Aramaic and Greek texts (Sommer 2009, 28–29). In his first century CE text, *Phoenician History* (preserved in Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel*), Philo of Byblos describes the betyls as *lithoi empsychoi*, "enlivened stones."[23] The terminology that was in usage suggests the concept of the divine animation of stelai enjoyed wide circulation around ancient Southwest Asia.

Stone may also have been perceived as one of the more suitable materials for hosting the agency of the deceased/divine in light of its durability. Genesis 49:24 refers to a deity (likely El) as the *'eben yiśrā'ēl*, "Stone of Israel," but this very early text seems to preserve a frozen epithet that is nowhere else used to refer to the deity of Israel. The term *'eben* is commonly used to refer to the material out of which stelai were constructed (Gen 28:18; 31:45; 35:14), but it is also frequently used in polemics against divine images (Lev 26:1; Deut 4:28; 28:36, 64; 29:17). The association of deity with the term *'eben* may have been abandoned by later authors and editors, who clearly prefer the term *ṣûr*, "rock" (Deut 32:4, 15, 18; 1 Sam 2:2; 22:3; Isa 17:10; 26:4) in reference to the deity. As *'eben* likely did originally, the term *ṣûr* seems to refer to the deity's eternal nature and ability to provide protection and refuge. The occasional denial of *ṣûr* ("rock") status to other deities suggests that status may even have been considered prototypical of deity (Deut 32:37; 2 Sam 22:32; Isa 44:8).

Unworked stone may also have boasted the additional feature of a more natural state (perhaps the state in which a deity was thought to have left it), rather than one forced on the stone by human industry. Flat stones placed horizontally before stelai to function as offering tables suggest rituals similar to those performed for the deceased were likely performed for the deities indexed by the stelai (Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2018, 131–32).[24] For instance, two open air sanctuaries at Hazor dating to the eleventh century BCE prominently featured stelai and included cultic assemblages. The elevated arrangement of stelai at Area A was surrounded by offering tables (Ben-Ami 2006, 123–27; see fig. 2.2). A recently excavated Iron IIA Judahite temple from Tel Moẓa features a room near the entrance with five stelai at the base of a bench (Kisilevitz 2015, 51). Several clay figurines were also discovered among cultic vessels, including horses showing the remains of riders, as well as two hand-modeled anthropomorphic heads.[25] At Khirbet Qeiyafa, three tenth-century-BCE cult rooms featuring stelai

[23] Philo of Byblos, *Phoenician History* 810.28 (see Baumgarten 1981, 16, 202–3).

[24] According to Mettinger (1995, 191–92), stelai functioned primarily to facilitate sacrifices and shared communal meals. Note the communal meal mentioned in Exod 24:10–11 after the elders of Israel "saw the God of Israel" (*yir'û 'ēt 'ĕlōhê yiśrā'ēl*). Mark Smith (2008, 58–61) elaborates on the importance of the communal meal to covenant ritual.

[25] The context does not yet make clear the intended referents of the figurines, but excavations are ongoing. Yosef Garfinkel (2020) suggested in a *Biblical Archaeology*