

To What Extent Did Foreign Aspects Influence the Religion of the Judahites? Sanctuaries, Altars and Terracotta Figurines

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David Rafael Moulis* 

Charles University, Czech Republic

Abstract

The aim of this article is to understand the foreign influence on Iron Age Judahite sacred architecture, offering and incense altars and clay figurines in the context of the latest archaeological finds from Israel. The important discoveries from the recent years are the Judahite temple at Tel Moza, the two-horned Philistine altar from Gath and a “horse and rider” figurine from Moza. Searching and analyzing parallels to the archaeological evidence from other sites is key to interpreting them from a different perspective. The architecture of the sanctuary at Moza reflects in antis (North Syrian) style that is also known from the Biblical description of the Solomonic temple. Nonetheless, the Arad sanctuary is a mixture of Early Bronze and Iron Age elements. The horned altars from Beer-sheba and Dan or Megiddo in northern Israel are related to the Philistine type which originated in the Aegean region and in Egypt. The motive of horns can be observed across these cultures, but their interpretation could be different for each culture. Relatively small objects, the Judean Pillar figurines, replace older nude terracotta plaques from the Late Bronze Age known from Egypt, Mesopotamia and a variety of places in the Middle East. The fundamental feature shared by all of them was basically connected to fertility. The other type of figurines, such as the “horse and rider figurines”, were symbols of the elite and not images of the male deity, as was presented in the past. The horse with the remains of the rider's feet was found at Moza in a clear cultic context, where it was used and smashed during a ritual. Why this happened is still unanswered. The Judahite cult was, thanks to its position among hegemony and due to nearby trade roads, influenced by Egypt, Aegean region, Syria and Mesopotamia. However, the meaning of objects or “symbols” differed from site to site.

Keywords

archaeology, ancient, history, religion, Judah, Canaan, Philistia, cult



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Introduction

The target of this paper is to expose the process of formation of the cult in Judah from the archaeological point of view. Direct and indirect international contacts of various cultures, such

* **Corresponding Author:** David Rafael Moulis, Department of Old Testament Studies, Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University, Černá 9, 115 55, Prague 1. E-mail: david.moulis@gmail.com.

as Israel, Assyria, Babylonia, Anatolia, Aegean region, Egypt, Philistia and Judah. Thus, it is necessary to identify the aspect of Judahite religion which were influenced by foreign cultures during the long-term development in the Iron Age period. It is also important to determine how deeply they were adopted by Judahites to the form of their sanctuaries, altars and small terracotta figurines.

Many questions were previously impossible to answer without significant explorations of Israel and surrounding states. Newly discovered material evidence from the archaeological excavations that took place during the second half of the 20th century has cast new light on the ancient religion of Judahites (e.g., see Zevit 2001). Over the past couple of decades, the first Judahite Iron Age shrine was discovered at Arad (Herzog 2002), later the horned altar at Beer-sheba (Aharoni 1974) and cultic objects at Lachish (Aharoni 1975; Ussishkin 2004) were unearthed. Finally, the most important cultic find was made at Moza, where the Iron Age Judahite temple was found (Kisilevitz 2015; Kisilevitz, Lipschitz 2020). Some foreign cultural, specifically cultic aspects were appropriated by the Judahites, but it is necessary to find their origins abroad. For example, the Philistines brought their know-how and new cultural traditions to Canaan such as the new types of pottery or the horns. Another example of adaptation of foreign artifacts are the nude female figurines that reflected old popular motives of prosperity, motherhood, sexuality and other things. However, in Judah, they show clear local design. Since the Kingdom of Judah was part of the important trade roads, there is no doubt that some aspects were brought through international cultural contacts from Cyprus, Mycenae, Philistia, Anatolia, North Syria, Egypt or Mesopotamia. Other elements which were not domestic in Judah were originally Canaanite.

The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel were both established on the remains of fallen Canaanite city states the religion which was related to the Ugaritic. They were part of the Late Bronze Age Northwestern Semitic system. It is still unclear whether these pantheons were identical, but some of the local names in Canaan refer to gods known from the Ugaritic texts.

The main important era is the end of the 13th century BCE. From that time, the presence of the following is archaeologically documented in Canaan: Egypt, local Canaanite people, Israel and Philistines in their main five cities called Pentapolis (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). Egypt ruled over Canaan but at the end of the Late Bronze Age its influence became less powerful and important states such as Ugarit or Hittites collapsed, as well as the Canaanite city state system. New groups from the Mediterranean Sea region came into southern Levant and the Philistines were among them.

The results published in this paper are based mostly on research of the cultic parallels between Judahite and foreign cultures. Not only were the archaeological records compared, but the Biblical text was also used. This approach contributes to better understanding of the religion of ancient Judahites, the development of which did not occur in cultural isolation or in vacuum.

Sacred Architecture

To date, there is not such strong evidence for the Judahite temples from the Iron Age as was found in Canaan during the Bronze Age period. The sanctuary of Tel Arad from the 8th century BCE is one of only two Judahite shrines that were ever found. This local sanctuary is composed of a courtyard with an offering altar, a roofed broad-room main hall (*hekal*) with a niche (*debir*) and additional rooms (Herzog 2002: 51). There is no doubt that this temple plan is in conflict with the biblical description of the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem in view of the fact that it was a long-room temple, also known as *in antis*, megaron or North Syrian style. The Arad sanctuary plan is similar to what is known as a *pillared house* or as the *four-room house* (Herzog 2002: 68). The typical basic plan of it is usually an open courtyard with two parallel rooms on each side

and one room orthogonal to these three. The main innovation is that all inner rooms are directly accessible from the courtyard. Due to this plan, the traditional Canaanite hierarchy system is not reflected in the Judahite/Israelite architecture (Faust, Bunimovitz 2003: 28), except the temple at Moza. Arad was a small military city, including domestic buildings. Since it was part of the royal fort, it is assumed that it served as an official YHWH sanctuary. The shrine only had a function for local people, not for foreigners. The broad-room temple of Arad made it possible for worshippers standing in the courtyard to be a sufficient distance away from the holy place (*debir*), while a long-room temple might be identified as aristocratic, where the holiest part is separated and far away from worshippers (Herzog 2002: 68):

And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place. And the house, that is, the temple before it, was forty cubits long (1 Kings 6:16–17).

Nevertheless, the Arad sanctuary might be presented as a mixture of this Israelite four-room house and local Early Bronze Age architecture. The clay model of these typical Arad houses was found there, in the lower Canaanite city. The only entrance is well modeled in a longer wall and the house was decorated with red colored stripes. There were no windows and the rooftop was flat (Amiran 1978: 52–53). The real unearthened Early Bronze Age dwellings had the same shape and style. The main hall (*hekal*) of the sanctuary is prominently similar to this broad room “*Arad house*” and the Canaanite influence on the Judahite architecture is evident.

The second example of the sacred architecture is the temple of Tel Moza (Figure 2), which is dated to the end of the 10th or early 9th century BCE. This unexpected find had a completely different plan from that at Arad. The Moza temple is a long-room building standing on a slope with an east-west orientation. Due to its position, the southern part was eroded and washed away in antiquity and probably the same occurred to the western part. At the eastern edge, the courtyard with an offering altar, antechamber and the main hall were found. A portico and columns were not found, maybe due to later activity at the site (Kisilevitz 2015: 150; Kisilevitz, Lipschitz 2020: 45). Only two roughly round stones of 0.6 m in diameter were found laid between the *anta* and entrance to the temple. They were interpreted as possible column bases as they are known from other Near Eastern temples and the Bible (Kisilevitz 2015: 50):

And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz (2 Chron. 3:17).

The origin of *in antis* temple architecture, specifically the Syrian style is documented from the third millennium BCE at Tell Huēra, Halāwa Tell A, Tell Kabīr, and Ebla; later in the second millennium in the southern Levant (e.g. Hazor) and in southern Anatolia Ain Dāra and Tell Ta'yinat. This type of temple *in antis* never appeared in Mesopotamian Central Anatolia (Kisilevitz 2015: 156; Novák 2012: 46). The inner structure of Syrian temples is basically divided into three main parts: an antechamber, a main hall and an inner shrine. Outside, there is an open portico with columns and additional rooms on the sides are possible. The Solomonic temple had the resembling description (in 1 Kings 6–7 and 2 Chron. 3–4) to the *in antis* temples. Nevertheless, it is the only literary record that reflected very well-known architecture in the Near East. In Judah, this style is confirmed by the Moza temple.

Horned Altars

Horned altars are common in Philistia, and the origin of this phenomenon is still debated. The most samples were excavated at Tell Miqne/Ekron. Nonetheless, more altars or only their horns were also found at Judahite and Israelite sites. According to the literal description of the offering altars, the inclusion of the four horns at each corner makes it obvious that this element was essential for the construction:

And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about (Ex 30:1–3).

And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass (Ex 27:1–2).

There is doubt that this text was used as a rule for some large offering altars in Judah. Some archaeological sites contained non-horned altars of different shapes and sizes as well. Non-horned altars were found, for example, at Tel Arad (Figure 3) or Tel Moza (Figure 4). The almost complete altar from Arad from the 8th century BCE had a preserved plastered surface with channels for liquids such as blood and fat to collect them and run off from the top, where an additional large flint slab was placed to be a base for a metal rack (Herzog et al. 1984: 11). Nothing else indicated there the remains of horns. However, according to Aharoni's early article about the altars, he admits that there is a possibility that altars originally had horns made from clay (Aharoni 1974: 2–3). Against this theory is the fact that the Arad altar was built against two walls, specifically in their corner (Herzog 2002: 55). That is why there was only one free corner for the (un)probably single horn. There is no reason to expect horns at this site, also because of the second evidence of the similar but lower non-horned altar from the 10th–9th century BCE. It was made of field stones and it was unearthed at Moza (Kisilevitz 2012: 151).

The only one horned altar in Judah was found at Tel Beer-sheba (Figures 5 and 6). It is approximately dated to the 10th–9th century BCE (Zevit 2001: 301). Due to the cultic changes in Judah during the 8th century BCE, it was not found *in situ*.¹ The ashlar blocks of sandstone and three horns were found in the secondary use context. Most of them were used for construction of public buildings that were built during King Hezekiah's reign. Some blocks were found as part of a storage-house and in the fill of the rampart. The fourth horn was cut off from ashlar to be placed as a threshold (Aharoni 1974: 5; Herzog 2010: 176). Not only were the large offering altars used during the Iron Age period cult, but also smaller “incense” altars with horns served in rituals.

One of this type was discovered at Lachish among other cultic objects. It is a 45 cm high altar with one preserved horn, but maybe it originally had four horns. The place where this assemblage was found was marked by Aharoni as “Cultic room 49” and he claimed that everything was found *in situ* in a small sanctuary (Aharoni 1975: 26). David Ussishkin later dated these artifacts to the 8th century BCE and he found out that they were lying in a round-pit that was part of the architectural elements from at least four phases, and not in the single room (No. 49). Their original location might be identified with an unpreserved main sanctuary from where it was dumped and

¹For an archaeological view on cultic reforms see Moulis (2019: 165–178).

buried into the pit before the palace was erected there around 760 BCE (Ussishkin 2004: 76, 109). It is important to note that Judah is limited with the number of horned altars and it is necessary to also mention finds from Megiddo and Tel Dan in the northern Kingdom of Israel.

Archaeologists at Megiddo uncovered two small horned altars, 39 cm and 31 cm high, used for purification sacrifices, probably oil libations. They were discovered among other non-horned altars. Several separated fragments of stones in the shape of horns from this site were part of the large horned altars which stood in the courtyard during 10th century BCE (Zevit 2001: 306, 312). A large single horn resembling the Beer-sheba altar horns type was also found at Tel Dan (Figure 7), where the monumental altar of a cultic complex was in use during the 10th–9th centuries BCE (Zevit 2001: 302). At Tel Dothan, the similar but smaller incense upper stone of a horned altar was discovered. Archaeologists claim that more lower parts were originally built of ashlar stones. Three or four horns were not in good condition, however, the preserved one had the same shape as that at the Megiddo altar. It was connected with a “Room 14” with a large courtyard dated to the end of the 9th century BCE, when the Dothan was destroyed by violence (Gibson, Kennedy, Kramer 2013: 311, 313, 317). According to its position in the collapsed debris, it is evident that the stone was later secondarily reused.

Much smaller horned altars with either only short horns or their rough indication like the consequence of erosion, represent finds from Gezer, Shechem, Shiloh. The question is whether they were made in this short version to be a support for a bowl which would be used for burning incense. But why do other incense altars not have horns? Some evidence is, for example, from Arad, where organic material was burnt directly on the top of it, without any bowl. New analysis has detected the remains of Cannabis plants, frankincense and animal fat that was burnt in the shrine (Arie, Rosen, Namdar 2020: 11–18). The real purpose of the horns in Judah and Israel is not clear. In the Bible, there are some possibilities. One of them is ritual function:

And thou shalt kill the bullock before the LORD, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And thou shalt take of the blood of the bullock, and put it upon the horns of the altar with thy finger, and pour all the blood beside the bottom of the altar. And thou shalt take all the fat that covereth the innards, and the caul that is above the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and burn them upon the altar (Ex 29: 11–13).

The other variation how to interpret the horns is their protective function:

And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon: for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword. And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. So king Solomon sent for him, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house (1 Kings 1:50–53).

To fully comprehend the meaning of the horned altars, it is desirable to move the interest to Tel Mique/Ekron in Philistia, where seventeen incense horned altars were found (Figures 8 and 9). The Philistines came to the Near East from Europe. It is not so far from the genetic research of the first Philistine cemetery which was ever found. The large cemetery containing more than 200 individuals was discovered at the ancient port of Ashkelon in 2016. Selected skeletons from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age were analyzed. The genetic results of the Bronze Age individuals

revealed that their genes were European (Feldman et al. 2019: 1–7). They were probably part of the group known as the Sea People which came from the Aegean region during the Late Bronze Age. Therefore, some scholars assumed that the Philistines brought the horn-phenomena to the southern Levant as a memory of their homeland. For example, the “*Horns of consecration*” were a common symbol of Minoan palaces architectural decoration during 17th to 15th century BCE. Later, during 13th century BCE, they appeared on Cypriot altars. In Minoan culture, they marked important entryways (Hitchcock 2002: 234). Horns had symbolic and functional aspects. Scholars guess that their symbolic meaning would be different outside the Aegean region (Hitchcock 2002: 236).

The horned altars are known in two main variations according to the number of horns. Two horns are typical for the Aegean and Cyprus, four horns are common for southern Levant, apart from one two-horned altar from 9th century BCE Philistine Gath. A significant similarity was found between Egyptian symbols of the horizon and mountains and the Minoan horns during the 2nd millennium BCE. The Egyptian symbol means two mountains on the east and west and the Nile valley. When the sun disk is added, the valley converts into a horizon (Bannou 2008: 30). The sun disk was connected to a bull, and its main symbol – the horns – was adapted by the Minoans, likely without any link to the mountains and valley. The bull was the Minoan’s sacrificial animal, and it is an opportunity that it contained a symbol of sun. The *Horns of consecration* are represented in a various context as a clay model at the cemetery of Mochlos (according to an alternative interpretation it was a boat), but the oldest *Horns of consecration* are on clay models attached to two vases from Phourni, Malia and Phaistos and later on shrine models from Knossos and Piskokephalo. A clay model of the *Horns of consecration* was excavated on the façade at the sanctuary of Petsophas. The twin-horns are modeled together in various sizes. They might be associated with Minoan cosmology and rituals. In Minoan culture, flowers or branches, symbols of the annual renewal of nature in spring, are sometimes added to the horns (Bannou 2008: 32–35, 42). The *Horns of consecration* were used to mark the important entryways, but in Levant, they are connected to the altars. Horned altars were also found at Knossos and at Kato Zatro. Why the Aegean and Cypriot altars had only one pair of horns, sometime with additional second pair, is not really clear. A single horn fragment is known from Myrtou-Pighades of Cyprus (Hitchcock 2002: 236–237). In Israel, there is also evidence of a two-horned artifact, specifically an Iron Age shrine model of Tel Rekhesh with two horns on the front façade. The connection with the Aegean shrine at Petsophas with horns on the façade, above the entrance, and the Rekhesh model is evident. The oldest Philistine horned structure, interpreted as a four-horned altar, was discovered at Ashkelon. The unusual pyramidal shape of “Installation 539” was made of earth and it was white lime plastered. It was situated in a domestic building dated to the 12th century BCE (Master, Aja 2011: 129, 137, 138, 141). It is difficult to determine a relation to Aegean or Judahite altars due to its atypical style and material, and its domestic context as well.

The Philistine horned altars from Ekron, already mentioned above, were found in an industrial context, close to the entrance of the 7th century BCE olive oil installations (Hitchcock 2002: 245, 247). The oil was important for religious activities and like this, the incense altars were connected to the cultic life. The missing link between the Aegean and Philistine horned altars is filled by the unique Philistine altar from Gath (Biblical Archaeology Society 2011). This is the earliest ever found horned altar in Philistia and it could be the other piece of glass to the large mosaic. The meaning of the horns is unclear. Nevertheless, it is known where it is possible to find their origin and what they symbolized. The only information is that this monolithic altar was found in a temple structure in the largest of the Philistine cities and it is similar to biblical descriptions of four-horned altars.

The Philistine, Judahite and Israelite horned altars (the offering and the incense ones) are either made of ashlar blocks of the stones or as a single monolith. The altars without horns are made of field stones and they are known from the sanctuaries at Arad and Moza. The interesting fact is, that the Moza temple was a monumental temple and the second sanctuary was only a local shrine at Arad, but both were part of the official Judahite cult. By the way, as well as the horned altar from Beer-sheba. For altars made of field stones, there are also rules in the Bible:

And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it (Ex 20:5).

However, the horns are not mentioned there, in contrast to the later passage of Ex 29:12. In this verse, the horns must be spread with the blood of a bullock, which is an interesting connection as the bullock is the ancient symbol of the Minoans.

To sum up, the concept of horned altars could be visible firstly in the Aegean region during the Bronze Age, and then they continued in the later Iron Age in Philistia, Judah and Israel. To understand better the meaning of the horns during these periods, it is necessary to find more discoveries in the clear archaeological context.

Pottery Figurines

During the Late Bronze Age, there was a noticeable presence of Egyptian gods in Canaan. The popular female deity was the goddess Hathor that was also worshipped outside Egypt at Timnah in present day Israel or on the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula (Berlejung 2017: 114–115). The connection to this goddess is a well-known plaque figurine depicting a naked female deity. One of this type is referred to as the Canaanite goddess – Qadesh. The hairstyle and position of the body were the typical Hathoric style. Sometimes, the attributes on the plaques, like a lotus flower or a papyrus held in the hands, are characteristic for Egypt (Keel, Uehlinger 1996: 65–66). Qadesh was adapted by Egyptians from Canaan and Hathor was imported to the Levant from Egypt. Both goddesses were responsible for a fertility and sexuality. The relatively small terracotta plaques served as amulets which were carried by worshippers from place to place. They are not made to be free-standing and, according to the archaeological context, were not placed in any specific place in dwellings (Levavi-Eilat 2020: 29). Apart from Hathor, Egyptians brought more deities such as Amun, Ptah, Maat and Bes to the land of Canaan. The Late Bronze Age amulets of Amun and Bes with grotesque faces were found e.g., at Tel Azekah in area T2. They were excavated mostly next to buried individuals (Koch et al. 2017: 11–18). During this time, the imported intermediary amulets for protecting human beings and scarabs (seals) were adapted by the local Canaanites and, as time passed, these motives were localized and used for daily life and for burials as gifts (Koch et al. 2017: 19). The Canaanites, and later the Judahites, used the seals and amulets during the Iron Age period. This tradition continued, but the original function could have been changed. Ancient people, just as we do now, imitated everything modern and popular (e.g., in Egypt or Assyria) and what was characteristic for elites.

The plaque figurines were typical for the Late Bronze Age; however, they were less used in the southern Levant to the Iron Age II. At this time, the motive of (semi)nude female free-standing figurines appeared in Judah. This kind of fertility and prosperity artifact is called a *Judean Pillar Figurine* (JPF). They were represented together with “horse and rider” figurines predominantly during 8th to 6th century BCE at almost every site in Judah. The problem is the original place of their use, because they were often found in a secondary (refuse) context (Levavi-Eilat 2020: 26). The bodies of all JPF figurines were hand-made and the heads had two variants: hand-made or molded in a form. The schematic hands are holding breasts, the body is a simple pillar, maybe in the shape of a bell skirt. The figurines belonged to the private sphere

as a part of the household practice, or they were found in graves. They could stand or they could be held or transported in the hand. JPF had a specific form in the Levant, but similar types of figurines were also unearthed in northern Israel, Phoenicia, Philistia and Transjordan (Berlejung 2017: 192). Generally, pillar figurines were called “*Astarte figurines*”, though today some theories present them as a symbol related to fertility, maybe pregnancy or motherhood rather than the goddess (Asherah) herself.² Some of the biblical scholars and archaeologists established this theory based on the Old Testament texts, where the term “Asherah/asherah”³ is mentioned forty times. Its meaning there is a carved wooden object, or a living tree and not just a female goddess (Hadley 2000: 54):

And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove^[4] that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever (2 Kings 21:4-7).

And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove^[5], and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel (2 Kings 23:4).

Other evidence of “Asherah” is from extra-biblical material from the site Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom. Texts were found there which mentioned “Asherah” or “YHWH and his Asherah” (Hadley 2000: 121, 125). Unfortunately, a clear connection to the terracotta JPF is missing. The only limited resemblance is that the clay pillar body might be the symbolic tree trunk. Till present, there is no clear evidence of where the origin of these figurines lay. One possibility is that they were a new form of the Late Bronze Age plaques or they were influenced by Philistines. Indeed, the Judahites continued at least in their homes with the practice of some Canaanite traditions, and this is a good example. Household cults had another form with comparison to the official Judahite cult, which was mainly kept by males. The magical JPF could be used only by women in private tradition in the sphere that was not covered by the official cult, e.g. (household) prosperity, plenty, fertility or motherhood. The end of the use of JPF occurred when the Babylonians conquered Judah in 586 BCE. That is why it is possible to claim that this popular ritual was tolerated by the state. Despite the hundreds of excavated JPF or their fragments, it is necessary to get more finds in their primary context. There is a similar problem of interpretation with the “horse and rider” figurines typical for Judah in the 8th to 7th century BCE. They were only hand-made. Yet, the earliest sample was excavated at Moza, so far dated to the early 9th century BCE (Kisilevitz, Lipschitz 2020: 48).

Moza was a Judahite royal city with granaries and the temple that was already mentioned above. The complete horse includes a fragment of the rider’s feet on its body. The rest of the figurine did not survive (Figure 10). The second zoomorphic figurine (Figure 11) was also interpreted as a horse wearing blinders (Kisilevitz, Lipschitz 2020: 41, 48). A horse and rider already

²In case of the Kingdom of Judah.

³“Asherah” means the goddess; “asherah” means an object.

⁴“Grove” means “asherah”.

⁵“Grove” means “asherah”.

existed in the 2nd millennia (e.g., at Tell Efrat) and this figurine was also produced in Philistia, Phoenicia, Transjordan and Cyprus (Kletter, Saarelainen 2014: 198). The horse and rider figurines were interpreted as various objects: a warrior or god of battles (Mackenzie 1912: 88) or horsemen from the northern steppes (Tufnell 1953: 377). It was a logical approach to find a divine male counterpart for the JPF. As usual, this Judahite version of a horse and rider was firstly identified with the god YHWH. Mistakenly, it was based on the specific circle between a horse's ears. In some cases, it looked like a small sun-disk which was connected to the main deity. In Israel, the best candidate was YHWH (Taylor 1994: 53-58). Although the disk is a schematic part of the mane, in one sample from the Jerusalem Cave I, it is nothing more than decoration rendering a rosette (Kletter, Saarelainen 2014: 201; Uehlinger 1997: 152; Briffa 2017: 352). According to Kletter and Saarelainen, they represent cavalymen (Kletter, Saarelainen 2014: 205).

A type of horse figurine without a rider is also known from various sites. They were probably originally modeled together with chariots. During the Iron Age, the horse had an important military role, especially in Egypt, Assyria and in Israel and Judah as well. Stables from the early 8th century BCE were excavated at Megiddo (Cantrell, Finkelstein 2006: 644–645). Similar buildings were discovered in Egypt (Late Bronze Age), Urartu (Late Iron II Age) and in the towns of Negev (Late Nabatean) (Cantrell, Finkelstein 2006: 645). The horse had a high elite status during these periods. According to the number of horses, the strength of the Assyrian army was set, and they were also used as a part of the tribute (Briffa 2017: 390). In Biblical texts, horses were a sign of royalty and authority:

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him (2 Sam 35:1).

Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him (1 Kings 1:5).

A horse and rider show the important relation between the human being and the animal. Horses were elite animals, which were used by kings and soldiers. That means people from higher society. And a horse figurine with or without a rider was an object that represented the importance and role of this animal. At Moza, horses and riders were found in a clear cultic context next to the offering altar and podium together with two anthropomorphic terracotta heads. Scholars do not know exactly what happened at the Moza temple. This object was probably used during rituals by soldiers and then all the pottery objects were smashed and thrown into the pit.

In the end, it is necessary to note that nothing indicates that the rider represents a deity, but rather a person from the military sphere, and the horse is a symbol of an animal, its power and its prestige.

Conclusions

The cultic finds from Judah attest to the strong influence of Aegean, Egyptian, North Syrian and Canaanite traditions, which were adapted and furthermore modified. The original character was adjusted to Judahite customs to be in accordance with their beliefs which can't be called monotheism during this period yet. The finds are interpreted to comparison with objects from regions where the cultural contacts were documented. Judahite sacred architecture was known only from the Bible until the Moza temple was discovered near Jerusalem. Curiously it had the same architectural style in comparison with the Arad sanctuary. It is characterized by a mixture of the old Canaanite architecture and the new Iron Age "four-room house". The Moza temple is *in antis*/megaron/North Syrian style originally from Syria and Anatolia in the third and the

second millennium. The situation is unique, because these two Judahite shrines were part of the same official cult, although they indicate completely different architectural plans.

The altars were an important part of the cultic activities, particularly in the temples. For Judah and Israel, non-horned and horned altars were typical, used for burnt offerings. A smaller type served for incense burning. The four-horned altars from Beer-sheba and from southern Israel (Megiddo, Gezer, Shechem or Shiloh) had connections to Philistine's horned altars from Tell Mique/Ekron and the Aegean region. The link between the Philistines and the Aegean civilization could be the two-horned altar from Gath because two horns were found on altars on Cyprus. Much earlier, twin horns *Horns of consecration* were the symbol of Minoan palaces and they marked important entryways. There, the horns are connected to the bull as a representation of the sun. There is a possibility that the Minoans adopted the motive of horns from the Egyptians, where the horns symbolized the mountains to the east and west and the valley of the Nile.

One object is common in almost every site in Judah, and it is connected to the household cultic practice. The nude women depicted by *Judean Pillar Figurines* were not part of the official cultic rituals. If they were found in their original place, they were private objects which replaced the Late Bronze Age nude female plaques, some had an Egyptian style, others Mesopotamian. They were likely used during motherhood and were carried from place to place like pocket amulets. The purpose of JPF was similar. They were also small enough to be held in the hand or to be freestanding at home. This artifact served for woman to provide a sphere that was not arranged in the official cultic sites.

The data presented in this article are based on present research. Future surveys might bring more evidence to understand these cultural connections in better context, although the last 60 years were successful. For example, in previous years, the first Judahite monumental temple at Moza was discovered and the European DNA of the Philistines was solved. This might be the important link between the Kingdom of Judah and other regions during the formation process of the Judahite identity.

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About author

David Rafael Moulis is an assistant professor and a researcher at the Department of Old Testament Studies, Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague. In recent years he has participated in the archaeological projects in the City of David in Jerusalem, Tel Azekah, Ein el-Jarba, Fazael, Naḥal Rephaim and Tel Moza. His main focus is on the study of transitions and developments of the cult in the Iron Age Judah according to the archeological records. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0150-3745>.

Appendix

Figure 1: Map of the main Philistine and Judahite cities (drawing: author)

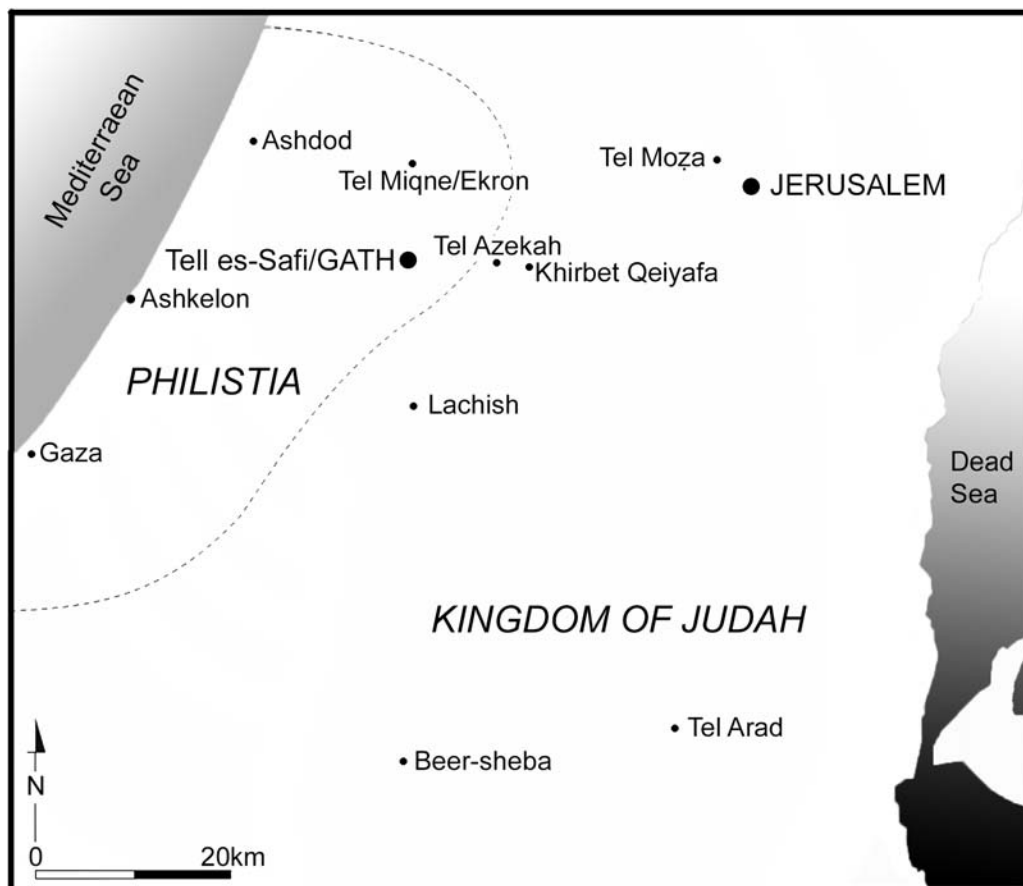


Figure 2: Temple, Tel Moza, 2019 (photo: author)



Figure 3: Offering altar, Tel Arad, 2013 (photo: author)



Figure 4: Offering altar, Tel Moza, 2019 (photo: author)



Figure 5: Offering horned altar, Tel Beer-sheba, the early reconstruction (drawing: author)

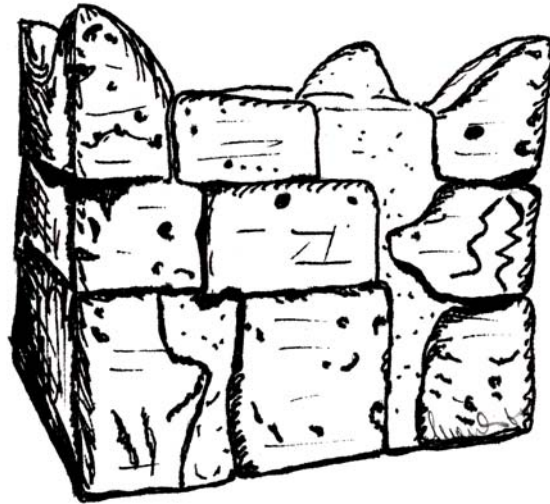


Figure 6: Offering horned altar, Tel Beer-sheba, the second possible reconstruction (drawing: author)

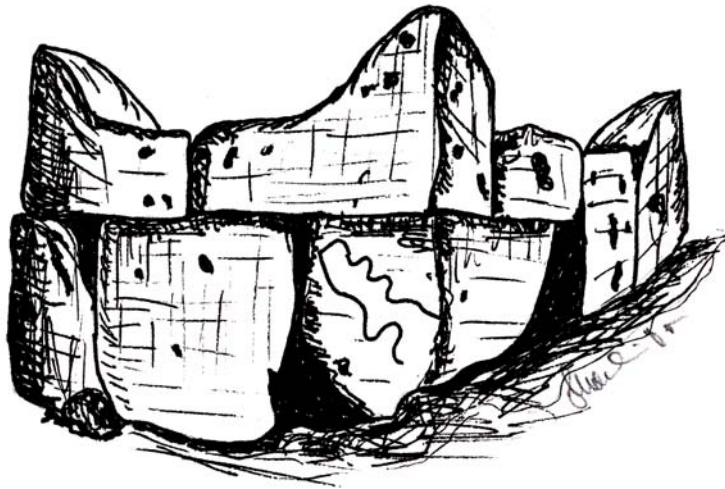


Figure 7: Tel Dan, place, where the horned altar stood, 2013 (photo: author)



Figure 8: Small horned altar, Tell Miqne/Ekron (drawing: author)



Figure 9: Small horned altar, Tell Miqne/Ekron (drawing: author)



Figure 10: Horse and Rider figurine, Tel Moza (photo: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority)



Figure 11: Zoomorphic figurine, Tel Moza (photo: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority)

