

space between the sphynx figures may represent the entrance to the shrine (rather than aniconically signaling YHWH's presence between "the cherubim" [*hakkərūbīm*]). According to this understanding, the lions and the female figure on the bottom section would be guarding the entrance.

Brian R. Doak (2015, 129) contends that several observations support interpreting the stand as entirely devoted to a female deity. First, the clearest indications of the stand's referent are the bottom and third friezes, which depict a female deity anthropomorphically and as a tree. The other two friezes have the empty space—perhaps representing the entryway—and the horse underneath the sun disc. The horse was used in ancient Southwest Asia predominantly to represent Anat and Astarte, as noted by Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 160).<sup>39</sup> They also note that Early Iron Age terracotta figures predominantly represent female agents (160).<sup>40</sup> The multiple manifestations of the deity on the shrine may have been intended to increase the accessibility or potency of her agency. Many shrine models were likely 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. More basic models could have been utilized privately or by smaller social groups (Ziffer 2020).

In connection with female deities, we must consider that most vilified of cultic objects from the Hebrew Bible, the *'āšerah* (Sommer 2009, 44–49; Thomas 2017). The Hebrew term occurs forty 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 (1998, 229) have argued that worship of Asherah was waning by the Iron Age, which has led many scholars to prefer understanding most uses of *'āšerah* from Iron Age Israel and Judah to refer to the cultic object.<sup>41</sup> The use of the roots *'md* and *nšb* (both roughly meaning "to stand")

<sup>39</sup> "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" (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 Anthonioz 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Darby (2014, 333) also notes that "almost every cult stand combines female figurines with zoomorphic images." The fifty-seven clay figurines and zoomorphic vessels discovered at Tel Rehov lend further support to this observation. Almost half of the figures were anthropomorphic, and almost all of those were female. Ten of the twenty-nine zoomorphic figurines and vessels depicted equids (Mazar 2015, 38–39).

<sup>41</sup> Putthoff 2020, 126–28. Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Ze'ev Meshel (2012, 131) note "Asherah's name had even vanished in Phoenicia in the 1st millennium BCE. It is not mentioned in the whole corpus of Phoenician inscriptions, not even as a theophoric element in personal names."