

## The Altar at Tel Dothan – A Trace of Josiah's Reform?

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### Dothan – General Background

The name Dothan (דוֹתָן, דוֹתָנָה, Δωθαμ) has remained preserved in its original location to this day. It appears twice in the Hebrew Bible, as a territorial name in Genesis 37:17, and as a city in 2 Kings 6:13.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these two occurrences, and ancient sources quoting them, it is also mentioned in the books of Judith (chapters 3, 4 and 7) and Jubilees (29:14), as a general geographical indication, and not as a populated place. Finally, it is mentioned in the Rehov Inscription (line 28) as a non-Jewish village. In the Middle Ages it was identified by R. Ishtori Ha-Prachi, and in modern times it was first identified by R. Joseph Schwarz (see Fig. 1) and Charles William Van de Velde.<sup>2</sup>

Tel Dothan is a large mound (about 100 dunams), located on an ancient main road over a spring at the edge of a fertile valley. The site was excavated in the 1950s and early 1960s by an archaeological team led by Joseph M. Free. According to the excavation findings, although there was some small unwallied settlements in the Chalcolithic period, and later in the Hellenistic, Roman-Byzantine and Mameluke periods, the main settlement periods of the tell were dated to the Early Bronze Age II–III, Middle Bronze IIB and Iron Age I–II.

Free and his team collected tens of thousands of complete and broken vessels, took many photographs and prepared a substantial number of plans and drawings, but published only preliminary reports. Over the following decades the site experienced a number of changes due to neglect, erosion, collapsing walls and robberies, which often led to the disappearance of finds

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<sup>1</sup> It is absent from the Book of Joshua because that book does not lists cities of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

<sup>2</sup> For documentation of the name in various sources along various periods, and for its pronunciation in modern times see Yoel Elitzur, *Ancient Place Names in the Holy Land: Preservation and History* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 211–212.

on the one hand, but also to the exposure of new findings on the other. In 2005, Master, Monson, Lass and Pierce published, in a clear and comprehensive manner, the results of Free's excavation, along with all other existing information, including surveys and other studies conducted in Dothan after the excavations. They added a review of the current state of the site, reports from Free's estate, and a survey of all the material from Dothan that reached several research institutions and museums.<sup>3</sup>

The latest addition to our knowledge of Tel Dothan is an article by Gibson, Kennedy, and Kramer from 2013.<sup>4</sup> This paper details a surprising discovery and a completely new interpretation regarding the main structure from the Iron Age – "House 14" in Area L, as will be detailed below.

### **Layers in the Israelite City**

The remains of the Israelite city of Dothan that have been revealed are concentrated in the large-scale excavation areas at the site, namely Area A on the southwestern side of the tell and Area L in the west. In both areas, there is a layer from Iron Age I with notable finds that characterize the period, such as four-room houses and an abundance of typical ceramics, in particular collared rim jars, along with a small amount of Late Bronze material.<sup>5</sup>

Above it there is another layer in a similar format, also with four-room houses and storage silos, but lacking typical settlement characteristics. This layer has been dated to the Iron II period.<sup>6</sup> Signs of dramatic destruction

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel M. Master et al., *Dothan I: Remains from the Tell (1953–1964)* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Shimon Gibson, Titus Kennedy and Joel Kramer, "A Note on an Iron Age Four-Horned Altar from Tel Dothan," *PEQ* 145 (2013): 306–319.

<sup>5</sup> As in Megiddo VI and other sites. This phenomenon is usually explained as remnants from an earlier period that continued to exist. According to Meitlis who speculates about the coexistence of Late Bronze and Iron I cultures in the mountain districts and in meeting areas between the mountain and the lowlands during the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BCE, the mixed repertoire may be better understood. See Yitzhak Meitlis, *Excavating the Bible: New Archaeological Evidence for the Historical Reliability of Scripture* (Baltimore: Eshel Books, 2012), 59–70 with references.

<sup>6</sup> Master et al., *Dothan I*, 77, 87, 113–114; Gibson, Kennedy and Kramer, "A Note," 306. Master and his colleagues (77) assumed that in Area A there was a period of time where the lower layer of Iron Age I was in ruin before it was resettled in Iron II. It is noteworthy that distinguishing between the layers here is not always easy because clear floor-to-floor

accompanied by intense fire are evident in this layer, corroborated by findings of burnt roofs and a thick layer of ash throughout the excavation area. Both the excavators and the later researchers who studied their findings have tended to date the destruction to around the end of the ninth century BCE. This dating is based on the large amount of both complete and broken vessels, together with radiocarbon<sup>14</sup> testing.<sup>7</sup> This led them to suggest that this destruction was caused by the Arameans, the major enemy of Israel during this period.

### **Tombs and Sherds without Architectural Context**

Between the end of the ninth century BCE and the Hellenistic period there is neither evidence of building remains nor a significant amount of pottery finds on the site, which led to the conclusion that the city was probably in ruin. However, Free and his staff reported on some surprising finds from this interim period: nine tombs with jewelry and pottery including some "Assyrian bottle" and some "Assyrian Palace Ware bowl" examples, as well as a small amount of similar pottery on the surface.

Three of the above-mentioned graves were discovered in Area A. While one of these graves was an infant jar burial, the other two were burials of adults – one of which showed signs of being severely tortured before his death. In Area L, six tombs were found, including three jar burials, and one pottery coffin 95 cm long, 58 cm wide and 25–35 cm deep, which contained scattered

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stratigraphy found at the same point was discerned only in a few cases. In addition, in Area L there are sections of slope and terraces, of which some are ancient and some were made by the 1950s diggers, making stratigraphic analysis difficult. Nonetheless, the excavators as well as later authors are convinced of the existence of both stages.

<sup>7</sup> Free's team collected a series of wood and seed samples for C14 analysis, one of them (from Area A) was sent for testing by them, and six others (from Building 14 in Area L) were taken from their findings, and sent after forty years for testing by Master and his colleagues. The sample from area A was dated in time to 2760 ± 80 B.P., which according to the currently accepted calibration gives a date between 1000 and 820 BCE (Master et al., *Dothan I*, 68; however they note that they are not sure that the analysis was done with the proper professionalism). The radiocarbon results of the six samples treated by Master and his colleagues were found consistent with the assumption that the Israelite city was destroyed around 800 BCE (Master et al., *Dothan I*, 103).

bones, two skulls, vessels, pieces of metal and jewelry. There was also one grave of a man holding a bottle jar, and one burial that was badly crushed.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the scholars who have studied these findings have attributed the burial and vessels to the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE, in my opinion there is reason to suspect that this determination is largely based on a historical view that attempts to date the finds as early as possible. Note that according to Nadav Na'aman and Yifat Thareani-Sussely, as well as Alice Hunt, Palace Ware and imitations of Assyrian ceramics in provinces far from Assyria are unlikely to be evidenced before the middle of the seventh century BCE.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, these findings present us with a historical riddle: If people did not live here, why did they bury their dead in this location? And if this is a burial site, then why is the number of graves so small? Why is there no uniformity in the nature of the tombs? Who are the buriers and who are the buried? And who left the scattered pottery on the surface?

In 1955, after the first skeleton was found in Area A near a collapsed wall, Free assumed that the Assyrians who had conquered the place were the ones who destroyed the wall, killed the man and added the pottery vessels for good measure,<sup>10</sup> but this explanation which was weak from the beginning, is impossible in light of the rest of the burial findings. The man who was tortured to death was apparently a victim of the Assyrian occupation known for its cruelty, and should be dated to the eighth century BCE. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the tombs that contain findings of Palace Ware probably date to the seventh century BCE. Combining these different dates together with the diverse forms of the tombs can, in my opinion, indicate that there was an initiated action of removing tombs from a nearby cemetery and deliberately burying them here among the ruins. In light of the Palace Ware found in some of the burials, as well as the potsherds from that time that were found

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<sup>8</sup> Master et al., *Dothan I*, 112–13.

<sup>9</sup> Nadav Na'aman and Yifat Thareani-Sussely, "Dating Imitations of Assyrian Ware," *TA 33* (2006): 61–82; Alice M. W. Hunt, *Palace Ware Across the Neo-Assyrian Imperial Landscape: Social Value and Semiotic Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Master et al., *Dothan I*, 68.

scattered on the surface, it is reasonable to speculate that this activity took place in the seventh century BCE.

Below I will attempt to provide an explanation for this phenomenon.

### **House 14**

"House 14" is a large complex of rooms of various types, most of which are paved, and two caves, surrounding a large courtyard in the southwestern part of Area L. Apparently, some portions of the entire complex of House 14 were not exposed. In the corners of the building and at the gate, dressed ashlar measuring around 70x40x20 cm were used. A large quantity of complete and broken storage vessels together with food scraps were found in this compound, and the excavators of the site and those who followed them assumed that it was an administrative center for collecting taxes or the like.<sup>11</sup>

There is evidence of reconstruction at House 14 that included the addition of rooms, raising floors, adding stone flooring and building stone-lined silos. The date of the reconstruction is unclear, and three possible options have been suggested:

- (a) Before the destruction that occurred in the ninth century BCE.
- (b) From the beginning to the middle of the eighth century BCE.
- (c) From the period of the tombs and the type of ware, similar to the Assyrian palace Ware, found in and around the tombs, which is dated later.

An entirely new understanding of House 14 and its role was proposed in 2013. During an excursion to the site in April 2013, Kennedy and Kramer accidentally discovered a broken incense altar in the courtyard of House 14. Following this discovery, and on the basis of a reassessment of Free's reports and photographs compared to current findings at the site, Gibson, Kennedy, and Kramer demonstrated that House 14 had a religious rather than administrative function. They assumed that the courtyard and the

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<sup>11</sup> Master et al., *Dothan I*, 102–103; Gibson, Kennedy, and Kramer, "A Note," 313–314.

surrounding rooms were a ceremonial cultic place built according to a plan. The ritual site included an elevated platform and a step below it, two stone monuments (of which one was found *in situ*), and a drainage channel covered with stone slabs that came out of the platform, passed under the floor of two rooms and exited the compound.<sup>12</sup>

In my opinion, it is likely that the altar was originally located inside one of the rooms, which was the sanctuary of the ritual site, similar to the incense altars in the temple of Arad.<sup>13</sup>

### **Description of the Altar**

The measurements of the upper part of the altar are 65x65 cm. Its thickness at the center is 18 cm. The altar has one horn in good condition (13 cm; its shape is similar to that of the altars in Megiddo and Dan), two that have been badly preserved and one that has been deliberately broken. Flat-blade chisel marks are evident on the extant horn, on the rim of the whole square stone and on its underside. That is to say, that there must have been an act of deliberate destruction (see Figs. 2–3). Gibson, Kennedy, and Kramer (314) suggest that the lower part of the altar consisted of hewn stones, but since there was deliberate destruction, there is no need for this hypothesis, and it is better to assume that this altar was monolithic until it was broken, like the vast majority of incense altars of the period found at various sites in the country.<sup>14</sup>

### **Iron Age Dothan – An Overview**

To summarize the findings of Israelite Dothan: It appears that there was a city here from the Settlement period, which was destroyed and conflagrated,

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<sup>12</sup> Gibson, Kennedy, and Kramer, "A Note," 317.

<sup>13</sup> Ze'ev Herzog and J. J. M. Roberts, "Arad (Place)," *EBR* 2: 612; cf. Exod 30:6, 40:5.26.

<sup>14</sup> A single case of an incense altar constructed from a number of stones is the double altar found recently in the gate shrine at Lachish (Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman, "An Eighth Century BCE Gate Shrine at Tel Lachish," *BASOR* 381 [2019]: 211–236, 218), to which I will refer below. The other examples mentioned by Ganor and Kreimerman (218–219) are all big sacrifice altars. In his letter dated November 6, 2020, Prof. Seymour Gittin confirmed that as far as he knows, except for the double altar mentioned above, no non-monolithic incense altar has ever been discovered in the Land of Israel. I thank him for his assistance.

probably at the end of the ninth century BCE. Inside the city there was a temple containing a large number of rooms around a central courtyard with an elevated platform (*bamah*). Cultic activity in the temple included sacrificing animals on the *bamah*, draining blood and water out of the courtyard, and burning incense or pouring libation on an incense altar or altars, probably inside a nearby sanctuary. At some point the site underwent renewal and was renovated, including the addition of rooms. After a period of activity the site was destroyed again and the stone altar and its horns were broken in a deliberate operation with an iron chisel. The last finding from Israelite Dothan is nine different tombs dug into the debris and a certain amount of ware, both within the tombs and on the surface, most likely attributable to the seventh century BCE.

It is reasonable to assume that after the destruction of the city by the Aramaeans in the ninth century BCE, worshippers who admired the sanctity of the ruined temple returned to the site and rebuilt the ritual complex. In those days the site no longer housed a habitable population, but instead served as a regional center of worship. The visitors to the location conducted their religious activities in the worship complex and probably also in its surroundings on the ruins of the city.

In a later period the local temple was violently and deliberately destroyed. The destroyers specifically broke the incense altar, or perhaps the incense altars that were in the place, one of which we have been able to identify thanks to the stubbornness of one of its horns which managed to withstand the chisel.

### **Comparison with Biblical Evidence**

A deliberate action to destroy altars and places of both polytheistic and illegal monotheistic worship throughout the country is attested twice in the Hebrew Bible – in the reign of Hezekiah and in the reign of Josiah.<sup>15</sup> The prophecy of

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<sup>15</sup> For critical views that deny the historicity of the biblical description concerning Hezekiah's and Josiah's religious activities, see Kristin A. Swanson, "A Reassessment of Hezekiah's Reform

Amos (3:14) that slightly preceded the reign of Hezekiah "and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground" is clear evidence that the smashing of altar horns was considered a common method for performing desecration of unwanted cultic sites.<sup>16</sup> In describing Josiah's action, the Bible emphasizes several times that he also defiled places of worship by scattering or inserting human bones within them (2 Kgs 23:6,8,10,13–16,20; 2 Chron 34:4–5). Apparently Israelite worshipers of all stripes believed that a place defiled by human bones was disqualified irrevocably for worship, and thus this action was an effective means of preventing the renewal of cult worship sites even later.

Scripture reports that Josiah dealt with the various places of worship with varying degrees of severity. At sites of distinctly pagan worship he sacrificed the priests themselves on the altars. Sacred trees and statues he burned and ground, and threw their dust upon the graves of the common people. In the central *bamah* of Bethel he took bones from tombs that were on the nearby mountain, including centuries-old tombs, and burned them on the altar that existed at the site from the reign of Jeroboam. In contrast, there were high places that were only "removed" and there were priests who were brought to Jerusalem and shared in the arrangements of the Temple but not in the active sacrifice (2 Kgs 23:9). These high places and priests were apparently the sites and the staff of the monotheistic *bamot* respectively, whose faith was considered legitimate, although their actual activity was illegal.

According to 2 Kings 23:19 and 2 Chronicles 34:6–7 Josiah destroyed and defiled the high places also in the cities of Samaria.<sup>17</sup> In the early years of

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in Light of Jar Handles and Iconographic Evidence," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 460–469 and Martin Prudky, "Josiah King of Judah," *EBR* 14: 791–795 and the comprehensive bibliography cited by both authors; also recently Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine," 230. Cf. also n. 71 below.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to James Seth Adcock who drew my attention to the importance of this verse to our discussion. Ganor and Kreimerman who discussed in depth the act of chopping altar horns ("Gate Shrine," 228–232) were not aware of it.

<sup>17</sup> According to 2 Chronicles 31:1 Hezekiah had acted similarly two generations before. It is possible that already in the reign of Hezekiah, after the Assyrian forces left the land and brought other nations to it in addition to the remnants of the Israelites who were not exiled, the king of Judah also had a free hand to act in Samaria.

Josiah's rule, the Assyrian power had already departed from the stage of history while the Babylonians had not yet arrived, and so the king of Judah's influence was also prominent in the former kingdom of Samaria.

It seems to me that at Tel Dothan we have found a perfect illustration of what the Bible tells us about the destruction of illegal cult sites, and most probably it reflects the activity of Josiah in the second half of the seventh century BCE. If my assumption is correct, House 14 was a *bet bamot* "house of high places" that was destroyed.<sup>18</sup> It is clear from the findings that the incense altar in the House 14 precinct was intentionally damaged. The destroyers of the altar probably used the same chisel to remove the horns and to damage the lower body of the altar, and the outer rim of its upper surface. One stubborn horn withstood the onslaught from the chisel and was left. At the same time, those who demolished the *bamah* and its surroundings incorporated several tombs that had been uprooted from a nearby cemetery into the ruins they left behind in order to defile the place.

Note the variety of the skeletons, bones and burials incorporated here: a man executed by torture apparently by the cruel Assyrian conquerors decades before the local imitation of the Assyrian Ware that accompanies other burials, alongside an infant tomb inside a jar, and a collection of bones from a secondary burial – a state of affairs that fits well with the collection of bones from various graves or caves as described in 2 Kings 23:16.

There is, however, a difference between the activity of Josiah at Bethel and the finds at Dothan. In the main center of the Israelite cult of Bethel, where statues of golden calves were venerated and worshipped together with a sanctified tree,<sup>19</sup> Josiah saw it necessary to burn the bones of the dead on the

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<sup>18</sup> The phrase *bet bamot* or *batei bamot* is mentioned in the Bible five times in three contexts, all in the books of Kings: in the context of Jeroboam's religious activities in Bethel, Dan and the cities of Samaria (1 Kgs 12:31, 13:32); in the description of the ritual of the Samaritans that the king of Assyria brought to Samaria (2 Kgs 17:29.32); and in the biblical survey of Josiah's acts in the cities of Samaria (2 Kgs 23:19).

<sup>19</sup> I agree with the opinion that the "Asherah" in 2 Kings 23:16, as well as in the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrūd and Kh. El-Kom, was a sacred tree and not a statue of a goddess (see William G. Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult: How Kh. el-Qôm and Kuntillet 'Ajrūd 'Asherah' Texts Have Changed the Picture," *EI* 26 [1999]: \*9–\*15, \*10–\*14; Shmuel

altar. Here, in the peripheral temple at Dothan it was enough to imbed a number of tombs, without harming the dignity of the dead, in the ruins around the temple and in its immediate vicinity.

A relatively small amount of sherds used by the worshippers during the last years of the temple and/or by the crew members who participated in the king's mission to desecrate it remained on the surface of the ruin.<sup>20</sup>

### Parallel Phenomena in Other Sites

This finding at Tel Dothan can be considered another constituent of a group of several sites where deliberate cessation of ritual activity in temples or shrines, with or without violent destruction, has been discerned. I know eight sites in which, at least according to some opinions, it is possible to find an indication of such an operation at the site that can be attributed either to the reign of Hezekiah or to that of Josiah. These are:

#### 1. *Arad*

In the Israelite fortress in Tel Arad, there existed a temple oriented east-west like the Tabernacle and the Temple of King Solomon, in the courtyard of which was a sacrificial "altar of earth" (cf. Exod 20:21) whose dimensions are identical to those of the altar in the Book of Exodus: "Five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and it shall be three cubits high" (Exod 27:1). The temple contained a sacred hall – *hekhal*, and an anterior niche in which two incense altars and two *maṣṣebot* were erected. Towards the end of

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Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* [Jerusalem: Carta, 2008], 221–224 with the bibliography, 233, 328–329). Scripture distinguishes between the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat which was not absolute idolatry and the sins of Ahab who explicitly worshipped the gods Baal and Asherah and their idols (compare 2 Kgs 10:26–31; 13:6). For a recent comprehensive survey of all the opinions concerning *šrth* (regardless of the view of the author himself), see Ryan Thomas, "The Meaning of Asherah in Hebrew Inscriptions," *Semitica* 59 (2017): 157–218.

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned above, both the archaeological and the biblical aspects support the dating of the demolition of the place and of the insertion of the burials into the ruins in the seventh century BCE, probably in the reign of Josiah. However, if one decides to accept the earlier dating of the excavators and the researchers who followed them, it would mean that the destruction of the site should be attributed to Hezekiah and not to Josiah. One who chooses this opinion, may assume that the method of defiling the *bamot* by human bones or burials was already practiced in the reign of Hezekiah although there is no explicit attestation to this in the Hebrew Bible.

the eighth century BCE the temple was no longer in use, and was carefully covered. According to Aharoni, this activity took place in two stages, the first attributed to Hezekiah and the second to Josiah.<sup>21</sup> However, according to later scholars, there is no evidence for dividing it into two stages. Today, most scholars believe that the suspension of the entire temple's operation was an act of Hezekiah.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. *Tel Sheba ("Beersheba")*<sup>23</sup>

The stones and horns of the dismantled sacrificial altar at this mound were found in secondary use within structures of a stratum dated prior to the destruction of Sennacherib's campaign. Therefore, damage to this altar and the temple in which it stood can be feasibly attributed to the reign of Hezekiah.<sup>24</sup> The temple in which the altar stood had been completely erased by the king's agents. This can be seen from the fact that no remains of a temple were found here, while the horns of the dismantled altar had already been incorporated into a secular structure. According to a reasonable hypothesis, Building 32 at this site, in stratum II attributed to Hezekiah's time, was built in the location of the sanctuary that had previously been destroyed to the foundation.<sup>25</sup>

## 3. *Lachish*

The gate shrine at Lachish, published recently by Ganor and Kreimerman,<sup>26</sup> is a type of cultic site mentioned once in the Hebrew Bible: *bamot ha-she'arim* –

<sup>21</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," *BA* 31 (1968): 2–32, 25–27.

<sup>22</sup> Herzog, "Arad," 612–613; Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine," 230.

<sup>23</sup> Publications and signs refer to "Tel Beersheba," but I support Nadav Na'aman's argument that this mound is not the biblical Beersheba but its neighboring town Sheba (Josh 19:2). See Nadav Na'aman, "The Inheritance of the Sons of Simeon," *ZDPV* 96 (1980): 149–151; Yoel Elitzur, *Places in the Parasha: Biblical Geography and Its Meaning*, transl. from Hebrew Daniel Landman (Jerusalem: Koren-Maggid and New Milford: Yeshiva University Press, 2020), 122–127.

<sup>24</sup> Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine," 230 with references.

<sup>25</sup> Ze'ev Herzog, Anson F. Rainey, and Shmuel Moshkovitz, "The Stratigraphy at Beer-sheba and the Location of the Sanctuary," *BASOR* 225 (1976): 49–58.

<sup>26</sup> Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine." I rely on Ganor and Kreimerman. Other recent studies have expressed different views. Elad Liraz ("A Second Cult Room at the Lachish Gate?" *NEA* 181 [2018]: 269–275) and Sabine Kleiman ("The Iron IIB Gate Shrine at Lachish: An Alternative Interpretation," *TA* 47 [2020]: 55–64) believe that there were two parallel shrines at the Lachish Gate, but according to Kleiman it was the Assyrians who destroyed the two

"the high places of the gates"—with the additional definition, "that were at the entrance of the gate which were on one's left at the gate of the city" (2 Kgs 23:8).<sup>27</sup>

Surprisingly, Ganor and Kreimerman make no mention of this verse, which accurately describes their findings. This unique shrine was located in the first chamber on the left as a person entered the city gate, just as described in the Hebrew Bible.

The small temple was divided hierarchically based on the degree of holiness of the different areas. On entering the compound there was an ascent to a paved room in front of which a bench and basins of stone were found; Ganor and Kreimerman assume that the basins were used for washing one's feet before entering the sacred place. Inside this room a double incense altar has been revealed together with some soot on the plaster of the walls, indicating that it was used for small offerings which required a lit fire. From here another ascent led into the inner sanctum, located within a niche. In both rooms stands, utensils and oil lamps were found.

Like the complex at Tel Dothan, this whole complex in Lachish appears to have been deliberately sabotaged. The altar and its horns were destroyed with a sharp iron implement, and here too, one of the horns remained somewhat intact. A unique finding in the inner sanctum was a rectangular stone with a hole in the middle that is believed to have been intended to be a

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temples. David Ussishkin ("Was a 'Gate Shrine' Built at the Level III Inner City Gate of Lachish? A Response to Ganor and Kreimerman," *BASOR* 385 [2021]: 153–170) claims that there is no temple here at all and what has been described as an altar is nothing but a dividing wall. He also denies the identification of the perforated stone as a toilet and claims that the pit into which it fell was not in existence at this time, but was dug later. However, he admits that it is quite similar to toilet stones found in the City of David, and also notes that he does not know how to interpret the nature and purpose of this stone.

<sup>27</sup> The term *bamot ha-she'arim* appears only in this verse. It was probably a ritual site within a compound of one of the gates of Jerusalem named after a certain Joshua, one of the city governors at the time of Josiah or earlier. The plural form *she'arim* may be explained by the fact that the site under discussion was located between the two inner and outer gates. Archaeological evidence for such a phenomenon can be found at Tel Fār'a (north), Hazor and Dan (see John A. Emerton, "'The High Places of the Gates' in 2 Kings XXIII 8," *VT* 44 [1994]: 455–467).

toilet. This is the first instance in which archaeological evidence has been found of turning a temple into a latrine as an acute action of desecration, a method that the Bible attests to several generations earlier (2 Kgs 10:26–28). However, chemical testing undertaken on the latrine indicates that it was not used, or had been in use for a very short period of time, thus, leading to the proposition that its erection may have been for symbolic value only. The floor of the room was then demolished, the toilet fell on its side and the door to the chamber was sealed. According to the excavators, this destruction must have taken place before the Assyrian conquest, based on the findings of arrowheads and slingshot facing this inner chamber.

#### 4. *The Tumuli West of Jerusalem*

The *tumuli* west of Jerusalem, some of which were excavated by Ruth Amiran (in 1953) and Ze'ev Yeivin (in 1959–1960), are mysterious large piles of stones and dirt, piled up over 17-sided constructed installations, inside which a small pit containing the remains of fire was revealed. They are generally dated to Iron Age II–III.<sup>28</sup> According to my late father Yehuda Elitzur, the installations with the 17 sides were field *bamot*<sup>29</sup> which were used by the faithful of the monotheistic belief during the reign of Manasseh king of Judah, when the Temple in Jerusalem functioned as an idolatrous temple. According to his suggestion, while Josiah had respect for these *bamot* and their priests, he was still obligated to prevent their usage. He therefore covered them in a manner that was respectful on the one hand, but, at the same time, halted their ritual activities.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ruth Amiran, "The Tumuli West of Jerusalem," *IEJ* (1958): 205–227; Ze'ev Yeivin, "Excavations at Tumulus 3 in Jerusalem," *ErIsr* 25 (1996): 175–183 (Hebrew).

<sup>29</sup> The diameter of the larger *tumuli* (nos. 2, 4, and 5) is between 30 and 42 meters. Before they were covered with stones and dirt, each had a surface surrounded by a low fence inside which was a point that was supposedly used to offer sacrifices. Such a reality is reminiscent of the biblical description of Elijah's field *bamah* on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:32).

<sup>30</sup> Yehudah Elitzur, *Israel and the Bible: Studies in Geography, History and Biblical Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 164–171 (Hebrew). For another approach concerning these *tumuli* see Gabriel Barkay, "Mounds of Mystery: Where the Kings of Judah were Lamented," *BAR* 29 (2003): 32–39, 66.

### 5. *The Israelite Fortified Structure near Vered Yeriho*

This site was excavated in 1982 by Avraham Eitan, who dated its occupation to the late seventh–early sixth centuries BCE.<sup>31</sup> It is a fortified structure (25x30 m) whose symmetrical plan included two podiums accompanied by staircases in its courtyard and a plastered platform in one of the long rooms flanking the yard. The whole complex is believed to have been destroyed in a fierce fire towards the end of the seventh century BCE. In his first Hebrew report,<sup>32</sup> Eitan did not mention any information about human bones or burials found at the site and also refrained from discussing who destroyed the place and when. However, in an interview with BAR editor Hershel Shanks in 1986,<sup>33</sup> in a lecture I attended in April 1992,<sup>34</sup> and in a short article he published in 1994,<sup>35</sup> Eitan briefly discussed these issues. In all these sources the data are incomplete, yet I have gathered them here together for the first time.

A male skeleton with a 1.05 meter sword next to it was discovered under collapsing stones and debris in the room flanking the courtyard to the west. Nearby, two additional skeletons, male and female adults, were found. In the room to the east of the courtyard, both next to and on top of the plastered platform, Eitan found a collection of bones that were probably brought from

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<sup>31</sup> During a visit to the site with a group of students in May 1992, my student Tamar Rotman (now Tamar Ariel) found an ancient coin on the surface. I then referred her to Prof. Yaakov Meshorer who had some difficulty in cleaning it, but estimated it to be from the time of Herod or his sons. I reported the discovery to Eitan, and at his request, Tamar handed the coin in to the Israel Antiquities Authority. Most probably the coin was a mere sporadic find that had reached the site by chance, but I find it appropriate at this opportunity to bring this information to the attention of those who deal with the subject.

<sup>32</sup> Avraham Eitan, "Vered Yeriho," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 82 (1983): 43–44 (Hebrew). The same text appeared in an English version 25 years later (idem, "Vered Yeriho," *NEAEHL* 5 [Supplementary Volume; ed. E. Stern, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2008]: 2067–2068).

<sup>33</sup> Hershel Shanks, "BAR Interviews Avraham Eitan," *BAR* 12 (1986): 30–38.

<sup>34</sup> Judea and Samaria Research Studies: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting at Ariel. He did not submit an article to the Congress Proceedings published a year later, but the abstract booklet distributed at the conference contained a quite comprehensive summary of the lecture.

<sup>35</sup> Avraham Eitan, "Rare Sword of the Israelite Period Found at Vered Jericho," *Israel Museum Journal* 12 (1994): 61–62.

somewhere else. Examination of this collection revealed that these were the bones of seven men, four women and two or three children.

In providing an explanation of the nature of the site, Eitan assumed that it was a *bet bamah*, a high-place house, destroyed during Josiah's religious reform. He suggested that the sword was used in the ritual ceremonies held in the building. The skeleton next to the sword and the two additional skeletons were probably priests who lived and served in the compound, and were put to death by Josiah's men. The sword was possibly left behind as it was considered an idolatrous cultic object and therefore defiled and prohibited for further use. Eitan mentioned the bone accumulation in the eastern room only in the lecture, and did not offer any explanation for this phenomenon. In my view, the testimony of 2 Kings 23 about the insertion of bones from a cemetery in the vicinity into the places of illegal worship by Josiah and his men, together with the findings of Dothan, can well explain this finding and present us with a complete picture.

In 2018 Liora Kolska Horwitz, Eitan Tchernov, and Omri Lernau published a very comprehensive article on the animal bones found at the site.<sup>36</sup> Hundreds of animal bones, some of which were burnt, were found here. Setting aside the bones from a small quantity of wildlife that apparently reached the site after its destruction, together with rodents and the like that inhabited the area even during its existence, (altogether 8%), the assemblage that contained consumable species was comprised predominantly of sheep and goats (74%), with a smaller amount of cattle bones (15%). In addition, part of the assemblage consisted of bones of large fish (2%). The remains of sheep and goats included adults and youngsters, and even fetuses or newborns. Butchery marks were evident on some of the cattle and sheep bones, indicating that the animal flesh was prepared for consumption, usually

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<sup>36</sup> Liora K. Horwitz, Eitan Tchernov and Omri Lernau, "The Archaeozoology of Vered Yericho: An Iron Age II Fortified Structure in the Kingdom of Judah," in Itzhaq Shai et al. (eds.), *Tell It in Gath: Studies in History and Archaeology of Israel in Honor of Aren M. Maeir* (Münster: Zaphon, 2018), 966–1007.

by cutting, and in some cases by filleting. The fish remains found are all of sea fish that probably originated in the Mediterranean Sea about 70 km from the Jericho area. This is not surprising, since many fish bones have been found in Jerusalem, Lachish and other sites in contemporary Judah. It is believed that fish were pickled, salted or smoked close to where the catch was landed, and thus, as a preserved food, would have had a longer "shelf life" and could be eaten in locations far from the sea. In contrast with other contemporary sites, including military fortresses, here there is an absolute absence of bones of work animals, such as asses, horses or mules, and domestic fowl, such as chickens and geese.

Nevertheless, Horwitz and colleagues concluded that the function of the structure was military rather than cultic.<sup>37</sup> In my opinion, their considerations raise considerable doubts. The large proportion of sheep and cattle bones, particularly those with butchery marks and signs of burning on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the lack of both domestic poultry and work animals, are all indicative of a ritual site rather than a military one.<sup>38</sup> The claims that in a ritual site the bones must be concentrated in an interment pit or that they cannot belong to animals that are too old or too young are not convincing, in my view. In addition, Horwitz and colleagues appear to be unaware of the human bones found at the site. In a military fortress there was no place for a woman; as part of the staff of an idolatrous ritual site she was welcome.

## 6. *Moza*

Excavations at Tel Moza began in 1993 and are still active, with the richest finds from the Iron Age. A large rectangular structure at the top of the mound that has been identified as a temple, contained a *hekhal* and probably also an inner "Holy of Holies." In the courtyard east of it a sacrificial altar, a *favissa* pit

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<sup>37</sup> Horwitz, Tchernov and Lernau, "Archaeozoology," 997.

<sup>38</sup> Such characteristics that were found at Tel Moza (albeit in a refuse pit and not scattered on the surface), were emphasized by the excavators of Moza as evidence of a temple or cultic center. See below.

with a large quantity of sheep and goats bones, many of which have traces of burning and butchery marks, have been found, along with *maṣṣebot*. In addition, four unique figurines, together with many vessels that probably had a cultic role have been revealed. According to the excavators, this complex existed for approximately three hundred years in the Iron Age II period, from the end of the tenth century or in the first half of the ninth century BCE, until around the end of the seventh century BCE.<sup>39</sup>

According to the latest publication, one may discern in the courtyard at least four phases. The excavators describe what happened between the lower phase that was constructed in the early ninth century BCE and the next phase, in these words: <sup>40</sup>

The artifacts were collected from throughout the temple complex, intentionally broken, and then covered with a thick layer of earth. This was followed by a fill deposited throughout the courtyard, covering the various installations, and sealed by a packed-earth floor marking the second phase of the temple courtyard.

Shua Kisilevitz, the main excavator of the site, suggested in 2013 that the breaking and covering of cultic artifacts may reflect the action of Hezekiah.<sup>41</sup> However, in later publications that she published either alone or together with Oded Lipschits,<sup>42</sup> this hypothesis is absent, and in the last publication they explained: <sup>43</sup>

These phases reflect the continuous function of the temple throughout most of the Iron II, with the intentional

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<sup>39</sup> Beneath its lower layer, a small ritual structure that preceded it was recently discerned (Shua Kisilevitz and Oded Lipschits, "Tel Moza: An Economic and Cultic Center from the Iron Age II (First Temple Period)," in Khalaily Hamoudi et al. (eds.), *The Mega Project at Motza (Moza): The Neolithic and Later Occupations up to the 20th Century* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority, 2020), 295–312, 304), but these finds are irrelevant for the current discussion.

<sup>40</sup> Kisilevitz and Lipschits, "Tel Moza," 303.

<sup>41</sup> Shua Kisilevitz, "Ritual Finds from the Iron Age in the Excavations of Moza," *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region* 7 (2013): 38–46, 44 (Hebrew).

<sup>42</sup> Shua Kisilevitz, "The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza," *TA* 42 (2015): 147–164; Shua Kisilevitz and Oded Lipschits, "Another Temple in Judah! The Tale of Tel Moza," *BAR* 46 (2020): 40–49.

<sup>43</sup> Kisilevitz and Lipschits, "Tel Moza," 303.

deposition and burial of the cult objects likely performed as part of a religious ritual during which cultic paraphernalia were decommissioned to make room for new artifacts—an act of reverence rather than signifying a break in religious traditions.

In a letter I received from Ms. Kisilevitz on January 28, 2021, in response to my request to her,<sup>44</sup> she repeated this explanation and added that the transition from phase 1 to phase 2 should be dated to the ninth century BCE. She did not elaborate on what basis she states this. However, in my opinion, this explanation is unsatisfactory. Why were the vessels and figurines broken? And why were the artifacts concealed by such massive coverage? As long as no clear archaeological data has been presented confirming the early dating, it seems to me that her former explanation, which attributes the breaking and covering to Hezekiah, is preferable.

In addition it should be noted that both excavators are doubtful as to whether the structure continued to be used as a temple at the end of the First Temple period.<sup>45</sup> Bearing this doubt in mind, I would like to raise the suggestion that perhaps one could interpret the findings as evidence of two religious reforms, first of Hezekiah and then of Josiah. Thus, for most of the period of the first kings of Judah the sacred site operated continuously as the Book of Kings often states: "The high places, however, were not removed" (1Kgs 22:44, 2 Kgs 12:4, 14:4, 15:4, 15:35). Hezekiah, towards the end of the eighth century BCE, broke figurines and vessels of worship, and then buried and sealed all the ritual artifacts. Later during the reign of Manasseh the sanctuary returned to operation until the reign of Josiah, when it was finally and definitively shut down.

## ***7. City of David***

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<sup>44</sup> In addition, Ms. Kisilevitz and Prof. Lipschits provided me with their publications concerning the site. I am indebted to both.

<sup>45</sup> Kisilevitz and Lipschits, "Tel Moza," 303.

Along a rock step adjacent to the eastern wall of the City of David, two points identified as cultic sites have been discovered. One is Kathleen Kenyon's "Cave 1," where a large quantity of a variety of pottery, figurines and ritual artifacts dated approximately to the end of the eighth century BCE were discovered. The other, sixty meters south, partly exposed by Parker and Vincent and fully by Reich and Shukron, is a series of six carefully made rock-hewn rooms open towards the east that were found devoid of content, except for a *maṣṣebah* that remained upright *in situ* and two well locked niches containing sherds and a weaving loom weight.<sup>46</sup>

The hewn rooms were blocked by a wall ("Wall 13" according to Vincent's terminology) with a road or path above them that ran along the city wall. Exactly the same phenomena were observed in "Cave 1" (Kenyon's "Wall 2"). Nahshon Szanton hypothesized that the two walls and the pass above them were in fact one sequence established after the two sites were no longer in use.<sup>47</sup>

According to Szanton's suggestion, which he expresses with great caution, the original ritual site comprised the six rooms and their surroundings. At some point in the late eighth century BCE, activity at the site was halted in an orderly fashion, with some of the materials being sealed in the two niches within it, while the rest were taken to "Cave 1" which served as a sort of *favissa*. At this point the two sites were sealed in a massive wall over which and along which people walked.

Responsibility for this activity may be attributed to King Hezekiah, who "removed the high places" (2 Kgs 18:4) and whose religious action was generally less violent than that of Josiah two generations later.<sup>48</sup> In

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<sup>46</sup> It seems to have been a *genizah* of ritual artifacts. Regarding the cultic role of loom weights, compare 2 Kings 23:7: "He broke down the houses... here the women did weaving for Asherah."

<sup>47</sup> Nahshon Szanton, "The Rock-Cut Rooms and Cave 1: Evidence for Culting Activity along the City of David's Eastern Slope in the Iron Age II," *New Studies on Jerusalem* 19 (2013): 67–94, 78–80 (Hebrew) with a complete bibliography. I would like to thank Mr. Szanton for speaking with me, and for the further clarifications I received from him during our conversation.

<sup>48</sup> Szanton, "Rock-Cut Rooms," 79–81.

conjunction, it is conceivable that the shrine in the eastern part of the City of David was not distinctly pagan, and therefore received more favorable treatment.<sup>49</sup>

### **8. *The Eastern Israelite Temple in Megiddo***

The complicated history of archaeological activity at Tel Megiddo has meant that many studies, encyclopedia entries and websites are unaware of the noteworthy temples dated to Iron Age II–III (stratum IV) at the summit of this mound.

Discussion of Israelite Megiddo is complex, and has been beset by difficulties – not only the dating of its strata, but also the location and drawings of the findings. Even more so, there have been heated disputes between scholars since Schumacher’s excavation in the early twentieth century up until today.<sup>50</sup> The difficulty in reaching agreement on many questions related to the site is mainly the result of:

- (a) Ancient strata that harmed their predecessors.
- (b) Destruction of the walls exposed as part of the excavations of Schumacher's team and the looting of building stones by the local population during the twenty years between Schumacher’s excavations and the arrival of the American expedition from the Oriental Institute of Chicago University in the 1920s, and again once the American expedition left the site.
- (c) Significant sections of the tell that the archaeologists themselves dismantled, largely, but not exclusively, to reach deeper layers.
- (d) Removal of findings from their original location.

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<sup>49</sup> Additional biblical interpretations of this site were raised by Eli Shukron and Yoel Bin-Nun in a Hebrew article not yet printed but available online. See

<https://www.k-etzion.co.il/%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A8-%D7%93%D7%95%D7%93>

<sup>50</sup> See for instance Assaf Kleiman, Adam Kaplan, and Israel Finkelstein, "Building 338 at Megiddo: New Evidence from the Field," *IEJ* 66 (2016): 161–176; David Ussishkin, "The Date of Building 338 at Megiddo: A Rejoinder," *IEJ* 67 (2017): 50–60; Assaf Kleiman and Israel Finkelstein, "The Date of Building 338 at Megiddo: *Eppur Si Muove!*" *IEJ* 68 (2018): 50–55; David Ussishkin, "The Date of Building 338 at Megiddo: Additional Comments," *IEJ* 68 (2018): 232–236.

(e) The lack of uniformity in the names and numbers given by the various excavators to items and strata at the tell.

Bearing these constraints in mind, it is my intention to concentrate my discussion of the findings from this site only in relation to the hypothesis I have presented in this article. Schumacher's excavation reports of the site are of particular importance. Of course, his work predated dating methods and other archaeological skills accepted as standard today and there were large parts of the tell that he could not dig. Despite these limitations, Schumacher's work is crucial for any investigation of ancient Megiddo for two reasons:

(a) Unlike his successors he excavated the mound before any modern damage to the site and, thus the findings reported by him relate to their original location and state.<sup>51</sup>

(b) Schumacher was a skilled, professional and meticulous architect and explorer. He described his findings at this mound, especially the architectural remains, in great detail and with accompanying useful drawings and photographs.

For the purposes of this article, I focus on the large palace and the shrine or shrines in the southeastern part of the tell. The palace is one of the most important finds in Israel and neighboring countries.<sup>52</sup> The shrine, too, is an outstanding edifice.<sup>53</sup>

According to current accepted approaches, the temple ("Room 340" in recent publications) was part of the complex of the magnificent palace

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<sup>51</sup> See David Ussishkin, "Schumacher's Shrine in Building 338 at Megiddo," *IEJ* 39 (1989): 152.

<sup>52</sup> "This structure is one of the most monumental Iron Age buildings unearthed in the southern Levant," Kleiman and Finkelstein, "*Eppur Si Muove!*" 50.

<sup>53</sup> "The finest shrine from the First Temple period known today"(Ussishkin, "Schumacher's Shrine," 149). And another statement of Ussishkin: "a unique shrine, a pearl in the archaeological landscape of Tel Megiddo." (David Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon: The Story of the Canaanite and Israelite City* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Biblical Archaeology Society, 2018], 370).

("Building 338").<sup>54</sup> However, according to Schumacher's original report and drawings, the fortified temple ("Tempelburg") was a separate complex northeast of the palace. His reports include written description, photographs and sketches of a main shrine where stelae, orthostats and ritual finds were found inside the Tempelburg, as well as a smaller worship room in the eastern part of what he considered to be the domestic section of the palace,<sup>55</sup> and additional stelae east of the palace courtyard wall, a little further south. At the three points, he reports the presence of *maṣṣebot* "stelae."<sup>56</sup> A little further south, the American excavators found incense altars and models of a shrine damaged by fire.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, Guy, and later Lamon and Shipton, who summarized in detail the findings of the American expedition, greatly underestimated the value of the ritual finds and even interpreted the incense altars as small models of fortified towers.<sup>58</sup> Ussishkin, in what may be considered a kind of compromise between the two positions, has only one Israelite cultic site in this wing of the mound – the "*Maṣṣebot* Temple" whose name and description he took from Schumacher's "*Tempel mit Maṣṣebot*." But, while according to

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<sup>54</sup> E.g. Ussishkin, "Schumacher's Shrine," 153–58; Kleiman, Kaplan, and Finkelstein, "Building 338: New Evidence," 161–63; Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 363.

<sup>55</sup> According to Lamon and Shipton (Robert S. Lamon and Geoffrey M. Shipton, *Megiddo I: Seasons of 1925–1934 – Strata I–V*, OIP 42 [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939], 12), whose opinion was accepted by Ussishkin and others, it was not a domestic house but actually the gateway of the palace courtyard. The actual palace they place in a building in the southern part of the courtyard.

<sup>56</sup> Gottlieb Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutesellim I*, ed. Carl Steuernagel (Leipzig: Der geschäftsführenden Ausschuss, 1908), 91–124, and plates II, XXIX, XXXV. An English translation of the book, by Mario Martin, edited by Myrna Pollak, which preserves the structure of the book in terms of division into the original pages, the illustrations in their original place and even the original German names given by Schumacher to the buildings and structures on the site, can be found at

<https://israelfinkelstein.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/schumacher-tell-el-mutsellim-plates-eng-trans-1908.pdf>. The descriptions of numerous artifacts, many of which are of a ritual nature in the Room with the *Maṣṣebot* ("Der Raum mit *Maṣṣeben*") in the eastern part of the palace complex and in the Tempelburg are detailed, together with photographs, on pages 106–110 and 121–124 and in plates XXXII–XXXVII. Of particular note is a set of well-made weaving vessels found in the *Maṣṣebot* Room (p. 107) reminiscent of the find from the City of David (see n. 47 above).

<sup>57</sup> Clarence S. Fisher, *The Excavations at Armageddon*, OIC 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 16, 70.

<sup>58</sup> Lamon and Shipton, *Megiddo I*, 24.

Schumacher, it was located in his Tempelburg northeast of the palace, Ussishkin places it in his Room 340 located inside the eastern part of the palace complex, about where Schumacher's third group of *maššebot* were marked.<sup>59</sup>

As mentioned above,<sup>60</sup> the dating of the palace (Building 338) is controversial, but for our discussion it is less important to deal with the issue of the exact date of the foundation of the palace and the temple or temples. Instead, we are interested in the question of when they *ceased* to be used.

The last significant layer in the tell, strata II–III, which by general consent is associated with the period between the Assyrian conquest and the final destruction of the city in the early sixth century BCE,<sup>61</sup> contains dense construction in most of the tell, but not above the eastern palace, the shrine and the debris piled on it.<sup>62</sup> In addition, apart from the palace and the temple where the remains of a fierce fire are visible, the transition from stratum IV to stratum III in the rest of the tell was almost without violent destruction – except for a few houses. Ussishkin speculates that the inhabitants of stratum IV were mostly associated with the military activity and horse stables that were to be linked to Joash and his son Jeroboam II. They left the city before the arrival of the Assyrians, who found the city almost uninhabited.<sup>63</sup>

What is particularly significant is that the finds at this site contain all the characteristics we encountered at previous sites. Thus there is room for speculation that here, too, one can discern traces of Josiah's activity. We find shattered Ashtoreth figurines and conflagration on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the cautious covering of a shrine with dirt without damaging its contents and the blocking of its doorway by a stone wall.

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<sup>59</sup> Compare especially Schumacher's plate II to Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, Fig. 17:4, p. 367.

<sup>60</sup> See n. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 419.

<sup>62</sup> Ussishkin, "Schumacher's Shrine," 167.

<sup>63</sup> Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 419–20.

A surprise find that the excavators found difficult to explain was six urns containing baby skeletons, which were carefully propped up on the walls of the untouched temple while it was covered.<sup>64</sup> Ussishkin noted that these are the only cases of burial of babies in jars during the Iron Age in Megiddo, and added that the urns are difficult to date. According to him, three of them can be considered similar to some types known in the Iron Age, but the others are unparalleled in this period.<sup>65</sup> But we are already familiar with the phenomenon of combining burial urns in the earth filling of a shrine as described in 2 Kings 23, since we have encountered it at Tel Dothan and Vered Yeriho. Apparently, we now have enough evidence to define the phenomenon: mortal remains of bodies relocated from an original burial site, brought or collected in order to prevent future worship at their present location. In Tel Megiddo, such burial urns from earlier periods were found on the eastern slope of the mound, and in them, as in the six burial jars found in the piled dirt of the temple, skeletons of babies were found with their limbs bent and their heads located at the bottom of the urn.<sup>66</sup> It is worth examining the possibility that the defilers of the temple perhaps brought the urns from these tombs.

In order to explain why there is evidence of both destruction and conflagration, together with careful coverage of the site with dirt, I would like to offer two alternative suggestions for consideration. One possibility is that the same structure that was originally a monotheistic shrine later became a temple to idols.<sup>67</sup> Josiah's men distinguished between the structure itself, including the pillars and stelae which they carefully covered, and the objects of pagan worship that they broke and burned.<sup>68</sup> The other possibility is that two shrines, one monotheistic and the other polytheistic, coexisted here; the

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<sup>64</sup> Schumacher, *Tel el-Mutesellim I*, 122.

<sup>65</sup> Ussishkin, "Schumacher's Shrine," 169–70.

<sup>66</sup> Schumacher, *Tel el-Mutesellim I*, 25; Fisher, *Armageddon*, 49; Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 190.

<sup>67</sup> Such a hypothesis was raised by Fisher according to his stratigraphic analysis of the field findings (Fisher, *Armageddon*, 16, 70; Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 364).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. m. Mid. 1:6: "In this chamber the Hasmonaeans hid away the altar stones that the Greek kings defiled."

monotheistic one was treated carefully, while the idolatrous one was brutally destroyed. According to Schumacher's report, there were two or three rooms used for worship in this area of the mound. The altars and shrine models found by the American excavators south of the three points of Schumacher's *maṣṣebot* might be interpreted as an additional cultic site in this area, although it is certainly possible that they were taken from a nearby sanctuary, as Fisher and Ussishkin hypothesized.<sup>69</sup>

In this site, the temple or temples that were active during the Israelite period had a tradition of worship from much earlier periods. We can assume that they continued to be used after the Assyrian conquest, as well, perhaps by the peoples that the Assyrians exiled here.<sup>70</sup> Scripture emphasizes that the peoples brought by the kings of Assyria to Samaria worshipped both the God of Israel and the gods from their countries of origin (2 Kgs 17, esp. vss 33, 41).<sup>71</sup> Josiah may have been the one who treated these temples in accordance with the policy that was outlined in the examples above. If this hypothesis is correct, it may add a new perspective to our understanding of the confrontation that occurred at Megiddo between Josiah and Pharaoh Necho, at which Josiah met his death.

## Conclusion

The broken incense altar found a few years ago in the courtyard of "House 14" in Tel Dothan, together with other finds, indicate that this building, its courtyard and the adjacent rooms were probably a ritual site. In my opinion, it is reasonable to deduce from the findings that after the destruction of the Israelite city of Dothan during the conflicts with the kingdom of Aram, the site

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<sup>69</sup> Fisher, *Armageddon*, 71; Ussishkin, *Megiddo-Armageddon*, 379.

<sup>70</sup> See Kleiman, Kaplan, and Finkelstein, "Building 338: New Evidence," 170–71 and n. 15.

<sup>71</sup> According to the testimony of Josephus (*Ant.* 12:257–64), which is probably confirmed by a numismatic finding, they continued such religious customs even in later periods. Cf. Yaakov Meshorer and Shraga Qedar, *The Coins of Samaria in the Fourth Century BCE* (Jerusalem: Numismatics Fine Arts International, 1991), 18; Yaakov Meshorer and Shraga Qedar, *Samaritan Coinage*, Numismatic Studies and Researches 9 (Jerusalem: Israel Numismatic Society, 1999), 51; Yaakov Meshorer, "A Samaritan Syncretistic Passover Sacrifice on a Coin of Neapolis," *Israel Numismatic Journal* 14 (2000–2002): 194–195 and Plate 21.

was once again used for cultic rituals as some form of temple. The deliberate desecration of the altar, in conjunction with the insertion of various graves, bones and secondary burials into the ruins near the temple may well fit the biblical description of the religious activity of King Josiah, which according to biblical testimony also included the cities of Samaria.

In comparing eight other locations where one can also find signs of desecration or deliberate cessation of ritual activity at temples and cultic sites during the Iron Age II–III, one might find evidence to support the biblical descriptions of this phenomenon, at least according to some approaches. Arad, "Beersheba" and Lachish, and possibly also Moza and Jerusalem could fit the religious reform attributed to King Hezekiah, whilst the *tumuli* west of Jerusalem, the site near Vered Yeriho and the eastern shrine or shrines at Megiddo can be attributed to King Josiah.

It is interesting to note that some of these cultic sites, namely the temples in Arad and Moza, the *tumuli* near Jerusalem and the shrine in the City of David received softer treatment than the other examples. In these instances, the site was not damaged or defiled but carefully covered. It is possible that these were places where the form of worship that was practiced was closer to the prophetic ideal that guided the activities of the Judahite king and his circle. The case of Megiddo is more complex, it has evidence of both damage accompanied by conflagration and a careful cover, which can be explained by the assumption that there were two nearby places of worship here that differ in character or that it was a temple whose character has changed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> After completing this article, I became acquainted with Lisbeth S. Fried's article "The High Places (Bāmôt) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 22 (2002): 437–65. Her article reviewed 21 sites across the country and concluded that before 701 BCE there were only four worship sites in Judah outside of Jerusalem, and after 701 there were no worship sites at all in either Judah or Samaria, "by the time of Josiah no cult site existed to be reformed." Fried relied on the information she had at the time of writing her article, preferring opinions appropriate to her conclusion and relying heavily on *argumentum ex silentio*. She was unaware of the phenomenon of incorporating tombs at a ritual site to prevent its resumption of activity, and hardly took heed of the importance of the difference between demolishing a temple proactively and covering it in a respectful way.

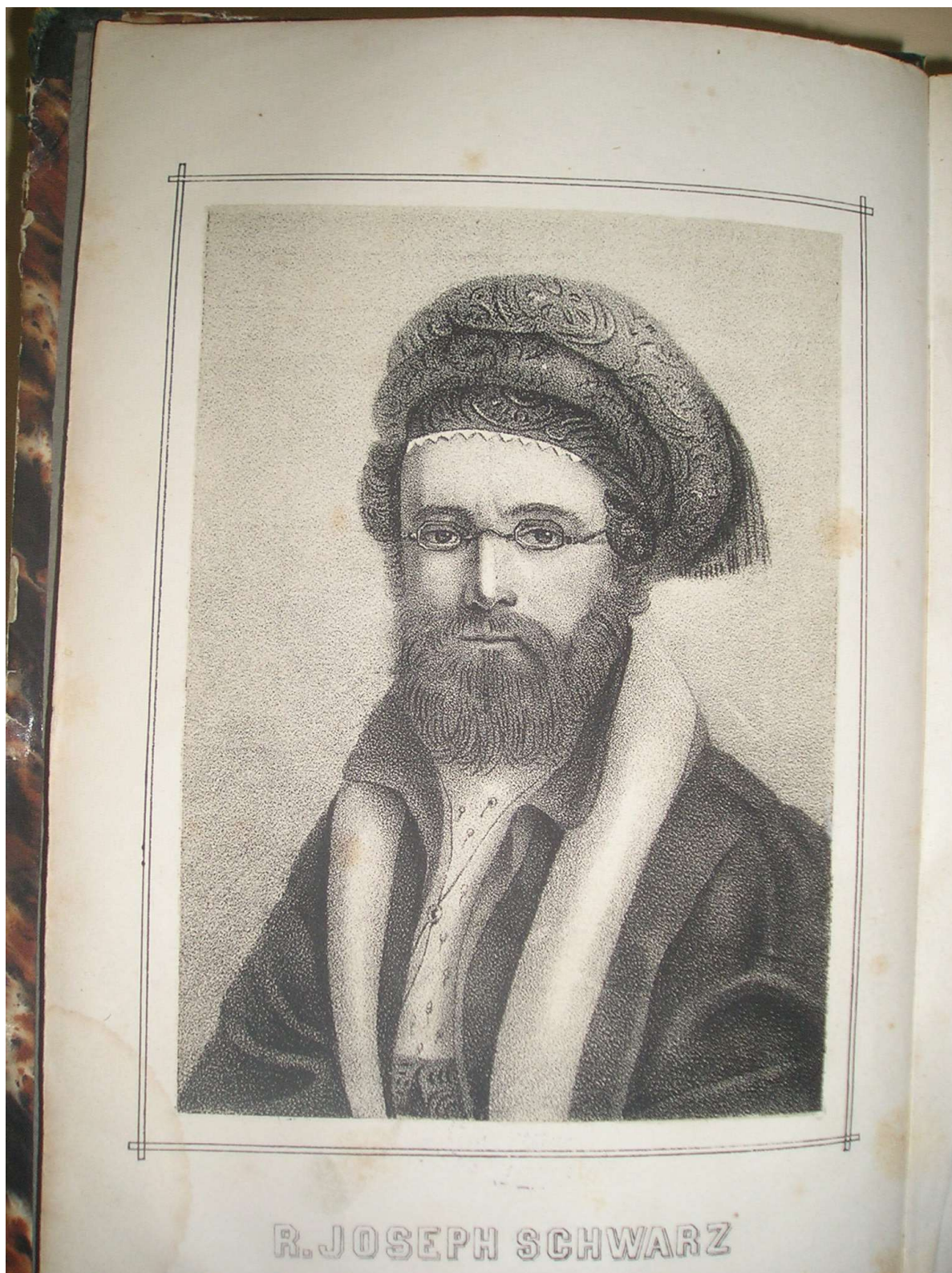


Figure 1: R. Joseph Schwarz (1804–1865) – The first researcher to visit Tel Dothan in modern times. Source: Joseph Schwarz, *Das heilige Land* (Frankfurt: J. Mann, 1852).



*Figure 2: The altar at Tel Dothan – looking west. Note the complete horn on the left and the broken horn on the back. (courtesy of Dr. Zev Rotkoff)*



*Figure 3: The altar at Tel Dothan – looking east. (courtesy of Dr. Zev Rotkoff)*