Amrit a steele of the god Shadrapa on a lion in Egyptian style was found. Aramean representations are known from several sites. Tell Halaf (Guzana); deities on animals, large bird, scorpion, and bull-men supporting winged sun. Ain Dana: mountain-god; Arslan Tash (Khudairi): ivories (Egyptian motifs such as a god on a lotus); Zizincile steele of God Hadad with horns, weather-god with ax and thunderbolt, and Eshmun (from Ashdoda); rare example of wall painting occurs at Deir Alla in Jordan depicting a winged sphinx. Later Aramean deities are known from Palmyra. Seals contain important stones, and a bull figure in a shrine comes from Ashkelon (1550 BCE). (Many other bull figures are known from other sites.)

An Edomite shrine at Qimmit contained the head of a goddess (consort of Quas) with three horns, and from En Hazeva come anthropomorphic cult stands of clay. Stone sculptures from Ammon might represent the god Milcom. A Late Bronze Age warrior-god comes from Sihan, and male and female deities are shown on a stele from Balsam in Jordan.

Nabataean religious iconography is a mixture of the stele cult (bety), sometimes aniconic and later anthropomorphic forms, as known from Petra. Dushara (Quas) is shown flanked by bulls with thunderbolt. His consort Allat is shown as a betyl with a face.

Resheph, the war-goddess (Astarte as a equestrian), comes from Beisan, and the goddess Ahala's “temple of the Baal” at Samaria was considered abominable by Deuteronomistic writers and is said to have been purged by Jehu (2 Kings 10:27). A standing stone painted red (possibly representing blood, i.e., life) seems to have been the only visual representation of the main deity worshiped there, probably YHWH. A similar installation in Ahab’s “temple of the Baal” at Samaria was considered abominable by Deuteronomistic writers and is said to have been purged by Jehu (2 Kings 10:27).

Israel

The ban on visual representations of YHWH or any other deity is one of the most distinctive features of biblical religion. Greek and Latin authors from the early Hellenistic period onward consider Jewish worship to include images, which include the most distinctive features of divine revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. Historians of religion have suggested various hypotheses to explain it, none of which is entirely convincing.

Biblical texts. The biblical prohibition does not concern visual art in general, but only the production and worship of cultic images among Israel. See Exod. 20:4 parallel Deut. 5:8 (the second commandment of the Decalogue); Exod. 20:23; 23:13-14; 34:13-16; 19:14-20; 21:5; Num. 33:53-55; Deut. 16:22-23; and 47:15. The prohibition is primarily directed against anthropomorphic and theriomorphic cult statuary; more extensive catalogues also mention stele, bull-men sculpting, and equestrian statues. The rare example of wall painting occurs at Deir Alla in Jordan depicting a winged sphinx. Later Aramean deities are known from Palmyra. Seals contain important stones, and a bull figure in a shrine comes from Ashkelon (1550 BCE).
Religions of the Ancient World
A Guide

Sarah Iles Johnston
General Editor

The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England
2004
preexistIsraelite religion as essentially analogous to the neighboring cultures of Iron Age Palestine. The main difficulties in this debate are our inability to date precisely most of the biblical texts and to substantiate any of the four positions with unambiguous archeological evidence.

While possibly related to an Old West Semitic tradition of stone worship, aniconism may have become more explicitly linked to the loss of anthropomorphic statues and other objects such as the ark in the wake of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. Exiled priests such as Ezekiel could not relegate the cult to the city of their central sanctuary. As a consequence, new concepts of divine presence were developed, which concentrated on purely symbolic presence such as the "glory" or "name" of YHWH. The image-ban texts in the Torah apparently do not antedate the Babylonian exile, consequently, they should be explained against the peculiar background of centuries ACE. We know that after the exile, Deuteronomic and Priestly theologians radically disconnected YHWH from all other deities of the region and even from traditional concepts of YHWH himself, which were now reviled as Baal worship. In this situation, the image ban effectively contributed to the strengthening of exclusive Yahwism.

Implementation of biblical and Jewish aniconism. The aniconic nature of the postexilic temple in Jerusalem is assured around 530 BCE (reported by Diodorus 40.3). Late Hellenistic descriptions of Second Temple inventory mention the menorah, a table, and an incense altar as the most basic furniture of the holy of holies. After the loss of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jewish synagogue worship focused increasingly on the Torah scroll in ways reminiscent of the treatment that other religions reserved for cultic images. Rabbinic tractates (especially Avot d'Rabbi Natan [lit., idolatry] discuss how aniconic worship of YHWH alone could be observed in the Jewish environment. Exoticized synagogues of late antiquity show that the interpretation of the biblical image ban could vary according to sociocultural context. The 530-CE mural paintings of the Diaspora synagogue of Dura Europos on the Euphrates or the 4th- to 6th-CE mosaics of synagogues in Byzantine Palestine describe scenes from the Bible and even the "pagan" zodiac featuring anthropomorphic Helios (the sun) in its very center. These images may have been understood as merely symbolic pictures with sacred character.


Anatolia

Most of the information we possess concerning Hittite religion is drawn from textual sources, from the thousands of cuneiform tablets excavated at the capital city of Hattusa. Among these texts we find hymns, prayers, detailed descriptions of ceremonies, and even cultic inventories containing descriptions of the divine images housed in temples and shrines. For example:

The Storm-god of Likzina as worshipped in the town of Tülüra: The divine image is a wooden bull rhyton, standing on all fours, plated with silver; its head and breast are plated with gold. Its height is one span; beneath it is a socle. King Murshili donated a silver beaker, eight sherdels in weight, to the Storm-god of Likzina. Ten bronze sun-disks have been nailed onto the offering table of the Storm-god (of Likzina). We have built a new temple for him. (KUB 38.11.1-6).

As indicated in this excerpt, the three-dimensional earthly representation of a god or goddess was often made in whole or in part of precious materials. Few objects of such valuable material have survived, but there are some exceptions to the general fate of plunder and destruction following for reuse. Three silver rhytons—a bull protocon (fig. 178)—all figures come from Bittel 1976), a stag protocon (fig. 169), and a “bull”—not only provide vivid confirmation of the occasional occurrence of depictions of Hittite deities, but each of the latter two objects is also decorated with a frieze depicting a scene of worship. Ceramic libation vessels in animal shapes (figs. 156-66) should also be mentioned here. Small (10-20 cm) bronze anthropomorphic figures (figs. 147, 149, 175, 162, 153) may be actual cult images from shrines, while tiny pendants of gold, silver, or electrum (figs. 167, 168, 170, 171, 173, 179, 180) give us an idea of the likely appearance of the lost statues from great temples.

The most impressive artistic renderings of Hittite divinities, however, are those done in relief sculpture, both on the living rock and in Imatel. The remains from Alaca Höyük (figs. 196, 198), and the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya (figs. 353-354, 364-365) and on stelae (figs. 207, 230, 241, 247, 264) or orthostats, the last particularly successful at Alaca Höyük (figs. 212-217). The cosmological scene at Ellilat Pinat, composed of blocks carved in low relief (fig. 257), is especially noteworthy. The use of orthostats would assume great importance in the Neo-Hittite culture of the 1st millennium (figs. 275-288), as exemplified most charmingly in a depiction of the battle of the storm-god with the serpent, an event well known from Hittite mythology (fig. 279). Stone sculpture in the round—or nearly so—is known chiefly for guardian figures in gate complexes (figs. 359, 368-369, 365-368). Thermomorphic column and statue bases are frequently found at Neo-Hittite sites (figs. 283, 305, 307).

Seals and seal impressions are another important source of Hittite religious imagery. The stamp characteristic of Hittite glyptic normally have space enough for the depiction of only a single god (figs. 185, 186, 195), but some large royal seals could accommodate a scene of a monarch in the embrace of his patron deity (figs. 313, 314). The long continuous design produced by the rolling of the much less common cylinder seal might picture two or more deities (figs. 182, 183) or even depict a religious ceremony (fig. 155) or mythological scene (fig. 142).

Presenting similar compositional possibilities is the relief vase, on which one—or more often several—bands of painted appliqué figures adorn the upper portion of the large vessel show scenes of worship. Well-preserved jars of this type are known from Brik (figs. 130, 144), Insindik, and Hıseryinde Tepe, and fragments of such vessels have been excavated at Bogazköy and Altilia. The frieze is thus an important organizational element in surviving Hittite religious art, appearing on rhyta, cylinder seals, and relief ceramics and in the galleries of Yazılıkaya.

A comparison of these decorative bands with the motifs on cylinder seals in use in the Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia from the period immediately preceding the establishment of the Hittite state leaves little doubt that the basic elements of Hittite religious iconography were borrowed from Syria and ultimately from Mesopotamia. This is seen particularly in the rendering of anthropomorphic figures in a combination of profile and frontal view, as well as the convention by which a personage’s divinity is indicated by the presence of one or more pairs of horns. As for work in three dimensions, many of the small bronze statuettes of Hittite deities—particularly those of the “divine couples” were practically indistinguishable from those found throughout the Levant in the Late Bronze Age.

A native Anatolian contribution, however, is the alternate representation of certain gods in thermomorphic and anthropomorphic form, a practice already attested in earlier local iconography (Alaca Höyük, Kanes). Thus the storm-god may appear as a bull, and the Tuteley Detty as a stag. It is also clear from both textual and artistic material that cultic implements in the shape of these animals, and the heads of sacrificial victims, were central to the worship of these particular gods.

Several deities enjoy an established standard iconography. For instance, the sun-god is inevitably dressed in a skullcap and long robe and bears a winged sun-disk upon his head. The storm-god wears a pointed hat and short cloak with a dagger tucked into his belt and often brandishes a mace and/or forked lightning bolt. The similarly clad Tuteley Detty shows a bow and arrows and a crook. Most divinities, however, are unfilled by visual, although they sometimes may be distinguished, as in the procession at Yazılıkaya, by accompanying hieroglyphic writings of their names. In particular, each goddess (save the begirded Kawuwu) is depicted in the same voluminous mantle and long skirt, sometimes with a cloak, or later a high cylindrical polos, upon her head.

Finally, the friezes on ceramic and silver vessels complement textual descriptions concerning Hittite worship. How we see the deities honored by libation or animal sacrifice, while being entertained with music, acrobatics, and other athletic activities, including hunting.