

# **A Ceramic Pomegranate from Shiloh**

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## **Abstract**

The article discusses a ceramic pomegranate found in the recent excavations at Tel Shiloh. The context of the find is described as well as other appearances of similar objects in the southern Levant, and the significance of the pomegranate as a symbol in Levantine and Near Eastern iconography. While the context is mixed, it is suggested the object should be dated to the Iron Age, possibly the late Iron Age I or Iron Age II as most parallels come from southern Judah during this period.

**Keywords:** Tel Shiloh, pomegranate, pendants, stands, Iron Age, cult

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## Introduction: The New Shiloh Excavations

Ancient Shiloh lies just east of the Jerusalem-Nablus road (route 60), 31 km north of Jerusalem, at Khirbet-Seilun (Fig. 1). In 1838, the American Orientalist Edward Robinson became the first modern person to correctly identify Khirbet Seilun as Shiloh. The Danish performed the first archaeological excavations at Shiloh under the leadership of Hans Kjær between 1926 and 1932.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Israel Finkelstein directed four seasons of excavations at Shiloh (1981–1984) on behalf of Bar-Ilan University (Finkelstein, Bunimovitz, Lederman and Brandl 1993). Since 1988, the Staff Officer of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria has conducted salvage excavations at the site. In 2017–2018, the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR), under the direction of Scott Stripling, conducted the first two seasons of a planned multi-year expedition. Their initial work focuses on Area H1 north of the summit and just east of the Danish Area F (Fig. 2).



**Figure 1:** Map of Ancient Israel with sites related to pomegranate finds mentioned in this article (created by David E. Graves; labelled by Tim Lopez)

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1 Marie-Louise Buhl and Svend Holm-Nielsen published the final report in 1969 after a final season of excavation in 1963.



**Figure 2:** Aerial view of the archaeological site of Shiloh (photo by Barry Kramer; used with permission of ABR)

Season Two of the ABR excavation at Shiloh yielded a small ceramic pomegranate from Field H1.<sup>2</sup> Given the pomegranate's important symbolism in the Ancient Near East, particularly in the Israelite cultic system, this object may be of special significance, and could be related to a local cult during the Iron Age. According to Joshua 18:1–10, Joshua set up the tabernacle at Shiloh and from there finished dividing the land among the Israelite tribes. The Iron Age I is well-attested archaeologically at Shiloh.

The rich history of archaeological work at Shiloh has clarified the habitation sequences, even though many questions remain unanswered. The knowledge gained by these excavations can be summarized in a well-defined stratigraphy with 9 strata (see Table 1).

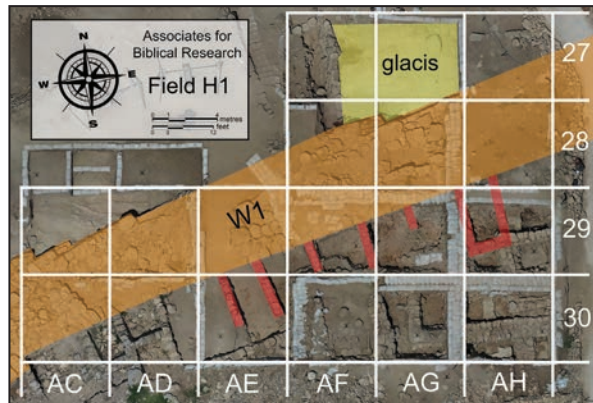
<sup>2</sup> The Danish expedition to Shiloh in the 1920s excavated a similar artefact (Danish #100). They identified it as a stopper, but it may have originally functioned as a pomegranate (see below).

**Table 1: Stratigraphic sequence at Shiloh**

Stratum	Chronology	Time Period
0	636–1917 CE	Islamic
I	325–636 CE	Byzantine
II	135–325 CE	Late Roman
III	167 BC–135 CE	Late Hellenistic/ Hasmonean/Early Roman
IV	980–332 BCE	Iron Age II-III
V	1177–980 BCE	Iron Age I
VI	1483–1177 BCE	Late Bronze
VII	1650–1483 BCE	Middle Bronze III
VIII	1750–1650 BCE	Middle Bronze IIB

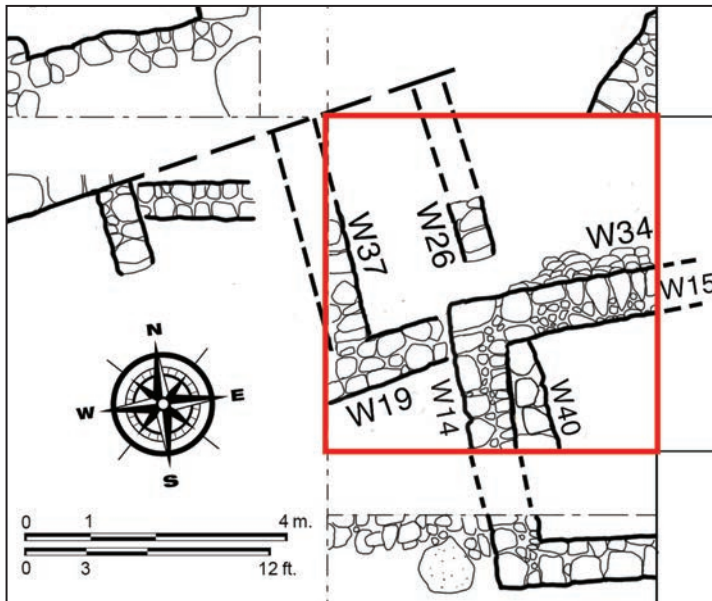
### The Context of the Pomegranate (Field H1, Locus 7)

In ABR’s Field H1, all strata have been exposed, confirming and challenging previous conclusions, but also shedding new light on previously uncertain issues. For example, 2 m of fallen mudbrick cover the perfectly preserved glacis in AF27-28 and AG27-28; hence, it is now clear that the city wall served as a fortification wall, not just as a perimeter wall. The MB III (MB IIC) perimeter wall (W1) dominates Field H1 together with the storage rooms just south of it. The later phases are more prevalent to the south of the storage rooms, especially in the southeast of Field H1. The following grid details Field H1 and its main features uncovered by the ABR team (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3:** Aerial view of Field H1 with ABR’s grid, highlighting the MB III perimeter wall (W1) in the center, the glacis to the north, and the storage rooms to the south (photo by Greg Gulbrandsen)

The ceramic pomegranate derives from square AH29, which is especially interesting and complicated because of its abundance of architectural structures.<sup>3</sup> The 2018 season exposed 7 walls in AH29, representing 3 strata (Fig. 4). 3 of these walls (W19, W26, and W37) enclose Storage Room FF, which most likely connects with the perimeter wall (W1) to the north. Together with W34, these 4 walls represent the architectural remains in the square from MB III (Stratum VII). W40 likely belongs to Stratum V, even though the nature of the structure to which it pertains is still uncertain and further excavation is necessary to fix a certain chronology and designation. Finally, the 2 walls, W14 and W15, forming a corner and connecting to another E-W wall in square AH30, represent the Early Roman (ER) occupation at Shiloh (Stratum III).



**Figure 4:** Top plan of square AH29 (plan by Leen Ritmeyer)

The pomegranate came from a locus associated to the ER structure, and thus from Stratum III (Locus 7). However, the material retrieved from this locus was very mixed and also included Early Roman pottery. The pomegranate likely derived from an earlier period. Locus 7 occupied the southwest area of the square with the dimensions 4.15 m × 2.90 m, covering an area of approximately 8 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 5).

<sup>3</sup> The northern balk remains unexcavated.

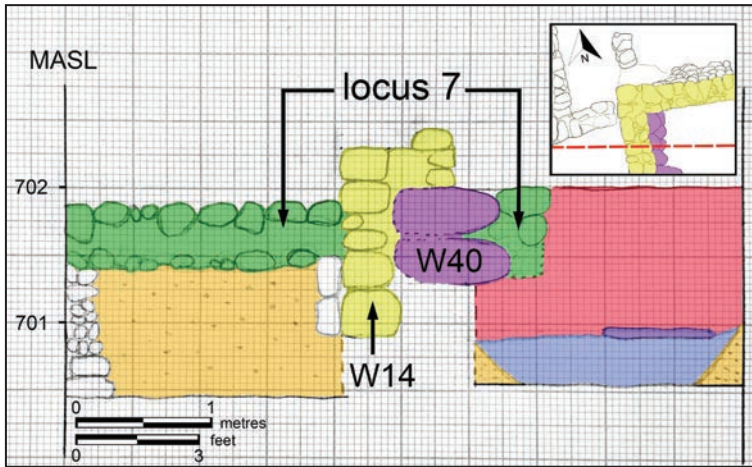
In 2017 it appeared that Locus 7 served as a foundation for the ER wall (W14), and partially for W15, but the 2018 excavation revealed that Locus 7 was clearly sealed against W14 on its west side, W40 to the east, and W15 in the northeast for approximately 0.50 m without any trace of a foundation trench (Fig. 6). The mixed pottery ranging from ER to MB (with 50% ER material) confirmed this. Thus, Locus 7 formed after the construction of W14, maybe for the purpose of raising and levelling the area. The material likely came from the surroundings, perhaps from the robbed W10 in square AG30.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 5:** Aerial view of square AH29 before the excavation of Locus 7  
(photo by Greg Gulbrandsen)

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4 Finkelstein exposed part of W10 in square U28 of his grid (square AK30 in the ABR grid), while ABR exposed 5 m of the wall in AH30 and approximately the same additional length in AG30. Thus, the currently total known length of W10 is approximately 22 m (Fig. 7). What makes this wall so interesting is the clear E-W orientation, the dimensions (c. 1.2 m wide), and an apparent building style from the IA. Furthermore, excavation in AH30 exposed another similar wall (W11), but in a N/S direction, abutting W10. Finkelstein dated W10 to MB III with the designation of a contention wall (Finkelstein et al. 1993: 74–76). However, the N/S W11 abutting W10 in AH30 argues against that designation. Furthermore, the building style with smaller stones is more like IA (Stratum IV-V), than the typical cyclopean boulders for the MB.



**Figure 6:** Section drawing of square AH29; the red dashed line in the top plan marks the location of the section (drawing by Tim Lopez)



**Figure 7:** Aerial view displaying the currently known total length of W10 (photo by Greg Gulbrandsen)

The locus top elevation measured 702 m, and the bottom elevation 701.27 m, which can be compared to the elevations of W14 (top: 702.44 m, bottom: 700.92 m) to indicate the relatively high location of Locus 7. The locus consisted of a layer of cobbles and boulders randomly distributed, but with clear limits to the north and east, followed by a layer of soil and another layer of cobbles and stones beneath it. To the south across the entire balk, and in an area of  $0.38 \times 0.28$  m closest to the balk, excavation exposed a 3–6 cm layer of very dark brown soil (Munsell 7.5YR 2.5/2) at an elevation of 701.45 m, containing a high density of large burned bones. Walls W37 and W19 emerged under Locus 7. Thus, as noted, the pomegranate came from a mixed context at an elevation of 701.60 m.<sup>5</sup> Several other objects from various time periods came from Locus 7, including a scarab of Thutmose III, half of a bronze axe head, a glass rim, and a Roman coin dated to 51 BCE.

### **The Ceramic Pomegranate (Figs. 8–9)**

The ceramic pomegranate came, as noted above, from Locus 7 of the new excavations at Shiloh (Season 2018; Area H1, Sq. AH29, Field No. TL104, Pail 57; Obj. No. 900). It is made of Munsell 2.5YR 8/3 colored clay. The dimensions are: length: 43 mm, max width 29 mm, calyx width 17 mm.

#### **Description**

The object is nearly complete, and its body is solid; it was made by hand and shaped by hand. It includes a wide (17 mm) addition on top perforated for suspension (the clay was perforated after firing, with a 3 mm perforation hole). The body of the fruit is wide and rather squat rather than spherical; the lower part is the calyx with a cylindrical shape and at its end 4 wide elongated petals, slightly bent inwards, cut in the clay (2 complete, 1 broken, and 1 missing). Their rather straight, wide edges are on the same plane. The object is a suspended solid pomegranate ‘pendant’ (see below Type 3). Possibly, the object depicts a pomegranate bud since the petals are not open.

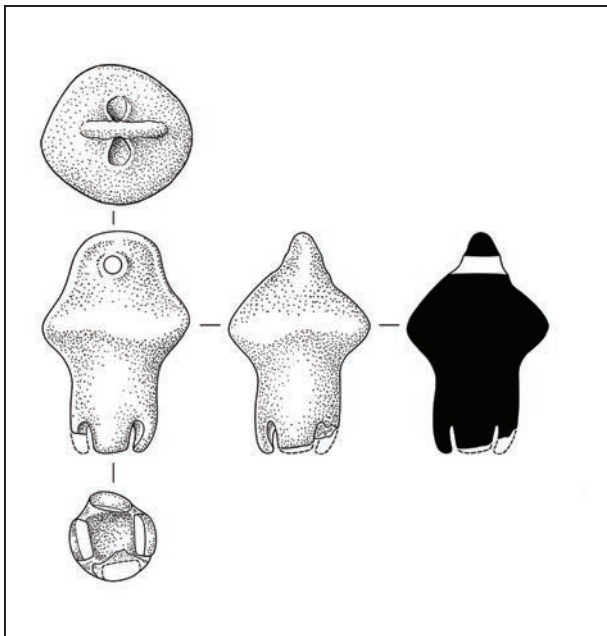
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5 The pomegranate was discovered via dry-sifting and not directly in the locus, so the exact location and elevation of the object remains unknown. But, taking in consideration the elevation of Locus 7 the day the pomegranate was found, it is fair to say that the suggested elevation is a close estimate.





**Figure 8:** The ceramic figure of a pomegranate from Shiloh exposed during ABR's second season of excavations at the site (photo by Tal Rogovski)



**Figure 9:** Drawing of the pomegranate, from left to right: profile, top, and bottom (drawing by Olga Dubovsky)

## **A Possible Ceramic Pomegranate from the Danish Excavations (Figs. 10–11)**

A possible pomegranate discovered by the Danish team derives from Cave S in Area F, an area south of the summit with several interconnected caves (Buhl and Holm-Nielsen 1969: 25–26). However, Cave S has no connection with other caves in the area. It has an irregular shape, measuring approximately 3.5 m from northwest to southeast, and 2.3 m from northeast to southwest. A flight of steps at the southern corner provides access to the interior of the cave. The bottom of the cave at an elevation of 67.32 m is 2.6 m below the surface.<sup>6</sup> Excavation revealed 2 loci near the bottom of the cave; the locus closest to the bottom measured 0.30 m deep, and the one above it measured 0.40 m. Above these lay only Roman material. Both loci contained only Pre-Hellenistic finds. Unfortunately, the Danish excavators did not specify the exact location of each object from the cave, but they did mention that 2 flint implements (#101–102) and the possible pomegranate (#100), which they identified as a stopper (Fig. 10), emerged near the bottom (Buhl and Holm-Nielsen 1969: 25). The pottery associated with object #100 dates from Iron Age I-II, which gives an indication of the chronology for the 2 loci closest to the bottom (Strata IV–V) and also for the possible pomegranate.

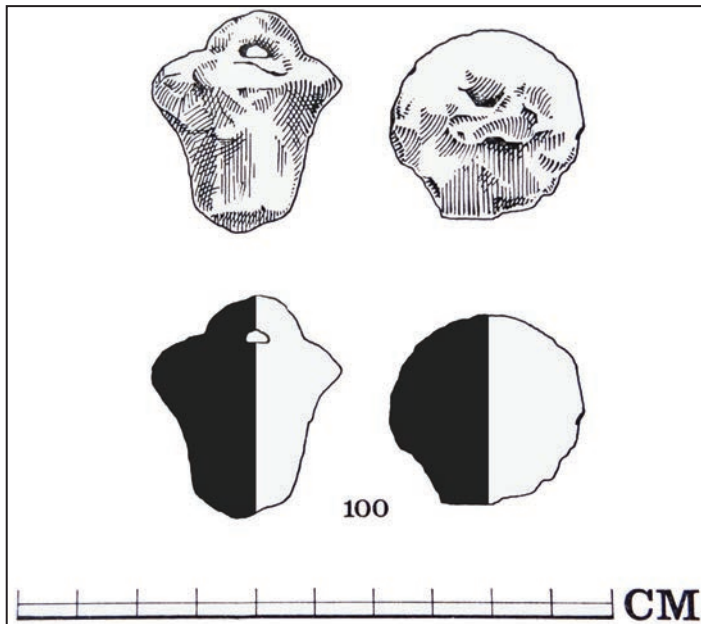


**Figure 10:** An artefact (Danish #100) from the Danish expedition that could have functioned as a decorative pomegranate (photo by Christian Jensen)

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<sup>6</sup> Elevations from the Danish excavation are relative; level 55.00 corresponds approximately to 700 m above sea level (Buhl and Holmen-Nielsen 1969: 12).

The solid item itself (Figs. 10–11) is fragmentary, measuring about  $37 \times 32$  mm, and is made of reddish-brown clay. It has an applied suspension hole and a wider upper part. The wide slightly squat body and the lower cylindrical part (as its dimensions) are rather similar to the complete pomegranate (Figs. 8–9); yet, the calyx if present was not preserved. Thus, this object could be another schematic suspended pomegranate pendant (see below Type 3) due to its size and shape.



**Figure 11:** Drawing of the artefact #100 from the Danish excavations at Shiloh (drawing by Marie-Lousie Buhl; adapted by Tim Lopez)

## Pomegranates and their Representations in Antiquity

While the pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) was possibly not indigenous, it was cultivated in the southern Levant in ancient times. Today it can be grown throughout the Mediterranean (Zohary and Hopf 1993). Ward (2003) has suggested that pomegranates were an elite-oriented luxury food during the Bronze Age, probably exported from the east to the Aegean and Cyprus. Large quantities of the remains of this fruit were found in the Late Bronze Age shipwreck from Ulu Burun, as well as in various elite, funerary, and cultic contexts in the eastern Mediterranean (Ward 2003: Tables 1–2; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: p. 12; see also Nigro

and Spagnoli 2018: 52–53, on pomegranate remains in the ancient Near East). This fruit was probably not a basic food stuff but connected to cult and religion or to elite consumption. For example, at the MB III (MB IIC) cemetery of Jericho, pomegranate remains were found in Tomb B35, as was a wooden pomegranate-shaped box (Kenyon 1960: 371, Fig. 158: 6, Pl. XVII: 1, 4). It was found in cultic contexts or votive vessels at Tell es-Safi-Gath (Frumin and Weiss 2018: 79, Fig. 6; see also at LB II Tel Burna, Orendi et al. 2017: 179, Table 1).

Pomegranates are represented in various media during Bronze and Iron Ages in the southern Levant; they appear even more frequently in materials other than clay (Ward 2003: Table 1). The origin of pomegranate-shaped objects in the Bronze Age, especially the clay vessels, has been traced to the southern Levant (Immerwahr 1989: 404–405; Ward 2003; Nigro and Spagnoli 2018). While appearing in Greek art and mythology (Immerwahr 1989; Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: 57–59) its roots are linked with the east, both according to early depictions in Mesopotamia (see Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: 51) and the Phoenician cult (Nigro and Spagnoli 2018). Pomegranate vessels in various materials (especially glass and faience) appear in the Middle–Late Bronze Age Levant, Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt; after a chronological gap, they reappear in the Iron Age II in Assyrian, Phoenician, and Aegean Geometric assemblages (Börker-Klähn 1957–1971: 626; Mazar 1980: 116, with references; Immerwahr 1989: 398–400, Fig. 1; Nigro and Spagnoli 2018). Egyptian faience and glass-free-standing vessels in the shape of pomegranates are known mostly from funerary contexts in various periods (Immerwahr 1989: 400–403; Honroth 1994: Fig. 8). Pomegranates appear also in Neo-Assyrian iconography, whether related to the motif of the ‘tree of life’ (see, e.g., Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: 53–54, for references, mostly in reliefs and glyptics) or as an independent motif from ivory or gold (as in the jewelry from a royal tomb at Nimrud; see Hussein 2016; Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: Fig. 8). Numerous pomegranate glass vessels come from the Late Cypriote period in Cyprus, mostly from tombs (e.g., Karageorghis 1974: 45, Pl. LXV: 25; Jacobsson 1994: 26–30, Pls. 56–65).

A scepter made of ‘Egyptian Blue’, with its upper part in the shape of a pomegranate, was found in an Iron Age II context at Moza (Greenhut 2009). Small ivory or bone pomegranates (also identified by certain scholars as opium poppies, see, e.g., Merrillees 1962) are related to the ivory rods on which they were affixed. These are known from the Late Bronze and Iron Age (see, e.g., Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 13; also, Beit Mirsim, Ben-Arieh 2004: Fig. 2.45: 144). Particularly famous is the large bone pomegranate in the Israel Museum inscribed with Hebrew ‘lby[*t yhw*]h qdš khnm’ (‘to the house of Yahweh, holy [to] priests’;

Lemaire 1984). The artefact was originally said to be the only relic known from the first temple at Jerusalem, yet, since it originated from the antiquities market, the inscription is likely a fake (e.g., Goren et al. 2005). The pomegranate itself, however, may be dated to Late Bronze or Iron Age. Another ivory pomegranate found in an excavation at the City of David carried a bird (dove?) sitting on top of it (Reich, Shukron and Lernau 2007: 160–161, Fig. 10); it was also attached to a rod since it had a perforation at its bottom. Pomegranates also appear, though rarely, on Judean stamp seals as a decorative/iconographic motif on private seals (as Avigad and Sass 1997: No. 583; Avigad, Heltzer and Lemaire, 2000: No. 70; Keel 2010: 226–227, Beth Shemesh No. 23; Keel 2017: 278–279, No. 3).

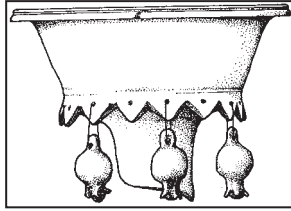
## **Ceramic Pomegranates in the Iron Age Levant**

Nevertheless, ceramic pomegranates are common, especially during the Iron Age (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007; Ben-Shlomo 2010: 155–158, Figs. 3.88, 3.89; see below). These ceramic pomegranates include 3 types of objects:

Free-standing pomegranate-shaped hollow vessels (see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: 4–6). These objects are most common during late Iron Age I and Iron Age II Philistia, as at Ashdod, Ekron, and Tell Qasile (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: Type 1, references and discussion therein). Almost all are red slipped (not surprising, since this is the natural color of the fruit) and are rather naturalistic in their depiction; they have one opening at their top, and sometimes perforations for suspension. They were probably not suspended from clay stands or vessels (as Type 3 below) since they are too big.

Pomegranate-shaped objects that constitute a component of a larger vessel. These include the bowls from Tel Mique-Ekron and Tel Halif and all the pomegranate-shaped vessels attached to kernos rings appearing in several Iron Age sites in the southern Levant (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: 7–10, Type 2, references and discussion therein). In both Types 1 and 2 the objects are oriented with the calyx of the pomegranates on top.

Ceramic pomegranates suspended from a protrusion attached to the body of the pomegranate, with the calyx facing downwards (shown as the fruit appears in nature, suspended pomegranate pendants; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: 10–11, references therein). They were probably suspended from stands, chalices, or other clay vessels (see Fig. 12); they were suspended by a string and the carrying of the stand or vessel with the suspended object probably created a ‘jangling’ effect, both visual and acoustic.



**Figure 12:** Suspended ceramic pomegranates from Hazeva and a reconstruction of their attachment to cult stands (Ben-Arieh 2011: Fig. 40; courtesy of IAA)

These include vessels from Tel Mique, Tel Sera', Qitmit (attached to the bowl's exterior rather than suspended), 'En Hazeva, and now Shiloh. In particular, the finds from the favissa at 'En Hazeva and the Qitmit shrine were rich with ceramic pomegranates. A ceramic pomegranate from an Iron IIA cultic corner at Tell es-Safi/Gath also probably belongs to this group (Maeir, Hitchcock and Horwitz 2013: 22, Fig. 9).<sup>7</sup> At 'En Hazeva (Ben-Arieh 2011: 158, Fig. 40) 6 examples (attributed to 2 different stands) include 3 hollow and more squat examples depicting the indentations of the fruit's body (Ben-Arieh 2011: Fig. 40: 64–66, representing ripe pomegranates), while 3 examples are solid, emphasizing the calyx (Fig. 12, depicted with a clay ball inside) representing pomegranate buds (Ben-Arieh 2011: 158, Fig. 40: 67–69).<sup>8</sup>

At the Iron Age shrine of Qitmit, which was characterized by excavators as 'Edomite', the finds include 2 chalices with pomegranates attached to the lower part of the bowl (1 with 7 reconstructed pomegranates) and 2 bowls with attached pomegranates (Beck 1995: 155–161, Figs. 3.105–3.108, Nos. 187–190), as well as 32 fragments of ceramic pomegranates. Although these pomegranates are hollow and are not suspended by a string from a stand, they are of a similar nature since they are oriented with calyx down and cannot be used as vessels (the bowls are without connected perforations) and create a similar visual effect.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The unique shape of the pomegranate, combining a naturalistic vegetative motif (the fruit) with a spherical symmetrical shape, makes it a popular artistic motif.

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7 This item has not yet been published in detail, but it seems to be hollow and decorated by stripes in the philistine Bichrome style (Maeir pers. comm.).

8 Metal pomegranates are also known in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages at Ras Shamra, Enkomi, and other Cypriot sites (Catling 1964: 192, 195, 202, Pls. 27: f, 28b, 32: a–c, f; see also an example from Megiddo in May 1935: 20, Fig. 5), and were similarly hung from stands.

The importance of the pomegranate in Canaanite religion and art may have been transferred to the Israelite religion, at least according to texts. It may have symbolized fertility, wealth, and common fruit of land of Israel.

Pomegranates are a well-known symbol of fertility, no doubt because of their multitude of seeds and possibly their blood-colored juice (e.g., Immerwahr 1989; Muthmann 1982; see Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: 64–65, for possible evidence for this in the Phoenician Motya temple at Sicily). The cultic significance of pomegranates has been noted both in Canaanite and Near Eastern religions (May 1935: 18; Immerwahr 1989: 405; Nigro and Spagnoli 2018). They symbolized life and fertility as well, as in a wall painting from Mycenaean Tiryns depicting a cultic figure carrying pomegranates (Papadimitriou, Tahler and Maran 2015: 200–202). Representations of a goddess with pomegranates are also related to the Hittite Kubaba, depicted with the fruit in her hand (Naumann 1983: Pls. 1: 2, 1: 3, 7: 1; Rova 2008), continuing later to be her symbol as Kybele (portrayed together with two musicians on a statue from Boghazkoy; see Beck 1995: 161). In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the connection between pomegranates and the underworld is indicated in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (Beach 1994). They are also related to the cult of Hera in Samos, presented as offerings (Immerwahr 1989: 407).

The Bible cites pomegranates in several contexts, usually as a typical fruit of the Land of Israel, together with the fig (e.g., Num. 13:23; Deut. 8:8; one of the ‘seven species’ of the Land of Israel). In the Song of Songs, the pomegranate is used as a metaphor for the redness or smoothness of a woman’s temple (4:3, 6:7), and its juice or wine is also mentioned (8:2), as well as its blossom as a sign of renewal (6:11). Pomegranates are an ornamental element on the Tabernacle high priest’s garment (Exod. 28:33, 39:25–26); they are described in relation to golden ‘bells’ covering them (see also Houtman 1990). The pomegranate as an architectural feature appears in the description of Solomon’s temple (or possibly other palaces) and is usually referred to as part of a lattice, probably made of wood, or as the top/capital of a pillar (1 Kgs. 7:42; 2 Kgs. 25:17; Jer. 52:23; 2 Chr. 3:12; also as on the sceptre recovered from Tel Moza). Thus, pomegranates during the Iron Age may also have been associated with symbols of power and kingship (as in the Moza sceptre, an object related to kingship – its calyx is also shaped as a crown; see also Nigro and Spagnoli 2018: 54–55). In addition, several biblical place names contain the name Rimmon (pomegranate in Hebrew) as in Beit (=house) Rimmon (2 Kgs. 5:18) and Gath (=winepress) Rimmon (Josh. 21:24), and also as cult (?) place Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (Zech. 12:11).

In the Judahite and especially later Jewish traditions, the pomegranate became a major iconographic symbol. The fruit was adopted into Jewish art among other vegetative motifs. It was part of the decorative elements of the Solomonic temple (see above) and shown later on the Great Jewish Revolt coins. The pomegranate is also associated with the 613 Jewish Mitzvot, as it is said to have 613 seeds (e.g., Abram 2009). Later, especially from the Middle Ages onwards, it was associated with the decoration of the Torah books in the Jewish tradition (see, e.g., Abram 2009: 27–28).

Pomegranate-shaped objects made of various precious or fine materials, such as ivory, bone, gold, silver, faience, glass, or wood, seem to occur in similar kinds of contexts during the Bronze and Iron Ages, namely in elite dwellings or cultic contexts. Pomegranate fruit botanic remains also appear in such contexts (but possibly not only). The pomegranate can also be considered a common symbol within the eastern Mediterranean, as a luxury commodity, an artistic motif, and a religious symbol. However, the major source of contextual finds of ceramic pomegranate-shaped vessels is the southern Levant; a large proportion of these vessels were found in Iron Age Philistia and southern Judah or Edom. It is possible that the clay objects were imitations of similar objects made of precious materials. They could also have been enduring substitutes for the fruit themselves, or in some cases, have contained liquids, perhaps the juice of the fruit itself. The common red color of these vessels attests to the importance of the naturalistic depiction of the fruit. Real pomegranates were possibly also suspended from stands, chalices, rods, or other cultic paraphernalia in temples and shrines or during religious ceremonies (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007: 14).

The distribution of the different types of ceramic pomegranates in the southern Levant may be important. While the ceramic pomegranate vessels (above Types 1 and 2) are common mostly in Philistia and sites with Canaanite cultural attributes (as Megiddo) and are also more common in the earlier Iron Age, suspended pomegranates are more common in the south, especially at the shrines of Qitmit and 'En Hazeva in the Negev, which were pertained by the excavators to the Edomites; they appear in later Iron Age contexts. However, no examples have yet been recorded from Judah proper, and the examples from Shiloh belonging to the latter group are the first examples known from an Israelite site. The context at Shiloh is mixed and contains Middle, Late Bronze, and Iron Age I and II as well as Early Roman pottery. During the Bronze and Iron Ages Shiloh was an important cult site; the books of Judges and Samuel describe the existence of the Israelite Tabernacle for over three centuries. Since ceramic pomegranates and



especially ceramic pomegranate pendants are common mostly during the Iron Age I (or even Iron Age II), it is likely that the pomegranates from Shiloh date to that period (although these are not common in this part of the country). Whether the object from Shiloh was related to the cultic paraphernalia of the tabernacle is of course an open question.

It may be suggested that while the pomegranate vessels (either free-standing or connected to other vessels) may have been used in Canaanite and Philistine cults, probably also with libation of liquids, the suspended pomegranates had a different, still cultic function. Their role was both symbolic and decorative; hanging on cultic stands and chalices, they possibly also imitated similar pomegranates appearing in metal stands and jewelry (as pendants or earrings). They were possibly later incorporated into Jewish iconography mostly due to their decorative value. Nevertheless, during the Iron Age they can still be seen as a Levantine motif, yet gaining popularity in Neo-Assyrian iconography during the late Iron Age. According to finds so far it is also common in the Philistia and in shrines possibly attributed to the Edomites. Ceramic pomegranates are rather rare in the iconography of Iron Age Judah, so far, with pomegranates depicted in ivory and on private stamp seals during the Iron II. This may indicate that the motif was adopted from neighboring cultures and increased in importance in the latter part of the Iron Age.

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