

central Mediterranean in the first half of the first millennium BCE, they were not nearly so salient in the societies of and around Israel and Judah during that time period.

Indications that both deceased kin and deity were presenced via cultic objects is evident in the use of stelai in burials and cultic installations that correspond with the rise of pastoralism in the Neolithic Negev (Avner and Horwitz 2017; Avner 2018). These stelai appear to have initially marked the location of burials, as they are widely found collocated with burials, but this indexing seems to have given way to presencing functions, as indicated by later intentional configurations of stelai set up at great distances from burials and associated with rituals such as mortuary feasts. An analysis of sites from the fifth to third millennia BCE identified two different arrangements of stelai that the authors concluded represented two different groups (Arav et al. 2016).² Larger stones arranged in standardized numbers and groupings were thought to represent deities, while smaller stones arranged individually and arbitrarily were thought to represent ancestors.³ In some mortuary locations, as well, stelai set up near the perimeter of tombs were understood to represent protective deities, while the stelai in the interior were understood to presence deceased kin.⁴

As noted by most scholars who address the function of stelai, they could serve multiple different functions, and often simultaneously, depending on the associated institutions and the experiences and perspectives of the person encountering them (e.g., Graesser 1972, 37). Central to all the different functions that have been identified is their use to cue the viewer's attention to their intentional upright orientation and whatever function the viewer may associate with that intention, which could obviously be quite subjective and fluid. The appropriation of older material media for new purposes illustrates a central feature of sociomaterial ecologies: as the identities and the meanings associated with objects and behaviors fade from communal memory or lose salience because of

² The authors noted that while ancient and modern societies around the world treated stelai as representing ancestors, the desert stelai of the Negev have always been treated as representative of deities. The authors refer to *KTU* 1.17.i.26–27, which describes establishing a stele for ancestors. (cf. Avner 2002, 65–92).

³ Arav et al. 2016, 20: "It is most likely that in sites of this group there is a combination of stones for deities and stones for ancestors. In ancient records and anthropological studies ancestors are perceived as sitting and dining in communion with the gods."

⁴ Avner and Horwitz 2017, 36: "In tombs, two types of *maššeboth* were set. Those incorporated in the tomb's perimeter, mostly on the eastern side and facing east, are explained as representing the deities that guard the tombs and the deceased. *Maššeboth* set within tombs are usually narrow, set separately and face north; these are interpreted as representing the ancestors."