

2. Encountering Divine Agency

Now that a theoretical framework is in place for the origin and function of deity concepts, as well as the intuitive reasoning that facilitates their presencing through material media, we can apply that framework to an interrogation of the material media employed in ancient Southwest Asia to presence divine agency. This will reveal some of the reflective logic and reasoning undergirding the presencing media employed by the relevant societies. This chapter will briefly consider the larger empires of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Anatolia, where the use of that media was much more widespread, elaborate, and explicit, and then move on the material remains of Israel and Judah. This interrogation will help me to begin to fill in my reconstruction of ancient Israel and Judah's concept of deity and its use of material media to presence it. It will also provide important context for the discussions in subsequent chapters regarding the relationship of YHWH's divine profile and presencing media to the broader concept of generic deity and to the broader repertoire of practices associated with presencing divine agency. These chapters will demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible's representations of YHWH and their material presencing do not represent revolutionary departures from widespread conventions regarding the representation and presencing of deity, but rather incremental elaborations on both.¹

ENCOUNTERING DIVINE AGENCY IN ANCIENT SOUTHWEST ASIA

The basic logic of presencing media is that an unseen agent whose presence is desired for one reason or another can be presenced through appropriate material media. A deity without a means of being in some sense materially *present* is of little value or utility in a society that does not have the institutions available to impose the kinds of philosophical notions of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence that are widely considered "theologically correct" in many societies today. While the seeds of those institutions were germinating in the

¹ On the embedded nature of Israel's history, sociomaterial conventions, and relationships with deity in the broader West Semitic world, see Smith 2002.