

around the world and down to the present time demonstrate the trans-cultural and trans-historical intuitiveness of this approach to divine agency. These concepts 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 (contra Sommer 2009, 195, n. 145). 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 DIVINE AGENCY IN IRON AGE ISRAEL AND JUDAH

We have no direct attestation of prescriptions for rituals associated with enlivening presencing media in the material remains of first millennium BCE Israel and Judah (Hundley 2013, 352–54),<sup>17</sup> but there is a rich tradition in the region of materially presencing deity that reaches back into Neolithic periods and drew in the Bronze and Iron Ages from the same conventions and intuitive concepts of deity in circulation in the surrounding societies.<sup>18</sup> The clearest example of this is the building and maintenance of temples in Iron Age Israel and Judah, which was closely patterned after the temples of surrounding societies, and was first and foremost a means of facilitating the deity's presence and nearness (Levine 1974, 2011; Hundley 2013). The points of contact do not end there, however.

According to Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (1998, 96), the material representation of deity in the highlands of Israel and Judah 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. 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 female deity 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 (Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 108). The effacement of Egyptian influence meant the similar withdrawal of wealth and markets it facilitated, so locally produced plaques, statuettes, stelai, and cult stands became less expertly and less expensively produced. By Iron Age I, the fertility aspects of the divine

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<sup>17</sup> According to Herbert Niehr (1997, 78), 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."

<sup>18</sup> Ben-Ami 2006, 132: "Standing stones were an integral (and dominant) part of early Israelite cult places."