

any detail, which may have been a way to intentionally represent the mystery and the chaos of sea, desert, and separation from civilization (cf. Hutter 2007).

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 effects 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 have yet to be fully unpacked by scholars.

#### THE PROTOTYPES OF DEITY

This subsection interrogates prototype effects associated with deity in the Hebrew Bible, beginning with the cognitive exemplars and then moving outward toward the fuzzy boundaries that were discussed above. Rather than attempt to be comprehensive, I will identify two features treated as diagnostic of deity in the biblical texts, and briefly review a few other features considered prototypical but not necessarily diagnostic. As should be clear by now, the intent is not to list necessary and sufficient features of deity, but to better understand the center of the category. Viewing deity as a neatly delineated category may seem a convenient scholarly heuristic, but it does considerable violence to the way the category was used in the biblical texts and in the sociomaterial ecologies that produced those texts. The effect of that violence is exponentially increased by the deployment of this particular conceptual category in attempts to structure power and values.

YHWH was not the prototypical deity 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 and circumstances of the societies over which they functioned as patron.<sup>71</sup> A significant 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

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Fleming 2021, 245: “By considering the great gods of Babylon and Assyria on one hand and the political gods of South Arabia and Moab on the other, I have weighed analogies that do not place primary significance on job descriptions that are imagined to be original to each deity. What makes each god ‘great’ for the people in question is his (in these cases) identification with the people bound to him.”