

but other material remains can be correlated to broader trends regarding the presencing of other deities. YHWH was not alone at Arad. For instance, fragments from multiple Judean Pillar Figurines (see below) were discovered near the sacrificial altar and in an adjoining storage room (Kletter 1996, 211–12; Bloch-Smith 2015, 102; Darby 2014, 254–58).

Several considerations support interpreting stelai as saliently presencing the agents they indexed.²⁰ The word *maṣṣēbā*, meaning “stood up,” or “erected,” reflects the upright orientation of the stones, which makes the stones stand out within the environment and cues the viewer to intention and agency.²¹ Beyond that orientation, the Ugaritic and Akkadian words for “stele”—*skn* and *si-ik-ka-num*—may derive from a verbal root meaning “to inhabit” (Fleming 1992, 75–79; Durand 1998, 24–29; Sommer 2009, 29; Scheyhing 2018, 95, 98). This terminology resonates with Jacob’s designation in Gen 28:22 of a stele he set up and anointed with oil as the *bēt ʾēlōhīm*, “house of deity.” Anointing with oil (see also Gen 35:14–15) may represent a commissioning of sorts, as has been proposed for some Akkadian rituals (Fleming 2000, 86–87), although it is less elaborate than the complex rituals described above, and perhaps intentionally so.²² The shortened form, *bēt-ēl*, would later become a designation for “stele” that would be adapted in Greek as *baitylos*, “betyl.” By the seventh-century BCE, Assyrian sources identify a West Semitic deity named Bethel who also appears in later

²⁰ Iron Age stelai have been found in cult installations and other contexts in Arad, Tel-Dan, Hazor, Bethsaida, Lachish, Tirzah, Tel-Rehov, Beth-Shemesh, Tel Qiri, Timna, Shechem, Khirbet Qeiyafa, and in other locations (Mettinger 1995, 149–68; Bloch-Smith 2015, 100; Zukerman 2012, 41–43; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018, 131–34; Garfinkel 2018, 55–70; Herring 2013, 53–63).

²¹ Carl Graesser (1972, 34) suggests this orientation “served as a marker, jogging the memory. It would arrest the attention of the onlooker because it stood in a position it would not take naturally from gravity alone; only purposeful human. Activity could accomplish such ‘setting up.’” While Graesser suggests memorial, legal, and commemorative functions, he insists it is “important to note that a single stone was not limited to a single function but often carried out several at one and the same time” (37).

²² 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. The abandonment of the use of *ʾeben* in reference to their deity may be another example. 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 2009, 49). As Sommer notes in a footnote (207, n. 67), 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. Anointing with oil is prescribed by Lev 8 to consecrate the various appurtenances of the temple.