

Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal. In 1 Kgs 18:23–24, Elijah describes the contest, which was simply a matter of calling upon their respective divine patrons to light the fire of a burnt offering. Elijah states in verse 24, “So you call on the name of your deity, and I will call on the name of YHWH, and it will be that the deity that answers with fire is the deity [*hû' hā'ēlōhîm*].” Patron deity status here was demonstrated through the performance of an act associated with the shared natures of the two as storm-deities, namely sending down fire (lightning) to light the sacrifice. YHWH's victory should not be understood to indicate that Baal was not thought to exist, but that the nation of Israel was YHWH's unique purview, therefore they were the only storm-deity authorized to exercise their divine power therein and to be worshipped by that region's inhabitants.

Communicable agency was not a rhetorically salient diagnostic for deity, although it was absolutely prototypical of deity. As stated in the previous chapter, a deity without some means of material presencing, mediation, or representation on earth would have been of little value or utility without philosophical frameworks leveraged by powerful social institutions. The references to such media used in the worship of other deities are ubiquitous, but the Hebrew Bible is also littered with references to material media that was used to presence YHWH or to transmit their agency.⁷⁶ Many of these references became increasingly pejorative in later periods, however, as YHWH's rhetorical differentiation from and exaltation over the deities of the nations combined with concern for the vulnerabilities of sociomaterial media to incentivize the restriction of those media to the proprietary modes of the priesthood's literate elite. Stelai, *asherahs*, and other cult objects appear to have been common to YHWH's material presencing, if the polemicizing references to their ubiquity and their removal from the Jerusalem temple approximate historical realities (2 Kgs 17:9–12; 18:4; 21:7; 23:6). These media were frequently described as dedicated to the deities of other nations (Judg 6:25–26; 2 Kgs 10:26–27; 23:13), although that may be largely editorial in origin.⁷⁷ Worshipping YHWH the way other nations worshipped their deities became explicitly prohibited (e.g., Deut 12:31). The vilification of these media relied on their prototypicality to the conceptualization of deity—in a sense, the prohibition was acknowledging that everyone else did it, but demanding devotees of YHWH resist the urge to do it themselves. This prototypicality is

contribute to the innovation of the category of monotheism in the seventeenth-century CE, although even that concept of monotheism was quite distinct from its contemporary iterations (MacDonald 2003, 5–58).

⁷⁶ For example, Exod 3:2–4; 32:4; Num 21:4–9; Deut 4:12; 12:5–7; Judg 17:1–5; 18:1–6; 1 Sam 5:2–4; 1 Kgs 12:27–29; Hos 3:4.

⁷⁷ Note Rainer Albertz's suggests everything in Hosea's anti-Baal rhetoric, “had been an uncriticized ingredient of the cult of Yahweh for centuries” (Albertz 1994, 173).