

front of his soul when it soars upwards, breaking through all barriers until the soul reaches its proper place; and it will stand by the man at the time when he is awakened at the resurrection of the dead, in order to defend him against any accusations.”<sup>31</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this treatment of the scrolls of the law and of other biblical and parabiblical texts facilitated their conceptualization at the periphery of and beyond rabbinical orthodoxy as “magical” objects (Sabar 2009; cf. Bohak 2017). A fascinating tradition related to this conceptualization is that of the *golem*, an artificial clay or mud creature animated by the invocation of divine names (Idel 1990). The traditions regarding the activities of golems vary regarding their capacities, purposes, and comportment. Gershon Scholem’s (2007, 735) entry in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* describes the golem in the following way:

The golem is a creature, particularly a human being, made in an artificial way by the virtue of a magic art, through the use of holy names. The idea that it is possible to create living beings in this manner is widespread in the magic of many people. Especially well known are the idols and images to which the ancients claimed to have given the power of speech.

While there are indeed several ancient analogues to the notion of animated anthropomorphic statues (Idel 1990, 3–8)—some have already been discussed in this book—the tradition is largely inspired by the medieval mystical text, *Sefer Yesirah*, which explores the capacity for special combinations of letters and numbers to reify divine creative powers (Idel 1990, 9–26; Weiss 2018). More broadly, the tradition harkens back to the initial creation of humanity in Gen 2:7 from the dust of the earth. The Talmudic tractate Sanh. 38b even refers to Adam as a “golem.” Later Jewish sages would assert their access to similar life-giving power through their knowledge of the law. In Sanh. 65b, for instance, Rabbi Rava is said to create a *gbr*’, “man,” which is sent to Rabbi Zeira, but is unable to speak and is commanded to *hdr l’pryk*, “return to your dust.”

## CONCLUSION

By the time of the exile, several campaigns associated with cult centralization and the restriction of access to the divine appear to have converged in a way that incentivized the prioritization of text as a medium for presencing the deity and their agency. The compartmentalization of presencing media from the primary loci of divine identity, the emphasis on the name as a vehicle for divine agency, the salience of the Torah in the absence of the temple, and the deemphasis of traditional divine images, all trained the focus of cultic elites on the texts. As a

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Schleicher 2010, 25.