

ANOTHER TEMPLE IN JUDAH!

The Tale of Tel Moza

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"Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord."

(DEUTERONOMY 12:11)

IN 2012, ARCHAEOLOGISTS from the Jerusalem District of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) made a jaw-dropping discovery that is still puzzling archaeologists and biblical scholars. They discovered a temple at Tel Moza, less than 4 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It apparently stood, operated, and welcomed worshipers throughout most of the Iron Age II, from its establishment around 900 B.C.E. until its demise sometime toward the end of the Iron Age (early sixth century B.C.E.). But what is a temple doing at Tel Moza during this period, when the Bible says the only temple in Judah was in Jerusalem?!

Could a monumental temple *really* exist in the heart of Judah, right outside Jerusalem? Did Jerusalem know about it? If so, could this other

temple possibly have been part of the Judahite administrative system? After all, the previous excavators of the site, Zvi Greenhut and Alon De Groot of the IAA,¹ had identified it with biblical Mozah—first mentioned in the Book of Joshua (18:26) as a city in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin—and labeled it a royal granary that primarily supplied Jerusalem.²

The Bible details the religious reforms of King Hezekiah and King Josiah, who assertedly consolidated worship practices to Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and eliminated all cultic activity beyond its boundaries (2 Kings 18; 23; 2 Chronicles 29–31; 34–35). These reforms should correspond to the late eighth century and the late seventh century B.C.E., respectively.



PHOTO BY CLARA AMIT, IAA

BLINKERS ON. Representing a horse wearing blinders, this clay figurine—along with another equine and two anthropomorphic figurines—was found next to a rectangular stone-built podium in the courtyard of the Moza temple. The podium most likely served as an offering table on which the figurines were originally placed.

With the biblical text echoing in our ears, we were initially apprehensive about our identification of the Moza temple. However, our analysis of the archaeological finds and biblical texts clearly demonstrates that the temple at Moza conforms to ancient Near Eastern religious conventions and traditions and to biblical depictions of cult places throughout the land.

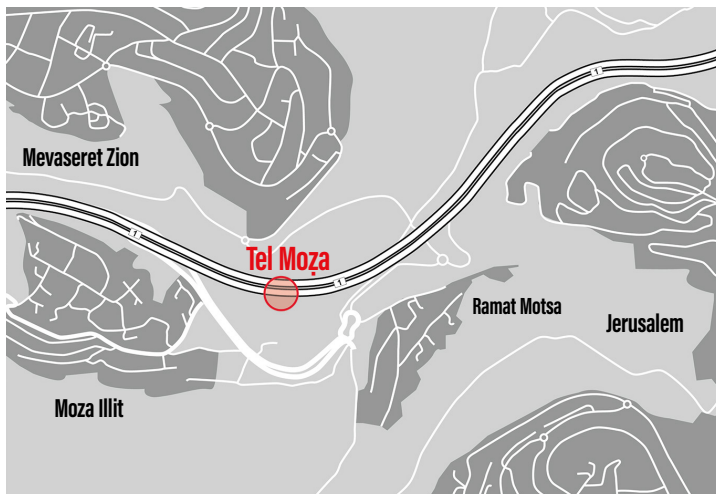
Setting aside the volatile topic of the formation of cult in Judah (the so-called Israelite religion that scholars continue to debate), it has become clear that temples such as the one at Moza not only *could* but also *must* have existed throughout most of the Iron II period as part of the official, royally sanctioned religious construct. Indeed, the temple at Moza is not an anomaly at

all; rather, it is the exception that proves the rule!

Simply put: Despite the biblical narratives describing Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms, there were sanctioned temples in Judah in addition to the official temple in Jerusalem. Allow us to explain.

The discovery of the Moza temple—and other remains excavated there between 1993 and 2013—produced an array of possibilities for the study of cult and state formation in Judah during the Iron Age II, the period Solomon's Temple stood (from the tenth century B.C.E. until its destruction in 586 B.C.E.). Enough archaeological and historical questions emerged that enticed us to return to the site to fully unearth the temple complex.

So in the fall of 2018, when construction on the new highway—which had triggered the site's initial excavation—was complete, and the IAA conservation department began removing the massive sand backfill that had covered and



HIGHWAY 1'S NEW COURSE cuts through the site of the Iron Age II temple at Tel Moza. The road construction had triggered the site's initial excavation.

revealed a cultic structure that predated the temple complex and is attributed to the tenth century B.C.E. Based on this superposition and the pottery found in the temple's foundation, we can date the construction of the temple to the early ninth or possibly late tenth century B.C.E. It is now evident that the site exhibits continuity in function—both administrative and cultic—from the early stages of the Iron II period.

Two more excavation seasons are planned, for the springs of 2020 and 2021. Our aim is to excavate the entire temple complex and unearth additional parts of the earlier cultic structure. Our discoveries thus far have fundamentally changed the way we understand the religious practice of the Judahites.

Located on a slope overlooking the ancient route connecting the Shephelah (the Judean foothills) to the west and the central hill country and Jerusalem to the east, Tel Moza is surrounded by water sources and has ample fertile soil. Because

protected the site, the time had come to return to Tel Moza.

The IAA conservation team started work on the remains, and the temple was once again brought to light. The first season of the Tel Moza Expedition Project, which we directed on behalf of Tel Aviv University, took place in the spring of 2019 with participants from Tel Aviv University and Charles University in Prague (the Czech Republic). Work during this season focused on small-scale probes and collection of soil and organic samples.

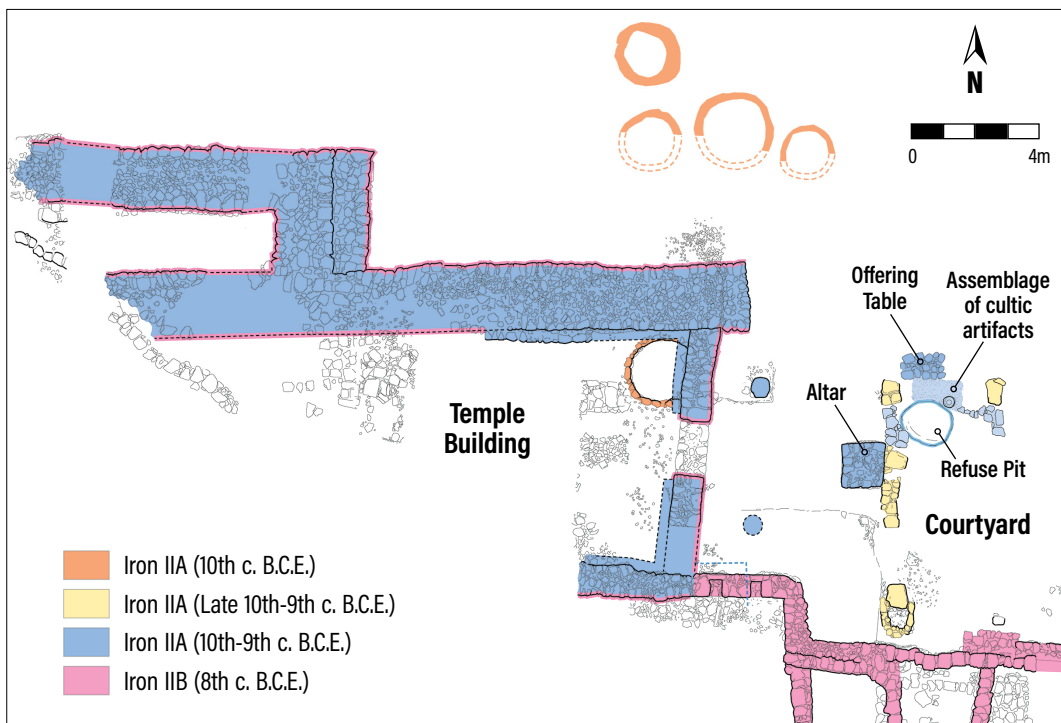
Excavation under the temple's earliest floor

FOREVER GREEN. The fertile basin at the foot of Tel Moza has provided favorable conditions for agriculture since at least the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (eighth and seventh millennia B.C.E.).



PHOTO BY P. PARTOUCHE, SKYVIEW

PHOTO BY P. PARTOUCHE, SKYVIEW



DRONE'S EYE VIEW. An aerial view of the temple at Tel Moza reveals walls up to 8 feet wide and a disposition with one long room segmented into two spaces: a smaller "holy of holies" and a larger front chamber connected to a portico with two columns flanking the entrance.

PRACTICAL TEMPLE. The construction of a temple at Tel Moza needs to be viewed in the light of the site's economic and administrative importance. Silos from the Iron Age IIA (in orange) attest to Moza's role as a royal granary that began to cater to Jerusalem in the late tenth century.



PHOTO BY SHUA KISILEVITZ

COMPLEX ALTAR. Next to the altar (foreground) built of unhewn stones in the temple courtyard is an oval pit, which probably served as a refuse pit for the sacrifices performed in this altar complex.

of these favorable conditions and the temperate weather, the region served as a prime location for settlement and agriculture.

Five seasons of salvage excavations of the site between 1993 and 2013 revealed remains from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (eighth and seventh millennia B.C.E.) through modern times, when the slope hosted the Arab village of Qaluniya. The most expansive and dominant remains date to the Iron II period (mid-tenth century to 586 B.C.E.). Aside from the temple, most of the Iron II features were used for grain storage. These include dozens of silos and parts of two storage buildings, one of which contained more than 130 hole-mouth storage jars in a single room.

Five silos date to the Iron IIA period (tenth to early ninth centuries B.C.E.), with one silo physically sealed by the later temple built over it. Therefore, the site functioned as an

administrative and economic center prior to the temple's construction. The remaining dozens of silos date to the eighth century B.C.E., indicating substantial economic growth during this time. The subsequent introduction of storage buildings, which cut through and replaced some of the silos during the Iron IIB–C period (late eighth to early sixth centuries B.C.E.), suggests increased use and industrialization of the site. Additional buildings built during this period likely served administrative—and religious—purposes.³

The surge in construction mirrors the demographic and economic growth witnessed throughout Judah during the Iron IIB–C period.

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The administrative and functional development of Moza as a storage and redistribution center highlights the site's centrality in the region. And it is in this light that the construction of the Tel Moza temple should be viewed.

The temple complex has an east-west orientation and consists of a courtyard and a large rectangular building. It has the conventional *in antis* north Syrian-style temple plan, which prevailed in the ancient Near East from the third millennium B.C.E. and became typical of temples in the southern Levant as early as the second millennium B.C.E.—including the Late Bronze Age temples at Hazor (Areas A and H), the temples at 'Ain Dara and Tell Ta'ynat in Syria, and also Solomon's Temple as described in the Bible. This plan consists of a long room, usually segmented into two spaces. A smaller “holy of holies” was located at the back, where the central object of worship—often a statue—was placed, while a larger forward chamber was connected to a front portico, with two columns flanking the entrance.

Although the southern part of the portico is not preserved due to later construction and erosion, we assume that the building was likely symmetrical, meaning that the portico consisted of two column bases flanked by evenly spaced *antae* (ends of walls acting like pillars) on either side of the entrance. The temple's walls are not perfectly aligned, creating a slightly offset polygonal structure, but it has a conventional outline with a wide entrance in the eastern wall. Aside from the massive northern wall, measuring between 5 and 8 feet wide and serving as a retaining wall against the slope, the temple's walls measure 3 feet in width. The northern and eastern walls were lined with benches built of fieldstones. The excavated temple measures 62 by 43 feet, but this calculation does not include the width of an additional chamber that may have existed to the south.

Segments of two floors were found: a packed-earth-and-plaster floor near the entrance in the eastern part of the building and, at a higher elevation, a fragmented-stone pavement to the west. Five fieldstones, probably serving as sacred stones (*masseboth*), had intentionally been placed on the plaster floor against the northern bench. The absence of an earlier floor under the stone pavement, revealed in the 2019 excavation season, indicates that the plaster floor and stone pavement were contemporary. Accordingly, the higher floor in the west can be understood as an architecturally designed ascension within the building: as one progresses toward the “holy of

holies,” one physically steps higher and higher. Although no partition wall was found within the temple, the variation in the floor's material composition may offer a further physical distinction between the front chamber and the “holy of holies.” The plaster floor represents the main chamber of the temple, while the stone pavement represents the innermost chamber, the “holy of holies.” This reconstruction allows for an unusually large space at the back of the temple and might indicate a tripartite building, with the “holy of holies” located at the western edge of the building.

The temple courtyard was paved with a packed-earth floor, only patches of which remain. Within the courtyard, a prominent stone altar, refuse pit, and other installations were

OUT WITH THE OLD. Cult artifacts uncovered in the temple courtyard had been intentionally broken, deposited, and covered with soil and pieces of plaster. These sacred objects attest to a ritual during which cultic paraphernalia were decommissioned to make room for new items.



PHOTO BY DAVID YEEGER



PHOTOS BY CLARA AMIT, IAA

HEADS WILL ROLL! Only heads remain of two human figurines from the Moza temple. The strands of their hair, headdresses with raised edges, and facial features are created by clay appliqués. Found in a clearly religious context, they must have been associated with the cultic activities that took place at the temple.

discovered. Built of unhewn fieldstones, the altar stands at the center of the courtyard, directly in front of the temple's entrance. It measures roughly 4.5 by 4.5 feet.

To the northeast, nearly adjacent to the altar, is a 6-by-4-foot oval pit dug about 3 feet deep into the packed-earth floor. It was filled with earth, ash, pottery sherds, and a large amount of bones—mostly sheep and goat remains, some burned and some with butchery marks. The pit probably functioned as a disposal pit associated with the sacrifices performed on the altar.

About 3 feet north of the refuse pit was a rectangular stone installation, or "podium," measuring approximately 3 by 2 feet, and about 1 foot high. An assemblage of cult artifacts and pottery sherds was found scattered along a narrow strip of the courtyard floor between the disposal pit and the podium. This assemblage includes four figurines

(two anthropomorphic and two zoomorphic), fragments of chalices (one with traces of burning), stands (including fragments of a large decorated cult stand), and pendants (one shaped like a pomegranate). These artifacts had been intentionally broken, deposited, and covered with a thick layer of earth and pieces of plaster. The podium appears to have served in the cultic rituals that took place in the courtyard, likely as an offering table on which the figurines (and plausibly additional cult artifacts) had been originally placed.

Modeled out of local clay, the four figurines exhibit similar features and production techniques, indicating that they were made in a local workshop. The anthropomorphic figurines, of which only the heads are preserved, are fashioned "in the round" out of a solid piece of clay. Onto each figurine, clay appliqués were attached to form hair, round headdresses with raised edges, and facial features, including punctured pellet eyes and puncturing on the chin to simulate a beard. These heads may have originally belonged to full-bodied figurines, and perhaps one was even the mounted rider of a large horse-and-rider figurine. Alternatively, the heads may have been attached to a vessel or another object.

Regardless, their craftsmanship implies that they were free-standing figures.

Whereas the temple building would be understood to be the literal house of god, a haven only the high priest was allowed to access occasionally, the temple courtyard was the focal point of most human cultic activity. The courtyard was where the public could access the religious sphere and where offerings and votives were brought, placed, and used as mediators in rituals designed to communicate with the god or gods.

Since it was continuously in use, this temple space had the greatest variety of archaeological features (i.e., various installations, artifacts, vessels, etc.) and the highest number of stratigraphic phases. In all, we noted four phases from the Iron Age II in the temple courtyard, the first of which is the best preserved and comprised the cultic assemblage, offering table, pit, and altar. These were eventually covered with fills and were sealed under a plaster floor marking the second floor of the temple courtyard. This deposition does not signify a break in religious traditions but rather a religious ritual during which cultic paraphernalia were decommissioned to make

room for new items.

The temple's architecture, the artifacts' morphology (type) and typology (shape), and the iconography exhibited in them all conform to the religious traditions of the ancient Near East that had prevailed since the third millennium B.C.E. The Iron IIA period was a formative one, during which new political entities emerged throughout the Levant, including the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It stands to reason that, especially during those formative years, they rooted themselves in the prevalent, innate religious practices, supplying their rulers with divine legitimacy and providing their people with a connection to their past. While maintaining their individuality, the artifacts from Tel Moza fit well within the larger Iron IIA tradition, which is characterized by the application of religious motifs to cult artifacts that are generally handmade and thus unique.

You Remind Me of Someone

In Judah, figurines are nearly nonexistent during the Iron IIA period (second half of the tenth to the mid-ninth century B.C.E.), and male figurines are especially rare. Although the Tel Moza human figurines have no exact parallels, certain stylistic components and physical representations, such as facial characteristics, hairstyles, and headdresses,

find their counterparts among Iron Age figurines from Israel, Philistia, and Edom.

The closest parallel to the Tel Moza figurines—both geographically and chronologically—is a slightly earlier head from Khirbet Qeiyafa (early Iron IIA). The best parallels, however, are an Iron I (11th century B.C.E.) Philistine male figurine head from Ashdod (above) and two Iron IIB (ninth–eighth centuries B.C.E.) figurines from near the Edomite capital of Bozrah (modern Buseirah) (left).

Although figurines are scarce in the southern Levant during the Iron Age IIA, the depiction of humans on emblematic Iron I and Iron IIA cult vessels is not uncommon. They appear on cult stands, shrine models, and clay altars. These figures exhibit facial characteristics and production techniques similar to the Moza figurines and provide a well-established cultural context for their appearance.



PHOTO BY MEIRAD SUCHOWOLSKI, IAA



FROM LANKESTER HARDING, "SOME OBJECTS FROM TRANSJORDAN," *PALESTINE EXPLORATION QUARTERLY* 63.4 (1937), PL. IX, FIG. 1

Since Tel Moza functioned as a granary throughout the Iron Age II, becoming a royal granary catering to Jerusalem and part of Judah's larger economic framework by the eighth century B.C.E., it seems that the construction of the temple—and the worship conducted in it—were related to its economic significance. The economic and administrative functions of the site are, in fact, the very reason the temple existed!

The link between religion and economy has been well established in the ancient Near East, including at the Jerusalem Temple. But the economic component of ancient temples is more than just the collection of taxes, safeguarding of

wealth, and distribution of aid. A link between economic subsistence, production, and the development of religious elites during the Iron IIA period has been suggested at several sites. The economic role of food and goods dispensation is known from Tell el-Mazar in modern Jordan. Metallurgical and agricultural industries are known from the temple at Tel Dan in northern Israel. The discoveries at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the Sinai, Tell el-Hammah in the West Bank, and Tel 'Amal in northern Israel illuminate the textile industry. Similarly, the temple at Tel Moza was built as an addendum to the agricultural structures.

The community maintaining the granaries at Tel Moza depended on agricultural success for their livelihood (i.e., ample rainfall, fertility of the land, and a bountiful harvest) and likely sought it out by worship of the god(s). The construction of a central cult place with regulated worship dedicated to this purpose is a natural progression for a growing community. According to this premise, when the site's function as a granary intensified, a temple was constructed to ensure economic success.

With time, the elite used religious belief and ritual practices to ensure the integrity of the administrative system. Cult corners or possible temples built to support industrial production have been identified in the Iron IIA period apiary at Tel Rehov in the Jordan valley, in an Iron IIA period textile production center at Tell es-Safi/Gath in Philistia, and in the Iron IIC period olive oil industrial production area in Ekron in Philistia.

But we must ask the big question:

Who was this agricultural community that established the site and built the temple at Tel Moza?

It is commonly accepted that the site was part of Judah's economic and administrative system during the Iron IIB–C period, meaning it would

have officially been sanctioned by the Kingdom of Judah. But attributing a monumental temple complex to a kingdom centered in Jerusalem in the late tenth and early ninth centuries B.C.E. seems impossible given the current state of our archaeological knowledge of Jerusalem. Instead, we suggest that the Tel Moza temple was the undertaking of a local group, initially representing several extended families or perhaps villages

Earliest Horses of Iron Age Judah?

The two zoomorphic figurines from Tel Moza depict harnessed horses with bulging eyes punctured in the center. The larger figurine is burnished and has a hollow torso and solid limbs, neck, and head. It has incised trappings, applied reins, and a rider—all of which have mostly broken off. The feet of the rider, whose body is not preserved, remain attached to the horse. The smaller horse figurine is a solid and less meticulously crafted piece, with blinders limiting its vision and the remains of a pack or rider still attached to its body.

These artifacts from Moza may be the earliest depictions of horses found in Iron Age Judah.



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that banded together to pool their resources and maximize production and yield. As they grew and expanded, so did their site, which eventually grew to house a cult place, constructed and established as a monumental temple. The erection of the temple is a hefty undertaking that necessitated administrative organization and exhibited a high level of craftsmanship and knowledge of ancient Near Eastern conventions. The construction of the Tel Moza temple should be viewed as a reflection of the complexity of the local community and an indication of a level of civic administrative formation by the early ninth century B.C.E. in this region—perhaps even an autonomous Moza polity.

Who *exactly* constructed the temple in the early ninth century B.C.E.? And were these people associated with the rise of Jerusalem and the emergence of the Kingdom of Judah? And how did this temple operate successfully in the shadow of the Jerusalem Temple throughout its entire lifespan, especially when the Bible makes no mention of any such temple and, moreover, says all other shrines were destroyed?

All we know so far is that when it was constructed, the Moza temple was likely the undertaking of a local group, but by the Iron IIB period, it was clearly under Judahite rule and must therefore have been royally sanctioned by the realm.

The rest remains to be discovered.⁴ ■

¹ The first three seasons of excavations at Tel Moza were conducted by Zvi Greenhut and Alon De Groot, assisted by Hamudi Khalaily and Anna Eirikh. In 2012 excavations resumed under Anna Eirikh, Hamudi Khalaily, Shua Kisilevitz, and Zvi Greenhut, assisted by Daniel Ein-Mor and David Yeger. They were carried out in advance of the construction of a new segment of Highway 1, near the entrance to Jerusalem, on behalf of the IAA and financed by the National Roads Company of Israel. The excavation areas and the depth to which these were excavated was determined primarily by the requirements of the planned constructions.

² See Zvi Greenhut and Alon De Groot, et al., *Salvage Excavations at Tel Moza: The Bronze and Iron Age Settlements and Later Occupations*, IAA Reports 39 (Jerusalem: IAA, 2009), p. 223.

³ Two of the structures excavated in 2012–2013 may have continued into the Babylonian and perhaps early Persian periods (586–332 B.C.E.). If so, the site was not destroyed during the Babylonian conquest as previously believed but continued to function as an economic center for several decades after the fall of Jerusalem and the demise of the Kingdom of Judah. This tentative assertion is pending further examination of the material.

⁴ For more on the Tel Moza excavations, visit www.telmoza.org.



Decorated Cult Stand

Among the cult artifacts excavated from the Iron Age II temple at Tel Moza was a large cult stand (pictured here from two sides). It had to be reconstructed from several fragments: a large solid base, a fragment with the “pendant petal” motif, a crescent-shaped appliqué, and fragments of a large bowl decorated with schematic pendant petals around the exterior. A popular motif throughout the ancient Near East during the Iron Age, pendant petals were used in various media and made of an array of materials. They likely represent a schematic and somewhat simplified lotus leaf.

The vessel's base diameter of about a foot indicates that the stand must have been quite tall. Its size and mass suggest that it was a semipermanent fixture positioned in the courtyard, near the offering table. In fact, the large base was found *in situ* on the courtyard floor.

Though badly preserved, the stand shows the remains of two symmetrical lions or sphinxes, one on either side of the base, facing forward. The front paw and hindquarters of both animals are preserved, with the animal on the right depicting a hind leg and a long, upward-curving tail ending in a tuft of hair that rests on the animal's back. Despite the absence of the animals' heads, their identification as sphinxes is more probable given a wing-shaped fragment found collapsed into the stand base.

Both lions and sphinxes are well known in Iron Age visual imagery of cultic artifacts, as these ferocious animals served as guardians and symbols of divine and royal dominance. Locally, they are best exemplified by the two large rectangular stands from Ta'anach, both elaborately decorated with pairs of sphinxes and lions positioned one on top of the other. Stands similar to the one from Moza have been found at Arad, Megiddo, and Tell es-Safi.

