

societies: “Now I know that YHWH is greater than all the deities [*gādōl YHWH mikol-hā ’ēlōhīm*]” (Exod 18:11); “What deity [*mī- ’ēl*] is there in heaven or on earth that could act according to your deeds and your might?” (Deut 3:24); “Because you, YHWH, are most high over all the earth. You are greatly exalted over all deities [*mā’ōd na’ālētā ’al-kol- ’ēlōhīm*]” (Ps 97:9). This conceptual domain was not an assertion of philosophical monotheism (though it is frequently read as such),⁴¹ but was a translatable feature of the generic concept of deity that was effectively and liberally employed by the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible in reference to their preferred deity. While generic greatness or might was the most basic theme of the rhetoric of incomparability, YHWH’s creative acts and military prowess were also frequently employed as a part of that rhetoric, as with praise for warrior and creator deities from other societies in ancient Southwest Asia.⁴² Isaiah 37:16 is representative of this rhetoric: “YHWH of Hosts, Deity of Israel, who sits enthroned among the cherubim: You alone are the deity for all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth.”

HOLINESS. While the Hebrew Bible does use the lexeme *qādōš* in reference to deities other than YHWH, it reserves its most emphatic rhetoric regarding holiness for YHWH. *Qādōš* is frequently a title of YHWH, and particularly in Isaiah, where it occurs over two dozen times.⁴³ In several places, the concept of holiness is connected with the inspiration of awe and dread. For instance, Isa 29:23 asserts, “They will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob [*hiqdīšū ’et-qēdōš ya’āqōb*], and they will dread [*ya’ārīšū*] the deity of Israel.”⁴⁴ First Samuel 6:20 asks rhetorically, “Who is able to stand in the presence of YHWH, this holy deity?” Isaiah 6 elaborates on this when, after the seraphs chant in verse 3, “Holy, holy, holy [*qādōš qādōš qādōš*] is YHWH of hosts!,” Isaiah cries out, “Woe is me! I am silenced! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the king, YHWH of hosts!” One of the seraphs then takes a coal from the altar of the temple and touches Isaiah’s lips with it, removing his sin and effectively rendering him “holy,” thus able to withstand the presence of the deity.

The sense of holiness as overwhelming radiance is most frequently connected to the description of YHWH’s appearance as like fire, although apart from

⁴¹ For instance, Hewel Clifford (2010) argues that Deutero-Isaiah is adopting conventional rhetoric of incomparability, but is using it to assert divine exclusivity, since idol polemic elsewhere “encourages reading the exclusivity formulae with an absolute monotheism” (276). His argument relies on Rechenmacher (1997) but does not adequately engage discussions such as MacDonald’s (2003, 82–85) regarding negating particles.

⁴² Most explicit is “The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re” (COS 1.25.i, iii).

⁴³ Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11–12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14–15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14.

⁴⁴ NRSV here renders, “they will stand in awe of the God of Israel.”