



Head of a deity from an Edomite shrine, Horvat Qitmit, first half of 6th century BCE. Courtesy Itzhaq Beit-Arieh

Astarte (standing, warrior, equestrian), Anat (seated, standing, and warrior), Qadeshet (naked, holding flowers and serpents, sometimes on lions), and Resheph (menacing, with shield). Resheph also occurs on seal amulets on the back of horned animals as “lord of the animals.” From Ugarit there are plaques of the Qadeshet-type in metal and in clay from Palestine. A goddess on horseback (Astarte as war-goddess) was found on a gold foil from Lachish, as well as graffiti of a god with spear (Baal as serpent slayer). Beisan stelae show Anat and the seated god Mekal. At Hazor a high place with stelae (one with hands worshipping the heavenly powers) and a stone statue of a god standing on a bull were found.

Several Phoenician deities have been identified on images. Baal-Melqart, chief god of Tyre, is shown with battle-ax over his shoulder on a stele (800 BCE) found near Aleppo. His consort Astarte is shown seated as a bronze figurine. Baal-Hammon of Carthage sits on a cherub throne, and stelae show the Tanit symbol. No clearly identified depictions of alleged child sacrifice have been found. The “lady of Byblos” is shown seated on a stele of Yehaumilk of Byblos (5th century BCE). At

Amrit a stele of the god Shadrappa 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 Dara: mountain-gods; Arslan Tash (Khadatu): ivories (Egyptian motifs such as a god on a lotus); Zincirli: stele of god Hadad with horns, weather-god with ax and thunderbolt, and goddess Kubaba. A rare example of wall painting occurs at Deir Alla in Jordan depicting a winged sphinx. Later Aramean deities are known from Palmyra, including the gods Baal-Shamem (Lord of Heaven) and Yarhibol (a sun-god). At Hatra the god Maran appears with horns, a crescent, and sun.

Philistine religion is known from the early Ashdoda figurines (from Ashdod): a throne/seat in the form of a woman perhaps representing a mother-goddess and imported from Mycenae. Seals contain important scenes, and a bull figurine in a shrine comes from Ashkelon (1550 BCE). (Many other bull figurines are known from other sites.)

An Edomite shrine at Qitmit contained the head of a goddess (consort of Qaus) 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 Balua in Jordan.

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

BIBL.: Izak Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Baal: The Late Bronze and Iron Age I Periods (c 1500–1000 BC)* (Göttingen, 1994). Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, 1998), chaps. 2–3. Ora Negbi, *Canaanite Gods in Metal* (Tel Aviv, 1976). I.C.

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 be aniconic. Biblical tradition relates this image ban to 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 cult-related images. Major references include Exod. 20.4 parallel Deut. 5.8 (the second commandment of the Decalogue); Exod. 20.23; 23.23–24; 34.13, 16–17; Lev. 19.4; 26.1; Num. 33.52–53; Deut. 16.21–22; and 27.15. The prohibition is primarily directed

against anthropomorphic and theriomorphic cult statuary; more extensive catalogues also mention stelae, barely sculpted or nonfigurative standing stones, and sacred trees and may even include votive statuary (cf. Deut. 5.8; 4.16–17). Only Deut. 4.15–18 provides a reason: Israel only heard YHWH on Mount Sinai but did not see any definite shape (*tēmûnâ*). Other texts may conceive of a divine *Gestalt*, which might have been known to Moses (Num. 12.8; Exod. 33.11 vs. 33.20; Deut. 34.10) but was never revealed to all of Israel. A few texts require the destruction of non-Israelite sanctuaries together with their images, sacred stones and trees, and other ritual paraphernalia (Deut. 7.5; 12.2–3; cf. Mic. 5.12–14 [= 5.11–13 Hebrew]; 1 Macc. 13.47).

Iconoclasm is reported for the so-called cult reforms of the Judean kings Hezekiah (2 Kings 18.4) and Josiah (2 Kings 23). Yet, biblical texts offer numerous examples of iconolatry practiced by Israelites (e.g., Judg. 17–18; Exod. 32; Ezek. 16.17–19; 23.41). Best known among Israelite cultic images are the bull calves said to have been erected at Bethel and Dan by King Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12.26–32). These are regarded by Deuteronomist historiographers as an expression of the northern kingdom’s basic sin against YHWH’s covenant with Israel (2 Kings 10.29; Deut. 9.12; Ps. 106.19–20). The golden calf episode in Exod. 32 (cf. Deut. 9) is related to the Bethel tradition. In both instances the people who produced the bull-calf statues perceived them as visual representations of YHWH, the god of Israel. This interpretation concurs with a well-established Bronze and Iron Age tradition of storm-god iconography, which may have subsisted in Israel until at least the 8th century BCE but was rejected by the biblical writers. In Hos. 8.4–6; 10.5–6; and 13.2, YHWH disconnects himself from bull statuary at Bethel. Further iconolatrous features in both Israel and Judah include the Asherah (as a cult object: 1 Kings 15.13; 16.33; 2 Kings 21.7; 23.4, 6–7), the Nehushtan serpent said to have been made by Moses (2 Kings 18.5; cf. Num. 21.9), and the image of jealousy (Ezek. 8.3). The tabernacle (Exod. 25–26; 35–40) and Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6–9), while lavishly decorated, are said not to have housed an image of the deity. According to 1 Kings 8.6–9, YHWH was represented in the holy of holies of the preexilic temple in Jerusalem by the ark, a mobile chest containing holy stones and protected by winged, human-headed sphinxes (the cherubim). However, Ezek. 8 hints again at the coexistence of several cults, some of them clearly iconolatrous, in the late preexilic temple precinct. Some exilic or postexilic prophetic texts mock artisans who produce idols, considering them to be actual gods (Isa. 40.18–20; 41.6–7; 44.9–20; 46.5–8; Jer. 10.1–8). Explicitly non-Israelite idolatry is a regular topic of biblical mockery (e.g., 1 Sam. 5), Babylon being considered the center of idolatry (Isa. 46.1; Jer. 50.38; 51.47, 52; Bar. 6 [The Letter of Jeremiah]; Dan. 5).

Extrabiblical evidence. A late-8th-century BCE Assyrian

royal inscription from Nimrud mentions “the gods in whom they trusted” (i.e., divine images) among the spoil taken from Samaria in 720 BCE. Hebrew inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud in northern Sinai, dated around 800 BCE, feature blessing formulas: “by YHWH of Samaria [or of Teman] and his Asherah.” According to some scholars, this should refer to the worship of a pair of divine statues; other scholars take “his Asherah” to refer to a nonanthropomorphic cultic symbol, possibly in the shape of a stylized tree (but note the reference to women weaving garments for “[the] Asherah” in 2 Kings 23.7). Asherah is generally thought to have provided the figurative model for the so-called *dea nutrix* pillar figurines of the 8th and 7th centuries that represent a well-dressed lady supporting or offering her breasts. Such small inexpensive statuary was mainly used in traditional Judahite family religion to provide blessing for the house and grave. It disappears from the Judahite and Samaritan archaeological record from the Persian period onward.

So far only one clearly Yahwistic sanctuary of preexilic times has been fully excavated: a small shrine that was part of the Judahite fortress of Arad, which controlled the southern Judahite hills during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. A standing stone painted red (probably representing blood, i.e., life) seems to have been the only visual representation of the main deity worshiped there, most 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 10.26–27).

Origins, formation, and development of biblical aniconism. Some authors follow the main lines of the biblical texts, considering that Israelite religion was always aniconic in essence; they regard conflicting evidence as traces of non-Israelite, that is, “pagan,” idolatry that persisted in Israel and Judah until at least the Persian period. Other scholars assume a dichotomy between an essentially aniconic state religion and iconolatrous popular religion. But terra-cotta figurines are attested even in royal palaces, and iconolatry was not restricted to cheap terra-cotta. A third group of scholars thinks that much of what the Bible depicts as heterodox deviations actually reflects practices that once were an integral part of Israelite religion. Some of these scholars favor a basically evolutionary view according to which sacred images became gradually suspect from the 8th century onward until the essentially aniconic worship of the postexilic period. However, biblical evidence such as Ezekiel’s visionary description of idolatrous cults performed in late preexilic Jerusalem (Ezek. 8) or Jeremiah’s debate with recently exiled Judeans over the legitimacy of worshipping the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44), seems to exclude a simple linear development. A last group of scholars tends to ascribe late, postexilic dates to the biblical sources that require an exclusively aniconic worship of YHWH. They consider

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a guide

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preexilic Israelite 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 explicit following the loss of anthropomorphic statuary and other objects such as the ark in the wake of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. Exiled priests such as Ezekiel could no longer relate to the cult of their central sanctuary. As a consequence, new concepts of divine presence were developed, which concentrated on purely symbolical 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 the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. We know that after the exile, Deuteronomistic 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 strength of exclusive Yahwism.

Implementation of biblical and Jewish aniconism. The aniconic nature of the postexilic temple in Jerusalem is assured around 300 BCE by Hecataeus (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 tracts (especially *Avodah Zarah* [lit., idolatry]) discuss how aniconic worship of YHWH alone could be observed in a non-Jewish environment. Excavated synagogues of late antiquity show that the interpretation of the biblical image ban could vary according to socio-cultural context. The 3rd-century CE mural paintings of the Diaspora synagogue of Dura Europos on the Euphrates or the 4th- to 6th-century CE mosaic floors of synagogues in Byzantine Palestine depict 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 without any inherently sacred character.

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Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Leuven: Peeters, 1997). C.U.

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 Hattusha. Among these texts we find hymns, prayers, detailed descriptions of ceremonies, and some cultic inventories containing descriptions of the divine images housed in temples and shrines. For example:

The Storm-god of Likhzina [as worshiped in the town of] Tiliura: 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 shekels in weight, to the Storm-god of Likhzina. Ten bronze sun-disks have been nailed onto the offering table of the Storm-god [of Likhzina]. We have built a new temple for him. (KUB 38.3 1.1-6.)

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 metals. Few objects of such valuable material have survived, but there are some exceptions to the general fate of plunder and melting down for reuse. Three silver rhyta—a bull protome (fig. 178—all figures come from Bittel 1976), a stag protome (fig. 169), and a "fist"—not only provide vivid confirmation of the occasional theriomorphic rendering 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 figurines (figs. 147, 149, 175, 262, 263) may be actual cult images from minor 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 as at İmamkulu (fig. 203), Fraktin (figs. 196, 198), and the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya (figs. 232-241, 249-254) and on stelae (figs. 207, 230, 247, 264) or orthostats, the last particularly numerous at Alaca Höyük (figs. 212-227). The cosmological scene at Eflatun Pınar, 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. 276-318), 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



Relief of a Hittite god in martial dress, with a pointed helmet, carrying an ax and sword. From the King's Gate, Hattusha, 13th century BCE. Ankara, Museum of Archaeology. *Hirmer Fotoarchiv*

chiefly for guardian figures in gate complexes (figs. 209-211, 258-261, 265-268). Theriomorphic column and statue bases are frequently found at Neo-Hittite sites (figs. 282, 303, 307).

Seals and seal impressions are another important source of Hittite religious imagery. The stamp seals characteristic of Hittite glyptic normally have space enough for the depiction of only a single god (figs. 185, 186, 193), but some large royal seals could accommodate a scene of a monarch in the embrace of his patron deity (figs. 191, 192). 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. 152).

Presenting similar compositional possibilities is the relief vase, on which one—or more often several—bands of painted appliqué figures around the upper portion of the large vessel show scenes of worship. Well-preserved jars of this type are known from Bitik (figs.

140, 144), İnandik, and Hüseyindede Tepe, and fragments of such vessels have been excavated at Bogazköy and Alisar. 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 "striding god" type—are 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 theriomorphic and anthropomorphic form, a practice already attested in earlier local iconography (Alaca Höyük, Kanesh). Thus the storm-god may appear as a bull, and the Tutelary Deity as a stag. It is also clear from both textual and artistic material that cultic implements in the shape of these animals, and the beasts themselves as 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 kilt with a dagger tucked into his belt and often brandishes a mace and/or forked lightning bolt. The similarly clad Tutelary Deity shoulders a bow or less frequently a crook. Most divinities, however, are undifferentiated visually, although they may sometimes be distinguished, as in the procession at Yazılıkaya, by accompanying hieroglyphic writings of their names. In particular, each goddess (save the bigendered Sawuška) is depicted in the same voluminous mantle and long skirt, with a cowl, or later a high cylindrical *polos*, upon her head.

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

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