

multiple different deities, indicating it did not constitute a particularly consistent praise indicative of consistent and systematic divine hierarchies (Labuschagne 1966, 33), though there was a limited number of deities at whom this rhetoric could be directed (Ready 2012, 68).⁴⁵

HOLINESS. Connected with the concept of incomparability was that of holiness, which is treated as a central attribute of deity across ancient Southwest Asia. The fundamental sense seems to be that of a distinctiveness that is a result of, and is marked by, cleanliness, purity, and radiance. For instance, the Akkadian verbs *qadāšu(m)* and *qašādu(m)*—cognate with Hebrew *qdš* (“holy”)—refer in the G stem to becoming clean or pure, and in the D stem to cleansing, purifying, or consecrating (Kornfeld 2003). These terms are overwhelmingly used to refer to the non-divine spaces, objects, and people involved in cultic activities and dedicated to serving deities (Clines 2021). Closely linked to these terms are the Akkadian adjectives *ellu* and *ebbu*, which can mean “clean,” “pure,” “holy,” “lustrous,” and “sacred.”⁴⁶ The deities themselves were qualified with different Akkadian terms that reflected the same conceptual suite, but with some additional nuances. The words *pulḫu* and *melammu* referred to the awesome radiance which with deities were adorned (Aster 2012).⁴⁷ That radiance engendered terror as a result of the power that it signaled. It could also be transferred to anything a deity endowed with their agency, including kings, temples, and cultic objects (Oppenheim 1943, Emelianov 2010, Aster 2015). Thus humans and their material spaces and media could approach deity through acts of purification that granted them a degree of “holiness,” while certain interactions with the divine could then endow certain humans and their material media with the deities’ own *pulḫu* and *melammu*, illustrating overlap and integration at the center of the human/divine continuum.

The Ugaritic literature provides a closer analogy to the Hebrew Bible in its use of *qdš* to refer to deities, who frequently carry the epithet “children of *qdš*” (*KTU* 1.2.i.20–21, 38; 1.17.i.3, 8, 10–11, 13, 22; Smith 2001, 93). El is referred to on a few occasions in the Ugaritic literature as *lḫpn w qdš*, “sagacious and holy one” (*KTU* 1.16.i.11, 21–22; ii.49; Rahmouni 2008, 207–9). The word was also

⁴⁵ Jill Middlemas (2014, 93–102) argues that the prophetic literature of the exile consciously combated idolatry by adapting the rhetoric of incomparability in order to assert aniconism and a philosophical monotheism. She states (95), “This is exclusive monotheism through and through: Yahweh is not God among gods, but God transcendent above the formed shapes of what some (erroneously according to the ideology) worship, tend, and regard as divine.” The same rhetoric aimed at other nations (Isa 40:17), or put in the mouths of personified cities (Isa 47:8, 10; Zeph 2:15), however, suggests the rhetoric is not quite so philosophically assertive (cf. Moberly 2004, Heiser 2008a, Olyan 2012).

⁴⁶ See *CAD* 4, s.vv. “*ellu*,” “*ebbu*.”

⁴⁷ *CAD* 12, s.v. “*pulḫu*”; *CAD* 10.2, s.v. “*melammu*”; *Enuma Elish* 1.138, 2.24.