

The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza¹

SHUA KISILEVITZ

Israel Antiquities Authority

The renewed excavations at Tel Moza brought to light remains of an exceptional temple complex, established in the Iron IIA (10th–9th centuries BCE).² An assemblage comprised of figurines and cultic vessels was found lying on the packed earth floor of the temple courtyard. The plan of the temple and the motifs of the figurines and cultic vessels are drawn from conventions prevalent throughout the Ancient Near East. The importance and unique nature of the Tel Moza temple are accentuated by the fact that it is the first Iron Age temple to be excavated in the heart of Judah, just a few km from Jerusalem, and thus provides new insight into early Israelite religion.

KEYWORDS Tel Moza, Judah, Iron Age, Cult, Temple, Stands, Figurines

Tel Moza is located approximately 7 km northwest of ancient Jerusalem (the City of David), close to the western entrance to the modern city. It is situated towards the bottom of the southern slope of a spur where the village of Qalunya stood until 1948. The village covered, and at times eradicated, earlier settlements on the slope. The landscape is dominated by agricultural terraces maintained by the village. Two main valleys, Soreq from the northeast and Moza from the northwest, blessed with seasonal water flow, converge at the base of the slope. These, along with several small springs in the immediate vicinity, have resulted in fertile soil conducive to agriculture.

Surveys and excavations had been conducted in the area previously,³ but it was not until 1993—when salvage excavations were carried out at the location in preparation for

¹ This article is a partial synopsis of a thesis recently submitted by the author to Prof. Tallay Ornan and Dr. Doron Ben-Ami of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I would like to thank my colleagues in this project, Zvi Greenhut, Hamudi Khalaily and Anna Eirikh, for entrusting me with the publication of the temple and its artefacts.

² The dating system presented in this paper follows the Modified Conventional Chronology (Mazar 2005, 2011).

³ For a synopsis of surveys and excavations at the site, see Greenhut and De Groot 2009: 3–6.

the construction of a section of the new road to Jerusalem—that the site was identified as an archaeological tell that had been occupied intermittently from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period to the first half of the 20th century.⁴ In the course of these excavations an abundance of remains and finds dating to the Iron Age II were found, confirming the identification of the site with biblical Moza, mentioned for the first time in the Book of Joshua as a town in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:26).⁵ Excavations resumed at the site in the summer of 2012, when remains of a temple were unearthed;⁶ it had been constructed in the Iron IIA, and contained a unique assemblage of cult objects. This article is a preliminary presentation of the temple and the cult artefacts found at Tel Moza; a detailed study of the finds is in progress.

Backdrop of the temple excavations

The most prominent remains unearthed at the site date to the Iron Age. The finds uncovered during the 1993 salvage excavations indicate that Tel Moza was settled continuously during this period, dated by the excavators from the 10th century BCE until the Babylonian conquest and destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the early 6th century BCE (Greenhut and De Groot 2009: 217). These excavations yielded remains of a storage building with numerous holemouth storage jars, as well as dozens of silos, leading to the labelling of Tel Moza as ‘a royal granary specializing in grain storage, which supplied its products first and foremost to Jerusalem’ (Greenhut and De Groot 2009: 223).

⁴ The first three seasons of excavations at Tel Moza (Permit nos. A-2041/1993; A-3612/2002; A-3889/2003) were conducted by Zvi Greenhut and Alon De Groot, assisted by Hamudi Khalaily and Anna Eirikh. Due to the importance of the discoveries made during these excavations and in order to preserve the remains, this segment was redesigned as a bridge rather than a paved road directly on the spur. For the final publication of the Iron Age and later period remains excavated during these seasons, see Greenhut and De Groot 2009.

⁵ An identification first suggested by Vincent and Abel (1932: 284).

⁶ The renewed excavations (Permit nos. A-6544/2012; A-6786/2013), carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and financed by the National Roads Company of Israel, were conducted due to changes and additions in the location of the columns designated to carry the new road. The excavations were conducted by Anna Eirikh, Hamudi Khalaily, Shua Kisilevitz and Zvi Greenhut, assisted by Daniel Ein-Mor (area supervision and photography), David Yeger (area supervision), Avi Hajian and Mark Kunin (surveying), Natasha Zack and Dalit Weinblatt (drafting of plans), Assaf Peretz (field photography), Pascal Partouche of SkyView (aerial photography), Nissan Nehama (administration), Clara Amit (photography of finds), Joseph Bukengoltz (pottery restoration), Nuha Agga (archaeozoology, preliminary identification), Lidar Sapir-Hen (archaeozoology), Carmen Hirsh (drawing of cult artefacts), Anat Cohen-Weinberger (petrography) and Elisheva Kameisky (production techniques). I am grateful to my advisors Tallay Ornan and Doron Ben-Ami, and to the array of scholars who visited the site, examined the finds, and provided insightful comments, including: Amnon Ben-Tor, Erin Darby, Michele Daviau, Alon De Groot, Israel Finkelstein, Liora Freud, Yuval Gadot, Yoseph Garfinkel, Amihai Mazar, Nadav Na'aman, Ariel Winderbaum, Ziony Zevit and Sharon Zuckerman; as well as countless others with whom I have discussed the finds in the course of the last three years.

A monumental public building, 'Building 500', dating to the end of the Iron Age (7th to early 6th centuries BCE (*ibid.*: 50–54, 225, Plan 2.15), was uncovered in Area B. It was only partially excavated, as it extended mostly beyond the scope of the 1993 salvage excavations. The southern part was not preserved and had washed down the slope. 'Building 500' is a large structure, with a massive northern wall terminating in a prominent anta, a stylobate supporting stone column bases and patches of a stone pavement. It includes a courtyard to the east, in which a white plaster floor, stone installations and partition walls were found. Special finds retrieved from the building include two Hebrew inscriptions on pottery vessels (*ibid.*: 137–142, Fig. 5.11), and a small sceptre head made of Egyptian Blue found above the floor (*ibid.*: 149–155). The structure was identified as 'a public building, which may have been used for cultic purposes' (*ibid.*: 225). Taken together, the finds led Greenhut and De Groot to attribute an important role to Tel Moza 'within the royal administration as an administrative centre of the Kingdom of Judah in close proximity to Jerusalem', functioning as a re-distribution centre for Jerusalem, that 'may have contained a cultic element' (*ibid.*: 222–225).

In 2012 salvage excavations at Tel Moza resumed, proceeding intermittently until the summer of 2013. The need for additional salvage excavations at the site arose due to changes made in the design of the planned modern road; this, in turn, affected the proposed position and width of the area prepared for the concrete pillars designed to support the bridge. As a result, a number of the previously excavated areas were revisited and expanded, generally down to bedrock.⁷

While expanding the area excavated east of 'Building 500', a unique assemblage of cult objects and figurines was discovered. Due to the abundance and unique nature of the finds permission was granted to excavate beyond the designated area, with the goal of revealing the stratum from which this assemblage originated and attributing a context to the special finds. To this end 'Building 500' and the courtyard to its east were re-exposed and partially excavated, revealing part of the original construction phase. The 2012–2013 salvage excavations revealed a large complex consisting of an elaborate building and a courtyard, with two strata (each featuring sub-phases). The first stratum consists of a temple complex, founded in the Iron IIA (probably during the early part of the late Iron IIA).⁸ The second stratum is attributed to the above mentioned 'Building 500'

⁷ The finds from the renewed excavations include remains of the village of Qalunya, the Early and Late Roman periods (most likely attributed to the settlement of Colonia established across the valley, which encroached upon the tell), the Persian period (scant finds), the Iron Age and the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period.

⁸ The building was dated according to pottery found sealed under the floors, in its foundation trench and on the courtyard floor. The majority of this assemblage is similar to that of the City of David Stratum 14, with a small percentage similar to that of the City of David Stratum 13 (10th–9th centuries BCE), and indicates a construction date no later than the first half of the 9th century BCE. I would like to thank Ariel Weinderbaum for sharing his insights on the Iron IIA pottery from Eilat Mazar's excavations in the Ophel, Jerusalem with me, for examining the pottery from Moza and for his valuable observations.

(Greenhut and De Groot 2009: 50–54, Plan 2.15). According to the current understanding of the finds it is not possible to definitively ascertain whether ‘Building 500’ continued to function as a temple.⁹

Due to the imminent construction of the bridge, only part of the complex was unearthed. The areas excavated include the northern part of the courtyard, the northeast corner of the building and a section of its western part. As a result the complete plan and dimensions of the complex are not known. Additionally, the southern part of the building was eroded and badly preserved in the small area excavated on its eastern edge. The western section of the southern part of the building is largely nonexistent, as can be deduced by the current curve of the slope, which dissects the western trajectory of the southern part of the building. The complex, along with significant portions of the site, was back-filled in the summer of 2013 and construction of the road began immediately thereafter.¹⁰

The temple plan

The temple was constructed as a complex built in an east–west orientation along a central axis: a massive temple building with a demarcated vestibule/portico in its façade, and to the east a large courtyard with a prominent stone altar and adjacent refuse pit and installations (Figs. 1–2).

The temple follows a long-room type plan, and is approached via a portico (probably alluding to the biblical *ʾûlām*). An anta protruding from the northern wall of the temple facing the east serves as the northern boundary of the portico. A flat-topped stone, roughly round and approximately 0.6 m in diameter, stands between the anta and the entrance to the building, and probably served as a column base. Although the southern part of the portico is not preserved due to later construction and erosion, it is most reasonable that the southern part mirrors the northern one, providing a symmetrical reflection, meaning that the portico consisted of two column bases and was flanked by antes.

Although the temple building consists of walls that are not perfectly aligned, creating a slightly offset, angled structure, it has a conventional outline. An impressive, approximately 1.6 m wide entrance is located in the eastern wall. Based on the parts that have been exposed, and assuming that the main chamber is symmetrical, the temple building is 18 m long and 13 m wide (this calculation does not include the width of an additional chamber that may have existed to the south of the main chamber); the inner width of the main chamber is 7–7.5 m. The northern wall was massive, and was reinforced during its use. It is 1.5–2.5 m wide, and served as a retaining wall against the slope. The remaining temple walls were likely not as broad since they did not act as retaining walls;

⁹ This paper focuses on the temple complex of the first stratum described above.

¹⁰ The remains are therefore currently not visible and further excavations will be possible only after the completion of the new road (scheduled to be opened in the summer of 2017). Since the bridge passes directly over the temple, and this is the point at which the road is closest to the surface, even with future excavations we may not be able to fully appreciate the entire complex, and restoration of the temple will not be feasible.

they are one metre wide, as indicated by the eastern wall at the entrance to the building, and a stump of the southern wall in the southeast. The northern and eastern walls were lined with benches built of fieldstones; they were on average 0.3 m wide.

The floor in the eastern part of the building, near the entrance, consists of packed earth with traces of plaster. A layer of pebble-like small stones in a rectangular shape was found on the floor, directly across from the entrance and along the same axis as the altar in the courtyard; this may have served as a foundation for an installation within the building. Five medium sized fieldstones, placed on their sides, were found set on the floor, juxtaposing the northern bench. The stones were clearly placed in the temple intentionally, and probably served as sacred stones, or *maṣṣēbôt*. To the west is a fragmented stone pavement 0.20 m above the elevation of the packed earth floor, near the entrance. Due to the restricted excavation in this area it is not clear whether this is a second phase of the building, in which the floor was repaved at a higher elevation, or whether this stone pavement is part of the original temple phase. In the latter case this would suggest an ascent within the building. The difference in elevation and type of floor could also indicate a distinction between the two parts of the chamber and allude to a partition between units within the temple that represent the main chamber of the temple (possibly alluding to the biblical *hēkāl*) and the innermost chamber which housed the shrine/holy of holies (possibly alluding to the biblical *dēbîr*).¹¹

In the western part of the building a rectangular chamber, 1.7 m wide and at least 5 m long, protrudes from the main axis towards the north. The length of the chamber is unknown as excavations in the western part ceased before the western wall was reached. Its floor was not preserved. This may have been a single chamber, or part of a series of chambers surrounding one or more of the building's walls.

The courtyard has not been fully exposed; only the western part was excavated. It was paved with a packed earth floor, of which only patches were preserved due to massive pitting throughout the Iron II. A rectangular altar (Fig. 3), built of unhewn medium to large fieldstones, stands at the centre of the excavated courtyard area, across from the portico and directly on the axis of the entrance to the temple building. The altar measures roughly 1.35 m × 1.4 m, and is preserved to a height of two courses above the floor level. To the northeast, nearly adjacent to the altar, is an oval pit measuring 1.85 m × 1.3 m, dug into the packed earth floor to a depth of approximately one metre. The pit is not lined, and its outline and base are irregular and uneven. It was filled with earth, ash, pottery sherds, and a large number of bones. Few of the pottery sherds found in the pit were originally part of cultic vessels. The large accumulation of ash and the sizeable number of bones, some of which are burned and have butchery marks, as well as the proximity to the altar, suggest that it functioned as a refuse pit associated with the cultic rituals that took place in the courtyard, specifically the sacrifices performed at the altar. Preliminary analysis of the animal bones by Nuha Aga of the IAA shortly after the excavations indicates that all

¹¹ This suggestion is only valid assuming that the floors are contemporary. Since the stone pavement has not been excavated and its date and relation to the packed earth floor at the entrance to the building are uncertain, this cannot be positively ascertained.

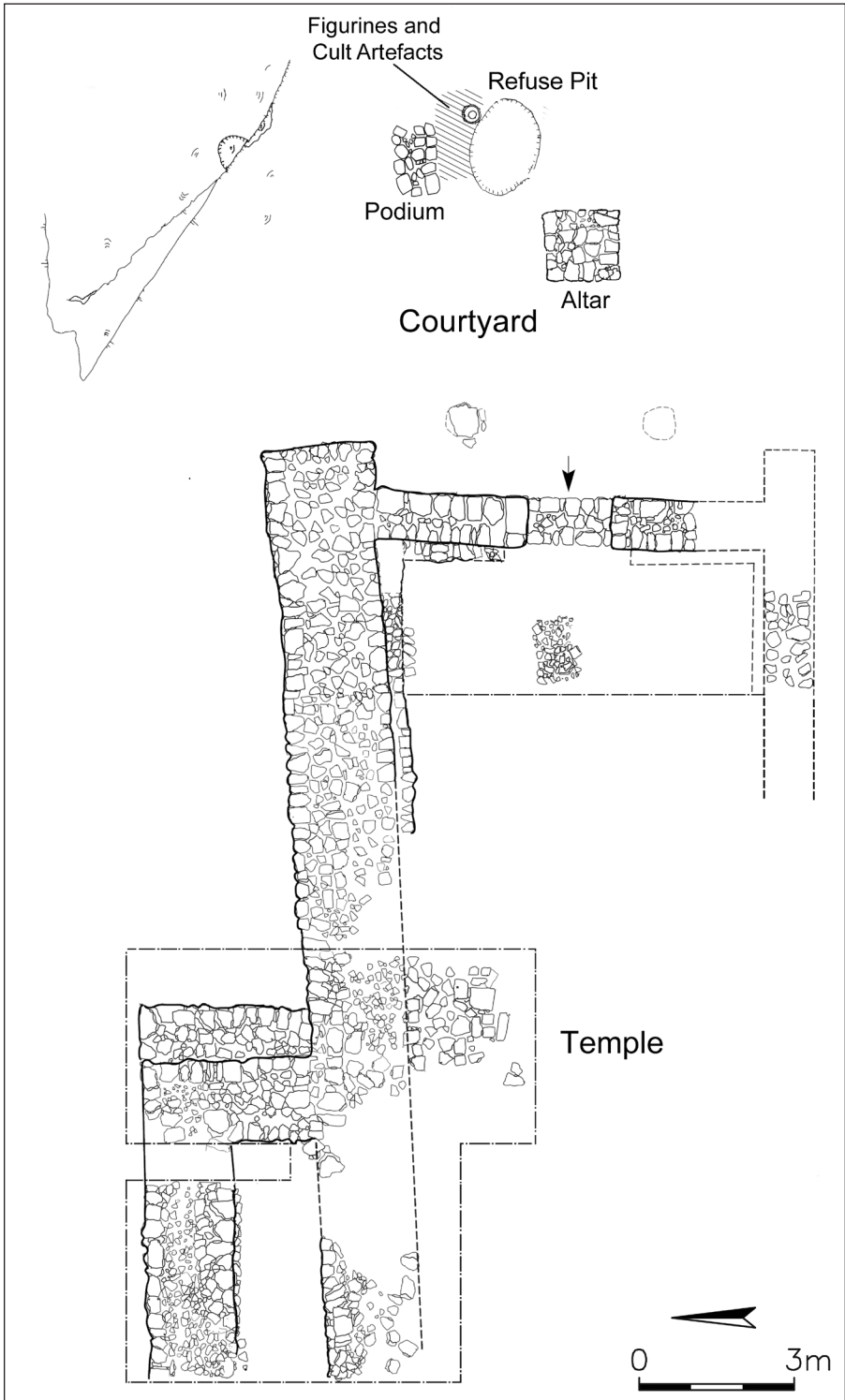


FIGURE 1 Plan of the temple.



FIGURE 2 Aerial photo of the temple (*photograph: P. Partouche, SkyView*).



FIGURE 3 The altar and packed earth floor in the temple courtyard (*photograph: A. Eirikh*).

the bones in the pit belong to young and ‘pure’ animals with no flaws or defects—that is, animals that are sanctioned for consumption under biblical law. These observations may indicate that the animals were carefully selected and used for sacrifices performed in the temple courtyard.¹²

About one metre to the north of the refuse pit is a rectangular stone built installation (‘podium’), measuring approximately 1.00 m × 0.7 m, and 0.25 m–0.35 m high (two courses were preserved). The podium is built of medium sized fieldstones, some of which are roughly hewn. The assemblage of cult artefacts and pottery sherds was found scattered along a narrow strip of the courtyard floor between the refuse pit and the podium. Among the finds in this assemblage are four figurines (two of which were anthropomorphic and two zoomorphic), fragments of chalices (one with traces of burn) and stands, including fragments of a large decorated cult stand (below), and styled pendants including one in the shape of a pomegranate. Of the four figurines in the assemblage three were found adjacent to the southeastern corner of the podium. The location of the podium within the courtyard and the accumulation of fragmented figurines to its feet, suggest that it may have functioned in some manner in the cult that took place in the courtyard, most likely as an offering table on which the figurines (and plausibly additional cult artefacts) were originally placed.

¹² Lidar Sapir-Hen of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University is currently conducting a comprehensive research project on the bones; a publication is forthcoming.



FIGURE 4 (A) Broken cult artefacts and pottery sherds spread across the courtyard floor; looking east. (B) Detail depicting cult stand base *in situ* (photograph: D. Yeğen).

The end of this phase is marked by the intentional covering of the fragmented cult artefacts with a thick layer of earth and clusters of plaster. The cult artefacts—along with the altar, refuse pit and podium—were then sealed under later Iron II walls and floors attributed to ‘Building 500’ (Greenhut and De Groot 2009: 50–54, Plan 2.15).

As previously mentioned, although the southern part of the building was not preserved, it is suggested that it was a symmetrical reflection of the remains in the north. Hence, the temple can be reconstructed as a large structure following a long-room plan with a room (or a series of rooms) encasing it on one or more sides. The entrance is fixed in the eastern wall, and a portico consisting of two pillars flanked by antes forms the façade. This plan became ubiquitous in the architecture of temples in the southern Levant as early as the second millennium BCE,¹³ originating in late third millennium BCE northern Syria (Mierse 2012: 13–14). The temple at Moza belongs to the ‘Syrian Temple’ plan, or temple in antis, epitomized in the Iron II by Temple II at Tell Tayinat (Harrison 2012: 6–9, Figs. 4–6, dated to the 8th century BCE). However, the above noted northern chamber of the Moza temple may classify it as a sub-type of the ‘Northern Syria’ group, as found at ‘Ain Dāra (Novák 2012 with previous bibliography), and probably in the biblical Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, the reconstruction of which is heavily based on the interpretation of the literary description in the biblical text (Herzog 2000: 157–165; Horwitz 2000).

Figurines and cult artefacts

Four figurines were found in the layer of cultic vessels, two anthropomorphic and two zoomorphic. All four are hand modeled out of clay made of the same, local, Moza marl and contain applied features.

The similarity between the two anthropomorphic figurines (Fig. 5)—one clearly depicting a male¹⁴—is evident. Only the heads were preserved. The faces have similar proportions and both are styled in the same fashion and utilize the same production methods. The figurines are fashioned ‘in the round’ out of a solid piece of clay onto which clay appliqué were attached to form the hair, headdress and facial features. The latter include a prominent straight-edged nose, large, bulky ears, and protruding eyes punctured in the centre to simulate the pupil. A prominent, pointed chin is evident in both figurines. Strands of hair fall down their napes, curling at the bottom; they were mostly fragmented in one of the figurines.¹⁵ Both have a round headdress with raised edges, which may recall headdresses of early Iron Age Philistine figurines interpreted as

¹³ For Bronze and Iron Ages in antis temples, see Mazar 1992: 164; Herzog 2000: 168–169; and Mazzoni 2010.

¹⁴ The male head (Fig. 5A) is clearly identified by a series of punctures outlining its face. The second head (Fig. 5B), although similar in shape, lacks markings of a beard.

¹⁵ The protruding nose, pointed chin, and bulging eyes punctured in the centre also characterize the anthropomorphic clay figures from 7th century Hazeva and Qitmit (Beck 1995: Figs. 27.3, 32.3; Ben-Arieh 2011: Figs. 11–12).



FIGURE 5 Anthropomorphic figurines.

originating from the Aegean styled Polos.¹⁶ However, the latter typically characterizes women.

Anthropomorphic figurines are, for the most part, uncommon during the Iron IIA in the southern Levant, and are predominantly idiosyncratic, making it difficult to find contemporary parallels. A notable exception is Philistia, which exemplifies a large, chiefly female, Aegean-style assemblage of figurines. Human-shaped figurines appear contemporaneously alongside the mould-made plaque figurines (Kletter 1996: 34–35), which maintain a Canaanite legacy. In Judah figurines are nearly nonexistent during this period. Male figurines are especially rare, and their paucity has led to their near exclusion from the scholarly discourse (Zevit 2001: 346, n. 167). Though the Moza figurines have no exact parallels, certain stylistic components and physiognomies, including facial characteristics, hairstyles and headdresses, do find parallels in Iron Age figurines from Israel and Philistia, and the latter may have transmitted Aegean-style traditions.¹⁷

The solid heads from Tel Moza may have originally belonged to figurines, and perhaps one was even the rider mounted on the large horse figurine (below); but they may have been attached to a vessel or another object. However, since they are made in the round, and great care was taken in the making of their hair-locks, it makes most sense that they were free-standing figures.

The two zoomorphic figurines are of harnessed animals. Both have bulging eyes punctured in the centre, but this is the only feature they have in common. One (Fig. 6) is a large hollow and burnished horse figurine unique in its meticulous fashioning and its somewhat realistic details.¹⁸ The feet of the rider, whose body is not preserved, remained attached to the horse. The second zoomorphic figurine (Fig. 7) is a smaller solid and less meticulously crafted piece, most likely also depicting a horse. To some extent, it is reminiscent of the horse figurines common in Judah during the Iron IIB–C in the 8th–early 6th centuries BCE, although it is more detailed and less crude. The Tel Moza figurines seem to be the earliest depictions of horses found in Iron Age Judah.

¹⁶ Press 2012: 42–54, 151, prevalent in Type I.A.1.a, miniature, small standing female figurines.

¹⁷ Early Iron Age male anthropomorphic figurines include a figurine head with a flat headdress exhibiting similar use of the puncturing technique, including bulging eyes punctured in the centre, found at Khirbet Qeiyafa (Garfinkel, Ganor and Hasel 2012: 163–164, Fig. 41). A male figurine head with red paint indicating a beard was found at Ashdod, Stratum XI (Ben-Shlomo, 2005: 162, Fig. 3.62.1; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: 54, Fig. 10.1); it exemplifies a similar headdress, similar protruding facial features and proportions. See also a contemporary clay head from Beth Shean (Mazar 2009: 536–538, Fig. 9.3).

¹⁸ Horses are the most dominant in animal representations of plastic art in the Iron Age (Holland 1977: 125). Horse shaped figurines appear throughout the southern Levant starting in the Late Bronze Age. However, they are rather scarce in the Iron I (Im 2006: 88–89). Their numbers increase in the Iron IIA (idem: 89–93), during which they appear in small numbers in Judah, Transjordan and Phoenicia, and in slightly larger numbers in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as well as in Philistia and Cyprus where they are rendered in a schematic style. They peak in the Iron IIB–C (8th–early 6th centuries BCE) during which time they become ubiquitous.

In all four Tel Moza figurines the eyes were fashioned by a similar technique, consisting of punctured button/pellet eyes. The entire assemblage appears to be indigenous, and was, as indicated by an initial petrographic assessment, made from the same composition of local Moza marl clay. That, added to the fact that they were all found together, indicates that they are part of one local group of items created by the same workshop. They were likely produced with the intention of serving in rituals held at the temple. As mentioned, figurines are not a common finding in Judah in the Iron IIA as opposed to their distribution in the Iron IIB–C, during which they are ubiquitous and found predominantly in residential contexts (mostly discarded in fills) and tombs (Moorey 2001: 47–51).

A fifth cult object (Fig. 8), found on the temple courtyard floor among the discussed figurines and additional fragmentary cult objects and pottery, is a cult stand reconstructed from 4–5 fragments. This reconstruction is based on the similar clay composition and their workmanship style. The fragments comprising the cult stand include a large solid base, a fragment with the ‘pendant petal’ motif, a crescent shaped appliqué, and fragments of a large bowl decorated with slightly convex nobs around the exterior. These, along with the vessel’s large diameter, indicate that it must have been quite tall. The large base with a tapering stem extending from the bottom upwards was found *in situ* on the courtyard floor. It was formed as a wheel-made bowl which was turned upside down and decorated by adhering hand-moulded clay appliques to form a low relief.



FIGURE 6 Figurine of a horse with the remains of a rider's legs on its back.



FIGURE 7 Small equid figurine.

Although the applied decoration on the base is badly preserved, the remains of two animals, one on either side, facing forward, can be discerned. Though the relief on the right is better preserved than the one on the left, the similarity between them indicates that they form a symmetric motif on either side of the vessel. No decoration was discerned between the two animals. The front paw of both animals is preserved, as are their hindquarters. The animal on the right depicts a hind leg, and a long, upward-curving tail ending in a tuft of hair that rests on the animal's back. The preserved features clearly depict the bodies of lions, and could therefore portray either lions or sphinxes. However, since the heads are not preserved it is impossible to determine which of the two was originally portrayed. These two creatures are well known in contemporary visual imagery; locally they are best exemplified by the two large rectangular 'tower stands' from Taanach, both elaborately decorated with incorporated pairs of sphinxes and lions positioned one on top of the other (Beck 1994 with earlier bibliography; Frick 2000: 118–119, Fig. 18). The nobbed-decorated bowl and the pendant petal are common on cult stands and chalices during the Iron IIA.¹⁹

A large number of pottery sherds and additional ritual objects were found near the figurines, among them a small pomegranate-shaped pendant and fragments of cult stands decorated with protuberances similar to those found at En Hazeva (Ben-Arieh 2011: Figs. 64–66; dated to the end of the Iron Age).

¹⁹ Arad (Singer-Avitz 2002: 138–139, Figs. 13, 24:14), Tel Amal (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 338–339, Fig. 16:6–7), Megiddo (May 1935: Pl. XX: P6056), Yavneh (Panitz-Cohen 2010: 122, Fig. 7.2: 28, Pl. 169: 2), Tell es-Safi (Katz, Kahane and Broshi 1968: 72, 77, Fig. 58 [right side of photo]; Shai and Maeir 2012: 326–327, Fig. 14.10, Pls. 14.4.4, 14.14.12, 14.16.5, 14. 21; Gadot *et al.* 2014: Figs. 2.1–3), Tell el-Orême/Kinneret (Fassbeck 2008: Fig. 1), Jerusalem, Givati Parking Lot (Ben-Ami 2013: 65, Fig. 3.2: 12). The pendant petal motif is common in the southern Levant during this period, appearing on an array of materials and artefacts, including on a stylized cultic sceptre head made of Egyptian Blue and decorated with two rows of pendant petals found in 'Building 500' during the first season of excavation (Greenhut and De-Groot 2009: 150–153; Fig. 6.1).



FIGURE 8 Cult stand, before and after restoration.

Since the fragments of the discussed cult stand and of the large horse figurine were found in one area, it seems that at least a few cult objects were broken, probably at the site of their use, or its proximity. They were intentionally covered by a thick layer of earth and pieces of plaster. The figurines, the other cult objects and the altar were sealed under a plaster floor associated with the above mentioned ‘Building 500’.

Conclusion

The remains unearthed at Tel Moza include a large temple with an altar, a refuse pit and a variety of cult artefacts found in the courtyard. The figurines found there constitute a unique assemblage from a single Iron IIA site in Judah. Not only are they distinctive in character; they are also distinctive in volume, considering the scarcity of figurines from the Iron IIA in general, and their dearth in Judah in particular. But perhaps more than anything, the Tel Moza figurines are distinctive in that they are the only assemblage of figurines to originate in a temple complex.

The visual repertoire of the human heads, horses, and the tall cult stand exhibit eclectic motifs characteristic throughout the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE. These motifs are not considered artistic innovations and some are even quite common. Their eclectic employment within the Tel Moza cultic assemblage stresses the latter’s

idiosyncratic traits. The application of these motifs in an Iron IIA Judahite cultic context, alongside the architectural plan of the temple, sheds light on the appropriation of local Near Eastern motifs into the Judahite religious imagery.

The temple at Tel Moza stands out in the Iron IIA as one of the very few Judahite sites with evidence for public rituals. This distinctiveness is accentuated even more due to the site's proximity to Jerusalem. These findings provide us with a rare opportunity to reexamine the formative stages of the ritual tradition in Judah and some of its sources. From the time it was established in the Iron IIA the temple at Moza served as a local cult centre alongside the nearby Temple in Jerusalem. Both its proximity to Jerusalem and its considerable architectural scale strongly suggest that the Tel Moza temple was a legitimate part of the official religious system that prevailed in Judah during the Iron IIA.

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