה אלינו משלה את־ארון ברית יהוה ויבא בקרבנו וישענו מכף איבינו

Let us go get from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of YHWH so that he will come among us and save us from the hand of our enemies.

The text suggests that where the ark goes, YHWH goes. Several other passages agree with this suggestion. In Numbers 10:35–36, for instance, Moses seems to equate YHWH’s own actions with those of the ark:

35 ויהי בנסע הארץ ויאמר משה

קומה יהוה ויפצו איביך

וינסו משנאיך מפניך

36 ובנחה יאמר

שובה יהוה רבבות אלפי ישראל

35 And when the ark would set out, Moses would say,  
“Rise up, O YHWH, and let your enemies be scattered,  
and let those who hate you flee from your presence.”

36 And when it rested, he would say,  
“Return, O YHWH, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel”

Sa-Moon Kang describes this passage as reflecting a view of “the ark as the visible symbol of YHWH’s participation in battle,”<sup>37</sup> which is a way for scholars today to reflectively frame the perception that YHWH’s agency was presenced and channeled by the ark while maintaining

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<sup>36</sup> See Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 12: “the ark narrative treats the ark as the functional equivalent of a divine image among Israel’s neighbors.” The use of the cherubim formula (ישב הכרבים) in connection with the ark in 1 Samuel 4:4 and 2 Samuel 6:2 suggests the conceptualization of the ark as a pedestal image. While this formula may be a late addition that would reflect a secondary elaboration on the ark—it is only connected to the ark in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40—the presencing function of the image would have been the same. On the relationship of the cherubim formula to the ark, see Alice Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 18–22.

<sup>37</sup> Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, 212.

their preferred ontological boundaries.

Next, carrying the ark into battle reflects the common Southwest Asian practice of carrying cultic objects or standards representing or presencing the deity before the army as a sign of divine favor and presence. Kang describes this motif in the following way:

The war begins after the discernment of divine favor. In the case of a favorable answer the divine warriors gave not only their oracles to make war, but they themselves also participated on the battlefield to destroy the enemies. This divine participation began with the divine march before the king and army. The visible symbols of divine participation in battle were the divine standards or statues which were widely used. These symbols’ loss and subsequent return were often important signs of the religio-political events. Such objects were also used in the vanguard motif in the context of a cultic procession to ensure that divine participation in battle was not ephemeral.<sup>38</sup>

The requisite signs of favor were not sought by the military in 1 Samuel 4, however, as they were, for instance, in Judges 20:27–28:<sup>39</sup>

27 וישאלו בני־ישראל ביהוה ושם ארון ברית האלהים בימים ההם 28 ופינחס בן־אלעזר בן־אהרן עמד לפניו בימים ההם לאמר האוסף עוד לצאת למלחמה עם־בני־בנימן אחי אם־אחדל ויאמר יהוה עלו כי מחר אתננו בידך

27 And the Israelites asked YHWH—since the ark of the covenant of YHWH was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, stood before it in those days—saying, “Shall we return again to go out to battle against the Benjaminites, our kin, or should we refrain?” And YHWH said, “Go up, because tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”

This passage preserves an important signal that the ark presenced YHWH, namely that YHWH appears to have been available for consultation precisely because of the presence of the ark. This is reinforced by passages elsewhere in D/Dtr where the phrase לפני יהוה, “before

<sup>38</sup> Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, 109 (for the ark in battle: pp. 208–12).

<sup>39</sup> See also 2 Samuel 5:19: וישאל דוד ביהוה לאמר האעלה אל־פלשתים התתנם בידך, “And David asked YHWH, saying, ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hand?’”

YHWH,<sup>40</sup> is employed to describe actions performed away from a temple, but in the presence of the ark, as in 2 Samuel 6:5, 14–16, in which David and all the house of Israel were משחקים לפני יהוה, “dancing before YHWH,” while they traveled with the ark towards Jerusalem. In a slight twist on that formula, Joshua 7:6 describes Joshua tearing his clothes and falling down on his face לפני יהוה, “before the ark of YHWH.” The Septuagint omits “ark” (as it does in Joshua 6:13). 2 Samuel 6:2 even states that the ark is נקרא שם יהוה צבאות, “called by the name, the name of YHWH of hosts.” Deuteronomy 10:8 describes the tribe of Levi as being set apart to יהוה לעמד לפני יהוה לשרתו ולברך בשמו עד היום הזה, “carry the ark of the covenant of YHWH, to stand before YHWH to minister to him, and to bless in his name, until this day.” Anne K. Knafl explains, “By carrying the ark, the Levites stand before YHWH and there minister to him.”<sup>41</sup>

Carting off the divine images of a defeated enemy and setting them up before one’s own in their temple is also attested in multiple locations, and particularly during the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>42</sup> The much earlier Mesha Stele, however, provides a more direct example. Lines 11–13 describe the conquest of Atarot and the seizure of the altar hearth of the city’s *dwd*,<sup>43</sup> which is described as being dragged *lpny kmš*, “before Kemosh.”<sup>44</sup> The *kly YHWH*, “objects of YHWH,” are also described as being taken from Nebo and dragged *lpny kmš* (lines 17–18).<sup>45</sup> The related literature stereotypically frames the loss of a divine image as the deity’s

<sup>40</sup> The construction לפני could also be understood as “before the face of,” which would strengthen the presenting function of the ark.

<sup>41</sup> Knafl, *Forming God*, 131.

<sup>42</sup> See Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 22–41; William W. Hallo, “Cult Statue and Divine Image: A Preliminary Study,” in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 13; Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 109–13. See also Seth Richardson, “The Hypercoherent Icon: Knowledge, Rationalization, and Disenchantment at Nineveh,” in May, *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, 231–58.

<sup>43</sup> On the phrase *r’l dwdh*, “altar hearth of *dwdh*,” see Jackson, “The Language of the Mesha’ Inscription,” in Dearman, *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, 112–13.

<sup>44</sup> See Jackson and Dearman, “Text of the Mesha’ Inscription,” 93–94;

<sup>45</sup> The word *kly* is most commonly rendered “vessels,” but my rendering suggests the term may represent more than dishes and other cultic accoutrements. Note that Mesha states on line 14, *wy’mr ly kmš lk’hz’ t nbh’ l ysr’l*, “And Kemosh said to me, ‘Go seize Nebo from Israel’” (Jackson and Dearman, “Text of the Mesha’ Inscription,” 94).

abandonment of their cultic image (though the abandonment motif can extend to the deity’s temple and city).<sup>46</sup> This appears to be the tacit position of the authors/editors of the ark narrative.<sup>47</sup>

Another practice attested at times in broader Southwest Asia is the destruction of confiscated divine images.<sup>48</sup> Nathaniel B. Levtow comments,

The abduction of a defeated enemy’s cult images to the temple of a victor’s gods is a well-attested motif in these accounts of military conquest, as is the mutilation of cultic and royal statuary during times of war—including the removal of heads, hands, eyes, ears, noses, and mouths.<sup>49</sup>

The removal of the head and hands is not common, though, and the statues were actually much more valuable when taken home and installed in one’s own sacred precincts.<sup>50</sup> Miller and Roberts argue for stronger resonance with the mythopoetic battles of the deities themselves in the cognate literature.<sup>51</sup> For instance, KTU 1.3.ii:11–13 describe Anat carrying severed heads and hands after battle, apparently as trophies: “She fixed heads to her back, / Fastened hands on her waist.”<sup>52</sup> If a similar tradition was in literary circulation and was cued by the narrative, then it may more strongly indicate the notion of deities doing battle, with YHWH playing the role of victor. This would normally correspond to the deity who led their troops to victory, but in the ark narrative, the convention would be rhetorically turned on its head in the service of

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<sup>46</sup> See note 29 above.

<sup>47</sup> In 2 Samuel 5:21, the Philistines abandoned their idols to be carried off by David and his men.

<sup>48</sup> Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 13–14, 57–58, repeatedly citing Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*. Cf. Hanspeter Schaudig, “Death of Statues and Rebirth of Gods,” in May, *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, 130–34.

<sup>49</sup> Levtow, *Images of Others*, 138.

<sup>50</sup> Richardson, “The Hypercoherent Icon,” 231–58.

<sup>51</sup> Miller and Roberts are concerned with the conceptual roots of both Dagon’s falls before the ark, and they argue that at least the first shows much stronger connections with a fall in battle than with worship or some other traditional framework. See Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 58–61.

<sup>52</sup> The translation is from Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume II: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 134.

theological and ideological interests: it is the cultic image (read: deity) of the defeated people that destroys that of the victorious people.

The ark’s function as a divine image is not merely a rhetorical tool used in 1 Samuel 4–6 to play off of the ideologies of the Philistines. Several passages were already shared above that utilized the formula לפני יהוה to refer to activity done before the ark. The assertion in 2 Samuel 6:2 that the ark was referred to with the very name of the deity rather undermines the notion that it was being rhetorically cut off from presencing functions. Like the fire out of which YHWH spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 4, the ark does not necessarily reify the single and sole locus of the deity’s very identity, but it does function as an extension of the deity’s agency, thereby intuitively presencing the deity. The ark’s theft plays into D/Dtr’s broader rhetorical campaign of compartmentalization by employing the abandonment motif to highlight the fact that the ark is most appropriately understood as an authorized divine agent. Much like the temple itself—after all, the model shrine miniaturizes and mobilizes the temple<sup>53</sup>—the deity’s agency can depart at will, and the righteousness not only of Israel, but also of its cultic specialists, is critical to the continued presence of the deity among the people. This suggests something akin to a “secondary” status for divine agents could be reflectively employed in ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>54</sup>

### *Implications*

The Hebrew Bible consistently presents the ark of the covenant as presencing the agency of the deity of Israel, though with differing degrees of connection to the deity’s loci of identity. The ark narrative makes use of the abandonment motif to assert the severability of the deity’s agency from the ark and to account for the loss of the ark to the Philistines (pinning the blame

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<sup>53</sup> Anne K. Knafl finds that the ark “represents a mobile divine presence, unbounded to the mandated cult site” (Knafl, *Forming God*, 131, note 190).

<sup>54</sup> See above, pages 18–19, note 58.

on the wickedness of the sons of Eli), but (*pace* Sommer) this does not remotely approximate the outright rejection of any and all presencing facilities on the part of the ark. Such a dichotomous structuring of the conceptualization of divine presencing is a presentistic scholarly imposition, particularly in light of the acknowledgement that elements of the earlier conceptualizations were left entirely intact later in the narrative. The rhetorical exigency of denigrating the worship of idols could be satisfied without abandoning the entire premise upon which the ideology of the Jerusalem temple was based, namely that the structure in some sense presenced YHWH. Instead, the data support a more nuanced renegotiation of the deity’s relationship to the temple and its cultic accoutrements that compartmentalized the loci of their identity and those of their agency. It remained a medium for, or extension of, YHWH’s power and agency, even as it was decoupled or distanced from the main locus of the deity’s identity.

By the time these texts were written and in circulation, however, the ark was no longer extant. D/Dtr’s weakening of the isometry of the deity and the ark served several rhetorical functions vis-à-vis that absence. By presenting the absent ark as a uniquely situated medium for the deity’s agency, the authors/editors of D/Dtr limited the other available objects of potential worship. This mitigated the risk of other divine images replacing the ark. YHWH’s abandonment of the ark was also a more favorable outcome than the deity’s willful self-exile to the sacred precinct of whatever empire absconded with it. It allowed for the assertion of YHWH’s remaining with their people. The authoritative knowledge these rationalizations helped codify served their immediate functions, but also created new conceptual relationships that would have to be renegotiated as the corpus of Israel and Judah’s authoritative texts began to take shape.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For a fascinating discussion of how the ubiquity of abducted divine images may have undermined Neo-Assyria’s traditional conceptualization of the relationship of cult statues to their deities, see Richardson, “The Hypercoherent Icon,” 231–258.



The fronting of the ark’s contents as the focal point of divine authority also played a role in this rhetoric. Shrine models primarily functioned to house miniature divine images, with the former providing the appropriate environment, and the latter constituting the primary facilitator of divine agency. Whatever the original contents of the ark, the tablets of the law become the centerpiece in D/Dtr. The intersection of text and ark, and the eclipsing of the latter by the former, may be interpreted to suggest the replacement of one by the other—a passing of the torch as the primary medium of presencing the divine.

### כבוד

The concept of כבוד (frequently transliterated *kabod* or translated “glory”) is found in many places in the Hebrew Bible, but is concentrated within P (in connection with Sinai and the installation of the tabernacle) and Ezekiel, occurring only once in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 5:24).<sup>56</sup> The best-known occurrences of this term are in reference to the deity’s כבוד filling the tabernacle (Exod 40:34–35) and later (in the narrative) the Jerusalem temple (1 Kgs 8:11). The Hebrew כבוד refers fundamentally to heaviness, and, by metaphorical extension, to wealth, reputation, and honor.<sup>57</sup> The basic sense of “body” or some weighty constituent part of it is indicated by occurrences in parallel to several references to human corporeality, as in pre-exilic texts like Isaiah 17:4 and Psalm 16:9.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Accordance Bible Software finds exactly 200 occurrences of כבוד (despite occurrences in Genesis 31:1; 45:13; 49:6, the term is nowhere within Genesis used in reference to the deity’s body or “glory”). For a recent monograph on the concept of the כבוד, see Pieter de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). For a cognitive-linguistic interrogation of the concept, see Marilyn E. Burton, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

<sup>57</sup> Cf de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament*, 51: “Both כבוד and יקר are expressed in splendor, greatness, might, brightness, etc. Texts that establish a relationship between the כבוד and the physical stature of a person are congruent with the meaning ‘be weighty’ of the root כבד. כבוד can also be connected with ornaments or clothing. Where that is so, there is a relationship both with someone’s riches and with his external appearance.”

<sup>58</sup> These two examples are drawn from Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 60. Sommer additionally refers to Genesis 49:6; Psalm 7:6; Isaiah 10:3–4; 10:16; 22:18.

Isaiah 17:4

והיה ביום ההוא ידל כבוד יעקב  
ומשמן בשרו ירזה

And it will be on that day  
that the כבוד of Jacob will shrivel,  
And the fat of his flesh will dwindle.

Psalm 16:9

לכן שמח לבי ויגל כבודי  
אף־בשרי ישכן לבטח

Therefore my heart rejoices,  
and my כבוד shouts with joy.  
Indeed, my flesh dwells securely.

This usage overlaps with later usage in P in reference to YHWH, as in Moses’ encounter with YHWH in Exodus 33. There Moses asks to see “your כבוד” (v. 18). YHWH responds that their טוב, “beauty,” will pass by Moses, but as it does, YHWH states, “I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” This seems to identify the כבוד with YHWH’s “beauty,” and both with their body. The passage also mentions YHWH’s hand, back, and face, suggesting a fully anthropomorphic conceptualization of the deity. כבוד indicates a fundamentally material medium for the deity’s presence.

While in some usage כבוד was likely understood as YHWH’s “body,” or something related to the deity’s corporeality, in many places this medium is understood as distinct and separate from YHWH’s “body” or primary locus of identity. Some scholars identify usage within a “Zion-Sabaoth” tradition according to which the כבוד functions as a separable divine agent. Robin C. McCall finds that, for that tradition, “the *kābôd* may serve to indicate the presence of YHWH to human beings (that is, it is perceptible in sensory ways), but it does not constitute God’s body.”<sup>59</sup> As with the messenger of YHWH, no doubt there were times and contexts in which some ambiguity regarding the relationship of the כבוד to the deity was rhetorically useful

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<sup>59</sup> Robin C. McCall, “The body and being of God in Ezekiel,” *RE* 111.4 (2014): 381.

for biblical authors. Pieter de Vries explains, “I use the term ‘hypostasis’ not only in cases where the כבוד of YHWH is described in terms of a human personhood but also when we see mention of a fire or an effulgence that has a degree of independence from the identity of YHWH himself.”<sup>60</sup> For de Vries, the couple dozen uses of the verb ראה/√ in connection with כבוד likely indicate the כבוד is to be understood as a hypostasis. While the terminology of “hypostasis” somewhat approximates the concept of communicable divine agency, it is rooted in trinitarian theology, which tends to discount the materiality of the media of divine presencing and imports other problematic dynamics.

By the time of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, כבוד seems to have taken on a euphemistic function, and was commonly used to refer to the radiance of the divine form and/or presence. In this way, it both represented as well as obscured that presence, and particularly as the concept of the existential threat of seeing the deity became salient within the rhetoric of the biblical authors.<sup>61</sup> The dread and terror of seeing deity, as well as the brilliance of divine bodies, is found in other Semitic literature that predates that of the Hebrew Bible (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). *Pulḥu* and *melammu* were the main terms used to refer to the awesome and terrifying radiance that attended divine beings.<sup>62</sup> However, the terror in the cognate literature seems more closely related to fear of what the deity could do rather than fear of the implications of looking upon deity.<sup>63</sup> The threat posed by divine brilliance was likely an elaboration that developed among the societies responsible for the biblical texts in concert with a need to mitigate the perception of access to the deity—a need most salient in light of the absence of the Jerusalem temple. These elaborations of earlier traditions are found in the Priestly literature and in Ezekiel, where this concept of the danger of seeing the deity appears

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<sup>60</sup> De Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament*, 56–57.

<sup>61</sup> This is David Aaron’s conclusion (Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 52–54), and Sommer echoes it (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 60–61).

<sup>62</sup> See above, page 263.

<sup>63</sup> Although see Exodus 34:29–35 (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 93–95).

to derive directly from the notion of their overwhelming radiance or brilliance, most commonly represented in the biblical texts as consuming fire.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Exodus 24:16–17 describes the כבוד as כַּאֲשֶׁר אֹכֵלֶת, “like a devouring fire,” that had an עֲנָן, “cloud,” covering it, shielding viewers from its unbearable brilliance.<sup>65</sup> The euphemistic use of כבוד could have easily become linked with the divine effulgence via the abstract sense of honor, wealth, and splendor, which would have provided an additional conceptual obscurant.

Tryggve N. D. Mettinger notes the convergence of some features in this passage that suggest P is appropriating an earlier pre-P tradition about a tent of meeting that simply facilitated dialogue between humans and the deity who arrived cloaked in a cloud.<sup>66</sup> An example of this earlier tradition is preserved in Exodus 33:9, where Moses enters the אהל מועד, “tent of meeting,” and the cloud descends (יִרְדֹּף) and sits at the entrance to speak with Moses inside. Verse 11 explains, וְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים, “And YHWH spoke to Moses face to face.” There is no mention of כבוד. The cloud seems to obscure the deity itself, who descends—perhaps from the heavens or from the summit of the holy mountain—to meet with Moses.<sup>67</sup> The verb יָרַד, however, never occurs in conjunction with the כבוד, which may or may not be incidental. The closest we get to that concept is the use of שָׁכַן, “to dwell, settle”—a thoroughly anthropomorphic concept—to describe the action of the כבוד upon the summit of Sinai in Exodus 24:16.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On P’s priority in relation to Ezekiel, see Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982); Galen Marquis, *Allusive Rhetoric in the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, Volume A*, ed. D. Assaf (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 131–36; Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 30–85. Against these, see Menahem Haran, “Ezekiel, P, and the Priestly School,” *VT* 58 (2008): 211–18.

<sup>65</sup> Sommer states, “The first points toward the bright nature of the *kabod*, and the cloud hints at its intense luminosity, because the cloud is needed to cloak the deadly brightness” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 222, n. 57).

<sup>66</sup> See de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament*, 120–24.

<sup>67</sup> Note Exodus 25:22: וְנִוְעַדְתִּי לְךָ שָׁם, “And I will meet with you there.”

<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, however, the cloud departs by ascending (עָלָה; Exod 40:35–36). This may suggest the dogmatic avoidance of the term יָרַד more than any systematic restructuring of the entire conceptualization of the function of the cloud and the divine presence. See de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament*, 124 and note 18. In Exodus 29:43–45, YHWH connects their own dwelling with that of the כבוד. In verse 43, YHWH puts the כבוד parallel to itself, stating in reference to the tabernacle, וְנִוְעַדְתִּי שָׁמָּה לְבֵנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכַבְדִּי, “I will meet with

Additionally, the traditions that lack the concept of the כבוד also lack reference to the משכן, commonly translated “tabernacle,” instead preferring אהל מועד. The concept of the משכן may derive from the description of the כבוד as “settling” on the summit of Sinai. The close relationship of the משכן and the כבוד is reflected in the materials used to accent and adorn the former. According to Exodus 25–27, the interior of the משכן was adorned with gold, silver, and brass—materials most naturally and frequently compared to the radiance of deity—and covered with linen curtains of blue, purple, and scarlet, reflecting darkness and heavy clouds.<sup>69</sup> Even the cherubim intended to adorn the interior curtains of the משכן materialize the beings and reflect their presence around the deity and the divine throne. These features of divine radiance are themselves obscured by coverings of goats’ hair and tanned rams’ skins. These skins can be connected to the practice of incubation, or sleeping within a cultic space to facilitate divine favors or visions in dreams. Animal skins and untasted sacrifices have been suggested to have been central features of the incubation ritual.<sup>70</sup>

It seems likely that the cloud—as a vehicle and attendant of the storm deity—literarily predated the use of the כבוד as a primary vehicle for YHWH’s presence and agency in the sanctuary, but once the כבוד became the vehicle of choice, the cloud remained a convenient means of literarily obscuring its radiant nature. Hundley supports this obscuring function of P’s presentation of the כבוד, describing P’s rhetorical goals in the following way: “the Priestly writers do not presume to describe Yhwh’s activity on his own time in his home, much less his nature, presence and activity in the larger cosmos.”<sup>71</sup> The כבוד thus added an additional

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the children of Israel there, and it will be sanctified by my כבוד.” In verse 45, YHWH further states, ושכנתי בתוך בני ישראל, “I will dwell among the children of Israel.”

<sup>69</sup> See de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament*, 122–23. See also Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 40: “In imitation of the multiple strata of the cloud formation that enveloped the Glory-fire at Sinai (the darkness, clouds, and heavy clouds), the tabernacle had several layers of coverings.”

<sup>70</sup> On this, see Susan Ackerman, “The Deception of Isaac, Jacob’s Dream at Bethel, and Incubation on Animal Skin,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 92–120.

<sup>71</sup> Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 32. Thomas Wagner states, “Aus der Pentateuchtradition stammte die Vorstellung von der Umhüllung JHWHs von der Wolke, die auf den *kābôd* übertragen wird” (Thomas Wagner,

obfuscating layer to the presence of the deity, allowing the Priestly authors to preserve the notion of YHWH meeting with Moses in the tabernacle (Exod 25:22) while also muddying the waters regarding the deity’s form and providing an explanation for the dangers associated with seeing the deity. This seems to be the primary rhetorical thrust of P’s renegotiation of the vehicles of divine agency and identity. P restricts the vehicles of divine identity to the כבוד, limiting access to the appropriate authorities, and also obscures the deity’s form, emphasizing the danger of exposure to it, perhaps to discourage the desire for unauthorized access to it or attempts to reproduce it.<sup>72</sup> This structures power in favor of the priestly classes. Their interests may have been further advanced, at least during the Second Temple Period, by the visual correspondence of two of the natural byproducts of the functioning of the temple cult (namely fire and smoke), and the two main visual manifestations of the כבוד (namely fire and a cloud). Seeing a cloud of smoke hovering over the temple by day and that cloud of smoke and the temple structures illuminated at night by the fires of the altar may have suggested to the observer the constant presence of YHWH while the cult was operative.

In its relationship to the tabernacle and temple, the כבוד seems to have been conceptualized as an extension of divine agency or a secondary divine agent, not necessarily representing the deity’s own body, but presencing their agency. In this sense, it functioned as an alternative to a cult statue, endowing the tabernacle or temple with the requisite divine authority and presence, while at the same time mitigating direct access and reproducibility.<sup>73</sup> In the narratives, the כבוד is intentionally and conspicuously visible to the Israelites,<sup>74</sup> occurring with the verb ראה more

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*Gottes Herrlichkeit: Bedeutung und Verwendung des Begriffs kābōd im Alten Testament* [Brill: Leiden, 2012], 117).

<sup>72</sup> Sommer concludes: “For P, God has only one body, and it is located either in heaven or on earth, but not in both places” (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 76). Hundley notes, “In the Priestly texts, Yhwh limits his point of contact with humanity to a single place and to an indescribable form, which may not be reproduced, and gives a single protocol for interaction, thereby eliminating all other places, modes of contact and means of representation” (Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 37).

<sup>73</sup> See Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 36–40.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Wagner notes that the visibility of the כבוד is reserved for Israel alone (Wagner, *Gottes Herrlichkeit*, 115).

than any other verb. Indeed, its fiery nature is critical to its function in leading the children of Israel and marking the divine presence, but unlike fire, individuals could not reproduce it for their own personal and private use. The direct association with the sanctuary also limited access, but this would need to be reconsidered once the temple had been destroyed.

Ezekiel’s innovations on P’s presentation of the כבוד relate to its anthropomorphism, visibility, and mobility.<sup>75</sup> While P is interested in prophylactically obscuring the divine form, Ezekiel 1:26–28a provide a frank description of the כבוד’s form that anthropomorphizes it while still emphasizing its radiance and transcendence:

26 וממעל לרקיע אשר על־ראשם כמראה אבן־ספיר דמות כסא ועל דמות הכסא דמות כמראה אדם עליו מלמעלה 27 וארא כעין חשמל כמראה־אש בית־לה סביב ממראה מתניו ולמעלה וממראה מתניו ולמטה ראיתי כמראה־אש ונגה לו סביב 28 כמראה הקשת אשר יהיה בענן ביום הגשם כן מראה הנגה סביב הוא מראה דמות כבוד־יהוה

26 And above the dome which was over their heads, what looked like sapphire, was the likeness of a throne, and higher above the likeness of the throne, was a likeness that looked like a human. 27 And above what looked like its loins, I saw what looked like sparkling amber, like what looked like fire, enclosing it all around. And beneath what looked like its loins, I saw what looked like fire, and radiance was all around it. 28 Like a bow that was in the clouds on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the radiance all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH.

In P, a cloud shrouds and obscures the divine form, while the author of Ezekiel appears to have an unobstructed view, apparently abandoning any concern for protecting authorized priestly viewers from the overwhelming radiance of the divine vision. There is one reference to the cloud in Ezekiel 1:4, but it employs imagery also found in Exodus 9:24 regarding lightning continuously flashing forth (ואש מתלקחת). This does not obstruct Ezekiel’s view, however, and may be repurposing the cloud to indicate the danger associated with the coming deity by

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<sup>75</sup> On this innovation as a reiteration of Zion-Sabaoth theology, see McCall, “The body and being of God in Ezekiel,” 376–89.

associating it with violent weather instead of with overwhelming radiance.<sup>76</sup> The deity’s appearance is still obscured, but the author of Ezekiel achieves this obscuring through literary hedging, or qualifying their descriptions as mere approximations. These employ the inseparable prefix כְּ, “like, as,” six times, מראה, “appearance of,” nine times, and דמות, “likeness of,” four times. Robin McCall concludes, “As the first prophetic book to be constructed as a work of literature, it is fitting that Ezekiel marries literary form and function this way.”<sup>77</sup>

Finally, for Ezekiel, the כבוד is not confined to the temple. As an exilic author seeking to rationalize the destruction of the temple and the continued commitment to YHWH and their cult, Ezekiel’s account must make room for YHWH’s continued activity beyond the bounds of the temple walls. It must also find a way to do this without entirely marginalizing the temple and its cult. This is achieved through the mobilization and universalization of the כבוד and its throne.<sup>78</sup> The cherubim throne that located the deity within the tabernacle in pre-P tradition is preserved in Ezekiel, but altered and relocated above the primeval dome of Genesis 1:6–7. Rather than two cherubim with wings touching over the ark, the author describes four היות, “living beings,” each humanoid in form with four faces and four wings, in addition to other theriomorphic features (Ezek 1:5–12). The living beings are described as traveling with the deity’s רוה, darting around like lightning (Ezek 1:12, 14). Ezekiel 1:15–21 also describe a wheel associated with each of the four living beings. These wheels all moved in unison with each living being, since, according to the text, כי רוה ההיה באופנים, “the רוה of the living being is in the wheels” (Ezek 1:20). The beings’ own locus of agency—their (shared?) רוה—appear to animate the wheels. If Ezekiel 1:12’s reference to the beings moving around where the deity’s רוה went is to be understood analogously, the רוה of YHWH may be animating each living being. Ezekiel thus expands on the central stream of the their received tradition (P) by

<sup>76</sup> Cf. McCall, “The body and being of God in Ezekiel,” 380–81.

<sup>77</sup> McCall, “The body and being of God in Ezekiel,” 381.

<sup>78</sup> Ezekiel also envisions the rebuilding of a significantly larger temple in chapters 40–47.



incorporating and innovating older pre-P material regarding the conceptualization of YHWH’s כבוד, the primary locus of divine identity, in order to meet the author’s rhetorical demands. As with P, the rhetoric focuses on a unified divine presence.

### *Implications*

As Sommer notes, P is concerned with “boundaries, their formation, and their maintenance,” but I would argue against insisting this approach represents a rejection of “fluidity.”<sup>79</sup> Sommer’s framework of the “fluidity of divine selfhood and multiplicity of divine embodiment”<sup>80</sup> addresses a phenomenon that extends beyond the locus of the deity’s identity (or “body”) and includes the loci of their agency and their divinity itself. Like human persons, deities were multifaceted entities, which allowed multiple different loci for their agency to be operative. While P is absolutely concerned with restricting access to the loci of identity, their agency must still be free to operate in the world and among YHWH’s people.<sup>81</sup> As with D, compartmentalization appears to be the key. For instance, the כבוד was not the only alternative to a cult statue. In describing humanity as created בצלם אלהים, “in the image of deity” (Gen 1:27), P also recasts humanity as an alternative.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Moses is rendered a deity (Exod 7:1), even radiating divinity after his mountain-top encounter with YHWH (Exod 34:29–35).<sup>83</sup> Even the tablets of the law, inscribed by the very hand of deity itself, were offered as an alternative to the golden calf, naively presented by Aaron (according to the text) as the deities

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<sup>79</sup> Hundley has concerns of his own, arguing that Sommer’s model would entrap YHWH in the tabernacle, “thereby circumscribing his potentiality and potency” (Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 30).

<sup>80</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 38.

<sup>81</sup> Hundley agrees that this is not a rejection of the fluidity model, but rather than address agency apart from a locus of identity, he concludes, “in P the deity centralizes the point of contact between heaven and earth, limiting access to a single place so as to avoid divine fragmentation, divine overlap and competing means of and protocols for access” (Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?,” 40).

<sup>82</sup> See Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 209–18; cf. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 207.

<sup>83</sup> As Herring notes, “Exodus 32–34 was consciously included in the Priestly redaction of the book of Exodus and can, therefore, be read from a Priestly perspective” (Herring, *Divine Substitution*, 127). Herring develops this argument further on pages 128–37.

that brought Israel up out of Egypt. As with D, the P source still represents the communicability of divine agency, even if distinguished from the locus of identity.<sup>84</sup> Ezekiel employs some of the central features of divine identity from P, but incorporates other traditions while expanding on and innovating both, mobilizing the loci of the deity’s identity beyond the confines of the temple while still employing concepts of communicable agency.

## Conclusion

The ark of the covenant and the כבוד served to presence the deity in a variety of ways throughout their occurrences in the biblical literature. They did not function as a means of rhetorically severing the deity’s presence from material media, but rather to renegotiate the nature of that presencing. For the ark, this involved compartmentalizing the vehicles of agency from those of the deity’s identity and subordinating the former to the latter, resulting in the “secondary divine agent” status described in Pongratz-Leisten’s model. The ark was described employing a variety of conventions associated with the nature and function of presencing media from cognate societies, and came to be viewed as a material host which the deity could inhabit or could abandon. The כבוד was not subject to the volatilities of a human-made cultic object, and so it was a more rhetorically flexible vehicle of divine identity and agency that came to be used mostly to both mark as well as obscure the deity’s presence. In both cases, a salient rhetorical goal appears to be the creation of space between the deity and their people. The deity was still accessible through a variety of acts, such as prayer, but their material presence was compartmentalized, obscured, and often more ephemeral.

These two entities were among the most visible and concrete presencing media from the

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<sup>84</sup> Sommer attempts to use his characterization of P’s understanding of the divine body as “fire” to account for its variations in size (Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 71–72), but I would argue this imposes a far stricter reflective framework than is necessary. These variations are the result of rhetorical expediency, not of some systematic accounting of the deity’s size and its variability.

Iron Age preserved by the texts of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods. While their relationships to the agency and identity of YHWH were renegotiated in order to respond to pressing rhetorical needs regarding the deity’s presencing, for the exilic worshippers of YHWH, both pieces of media were also conspicuously absent. The temple was gone, and with it, the ark of the covenant and any pillar of fire or cloud of smoke that might have visibly manifested the deity’s presence to previous generations. They existed only in written, spoken, and performed tradition. This reality imposed additional prosocial exigencies upon authorities and community leaders whose interests were tangled up with the survival of the Israelite/Judahite identity. In the absence of the temple, and the divine presence and oversight it helped facilitate, other strategies for social cohesion and for conceptualizing the relationship of YHWH to their people would come to the fore.

## CHAPTER 7

# YHWH’s Divine Agents: The Messenger and the $\text{ַשׁ}$

## Introduction

The compartmentalization of loci for divine identity and divine agency in the late-seventh and the sixth centuries BCE opened the door for a number of entities to take on presencing roles in the biblical literature. As that literature arrogated increased authority in certain circles, and in the absence of the temple and its trappings, cult seems to have given way to textualization as the primary backdrop against which those entities facilitated both the assertion of divine imminence and the sheltering of the deity’s central loci of identity from the prying eyes of humanity. The most prominent vehicle for divine agency and identity in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible is undoubtedly the messenger of YHWH, and that vehicle will be interrogated in the chapter’s next section. Part of this interrogation addresses one biblical author/editor’s use of the YHWH’s  $\text{ַשׁ}$ , or “name,” to rationalize the messenger’s occasional identification—even self-identification—as YHWH, the very deity of Israel. This rationalization draws from a broader rhetorical context found in Dtr and certain layers of D in which the  $\text{ַשׁ}$  is the vehicle for presencing the deity in the temple. That context will be the subject of the chapter’s third section. The chapter will first discuss the relationship of the two entities and their significance

for the changing ways in which authors and editors represented the deity’s presence among their people.

## The Messenger of YHWH

This section interrogates a peculiar phenomenon related to divine agency and the messenger of YHWH, namely the putative conflation of identities of the deity and their messenger in a handful of early biblical narratives: Genesis 16:7–13; 21:17–19; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exodus 3:2–6; Numbers 22:22–35; Judges 2:1–5; 6:11–23; 13:3–23. In her discussion of the reception of the messenger of YHWH in early Jewish engagement with the book of Genesis, Camille Hélena von Heijne includes Genesis 48:15–16 and Joshua 5:13–15; 6:2 in her list of texts that merge the identity of the messenger with that of YHWH.<sup>1</sup> The situation is distinct in these verses, however. In the poetic blessing of Joseph in Genesis 48, Jacob refers to “the messenger who redeemed me from all evil” in one colon, and to אלהים in the parallel colon, which does not invoke the “messenger of YHWH/deity” pattern discussed in this chapter. Similarly, in Joshua 5:13–15, Joshua’s interlocutor is not described as a messenger, but as שר־צבא־יהוה, “the captain of YHWH’s host.” In Joshua 6:2, YHWH is described as speaking to Joshua, but the continuity with 5:13–15 is not clear. We might also consider the narrative in Zechariah 3, which has the messenger of YHWH speaking on behalf of YHWH. The text, however, refers to the messenger as a messenger, independently of the divine name, and the construction כה־אמר יהוה precedes one of the messenger’s statements. This appears to be a later narrative that incorporates some of the features of the conflated narratives while also maintaining the distinction of the messenger and YHWH.

The passages that conflate the identities of YHWH and the messenger refer specifically to

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<sup>1</sup> Camille Hélena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 1.

a מלאך יהוה, “messenger of YHWH,” but they also (1) refer to that messenger as YHWH, (2) describe them self-identifying as YHWH, and/or (3) attribute authority and prerogatives to them that were usually understood to belong solely to YHWH. Similar to the cult statues of surrounding societies, the messenger appears to be both identified as the deity, but also distinguished from them. Sommer treats these passages as one of the main prototypes of divine fluidity, but the story is a bit more complicated than he describes.<sup>2</sup>

A representative example of this phenomenon is Exodus 3:2–6:

2 וירא מלאך יהוה אליו בלבת־אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בער באש והסנה איננו אכל 3 ויאמר משה אסרה־נה ואראה את־המראה הגדל הזה מדוע לא־יבער 4 וירא יהוה כי סר לראות ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה ויאמר משה ויאמר הנני 5 ויאמר אל־תקרב הלא של־נעליך מעל רגליך כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת־קדש הוא 6 ויאמר אנכי אלהי אביך אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב ויסתר משה פניו כי ירא מהביט אל־האלהים

2 And the messenger of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire in the midst of the bush. And he saw, and, look!, the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. 3 And Moses said, “I am going to turn aside and take a look at this incredible sight, why the bush is not burning.” 4 And YHWH saw that he turned aside to look, so the deity called out to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses! Moses!” And he said, “I am here.” 5 Then he said, “Do not come over here. Take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing, it is holy ground.” 6 And he said, “I am the deity of your father, the deity of Abraham, the deity of Isaac, and the deity of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at the deity.

Verse 2 describes the messenger appearing to Moses in the burning bush, but YHWH is the one observing Moses’ actions in verse 4, which also states that the אלהים called out from the bush. This may exploit the semantic vagaries of the term אלהים—a divine messenger could be referred to as a deity—or it may have been understood to refer specifically to YHWH, in which case, the identity of the entity appearing to Moses in the bush has changed. In verse 6, the entity identifies itself as the deity of his ancestors. If we understand verse 2 to provide contextualization for verses 3–6, then the messenger is appropriating the divine name,

<sup>2</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 40–44.

identifying itself as YHWH. At the same time, the simple removal of the word מלאך from verse 2 results in a perfectly consistent and clear narrative about the deity YHWH appearing to Moses in a burning bush.<sup>3</sup>

In this section I will argue that that conflation of identities is rooted in textual interpolations in passages that initially narrated the deity’s own direct interaction with humanity.<sup>4</sup> As the deity’s profile accreted more rhetoric associated with their transcendence and the dangers of looking upon the divine glory, and the deity was distanced from certain earthly acts (see Chapter 6), earlier passages were emended to obscure the deity’s presence and replace it with that of the messenger (or “angel”). This resulted in some narratives in which the messenger self-identifies as the deity, or in which an individual refers to their interlocuter alternatively as the deity and as their messenger. These circumstances appear to have been acceptable to the communities in which the texts circulated. This has caused a great deal of debate among scholars regarding the precise nature of the relationship of the messenger to the deity. The theoretical framework of communicable divine agency I have constructed accounts for all the idiosyncrasies of these narratives, including a later-composed enigmatic narrative from Exodus 23 that unambiguously distinguishes between the two entities, but also attempts to accommodate and account for their conflation.

### *Accounting for the Messenger of YHWH*

Four general approaches to this phenomenon have gained some degree of currency among scholars.<sup>5</sup> The prevailing view, which has been called the “identity theory,” holds that the

<sup>3</sup> Alexander A. Fischer, “Moses and the Exodus-Angel,” in Reiterer, Nicklas, and Schöflin, *Angels*, 79–93.

<sup>4</sup> For theophany narratives where the deity appears as an שׂמ, see Hamori, “*When Gods Were Men*”.

<sup>5</sup> For broad summaries of these different theories, see William George Heidt, *Angelology of the Old Testament: A Study in Biblical Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 69–101; A. S. van der Woude, “De Mal’ak Jahweh: Een Godsbede,” *NTT* 18 (1963/64): 1–13; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents & Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 53–57; von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis*, 114–120.

messenger is a hypostasis, or avatar, or some manner of extension or manifestation of YHWH’s own self.<sup>6</sup> The second theory, the “representation theory,” suggests the messenger is a separate and individualized entity who as an authorized representative may speak in the first person as its patron.<sup>7</sup> The third approach is the “interpolation theory,” which holds that the word מַלְאָךְ, “messenger,” is a textual interpolation.<sup>8</sup> A final approach contends that the authors have intentionally blurred the distinction between the two entities to create a tension and ambiguity that signals the unknowability and mysteriousness of the divine form.<sup>9</sup> This theory has yet to be given a short-hand designation in the scholarly literature, but I will refer to it as the “ambiguity theory.”

Among the most conspicuous indicators that the מַלְאָךְ is an interpolation is the fact that the messenger in the relevant passages acts in ways entirely inconsistent with the responsibilities of divine messengers within the broader Southwest Asian literary tradition. This was briefly addressed by Samuel A. Meier in his 1999 monograph, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, but more forcefully by Dorothy Irvin in her 1978 book, *Mytharion*.<sup>10</sup> While Michael B. Hundley highlights this fact in arguing for the “idiosyncratic” representation of the messenger in the biblical texts, he overlooks the fact that the messenger’s activity is not so idiosyncratic—

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<sup>6</sup> Heidt, *Angelology of the Old Testament*, 95–100; van der Woude, “De Mal’ak Jahweh,” 6–13; Saul M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 89–91; Richard E. Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 13; Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27–28; Stephen F. Noll, “mal’ak,” *NIDOTTE* 2.942; Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 67–69; Stephen L. White, “Angel of the Lord: Messenger or Euphemism?” *TB* 50.2 (1999): 299–305; James Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 18–20; Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2004), 62–64; R. M. M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 99–101; Erik Eynikel, “The Angel in Samson’s Birth Narrative: Judg 13,” in Reiterer, Nicklas, and Schöflin, *Angels*, 109–23; Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 40–44.

<sup>7</sup> René A. López, “Identifying the ‘Angel of the Lord’ in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci,” *BBR* 20.1 (2010): 1–18. Cf. Andrew S. Malone, “Distinguishing the Angel of the Lord,” *BBR* 21.3 (2011): 297–314.

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercker, 1978), 93–104; Samuel A. Meier, “Angel of Yahweh יהוה מַלְאָךְ,” *DDD*, 54–58.

<sup>9</sup> Carol A. Newsom, “Angels,” *ABD* 1.250; Hundley, “Of God and Angels,” 1–22.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1999), 96–97; Meier, “Angel of Yahweh,” 53–54; Irvin, *Mytharion*, 93–104.



it matches the responsibilities of the deities themselves as represented in the broader Southwest Asian literary milieu.<sup>11</sup> Even within the biblical context itself, the messenger seems to take on features and roles exclusively held in the biblical and broader literature by fully-fledged deities. Note, for instance, that the fearful reactions to the messenger in several places reflect Exodus 33:20’s warning regarding the deadliness of seeing the deity’s own face:<sup>12</sup>

Exodus 3:2a, 6

2 וירא מלאך יהוה אליו בלבת־אש מתוך הסנה . . . 6 ויאמר אנכי אלהי אביך אלהי אברהם אלהי יעקב ויסתר משה פניו כי ירא מהביט אל־האלהים

2 And the messenger of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire in the midst of the bush. . . . 6 And he said, “I am the deity of your father, the deity of Abraham, the deity of Isaac, and the deity of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at the deity.

Judges 6:22

וירא גדעון כִּי־מלאך יהוה הוא ויאמר גדעון אהה אדני יהוה כִּי־על־כן ראיתי מלאך יהוה פנים אל־פנים

And Gideon saw that it was the messenger of YHWH, and Gideon said, ‘Help, Lord YHWH! For I have seen the messenger of YHWH face to face!’

Judges 13:21–22

21 ולא־יסף עוד מלאך יהוה להראה אל־מנוח ואל־אשתו אז ידע מנוח כִּי־מלאך יהוה הוא 22 ויאמר מנוח אל־אשתו מות נמות כי אלהים ראינו

21 And the messenger of YHWH did not again appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the messenger of YHWH, 22 and Manoah said to his wife, ‘We will definitely die, because we have seen deity.’

There is no such threat associated in the Hebrew Bible with communication with the deity’s messenger. Indeed, it entirely undermines the function of a divine messenger for direct communication to be deadly. From the biblical to the wider Southwest Asian contexts, the texts

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<sup>11</sup> Hundley, “Of God and Angels,” 7–12. The case that the messenger is functioning as the deity is supposed to be made most directly in Irvin, *Mytharion*, 93–104.

<sup>12</sup> ויאמר לא תוכל לראות את־פני כי לא־יראני האדם וחי” This is clearly distinguishable from the motif in Ugaritic and other literature wherein the deities are fearful at the approach of another deity’s messengers (e.g., KTU 1.2.i:20–24).

reflect the literary motifs associated with direct communication between humans and full-fledged deities. The removal of the word מלאך resolves all the complications.

Another consideration that adds further support to the interpolation theory is the frequent interpolation of the messenger in the ancient versions. A famous example is Exodus 4:24, which reads in the Hebrew, וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַמַּיִתּוֹ, “And when YHWH met him [Moses], he sought to kill him.” In the Septuagint, however, we find, συνήντησεν αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου καὶ ἐζήτει αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι, “a messenger of the Lord met him and sought to kill him.” The messenger was interpolated, either by the translator or in their source text, to obscure the deity’s physical interaction with Moses, and likely also their attempted murder.<sup>13</sup> A similar prophylactic alteration takes place with the biblical שׂטן, “Satan,” who functions as a sort of prosecutor. In 2 Samuel 24:1, YHWH is described as influencing David to conduct a census of Israel and Judah. The much later version of this pericope preserved in 1 Chronicles 21:1 describes the שׂטן as the agent of influence. The insertion of the שׂטן here protects YHWH from the implications of engaging in what was considered inappropriate behavior.

In the story of God’s bedside chats with Balaam, the Samaritan Pentateuch adds מלאך before אלהים in Numbers 22:20. No such addition is made in verse 12, at the first nightly chat, but there the verb used to describe the deity’s action is אָמַר, “to speak,” while in v. 20 it is the more physical בָּא, “to come.” The theological concern is not with the deity seeking to kill someone, but perhaps just with their physical presence. SP Numbers 23:4 has the same addition of מלאך where the verb is מָצָא, “to find,” or “meet,” and SP Numbers 23:5 has the מלאך יהוה putting the deity’s word in the mouth of Balaam. The מלאך of Numbers 23:4 is also found at Qumran in 4QNum<sup>b</sup>, and the spacing suggests it also appeared in that manuscript at Numbers 22:20 and 23:5.

This interpolative practice flourished in the targumim, which also added other personified

<sup>13</sup> For the latter position, see Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him*, 27–28.

attributes of deity to mediate divine presence and activity. *Targum Onqelos* adds “messenger” at Exodus 4:24 in agreement with the Septuagint. *Targumim Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Neophiti* edit Jacob’s encounter at Peniel in Genesis 32:31 to read, “I have seen messengers of the Lord.” *Pseudo-Jonathan* also amends Eve’s famous claim in Gen 4:1 to have conceived a man with YHWH, rendering, “I have got a man from the messenger of the Lord.” Many of our scenes show textual instability in the versions, as well. In the Hebrew of the Hagar episode in Genesis 16 the מלאך יהוה appears in verses 7, 9, 10, and 11. The Septuagint adds an additional reference in verse 8, but the Vulgate lacks the references in verses 10 and 11. In the Vulgate, only the Lord appears to Moses in Exodus 3:2; there is no messenger. In paraphrasing Exodus 3, Josephus only mentions a “voice” calling Moses by name. In Genesis 22, Josephus lacks all references to a messenger; there it is only the deity calling out to Abraham.

As with so many theories in biblical studies, James Barr is responsible for the most frequently quoted criticism of the interpolation theory:

The introduction of the mal’ak is too extremely spasmodic, and leaves too many fierce anthropomorphisms untouched, for its purpose to be understood in this way. The voice and presence of the mal’ak alternates in a number of stories so much with the voice and appearing of Yahweh that it is hardly possible to understand his place as a substitute for the latter.<sup>14</sup>

This concern hardly undermines the theory, however, as there is no reason to alter or add to every single verse in order to massage a text’s interpretation when the hearer/reader needs little more than a contextualizing suggestion, particularly when it resolves a theologically thorny reading. In Genesis 32:24–32, Jacob’s sparring partner is nowhere called a messenger, and even though Jacob states, ראייתי אלהים פנים אל־פנים, “I have seen deity face to face,” it has been read as a reference to a messenger for millennia. This is reflected in the received version of

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<sup>14</sup> Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament,” 33.

Hosea 12:4–5, which makes reference to the tradition and refers to the entity first as an אלהים and then as a מלאך (although the latter is likely itself an early interpolation).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Samaritan Pentateuch was selective in those passages that were emended, but it influenced the reading of nearby passages left untouched. The comprehensive approaches of later Greek and rabbinic authors/editors are products of much more systematic literary conventions that cannot be so arbitrarily retrojected into the mid-first millennium BCE. The clearest and most definitive evidence that one need not change all the occurrences to influence interpretation is the fact that the vast majority of conservative Jewish and Christian readers have interpreted the texts over the millennia precisely as those spasmodic interpolations would have them read.

*The Messenger of YHWH as Divine Agent*

The interpolation theory best accounts for those passages in which the identity of the messenger overlaps or appears to be conflated with that of the deity. This does not fully explain the perpetuation and accommodation of these ostensibly conflated identities down through the ages, though. These passages grate against contemporary conceptualizations of identity built up from binary Aristotelian notions of classification,<sup>16</sup> but for ancient audiences, whose intuitive perspectives regarding the individual as both partible and permeable were far more salient, and who intuitively accepted the communicability of agency in their socio-material interactions with deity, the notion of a divine messenger somehow endowed with divine agency would not have been the logical paradox it is for us today. (Of course, anyone who has ever spoken to a headstone as if to a deceased loved one should know it only becomes a paradox when a

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<sup>15</sup> Most likely, אלהים in verse 4 is intended to parallel אל, “deity,” in verse 5. This results in the phrase וישר אל, “he contended with El,” at the beginning of verse 5—a handy etiology for the name ישראל. Instead, the מלאך is interpolated, אל is reread as a preposition, and the etiology vanishes.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Jong states, “the ghost of Aristotle haunts us still” (Jong, “On (not) defining (non)religion,” 16).

reflective accounting is required. The act itself is quite intuitive.)<sup>17</sup> One passage in the Hebrew Bible even appears to construct a conceptual framework for this endowment.

Following a series of commandments in Exodus 23 regarding cultic expectations upon entry into the promised land, the deity explains in verses 20 and 21,

20 הנה אנכי שלח מלאך לפניך לשמרך בדרך ולהביאך אל-המקום אשר הכנתי 21 השמר מפניו ושמע בקלו אל-תמר בו כי לא ישא לפשעכם כי שמי בקרב

20 Look, I am sending a messenger before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place I have established. 21 Pay attention to him and listen to his voice. Do not rebel against him, because he does not have to pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him.

The passage clearly distinguishes the deity from their messenger, but describes the latter as having the divine prerogative to not forgive sins (usually assumed to be YHWH’s sole prerogative).<sup>18</sup> The exercise of this privilege is explained as the result of the messenger having YHWH’s name “in him.” The composer of this passage was likely aware of—and providing a rationalization for—the conflated identities of YHWH and their messenger in the other passages discussed above, and particularly Judges 2:1, which narrates the story of YHWH’s leading the Israelites out of Egypt and appears to have been amended to include the messenger. We may leverage the theoretical framework of communicable agency to posit that the “name” operates in Exodus 23 as a conceptual vehicle for YHWH’s agency. Thus, possession of the name not only allowed the messenger to be referred to as YHWH, but it endowed them with YHWH’s power and authority. According to this theory, with the interpolation of the מלאך—or between the initial interpolation of the מלאך and the composition of this passage in Exodus 23—the conflated identities of YHWH and their messenger were rationalized using the notion

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<sup>17</sup> The presencing of deity in the societies around Iron Age Israel and Judah prototypically used inanimate objects, however, so the messenger is a bit idiosyncratic as a medium for divine agency.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Daniel Johansson, “‘Who Can Forgive Sins but God Alone?’: Human and Angelic Agents, and Divine Forgiveness in Early Judaism,” *JSNT* 33.4 (2011): 351–74 (366–69).

of the indwelling of YHWH’s name.<sup>19</sup> This concept is not unique to this passage, however, and likely shares some manner of relationship with the so-called “Name Theology” of D and Dtr, which will be discussed in the next section.

The exclusively literary context of the origins of the composite “messenger of YHWH” merits further discussion. Because it operated within a literary medium under the control of authorities, the messenger could present the deity’s identity (not only their agency) in a way that could not be privately reproduced and was not subject to the violence to which the temple and its accouterments could be. The agent’s animate and anthropomorphic representation in that literary medium blurred the traditional boundaries between the deity and its presencing media. The messenger was not a cultic object or a cultic installation whose theft or destruction the authorities found themselves having to rationalize, nor was the goal to discourage the followers of YHWH from worshipping an already accessible material object, at least initially (see below). Rather, the interpolation of the messenger initially answered a reflective concern for theological propriety and was subordinated and initially confined to the text. It would take on a life of its own within the community’s broader discourse about divine presencing, but this marks a unique innovation born of text and its features, rather than of rationalizing and/or accommodating uncomfortable cultic practices. This may account for the literary survival of this specific medium for the presencing of the very identity of the deity.

The veneration of divine messengers may have become an unintended consequence of the survival and expansion of this text-based medium for divine presencing. As the Jewish literary

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<sup>19</sup> An alternative explanation is that the notion of the name indwelling the messenger in Exodus 23 inspired the later interpolations, but this would make Exodus 23:20–21 prior to texts like Judges 2:1, and raises more questions about the presence of the messenger in Exodus 23 than it answers. If the messenger is an interpolation in the other passages, Exodus 23 is most likely an elaboration on those interpolations. The literary progression would begin with YHWH themselves leading the Israelites (Exod 13:21; 33:14–17), then an interpolated messenger (Exod 14:19; Judg 2:1), and then the rationalized messenger (Exod 23:20–21). Scholars have alternatively dated the so-called “appendix” to the Covenant Code (of which Exod 23:20–21 are the opening verses) to a pre-D setting and a late-D setting. For the former, see Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 119; David P. Wright, “The Covenant Code Appendix (Exodus 23:20–33), Neo-Assyrian Sources, and Implications for Pentateuchal Study,” in Gertz et al., *The Formation of the Pentateuch*, 47–85. For the latter, see Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 377.

imagination expanded beginning in the Greco-Roman period, writers began to explore in greater detail the hierarchical structure of the heavens, producing complex social structures for the denizens of the heavens, even developing names and mediatory responsibilities for a variety of different divine messengers. In some cases, divine attributes that appear to be personified in the biblical texts become identified with these messengers, such as אף, “Anger” (Ps 78:49), חמה, “Wrath” (Isa 66:15), קצף, “Qeṣeph” (Num 17:11), and even שם, “Shem” (Isa 30:27). Texts like Psalm 78:49 may have influenced the reading of attributes like these as divine messengers: ישלח־בם חרון אפו עברה וזעם וצרה משלחת מלאכי רעים, “He sent against them his burning anger, wrath, and indignation and distress—a company of evil messengers.” In the later literature in which these figures appear explicitly as messengers, a common modification to the biblical iterations of these figures was the addition of the theophoric element יאל-, as in קצפיאל, as in *Sepher Ha-Razim* 4:22 and *3 Enoch* 1:3. Other names are carried through without alteration, such as עזאזל, from Leviticus 16:8, 10, and 26, who appears as a messenger in several places in *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.<sup>20</sup>

The risk of worship appears to have been most acute in that literature which ruminated on the relationship of divine mediators and the possession of the divine name. Jarl E. Fossum explains that the appeal to the divine name in Exodus 23:20–21 “shows the individualization and personification of the Name of God in the figure of the Angel of the Lord. . . . this means that he has put his power into the angel and thus will be with his people through the agency of the angel.”<sup>21</sup> The messenger Yahoel, from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*—whose name means “YHW is El”—is referred to by the deity as “the namesake of the mediation of my ineffable

<sup>20</sup> See Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him*, 109–111.

<sup>21</sup> Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 86. Regarding the temple, Fossum asserts, “YHWH certainly inhabits the earthly temple, but not in person; he is present through the agency of his Name” (p. 87). Biblical figures besides the messenger were also endowed with the power of the divine name. Moses, for instance, is said to be “vested with prophethood and the divine Name” in the Samaritan text, *Memar Marqah* (2.4; quoted in Andrei A. Orlov, *Yahoel and Metatron: Aural Apocalypticism and the Origins of Early Jewish Mysticism* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017], 30).

name” (*Apoc. Ab.* 10:3).<sup>22</sup> When Yahoel encounters Abraham, they explain, “I am a power in the midst of the Ineffable who put together his names in me” (10:8). This is what facilitates the performance of deeds normally restricted to the deity. While this messenger is not worshipped in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *1 Enoch* 48 does refer to worship in discussion of the relationship of the divine name, the divine glory, and Daniel 7’s בר אנש, “Son of Humanity.” There the “Son of Humanity” is endowed before the creation of the earth with a special name: “And at that hour that Son of Man was named by the Name in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, the Before-Time; even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was named by the name in the presence of the Lord of Spirits” (*1 En.* 48:2–3).<sup>23</sup> And then two verses later: “all those who dwell upon the dry ground will fall down and worship before him, and they will bless, and praise, and celebrate with psalms the Name of the Lord of Spirits” (*1 En.* 48:5).<sup>24</sup> Charles A. Gieschen states that the genuflecting masses “will use the name of the Lord of Spirits in worshipping the Son of Man because both possess the same divine Name.”<sup>25</sup>

Through this and related literature and cult, the divine council that had once been deposed was now being reconstituted by subordinate divine messengers and other mediating entities. Following this expansion, internal prohibitions against—and external accusations of—the worship of these entities began to proliferate, which has commonly been interpreted as evidence that people were engaging in their worship to one degree or another.<sup>26</sup> The mediation

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<sup>22</sup> This translation and the next are from Orlov, *Yahoel and Metatron*, 73. On the connections between this tradition and Exodus 23:20–21, see pages 73–77.

<sup>23</sup> Following Charles A. Gieschen, “The Name of the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 240, this translation is from E. Isaac, “1 Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 1.35, but restores the more literal rendering of “named by the name” that is relegated to the footnotes in the text.

<sup>24</sup> This translation is from Orlov, *Yahoel and Metatron*, 43–44.

<sup>25</sup> Gieschen, “The Name of the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” 240.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 55: “Ancient authors insisted that angels *not* be worshiped precisely because angels *were* being worshiped.” For the broader discussion, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995]; Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 124; Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him*; Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*.



of divine messengers would provide an attractive alternative to the sanctioned cult for privately accessing divine presence and favor, particularly for the growing diaspora communities and those increasingly finding themselves outside the shrinking boundaries of orthodoxy.

Internal prohibitions are particularly concentrated in rabbinic literature, such as *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*’s commentary on Exodus 20:20, which interprets the prohibition of fashioning images to include

דמות שׂמשי המשׂמשין לפני במרום לא דמות מלאכים ולא דמות אופנים ולא דמות כרובים

the likeness of my servants who serve before me on high: not a likeness of messengers, not a likeness of ophanim, and not a likeness of cherubim.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the accusations about worship came from other groups, such as Clement of Alexandria’s accusation that Jewish people were worshipping (λατρεύω) messengers.<sup>28</sup> Origen of Alexandria reported in the third century CE that a Greek philosopher named Celsus accused Jewish people of worshipping messengers.<sup>29</sup> Already in the Christian Epistle to the Colossians (late first century CE), the author refers to θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων, “worship of messengers” (Col 2:18).<sup>30</sup> Beginning in the fifth century CE, petitions and incantations addressed to divine messengers appear on bowls and amulets. These practices drew from existing conventions directed at high deities, but it is not clear how early they began to be aimed at divine messengers.<sup>31</sup> What *is* clear is that the intuitive compulsion to access divine agency could not

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<sup>27</sup> See Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael. Second Edition*, 2 vols. [Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004], 2.344; cf. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 57–59.

<sup>28</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.5.41.

<sup>29</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.26.

<sup>30</sup> On the influence of this passage on later Christian engagement with the veneration of divine messengers, see Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 137–46.

<sup>31</sup> See, most recently, Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls. Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). There is also discussion in Cline, *Ancient Angels*, 137–65 and throughout de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*. For the reconstruction of an invocation of mediatory divine figures at Qumran, see Doulas L. Penney and Michael O. Wise, “By the Power of Beelzebub: An Aramaic Incantation Formula from Qumran (4Q560),” *JBL* 113.4 (1994): 627–50.

be entirely quashed by the machinations of authority. More effective was to redirect the impulse to an agent more directly under the control of cultic authority, which brings us back to the שם.

## The שם

While the narratives that involve the messenger of YHWH make the most thorough and explicit use of the שם as a vehicle for divine identity and presence, its use as a sort of proxy for the deity is known from several passages in the Hebrew Bible. One example is Psalm 76:2–3:<sup>32</sup>

2 נודע ביהודה אלהים  
בישראל גדול שמו  
3 ויהי בשלם סכו  
ומעונתו בציון

- 2 God is known in Judah,  
In Israel, great is his name.  
3 His abode was in Salem,  
And his habitation in Zion.<sup>33</sup>

In Isaiah 30:27, the שם seems to be treated as one of the partible components of the deity’s identity: שם־יהוה בא ממרחק בער אפו, “The name of YHWH comes from far off, his anger burning.” The partibility of one’s name, and particularly a divine name, is well known from ancient Southwest Asia. Chapter 2 discussed the different ways the “name” was conceptualized as a partible agent. In addition to reifying agency, it could refer to one’s reputation or legacy, to their social presence, or to their authority. The materialization of the name through inscription

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<sup>32</sup> S. Dean McBride employs the concept of “nominal realism,” which he describes as a belief in “a concrete, ontological relationship . . . between words and the things and actions which the words describe. A name is consubstantial with the thing named . . . [or] a physical extension of the name bearer, an attribute which when uttered evokes the bearer’s life, essence, and power” (S. Dean McBride, “The Deuteronomic Name Theology,” [PhD diss., Harvard University, 1969], 67, as quoted in Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 26).

<sup>33</sup> This example is employed in Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 65.

created a durative invocation that rendered the intended reference or reification as permanent as the medium of inscription. While someone to read or pronounce the name appears to have been desired in many cases, it was not absolutely necessary for the materialization of the name to perpetuate one’s agency.<sup>34</sup>

For human persons, the most salient use of the partible “name” was in funerary and mortuary inscriptions, where it was inscribed on stelai, painted on plaster, or carved into wall inscriptions. The invocation of the name by readers of these inscriptions, whether descendants or passers-by, was often intended to facilitate the continued memory and existence of the deceased. Perhaps the clearest example from the Hebrew Bible of this function of the name is Absalom’s lamenting, “I have no son to cause my name to be remembered” (2 Sam 18:18), which necessitated his erection of his own stele in the Valley of the King to facilitate his care and feeding throughout the afterlife.<sup>35</sup> In her discussion of the power of the name, Karen Radner observes that in ancient Southwest Asia, the juxtaposition of name and image could serve to amplify the desired effect: “The ‘written name’ is closely related in its meaning and usage to the representative image, and is often used in conjunction with it to ensure the presence of the individual.”<sup>36</sup>

Divine names had additional functions associated with their partibility. In one of the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, parallel cola bless “Baal on the day of war” and “The name of El on the day of war,” suggesting the deity (whether YHWH or Baal) personifies or employs

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<sup>34</sup> Karen Radner states, “Wesentlich ist dabei, daß die Wirksamkeit des ‘geschriebenen Namens’ nicht davon abhängt, ob er gelesen wird: Seine Wesenseinheit mit dem Individuum allein reicht aus, daß dessen Fortbestand durch seine Existenz gewährleistet ist; ob eine Inschrift sichtbar oder versteckt angebracht ist, hat deshalb keinen Einfluß auf die Wirkung des ‘geschriebenen Namens.’ Besonders bei verborgenen Texten ist die Vorstellung des eigenen, selbstwirkenden Seins des ‘geschriebenen Namens’ deutlich zu erkennen, der seinen Zweck—die Wesensbewahrung des Individuums—auch ohne eine Leserschaft erfüllte und so, dem Zugriff durch unbefugte Hände und Blicke effektiv entzogen, sogar besonders machtvoll walten konnte” (Radner, *Die Macht des Namens*, 130).

<sup>35</sup> See above, pages 154.

<sup>36</sup> Radner, *Die Macht des Namens*, 22 (see also pp. 114–29): “Der ‘geschriebene Name’ ist in seiner Bedeutung und Anwendung dem repräsentativen Bild eng verwandt und wird häufig im Verbund mit diesem verwendet, um die Präsenz des Individuums zu sichern.”

the name of El in battle. A related inscription is that of the Ugaritic KTU 1.16.6.54–57, in which King Kirta curses his son Yassubu, declaring:

<i>yṭbr ḥrn ybn</i>	May Horanu break, my son,
<i>yṭbr ḥrn r’išk</i>	May Horanu break your head,
<i>ṭtrt šm b’l qdqdk</i>	‘Athtartu-Name-of-Ba’lu your skull <sup>37</sup>

The same epithet is restored in a fragmentary portion of the Baal Cycle (KTU 1.2.1.7–8), and even makes an appearance in the fifth-century BCE Eshmunazor inscription (KAI 14.18). These texts seem to objectify and weaponize the divine name. Theodore J. Lewis notes that several scholars understand ‘Athtartu to be functioning in the role of “hypostatic” extension of Baal, but he finds additional interpretive clues in some rhetoric from ancient Egypt.<sup>38</sup> In a relief from the fourteenth-century BCE Egyptian Thutmose IV, the name of the pharaoh is represented with a fighting cartouche that goes into battle on behalf of the pharaoh. In a twelfth-century BCE inscription from Medinet Habu, Ramses III declares, “When they (the Sea Peoples) mention my name in their land, may it consume them, while I sit on the throne of Harakhte.” These texts seem to suggest the weaponization of the name, which leads Lewis to the conclusion that ‘Athtartu is not simply an extension of Baal’s agency, but an independent agent incantationally wielding the name of Baal as a weapon. He concludes, “Certain specific words when correctly wielded by the right persons—an exorcist priest or a goddess such as ‘Athtartu—were though by the ancients to contain effectual power.”<sup>39</sup> Lewis even points to several passages from the Hebrew Bible that could be read to weaponize the name of YHWH, such as 1 Samuel 17:45, Isaiah 41:25, and Psalm 118:10–11.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The translation is from Theodore J. Lewis, “‘Athtartu’s Incantations and the Use of Divine Names as Weapons,” *JNES* 70.2 (2011): 207–27.

<sup>38</sup> See Lewis, “‘Athtartu’s Incantations and the Use of Divine Names as Weapons,” 208–09, and note 11. Both of the following quotations are taken from page 219 of Lewis’ article.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, “‘Athtartu’s Incantations and the Use of Divine Names as Weapons,” 227.

<sup>40</sup> These readings largely rely on reading the *beth* in the construction  $\text{נש}$  as instrumental.

Divine names could also function similarly to personal names in their memorialization and reification of agency. Cultic spaces are commonly referred to in the biblical literature as places where the deity’s name was invoked, remembered, or placed. YHWH directs Moses to build an altar of earth in כל־המקום אשר אזכיר את־שמי, “every place where I make my name known,” so that YHWH may come and bless him. D and Dtr make oblique reference to the Jerusalem temple as the place YHWH chose לשכן שמו, “to place his name” (Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2).<sup>41</sup> This formula represents an expansion on the earlier “short centralization formula” found in Deuteronomy 12:14: במקום אשר־יבחר יהוה באחד שבטיך שם, “the place that YHWH will choose among one of your tribes.” There is a distinction between this usage and that of Psalm 76 and other texts, however. Deuteronomy 4:36 and 5:24 rather explicitly locate the deity in heaven, and not in their temple. There seems to be a renegotiation of the sense in which the שם presences the deity. The recognition of this compartmentalization of the loci of divine agency and identity, and attempts to make sense of it, have given rise to a concept conventionally called “Name Theology.” This is a theory classically promulgated in 1947 by Gerhard von Rad<sup>42</sup> that holds that D and Dtr significantly altered (or “corrected”) the conceptualization of divine presence by removing the divine presence from the temple and locating it in the heavens, leaving only the deity’s name to inhabit the temple as a hypostasis of sorts. This is thought to be reflected in the construction לשכן שמו, which is understood according to this theory to mean “to cause his name to dwell.” This reading is supported by the later Dtr phrase לבנות בית לשם, “to build a house for the name” (2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 5:3, 5; 8:16, 17).

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<sup>41</sup> Following Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: 1<sup>c</sup>šakkēn š<sup>c</sup>mô šām in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); Sandra L. Richter, “The Place of the Name in Deuteronomy,” *VT* 57 (2007): 342–66. Richter shows the Deuteronomistic name theology adapted the Akkadian phrase *šuma šakānu*, “the place a name” (pp. 127–205). (In Deuteronomy 12:21 and 14:24, the Hebrew is לשום שם, “to place his name there.”) Cf., however, William Morrow, “‘To Set the Name’ in the Deuteronomistic Centralization Formula: A Case of Cultural Hybridity,” *JSS* 55.2 (2010): 365–83. On the relationship of the passage in Exodus 23 to the Deuteronomistic literature, see Hans Ausloos, “The ‘Angel of YHWH’ in Exod. xxiii 20–33 and Judg. ii 1–5. A Clue to the ‘Deuteronom(ist)ic’ Puzzle?” *VT* 58.1 (2008): 1–12.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1947). Cf. Benno Jacob, *In Namen Gottes: eine sprachliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Alten und Neuen Testament* (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1903), on which Richter builds to argue against von Rad’s theory.

A variety of positions regarding “Name Theology” have been developed since Von Rad’s initial formulation.<sup>43</sup> Some have turned to comparative philology to gain better interpretive purchase on the constructions involved, pointing to the Amarna Letters and the broader Akkadian corpora as evidence that the intended sense was not “to cause his name to dwell,” but “to put/place his name.” This was most commonly achieved through the erection of stelae or inscriptions or the depositing of other media that could bear the royal or divine name.<sup>44</sup> These media were ubiquitous in ancient Southwest Asia. William M. Schniedewind explains,

Everywhere a king places his name, he claims exclusive ownership. Kings, in particular, put their names on monuments, stelae, and border inscriptions to claim exclusive ownership of things. It is not a coincidence that Semitic royal inscriptions often begin with the expression, ‘I am X, son of Y, king of Z.’ The king puts his name in a place and thereby claims ownership and exclusive dominion.<sup>45</sup>

Now, Schniedewind here does not consider Seth Sanders’ argument that royal self-identification in inscriptions appears to have developed as a “ventriloquizing” presencing of the king,<sup>46</sup> but he does suggest that Second Temple biblical texts that address this theme appear to reflect a “hypostatization of the Tetragrammaton.”<sup>47</sup> Other scholars suggest the “put/place his name” reading supports the continuation of much earlier conceptualizations of name and presence,<sup>48</sup> or have argued for the relevance of the Akkadian antecedent without denying that

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<sup>43</sup> For a review of this scholarship, see Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 26–36.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Jeffrey H. Tigay, “‘To Place His Name There’: Deuteronomy’s Concept of God Placing His Name in the Temple,” in *Now It Happened in Those Days”: Studies in Biblical Assyrian, and Other Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Mordechai Cogan on His 75th Birthday. Volume 1*, ed. Amitai Baruchi-Unna et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 17–26, who argues that there was likely an inscription of some kind bearing the divine name in the sanctuary.

<sup>45</sup> William M. Schniedewind, “Calling God names: an inner-biblical approach to the Tetragrammaton,” in *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination. Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, ed. Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76.

<sup>46</sup> See above, pages 86–87, note 179. This will also be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>47</sup> Schniedewind, “Calling God names,” 78. He elaborates: “Strikingly, the very symbol of God’s presence in the temple, namely the ark of the covenant, was absent from the Second Temple; however, the divine name serves in its stead as the symbol of God’s physical presence in the Jerusalem temple” (p. 79).

<sup>48</sup> For instance, Roland de Vaux, “Le lieu que Yahvé a choisi pour y établir son nom,” in *Das ferne und nahe Wort, Festschrift Leonhard Rost zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 30. November 1966 gewidmet*, ed. Fritz Mass (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967), 219–28.

D and Dtr are overturning existing conceptualizations of that presencing.<sup>49</sup> Still others have continued to defend both the “dwell” reading and Dtr’s reformation of the divine presence.<sup>50</sup> Some see no reformation taking place, but just a nuancing of the same concept of divine presence found elsewhere.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the many stelai that were in use around Israel and Judah that did have or could have had inscribed or painted divine names, votives and other offerings set within sacred precincts could also include the names of human persons seeking favor through the presence of their names before the deities. Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme interrogates second-century BCE Aramaic votive inscriptions from Mount Gerizim that include the petition, “Remembered be PN before DN.”<sup>52</sup> According to Gudme, the goal of including the personal name would be to catalyze the invocation of the names by visitors and passers-by, thereby ensuring the deity’s remembrance of the individual. I would suggest this and other conventions that link one’s name to their presence and interests undermine the argument for the secularization of the name.

The most salient approach to “Name Theology” for this subsection is, of course, that of Sommer, who firmly sides with the reformative reading. He concludes that,

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<sup>49</sup> McBride, “The Deuteronomistic Name Theology.” See also Hundley, “To Be or Not to Be,” 542, citing John Van Seters, “Review of *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*,” *JAOS* 123.4 (2003): 871–72. I would agree with Hundley that Richter’s argument regarding semantic content may not be off-target, but that does not necessarily preclude presencing. Even the use of the formula in the Akkadian literature could have a presencing dimension. William W. Hallo, for instance, insists the inscription of one’s name functioned “to proclaim one’s ownership of, or presence in, the inscribed object or place” (William W. Hallo, “The Royal Inscriptions of Ur: A Typology,” *HUCA* 33 [1962]: 6 [quoted in Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 131]). A good critique of Hallo and Richter is Morrow, “‘To Set the Name,’” 365–83, who concludes, “common to all of these interpretations surveyed is the inference that YHWH sets his name in the place he chooses in order to promote his divine presence and his claims to sovereignty” (p. 381). Morrow posits that the “Assyrianism” of the specific form of the phrase is a product of “hybridity” or “colonial mimicry”: “In the very act of mimicking the dominating culture’s linguistic forms, there is an effort to make an ideological expression that serves the interests of the colonized, not the colonizer” (p. 382).

<sup>50</sup> For instance, Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 41–46, 56–59.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, J. Gordon McConville, “God’s ‘Name’ and God’s ‘Glory,’” *TB* 30 (1979): 149–63; Ian Wilson, *Out of the Midst of Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995); Knafl, *Forming God*, 99–109, 184–87.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, *Before the God in this Place for Good Remembrance: A Comparative Analysis of the Aramaic Votive Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

According to the deuteronomic Name theology, then, the *shem* is not God, it is not a part of God, and it is not an extension of God. The *shem* is merely a name in the sense that Western thinkers regard names: a symbol, a verbal indicator that points toward something outside itself. . . . the deuteronomists used the term *shem* not to endorse or even modify its more common theological use but to deflate it.<sup>53</sup>

Sommer cites S. Dean McBride’s “nominalism realism” framework as “one of the most thorough and sensitive discussions of this topic,”<sup>54</sup> but goes further than McBride in entirely denying any presencing function of the  $\text{ַשׁ}$ . For Sommer, the  $\text{ַשׁ}$  is completely secularized, which stands in stark contrast to its pre-D use, and thus supports his position regarding D and Dtr’s rejection of the fluidity model:

As Deuteronomy 26.2 reminds us, it is the *shem* that is located there. Unlike Psalm 76, Deuteronomy 26 does not put God and the *shem* in the same place or allow them to overlap. In short, the author of Deuteronomy has put the *shem* where others thought God Himself to be.<sup>55</sup>

Concern can be raised with the conclusions Sommer draws from the differences between earlier usage of the  $\text{ַשׁ}$  and those of D and Dtr. As the interrogation in Chapters 3 demonstrated, loci of agency were not necessarily identified or coterminous with loci of identity, and particularly for unnatural unseen agents (like deities) whose partibility was bound only by the limits of imagination and the dynamics of counter-intuitiveness. For Sommer, the deity’s body and self are the only vehicles of their presence, but just as the self could be parted from the body, other vehicles of agency could be parted from the body and the self.<sup>56</sup> The location of

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<sup>53</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 65–66.

<sup>54</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 65. Sommer cites Richter’s criticisms of the notion of “nominal realism,” which is the framework McBride uses to develop his notion of divine presencing via the name (p. 190, n. 101), and levels a more lengthy critique at her work (based primarily on McBride’s arguments) on pages 218–219, note 47.

<sup>55</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> Sommer briefly considers the notion of the presencing of the name in relation to the Amarna Letters, which refer to the placement of the name of the Egyptian Pharaoh in Jerusalem. Sommer asserts, “The phrase *šakan šumšu* (precisely cognate to the Hebrew  $\text{לשכן את שמו}$ ) does not mean that Abdi-Heba thought that Pharaoh was physically present in Jerusalem; rather, Abdi-Heba acknowledges Pharaoh’s claim over the city” (Sommer, *The*



the deity’s “self” in the heavens in no way indicates that a known vehicle of divine agency cannot be presencing that agency on earth. That is, after all, one of the primary functions of the partibility and communicability of divine agency. Deuteronomy also appeals in several places to the prototypical language of divine presencing in referring to the temple. Ian Wilson, in his own critique of Name Theology, highlights multiple ways in which Deuteronomy actually strengthens the sense of the divine presence over and against the earlier narratives.<sup>57</sup> For instance, לפני יהוה, “before YHWH,” is used frequently in Deuteronomy in reference to events occurring in the temple,<sup>58</sup> even where it was not used in previous iterations of the narratives.<sup>59</sup> Deuteronomy 4 also introduces innovations on the nature of vehicles for divine agency, describing YHWH as present in the heavens but manifesting their voice on earth through the divine media appropriated from earlier traditions.

Deuteronomy 4:12

וידבר יהוה אליכם מתוך האש קול דברים אתם שמעים ותמונה אינכם ראים זולתי קול

And YHWH spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You all heard the sound of words, but you saw no form; there was only a voice.

Deuteronomy 4:15–16

15 ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם כי לא ראיתם כל־תמונה ביום דבר יהוה אליכם בחרב מתוך האש 16 פן־תשחתון ועשיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל־סמל תבנית זכר או נקבה

15 Since you saw no form at all in the day YHWH spoke to you on Horeb from the midst of the fire, watch yourselves very closely, 16 lest you corrupt yourselves by making a graven image for yourselves in the form of some figure—a male or female likeness . . .

Deuteronomy 4:36

מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשְׁמִיעַךְ אֶת־קוֹלוֹ לְיִסְרֹךְ וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ הִרְאָךְ אֶת־אֲשׁוֹ הַגְּדוֹלָה וּדְבָרָיו שָׁמַעְתָּ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ

From the heavens he caused you to hear his voice in order to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and his word you heard from the midst of the fire.

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*Bodies of God*, 66). This constitutes a bit of a straw man, though, as the partibility and presencing capabilities of deities were considerably more dynamic than those of human beings, and the שם was being implanted within a literary tradition that already had an active tradition of divine presencing.

<sup>57</sup> See Wilson, *Out of the Midst of Fire*, 152–59, 192–97; Knafl, *Forming God*, 99–109, 184–87.

<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, Deuteronomy 12:7, 12, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20; 16:11, 16; 18:7; 26:5, 10, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Hundley, “To Be or Not to Be,” 537–40.

The fire still clearly facilitates the presencing of YHWH’s voice, but the primary locus of the deity’s identity is decoupled and explicitly located in the heavens.<sup>60</sup> This passage still employs the notion of communicable divine agency; it simply distinguishes the vehicle for it from the deity’s identity in the service of the authors/editors’ rhetorical goals.

The framework of divine agency formulated in this thesis thus undermines the primary contention of “Name Theology,” namely that D and Dtr employed the concept of the name’s installation in the temple precisely to deny the deity’s presencing therein. Rather, these authors maintained the presencing function of the temple while insulating the deity’s “self” from the risks associated with traditional hosts for the vehicles of divine identity. The identification of the  $\text{אש}$  as the salient locus of divine agency also likely served these authors’ structuring of power and of authoritative knowledge, isolating the temple as the only appropriate host for this primarily textual vehicle of divine agency over which they had unique purview. That is, until the interpolation of the messenger.

### *Implications*

Names were conceptualized as powerful agents in ancient Southwest Asia, and Iron Age Israel and Judah were active participants in the socio-material conventions associated with that conceptualization. Scholars have sometimes appealed to the notion that inscriptions on stelae or other monuments served solely memorializing, commemorative, or authoritative functions, but in a socio-material ecology where memory could perpetuate the afterlife of the deceased (for example, through invocation), and reify the presence of human or divine agency (for example, through ventriloquization), we cannot simply consider the issue resolved. The socio-material functions of names in glyptic and literary texts were much more complex than is

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<sup>60</sup> We might ask if we are also to understand that the very voice of the deity, coming out of the fire in the temple, “is not a part of God, and . . . is not an extension of God”? See page 407 and note 53 above.

generally allowed by the retrojection of twenty-first century CE reflective rationalizations. The significance of those functions to the changing means of presencing deity as well as to the development and authority of the biblical corpora will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

The messenger of YHWH began with the appropriation of a figure from the fourth tier of the conventional hierarchy of divinity for purposes of rhetorical prophylaxis—likely on the part of redactors who sought to obscure the deity’s direct physical interactions with humanity—but ultimately overlapped conceptually with expectations regarding divine agency and its communicability, giving rise to a new and dynamic literary framework for divine presencing. This was a textual solution to a textual problem that laid the conceptual groundwork for the elaboration of a new rhetorically flexible divine agent. I have argued that the messenger of YHWH’s presencing of the divine identity was reflectively rationalized in Exodus 23:20–21 via the indwelling of the  $\text{מַשְׁכָּל}$ , a traditional vehicle for divine agency that would also be employed by D/Dtr to serve their own rhetorical ends regarding the divine presence. By virtue of possessing the divine name, the messenger may not only be referred to by YHWH’s own name—thus the first-, second-, and third-person references in the interpolated passages to the messenger as YHWH—but they may also exercise YHWH’s own power and authority. In this sense, both the identity theory and the representation theory approximate some of the rhetorical goals of the messenger’s function, but are off-target regarding the governing conceptual framework. The ambiguity theory also likely accounts at least in part for the rhetorical salience of the messenger, as an additional layer of ambiguity was no doubt helpful for those authorities who were concerned to keep the community from getting too firm a grasp itself on the nature of deity, or too comfortable with the deity’s immanence. The utility of that ambiguity also

likely contributed to the survival of the discordant texts that seemed to conflate the identity of the messenger with the identity of YHWH. There would have been no compelling need to resolve a tension that served the interests of those authorities.

## CHAPTER 8

# YHWH’s Divine Agents: Text

## Introduction

One final and perhaps unexpected means of materially encountering deity in ancient Israel and Judah that grew out of the rhetorical machinations of cultic authorities is that of text, and particularly the text of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> The materiality of text has already been emphasized several times in this thesis for methodological purposes, but that materiality also facilitated important socio-material roles for texts in Israel and Judah. This chapter will interrogate two broad categories of texts that could function as presencing media for deity in general, and for YHWH more specifically. The first section will look at amulets, inscriptions, and other “magical” texts, and the second will interrogate the Torah. These are not the only two categories of presencing texts, however. The ritual in Numbers 5:11–31, for instance, is an example from the reflective tradition of ancient Israel and Judah of the capacity for written text to transmit unseen agency. Part of the prescribed process includes writing out the priest’s curse and then wiping the ink of

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<sup>1</sup> See Francesca Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading: Materialism, Materiality, and Biblical Cults of Writing,” in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Paul M. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 223–42; Watts, “From Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll,” 21–34.

the text off either with or into the water that had been prepared with dust from the floor of the sacred space. This seems to imbue the water with the words of the curse, which, while already materialized in their pronunciation, took on a more durative and manipulable state when written out. When mixed with water and drunk, the curse is interiorized, physically and conceptually, by the drinker. This passage clearly indicates the artifactual nature of text, as well as the perception that, when properly produced in the appropriate circumstances and environments, cultic text can transmit the agency necessary to reify the events or states prescribed by the text.

The necessity of embeddedness within the appropriate environment should be emphasized here. Prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the temple and other cultic structures, including city gates and other significant locations, delineated sacred space and provided an environment dedicated to acts associated with the divine and its agency. That space could be controlled so that socio-material cues and ritualistic acts facilitated the desired encounter with divine agency, but in the absence of spatially delineated cultic sites, textual means of presencing the divine could face the challenge of enacting the appropriate cognitive ecology. This challenge could be overcome by embedding the engagement with the text in narrative, in ritual (such as recitation), in a closed-off space, or in some combination of the three. In this way, conventionalized means of reifying boundaries between mundane cognitive acts and the presencing media could provide that sense of separation and facilitate the desired cognitive effects.

### Amulets and ‘Magical’ Texts

Among the earliest material witnesses to “magical” texts among YHWH-worshippers is the eighth-century BCE Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>2</sup> Like other presencing texts, the function of this inscription must be interrogated in connection with the

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<sup>2</sup> See above, pages 157–58, note 248.

socio-material ecology in which it was situated, which includes its location within a darkened tomb and the funerary and mortuary rites associated with it. Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak describe this and related inscriptions as “bound to the protection of the dead, and burial and funerary ritual enacted by the living kin. These inscriptions also communicated a warning to unseen malevolent forces, such as ghosts, demons, or potential intruders seeking to loot the tomb.”<sup>3</sup> Such inscriptions frequently occur with pictorial reliefs—the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, for instance, surrounds an impression of a downward-facing hand—which suggests the fuzzy boundaries separating the semiotic and performative function of picture and text.<sup>4</sup> Both frequently combined in these inscriptions to invoke the agency of the deities whose names the inscription materialized in order to (hopefully) ward off the influence of malevolent forces operating among the living or the dead. Touching or tracing these words seem to have been just as salient a means of engagement as reading, and repetition of divine names may have been a way to amplify their power. Even many of those who could not read were likely able to recognize a small number of words, and particularly names, even if only from the pattern they visually formed and not from the arrangement of phonemes signaled by the characters. A standardized way to write a divine name could be recognizable to literate and illiterate alike, in a sense functioning for both as a divine image in and of itself.<sup>5</sup>

The commonality of inscriptions like these was likely due to the ubiquitous perception of the pervasiveness of unseen agents and agency in the surrounding world, as well as the notion that those agents and agencies could be employed, controlled, or at least kept at a distance through the recitation and/or inscription of their names.<sup>6</sup> Another medium for influencing this

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<sup>3</sup> Mandell and Smoak, “Reading and Writing in the Dark at Khirbet el-Qom,” 190.

<sup>4</sup> See above, page 402 and note 36.

<sup>5</sup> William M. Schniedewind has argued that by the time of the second temple, “the name of God became a hypostasis of Yahweh himself” (William M. Schniedewind, “The Evolution of Name Theology,” in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers [London: T&T Clark, 2003], 228). Writing the name could therefore constitute creating a divine image, and for some became taboo.

<sup>6</sup> Note John G. Gager’s comments prefacing his discussion of the use of curse tablets and binding spells: “The role of images and figures as mediators of power brings us finally to the names of deities and other spiritual

agency was inscribed amulets, which have been described as “the most pervasive of magical tools in antiquity.”<sup>7</sup> Yehuda B. Cohn has traced the apotropaic use of written amulets back to eighth-century-BCE Egypt, at the latest, from where it soon spread out to Greek, Phoenician, Mesopotamian, and other societies.<sup>8</sup> Cohn favorably cites John G. Gager’s rhetorical flourish regarding the ubiquity of amulets that, “given the conventional cognitive map of that world, it would have been foolish and unreasonable to behave otherwise.”<sup>9</sup>

Stamp seals likely represent our earliest and most ubiquitous examples of powerful inscriptions that could operate on a personal level.<sup>10</sup> These were small carved seals intended to create impressions in clay or other materials to mark ownership or to “sign” a transaction or contract. Most stamp seals had primarily administrative or legal functions, but there were also personal seals that in many cases could be more accurately described as “seal amulets.”<sup>11</sup> Frequently inscribed with the names or symbols of deities, and likely worn on rings or threaded on necklaces, seal amulets could have been understood as perpetual invocations of divine

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entities on *defixiones*. In discussing these names, it is essential to keep in mind three fundamental characteristics of the ‘spiritual universe’ of ancient Mediterranean culture: first, the cosmos literally teemed, at every level and in every location, with supernatural beings; second, although ancient theoreticians sometimes tried to sort these beings into clear and distinct categories, most people were less certain about where to draw the lines between gods, *daimones*, planets, stars, angels, cherubim, and the like; and third, the spirit or soul of dead persons, especially of those who had died prematurely or by violence, roamed about in a restless and vengeful mood near their buried body” (John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 12).

<sup>7</sup> Yehuda B. Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2008), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 19. Psalm 91 pops up throughout the history of early Judaism and even early Christianity as a text with a clear apotropaic function. It is not unlikely it was inscribed on amulets or other media and brandished as a means of warding off evil. See Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 359–63; Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 94; Brennan Breed, “Reception of the Psalms: The Example of Psalm 91,” in Brown, *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, 298–303.

<sup>9</sup> Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 18, citing Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 220.

<sup>10</sup> Because of their commonality, Keel and Uehlinger suggest, “they can virtually serve as the standard by which religious history is documented, particularly because they are more or less public artifacts and can thus serve as a sensitive seismograph to detect subtle shifts in religious history (Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 10). See also Stefan Münger, “Egyptian Stamp-Seal Amulets and Their Implications for the Chronology of the Early Iron Age,” *TA* 30.1 (2003): 66–82.

<sup>11</sup> See Christoph Uehlinger, “Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals, Iconography and Syro-Palestinian Religions of Iron Age II: Some Afterthoughts and Conclusions,” in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 273–74; Floris Nicolas Vermeulen, “Egyptian Religious Symbols in Judah and Israel from 900 B.C.E. to 587 B.C.E.: A Study of Seal Iconography” (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2010). As Uehlinger notes, “seal-amulet” was coined by Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Staehelin, *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1976).



agency. The use of particularly precious, reflective, or transparent ores for some seals supports the conclusion that they could be seen as appropriate media for conducting divine agency. These were likely used throughout life and were commonly included in grave goods, suggesting their power was thought to extend into the afterlife. In support of this conclusion, some scholars have highlighted a reference to sealing in Song of Songs 8:6, in which the narrator compares herself to a seal amulet that can protect her lover from death:<sup>12</sup>

שימני כחותם על־לבך  
 כחותם על־זרועך  
 כי־עזה כמות אהבה  
 קשה כשאול קנאה

Place me like a seal upon your heart,  
 Like a seal upon your arm  
 For as strong as death is love,  
 As resilient as Sheol is passion.

While anthropomorphic divine imagery is known from the seals of broader ancient Southwest Asia, in Israel and Judah, the preference was for symbols or symbolic animals.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the Egyptian *uraeus* cobra—an apotropaic symbol that became associated with the biblical seraphim and with divinity in general—commonly occurs in Hebrew iconic seals from the eighth century BCE.<sup>14</sup> The sun disk also appears on a number of seals from the end of the eighth century, including on multiple seals bearing the name of the Judahite king Hezekiah.<sup>15</sup> In the seventh century BCE, however, the appearance of Yahwistic theophoric elements on Hebrew seals began to correlate significantly with an *absence* of iconography on

<sup>12</sup> William W. Hallo, “‘As the Seal Upon Thy Heart’: Glyptic Roles in the Biblical World,” *BR* 1 (1985): 20–27; Uehlinger, “Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals, Iconography and Syro-Palestinian Religions of Iron Age II,” 274; Vermeulen, “Egyptian Religious Symbols in Judah and Israel from 900 B.C.E. to 587 B.C.E.,” 9.

<sup>13</sup> Tallay Ornan, “The Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals: A Preference for the Depiction of Mortals,” in Sass and Uehlinger, *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Vermeulen, “Egyptian Religious Symbols in Judah and Israel from 900 B.C.E. to 587 B.C.E.,” 56–57.

<sup>15</sup> Vermeulen, “Egyptian Religious Symbols in Judah and Israel from 900 B.C.E. to 587 B.C.E.,” 64–66.

the same seal.<sup>16</sup> Despite the development of a more programmatic aniconographic tradition, there is still ample evidence for the power of seal inscriptions to presence divine agency. Keel and Uehlinger, for instance, highlight the use of a Greek Ω symbol on seals ranging from Mesopotamia to Judah.<sup>17</sup> The symbol was associated in Old Babylonian iconography with miscarriage, and seals bearing the symbol were commonly included in the graves of children. The symbol may have represented the womb, and its inclusion in Iron Age IIC graves in Judah may reflect the conceptualization of the grave as a womb. Whatever the precise association, scholars believe it was included in order to grant protection to the miscarried child.

Another pre-exilic example of inscribed amulets from ancient Israel and Judah are the Ketef Hinnom scrolls briefly mentioned in Chapter 2.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned there, they likely served apotropaic functions, perhaps both in life and death, but some additional observations may be made about their materiality. First, the scrolls were silver, which we have seen in previous chapters was one of a limited number of substances thought to either originate with the divine or be particularly conducive to transmitting divine agency. That would have made them more effective conduits for the divine agency that would have aided in warding off evil. Unlike the JPFs, however, they were explicitly associated with a specific deity, namely YHWH, whose name was inscribed at least seven times in the silver. This leads to the second observation: the use of the divine name was likely understood as a means of invoking that deity’s specific agency, particularly via the possessor’s vocal recitation of the blessing. Even when not speaking the blessing, however, the inscription of the name in the silver was understood as a means of perpetual invocation.<sup>19</sup> Third, the text on the scrolls appears to have been closely

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<sup>16</sup> Golub, “Aniconism and Theophoric Names in Inscribed Seals from Judah, Israel and Neighbouring Kingdoms,” 157–69. Cf. Vermeulen, “Egyptian Religious Symbols in Judah and Israel from 900 B.C.E. to 587 B.C.E.,” 57–69.

<sup>17</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 24–26.

<sup>18</sup> See pages 157 and note 247. See also Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 49–50.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Jeffrey H. Tigay, “The Priestly Reminder Stones and Ancient Near Eastern Votive Practices,” in *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis and Its Language*, ed. Moshé Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2007), 339–55.

connected with the temple cult, which may indicate the small-scale and private appropriation and relocation of ritual practices prototypically associated with the temple.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the scrolls were rolled up, meaning the text inscribed upon them, including the divine name, was not immediately accessible.<sup>21</sup> The text itself was closed off, separate, and yet, still materially present and available to remind the person (who likely wore them on a chain or string around their neck) of their presence and of the words of the blessing. Jeremy D. Smoak comments,

It did not matter if the words on the amulets were visible to the eye. Their silver scripts touched the wearer’s body and projected the words of the divine blessing into the wearer’s mind. The brilliance of these metal objects was their ability to ‘produce the presence’ of Yahweh’s blessings and protection throughout the day as the body ‘awakened,’ ‘jarred,’ and ‘livened’ their words.<sup>22</sup>

The Ketef Hinnom scrolls are likely to be plotted along the early stages of a trajectory of innovation toward the primary textual—which is not to say immaterial—presencing of deity, an innovation born of circumstance and rhetorical utility, most fully realized in the Achaemenid and Greco-Roman periods. It appropriated for certain texts some of the features of larger-scale divine images known from elsewhere in early Southwest Asia, including the use of precious metals and the incantational employment of the divine name. Several texts from the Hebrew Bible betray similar attempts at appropriation, but instead of being understood as a means of renegotiating the meaning of materialization, they are frequently misunderstood through the Reformation lenses of scripturalization precisely as a means of *dematerialization*.

This is not only a presentistic understanding of textualization, it ignores the constraints of cognition and of mnemohistory. The socio-materially embedded memories of these media and practices are not so easily abandoned, particularly in light of their foundation upon universal

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<sup>20</sup> On this idea, see Smoak, “From Temple to Text,” 1–26.

<sup>21</sup> They were likely too small to easily read, as well. On this, see Jeremy D. Smoak, “Words Unseen: The Power of Hidden Writing,” *BAR* 44.1 (2018): 53–59.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy D. Smoak, “Wearing Divine Words: In Life and Death,” *MR* 15.4 (2019): 445.

principles of intuitive cognition. Scholars frequently posit the “rejection” of this or that fundamental ideology when all that took place was a renegotiation of function. This is the case for Sommer’s discussion—addressed above—of the “rejection of the fluidity model,”<sup>23</sup> which was no rejection at all, but a rhetorical renegotiation. In my opinion, Sommer’s tendentiousness derives from the assumption that innovation in the biblical texts was driven by an attempt on the part of the authors and editors to free themselves from the influence of surrounding cultural matrices. He states the following:

The ancient religious intuitions we found in JE texts and Israelite inscriptions were deeply indebted to the Canaanite and Mesopotamian matrix from which many biblical texts, especially those stemming from priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions, attempt to free themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Later, he asserts the fluidity model was rejected by P and D “because of the dangers it posed,”<sup>25</sup> and specifically related to monotheism. No doubt some of the Hebrew Bible’s innovation was driven by a desire on the part of the authors and editors to react against and to distinguish themselves from the surrounding cultures, but more saliently by a desire to structure power in their favor, whether that meant overturning the conventions of surrounding cultures or of their own. The line distinguishing those two categories is not so easily drawn.

## The Torah

While the significance of the ark of the covenant was renegotiated within the historical narratives of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history, a more significant renegotiation was needed to account for the presencing of the deity in the absence of the ark—the very

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<sup>23</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 58–79.

<sup>24</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 134.

<sup>25</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 138.

footstool of deity—during the Neo-Babylonian and later periods. Texts like Jeremiah 3:16–17 dismiss the significance of the ark and prophetically expand the purview of the temple beyond its physical existence to the point that Jerusalem itself is recast in the role of the ark as the throne of YHWH. Ezekiel 1 and 10 do not mention the ark, but similarly shatter the confines of the physical temple, envisioning a portable cherubim throne on which the deity traveled. Isaiah 66:1 further expands the rhetoric about the deity’s purview, casting the heavens as their throne and the earth as their footstool. While this rhetoric allowed authors to rationalize the loss of the temple while exalting the deity further, there remained a need to be able to focus the ritual/cultic attention of the people and still provide for the presencing of the deity among the people, particularly as the deity became increasingly transcendent. What better way to do this than to replace the ark as the locus of immanent divine presence with the very contents it was said to house: the Torah and the divine name that it bore?

This role for the Torah (and more specifically the discrete lists of the deity’s apodictic and casuistic laws) represents a significant innovation, within Israel and Judah, on the use of text to presence deity. This did not originate here, of course. According to Nathaniel B. Levtow, as far back as the third millennium BCE, “text production was a ritualized activity that embodied divine and human subjects in textual form.”<sup>26</sup> Deuteronomy 27:1–10 helpfully illustrates the way this innovation was implemented in ancient Israel/Judah. This text describes instructions given by Moses and the elders of Israel to erect (קוֹמֵם) large stones, plaster them, and write the words of the Torah (likely an early law code later incorporated into Deuteronomy). They are then to construct an altar of unhewn stones, offer burnt offerings to YHWH, and share a communal meal while rejoicing יהוה אלהיך, לפני יהוה, “before YHWH, your deity.” According to verse 9, this ritual process—which makes no mention of an oral recitation or a requirement to

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<sup>26</sup> Nathaniel B. Levtow, “Text Destruction and Iconoclasm in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,” in May, *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, 311.

read the text<sup>27</sup>—facilitates their becoming the עם יהוה, “people of YHWH.” The features of this ritual act combine conventions of sealing treaties with more traditional acts of communal worship before divine images. The use of the לפני יהוה formula indicates the presence of the deity’s agency, most likely reified by the divinely-given words of the covenant—which included the deity’s first-person speech and numerous iterations of the divine name—being written on the erected stones, which themselves invoke more traditional media for divine presencing. This writing of the text on the stones may thus be thought of as sacralizing or commissioning the object, endowing it with the divine agency previously facilitated by anointing, incantations, and/or other ritual. As noted by Stavrakopoulou, “The narrator appears less concerned with the specifics of the ‘message’ of Torah than with the performance of writing and other rituals. . . . it is the material manifestation of Torah that is of central concern in this passage.”<sup>28</sup>

This passage does not polemicize or prohibit the material presencing of deity so much as constrain the accessible and reproducible media for that presencing. By requiring the imposition of the text of the covenant upon the generic stelai, the Deuteronomists did not invalidate cultic objects, but restricted the production of and access to sanctioned cultic objects to those who were (1) literate and/or (2) could access the text of the Torah.<sup>29</sup> The only such

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<sup>27</sup> It is not until Deuteronomy 31:11 that the Sinai event is reenacted with the reading of the entire law. See also Joshua 8:30–35, which has Joshua writing the law on the stones (apparently of the altar) and then reciting every last word before the Israelites. Cf. Joachim Schaper, “The Living Word Engraved in Stone: The Interrelationship of the Oral and the Written and the Culture of Memory in the Books of Deuteronomy and Joshua,” in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, and Benjamin G. Wold (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9–23.

<sup>28</sup> Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading,” 228.

<sup>29</sup> I use “and/or” to reflect the reality that even those who could not read could recognize some words, and especially those understood widely to be powerful. A person who could not read could conceivably reproduce a crude version of the Torah by copying the shapes, but they would still need some kind of access to it.

Seth Sanders finds that the inclusion of memorial inscriptions on mortuary stelai (and specifically inscriptions that presenced the dead and demanded their feeding) was an innovation of the early Iron Age in the West Semitic world. See Sanders, “Words, things, and death,” 327–49.

groups in this early phase of the Torah’s existence were the elite scribal classes who produced that text under the purview of the cultic authorities.<sup>30</sup>

Another text, Joshua 24:25–27, reflects a similar renegotiation of the relationship of text and cult, but employs the motifs differently:<sup>31</sup>

25 ויכרת יהושע ברית לעם ביום ההוא וישם לו חק ומשפט בשכם 26 ויכתב יהושע את־הדברים האלה בספר תורת אלהים ויקח אבן גדולה ויקימה שם תחת האלה אשר במקדש יהוה 27 ויאמר יהושע אל־כל־העם הנה האבן הזאת תהיה־בנו לעדה כי־היא שמעה את כל־אמרי יהוה אשר דבר עמנו והיתה בכם לעדה פן־תכחשון באלהיכם

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people on that day, and he set up statutes and ordinances for them in Shechem. 26 When Joshua wrote these words in a scroll of the Torah of the deity, he took a large stone and erected it there under the oak which was in the sanctuary of YHWH. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, “Look! This stone will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the sayings of YHWH which they spoke with us, and it will a witness against you if you act deceptively to your deity.”

The words of the deity are here materially manifested on a scroll rather than a stele, but that scroll is immediately backgrounded as a stele is erected to monitor the people’s commitment to the covenant into which they have ritually entered.<sup>32</sup> Again, preexisting conventions of divine presencing are adopted to this textualization of the deity’s words, even as those conventions are renegotiated to fit the new paradigm. The stone does not so much presence the deity here as function as an independent agent, having heard the words of the deity and having witnessed the people’s entry into the covenant. Functionally, the stone acts as a “witness” by reminding viewers of the covenant, but its presence alone is enough to reify a sense of unseen monitoring, whether or not it was identified with a specific unseen agent.

<sup>30</sup> “In robust materialist perspective, socio-religious and economic power is thus held by those who literally and literarily hold Torah—to the exclusion of those who do not and cannot participate in the textuality of the covenant” (Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading,” 234).

<sup>31</sup> On this passage, see Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading,” 229.

<sup>32</sup> As was mentioned above (p. 362), treaties were frequently set before divine images for approval or enforcement, and so while it is not mentioned in the text, there is a possibility the scroll was understood to have been placed at the base of the stele.

Closely linked to the Ketef Hinnom scrolls, however, are the prescriptions outlined in Exodus 13:9, 16 and Deuteronomy 6:6–9; 11:18–21 (widely understood to be Achaemenid period compositions). These passages command the people to recite the words of the covenant to their children, to discuss them at home and abroad, to bind them as a sign upon their hands and as emblems between their eyes,<sup>33</sup> and to write them on their doorposts and gates. Here the text of the law is integrated into practices associated with inscribed amulets. The words of the law themselves have become salient, but still only insofar as they are both oralized and materially present.<sup>34</sup> Stelai were marginalized within the community by this time, but the abstract words independent of their media were not yet authoritative—the need for and the rhetorical utility of the material mediation of the law remained.<sup>35</sup>

There is a sense in which the promiscuous presencing of the words of the deity democratized access that had frequently been restricted in earlier periods—for some, privatizing the temple/cult site experience—but by reframing that presence in terms of the law instead of the deity, the goal also (or rather) appears to be to extend the centralized cult’s reach out into the diaspora and transfer the people’s socio-material focus away from the deity itself and onto their institutional purview: the Torah. As with the passages discussed above, the words of the text itself are not the primary focus, rather it is the material carrier of the text. At the beginning of this trajectory towards the textualization of divine presencing, the text either accompanied or was overlaid upon existing means of materially presencing deity, but the larger and more conspicuous of those means was largely phased out by the Achaemenid period,

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<sup>33</sup> I use “emblems” here to gloss טוטפת. The word is unattested in the Hebrew Bible outside of these verses, but may have indicated some kind of adornment for the head. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, “On the Meaning of *ṭ(ʾ)ṭṭp*,” *JBL* 101.3 (1982): 321–31; Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 38. For a detailed discussion of these passages and their contexts, see Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*, 33–53.

<sup>34</sup> Schaper, “The Living Word Engraved in Stone,” 14–16. Note, the word traditionally translated “meditate” in Joshua 1:8 (הִגִּדָה) means to read in an undertone or to mutter, not to silently ponder.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the development of the authority of text that bears on these passages, see Donald C. Polaski, “What Mean These Stones? Inscriptions, Textuality and Power in Persia and Yehud,” in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 37–48.



leaving the smaller amulets and other adornments that had not fallen victim to priestly proscription to become the sacralized material bearers of the law and, just as significantly (if not more so), the divine name.<sup>36</sup>

The first-person voice of much of the Torah introduces an additional dynamic associated with divine presencing. Early iterations of the Torah are written in the first person—even by YHWH’s own hand—reflecting the deity’s own voice and intuitively conjuring for the reader some concept of the speaker. This was likely in imitation of developing conventions regarding monumental inscriptions.<sup>37</sup> Across multiple publications, Seth Sanders has promulgated the theory that monumental inscriptions not only served to mark property and memorialize socio-materially significant space, but also—by the time first-person narrative began to appear on alphabetic memorial inscriptions—to “ventriloquize” the author. The Mesha Stele represents one of the earliest examples. Sanders explains:

The stela of Mesha is the first known alphabetic inscription to address an audience in the first-person voice of the king. It presents a man who claims, in Moabite, to be the king of Moab. The shift in participants from earlier alphabetic royal inscriptions is decisive. The inscription now designates itself by the speaker, not the object, no longer “(this is) *the stela* which Mesha set up” but “*I am* Mesha, son of Kemoashyat, King of Moab, the Dibonite.” The inscription presents royal power by making the king present in language, ventriloquizing Mesha as if he were standing in front of us.<sup>38</sup>

Sanders refers to this first-person address in alphabetic writing as “an unrecognized landmark

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<sup>36</sup> For some additional discussion about the effacement of the cult and the prioritization of the text (particularly in the Common Era), see Konrad Schmid, “The Canon and the Cult: The Emergence of Book Religion in Ancient Israel and the Gradual Sublimation of the Temple Cult,” *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 289–305.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Hogue has recently argued that Exodus 20 is best understood in light of these conventions. See Timothy Hogue, “The Monumentality of the Sinaitic Decalogue: Reading Exodus 20 in Light of Northwest Semitic Monument-Making Practices,” *JBL* 138.1 (2019): 79–99. As noted by Hogue, the first-person nature of the opening of the Decalogue cued scholars to the relationship with monumental inscriptions as far back as Arno Poebel, *Das appositionell bestimmte Pronomen der 1. Pers. sing. in den westsemitischen Inschriften und im Alten Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 53–57.

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 114. See also Sanders, “Naming the Dead,” 35; Sanders, “When the Personal Became Political,” 72; Seth L. Sanders, “Words, things, and death: The rise of Iron Age literary monuments,” in *Language and Religion*, ed. Robert Yelle, Courtney Handman, and Christopher Lehigh (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 337.

in West Semitic literature.”<sup>39</sup> While he does not consider (much less endorse) a cognitive framework for this “ventriloquizing” phenomenon, it fits quite comfortably into the features of intuitive reasoning regarding the presencing of unseen agents that have been discussed to this point. Not only is the medium for the text intended to stand out from the environment and signal agency, the text, when read or heard, explicitly invokes the agency of the speaker, who speaks as if present.

A closer example for this particular subsection might be the Katumuwa inscription, discussed above in Chapter 2.<sup>40</sup> Here the owner of the stele, whose own image is depicted, declares in the first line,<sup>41</sup>

1 *’nk.ktmw. ’bd.pnmw.zy.qnt.ly.nšb.b.*  
 2 *hyy. . . .*

1 I am Katumuwa, servant of Panamuwa, who created this stele for myself during  
 2 my life. . . .

This first-person speech is intended to presence the agency of the deceased. According to Timothy Hogue, “It was the materialization of Katumuwa’s presence and agency so that he might interact with future users of the monument.”<sup>42</sup> In the absence of a son to erect a mortuary stele for him, Absalom is said in 2 Samuel 18:18 to have erected his own stele, which could have been written in first-person speech. Seth Sanders distinguishes first-person mortuary inscriptions from earlier iterations: “The new inscriptions and monuments actually speak on behalf of the dead and make demands for themselves. They are designed to produce the

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<sup>39</sup> Seth L. Sanders, “Writing and Early Iron Age Israel: Before National Scripts, Beyond Nations and States,” in *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context*, ed. Ron E. Tappy and P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 99.

<sup>40</sup> See above, pages 145–47.

<sup>41</sup> I have followed Timothy Hogue and my own precedent in understanding the verb *qny* to be able to reflect creation in certain contexts. Hogue bases his argument on the conventions of Luwian monumental inscriptions. See Timothy Hogue, “*Abracadabra*, or ‘I Create as I Speak’: A Reanalysis of the First Verb in the Katumuwa Inscription in Light of Northwest Semitic and Hieroglyphic Luwian Parallels,” *BASOR* 381 (2019): 193–202.

<sup>42</sup> Hogue, “*Abracadabra*,” 200.

presence of the dead and demand their feeding.”<sup>43</sup>

Compare such first-person speech to the opening line of the Decalogue: אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים, “I am YHWH, your deity, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.” Whether read or heard, the agency of the deity is essentially made present by the first-person voice of the text. Timothy Hogue explains,

The result is an imagined encounter with the projected speaker implied by the pronoun ‘I.’ This process of deictic projection thus conjures a speaker—reembodying them in the imagination of the audience. The opening line of the Decalogue—‘I am Yahweh’—is not a prosaic statement nor even a mere adaptation of royal monumental rhetoric. This statement actually produces the presence of Yahweh in the minds of the readers and hearers of the text. It is a theophany condensed into a formula.<sup>44</sup>

As the very first words of the law given by YHWH, these would have been the first words written, according to Exodus 31:18, on the tablets of stone provided to Moses. This text also states the deity wrote the words with their own finger, distinguishing the tablets from the golden calf, an unauthorized cult image produced by human hands rather than by deity (cf. Exod 32:15–16; Deut 9:8–21).<sup>45</sup> In this way, the tablets of the Torah evince significant overlap with more traditional media for divine presencing. Humanity’s role in the production of the tablets is also denied through the narrative which asserts their heavenly origins, in line with the authorized cult statues of surrounding cultures.<sup>46</sup> As miniature stelai inscribed with the divine name and the words of Torah, the tablets are functionally identical to the cultic stelai of Deuteronomy 27, able to facilitate worship “before YHWH.” The original tablets (the

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<sup>43</sup> Sanders, “Naming the Dead,” 35. See also Radner, *Die Macht des Namens*, 114–55.

<sup>44</sup> Hogue, “Image, Text, and Ritual,” 11.

<sup>45</sup> Moses goes on to shatter these tablets (Exod 32:19), but Exodus 34:1 has YHWH command Moses to carve two new tablets, on which YHWH would again write the words of the law. According to Exodus 34:28, however, Moses wrote on the tablets.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Dorina Miller Parmenter, “The Bible as Icon: Myths of the Divine Origins of Scripture,” in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 298–309.

narratives alternate between clay tablets or small stelai) were thus created by deity, contained words written by deity itself, and spoke in the first person as the deity, combining multiple conventions of the production of divine images with those of monumental inscriptions to indicate the Torah’s capacity to presence the deity. The later commandments to write the Torah (in whatever iteration) upon or before stelai reflect variations on this same theme: the agency of the deity is appropriately made present in the reading, hearing, or even just the presence of the Torah.<sup>47</sup>

The treatment of the divine name and texts bearing the divine name in later Jewish practice further attests to its conceptualization as a species of presencing medium. The temple had been rebuilt in the late sixth century BCE, but the Torah had become another locus of divine presencing, and legal authorities were in no hurry to relinquish the access to and influence over divine agency their stewardship of the texts afforded them. By the time of the Second Temple period, Yahwistic theophoric elements were appearing less frequently in personal names, likely out of reverence for, and avoidance of the pronunciation of, the Tetragrammaton.<sup>48</sup> In a sense, avoiding writing or pronouncing the divine name in common circumstances evinced a desire not to invoke the deity’s presence in profane contexts.

This reverence for the texts bearing the divine name is demonstrated by practical observances associated with their transcription. For example, some twenty-eight or twenty-nine of the Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts were written in the square Aramaic script, but represented the Tetragrammaton in a paleo-Hebrew script. In many cases, scribes left gaps in the transcription where the divine name was to appear, and more senior scribes would come through later and insert the divine name in the paleo-Hebrew script. That this was not just a

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<sup>47</sup> See Watts, “From Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll,” 21: “the Pentateuch was shaped to lay the basis for Torah scrolls to replace the ark of the covenant as the iconic focus of Israel’s worship.” Cf. Schniedewind, “Calling God names,” 78–79.

<sup>48</sup> See Schniedewind, “Calling God names,” 75: “By the end of the Second Temple period these names will have disappeared completely, corresponding to the increasing reverence for the Tetragrammaton that is evident in the late Second Temple period.”

stylistic consideration, but evidence of special treatment, is indicated by one manuscript, 11QPs<sup>a</sup>, in which twenty-eight words were erased from the transcription, except for the Tetragrammaton.<sup>49</sup> In two instances, cancellation dots appear with the divine name, but none were erased. The goal of offsetting the divine name may have been to protect against accidental erasure,<sup>50</sup> but these scribal practices were not consistent, and the Tetragrammaton frequently occurs in the square script throughout the Qumran corpora. Similarly, while most Septuagint manuscripts substitute for יהוה the Greek word κύριος, “lord,” in some Greek manuscripts from Qumran, such as 4Q120 and 4QpapLXX-Lev<sup>b</sup>, the divine name appears as Ιαω.<sup>51</sup> Prescriptions for handling texts bearing the divine name were still developing.

By the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, an authoritative corpus of literature was taking firmer shape, and Jewish authorities were once again wrestling with accessing divine agency through text and in the absence of temple ritual. The form and function of the Torah and other authoritative texts became a focal point of early rabbinic literature, at which point standardized guidance began to come into clearer focus. The oft-quoted guiding principle from this period was the final clause from opening passage of the Mishnaic tractate, *Pirkei Avot*, which reflects the conceptualization of the Torah as reifying sacred space: ותורה לתורה, “make a fence around the Torah.” In the Mishnah’s *Yadayim* 4:5, biblical texts are not said to “defile the hands” unless and until ובדיו, “they are written

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<sup>49</sup> In another eight manuscripts, the divine name was substituted with four dots, sometimes called the “Tetrapuncta.” See Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 238–45. Cf. Donald W. Parry, “4QSam<sup>a</sup> and the Tetragrammaton,” in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 106–25.

<sup>50</sup> The Talmudic text *Shevuot* 35a, which dates to the fifth century CE at the earliest, explains that while adjectives describing the deity may be erased, terms like אלהים, אלהים, either term with second person singular or plural suffices, אהיה אשר אהיה, שדי, and other divine epithets may not be erased.

<sup>51</sup> See Frank Edward Shaw, “The Earliest Non-Mystical Use of Jewish Ιαω” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2002; Martin Rösel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” *JSOT* 31.4 (2007): 411–28; Hermann Lichtenberger, “The Divine Name in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in New Testament Writings,” in *The Religious Worldviews Reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Fourteenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 28–30 May, 2013*, ed. Ruth A. Clements, Menahem Kister, and Michael Segal (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 140–55.

in the Assyrian script, on parchment, and in ink.”<sup>52</sup> The Talmud lays out further prescriptions regarding the preparation of the parchment from appropriate animal skins, the production of the scrolls themselves (codices were not adequate),<sup>53</sup> and their handling. Marianne Schleicher explains,

Once written, inspected, accepted, and used for ritual purposes, the Torah had to be chanted aloud using a special melody (*bTalmud*, ‘Megillah’ 32a). These artifactual prescriptions for the preparation and transmission of the physical text provided and continue to provide tools within the Rabbinic tradition for projecting a status of holy *axis mundi* onto the Torah scroll. . . . In line with this conception, the Torah is even referred to as God’s temple (*mikdashyah*) in medieval writings.<sup>54</sup>

The sixteenth century legal code, *Shulkhan Arukh*, even requires uttering the following statement out loud before beginning to write a Torah scroll: “I have the intent to write the holy name.” For Schleicher, this indicates that “every Jew writing a scroll had to remind himself of its numinosity and thereby contribute to the maintenance of the status of the Torah as a holy artifact.”<sup>55</sup> These practices have clear conceptual parallels to the preparation and installation of cultic statues.

Disposal of texts bearing the divine name required special care, as well. If the divine name cannot be erased, then it also cannot be simply thrown in the trash. The Talmudic text “Shabbath” 115a states that in the case of a fire, all parts of the Hebrew Bible are to be saved, as well as the *tefillin* (phylacteries) and the *mezuzot*. Other texts and fragments bearing the

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<sup>52</sup> For a brief discussion of the reception of translations of the Hebrew Bible as holy writings, see Willem F. Smelik, “The Rabbinic Reception of Early Bible Translations as Holy Writings and Oral Torah,” *JAB* 1 (1999): 249–72. See also the contributions in Timothy Michael Law and Alison Salvesen, eds., *Greek Scripture and the Rabbis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of the development of the codex as a diagnostic for Christian literature, see Brent Nongbri, *God’s Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 21–46.

<sup>54</sup> Marianne Schleicher, “Accounts of a Dying Scroll: On Jewish Handling of Sacred Texts in Need of Restoration or Disposal,” in *The Death of Sacred Texts: Ritual Disposal and Renovation of Texts in World Religions*, ed. Kristina Myrvold (London: Routledge, 2010), 14.

<sup>55</sup> Schleicher, “Accounts of a Dying Scroll,” 15.

divine name (or 85 coherent letters from the Torah) were known as *shemot* (“names”), and they, too, were required to be reverently disposed of. The method of disposal that became normative was storage in a *genizah* (“storing”), which was a special storeroom in a synagogue or a designated area in a cemetery where worn-out Torah scrolls as well as other heretical or disgraced texts could be held. The use of a cemetery cues one to the texts’ proximity to personhood (they were also sometimes buried with respected deceased persons), and in much the same way that decommissioned stelai are known to have been plastered into walls in Iron Age Israel and Judah, worn-out scrolls have been found plastered into the walls of synagogues.<sup>56</sup> The Torah’s presencing of divine agency is also suggested by its protection of the deceased through the afterlife. A medieval Jewish mystical text called *Sefer haZohar* points to the apotropaic capacities of the Torah (*Sefer haZohar* 1.185a):

When a man’s body is laid in the grave, the Torah keeps guard over it; it goes in front of his soul when it soars upwards, breaking through all barriers until the soul reaches its proper place; and it will stand by the man at the time when he is awakened at the resurrection of the dead, in order to defend him against any accusations.<sup>57</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this treatment of the Torah scroll and other biblical and parabiblical texts facilitated their conceptualization at the periphery of and beyond rabbinical orthodoxy as magical objects.<sup>58</sup> A fascinating tradition related to this conceptualization is that of the *golem*, an artificial clay or mud creature animated by the invocation of divine names.<sup>59</sup> The traditions regarding the activities of golems vary regarding their capacities, purposes, and comportment. Gershon Scholem’s entry in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* describes the *golem* in the following

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<sup>56</sup> Schleicher, “Accounts of a Dying Scroll,” 21.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Schleicher, “Accounts of a Dying Scroll,” 25.

<sup>58</sup> On this, see Shalom Sabar, “Torah and Magic: The Torah Scroll and Its Appurtenances as Magical Objects in Traditional Jewish Culture,” *EJJS* 3.1 (2009): 135–70; cf. Gideon Bohak, “Dangerous Books: The Hekhalot Texts as Physical Objects,” *Henocho* 39.2 (2017): 306–24.

<sup>59</sup> The definitive treatment of this tradition is Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

way:

The golem is a creature, particularly a human being, made in an artificial way by the virtue of a magic art, through the use of holy names. The idea that it is possible to create living beings in this manner is widespread in the magic of many people. Especially well known are the idols and images to which the ancients claimed to have given the power of speech.<sup>60</sup>

While there are indeed several ancient analogues to the notion of animated anthropomorphic statues<sup>61</sup>—many have already been discussed in this thesis—the tradition is largely inspired by the medieval mystical text, *Sefer Yeşirah*, which explores the capacity for special combinations of letters and numbers to reify divine creative powers.<sup>62</sup> More broadly, the tradition hearkens back to the initial creation of humanity in Genesis 2:7 from the dust of the earth. The Talmudic tractate *Sanhedrin* 38b even refers to Adam as a גולם, “golem.” Later Jewish sages would assert their access to similar life-giving power through their knowledge of the Torah. In *Sanhedrin* 65b, for instance, Rabbi Rava is said to create a גברא, “man,” which is sent to Rabbi Zeira, but is unable to speak and is commanded to הדר לעפרך, “return to your dust.”

## Conclusion

By the time of the exile, several rhetorical campaigns appear to have converged in a way that incentivized the prioritization of text as a medium for presencing the deity and their agency. The compartmentalization of presencing media from the primary loci of divine identity, the emphasis on the name as a vehicle for divine agency, the salience of the Torah in the absence of the temple, and the deemphasis of traditional divine images, all trained the focus of cultic

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<sup>60</sup> *EncJud* 7.753.

<sup>61</sup> Some are discussed in Idel, *Golem*, 3–8.

<sup>62</sup> See Idel, *Golem*, 9–26; Tzahi Weiss, *‘Sefer Yeşirah’ and Its Contexts: Other Jewish Voices* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).



## CHAPTER 8 – YHWH’s Divine Agents: Text

elites on the texts. As a material bearer of the divine name, text was in every sense an appropriate medium for the presencing of deity, despite today’s stereotypical focus on the concepts indexed by a text rather than on its materiality. The primary function of text in these periods was more artifactual than literary for the majority of the populations in which they exercised authority, and as time passed and their compositional origins faded into obscurity, they would be reinterpreted as divine in origin, further facilitating their conceptualization as media for presencing the divine.

The fallacious presentism of the dichotomy of “book religion” over and against cultic practice was discussed already in Chapter 1,<sup>63</sup> but one point of this chapter has been to throw into sharp relief the damage that dichotomy can do to our ability to approximate the perspectives of the authors, editors, and consumers of the Hebrew Bible. The prioritization of the law was not a rejection in any sense whatsoever of the material mediation of the divine presence.<sup>64</sup> Rather, it was the very deployment of it. It incorporated, in its earliest strata, the very same cultic media to presence the deity that existed in the earliest days of Israel and Judah’s worship of YHWH, only altering the conventions as far as necessary to accommodate contemporary circumstances and to restrict access to the desired groups. When stelai too fell out of favor, other more personal media were incorporated to facilitate access to the Torah and to thus democratize and personalize the experience that was made available centuries before through corporate temple worship, namely communion with the divine presence.

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<sup>63</sup> See above, pages 50, 63–65.

<sup>64</sup> Stavrakopoulou refers to “the pervasive imaging of Torah as a material entity, rather than solely as abstract ‘teaching’” (Stavrakopoulou, “Materialist Reading,” 228).

# Conclusion

## Summaries and Conclusions

This thesis began with the goal of interrogating conceptualizations of deity and divine agency in the societies that produced the Hebrew Bible, and with a particular focus on conceptualizations of the deity's relationship to their cult images and representatives. There were several questions it sought to address, including the nature of "deity" as a conceptual category, but the most salient question was that of the cult image's identification *with* and distinction *from* the patron deity. Accounting in a generalizable way for this ostensible paradox would illuminate the foundations of the conceptualization of deity and divine agency across several disciplines, societies, and time periods, but up to this point, the scholarly frameworks that have been available and have been employed by scholars treating the question have been constrained by a marked presentism.

In the Introduction, I described the problem and discussed some of the more common solutions that have been offered to this point, as well as what I saw as heuristic stumbling blocks. There has been great progress on certain fronts in recent years, but the scholarship has

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become snagged on the questions of ontology and categorization, and in large part because of how firmly embedded in the related frameworks our contemporary worldviews have become. In Chapter 1, I explained that in order to better approximate the perspectives of the people who occupied the lands in and around first millennium BCE Israel and Judah, I would employ an interdisciplinary approach that included the methodological frameworks of cognitive linguistics and the cognitive science of religion. I chose this approach in order to overcome, as much as possible, the presentism that characterizes much of the contemporary scholarship that addresses these topics. This presentism is manifested most clearly and most detrimentally in the imposition upon the data of sharp dichotomies that primarily serve the interests of methodological efficiency and convenience. The data are much easier to handle when they can be divided up into easily distinguished conceptual boxes. The question of the category of religion represents a salient example of how this concern for methodological convenience and clarity has produced stultifying conventions that serve the structuring of power more than the advancement of our knowledge. I argued that the category of religion holds no heuristic value for the study of the ancient world, and as a result, would not be employed.

The most important contributions these cognitive frameworks made to the goals of this thesis were the identification of trans-historical and trans-cultural patterns of cognition related to the perception of the world around us, the agents within it, as well as to discourse about both. The universal or near-universal nature of these more basic patterns allows scholars to more carefully reconstruct some of the interpretive lenses that influenced different societies' conceptualizations of deity and divine agency, as well as of their relationships to the world around them. Two of these patterns that were particularly influential, discussed in Chapter 1, were (1) dual-process cognition, and (2) intuitive categorization according to prototypes. Understanding the ways these patterns influence our structuring of knowledge allows us to begin to distinguish reflective cognition from undergirding intuitions, and to consider the

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determinative roles of rationalization and decoupling in the production of discourse regarding the divine. To this point, there has been little engagement with the fundamentally reflective and distorting nature of the scholarly end of that discourse, whether related to presentistic assumptions about the nature and function of religion or deity as conceptual categories, about ontology as a relevant framework, or about the fallacy of dictionary semantics when it comes to delineating the objects of our study. At the most basic levels of understanding that Thorkild Jacobsen wanted to plumb—“the very fundamentals of ancient thought”—the structuring of knowledge is not primarily a question of conscious and systematic beliefs about “being” and “non-being,” but of the intuitive perception of material relationships in the world around us and the influence of those perceptions on reflective discourse.

Chapter 2 interrogated the ways these intuitions combine with cognitive ecologies to produce both consistency and variability in conceptualizations of agency and personhood that are known from contemporary and ancient societies. The chapter found that trans-historical and trans-cultural consistencies in the human experience result in some shared frameworks in the symbolic structuring of ourselves and the world around us. We tend to identify a “self” that is located internal to the body, which is itself consistently conceptualized as a container of some kind. The person is not binary, though; we also tend to associate different regions or parts of the body with different loci of cognition, emotion, identity, and animation, with the salience of a relational understanding of the person contributing to different degrees of partibility and permeability for the self and the different loci of agency. Partibility takes on particular significance after death, since the intuitive perception that certain socially determined loci of the deceased’s identity or agency continue to exist dovetails with our cognitive predisposition towards heightened sensitivity to the presence of agency in the world around us. On the intuitive level, the material world is potentially teeming with unseen agents and agency, including that of deceased kin.

## Conclusion

Chapter 3 began the application of the theoretical frameworks formulated in the previous two to the question of deity and divine agency. The first section discussed theories regarding the role of these relationships and circumstances in the development, transmission, and socio-material propagation of concepts of deity. I proposed that deceased kin represent the most likely intuitive foundations for the development of concepts of socially concerned deities. While intuitions about agency and the deceased were a catalyst for these concepts and discourse about them, they could not survive long or be productively elaborated upon without socio-material anchoring. This anchoring externalized these concepts and contributed to cognitive ratcheting, which obviated the need to reinvent the concept with each iteration, allowing cognitive effort to be reallocated to further elaboration and innovation, leading to more complex and durative deity concepts, as well as to more complex narratives about them and relationships between them. Through socio-material media, deity concepts built upon and remained anchored to the conceptualization of the person. They are not “wholly other,” but fundamentally linked to humanity and to its material relationships.

Exploiting our sensitivity to the presence of agency, these material media also functioned to presence the agency and identity of these deities. Theoretically, since deities were unseen agents without observable bodies, they would have enjoyed few restrictions on the expansion and elaboration of their power and immanence, and so, as noted above, the entire material world would have been potentially inhabitable by loci of divine agency. Within historically situated societies, however, markets, socio-material affordances, and concerns for structuring power constrained and canalized reflective knowledge about the various ways and degrees to which deities could be presenced, resulting in presencing media that varied within and across societies and time.

Two prosocial functions arising from this socio-material presencing that further facilitated the transmission and perseverance of deity concepts were social monitoring and ritual, both of

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which allowed for credibility enhancing displays, for boundary maintenance, and for an increased sense of divine oversight. To the degree the deities fulfilled these roles, they increased the fitness of the social group and persevered as salient divine patrons. In larger and more socially complex societies, authority structures tended to exercise more influence on these functions, and in many such societies, they were no doubt reflectively manipulated in the interests of structuring power and values to serve the interests of those authorities. For this reason, while a divine agent may not necessarily be “secondary” on a theoretical level, in practice, and particularly within the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible, authorities were incentivized to constrain, control, and even reject the presencing potentiality of cultic media, resulting in a broad spectrum of presencing functions.

The second section of Chapter 3 employed the insights from the first regarding the partibility and communicability of divine agency as a framework for examining more common means of socio-materially encountering deity in ancient Southwest Asia. The primary events from beyond Israel and Judah that were interrogated were the enlivening rituals for cultic statues from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia, which rather explicitly call upon deities to inhabit statues made from prescribed materials and prepared according to prescribed processes. While no texts describing such ritual preparation of cultic objects are known from the much smaller “secondary states” of Iron Age Israel or Judah, their less affluent circumstances were not particularly conducive to them. These societies, however, made common use of artifacts that paralleled, on a smaller and more constrained scale, the socio-material roles played by those divinely inhabited statues, including stelai, Judean Pillar Figurines, model shrines, the ark of the covenant, and perhaps even the enigmatic *asherim*. These entities were made from materials understood to be divine in origin or to be particularly conducive to divinity, and appear to have been understood to presence divine agency in different ways and to different degrees.

## Conclusion

The chapter's third section proposed a reconstruction of the development of concepts of deity and divine agency within Iron Age Israel and Judah, focusing on the prosocial nature of the patronage of the high deity El, the shift to the patronage of the storm-deity YHWH, and the conflation of their originally independent divine profiles. The section suggested El was the original patron of a collective of smaller societies that confederated in the interests of mutual defense and expansion. The high deity was unlikely to have been the patron deity of any of the constituent members of the multiplicity collective, and may have been chosen precisely to avoid granting any of those members or their cult sites privileged status.<sup>1</sup> This collective could not long be held together by El's patronage alone, however, and in the tenth century BCE, a king appears to have acceded from one of the members of the collective, likely bringing their patron deity, YHWH, with them. At this point or shortly after, a campaign of conflation of the two deities began, helped along by circumstances and by features of the El- and Baal-type divine profiles of El and YHWH that were conducive to combination. The resulting hybrid profile would achieve a high degree of prosocial functionality and flexibility that contributed to its survival through the vicissitudes of internal rupture, oppression, and even exile. Around the time of this conflation, a smaller kingdom to the south was established with the same divine patron, perhaps by the members of a society that tried and failed to acquire the Israelite throne. Kingship seems to have been a more salient framework of identity for the burgeoning "House of David," later known as Judah. Chapter 3 ended with a brief discussion of the salience of prosocial monitoring to the deity's divine profile, particularly as represented in the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> A contemporary parallel to this might be the jostling of the thirteen British colonies on the American continent as they struggled to determine whether they would remain independent states or merge into a single nation. The victory of the latter ideal was largely a product of the need for a strong central authority to be able to hold the states together. The decision about the location of the nation's capitol was a contentious debate that would obviously privilege nearby locales over and against those farther away.

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Chapter 4 interrogated the conceptualization of generic deity in the Hebrew Bible and related inscriptions, leveraging the insights of cognitive linguistics in order to sidestep the tendentiousness that attends much of the scholarship addressing this question. Broadly speaking, it pivoted the focus away from arbitrarily identified conceptual boundaries and towards the prototypical features of the category, which were far more salient to its development, transmission, and conceptualization. The chapter began with a brief review of the Hebrew Bible's terminology for deity, unpacking some of the nuances of its usage and proposing that any entity to which that terminology was applied must be at least preliminarily considered a member of the category of deity. I then proposed a conceptual base for deity—namely [UNSEEN AGENT]—and a number of conceptual domains and profiles that helped fill out the broader profiles of deity, contributed to their socio-material salience and utility, and ultimately increased their prosociality and success as divine patrons.

I used two passages from the Hebrew Bible as brief case studies for schematizing the conceptualizations of deity those passages may have evoked for informed readers in the periods of their original consumption. The chapter did not entirely abandon discussion of boundaries, though; it interrogated prototype effects related to deity and the fuzzy and shifting boundaries of the category, which emerged situationally according to rhetorical exigency. The conceptualization of deity could include humans, cultic objects, and even celestial objects. As Neo-Babylonian- and Achaemenid-period authors became more and more committed to delineating the boundaries of Israelite/Judahite identity and to emphasizing fidelity to YHWH alone as essential to it, those fuzzy boundaries tightened around YHWH. While the rhetoric of incomparability became critical to the identity politics of authors like Deutero-Isaiah, however, they nowhere formulated or asserted the sharp dichotomies that are often assumed by those committed to the notion that the moral and theological pinnacle of the Hebrew Bible was the formulation of a clear and committed philosophical monotheism. Much like “religion,”



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monotheism is a modern conceptual category that simply did not exist during the periods of the Hebrew Bible's composition and constitution. Its imposition on the text provides no real analytical value.

Chapter 5 then applied the frameworks associated with the generic conceptualization of deity to YHWH to demonstrate the latter's conceptual origins within that conceptual domain. Even the more unique aspects of the Yahwistic divine profile represent elaborations on more generic domains and profiles, and are not unprecedented and revolutionary deity concepts descended *ex nihilo* from the heavens. While there is a dearth of artifacts that are explicitly identified as Yahwistic cultic images, this is not particularly unexpected for the time and place, nor indicative of a programmatic aniconism. There are also some few artifacts, such as the stele at Arad, that we can comfortably conclude were material media for the presencing of YHWH. The chapter next showed ways that YHWH's representation in the biblical texts evoked the same sixteen conceptual domains and the same fifteen conceptual profiles as were identified for the generic concept of deity (with an additional YHWH profile). I also discussed ways the authors altered those domains and profiles in the service of their rhetorical needs. The final section of Chapter 5 discussed the divine profiles of YHWH and El and used conceptual blend theory to examine the ways the nature of those profiles could have helped facilitate their conflation and maximize the prosocial utility of the resulting hybrid divine profile.

In Chapters 6 through 8, I turned to the main vehicles of YHWH's divine agency in the Hebrew Bible and to their elaboration in the late-Assyrian, the Neo-Babylonian, and the Achaemenid periods. I addressed theories about changes to the conceptualization of these entities throughout, and particularly those theories regarding an abandonment of prior concepts of divine presencing. I began with the ark of the covenant, an explicitly material cultic object most closely connected with the cult practices of wider ancient Southwest Asia. I showed that while the presencing capacities of the ark were nowhere rejected, its nature and function was

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renegotiated as part of a campaign of compartmentalization intended to assert the deity's partibility from presencing media. In addressing the כבוד, I showed that it frequently represented the divine body in pre-P literature, but was elaborated upon in P in a way intended to obscure the deity's presence, primarily in the service of the distancing of the divine form. It also obviated the need for a cultic object and endowed the priestly class with exclusive access to the כבוד. The author of Ezekiel conflated P and pre-P conceptualizations of the כבוד in order to free it from the confines of the sanctuary, restore an anthropomorphic conceptualization of the divine form, and assert the unity of the divine presence.

Interrogating the messenger of YHWH in Chapter 7, I proposed that the entity began as a textual means of obscuring the presence and activity of YHWH among humans, but conflated the identities of the messenger and YHWH in ways that would need somehow to be resolved, either textually or through normative readings. A passage in Exodus 23 demonstrates that at least one author/editor accommodated the conflated identities via the notion of the indwelling of the divine name, which granted the messenger the power and authority of YHWH and accounted for the references that seem to treat the messenger as YHWH themselves. I turned from this concept of the presencing function of one's name to the "name theology" of D/Dtr, finding that the name is not secularized in those literary strata, but was compartmentalized in a way that facilitated the deity's presencing within the sanctuary while protecting the deity from potential threats and from the perception of unmediated full access to their presence.

Finally, Chapter 8 addressed the concept of the presencing function of text. I began with stamp seals and apotropaic amulets like those of Ketef Hinnom to demonstrate the power of text to mediate divine agency for individuals in Iron Age Israel and Judah. The most influential and widespread text that was represented as presencing the deity was that of the law, which was to be overlaid upon traditional media for divine presencing, such as stelai and altars. Rituals performed in the presence of the law were framed by Dtr as if the law facilitated

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YHWH's presence. This overlap between cultic objects and the text of the law may have been a way of providing for the deity's presence in the absence of the ark of the covenant and the temple, but it also facilitated the appropriation by cultic authorities of access to that presence. In later periods, this presencing function appears to have been democratized—whether conceded or prescribed—through miniature materializations of text that could be carried on the person and installed in homes. While the sense of more immanent access to divine agency was certainly real, the practice also constituted a widespread credibility enhancing display that made the determination of adequate fidelity to the ideological group's standards a simpler matter, and so also served the interests of prosociality and of existing power structures.

## Implications for Further Research

The implications of the findings of this thesis for further research are numerous and varied. While my primary goal was to formulate a theoretical framework to account for the relationship of the deity to their cultic objects and representatives, that formulation involved innovative approaches to several different themes related to the study of “religion,” deity, and the Hebrew Bible. My integration of the cognitive sciences demonstrates the need to consider the role of intuitive versus reflective cognition in interrogating data deriving from emic or nativist accounts. This has particular relevance for the evaluation of the Hebrew Bible because so much of our scholarship has demanded the texts themselves have the prerogative to dictate the terms of scholarly analysis. This is a brand of what the study of religion has referred to as “protectionism,”<sup>2</sup> and it is intended to perpetuate the rationalizations promulgated by the authors of the biblical texts, which serves the interests and power structures of scholars operating within the perception of a shared tradition.<sup>3</sup> As this thesis has demonstrated, with

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<sup>2</sup> For two case studies related to New Testament scholarship, see Stephen L. Young, “‘Let’s Take the Text Seriously’: The Protectionist Doxa of Mainstream New Testament Studies,” *MTSR* (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see above, pages 60–62.

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careful consideration of the roles of cognitive ecologies, cognitive architecture, and rhetorical contexts, the rationalizations of the authors of biblical texts can be productively contextualized and interrogated. While the findings of this thesis are most directly relevant to future research related to the conceptualization of themes like personhood, deity, monotheism, and worship, the application of the cognitive sciences to the study of the Hebrew Bible has numerous other applications relevant to the rhetoric and ideologies employed within it.

Another way in which the findings of this thesis can contribute to research related to these themes is through its challenging of many of the field's governing frameworks and dichotomies, which have been buttressed and perpetuated more by authority and tradition than by heuristic productivity. For example, I showed in Chapter 1 that the concept of religion—along with its subordinate dichotomies of “official/popular religion” and “folk/book religion”—was itself precisely one of the “stultifying conventions” Benson Saler warned us about.<sup>4</sup> While these insights have been known in the broader study of religion for some time, their full integration into the study of the Hebrew Bible is long overdue. A number of distorting frameworks buttressed by little more than the perception that the biblical literature treats a separate socio-cultural domain of “religion” could be discarded with the recognition that there is no such framework operative in the discourse. More deliberately mitigating the influences of the Reformation and Enlightenment on our approaches to the beliefs, authority structures, and modes of ritual in the Hebrew Bible and the material remains of Israel and Judah can help us to decenter imperial interests and powerful voices and begin to center long-marginalized socio-material practices and minority voices.

My approach to the conceptualization of deity discarded the notion of a clear dichotomy distinguishing deity from humanity, favoring instead the notion of a spectrum or continuum, which has already had circulation for years in cognate fields of study. I also suggested that the

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<sup>4</sup> See above, page 49, note 62.

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conceptualization of deity is fundamentally an elaboration on the conceptualization of human persons. Both findings have the potential to alter the landscape regarding the study of deity in the Hebrew Bible. Most significantly, I have shown that for the societies that produced and initially consumed the biblical texts, the concept of deity stretched well beyond the strict boundaries that have long existed primarily to facilitate the structuring of power and identity for ideological groups. This will bear significantly on the study of the emergence of monotheism, which has seen a number of important contributions in recent years, but has failed to break free from the gravitational pull of that boundary maintenance. For the study of early Christianity and its texts, a more robust framework for understanding deity and divine agency as well as the spectrum of intuitive and reflective cognition has much to add to the discussion of the emergence of a savior who was simultaneously identified with and distinguished from the patron deity.<sup>5</sup> As has been noted by other scholars, the messenger of YHWH, whose identity also appears conflated with that of the patron deity, may even have functioned as a conceptual template for reflectively developing the tradition of Jesus Christ within early Christianity. Even the study of Christian worship, and particularly the relationship of the Eucharist to the deity, stands to profit from these insights.

The primary finding of this thesis, of course, is that the presence of a deity was understood to be a partible aspect of its personhood that was communicable via certain loci of agency and identity. The socio-material transmission and proliferation of this understanding resulted in reflective rationalizations, which themselves resulted in the various conventions, prescriptions, proscriptions, and habits associated with facilitating access to divine presence and agency across the societies of ancient Southwest Asia. There is still much room for growth and maturation within the methodologies and approaches incorporated into this thesis, of course,

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<sup>5</sup> Already Michael Peppard has employed the notion of a divine/human spectrum in the interrogation of the origins of Jesus Christ as mediator—which has been picked up by others (see above, p. 6, n. 22)—but without the significant methodological support provided by the cognitive sciences. See also Daniel McClellan, “Cognitive Perspectives on Early Christology,” *BI* 25.3–4 (2017): 647–62.

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and so many of its findings may be nuanced, altered, abandoned, or expanded upon in the future, but there is significant potential for the productive application of these frameworks to the study of divine agency and presence elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the socio-material practices of Greco-Roman period, Rabbinic, and late antique Judaism, in addition to Greece, Rome, the various phases and traditions of Christianity, Hinduism, and the many other traditions and ideologies that employ concepts of partible and permeable personhood, of deity, and of communicable agency.

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