

rhetorically cast in Exod 32 (P) as the authorized alternative to the golden calf—a sanctioned medium for divine presencing. Both entities function as cultic images in different ways. For instance, the golden calf and the stone tablets made use of materials traditionally associated with the divine. The divine production of the text of the tablets is emphasized in Exod 32:16, while Aaron asserts in verse 24 that the golden calf just “came out” of the fire, as if it were not the work of human production. Both were smashed. A critical distinction was Aaron’s assertion that the calf actually presented the locus of the deity’s identity (Exod 32:4: “these are your deities, O Israel!”). This stands in contrast to the treatment of the tablets as a secondary divine agent.

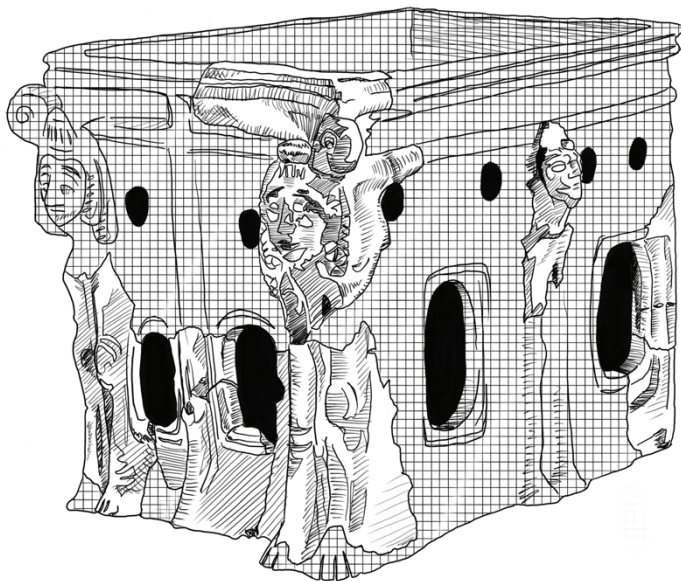


Figure 5.1. A reconstruction of a closed shrine model discovered at Megiddo. Source: May 1935, 13–17, plates 13 and 14. Drawing by the author.

Youn Ho Chung (2010, 82) argues that in narrating their intentional destruction by Moses’ hand, Deuteronomy “attests to the fact that the tablets themselves are not holy: stone tablets are unlike the ‘pillar.’” For Deuteronomy, however, presencing media is only “holy” if the deity’s agency is intentionally inhabiting it. The root *šbr* occurs only four times in Deuteronomy, with two occurrences referring to Moses’ destruction of the tablets (Deut 9:17; 10:2), and two referring to breaking unauthorized stelai (Deut 7:5; 12:3). Rather than indicating the tablets