



New Insights on Israelite Religious Practice

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INTRODUCTION

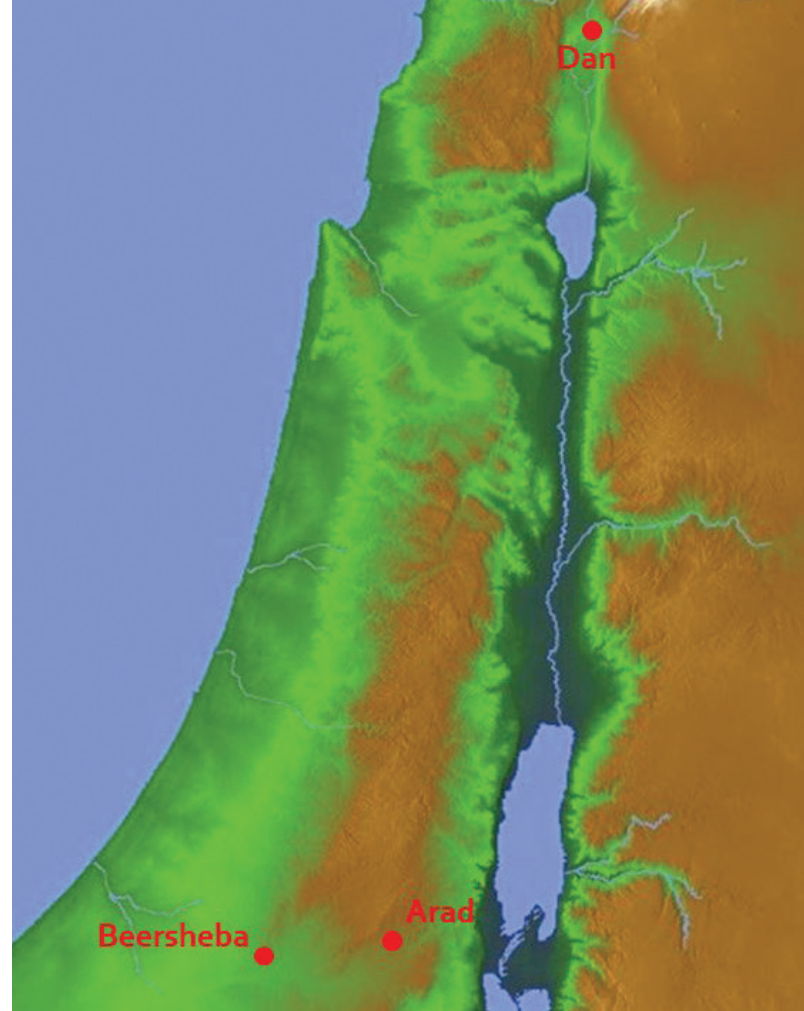
For many years, major archaeological finds in Israel that shed light on Israelite religious practice during the time of the divided monarchy were rather limited. They included multiple religious centers at Dan, a dismantled large horned altar at Beersheba, and an Israelite temple at Arad. In recent years, however, the list of finds has grown meaningfully and now includes multiple places of worship at Khirbet Qeiyafa (a town associated with David), another Israelite temple at Tel Moza, a ritual feasting hall possibly connected to Elisha at Tel Rehov in northern Israel, a gate shrine at Lachish, and even residue of cannabis from the temple at Arad.

This article will summarize the biblical information describing orthodox and unorthodox religious practice during the Israelite monarchy, as well as information about the previously known finds from Dan, Beersheba, and Arad. It will then describe the new finds mentioned above and summarize what the new information tells us about Israelite religious practice during the time of the divided monarchy (Iron Age II).

Orthodox and Unorthodox Religious Practices

Generally speaking, the Pentateuch describes how the ancient Israelites were supposed to practice their religion after they settled into Canaan, and subsequent historical and prophetic books include information about how they did and did not follow those guidelines. The Pentateuch describes Israel's national covenant with God, including prescribed religious practices. It further states that when the Israelites conquered Canaan, they were to expel the Canaanites and demolish their places and objects of worship (Ex 23:24; Dt 12:2–4), lest the Israelites be tempted to follow other gods. Israel was supposed to worship YHWH at a single location (Dt 12:5–6)—ultimately the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem.

Sadly, Israel quickly and repeatedly failed to obey these commands. Disobedience and idolatry began with the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Ex 32) and continued during the Conquest of Canaan (Jgs 2:11–14). Even Solomon built places of worship for other gods (1 Kgs 11:5–8), helping to set the stage for continued idolatry during the divided monarchy. Jeroboam I built illegitimate worship centers at Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12:26–33), and later kings continued forbidden practices, including using worship centers at city gates and even practicing child sacrifice (2 Kgs 23:8, 23:10). Although a few godly kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah carried out religious reforms (2 Kgs 18:4, 22:3–23:25), Israel's continued and rampant idolatry (Ez 8:5–18) eventually led God to punish the nation with conquest and exile (2 Chr 36:14–20).



Sites with earlier major finds illustrating Israelite religious practice.

Previously Known Finds

Up until recently, major finds reflecting illegitimate Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II were limited to multiple worship centers at Dan, a dismantled altar at Beersheba, and an Israelite temple at Arad, plus numerous smaller finds like figurines, cult stands, and incense altars. Together these provided a limited supplement to the biblical texts describing Israelite religious practice during the divided monarchy.

At Dan in the far north of Israel, an excavated religious complex from the tenth through eighth centuries BC appears to match the biblical account of a religious center at Dan erected by King Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:26–30) following the division of Israel. The excavated complex consisted of an open-air enclosure that contained a sacrificial horned altar; a large podium for a “high place” or a temple,

The religious complex at Dan, with a place for an open-air altar on the left and with a platform where the golden calf would have stood on the right.

Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.



which apparently was the location of Jeroboam's golden calf; and side chambers for feasting and administration.¹ In addition, excavations uncovered multiple contemporary worship centers in and around the city's gate (cf. 2 Kgs 23:8). These included a total of 14 standing stones (elongated natural stones set on end and often serving as a focal point of worship) in three locations, votive vessels such as lamps and incense bowls, and bones of sacrificial animals.² The eighth-century-BC prophet Amos likely had these worship centers at Dan in mind when he condemned idolatrous worship practiced there as well as at Beersheba in the south (Am 8:14).

Excavations at Beersheba did not uncover remains of a temple, but rather the carefully hewn stones of a large sacrificial horned altar that may have been used



Horned altar from Beersheba, reconstructed in the Israel Museum. Photo by Boyd SeEVERS.

in a temple or open-air shrine. The altar had been dismantled and the stones reused for the building of municipal storehouses in the late eighth century BC.³ Although 2 Kings 23:8 notes that Josiah (late seventh century BC) desecrated high places (*bāmōt*) as far south as Beersheba, the dismantled altar more likely connects to the religious reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:3–4, 18:22) approximately one century earlier.

At the nearby southern city of Arad, excavations did uncover an Israelite temple. It consisted of a large courtyard with a sacrificial altar; a broadroom “holy



High place at city gate at Dan with three standing stones. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

place”; and a smaller, raised “holy of holies” flanked by two incense altars, with one or two standing stones nearby.⁴ Inscriptions excavated at Arad mention “the house of Yahweh” and known Jewish priestly families, suggesting that the temple directed worship to Israel's God. Excavators originally dated



The Arad temple's 'holy of holies,' as rebuilt on site. It includes replicas of two standing stones in the back, plus two incense altars that had residue of incense burned when the temple was in use. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

the temple to the tenth through seventh centuries BC,⁵ but later analysis suggested a shorter life span, perhaps just during the eighth century BC.⁶ The complex was desacralized (purposefully taken out of religious use),⁷ as shown by the altars having been laid on their sides and covered in plaster, perhaps during the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 23).



Temple at Arad with altar on right in courtyard; broadroom “holy place” to its left; and smaller, raised “holy of holies” in upper left. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

Together, these finds at Dan, Beersheba, and Arad provided limited but meaningful evidence corroborating what the Bible says about a number of illegitimate ways the Israelites worshipped during the divided monarchy—using high places, gate shrines, and even a temple outside of the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem. In the last few years, however, the body of evidence for such illegitimate Israelite religious practice has grown considerably, as described below.

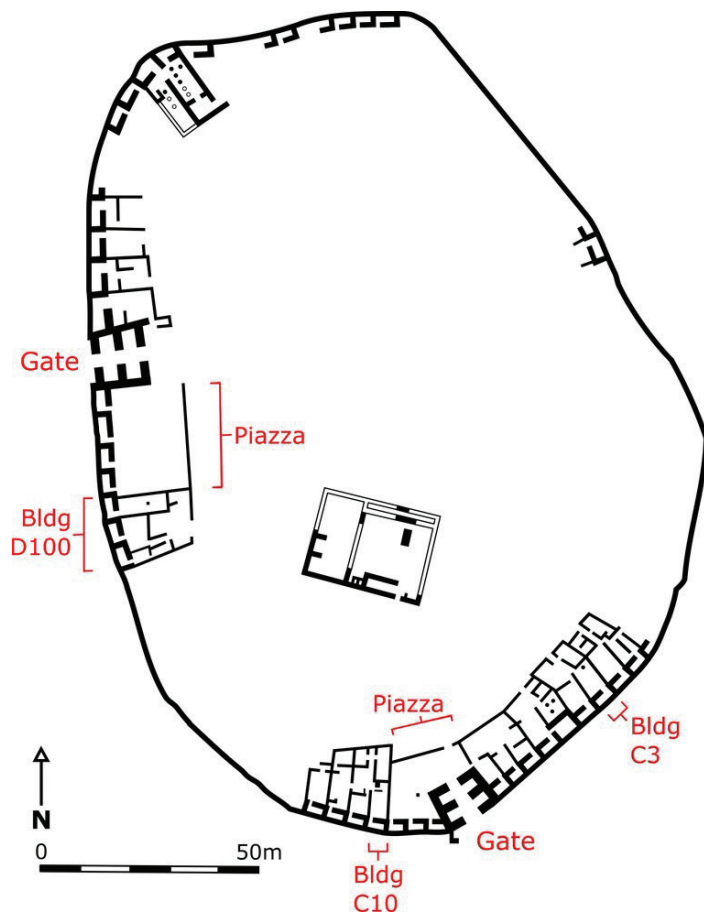
Recent Finds

Cultic Rooms at Khirbet Qeiyafa

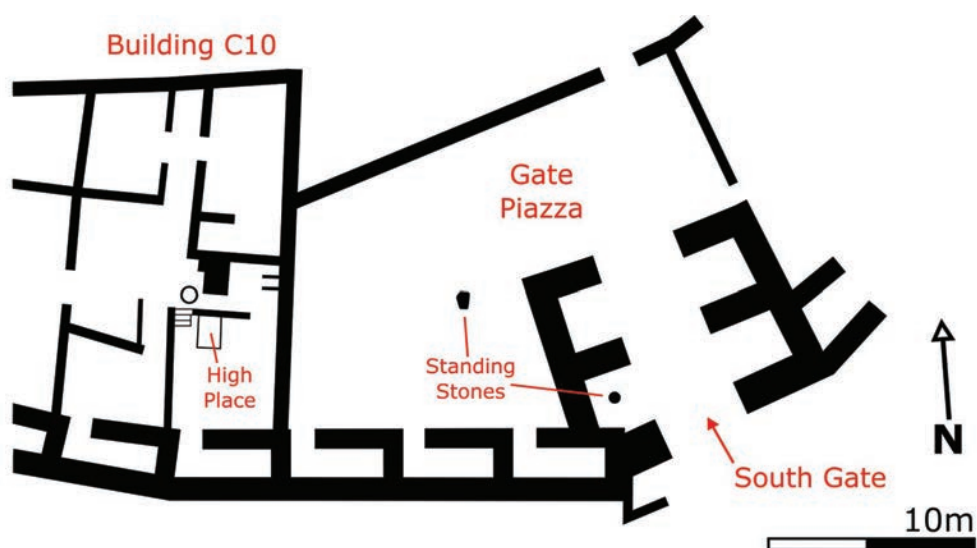
(Early Tenth Century BC)

The earliest of the more recent evidence comes from Khirbet Qeiyafa, dated to ca. 1020–980 BC. According to the excavators, this well-built, strongly fortified town on the border of Philistia was apparently established at the time of David and destroyed a few decades later by Philistines from nearby Gath.⁸ Although the finds at Qeiyafa did not produce a temple, they did include three groupings of rooms and associated structures where religious activity took place. Finds in these groupings included seven aniconic (without images) standing stones,⁹ clay and stone portable shrines, libation vessels and installations, basalt altars, and a male figurine.¹⁰ Two of the rooms were located next to each of Qeiyafa's gates and associated piazzas (large but confined areas where large groups could gather). These two religious complexes apparently facilitated public worship, while the third site (Building C3) was in a private, domestic structure and would have served smaller numbers.¹¹

The public worship center in and adjacent to Building C10 near the southern gate was arguably the main worship center at Qeiyafa, since it was the most developed and was located next to the city's main gate. Religious objects from this worship center included two large standing stones, one 150 cm (5 ft.) high and weighing more than a ton, erected in the middle of the piazza, and the other 110 cm (3 ft., 7 in.) high, in the south-west gate chamber. Building C10 adjoined the piazza and included a high



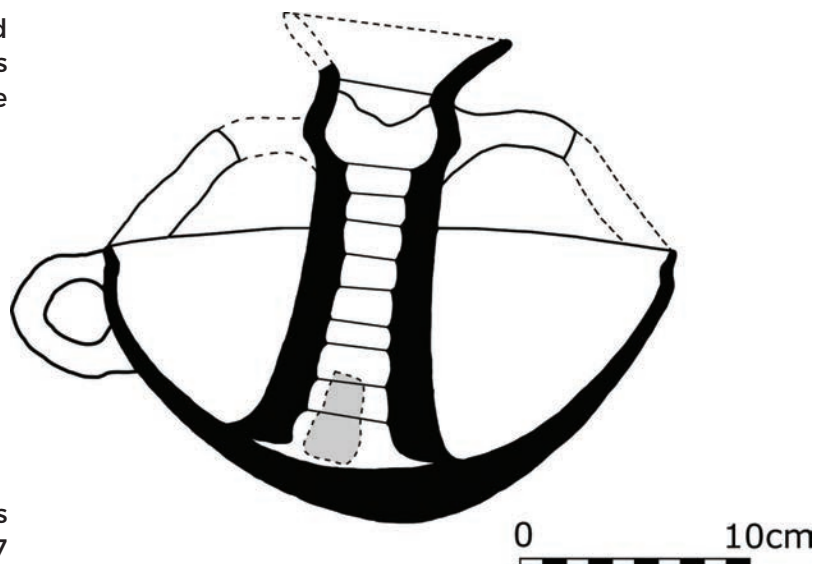
Plan of Khirbet Qeiyafa showing religious sites at each gate, plus at Building C3. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, "Introduction," in Khirbet Qeiyafa, vol. 4, Excavation Report 2007–2013: Art, Cult, and Epigraphy, by Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, ed. Martin G. Klingbeil, with contributions by David Ben-Shlomo et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2018), 4, fig. 1.3.



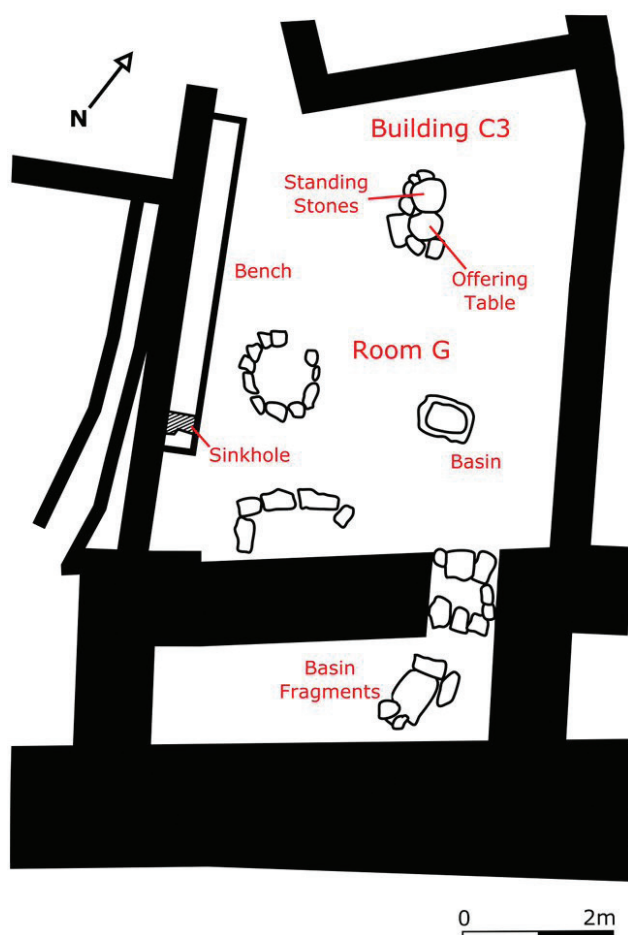
Religious complex adjacent to southern gate at Khirbet Qeiyafa. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Yosef Garfinkel and Michael G. Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," in Khirbet Qeiyafa, 4:47, fig. 2.57.

place and fragments of elaborate stone and clay house shrines resembling buildings and apparently intended for holding divine symbols. Other religious finds from this building included fragments of pottery cult stands, a very large cup-and-saucer vessel probably used for libations,¹² and many cooking installations likely associated with religious feasting.

The smaller, apparently private religious center in Room G of Building C3 east of the southern gate included a number of features connected to religious activity. These consisted of a bench with a sinkhole for draining liquids used in religious functions; two standing stones, 80 cm (2 ft., 7 in.) and 25 cm (10 in.) high, next to a large, flat stone used as an offering table; and a limestone basin (the adjacent casemate room designated "Room H" contained a second limestone basin).



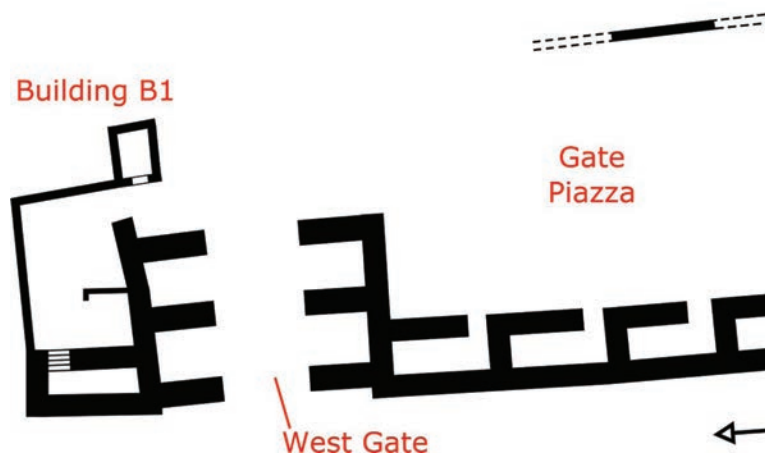
Large cup-and-saucer vessel used for libations, from Building C10. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Igor Kreimerman and Yosef Garfinkel, "The Cup-and-Saucer Vessels," in Khirbet Qeiyafa, 4:188, fig. 12.2.



Private worship center in Room G of Building C3. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 17, fig. 2.3.

The public worship center in Building D100 and the adjoining piazza next to the western gate included two standing stones, 90 cm (3 ft.) and 130 cm (4 ft., 3 in.) high; a bench; a twin-cup vessel for making libations, similar to one found in Building C3; and three long iron sword blades and an iron knife blade that were possibly used ceremonially.

In Building B1 north of the western gate, excavators found evidence of desacralization. A standing stone had been placed upside down and completely enclosed into a wall, demonstrating a similar repurposing to that of the dismantled and reused altar at Beersheba. This suggests desacralization by the Judean residents of Qeiyafa sometime during its brief time of occupation. By contrast, most of the altars and other religious artifacts at Qeiyafa were

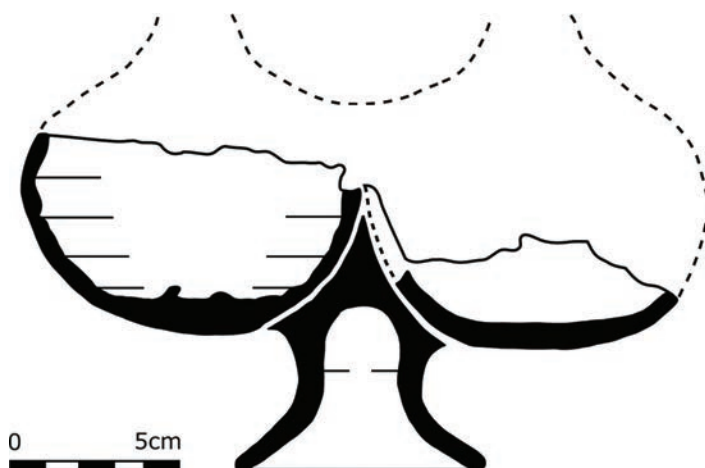


Israelite Temple at Tel Moza

(Late Tenth to Early Sixth Century BC)

In the center of Israel, just a few miles west of Jerusalem, Tel Moza lies on a slope overlooking a fertile region with ample soil, plentiful water sources, and temperate weather. These conditions, along with the remains of silos, storage buildings, and storage jars, suggest that Moza likely served as a granary and supplier to nearby Jerusalem during Iron Age II. However, the most striking feature found at Moza was an apparent temple.

The Iron Age temple structure was likely constructed ca. 900 BC, and it remained in use until the early sixth century BC.¹³ The temple's pattern—the long-room or Syrian style—is typical for the period, including serving as the pattern for the contemporary Solomonic temple in nearby Jerusalem. The massive temple at Moza was built in a long-room plan along an east-west axis. A portico served as the entrance on the east, and one pillar base out of a presumed pair of pillars flanking the entrance was preserved. The



Twin-cup libation vessel from Building D100. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 39, fig. 2.45.

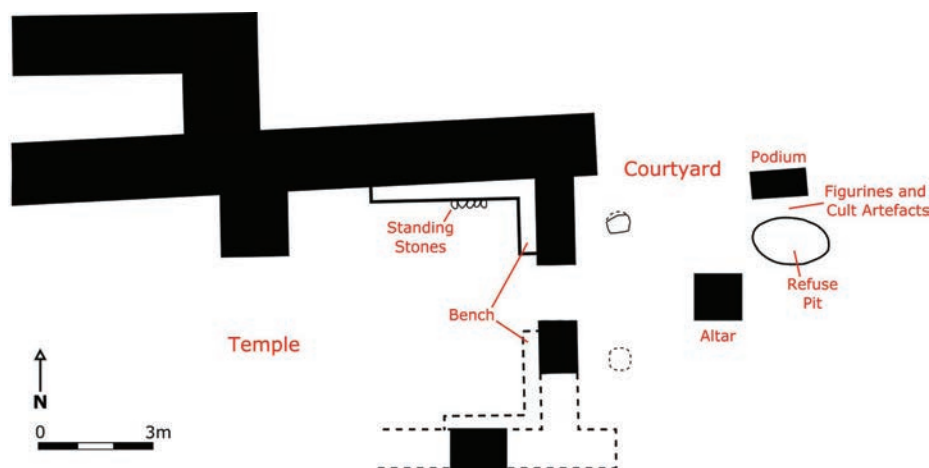
smashed and scattered at the destruction of the city (cf. Ex 34:13).

What do these extensive religious finds at the site tell us? The many finds suggest that the Judean inhabitants of Qeiyafa used the buildings, installations, and related small finds for religious libations and other offerings, and for food preparation and religious feasting. The lack of concentrations of animal bones argues against animal sacrifice at the site.

Which god(s) did the residents of Qeiyafa worship? Since standing stones were sometimes acknowledged by prophets (Is 19:19–20; Hos 3:4), and the standing stones at Qeiyafa bore no engraved imagery, the Qeiyafa stones may have represented YHWH. However, the two portable shrines in Building C10 may suggest two gods, perhaps male and female, since such shrines often housed symbols of gods.



Religious complex near western gate at Khirbet Qeiyafa. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 47, fig. 2.57.



Temple and associated structures at Moza. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Shua Kisilevitz, "The Iron IIA Judean Temple at Tel Moza," Tel Aviv 42, no. 2 (2015): 152, fig. 1.

building lacks the southern wall, but if it mirrored its counterpart on the north, the building would have been ca. 18 m (59 ft.) long and 13 m (43 ft.) wide. The main room had two different types of flooring but no partition wall to divide the two parts. For the eastern part, which formed the main chamber, the floor consisted of packed plaster and earth, and for the western part, which was slightly elevated and thus likely represented an inner chamber, the flooring consisted of fragmented stones. Benches lined the northern and eastern walls of this main room, and five fieldstones set against the northern bench probably served as standing stones.

The courtyard east of the entrance had a packed-earth floor and contained an altar, a refuse pit for remains from ritual sacrifice (earth, ash, bones—some burned and some with butchery marks),¹⁴ and a stone podium. Fragments of religious objects surrounded the podium, including a small pomegranate-shaped pendant, fragments of decorated cult stands, and four figurines—two anthropomorphic (male heads, similar to the one found at Qeiyafa) and two zoomorphic (horse and riders). Such figurines would become common in later Iron Age II but were rare at this stage.

A couple aspects of the temple at Moza stand out. First, the temple and related finds, while unexpected in an orthodox biblical context, all conform to long-standing religious traditions of the ancient Near East. Second, the bones in the refuse pit (mostly from sheep and goats, corresponding to biblical law concerning animal sacrifice), the style of the temple complex, and the temple's proximity to Jerusalem all suggest that the operation of the temple at Moza may have been sanctioned at least to some degree by the centralized government in Jerusalem. Thus, the temple at Moza joins the temple at Arad in testifying that Solomon's temple was not the only Judean temple directed to YHWH during Iron Age II, and the temple at Moza shows that Solomon's temple was not even the only one in the region.

Inscriptions and Feasting Hall at Tel Rehov (Tenth–Ninth Century BC)

The apparent time when the temple at Moza was established is also the approximate time to which significant finds at Rehov, much farther north in Israel, have been dated. Along with a large apiary (honey production facility) and religious remains consistent with traditional Canaanite culture,¹⁵ Rehov produced inscriptions possibly connected to the Israelite prophet Elisha and the Nimshi clan that included King Jehu (2 Kgs 9), as well as a feasting hall possibly connected to Elisha and his activities as a prophet.

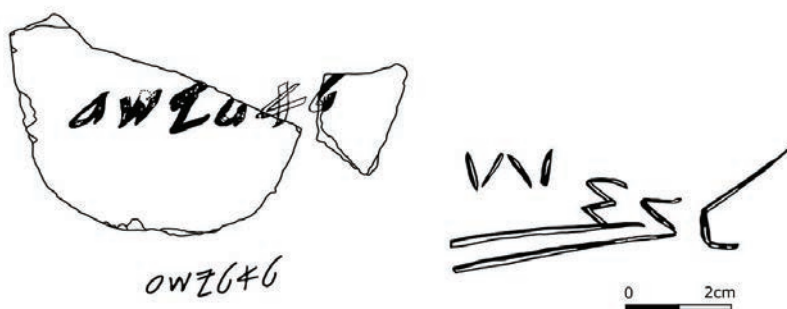
The Elisha inscription was written in red ink and appeared on two pieces of an ostrakon, both found in one of the rooms of Building CP (discussed below). Although one cannot know if this Elisha was the biblical prophet, the famous Elisha son of Shaphat was born in this region,¹⁶ was active during this period, and was involved in the ascension of Jehu son of Nimshi to the Israelite throne (2 Kgs 9). A contemporaneous inscription with the name Nimshi (or Nemesh) was also discovered at Rehov on a storage jar in the



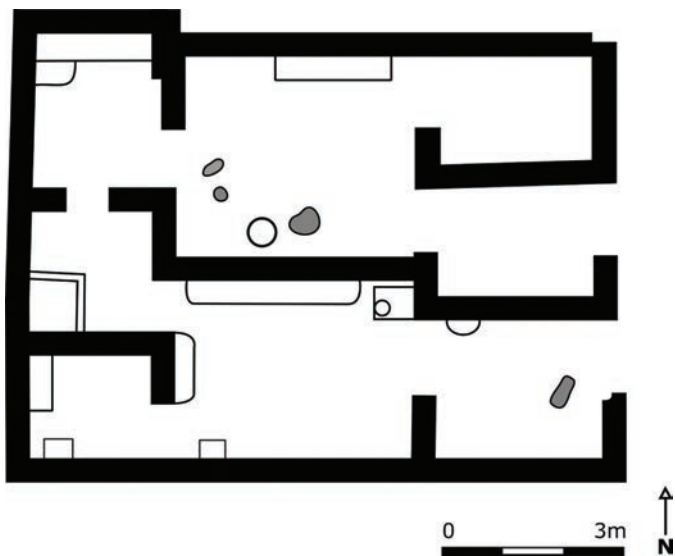
In black: sites with recent major finds illustrating Israelite religious practice.

apiary. Since the name “Nimshi” was connected to Jehu's father (1 Kgs 19:16) and grandfather (2 Kgs 9:14), it was likely the name of a family or clan.¹⁷ Its appearance in the apiary suggests that the family may have owned that major industrial enterprise.

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“Elisha” and “Nimshi” inscriptions from Tel Rehov. Drawings by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Shmuel Ahituv and Amihai Mazar, “The Inscriptions from Tel Rehov and their Contribution to the Study of Script and Writing during Iron Age IIA,” Maarav 20, no. 2 (2013): figs. 10, 5.



Building CP—the “house of Elisha” at Tel Rehov. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Nava Panitz-Cohen and Amihai Mazar, “Area C: Stratigraphy and Architecture,” in *Tel Rehov: A Bronze and Iron Age City in the Beth-Shean Valley*, by Amihai Mazar and Nava Panitz-Cohen, vol. 2, *The Lower Mound: Area C and the Apiary*, with contributions by Guy Bloch et al., *Qedem 60* (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2020), 58, fig. 12.21; 148, fig. 12.50.

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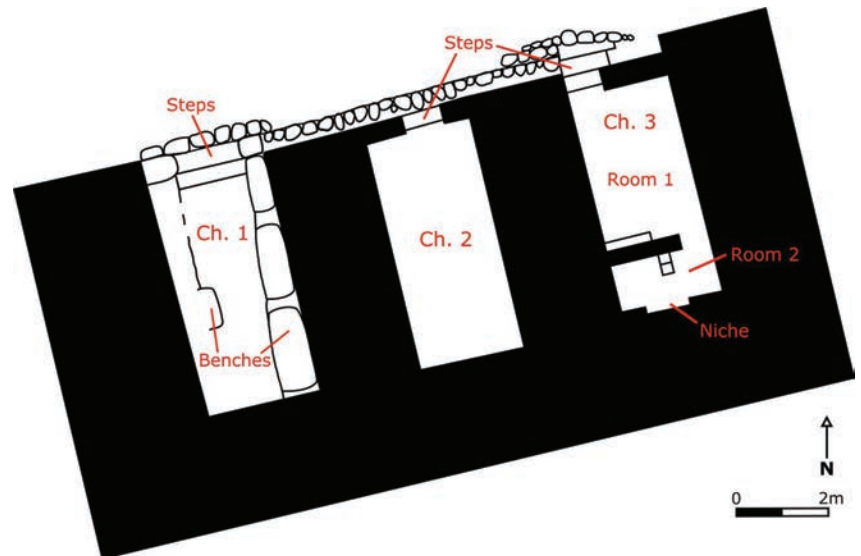
Building CP —nicknamed the “house of Elisha” because the inscription was discovered in it—consisted of eight rooms divided between two wings, with benches running along several of the walls and a large hall in the center of each wing. Numerous religious objects were found in the building, such as two four-horned clay altars that flanked the doorway and apparently were used for conducting some sort of ritual when entering or leaving the room, as well as fragments from one or more additional horned altars, an incense burner, a mold for casting female figurines, and 24 astragal bones (a type of bone often used for divination). The building also contained a large number of vessels for cooking and serving food. Thus, the building seemingly served to host religious activity that included communal banqueting and feasting (cf. 1 Sm 9:19–24), and the Elisha inscription suggests the possibility that the biblical prophet may have been an important part of this activity.

Gate Shrine at Lachish (Eighth Century BC)

Dating somewhat later than the finds at Moza and Rehov, a recently excavated eighth-century-BC gate

shrine at Lachish (southwest of Jerusalem) provided an example of a high place at a gate (2 Kgs 23:8), as well as another apparent example of the religious reforms of King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18).

In ancient Israel, gate complexes were essential to a well-fortified city, offering protection from attacking armies as well as providing communal space for public activities such as legal proceedings (Ru 4:1; Jos 20:4) and worship. Second Kings 23:8 gives the only explicit biblical reference to worship at city gates (Josiah “broke down the high places of the gates”). In like manner to Dan and Qeiyafa, Iron Age II Lachish revealed remains of a gate shrine. Hezekiah apparently desacralized the Lachish gate shrine before the city fell to Assyria in 701 BC.¹⁸



Southern half of Lachish inner gate. Gate shrine is in the lower right of Chamber. 3, with Room 2 containing the niche and double altar. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman, “An Eighth-Century B.C.E. Gate Shrine at Tel Lachish, Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 381 (May 2019): 213, fig. 2.

The shrine consisted of two rooms plus a niche at the back. The larger, outer room included a narrow ledge on its southern wall, on and around which lay much broken pottery that apparently was once offering vessels. Excavators also found four arrowheads and a slingstone in the room, which were presumably shot by Assyrians from the street into the chamber at the fall of the city.

The smaller, inner room was entered through a doorway on the east. The center of the back (southern) wall of the inner room included a niche, and this was opposite a stone structure that the excavators interpreted as a double altar, each with four horns. The altars could have been used for libations or



Room 2 of the gate shrine, with niche on left and double horned altar on right, after excavation of pit in back with toilet seat. Photo from Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine," 217, fig. 10. Used by permission.



The double altar in Room 2 with only the horn in upper left preserved (upper image), and the toilet seat found lying in the pit (lower image). Photos from Ganor and Kreimerman, "Gate Shrine," 219, fig. 11b; 220, fig. 15. Used by permission.

burning incense, but they had been put out of use when seven of the eight horns were smashed. Apparently at the same time, a pit was cut in the floor on the western side of the inner room and a carefully shaped square stone with a keyhole-shaped hole cut into it was mounted above (though it eventually fell in). The excavators interpreted this stone as a toilet seat installed to defile the shrine (compare Jehu's desecration of a temple of Baal by turning it into a toilet—2 Kgs 10:27). Somewhat surprisingly, the sediment immediately below the seat did not show evidence of fecal remains, suggesting that the stone was not a toilet seat, or that it was installed symbolically before the room was sealed, or that it was used as a toilet only for a brief time.¹⁹

The Lachish gate shrine's structure—a larger and a smaller room, with a niche at the back center of the smaller one—is similar to the arrangement of the larger Israelite temple at Arad in that both places of worship seem to feature increasingly smaller spaces with increasing holiness, much like what is found in Solomon's temple.²⁰ Given its desecration before the Assyrian conquest in 701 BC, the gate shrine at Lachish joins the desacralized cultic objects at Arad and Beersheba in likely bearing witness to Hezekiah's religious reforms in the eighth century BC.



Elisha Inscription

Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal
2 Kings 2:1

"And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over." (2 Kgs 2:11–14).



Credit: BiblePlaces.org
Alexander Schick/bibelausstellung.de

This exquisite close-up image shows a potsherd inscription with the name "Elisha" written in large letters and in red ink. The artifact was discovered at the site of Tel Rehov in the Jordan Rift, about 7 miles (11 km) northwest of Elisha's hometown of Abel-meholah. Because of this geographical proximity and the fact that the inscription dates to around the prophet's lifetime, it is possible the inscription may refer to the Elisha mentioned in the biblical accounts in First and Second Kings. Indeed, some archaeologists believe that this identification is clearly warranted.

Cannabis at Arad Temple

(Late Eighth to Early Seventh Century BC)

The final example of a recent find reflecting Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II comes from the eighth-century-BC Israelite temple at Arad in southern Israel discussed earlier. When the excavators uncovered the temple in the 1960s, they noted the presence of residue in depressions on top of each of the two incense altars flanking the entrance to the "holy of holies" (fig. 6). Testing of the residue at the time of the excavation produced quite limited information—that the residue likely included animal fat.²¹ More recent residue analysis, however, revealed that frankincense (sanctioned for Israelite religious use in Lv 2:1–2, 2:15–16, 24:7; Nm 5:15) was burned on the larger of the two altars and that, surprisingly, cannabis (not mentioned in the Bible) was burned on the other. This evidence of cannabis at Arad is the first discovered in ancient Judah and provides the earliest example of cannabis's use in the ancient Near East.

Additionally, similar testing on roughly contemporaneous Philistine religious objects such as chalices, bowls, and juglets indicates that religious use of hallucinogenic materials was practiced in Philistia as well, although slightly earlier. Residue analysis on religious implements such as chalices (likely used for burning incense) at Tell es-Safi (Gath; 11th and 9th centuries BC) and other Philistine sites showed various types of hallucinogens. At Tell es-Safi, the testing showed evidence of trimyristin, which is abundant in plants known to cause hallucinogenic effects, as well as evidence of animal fat.²² At Yavneh, the items bore residues of floral oils that could





A view from above one of the altars from Arad showing evidence for the burning of incense. Scripture provides the Lord's instructions for Israel in Exodus 30:34-37 for the use of incense in worship. Credit: Public Domain

have come from nutmeg or jasmine that had been heated by burning animal fat, as well as residues of scopolin, which is found in mandrakes and various types of henbane.²³ The evidence of these hallucinogens raises the question of how widespread their use may have been in contemporary religious practices in Philistia and Israel, and perhaps nearby societies as well.

Summary and Conclusion

These recent archaeological finds add substantially to the physical evidence for several types of Israelite religious practices during the time of the divided monarchy. The remains at Moza apparently reflect animal sacrifice, as the earlier finds at Dan, Beersheba, and Arad did. Offerings of libations seem especially indicated by the finds at Qeiyafa, but they likely occurred in many other places as well. Similarly, burning incense was seemingly widespread in ancient Israel and elsewhere, but the new evidence of hallucinogens at Arad and in Philistia adds an interesting new wrinkle to what we know about the materials that were burned. Numerous standing stones are now known from Qeiyafa and Moza, as at

**The Lord said to Moses,
“Take sweet spices, stacte,
and onycha, and galbanum,
sweet spices with pure
frankincense (of each shall
there be an equal part), and
make an incense blended as
by the perfumer, seasoned
with salt, pure and holy. You
shall beat some of it very
small, and put part of it
before the testimony in the
tent of meeting where I shall
meet with you. It shall be
most holy for you.**

EXODUS 30:34-37

Dan and Arad before. And finally, the evidence for feasting connected to religious activity is much clearer now because of the finds at Qeiyafa and Rehov.

As much as these archaeological finds tell us, they often don't tell us which gods were being worshipped, and sometimes it is unclear even whether the worship was considered orthodox for Jews at the time. In particular, the standing stones, as physical remains, are difficult to interpret. At Qeiyafa, one standing stone was apparently desacralized by the Judean inhabitants, but the others seemingly remained in use. Even in the Bible, standing stones were sometimes permitted (Gn 28:18; Ex 24:4; Is 19:19), but they were often condemned (Dt 16:22; Lv 26:1) and were destroyed during religious reform (2 Kgs 18:4, 23:14). Additionally, the temples at Arad and Moza may have been used to worship YHWH, but the multiple standing stones at Moza and the desacralization of the temple at Arad seem to suggest that these temples were unorthodox, at least to some degree. Hopefully additional finds in the coming days will add to this body of evidence about Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II and help resolve some of these issues.

The “Holy of Holies” has been reconstructed and is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The two altars shown in the photo reveal clear evidence of the use of frankincense and cannabis in worship. Credit: Public Domain