

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—which 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 and their institutions grew in size and complexity in the seventh century.⁵

THE CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS AND PROFILES OF YHWH

DEITY. In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH is the prototypical representative of the conceptual domain of DEITY.⁶ Thus, the most common profile for the terms for deity is “YHWH.” We see this demonstrated in places like Isa 13:19: “And Babylon, the splendor of kingdoms, / the beauty and pride of the Chaldeans, / will be as when Deity overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.”⁷ The informed hearer/reader

⁵ Middlemas (2014) and Schaper (2019) both make the case that this abstraction was the answer to the anxiety associated with divine imagery. In the next few chapters I will argue that abstractions absolutely played a role, but with two caveats: first, abstractions only served this function to the degree that institutions and texts could maintain and enforce the desired associations; second, material presencing media were not abandoned, they were simply adapted.

⁶ An exception may be Gen 33:20: *'el 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl*, 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 formula “YHWH, the deity of Israel” (*YHWH 'ēlōhē yiśrā'ēl*), which occurs 119 times, but not in Genesis, suggesting its association with Israel’s more developed national identity. This analogy also suggests *'el* is functioning as a DN and not the appellative “deity.” Wardlaw argues for the appellative use of *'el* in Gen 33:20 on analogy with the arthrous *ha-'el 'ēlōhē 'ābika* in Gen 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 *'el* 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 2008, 132–34).

⁷ 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.