

### Cult Stand

Beginning with the Wadi Rabah Culture (Early Chalcolithic period, ca. 5800–5300 BCE), stands made of clay or basalt stone belong to the material culture of the Southern Levant. Although only few items have been found in an explicitly cultic context, they are normally considered to be used for cultic purposes. At least some of them may have been used in household cults. Unfortunately there exists not a single detailed study about the find context, the function and the shape of the stands over all the periods. In the Golan culture (Late Chalcolithic period, 4500–3600 BCE) such stands made of basalt and with the shape of a (sometimes bearded) human being were found in several houses (Epstein: 230–33), while at the same time in the Ghassulian culture fenestrated-pedestalled stands made of clay or basalt were typical (Amiran: 24); this type continued nearly unchanged in the Early Bronze Age (3300–2200 BCE). Although they are generally considered to be incense burners, this function has never been proven.

In the 3rd millennium a new type of cult stands was developed in Assyria (especially Assur): this type resembles houses or temples with windows and is often stepped (Bretschneider; Muller). This same type, which is also depicted on seals, has often been found in temples and therefore certainly has cultic affinities. Several kinds of offerings to a god could be presented on those stands. This type is also known in Syria in the early 2nd millennium BCE (e.g., Meskene, Emar). In Palestine this tradition was taken over in the Late Bronze Age in Megiddo and especially in the Iron Age I (12th–10th centuries BCE) in Megiddo, Taanach, Bet Shean, Tel Rehov, Tabaqat Fahil and Jerusalem (fragment). Normally the stands in Palestine were not stepped (exception: Bet-Shan), but formed like an altar with vertical sides, which could be beautifully decorated (cf. the two stands from Taanach, see fig. 21). Typical decorations are cherubs, naked goddesses as a symbol of fertility, the tree of life (sometimes with caprides climbing and eating), likewise a symbol of fertility, and lions as a sign of power and strength. This type of cult stand, which resembles a house, represents a temple in miniature; the decorations on the stands signify the presence of a deity and

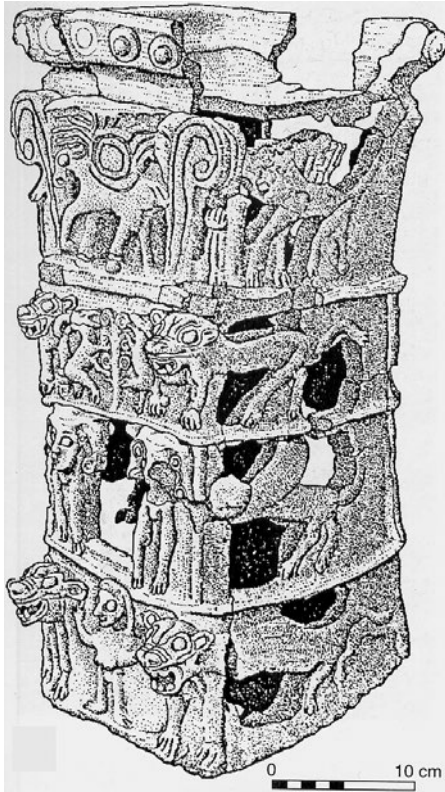


Fig. 21 Cult stand from Taanach (10th cent. BCE)

(Beit-Arieh) are shaped in an anthropomorphic style.

Cult stands fell out of use in the Persian period.

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