The Iron Age I Structure on Mount Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation

Ralph K. Hawkins

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THE IRON AGE I STRUCTURE ON MT. EBAL
EXCAVATION AND INTERPRETATION

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Ralph K. Hawkins

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ABSTRACT

THE IRON AGE I STRUCTURE ON MOUNT EBAL:
EXCAVATION AND INTERPRETATION

by

Ralph K. Hawkins

Adviser: Randall W. Younker
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

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Problem

The Iron Age I site on Mt. Ebal, discovered in 1980 by Adam Zertal and excavated between 1982 and 1989, has remained largely unknown by both the scholarly community and the public. No scholarly congress or colloquium has ever been held regarding the Mt. Ebal excavations. The Mt. Ebal excavations, however, may have important implications for reconstructing Israelite origins. This present study investigates the Mt. Ebal excavation and its results.
Method

My study uses the comparative method and is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, giving an overview of the investigation to be carried out in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 analyzes the archaeological data from the Mt. Ebal site and compares it with both cultic and non-cultic materials in order to assess the nature of the site. Chapter 3 considers physical parallels for the Ebal site. Chapter 4 compares each of the physical elements of the Ebal site with biblical and other literary data relevant to a cultic interpretation. Chapter 5 examines the site in its historical and sociological position among the new settlement sites of the central hill-country in Iron Age I. Chapter 6 provides a summary and draws conclusions based on the overall study.

Results

The Mt. Ebal site appears to fit the criteria for a cultic site from archaeological remains and also the general picture in terms of the biblical accounts. When the Ebal site is set on the larger stage of the Israelite settlement, its origin seems to be consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill-country during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I.

Conclusions

The Mt. Ebal site may have served an important role in the early religious life of the central hill-country settlers. Altars played an important role in centralizing peoples in the ancient world. In light of the claim of the biblical tradition that a cultic site located on Mt. Ebal played a centralizing role in the process of the Israelite
sedentarization, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that a single site may have functioned in a central capacity.
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<td>ANET</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</td>
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<td>CP</td>
<td>Cooking Pot</td>
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<td>EA</td>
<td>El-Amarna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ir1</td>
<td>Iron Age I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ir2</td>
<td>Iron Age II</td>
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<td>Late Bronze Age II</td>
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PREFACE

In Josh 8:30-35 Israel constructs an altar on Mt. Ebal in fulfillment of the command of Deut 27:1-8. This structure had very important social, political, and religious implications for Israel, for it was the first structure to be built upon entering into the land of Canaan. Upon completion of the altar, sacrifices were to be offered upon it, and a renewal of the covenant was to be carried out (patterned after the ritual of Deut 31:9-13). Following penetration into the hill-country, the covenant renewal was necessary to integrate into the covenant those who had not been a part of the Sinai experience (Rowton 1953: 46-60). The sanctity of the event certainly surpassed in significance the first covenant ceremony at Sinai for those who were only now being officially assimilated into the people of Israel. The event was significant enough to establish nearby Shechem as the tribal league shrine (Campbell and Wright 1969: 104-116). This ceremony of covenant renewal was the first political and religious ceremony the Israelites undertook following their entry into the land and, as a covenant ratification, it could be described as their ratification as a nation, or at least as “a crucial point in the crystallization of the new Israelite entity” (Zertal 1994: 66). The altar on Mt. Ebal and its concomitant ceremony are, therefore, according to the claims of the Hebrew Bible, of supreme importance within the life of ancient Israel.
Background

In 1980, during the survey of the territory of Manasseh (for an overview of the survey, see Zertal 1993b: 1311-1312), Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a site on Mt. Ebal dating to the period of Iron I, during which the Israelites began to sedentarize in the central hill-country of Canaan. The site is known in Arabic as el-Burnat, and lies on a mountain ridge high above sea level and far from any roads. The site was excavated over eight seasons, from 1982 to 1989, under the auspices of the University of Haifa and the Israeli Exploration Society. In 1985, Zertal published an article in which he suggested that the structure on Ebal may have been the altar of Josh 8:30-35 (Zertal 1985: 26-43). Zertal’s article was poorly received by the scholarly community and his conclusions were dismissed without serious analysis. This was due, in part, to the fact that he had published his claims in the popularly written journal, Biblical Archaeology Review, without having first made a case for his views in the purely scientific journals.¹ Nothing more than a brief scholarly exchange followed Zertal’s publication, in which his thesis was summarily dismissed as either a watchtower (see p. xviii; Kempenski 1986: 42-49; Zertal 1986: 43, 49-53) or, as William Dever jokingly claimed, a barbecue site (Dever 1997: 34). Since the appearance of these articles, no scholarly congress or colloquium has ever been held regarding the Mt. Ebal excavations.

¹ Zertal had presented an overview of the Ebal findings at the 1986 meeting of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, which were subsequently published as “A Cultic Center with a Burnt-Offering Altar from Early Iron Age I Period at Mt. Ebal,” pp. 137-54 in “Wunschel Jerusalem Frieden”: Collected Communications to the XIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, eds. Matthias Augustin Klaus and Dietrich Schunck (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988). There were other reasons that scholars may have wanted to avoid taking a position on Ebal, such as the fact that it was located in the West Bank, as well as the fact that Samaritan clergy had taken public positions against it. These religious and political problems surrounding the site and their implications for its promotion are outlined in Milt Machlin, Joshua’s Altar: The Dig at Mount Ebal (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 44-76, passim.
Statement of the Problem

The Mt. Ebal excavations, however, may be very important in the discussion of the emergence of ancient Israel. The common assumption in biblical scholarship today is that Israel emerged from the indigenous peoples of Canaan (see Younger 1999: 176-206), and that the biblical books of Joshua-Judges were written in the Josianic period as political propaganda to solidify Israel’s national identity (e.g., Soggin 1972: 131). Since Martin Noth first proposed his theory of the “Deuteronomistic History,” it has become more or less standard for theories of Israel’s origins to be built on these foundations. Even archaeologists, pointing to continuity in material culture, have argued that the idea of an early Israel must have been a later fabrication, and that later Israelites originated from the autochthonous population (e.g., Hayes and Miller 1977: 255, 262). Finkelstein and Na’aman (1994: 13) have recently argued that:

[A] combination of archaeological and historical research demonstrates that the biblical account of the conquest and occupation of Canaan is entirely divorced from historical reality. Instead, it proves the correctness of the literary-critical approach to the biblical text. The biblical descriptions of the origin and early history of the people of Israel are not dissimilar from narratives on the origins of other peoples, which likewise do not withstand the test of historical criticism.

These authors go on to suggest that equating any material culture remains from the Iron I highlands with an Israeliite ethnic identity is “dubious,” “since there was no political entity named Israel before the late eleventh century BCE” (Finkelstein and Na’aman 1994: 13). Na’aman himself suggests that the literary sources on which Joshua was...
based do not originate until the eighth century BCE, “and are thus hundreds of years remote from the time when the events described therein took place” (1994: 222). John Van Seters has argued that the account of the history of Israel was a complete invention (van Seters 1983).

If Zertal’s Iron I structure on Ebal is the altar of Josh 8:30-35, there could be important implications for the understanding of Israelite origins and for the Documentary Hypothesis. Writing about the importance of the discussion of the nature of the Ebal site, Zertal (1997: 77-78) has said:

It is not by chance that not a single archaeologist has responded seriously to my scientific report on Mt. Ebal. It is not by chance that a serious congress has never been convened to address openly the Mt. Ebal finds, even though many less important matters have been discussed. The reason is that Mt. Ebal presents hard evidence for the existence of an early Israelite cult place, presumably related to the biblical account of Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8:30-35. The reason is that if Mt. Ebal so powerfully corroborates the Bible, some of the highly sophisticated theories based on ongoing intellectual speculation (without really examining the field data) will have to go back to square one.

While not taking a position on the cultic nature of the Ebal site, Lawrence Stager of Harvard has concurred about the potential significance of the site, if the cultic nature and its connection with Josh 8:30-35 were verified. In an interview, he said that, under those circumstances, Old Testament scholars would have to “go back to kindergarten” (Machlin 1991: 235).

Purpose

This dissertation will review the excavation on Mt. Ebal and its results, including the scarabs, seals, and animal bones found there. The architecture of the site will be examined in relation to Mesopotamian watchtowers, altars, and the descriptions of altars in Mishnaic materials, Ezekiel, and Deuteronomic passages. The question of whether
there may or may not be a connection between this Iron I structure and the altar of Josh 8:30-35 will be considered.

**Methodology**

This dissertation examines the Mt. Ebal site using a comparative method, both in the study of the physical data (cf. Trigger 2003: 15-39) and the textual data (Hallo 1980: 1-26; Walton 2006: 15-40).

Chapter 1 of the study will be an overview of Adam Zertal’s survey of Manasseh, the discovery of the installation on Mt. Ebal, its subsequent excavation, and the conclusions he drew regarding the nature of his discovery and its potential implications – though analysis of Zertal’s conclusions will be reserved for the second chapter. In addition, the introduction will establish criteria for understanding the Ebal site. These criteria will be derived from archaeological and literary sources.

Chapter 2 will analyze the data related to the Ebal installations. This will include examinations of the layout of the site; the ceramic inventory and its implications for dating the site; vessels and the stone installations in which they were found; bone remains; scarabs and other pottery fragments; and the central structure and the condition in which it was found. All of these pieces of data will be examined in an effort to determine the nature of the Ebal installation, and tentative conclusions will be drawn.

While there has never been a scholarly colloquium held to analyze the Ebal findings, there have been a few alternative explanations of the installation there, which have appeared in print. Chapter 3 will critically review these alternative interpretations. These will include Kempenski’s argument that the Ebal structure is a watchtower, Rainey’s suggestion that the remains are those of a manor house, and Dever’s proposal
that the site was simply a popular outdoor barbecue site. Each of these arguments will be reviewed, in turn, and compared with the data collected in chapter 2. This comparative approach will seek to determine whether their proposed, alternative interpretations match the existing artifactual remains or whether the site is anomalous – as the excavator claims.

Chapter 4 will turn to literary sources, reviewing the architectural tradition of altars in an effort to determine the potential veracity of identifying the Ebal structure as an altar. A comparative analysis will be undertaken toward this end, beginning in the Mishnaic period and working backwards through the altar descriptions in the Hebrew Bible. This will include a study of the Mishnaic tractate Middot, Ezekiel’s visionary altar, Solomon’s Temple altar, the Tabernacle altar, and Deuteronomic instructions for the construction of an altar. The architectural traditions of Mesopotamia will also be considered. The question that will be addressed here will be whether a uniform tradition of altar architecture can be detected and, if so, whether it can help in determining the nature and function of the Ebal site. This chapter will also take a comparative approach, seeking to determine whether the Ebal structure reflects the literary architectural traditions of altar construction.

Chapter 5 will build on all the aforementioned data and seek to draw some conclusions about the nature and function of the Ebal installation. The question of how the Mt. Ebal site relates to the larger settlement picture presented by the survey of Manasseh will be addressed, as well as what it might contribute toward understanding the identity of the settlers in the northeastern mountains of Israel in the 13th century B.C.E.
A sixth and final chapter reviews what we have discovered and offers my conclusions.

Delimitations

The parameters of this study will primarily be limited to an analysis of the physical data excavated during the Mt. Ebal excavations. It will not, however, attempt to produce a “final report.” Instead, my primary purpose will be to examine the data with a view to determining the nature and function of the site. Issues related to the implications of the site’s possible relation to Josh 8:30-35 will be relegated to the summary, conclusion, and implications section.
CHAPTER 1

DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION
OF THE EBAL STRUCTURE

Overview of the Survey of Manasseh

Geographic and archaeological surveys in western Palestine in the 20th century mostly concentrated on Transjordan, the Negev, and the Galilee (for an overview of the surveys, see Finkelstein 1988: 34-117). While these are important areas, they are actually on the biblical periphery. It was widely agreed that the origins of Israel should be sought in the central hill-country, where three of the early capitals of the Israelite kingdom had been located: Shechem, Tirzah, and Samaria. E. Sellin excavated at Shechem in 1913-14 and in 1926-7 (Sellin 1914: 35-40, 204-207); G. A. Reisner and C. S. Fisher excavated at Samaria-Sebaste from 1908-10 (Reisner, Fisher, and Lyon 1924), excavations which were continued by the Palestine Exploration Fund from 1931-5 (Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik 1942; Crowfoot, Crowfoot, and Kenyon 1957); and the Shechem excavations were renewed from 1956-64 by the Drew-McCormick expedition (Wright 1965; Cole 1984; Campbell 1991). Other important work in the region has been that of De Vaux at Tell el-Far‘ah (North) from 1946-60 (De Vaux 1947: 394-433, 573-589; 1948: 544-580; 1949: 102-138; 1951: 393-430, 566-590; 1952: 551-583; 1955: 541-589; 1957: 552-580; 1961: 557-592; 1962: 212-253) and J. P. Free at Tel Dothan from 1953-60, though Free's results have only been partially published (Free 1953: 16-20; 1954: 14-20; 1955: 3-9;

While these excavation projects have each been valuable, no systematic survey had been done before the 1960s. An emergency survey conducted by Z. Kallai, R. Gophna, and Y. Porath was conducted from 1967-8 (Gophna and Kochavi 1966: 143-144; Gophna and Porat 1972: 195-241; Kallai 1972: 151-193), and this gave the first glimpse of the settlement history and archaeology of the region. A comprehensive survey of the region was begun in 1978, on behalf of Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, and the Israel Exploration Society, under the direction of Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal (Zertal 1993b: 1311-12). The Manasseh survey team has covered more than 2,500 square kilometers by foot, which is about 80 percent of the central hill-country area. The survey territory extends from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean coastal plain, which provides a cross-section of western Palestine (Fig. 1). This makes a comparison among different geographical units possible. More than 200 Iron Age I sites were processed (Zertal 1998b: 240; this number has risen to about 450 since the aforementioned publication), producing a wealth of data regarding the central hill-country settlement from ca. 1250-1000 BCE. Due to the wealth of new data produced, the survey of Manasseh has been called “one of the most important ever undertaken in the land of Israel” (Finkelstein 1988:89).

1By processing these sites, a computer-generated profile of an Iron Age I site was created using a seven-point methodology. “An Iron I site was defined as one yielding Iron Age I pottery, in some cases with characteristic architecture and settlement pattern, based upon past excavations of hill-country sites with remains dated to 1250-1000 BCE” (Zertal 1998b:240).

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Tribal Allotments According to the Book of Joshua

Figure 1. Map of the survey area (Zertal 1991a: 32).

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The survey team examined the pattern of settlement in the Manasseh territory from the beginning of the Calcolithic (ca. 4500-3150 BCE) to the end of the Ottoman (1516-1917 CE) periods.

For the purposes of this study, the periods ranging from the Middle Bronze Age II to Iron Age I are of particular interest. Findings from each of the periods within this range are as follows:

1. Middle Bronze Age IIB (ca. 1750-1550 BCE). This was a prosperous time in Canaan. The population was high in number, lived in fortified towns, and had a rich material culture. Seventy-two settlements were established in the Manassite territory during this period, as a result of "a considerable 'wave' of settlement" that also began in this period (Zertal 2004: 52). This number is double that of the Early Bronze Age I.

2. Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE). The number of settlements "sharply declined" in this period, with only a quarter of the MB IIB sites remaining. Zertal attributes this decline "mainly to the destruction of the highland settlements by the pharaohs of the New Kingdom who eliminated the 'Hyksos' entity" (Zertal 2004: 53). This accords well with the general historical picture, since the New Kingdom pharaohs incorporated Canaan into the Egyptian Empire during this period, draining the economy of the region through taxation and occasionally putting down rebellions and deporting parts of the population. The fact that culture suffered and that populations and the number of settlements declined during this period is now well-known (Gonen 1992: 211-57). No new sites were established in the Manassite territory during this period.
3. Iron Age I (1250-1000 BCE). During the Iron Age I there was a large increase in settlements. Fifty-six settlements with pottery of this period were found in the Shechem syncline, three times the number of Late Bronze sites. Thirty-eight of these sites were established on virgin soil or rebuilt after having been abandoned for some time. This considerable increase in settlements has been interpreted as "the penetration of an outside population" (Zertal 2004: 54).

Each site surveyed was categorized by type, with nineteen types defined (Zertal 2004: 18-19). These included: tell, fortified tell, large ruin, medium-sized ruin, small-sized ruin, fortification, Arab village, enclosure, city enclosure, ancient cemetery, ancient military camp, fortress, farm, structure, ancient road, cairn, sheikh's tomb, prehistoric site, and cave. The list does not include "cultic" as one of the types, though Dhahrat et-Tawileh (the "Bull Site") and el-Bumat are both understood to be cultic in nature (Zertal 2004: 179, 533). Dhahrat et-Tawileh is categorized as an enclosure and small cairn (Zertal 2004: 178) and el-Bumat as an enclosure (Zertal 2004: 532). Other sites, such as el-'Unuq (Zertal 1996: 394-97), Bedhat esh-Sha'ab (Zertal 2005: 238-42), Masu'a (Zertal 2005: 305-7), Yafit (3) (Zertal 2005: 333-37), and Wadi Ahmar (7) (Zertal 2005: 529-32), also typed as enclosures, have been understood to have some cultic function as well (see chapter 3, below). Zertal notes that "in many instances one definition is insufficient," and that "site characterization is flexible and open to additions and changes" (2004: 18).

**Overview of the Discovery and Excavation of the Mt. Ebal Complex**

On April 6, 1980, in the course of the survey of the territory of Manasseh, Zertal discovered a site on Mt. Ebal dating to the Iron Age I (1200-1000 BCE), the period during which the Israelite sedentarization in the central hill-country of Canaan began.
The site is known in Arabic as el-Bumat Sitti Salaamiyya, and lies on a mountain ridge high above sea level (940 m) and far from any roads (M.R. 1773.1829) (Fig. 2). The site lies 150 m below the peak of Mt. Ebal, and 25 m above its surroundings (Zertal 1983: 72). From the site, one can see eastern Samaria and the Wadi Far’ah, though Tell Balatah (ancient Shechem) cannot be seen. Twelve sites were discovered on Mt. Ebal in the survey of the Manasseh hill-country, but el-Burnat is the only one of these dating to the Iron Age. The initial excavation season was short, from October 15-29 of 1982.

Figure 2. View of the site from the slopes of Mt. Ebal, looking east (Courtesy of Ralph K. Hawkins).

El-Bumat is essentially a one period site, consisting of Stratum II, an LB village/campsite which was remodeled as Stratum IB, ca. 1200-1140 BCE and, finally, abandoned in Stratum IA, ca. 1140 BCE.

Stratum II

In this, the earliest stratum, Areas A and B (Fig. 3)—the main building complex and a court to its west—were excavated. During this founding period of the site, easily distinguished from the later filling of Stratum IB, a construction was built on bedrock on the ridge of the mountain. This structure was divided into smaller sections by two thin walls. East of the center of the structure was a depression in the floor in which a circular stone repository 2 m in diameter was located. The depression and the surrounding floor contained a layer of ash and charred animal bones. A nearby rock exhibited a depression which the excavator interpreted as a votive deposit or *favissa*. This depression in the stone held hammerstones and a decorated vessel of porous, volcanic rock, interpreted as a chalice. A sounding conducted in the area outside the building revealed an area that contained scattered plain hearths, excessive ash, potsherds and animal bones, all resting on bedrock.

In Area B, 25 m west and northwest of the structure in Area A, a retaining wall was built of large stones. This was abutted by a 16 x 9 m four-room house, oriented northwest-southeast, with inner walls one stone in width and doorjambs constructed of stone slabs. The house consisted of three long, parallel rooms, the easternmost of which contained a silo in which a complete storage jar was found *in situ*. The floor of the house
Figure 3. General plan of the enclosure (Zertal 1986/87: 107, fig. 2).
was made of thin, well-packed earth but with no ash or animal bones. Various kinds of pottery were found on the floor, including an oil lamp, storage jars, bowls, and a collared-rim jar.

An interesting collection of collared-rim jars that were arranged in a way similar to that of a collection in Area C at Shiloh was found in the 1988-1989 seasons. This collection was found in a group in the center of Area B, just south of the four-room house. This area was divided into separate units or compartments, where the eight pithoi stood in pairs. Shiloh's Area C contained a similarly arranged grouping.

Stratum IB

The site underwent significant modification during this phase. The prominent feature of El-Bumat is a rectilinear structure built of unhewn stones and measuring 9 x 14 m that was built above the earlier construction in Area A. This structure has no floor or entrance (Zertal 1985: 31), and two of its internal walls come partway to the center but do not meet (1985: 32). The interior of the main structure seems to have been deliberately filled with layers of bones of male bulls, caprovids and fallow deer, ash and Iron I pottery – including a whole collared-rim pithos (Zertal 1986-87: 113).

On the exterior of the main structure, 1.2 m below the top is a small ledge that partially encircles the entire structure (Zertal 1985: 38). On the SE side is what has been interpreted as a ramp, 1.2 m wide, which descends for 7 m at a 22 degree incline from a height of 2 meters at its NW end (1985: 32). On each side of this ramp are two paved courtyards, totaling 27 x 7 m (Zertal 1983: 22), each of which include a number of stone installations which are filled with bones, ash, jars, jugs, juglets, and pyxides (Zertal 1985: 34-5).
Surrounding the central structure is a thin enclosure wall 1 m high and 110 m long. Area B underwent changes, as the entire area of the four-room house was paved over with medium-sized stones to make a paved court in front of the main complex. The court was ca. 10 m wide and 50 m long. A gate (Locus 220), 7 m wide, with three steps that descended to this courtyard was also added (1985: 34). Additional installations are located in this enclosure. Seven m to the west and beyond the thin wall, a retaining wall 1.7-2.5 m in width extends for 250 m (Zertal 1986/87: 108).

The finds related to Stratum IB will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2. A list includes:

   a. Kraters (69) with straight walls and covered rims
   b. Cooking pots (51), mostly with plain rims or with a ridge just below the lip
   c. Jars (49); some featured punctured handles
   d. Pithoi (250); 84 percent were collared-rimmed
   e. Jugs (142); the "man's-face" appeared on many of these
   f. Biconical jug (1)
   g. Juglets (47)

2. Various finds:
   a. Bronze loop earring (Zertal 1986/87: 150)
   b. Bronze ingot (Zertal 1986/87: 150)
   c. Iron nail (Zertal 1986/87: 150)
   d. 32 sandstone basins (Zertal 1986/87: 148)
e. No sickle blades (1986/87: 148)

3. Scarabs:
   a. Scarab 1. Found in Area A. Bears pattern that seems to have been characteristic of the 19th Dynasty, and may be dated to ca. 1250-1200 BCE (Brandl 1986/87: 168-9)
   b. Scarab 2. Found in association with one of the installations outside the central structure. A Thuthmos III commemorative scarab, also dating to the second half of the 13th century BCE

4. Floral remains (Liphschitz 1986/87: 190-1):
   a. Ash of terebinth
   b. Ash of Kermesian oak
   c. Remains of olive and almond

5. Faunal remains:
   a. Caprovids make up 65 percent of the bone assemblage; 81 percent of them had been burned, and 44 percent of the burned remains were found in the central structure
   b. Cattle made up 21 percent of the assemblage, with half of the remains located in the main structure
   c. Fallow deer contributed 10 percent of the assemblage; 63 percent of these remains came from the central structure
   d. Mottled polecat (a local species called *Vormella peregusna*). Not burned
e. Red-Billed Chukar partridge (a local game bird called *Alectoris Cypriotes*). Not burned

f. Arabian rock pigeon (*Columba livia*). Not burned

g. Falcon. Not burned

h. Fish (in the central structure). Not burned

i. Cardium shell of Mediterranean *Glycymerys violacescens* (Horwitz 1986/87: 173). Not burned

j. No equids, pigs, or carnivores

Many of the bones were butchered at the joints (Horwitz 1986/87: 180) and roasted in an open flame (1986/87: 179).

**Stratum IA**

In Stratum IA, the site appears to have been deliberately covered with stones in both Areas A and B sometime around 1140 BCE (Zertal 1986/87: 123). This appeared to have been a deliberate burial in order to protect the site.

**Overview of Zertal's Conclusions Regarding the Ebal Site**

Both phases of this site were understood by Zertal as having been cultic. Stratum II, the earliest phase, was understood to have been a small cult site where feasts or ceremonies were held and sacrifices were offered. Since the site was fairly small during this phase, it is assumed that it served either as a family or tribal cult site whose attendants dwelled in the adjoining four-room house in Area B.

Stratum IB was also interpreted as cultic in nature. During this phase, the site was understood to have evolved into a main cult site of the Israelite settlers. Dwelling places
were removed, and the main structure during this phase was interpreted as a paved *bamah* on which ritual ceremonies took place. The double sloping wall between the two courts in the central structure was interpreted as a "double ramp." This main structure was seen to have been the focal point of ceremonies for a large assembly, who could enter processionally through the staired entryway in Area B. The installations around it were regarded as having been built for the express purpose of depositing offerings by those in attendance. Zertal summarizes: "The structure on Mt. Ebal can be compared to a large burnt offering altar, with a ramp leading up to it and ledges around it in the image of a stepped building. We therefore suggest that this was an open cultic site with an altar, surrounded by a *temenos*, entered by a ceremonial entrance, with installations around it containing offerings of the worshippers who came to the site or remains of previous sacrifices" (Zertal 1986/87: 156).

The biblical tradition contains two passages that describe the construction of a central cultic structure on Mt. Ebal. Deuteronomy 27 records a command given to the Israelites to build an altar on Mt. Ebal once they had entered the land of Canaan, and Josh 8:30-35 purports to recount how they carried out that command. The presence of these traditions suggests to Zertal that "the question must be raised as to whether there is a connection between the biblical tradition and the finds from the site." Zertal qualifies this by noting that "no conclusive answer can be given," though he goes on to stress that el-Burnat "is the only transitional Late Bronze Age/Iron Age site existing on the mountain" (Zertal 1986/87: 158). In the previous year, in his popularly written account of the discovery and excavation of the Ebal site, the connection is implied more strongly (Zertal 1985), especially by its sensational title: "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?"
Zertal argues extensively for the identification of the main structure as an altar (1985: 35-41), notes the Deut 27 and Josh 8 passages (1985: 41), and then asks: "Is the cult center altar unearthed by us on Mt. Ebal the one mentioned in the Bible? How can one judge such a fundamental issue? What criteria should we use for such a judgment?" (1985: 43). While Zertal's conclusion may not explicitly say that the Ebal structure was Joshua's altar, and despite his qualification that "certainty as yet eludes us" and that "we must say that the case has not been proven," the implication is clear: "It may be said with all scientific restraint that there must be a connection between the strong, important and authentic Biblical tradition that identifies Mt. Ebal as a central Israeliite cultic center and the gathering place of the Israeliite tribes, on the one hand, and the site unearthed by us, on the other" (1985: 43).

The cultic interpretation of the site of el-Burnat and its possible association with the altar of Josh 8:30-35 has been a point of controversy—one from which many scholars have wanted to distance themselves. Zertal has been derogatorily portrayed as having assumed a biblical association for the site prior to having undertaken excavations. Rainey's immediate reaction was to argue that "the entire interpretation by Zertal is a fabrication of wishful thinking and partial evidence" and that it should be dismissed as "a blatant phony" (Rainey 1986: 66). Kempinski asserted that "it seems that from the beginning Zertal really thought he had discovered 'Joshua's altar,'" and that, by 1982, during the first season of excavation, "notices had already appeared in the Israeli daily press that the altar that Joshua had built on Mt. Ebal, according to Joshua 8:30-35, was being excavated" (Kempinski 1986: 42). Kempinski reports that when Zertal first led himself, Benjamin Mazar, and Amihai Mazar to the site in October of 1982, that Zertal
"described the wall surrounding the square structure as a temenos wall, thus implying the cultic nature of the site" (Kempinski 1986: 44).

The first appearance of an announcement in the popular press regarding the excavations at el-Bumat, however, was actually in the Sunday, November 3, 1983, issue of Ha-aretz. This article did refer to Ebal as an "altar" site. But Zertal notes that "this was exactly a year after the time that Kempinski indicates that the news was already in the Israeli daily press, during his visit in 1982" (Zertal 1986: 49). Zertal also stresses that, in 1982, when Kempinski visited the site, "no one would or could have used the term 'altar,' because at that time we had no idea what the nature of the site was" (1986: 49).

In 1984, after four seasons of excavation,1 Zertal did note that "the unique character of the site and the importance of Mt. Ebal in the biblical tradition (e.g. Deut. 27; Josh. 8) [had] made excavation desirable" (Zertal 1984: 55). The following year, Zertal specifically stated that he had initially thought he was working with an ordinary settlement - "our initial thought was that this was a farmhouse or perhaps a watchtower" (Zertal 1985: 30-31). Zertal reiterated this point later in his response to Kempinski (Zertal 1986: 49). He explained that the purpose of the excavation of the Ebal site had to do with "the need to explore a site from the Israelite settlement period in the territory of Manasseh. Such sites in Manasseh were important to Biblical history and none had been explored archaeologically" (1986: 49). The excavation of el-Bumat, in other words, was to be a benchmark site for the survey of Manasseh.

In 1985 Zertal published a popularly written article in BAR in which he associated the Ebal structure with the altar of Josh 8:30-35 (Zertal 1985: 26-43). This article elicited

a number of reactions, mostly dismissive, which will be briefly examined in the following discussion about methodology. The following year, Zertal presented an overview of the Ebal findings at the 1986 meeting of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (1988c:137-54). Here Zertal still "suggested" that the structure at Mt. Ebal was an altar and that it may be associated with the early Israelites (Zertal 1988c: 144), though he was a bit more tentative in his association of the structure with Josh 8:30-35. Zertal suggested that, in light of the biblical text, "an inevitable question must be raised, whether it can be a connection between the biblical tradition and the site at Ebal or not" (1988c: 145). He concluded that the site "is connected to the biblical tradition" (1988c: 146), though, as Soggin noted, "Zertal does not insist any longer that the altar was Joshua's" (Soggin 1988: 119, n. 10).

When Zertal published his preliminary report in 1986-1987, after documenting the excavation of Ebal and its concomitant data, the author gave detailed consideration to possible alternate interpretations of the Stratum IB structure as a domestic quarter, a storehouse, and a tower (Zertal 1986/87: 151-4). After having ruled these out as viable options, Zertal concluded that the site must have been cultic in nature (1986/87: 154). He then devoted eight pages – about 13 percent of the article – to exploring what kind of cultic site Ebal may have been, how it relates to the biblical text, and what role it played in the Israelite settlement (1986/87: 154-61). In the end, although Zertal acknowledges that it is his "opinion [that] the main complex at Mount Ebal is indeed an altar" (1986/87: 161), he also stresses that the very existence of el-Burnat as an Iron Age I site on Mt. Ebal itself raises the question of "whether there is a connection between the biblical tradition and the finds from the site." At the same time, he acknowledges that "no
conclusive answer can be given," and that he is hopeful that "further research will be able
to contribute more information to answer this crucial question" (1986/87: 158).

Despite Zertal's qualifying statements, G. Gilmour has criticized the fact that
Zertal set forth conclusions identifying the site as cultic in nature in his preliminary
report. He argues that Zertal's interpretation "compromises a comparative approach"
because his "identification of the site's function dominates the report in a manner that
precludes an objective reading of the basic archaeological facts" (Gilmour 1995: 119).
Gilmour wonders "how the report may have differed if the site was excavated and written
up by another archaeologist with a more open mind as to the site's identity and function"
(1995: 119). Though he notes that "Zertal may be right – the structure may be an altar."
he laments that "we are invited to accept his word for it, and this precludes genuine

Gilmour's criticisms seem overstated. It is true that, in the past, the agenda for
studying ancient Near Eastern religions was set by reference to biblical texts (Nakhai
2001: 5-18), and interpreters were quick to assign a cultic interpretation to unexplained
archaeological sites or material remains. Shiloh has referred to "the method that
prevailed in the past, according to which a cultic interpretation [was to be] bestowed on
every unusual structure or other object to which such a designation could conceivably be
attached" (Shiloh 1979: 148). New approaches seek to accept archaeology as an
"independent witness" completely autonomous from the biblical text (Dever 1987: 219-
222). However, if archaeological data are to be accepted as a witness at all, they must still
be interpreted, and interpretive strategies are a standard topic of discussion in
archaeological handbooks (e.g., Holladay 2003: 44). The very motivation for the

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archaeological enterprise is for researching and comparing the material culture, which means that "a major research focus is the development of classification systems and typology" (Ortiz 2005: 67). To argue that Zertal should have left the interpretation of the site to others is to suggest that archaeologists should not engage the basic arenas of inquiry which make up the archaeological task: material cultural studies, historical reconstruction, and anthropological processes (Ortiz 2005: 67). It seems to me that Zertal has done no more or less than other archaeologists who have offered interpretations of the sites they have excavated. The question that remains is how subsequent researchers are themselves to evaluate the site on Mt. Ebal.

**Methodology and Criteria for the Identification of the Site**

At present, there has been little discussion of the actual archaeological data related to Mt. Ebal. Instead, the objections of both archaeologists and biblical scholars have often seemed to return to arguments about the date and nature of the book of Joshua as the primary reason for ruling out the Ebal site as having a biblical connection. Soggin wrote that "I must object to A. Zertal's way of using the biblical evidence" (Soggin 1988: 116), and lamented that "such use, or rather misuse, of biblical texts is unfortunately not unknown among archaeologists" (1988: 119, n. 10). He states that "the late dating of Josh 8:30-35 is something about which all non-'fundamentalist' scholars agree" (1988: 117). Kempinski's objections, already noted, rested in part on arguments about Deuteronomic origins of the Joshua material (Kempinski 1986: 48). Whereas Coogan has been open to a cultic understanding of the site (Coogan 1987: 1-8), he suggests that Ebal is a Canaanite site, a conclusion which seems to be conditioned by Deuteronomic understandings of the Joshua material. Coogan explains that, "since the division of the land in Joshua is an ideal
picture . . . the mere presence of premonarchic remains within the ideal tribal boundaries does not require their construction or use by the members of that tribe" (Coogan 1990: 27). Dever's joking dismissal of the "altar" as "a picnic site where barbecues were enjoyed by families on Saturday afternoons" (Dever 1992: 34) is also undergirded by an understanding of the biblical text as having postexilic origins (1992: 28), despite his call on repeated occasions for a specifically archaeological approach to the reconstruction of ancient Israelite religion (Dever 1987: 209-10; 2002: 11-33). Evangelical scholars have been no quicker to make a biblical connection with the Ebal structure. Here again, the reasons are not archaeological, but biblical: "The current dating of the site does not fit with Biblical chronology, which suggests an earlier, fourteenth century (c. 1400 B.C.) date for Joshua and the conquest" (Kaiser and Garrett 2005: 288). It seems clear, therefore, that many of the reactions against Zertal's conclusions about Ebal seem to be based on biblical interpretive approaches rather than on the archaeological data themselves.¹

My goal in this dissertation will be to consider the archaeological data associated with Mt. Ebal and whether the data themselves point to a specific interpretation of the site. This raises the question of the process of the identification of cultic activity in archaeological contexts – a subject with its own long history of controversy. Prior to the last quarter of the twentieth century, a comprehensive, theoretical approach to the identification of cultic sites had not been devised. A number of recent works have made

¹There were other reasons that scholars may have wanted to avoid taking a position on Ebal, such as the fact that it was located in the West Bank, as well as the fact that Samaritan clergy had taken public positions against interpretation of the site as an altar early on. These religious and political problems for the site and its interpretation are outlined in Machlin (1991: 44-76).
important contributions toward filling this gap, one of the earliest and probably the most influential being Colin Renfrew's study of the sanctuary at Phylakopi on the Aegean island of Melos, *The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi* (1985). Renfrew seeks to define and interpret religion anthropologically, claiming that religious beliefs form a "more or less coherent system or structure, to which the cult observances relate" (1985: 17). The cult observances have four primary transcendent or supernatural objectives, which are to focus the attention of worshipers, to create a boundary zone between this world and the next, to demonstrate the presence of the deity, and to allow for participation and offering (Renfrew and Bahn 2007: 230-31). This essential "structure in the belief system should engender pattern in cult practice, and it is this which we as archaeologists may hope to discern" (Renfrew 1985: 17). Renfrew then seeks to elicit behavioral and material correlates from belief systems that may then be clearly identified in the archaeological record (1985: 1-4, 11-26). Renfrew's correlates (1985: 19-20), however, are designed for identifying cultic sites built for centralized public worship rather than decentralized private worship, a shortcoming that Renfrew himself notes (1985: 22). During the Iron Age I, the primary period under consideration in this dissertation, sacred places were eclectic and included pilgrimage sanctuaries (Shiloh), open-air sanctuaries (e.g., "Bull Site"), village sanctuaries (e.g., Hazor, Dan, 'Ai, et al.), domestic sanctuaries (e.g., Megiddo, Tell el-Wawiyat, et al.), and possibly at gateway sanctuaries (Tall al-`Umayri?) (Nakhai 2001: 170-76). "The type of sacred places at which the Iron I settlers worshipped – small and simple – stands in contrast to the single large fortified Canaanite sanctuary (Shechem) of the same period" (Nakhai 2001: 176). This contrast would apply as well to the kinds of public cult sites that Renfrew's
correlates are designed to identify. Without modification, therefore, Renfrew's methodology is insufficient for use in identifying cultic sites in Iron Age I Palestine.

The first theoretical statement specifically dealing with the Palestinian context appears to have been that of M. D. Coogan, prompted by the discovery and publication of data related to the "Bull Site" and the Mt. Ebal site (1987: 1-8). Coogan proposed four basic criteria that could be used in cases where decisive written evidence was lacking (1987: 2-3):

1. **Isolation.** "In most cultures," Coogan notes, "there is a conscious separation between the holy and the profane" (1987: 2; cf. also Zevit 2002: 73-81). One of the ways this finds expression is in a temenos wall (τέμενος), which separates a holy precinct from other, secular parts of the site. Examples of this can be found in the Middle Bronze IIB at Tell Kittan Stratum IV (Eisenberg 1977: 79-80); in the Late Bronze Age at the Temple of Baal at Ugarit (Schaeffer 1931: fig. 2; 1933: fig. 14), the Bipartite Temple in Area H of the Lower city of Hazor (Yadin et al. 1989: fig. 4, pl. 38), Temple 2048 at Megiddo (Loud 1948: fig. 247; A. Mazar 1992b: 171), in Shechem Field VI (Wright 1975: 60-61), and Tel Mevorakh (Stern 1984: 31); and in the Iron Age II at Dan (Biran 1998: 40) and Tel Qasile Stratum X (A. Mazar 1980: 71), among others.

2. **Exotic Materials.** Material such as miniature vessels, figurines, rare or costly items, usually atypical of other contexts, are often found at cultic sites (Coogan 1987: 3). Coogan notes the problems associated with the use of "incense burners" and figurines for the identification of cult sites, since neither of these necessarily had a cultic function. Indeed, figurines are found in random
excavation contexts and cannot always be interpreted, since there is rarely written evidence related to their usage. In many cases, their interpretation has been a matter of conjecture (Black and Green 2000: 116-17). However, when exotic materials are considered cumulatively as part of the overall archaeological repertoire, they may contribute to an understanding of the nature of a site.

3. Continuity. Sites regarded as holy often retain the appellation of holiness in the future. Coogan cites several examples, including the successive sanctuaries at Beth Shan, whose usage continued from the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Ages, and the Fosse Temples at Lachish, which also experienced multiperiod usage (Coogan 1987: 3). If a site is currently utilized for cultic purposes and appears to have experienced such usage in previous periods, then the principle of continuity may be projected backwards in time to argue for a cultic identification of a site.

4. Parallels. Sites that share similar functions will also tend to share similar morphological characteristics, both in terms of architecture as well as other material paraphernalia, particularly when they date to the same period. "Thus, building plans, altars, pedestals, and the like should show resemblance to cultic installations known from written or non-written sources" (Coogan 1987: 3). Coogan attributes this to the natural tendency toward conservatism – both human and religious.

Using these four criteria, Coogan rules out a cultic function for the "Bull Site" on the basis of the absence of exotic materials other than the bull figurine and because he sees the architectural evidence as "too fragmentary to adduce convincing parallels or to indicate isolation" (Coogan 1987: 5). The Mt. Ebal site, on the other hand, is accepted by
Coogan as cultic because of its isolation, exotic material, and the fact that "convincing parallels can be made" (Coogan 1987: 5).

A. Mazar has demonstrated the shortcomings of Coogan's four criteria for the identification of cultic sites, noting that a number of clearly identified cult places and temples in ancient Israel do not conform to all of Coogan's criteria. In relation to the requirement of "isolation," for example, Mazar notes that "the temples at Tell Qasile, a temple in area A at Hazor, the temple at Arad and others all fail to meet this criterion, yet they are all clearly temples" (A. Mazar 1988: 45). With regard to the requirement of the presence of "exotic materials," such may not always be present in a cultic site. Their absence may occur due to the site having been abandoned in its final phases or having been robbed out at a later time. As examples, Mazar notes that exotic materials were not found at the Chalcolithic temple at Ein-Gedi, the Early Bronze temples at Megiddo, the Canaanite temple 2048 at Megiddo, and the Shechem temples (1988: 45). "Continuity" is not a viable requirement, as it may not always be present, especially in the case of Iron Age I settlement sites, which are often one period sites (as are both the "Bull Site" and the Mt. Ebal site) (1988: 45). Finally, Mazar notes that "parallels," Coogan's four criterion, may not always be found for every piece of archaeological datum and that, "if we expect to find parallels to every new archaeological feature, we probably will never be able to advance our research in this field of study" (1988: 45). Both the "Bull Site" and the Mt. Ebal site have only limited parallels. On the whole, then, while Coogan's criteria may be helpful in considering the nature of the Ebal site, it is inadequate for reaching definitive conclusions.
Another attempt at establishing a methodology for the identification of cultic sites, albeit in Iron Age II, is Holladay's article, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach" (1987: 249-99). Because he believes that "the biblical tradition, however polyvalent it may seem, is the continuously edited, consciously selected, generally prescriptive literary tradition of a very small hierarchy," Holladay seeks to devise a method that has no "regard for special considerations" (1987: 249-250). Holladay identifies four classes of data available for the reconstruction of the religion: architectural, artifactual, artistic, and epigraphic (1987: 252). He works from the material to the theoretical by first reviewing the architecture and artifacts of recently discovered sites that have been identified as sanctuaries, shrines, and cult areas (1987: 252-66), after which he seeks to develop a model based on the clustered phenomena of the aforementioned sites (1987: 266-80). For most Israelite and Judean cult places, the distinguishing artifacts seem to be the horned incense altar, tall "cult" stands, "incense bowls," lamps, steleform stones, pottery vessels (both ordinary and cultic) and, sometimes, figurines. Chalices appear in the earlier periods. Benches, podia, and sometimes altars of burnt offering are included among the immobilia (Holladay 1987: 265-66).

Holladay sets forth an operative hypothesis based on a distinction between sites of "established worship" and "tolerated nonconformist worship," or "state" and "local" worship, which should be distinguishable archaeologically. Inherent within this model is the idea that one of the major goals of the religious establishment was to promote national unity and a feeling of distinctiveness vis-à-vis neighboring states. Based on this assumption, established religion should then be national in scope and distinguishable at
the town and national levels by (a) concentration of cultic apparatus and (b) distinctive architectural traits suited to the function of the cultus. "In the truest sense of the term," he writes, "these are 'public buildings'" (1987: 268). Holladay notes specifically that, "since the temple, sanctuary, or shrine is intended to be an important part of the general cultural milieu of the populace, the building should not be a 'closed box.' A significant part of the sanctuary might reasonably be expected to be open to public view, even if access to certain more sacred portions of the structure were reserved to priests" (1987: 289-90, n. 98). In other words, "as an important official building and divine correlate to the palace of the king, governor, or appointed official, the shrine of the deity should exhibit traces of monumental architecture appropriate to the level of political organization" (1987: 268).

Holladay hypothesizes that "Nonconformist" religion, on the other hand, serves a completely different social function. It is designed "to remedy perceived deficiencies in the established religion," examples of which might be the failure of "Establishment" cultus to allow full access by women and/or the failure to include various aspects of divinity in its worship (1987: 269). Locations of tolerated "Nonconformist" worship "should be archaeologically distinguishable (a) by localized concentrations of material correlates of cultic activity and (b) by distinctive architectural traits vis-à-vis the 'Established' sanctuaries" (1987: 269). Holladay (1987: 269-70) explains:

Political considerations, if nothing else, would dictate that any "Tolerated Nonconformist" shrine should be smaller scale than the "Establishment" shrines at the same level of political organization. Since they would lie outside the area of direct governmental sponsorship and control, they would not form a key part of the town plan and would not be expected to be sited on particularly good ground. Especially within built-up town sites it might be anticipated that they would exhibit an indirect access plan. In fact, from outward appearances, particularly in plain view, publicly visible cult places might appear "private." As a conscious or unconscious attempt at modification of the "Establishment" cultus, "Nonconformist" cult apparatus probably would not be a direct subset of the state
cultus, although it seems reasonable to suppose that there might be a possible tendency toward mutual accommodation through time. In a small nation-state with culturally significant neighbors, a nonconformist cult or group might be expected to exhibit explicit signs of "foreign" influence, although this would vary depending upon what perceived weaknesses of the official cultus were at issue. That is to say, from the material culture viewpoint we might expect to find, in such a sanctuary, cult symbols from foreign cultures, amulets from foreign cultures, and possibly even specialized cultic apparatus more favored outside the nation-state than within it.

Holladay postulates that, since this kind of nonconformist religion lies outside the auspices of "official" religion, it may have been regional in scope, with some variability between neighboring regions (1987: 270).

Other writers have built on this distinction between official and popular religion. S. Ackerman wrote one of the first book-length treatments on the subject of folk religion, entitled *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah*, in which she used the term “popular religion” throughout. She defined it mainly as “an alternate vision, a non-priestly, non-Deuteronomistic, non-prophetic view of what Yahwism was” (Ackerman 1992: 1-2). S. Niditch produced the first synthesis of ancient Israelite religion by a woman scholar, entitled simply *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Niditch 1997). In this volume, Niditch pays attention to the larger social setting, including the role of women, in the religious beliefs and practices of ancient Israel. She argues that a single worldview is implied in the Bible, although the Israelites were not a monolithic community over time “or at any given time” (1997: 27). She explains the Bible as a product of the "Establishment," to use Holladay's terminology:

This is the point of view of a southern, that is, Judean, Jerusalem based, pro-Davidic, male-centered group. One might therefore assume that such a group is responsible for the final form of the particular set of Israelite compositions that we call the Hebrew Bible, but they are not representative of all Israelites in the lengthy social history . . . even if they did have the final word. To raise these questions already is to suggest that the Bible is a selection from a wider range of
materials that were part of Israelite tradition. The final redactors or composers of the Bible worked with an inherited corpus of tradition, but the voices we hear so strongly in the Old Testament may have been those of the minority in a larger culture, only hints of which are preserved in the Hebrew Bible. The crucial questions thus become not only who wrote the Bible but also what the others believed. (Niditch 1997: 27-8)

The recent work by W. G. Dever, Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel (2005), continues to build on the idea of a distinction between state and folk religion, which he seeks to demonstrate through extensive use of archaeological data. Dever defines “religion” as “essentially the practice of the majority” (2005: 59) and argues that this “religion arises out of the exigencies of real-life experience” (2005: 60). By this he means that religion originates in responses to experience; i.e., rituals related to rites of passage (birth, transition to adulthood, marriage, death), agricultural cycles, etc.

In this paradigm,

theological formulations and even the ‘official’ cult come later, largely as a reaction against practices already widespread. As for abstract theological concepts, these are always the products of the clerical establishment, of the literati, of the elites of the day – in this case, the right-wing, ultranationalist religious parties who wrote the Bible. . . . Such religion [as that contained in the Bible] was unknown and in any case would have seemed irrelevant. . . . The religious practices of common folk . . . were informed not by the canonical literary tradition and its late, ‘orthodox’ ideals, but rather by centuries-old religious myths and rituals, many of them going back to Canaanite Bronze Age traditions. (2005: 60)

Israelite religion did incorporate elements of Canaanite religion intermittently, throughout its history. For example, Asherah images were made in ancient Israel, both by individuals and by commission of the government, which the Bible acknowledges (e.g., 1 Kgs 16:32-33; 2 Kgs 18:3-4; 23:4ff.), a fact that has been acknowledged for many years (e.g., Reed 1949). It is not clear, however, that these kinds of non-orthodox practices were peculiar to a particular element in Israelite society, as has been claimed. Instead, the
evidence seems to make it clear that these practices cut across economic strata. Biblical and archaeological data indicate that non-orthodox elements of Yahwism could be found at "Establishment" cultic centers (e.g., Samaria and Jerusalem), as well as at more peripheral locations or "Nonconformist" cultic centers (e.g., Khirbet el-Kom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud). These data have led P. Miller to prefer the term "heterodox Yahwism" over terms that refer to a dichotomy between state and folk religion. For Miller, heterodox Yahwism is, by definition, "an amalgam of [pure Yahwism blended with foreign elements], together with particular practices that came into conflict with some of the facets of more orthodox Yahwism or were not customarily a part of it" (Miller 2002: 51). While the relationship between state and folk religion may be more fluid than some scholars have allowed, Holladay's initial operative hypothesis has merit. In addition, while his model is primarily designed to work within the Iron Age II, he includes the "Bull Site" among those that he assesses (Holladay 1987: 272). It may be, therefore, that Holladay's model can contribute to an understanding of the nature of the Mt. Ebal site as well.

G. Gilmour, in his 1995 dissertation, sought to address the need for a theoretical approach to the identification of cultic sites by devising a "continuum of probability" to assess the likelihood of a given site's cultic nature. Gilmour's degrees of probability range from 0 (not cultic) to 10 (definitely cultic) and are based on the three typical variables of architecture, artifacts, and continuity of use (Gilmour 1995: 10-11). Temples would obviously be assigned the highest numbers, as they would include all three variables, while sites and loci with only partial evidence would be assigned lower numbers (Gilmour 2000: 286-87). Gilmour claims that his methodology provides the means for a
"standardization of approach," and that the assignation of numerical values was "arbitrary but consistent" (Gilmour 2000: 288). This model, however, is somewhat ambiguous, as Gilmour states that "any numerical value on the continuum indicates the presence of some evidence of cult" (1995: 12). He explains that, "while a higher rating on the probability continuum indicates a greater probability of cultic identity, a lower rating does not necessarily mean that a site has a proportionately lower probability of cultic identity." Instead, it simply "may reflect the absence of information with which to assess that site or locus" for whatever reason (1995: 12). Gilmour notes that "it is important to stress that a low rating on the probability continuum does not necessarily imply that a site or locus is not cultic" (1995: 12). Thus, while Gilmour may register skepticism about a site's cultic nature, Gilmour's assignment of even one point to it holds out the possibility that it may be cultic in nature.

This ambiguity has led Z. Zevit, in his monumental work, The Religions of Ancient Israel (2001), to prefer to return to Renfrew's system of correlates that refers to behaviors, which he has modified to reflect the possibilities of Iron Age Syria-Palestine (Zevit 2001: 82; adapted from Renfew 1985: 19-20):

1. Rituals may be performed in a place of natural significance such as a cave, spring, mountain top, or grove of trees.

2. They may be performed in a place of historical significance, e.g., the site of a theophany to an ancestor, or of a famous event, or a grave.

3. They may take place in an enclosure, a room, or a building set aside for their performance.
4. Rituals may involve public and/or secret aspects whose practice will be reflected in architecture.

5. Worship involves prayer and prescribed movements which may be reflected in architecture or iconography.

6. Architecture and appurtenances may reflect the points of major concern and the focus of attention.

7. Cult images, icons, or aniconic representations of the deity or of deities may be present.

8. Special facilities such as benches, altars, hearths, basins, storage bins or jars necessary for the rituals may be present.

9. Sacrifice may be practiced.

10. Food and drink may be brought and either presented, consumed, or libated.

11. Material objects such as votives may be presented. The act of offering may entail breakage.

12. The ritual area may have repeated symbols or redundant appurtenances.

13. The physical plan of a building or of a site may reflect the concepts of ritual cleanliness and gradations of sanctity.

14. The structure and its appurtenances may reflect a significant investment of wealth.

While Zevit has been called a "positivist" (e.g., Dever 2005: 46), most reviewers have noted his judicious application of his methodology and his tendency not to interpret the evidence when the data are insufficient (e.g., Alpert-Nakhai 2003a: 46; Burnett 2006; Hess 2002: 6-7; Klingbeil 2003: 157-60; Mandell 2003; Noegel 2002/03: 2-3; Ortiz
2004a: 499-500). Zevit himself notes the special difficulties that one faces when examining an archaeological site or locus with the purpose of determining whether it may have had a cultic function:

Studying an excavated site with this list in hand while checking off a number of items from the preceding list would not necessarily mark a site as cultic. For example, items, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 14 could be checked off in a wealthy home or a major administrative center, even if figurines were included in the finds. However, a smaller list of items such as 7, 8, and 12 alone could indicate a cult site even in a humble structure. Since many types of vessels such as bowls, stands, lamps, and installations such as basins, bins, and niches have domestic applications, these, in and of themselves, cannot establish a cultic interpretation for a site, even though they are characteristic of some such sites. One rule of thumb in this problematic area is to eliminate from cultic consideration any assemblage explicable as domestic or at least as non-cultic in light of what is known about the society. This rule, however, should not eliminate from consideration as cultic a site where common objects occur in uncommon quantities or atypical arrangements.

Zevit's judiciousness has led him to rule out some sites that have often been interpreted as cultic, including the cult complex from Arad Stratum XII (Zevit 2001: 157-8; Gilmour [1995: 204] also rates it "0"), Ein Gev (Zevit 2001: 201), a late ninth-century Jerusalem cult room (Zevit 2001: 206), Makmish (Zevit 2001: 218; Gilmour [1995: 122] rates it a "3"), Tel Michal (Zevit 2001: 219; Gilmour [1995: 127] rates it a "5"), the Stratum VA "Davidic" gate at Megiddo (Zevit 2001: 231), the eighth-to-seventh century BCE Samaria shrine (2001: 234), and the Ta'anach cultic area (2001: 235-37; Gilmour [1995: 69-70] rates it a "3"). On the other hand, Zevit identifies as cultic some sites that have sometimes been rejected as such, including Giloh (Zevit 2001: 197-98, n. 122), Horbat Radum (2001: 197-98, n. 122), the "Bull Site" (2001: 176-80; Coogan [1987: 5] finds a cultic identification "unlikely;" Gilmour (1995: 92) rates it a "4"; and Kitchen [2003: 231] suggests that the site could be easily explained by a "domestic" appellation), and Mt. Ebal (Zevit 2001: 196-201; Gilmour [1995: 118] rates it a "2"). It appears that Zevit "takes
nothing for granted" and that he "puts to the test each identification of a site" (Spronk 2003: 674) when it comes to cultic identification of a site. In a dust-jacket review, W. G. Dever described Zevit's work as "the most ambitious, the most sophisticated, the most important study of ancient Israelite religion ever undertaken."

Each of the aforementioned methodologies has been important for the development of a better understanding of cultic sites in ancient Syria-Palestine. Renfrew's four essential transcendent objectives of cultic activity – focus of attention, development of a boundary zone between this world and the next, demonstration of the presence of the deity, and allowance for participation and offering – engender a series of behavioral and material correlates. While these are useful as a theoretical reference point, they are limited by their design for the identification of cultic sites built specifically for public or communal use, which precludes their usefulness in identifying small, rural, private or domestic cultic sites. Though Coogan does not cite Renfrew, his four criteria of isolation, exotic materials, continuity, and parallels seem to build on his methodology in a way that is useful, though ultimately limited, in a Palestinian setting. The work of Holladay, though geared toward the study of Iron Age II cult sites, makes an important contribution in terms of its distinction between the interests that might be expressed in the architecture and appurtenances of "Establishment" cultic sites versus "Nonconformist" cultic sites. Gilmour's continuum of probability seems to me to be too ambiguous to provide the standardized approach he hopes for, though his analyses are useful in that they rely on the typical variables of architecture, artifacts, and continuity of use. Zevit's new typology seems to be the most comprehensive in terms of its development of an extended list of behavioral correlates designed specifically for a Syro-Palestinian setting. I will interact
with all of these models in this dissertation when they are relevant, and will particularly note assessment of cultic identifications by Gilmour or Zevit, since they both assign either numerical evaluations of probability for cultic identification (Gilmour) or a listing of the number of behavior correlates (Zevit). My approach will be analytical and comparative. I will begin by analyzing the site and its artifacts, then compare it with the alternative proposals and literary traditions. Ultimately, I will seek to place Ebal in its broader regional context, in order to determine how it might relate to the larger settlement picture of the Iron Age I.
CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE EBAL INSTALLATION

Location and Layout of the Site

Location of the Site

El-Bumat is the sole Iron Age I site located on Mt. Ebal. Twelve sites were discovered, one of which was dated to the Middle Bronze Age IIB and the remainder of which dated to the Persian period and later. El-Bumat is located northeast of Mt. Ebal's peak, which ascends to the north of the valley of Shechem (Fig. 4). It is 940 m above sea-level. Tell Balatah (ancient Shechem) lies at the base of the southern slope of Mt. Ebal. On the northern slope, Mt. Ebal descends in a series of four terraces, on the second of which lies el-Bumat (Zertal 1986/87: 106). Wadi Abiad can be seen to the east, and Wadi Far'ah to the northeast. The southwestern slope is moderate, and it descends into a valley where a path connects it to 'Asirewh esh-Shemaliyeh (Zertal 1992a: 485). This path, as already noted by Conder and Kitchener in their 19th-century survey, is the only path in existence on Mt. Ebal (Conder and Kitchener 1882: Sheet XI, cited in Zertal 1986/87: 106).

The remote location of el-Bumat contributed to Zertal's conclusion that the site was cultic in nature (Zertal 1985: 38). As noted above, the only path on or around Mt. Ebal is the one connecting it to 'Asirewh esh-Shemaliyeh. Zertal notes that "Mt. Ebal has always been an obstacle to transportation. All transportation routes have avoided it"
(Zertal 1985: 31). In addition, there are no Iron Age settlements in the vicinity (Zertal 2004: 527-48). This remoteness is in conformity with the first of M. Coogan's criteria for cultic interpretation: isolation (Coogan 1987: 2). A. Mazar has questioned the requirement of "isolation" as a criterion for a cultic site (Mazar 1998: 45).

The first of Z. Zevit's behavioral/material correlates, which notes that "rituals may be performed in a place of natural significance such as a cave, spring, mountain top, or grove of trees" (Zevit 2001: 82), is more nuanced and may explain more accurately the
characteristic Coogan was seeking to describe with his term "isolation." In either case, el-Burnat is isolated and does capitalize on features of natural topographic significance.

Layout of the Site

The typical Iron Age I settlements are hamlets or small villages often laid out in the *khater* style ((plan (Herzog 1992b: 233). Settlements that followed this pattern were oval-shaped with a large open space in the center. The buildings faced the center and encircled the settlement, forming a courtyard, probably for penning the herds of the inhabitants at night, and also providing some measure of defense. Horvat ‘Ovot, Shiloh, Giloh, Ai, ‘Izbet Sartah, Tel Masos, and Tel Esdar are all arranged according to this plan.

The plan of the Ebal site is very simple. It consists merely of an enclosure with an isolated building in its center. Clearly, the site is not a hamlet or village, though it has been suggested that the site may be a farmstead (e.g., Fritz 1993: 185; 2005: 87) or an isolated watchtower (e.g., Kempinski 1986). These interpretations will be examined in chapter 3.

**Stratum II**

**Area A**

Partial remains of the Stratum II occupation were uncovered under the central structure of Stratum IB and under the southern courtyard associated with the central structure (Fig. 5). These remains included Walls 18 and 36, both fragmentary, Surface 61, Pit 250, and Installation 94 (Fig. 5), all located under the central structure. Surface 61 lies on bedrock underneath the fill of the Stratum IB central structure. An ancient building
Figure 5. Plan of Stratum II, Area A (upper left, with central structure of Stratum IB superimposed) and Area B (lower right) (Zertal 1986/87: 110, fig. 3).
was clearly built on this surface. Walls 18 and 36 were clearly a part of this ancient building, though the relationship between them is not clear.

Of special interest in Stratum II of Area A is Installation 94, which was located "in the exact center of the overlying building" between Walls 13 and 16 (Zertal 1986/87: 110). Walls 18 and 36 did not, therefore, connect, since Installation 94 created "an obstacle for passage between the two spaces." This installation is round, 2 m in diameter, and constructed of medium-size stones (Fig. 6). This installation contained a layer of ash and animal bones 10 cm in depth, some of which was burned. Zertal points to a similar structure discovered in the Philistine temple at Tell Qasile, excavated by A. Mazar (A. Mazar 1980: 51). This structure was discovered in a large, open courtyard (Courtyard 103) surrounding Temple 118 of Stratum XI, dating ca. 1100-1050 B.C. (1980: 11). The installation (108) consisted of a large stone slab, which was surrounded by "an irregular circle of stones" measuring 1.45 meters in diameter (Fig. 7). Mazar interpreted this installation as "a sacrificial altar" (1980: 51).

Pit 250, also located underneath the central structure of Stratum IB, borders Surface 61. It contained hammerstones, pottery sherds that were able to be reconstructed into whole vessels, and a chalice. The chalice was unique, with no exact parallels. It was made of porous, lightweight volcanic rock (Fig. 8). Zertal suggests that it shares similarities with a group of stone vessels found in a Hathor cave associated with an Egyptian temple at Serābīt el-Khādim in Sinai (Zertal 1986/87: 148-9). Petrie described all of these vessels as "altars" (Figs. 9-10). Altars 14 and 15 are very plain, with number 15 having been chipped and number 14 having been dressed. Number 13 is well-finished.
Figure 6. Installation 94, located in center of overlying Stratum IB structure (Zertal 1985: 31).
Figure 7. Installation 108 in Courtyard 103 of Temple 118, Tell Qasile (A. Mazar 1980: Pl. 18, fig. 1).

Figure 8. Pumice chalice from Pit 250 (Zertal 1986: 53; 1986/87: 149, fig. 21).
Figure 9. "Altars" from the Hathor cave at Serābīt el-Khādim in Sinai (Petrie 1906: fig. 142).
Figure 10. More "altars" from the Hathor cave at Serābīt el-Khādim in Sinai (Petrie 1906: fig. 143).
Vessel number 3, according to Petrie, was originally quite elaborate, though its top has not survived. The top originally had a cup-hollow 9 inches wide and 4 inches deep. Altar number 4 is the tallest of the vessels, measuring 22 inches in height, and it is the primary one Zertal points to for a parallel (Zertal 1986/87: 149). This vessel has a cup-hollow on the top measuring 3½ inches wide and 1 inch deep. Many of these vessels appear to have been intended for incense, and the top of altar 13 specifically was burned "for about a quarter of an inch inwards, black outside and discoloured below" (Petrie 1906: 133).

Petrie notes that numbers 1-2, 7 and 12 are similar to the vase-altars of the Egyptian 12th Dynasty, though the corpus as a whole dates to the 19th and 20th Dynasties (Petrie 1906: 94-5). Regardless of their exact function, the vessels were clearly from a cultic context in the Serabit el-Khadim temple.

Based on the finds associated with Pit 250 at el-Burnat, Zertal concludes that it "may have been used as a favissa, just before it was sealed by the fill of Stratum IB" (Zertal 1986/87: 111). Large amounts of ash, coals, and burned wood and animal bones were found on the nearby bedrock, as well as some scattered hearthstones and restorable pottery vessels. "The picture, as suggested by the burnt bones, is one of cooking, roasting and/or sacrificing, which apparently took place on bedrock in the open" (Zertal 1986/87: 111). Based on the artifacts discovered in Area A of Stratum II, Gilmour concludes that, "while there are no overtly cultic items such as cult stands or kermoi in the assemblage, the quantitative analysis suggests it is not a domestic assemblage" (Gilmour 1995: 111). The quantity of cooking pots was very low (5%), while the quantities of collared-rim pithoi (28.5%) and other storage jars (11.6%) and jugs (19.3%) were very high (Zertal 1986/87: 124-47).
If Area A of Stratum II is part of a cultic complex, the question is raised as to the nature of the structure of which Walls 18 and 36 were a part. If Installation 94 was an altar and Pit 250 a favissa, it could be that the adjacent walls were part of a vestry or a storeroom. Storerooms were essential components of most local sanctuaries in Palestine. In temples, they were sometimes located at the back of the building, behind the raised platform (Mazar 1980: 70-71), or on one or both sides of the temple (Stern 1984: 30). In sanctuaries with a raised cella, they are located on both of its sides (Stern 1984: 30). The Stratum II remains are too fragmentary for a reconstruction of the ancient building to be made, though finding a storage facility of some kind in relation to a cultic area would be consistent with what is known about sanctuary design.

Area B

Stratum II of Area B contained the inner enclosure wall (Wall 29), abutted by a coarse domestic-type four-room house built on bedrock (Zertal 1986/87: 111-12) (Fig. 5). The building's three longrooms are oriented northwest-southeast and are parallel to Wall 29. A broadroom is located at the rear, in the northwestern part of the building. The building contained some pottery, including lamps and a collared-rim pithos (Zertal 1986/87: 112). The relationship between Areas A and B does not have a direct stratigraphical relationship, though both areas are connected by Wall 32 and are "covered by the unified plan of Stratum IB" (Zertal 1986/87: 112). Hence, their connection is implicit.

The presence of a four-room house raises the issue of ethnicity. Zertal notes that "the four-room house is considered characteristic of the settling Israelites" (Zertal 1986/87: 112). When the four-room house sprang up in the hill-country on both sides of
Iron I, early excavators proposed that it was a new, specifically “Israelite” form. Yigal Shiloh was a pioneer of this interpretation (1970: 180-190). Critics claim to have found a few of these style houses at non-Israelite locations (Megiddo, Philistia, et al.) (see the citations in Edelman: 1996: 44-5), bringing the theory under question. Some of the examples presented by critics do not, however, fall within the four-room house category – their overall configuration is completely different. In other cases, such as Building B at Tall al-‘Umayri, the four-room house design is clear (Herr 2000: 167-179). Younker has recently suggested that, “in light of the various traditions of Israelites living outside their homeland (e.g., Ruth's family in Moab), the question should perhaps remain open for the present” (Younker 2003a: 371-2). Regardless of its origins, the four-room house achieved a dominant position within Israelite architecture during the Iron Age. In exploring the reasons for this, Bunimovitz and Faust have recently made a convincing case that the four-room house may be understood to be not only an ethnic marker, but, more than that, “a symbolic expression of the Israelite mind – that is, their ethos or world-view” (Bunimovitz and Faust 2002: 36). Zertal argues that "the fact that a four-room house was unearthed in Stratum II at Mount Ebal already in the second half of the 13th century gives support to its Israelite origins" (Zertal 1986/87: 113).

If Area A is understood as a cultic installation, then the nearby four-room house may have been the residence of those who serviced it. Sanctuaries often had residential houses located near them to house cultic personnel. For example, a multi-roomed house with a courtyard stood near Building 5988, a Late Bronze Age sanctuary in Shechem Field IX (Bull et al. 1965: 11). The house and the sanctuary were separated only by an alley, which provided access to the sanctuary. A residential complex located near the
Late Bronze Age sanctuary at Tell Deir 'Alla contained specialized objects, suggesting that the complex housed cultic personnel (Franken 1969: 19-20; 1975: 322). In Stratum II of the Mt. Ebal site, Areas A and B, taken together, appear to be a modest cultic site with a four-room house that may have "served as a residence for the people who were in charge of the cultic place on the ridge above" (Zertal 1986/87: 151).

**Stratum IB**

**Area A**

The primary features of Stratum IB are its central structure, the surrounding walls, courtyards, a double wall between the courtyards, and a number of installations around the structure. These will each be discussed in turn.

**The Central Structure**

The main feature of Stratum IB was a sizeable structure built of large, unhewn stones, located in Area A (Figs. 11-12). This central structure rises 3.27 meters above the bedrock, and its corners are oriented towards the four compass points with less than 1 degree of error (Zertal 1986/87: 113). The outer dimensions of the structure are:

- Wall 15 (northeast): 8.75 m
- Wall 9 (southwest): 9.00 m
- Wall 14 (northwest): 7.00 m
- Wall 8 (southeast): 7.00 m

Each of these walls is approximately 1.4 m wide, producing a space inside the structure of 30 square m. This interior space was then further divided into two extended spaces by Walls 16 and 13, with an opening between them (Fig. 11). These inner walls are
Figure 11. The central structure of Stratum IB (Area A) (Zertal 1986/87: 114, fig. 5).
constructed to the same height as the exterior walls. The main structure at Ebal was filled with layers containing earth, stones, ashes, animal bones, and potsherds – each in different combinations (Zertal 1986/87: 113-14) (Fig. 13). Kempinski wrote that "this fill appeared to me to be simply destruction debris from the destroyed watchtower. Or it could have been deliberately laid to create a surface or podium on which to build the tower in a later period" (Kempinski 1986: 48). Instead of consisting of random collapse, however, four distinct layers were recognized within the fill. These were labeled A-D, from bottom to top (Fig. 14).

A. Pure black ash, containing numerous animal bones and sherds. This material made up a thin, evenly spread layer over the floor of Stratum II, primarily in the western and eastern parts of the structure.

B. Primarily made up of stones and earth, with a few bones and sherds, and measuring about 60 cm thick.
C. This layer, consisting of 60 cm of pure black ash, had a large concentration of animal bones and pottery.

D. The final layer was primarily comprised of stones, possibly a rough paving designed to seal the contents of the structure.

Zertal has concluded that "the layers inside the structure were apparently all laid at the same time, since they are evenly spread throughout (except at the sides from which they were poured), and the sherds in all of them are homogeneous" (Zertal 1986/87: 114). Outside, near the eastern corner of the main structure, an accumulation of material was found which was "identical in nature to Layer C of the fill inside the structure, and likewise containing many cattle bones" (Zertal 1986/87: 115). It seems, therefore, "that this deposit originated from the fill material inside the structure and spilled out when its eastern corner collapsed" (Zertal 1986/87: 115).

Anson Rainey argued that "an altar would not be filled with animal bones" (1986: 66), and that "you do not dig rooms or ash pits in an altar" (2005). It is true that this feature of the central structure is without parallel in the corpus of known altars in ancient Syria-Palestine. This argument is based on the understanding of the site as a three-phase village, which will be examined in chapter 3, and on biblical textual understandings of altar architecture, which will be examined in chapter 4.

Kempinski has argued that the Mt. Ebal site should be understood as a three-phase village (Kempinski 1986: 42, 44-49), an argument which shall be examined in detail in chapter 3. Kempinski argues that the central structure at Mt. Ebal was the second of three phases, and should be understood as a two-room or three-room house. Phase 3 followed the destruction of phase 2, after which the inhabitants sought to improve security by
Figure 13. The "fill" inside the central structure (Zertal 1985: 30).

Figure 14. Layers A-D of the "fill" within the central structure. Section C-C (Stratum IB). (Zertal 1986/87: 118, fig. 8).
building a watchtower atop the ruins of the phase 2 domestic structure. The central structure, therefore, according to Kempinski, is to be understood as the foundation of a later watchtower. A. Rainey, G. Ahlström, V. Fritz, and W. Dever all followed this interpretation of the site (Rainey 1986: 66; Ahlström 1993: 366; Fritz 1993: 185; Dever 1992: 32-4).

The unusual central structure, however, does not seem to have had an entrance or a floor. It appears that the Stratum II surface would not have successfully functioned as a floor for the Stratum IB structure either, due to its irregularity and the fact that installation 94 creates an obstacle between Walls 13 and 16 (Zertal 1986/87: 115). Rather than having been built as an ordinary building, it appears that the Stratum IB structure was built as an elevated stage of some kind. Following its construction, it was apparently filled with deposits from Stratum II around the site.

An additional feature of the fill that should be mentioned are the 20 pieces of white plaster, about 3 cm thick and carefully organized in layers, that were found in the middle of the northern part of the fill (Zertal 1986/87: 113) (Fig. 15). Traces of plaster were also found in Area B in both Stratum II and Stratum IA. The use of plaster for interiors, and hydraulic plaster for cisterns and other water installations, did not become widespread in Palestine until the Hellenistic period (Reich 1992a: 9). Prior to that time, it appears to have been used primarily in association with official structures (e.g., fortifications) or sacred areas, which are often set apart from the residence of the average town dweller by the use of uncommon building materials (among other things). A number of sites where plaster was utilized in a sacred area have been discovered in
Palestine ranging across several periods. In the Middle Bronze IIC, a *favissae* set into the floor of the inner chamber of the Fortress Temple at Shechem was plastered (G. E. Wright 1965: 87-91) and the surface in front of the *stelae* at the Gezer High Place was plastered (Dever 1973: 68-70). In the Late Bronze Age, in the Field B monumental building at Tall al-‘Umayri, a cultic niche was found coated with a thin layer of plaster. The niche contained five natural limestone standing stones securely set into a stepped layer of thick plaster (Bramlett 2005: 233). An offering bench along the rear wall of the Stratum VIIA Temple 2048 (LBA) was covered with a layer of rough stones and plaster (Kempinski 1989: 183). At Tell Safut, in the Baq‘ah Valley, a room containing several cultic objects, including a footed ceramic vessel and a bronze figurine of a seated deity,
was coated with red plaster (Wimmer 1997: 448-50). The floor and altar of Building 5988, in Shechem Field IX, was plastered (Bull et al. 1965: 11). The walls of the Stratum XI sanctuary at Tel Mevorakh were thickly plastered (Stern 1984: 4-6). The floor of the Stratum III sanctuary at Jaffa was plastered. Very little plaster has been found in Iron Age I, though it does appear in cultic contexts in some sites. These include a brick altar in Area G of Stratum XIII Ashdod (M. Dothan 1979: 127-28) and a courtyard associated with the Stratum X sanctuary at Tel Qasile (A. Mazar 1980: 47-56). While the appearance of plaster at Mt. Ebal does not necessarily imply a cultic identification, it certainly contributes to the uniqueness of the site in its Iron Age I setting.

The Surrounding Wall Complex

The central structure was bordered on three sides by supplementary walls (Fig. 11). These were all the same height and approximately 80 cm below the top of the main building (Fig. 16). Wall 20 is parallel to Wall 14 of the main structure, Wall 12 is parallel to Wall 8, Wall 21 runs generally in the same direction as Wall 12, and Walls 7 and 10 parallel interior Wall 9. These walls create a veranda-like ledge around the central structure (Zertal 1986/87: 115-16). These features of the main structure have not been contested.

Figure 16. Walls bordering the central structure (from Zertal 1986/87: 116, fig. 7).
The Courtyards

Well-paved, squarish courtyards lie in front of the central structure on the northern and southern sides (Fig. 11) and appear to have been integral parts of its architectural design. The southern courtyard lies inside Walls 2, 5, 58, and 10, and measures 6 x 8 m on the outside and 35 square m. on the inside. The northern courtyard is surrounded by Walls 4, 3, and 7, measures 6 x 6.6 m on the inside and is about 20 square m in area. The northern courtyard appears to have been entered by three steps, "built along the width of the courtyard" (Zertal 1986/87: 117). Wall 3 (Fig. 11) appears to have been the top step of this broad stairway, built "on the same level as the paving of the northern courtyard" (Zertal 1986/87: 117). It is not clear whether the southern courtyard had an entrance.

Each of the courtyards contained a number of stone installations that had been built into the paving (Fig. 11). In the southern courtyard, Locus 17 contained ash and animal bones that had been in some measure burned; Installation 53 contained the remains of a jar; and Installation 51 contained an intact whole juglet that had been positioned on a horizontal stone. Installations in the northern courtyard held a complete juglet (Locus 42), ash and animal bones (Locus 64), a whole three-handled jar-jug (Locus 24A) and an entire three-handed jug (Locus 24) (Zertal 1986/87: 116-17).

In addition to the Installations, four rings of stones encircling flat stones in their centers were discovered on the top of the pavement within the courtyards. Each of these measured approximately 1 m in diameter. The purpose of these encirclements remains unknown (Zertal 1986/87: 117).
The Double Wall ("Ramps") Between the Courtyards

Walls 2 and 7 are parallel and rise diagonally from the southwest to the top of the central structure (Fig. 11, Fig. 17). Wall 2 is 7 m long and 1.2 m wide. From ground level, where it adjoins Walls 3 and 5, it rises at a gradient of 22 degrees until it abuts Wall 9. Since Wall 2 is an integral part of Walls 3 and 5, "which in turn are part of the surrounding wall complex, it appears that all these elements were built in the same phase" (Zertal 1986/87: 117). Wall 7, on the other hand, has no clear purpose, and "it may have served as a secondary ramp leading up to the ledges of the main structure" (Zertal 1986/87: 117).

Zertal interpreted Wall 2 as a "ramp" instead of as a normal partitioning wall. This conclusion was based on the disparity between the inner and outer ends of the wall. "Were it an ordinary wall, its outer end would have joined walls of approximately the same height as the main structure, whereas Walls 3 and 5 are low 'framewalls,' whose function was to retain the floors of the open courtyard" (Zertal 1986/87: 117).

The interpretation of this double-wall as a "ramp" drew strong objections from A. Kempinski, who argued that it was much too narrow for such usage. The double-wall is just over three feet wide, Kempinski notes, which "would be a dangerous passageway whether a ramp or steps. Imagine climbing up to the altar by so narrow a passage, especially if one was taking a sheep, goat or cow up with him" (Kempinski 1986: 45). Alternatively, Kempinski understood the structure as "nothing more than a wall of a room or courtyard that slopes down the hill" (Kempinski 1986: 45). The reason for the greater height of the double-wall at its closest point to the central structure was that there it was

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protected from the falling debris when Kempinski’s reconstructed phase two tower collapsed (Kempinski 1986: 45). The portion of the wall farthest from the central structure, therefore, was cut down in the collapse, while the wall closest to the main building was left preserved to a greater height, hence the appearance of a slope. This damage pattern is "a common phenomenon in archaeological excavations" (Kempinski 1986: 45).

In reply to Kempinski’s argument, Zertal explained that "the ramp cannot under any circumstances be a wall" (Zertal 1986b: 51). He explained that "the steps that provided access into the courtyards show that there could never have been a freestanding wall where the ramp is because there were no walls on the western (outside) line of the
courtyards" (Zertal 1986b: 51). Zevit has argued that "the structural elements which Kempinski disassociated from each other in his proposed three-phase schematic history are actually bonded together in the original construction project and are not to be separated or disassociated from each other" (Zevit 2001: 197, n. 121). Coogan agrees that the structure under question was "a wall which may have served as a ramp leading to the top of the filled chamber" (Coogan 1987: 2).

The Installations

North, south, and east of the main structure were discovered 70 to 80 apparatuses that Zertal termed "installations." These consist of stone-bordered circles, squares, or rectangles, as well as of irregular shapes, that range in diameter from ca. 30 cm to 70 cm (Zertal 1986/87: 117) (Fig. 18). These are intermingled and, in some cases, built over each other. Zertal suggests that "they probably represent at least two stages of use (Strata II and IB), but their stratigraphic relation to each other is not always clear" (Zertal 1986/87: 118). These small structures were concentrated in the north, and "about half of them contained vessels or parts of vessels: pithoi, jars, bowls, jugs, and a few cooking pots" (Zertal 1986/87: 118). Some of these were votive vessels. Scarab 2 was found in one of these structures associated with Walls 17, 44, and 22 (see below). Some of the apparatuses were empty and none contained any ash or bone remains (Zertal 1986/87: 118).

Zertal concluded that, "in view of their great number, their concentration around the main structure and the presence of votive vessels, we interpret these installations as places for visitors to a sacred place to leave their offering vessels" (Zertal 1986/87: 118). In his comparison of the Ebal site with other Iron I sites, Gilmour hypothesizes that,
"from [Zertal's] description they sound like small silos" (Gilmour 1995: 116). Silos were a key means by which the central hill-country settlers adapted to their new environment, and they have been discovered in most of the Israelite settlement sites, including Dan, Tell Deir Alla, Tel Zeror, 'Izbet Sartah and Tell Beit Mirsim. Borowski (2002: 71-2) distinguishes between two types of subterranean storage facilities: grain-pits and silos. Grain-pits are the most ubiquitous, and have been discovered at both southern and northern sites. Grain-pits are usually located in close relationship to domestic areas of dwellings, and are often up to five feet in diameter and up to or over three feet deep. In Stratum II at 'Izbet Sartah, dozens of silos, crowded together, surrounded a four-room house (Finkelstein 1988: 75, 265). In Stratum III of Iron I Beth Shemesh, grain-pits were
located inside the houses (Herzog 1992b: 237). This was also the case at Shechem, where
the main living room contained a grain-pit and, in the kitchen, next to a saddle quern and
grinding stone for flour, another grain-pit was located (Toombs and Wright 1963: 39).
The size of these pits varies. At 'Izbet Sarta, where these pits (Finkelstein uses the term
"silos") were particularly prolific, the capacity was very large, with silos typically
ranging from 1 to 2 m in diameter, lined with stones, and either paved with small pebbles
or built directly on bedrock (Finkelstein 1988: 265). Borowski concludes that "the close
proximity of these installations to dwelling areas, where domestic activities like cooking
took place, indicates that they were constructed to allow ready access to a family's store
of grain for their daily needs" (Borowski 2002: 73).

Borowski's second category of subterranean storage facilities is silos, which he
distinguishes from grain-pits by their larger size and proximity to public areas and
structures (Borowski 2002: 73). Silos were typically lined with stones or plastered, and
they were designed for the storage of quantities of grain much larger than that held by the
domestically used grain-pits. Borowski cites examples from Beth-Shemesh, Hazor, and
Megiddo, where each of the facilities was much larger in size and were located in areas
that seem to suggest institutional or governmental ownership. The silo at Beth-Shemesh,
for example, was built next to a large building the excavators termed the "residency,"
which resembled a citadel. This silo was about 7 m in diameter and 5.7 m deep. The
excavators speculated that the "residency" may have been the dwelling of the district
governor, and that the silo may have been connected with the city's economic
organization (Grant and Wright 1939: 71, cited by Borowski 2002: 74). Both of the silos
at Hazor and Megiddo suggest similar relationships to governmental or administrative
structures, and their sizes are reflective of such roles, with Hazor measuring at 5 m deep and Megiddo at 7 m deep (Borowski 2002: 74). Borowski concludes that "the large size of the silos described above suggests that they were not owned by an individual but by a large social organization, such as the state... Therefore, on the basis of size and location I suggest that these structures were the property of institutions and should be distinguished from grain-pits by the term *silos*" (Borowski 2002: 74-5).

But the size and arrangement of the el-Burnat "silos" do not conform to the typical construction or arrangement of these silos. The stone-bordered circles around the central structure are tiny in comparison to both the typical grain-pit and the silo. Despite the objections raised by Gilmour to the identification of these apparatuses as "installations," Zertal's interpretation of them as "installations" for the placement of pottery vessels around a cultic structure seems to be the most straightforward understanding. While many of the vessels found in these installations were non-cultic (pithoi, jars, bowls, jugs and cooking pots), the presence of non-cultic pottery in the apparatuses does not, however, mitigate against their identification as cultic installations.

As R. Amiran (1970: 302) has noted, "many ordinary household vessels were also used for cultic purposes in temples and sanctuaries, to judge from the abundance of such common pottery found among the furniture, for example, of the Early Bronze III sanctuary at Ai, or in the Late Bronze Temple at Lachish, or in the Iron II A (the Solomonic Stratum) house-shrine at Megiddo. These domestic vessels, when found in temples, appear also to have had a cultic function." As he noted in his preliminary report, "the custom of placing pottery vessels around a ritual structure has deep roots in Near Eastern traditions." Zertal cites examples of this practice from the Middle Bronze to Late...
Bronze Ages from all over the Near East, from the western Mediterranean to the southern Levant (Zertal 1986/87: 118-19).

**Area B: Courtyard 139 and Entrance Structure 220**

Whereas Area B was a domestic area, including a four-room house, in Stratum II, it was turned into a large quad (Locus 139) in Stratum IB (Fig. 19). This quad, or courtyard, served as "a kind of platform in front of the main complex" (Zertal 1986/87: 119), with a broad staircase at its northern end (Entrance 220).

During Stratum IB the domestic area was filled and leveled for the construction of the Stratum IB paved courtyard and entryway. In addition, Wall 32 was built on bedrock, separating the central structure from the courtyard. Locus 139 and Entrance 220 are stratigraphically connected (Zertal 1986/87: 120). Entrance 220 is 7.5 x 9.0 m with a northwest southeast axis, is made up of Wall 70 and Wall 71, and includes three steps constructed and paved with stone slabs. This entryway does not fit the normal paradigm for Iron Age I entrance passages and gateways. In Iron I settlements arranged according to the *khatser* (דשא) plan, "the entrance was placed in a space intentionally left between two houses and was sometimes guarded by two rooms that made the passage narrower (Herzog 1992b: 233). While entrances known from Iron II are typically always fortified gate entrances, such as at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer (Barkay 1992: 307), monumental structures and fortified gates are virtually unknown at the Israelite settlement sites (Mazar 1990a: 344). Instead, entryways are usually simple and narrow. The entryway at 'Izbet Sartah, for example, was on the eastern side of the site and "through a narrow opening
Figure 19. Plan of Stratum IB (Zertal 1986/87: 120, fig. 9).
between two Monolithic jambs" (Finkelstein 1988: 74), which then led onto a paved atrium.

At another Iron I site, the "Bull Site," Mazar has proposed a possible entrance on the eastern side of the elliptical wall, where "one can observe remains of narrower walls running east-west" (Mazar 1982: 33). The entrance to el-Burnat does not fit into these patterns. It is unusually wide (7 m) and seems designed to facilitate the simultaneous entry of multiple individuals. This, and the lack of defensive walls, led Zertal to conclude that Entrance 220 was designed for a ceremonial function (Zertal 1986/87: 121).

Area C

Area C was made up of an area of open ground – dubbed the "corral" – located on the northern part of the site near the intersection of Walls 78, 99, and 77, the last of which was an inner enclosure wall (Fig. 20). This area appears to have been built contemporaneously with the rest of Stratum IB, as the only sherds discovered were of Iron Age I and the enclosure walls seem to be part of the site design during this period (Zertal 1986/87: 122-3). Wall 78 measures 2.5 m wide and is constructed of medium sized fieldstones. Wall 99 is 1.7 m wide and probably stood at an original height of about 90 cm, and its foundations were laid in shallow trenches rather than on bedrock (Zertal 1986/87: 121). Wall 77 is the narrowest of the walls, measuring only 60 cm wide. "Because of the unusual entrance structure, the limited height of the walls and the fact that the weakest wall was built on the weakest line" (Zertal 1986/87: 123), Zertal interpreted these walls as "enclosure walls" rather than as defensive walls.
Figure 20. Area C (Zerral 1986/87: 122, fig. 10).
Fortifications are seldom found in Iron Age I strata in ancient Israel. A "massive and well built" double outer wall enclosed the site of Giloh on at least its southern, eastern, and northeastern sides (A. Mazar 1981: 12-18), but this appears to be exceptional in this early period. Though fortifications became common in the Iron Age II, close parallels to the fortifications at Giloh do not appear until the end of the 11th-century BCE, at Tell el-Fül (Lapp 1993: 445-8). At most early Israelite sites, the settlements were arranged in a khatser (כַּחַסר) plan, with the houses arranged in a ring with the backs of the houses forming something of a protective belt (Herzog 1992b: 233). At sites arranged in this plan, the walls were always either formed or abutted by buildings. Surrounding walls were seldom, if ever, built to encircle vacant ground.

The one Iron Age I site where such a similar phenomenon occurs is at A. Mazar's "Bull Site," located on the top of a ridge in the north Samaria hills (Mazar 1982: 27-42). The site consisted of a wall surrounding an elliptical area, measuring 21 m east to west and 23 m from south to north (Fig. 21). Almost no remains were found on the northern side of the site (Mazar 1982: 33), and the primary find in the southern area was a stone installation identified as a bāmāh, or offering altar (Mazar 1982: 33-5). The site was devoid of any other buildings, structures, or installations. Based on the location, site design, and physical remains from the site, Mazar concluded that the site was "a cult place composed of a massive stone enclosure with certain installations inside" (Mazar 1982: 34). While some scholars have contested the cultic nature of the site (Coogan 1987: 1-8), Mazar seems to have successfully defended this interpretation (Mazar 1998: 45).

Kempinski compared the walls at the Mt. Ebal site with the walls at Giloh (1986: 44), implying that this similarity made el-Burnat unexceptional. As noted above,
Figure 21. Plan of the "Bull Site" (A. Mazar 1982: 34, fig. 5).
however, the walls are quite dissimilar. The walls at Giloh are massive, built of large stones laid in a double row, with a fill of smaller stones in between, anticipating the later casemate walls (A. Mazar 1981: 13). The walls of Giloh were preserved in some places to 1.85 m wide and 1 m high (see further A. Mazar 1981: 12-18). While the width of the Ebal walls are similar, their construction is, again, of medium sized stones, built very low and built on shallow trenches rather than on bedrock (see above). Fritz argued that the walls at the Ebal site "are a well known phenomenon from other sites of that period and can easily be understood in connection with animal husbandry" (Fritz 1993: 185). The design of a large site encompassed by a wall expressly for use as an animal pen, however, is unknown among Iron I settlement sites. Two types of sites facilitated the corralling of animals. The first was laid out as a cluster of pens. Herzog interprets the design at Giloh as a cluster of pens, where "the settlement . . . comprised five pens which served as dwellings for five families and their herds" (Herzog 1992b: 232). He suggests that "similar pens [probably] existed at other sites in the hill country" (Herzog 1992b: 232). The other type of site facilitating the corralling of animals was the "enclosed settlement," where the entire settlement was arranged in a khatser (כְּחַסֶּר) plan, with the houses arranged in a ring with the backs of the houses forming something of a protective belt (Herzog 1992b: 233). In these enclosed settlements, "the centre of the settlement served as a court, probably for penning the herds of the residents at night" (Herzog 1992b: 233). In addition, at sites arranged in this plan, the walls were always either formed or abutted by buildings. The walls at the Ebal site do not correspond with known features of sites where animal husbandry was practiced.
The walls at el-Burnat do not seem to have served a clear purpose other than to divide the site into demarcated areas. This comports with numbers 3, 6, and 13 of Zevit's physical/behavioral correlates.

**Stratum IA**

In Stratum IA, parts of the main structure in Area A were covered over by stones (Zertal 1986/87: 123), as well as portions of Area B (Zertal 1986/87: 124). While it is possible that the accumulation may have accrued due to field cleaning in later periods, it appears instead that the stones were deliberately placed on top of Areas A and B. This conclusion is based on the fact that a new wall, Wall 1 (Fig. 11), was added in Stratum IA which was "not an organic part of the structure" (Zertal 1986/87: 123-4). Wall 1 appears to have been built for the sole purpose of supporting the stones placed on top of Wall 12. Wall 1 was built atop the southeastern ledge of the main structure, thereby obstructing access onto it, which affirms that the ledges went out of use in Stratum IA. Similar constructions were found on the northwestern side of the central structure.

Based on the non-utilitarian nature of the accumulation of stones in Stratum IA and their uniform placement over the site, Zertal concluded that "it seems that before the final abandonment the site was deliberately 'buried' by a layer of stones" (Zertal 1986/87: 124). Zertal notes that "the protection of sacred places by burying them is a well-known phenomenon in the Near East, including Israel" (Zertal 1992c: 256). In a study by D. Ussishkin (cited by Zertal 1992c: 256), the writer postulated the existence of "a Syro-Hittite ritual custom of burying monuments" (Ussishkin 1970: 124). While some monuments were destroyed, incorporated in secondary usages, or carried away by conquerors, Ussishkin notes that in cases from Alalakh, Hazor, Zincirli, and Arslantepe
near Malatya, gate-lions and royal statues seem clearly to have been intentionally buried in the ground with much care" (Ussishkin 1970: 124). In several of the cases examined, the burials required significant investiture of effort, "and the repetition of similar phenomena in four places . . . rules out the possibility that the parallelism in all cases is accidental. Therefore the existence of analogous ritual burials . . . seems to be established" (Ussishkin 1970: 127). This practice clearly prevailed in Canaan and throughout the Near East (Na'aman 1986: 274-75). Early examples include the burial of statues at the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar (Frankfort 1939: 3-4), while a more relevant example is found at the temples of Tel Qasile, where Favissa 125 seems to have been built for the express purpose of burying cult objects when they went out of use (A. Mazar 1980: 25, 73).

This custom was not restricted to the burial of monuments, but appears to have included the covering over of sacred sites in their entirety. At Tel Arad, the stelae and the horned incense altars at the entrance to the inner sanctum were all overturned and the entire area was covered with a deep fill at the end of Stratum VII, when the temple went out of use (Dever 2006: 312). At Megiddo, a tenth-century shrine (Shrine 338) usually dated to the Solomonic period contained an offering table and bench and six cultic stelae, along with horned and round stone altars and a stone basin in the courtyard (Ussishkin 1989: 154162). The shrine was originally excavated by G. Schumacher, who discovered that even after the shrine had gone out of use, it remained in complete and perfect order. In a recent analysis of Schumacher's findings, Ussishkin (1989: 154-66) summarizes:

The walls of the chamber still stood to a height of about 2.50 m.; the two monolithic stelae and the four 'cult columns' – the latter made of a number of superimposed stones – were found secured in the ground and standing erect; the 'idol' was found in situ on top of the southernmost 'column'; various clay vessels
and other objects placed in the shrine were uncovered whole. Most significantly of all, Schumacher found the entrance to the shrine "blocked by a wall in a later period."

As Ussishkin notes, the only entrance to the shrine was blocked and the shrine was deliberately filled in with earth with everything inside left as it was. This burial was quite intentional, and required some investment of labor. Ussishken (1989: 166) reviews the evidence as follows:

We have to assume that the chamber, or at least its upper part, was filled from above, ether through the windows or after openings had been made in the roof. As the walls have been preserved slightly above the level of the tops of the stelae, we can conclude that the shrine was meant to be buried to that level. It seems probable that the walls were also covered by earth from outside, otherwise they would have not been preserved through the millennia to that height.

The evidence shows that the shrine was deliberately buried once it had gone out of use.

The purpose of such ritual burials, both of statues and of cult sites themselves, is not completely clear. In cases where a site was destroyed by invading forces, the inhabitants may have buried their statues to prevent their destruction by invaders. Conversely, conquerors may have buried the monuments in an effort to eradicate their magic powers (Ussishkin 1970: 128). In sites where a shrine or cella was covered over, the purpose seems to have been to prevent other usage. The unusual covering over of el-Burnat in Stratum IB may have been similar to that of these parallels. Since there is no destruction level at the site, the covering may be explained as an attempt to prevent further usage.

**Pottery**

The pottery of the Ebal site included bowls, kraters, cooking pots, jars, jugs and juglets, pithoi, and chalices. Basically, "the ceramic inventory at Mount Ebal is a
homogeneous, well dated and short-lived assemblage" (Zertal 1986/87: 140). Zertal summarizes: "About 70 percent of the pottery vessels are large collar-rim storage jars, which are known to have been the principle storage vessels of the newly settled Israelites. About 20 percent of the pottery vessels are jugs and chalices. The balance are small vessels, mostly votive, specially made by hand for ritual use. We found only a small quantity of common domestic pottery, such as cooking pots" (Zertal 1985: 34-5). Zertal has candidly observed that 3 percent of the pottery of Stratum II was in the Late Bronze Age tradition (Zertal 1986/87: 137). He explains that "this stage apparently represents the interrelationship between Israelites and Canaanites during the 13th century B.C.E." (Zertal 1992c: 257). "The rest of the pottery," Zertal notes, "was typical 'Israelite'," resembling the inventory of Giloh, 'Izbet Sartah, Raddanah, Shiloh, Israeliite Ai, Ta'anach, etc." (Zertal 1992c: 257). Finkelstein, however, has argued that the pottery chronology at the Ebal site must be understood differently. He explains that "chronologically, the ceramic assemblage must be understood to reflect material accumulated throughout the entire period of activity in each level. According to the material presented so far, the end of Stratum II may be dated to the middle or even the second half of the 12th century, and Stratum I shortly after" (Finkelstein 1988: 85). He notes especially the three-handled jug, the only parallels for which were found in Qasile Stratum X and Shiloh in the first half of the 11th century BCE (Finkelstein 1988: 85; Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: 158; see discussion below). Finkelstein's argument, however, ignores the fact that pottery sequences always overlap. Pottery forms do not disappear homogeneously, only to be replaced by other homogeneous pottery forms. Rather, pottery forms only gradually decline and give way to others (Lapp 1992: 433-4). Pitkänen notes that, "if Late Bronze
vessels were still attested at Mount Ebal, it is conceivable that the combination jar-jug in question had a reasonably long period of use even though it is rare among finds” (Pitkänen 2004: 180). Aside from the issue of dating the site, the pottery repertoire contributes to the discussion of whether the site may or may not be identified as cultic in nature. The presence of collared-rim storage jars has been a point of some controversy. As mentioned above, about 70 percent of the pottery vessels are large collared-rim pithoi (Fig. 22) which, Zertal writes, "are known to have been the principle storage vessels of the newly settled Israelites" (Zertal 1985: 34). This identification, first made by Albright (1937: 25; 1971: 118), has been contested (Edelman 1996: 42-4 and bibliography there). Despite the protestations, there seem to be good reasons for continuing to regard the collared-rim storage jar as "Israelite" (Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996: 93; Killebrew 2001: 377-98; 177-81). When Kempinski first visited the site in 1982, he observed a large, collared-rim pithos that "appeared sunk into the floor inside the [central] structure" (Kempinski 1986: 44) (Fig. 23). Kempinski mused that "one would hardly expect to find a whole storage jar inside an altar – if it were an altar!" (Kempinski 1986: 44). Zertal had already emphasized that the installations at the bottom of the central structure belonged to an earlier stage of the site – Stratum II (1985: 49). He reemphasized this in his response to Kempinski (Zertal 1986b: 49) and in the preliminary report for the Ebal site (Zertal 1986/87: 134). If the understanding of el-Burnat as a two-phased site including Stratum II and Stratum IB is correct, then the collared-rim jar at the bottom of the central structure does not contribute toward its identification as a domestic structure but, rather, predates it. The aforementioned collared-rim pithos was certainly not the only one discovered at the site. As mentioned above, they account for about 70 percent of the
Figure 22. Collared-rim storage pithos (adapted from Zertal 1986/87: 131, fig. 13).

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pottery vessels. Ahlström argued that the preponderance of collared-rim storage jars runs counter to the identification of el-Burnat as a cultic site (Ahlström 1993: 366). A prevalence of collared-rim pithoi, however, seems irrelevant to the question of whether the Ebal site is or is not cultic in nature. Zertal notes in his report that "the wide representation of the collared-rim pithos in all the hill country Iron Age I sites suggests that this vessel was used as the main container for storing water. Apparently, few water cisterns were hewn by the new settlers in the 13th-12th centuries B.C.E. and they must have been dependent upon perennial water sources during the formative stage of their sedentarization" (Zertal 1986/87: 136). It appears that the rock-hewn and plastered cistern did not appear at settlement sites until the 11th century BCE and, until then, "the solution of the water problem of the early settlements can be found in the collared-rim pithoi"
If this understanding of water procurement and storage is correct, it seems logical that a high percentage of this vessel would appear at any settlement site, regardless of whether or not it was cultic in nature.

Cooking pots appear in very low numbers at el-Burnat in both Stata II and I. While cooking pots account for 15 to 20 percent at domestic sites like Giloh and 'Izbet Sartah, they comprise only 5 percent at the Mt. Ebal site. Zertal notes that "this may possibly be a characteristic of a cultic site, since the same phenomenon appears at Tell Qasile" (Zertal 1986/87: 129-30). There were no complete cooking pots discovered at Ebal, and the reconstructed data come solely from rim sherds, which will be discussed further in chapter 5.

There are several new and unique kinds of pottery that appear at el-Burnat: the three-handled jug and different kinds of votive vessels. These types are not found at sites of the same period, such as at Taanach, Tell el-Far'ah (N), Megiddo, Hazor, Giloh, and 'Izbet Sartah. This "may be due to the cultic nature of the site at Mount Ebal," which "may also account for the rarity of the cooking pots" (Zertal 1986/87: 142). The first is the three-handled jug, which is characterized by two loop handles on its body and another handle at its neck (Fig. 24). Six restorable three-handled jars were found at Mount Ebal, though "elsewhere it is very rare" (Zertal 1986/87: 132). The only parallel for this vessel, in Stratum II and IB (Zertal 1986/87: 134), with one completely restorable one from in fact, was found in a domestic building (no. 225) of Stratum X adjacent to the Philistine temple at Tell Qasile (Fig. 25). Mazar postulated that this building may have been a priestly dwelling (Mazar 1985a: 45, 75). Mazar describes the three-handled jug found there as "a unique combination of jar and jug," and notes that it "is unparallelled
elsewhere" (Mazar 1985a: 64). At el-Burnat, five of the six three-handled jars were found in the constructions Zertal interpreted as "installations." The rarity of this vessel, along with its appearance at a clear cultic site and the form of its usage at el-Burnat, may suggest its cultic nature.

There were two kinds of juglets at el-Burnat with a possible cultic usage. One is the small juglet with a pointed base (Fig. 25). Many sherds of this vessel were discovered in Stratum IB. This juglet was found in an installation and, therefore, may have been a votive vessel.

Another kind of juglet belongs to a grouping of juglets with a single handle that extends from the rim to the shoulder (Fig. 27). One of these juglets, found in Stratum IB, was able to be completely restored. This vessel has parallels in Megiddo VII-VI and Hazor XII (Zertal 1986/87: 140). This juglet was also found in an installation and
Figure 25. Three-handled jug from Tell Qasile (A. Mazar 1985: 63, fig. 49:1).
Figure 26. Votive juglet from Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1986/87: 145, fig. 18).
Fig. 27. Single-handled juglet from el-Burnat (Zertal 1986/87: 145, fig. 18).

may, therefore, have been a votive vessel deposited as an offering (Zertal 1986/87: 140).

Two vessels found in Stratum II seem clearly identified as chalices (Fig. 28). A chalice foot was found in Locus 157 (Fig. 27, top), the fill of the main structure. This chalice foot was made of light-colored, well-levigated clay, with an outward flaring rim. This chalice has parallels at Megiddo VII and Hazor XIII (Zertal 1986/87: 137), and varies in structure from the typical Iron Age I chalice. The second chalice (Fig. 28, bottom), also found in the fill of the central structure, has several parallels, including those from Megiddo VII and the Megiddo LB tombs, Hazor XIII, and Tel Mevorakh X (Zertal 1986/87: 137).
Gilmour (1995: 115) has raised valid questions about the pottery assemblage. He suggests that a brief comparison of aspects of the Mt Ebal site and other Iron I sites is appropriate at this point. If the pottery assemblages of five settlement sites are considered it is clear that the Mt Ebal assemblage falls neatly into the pattern of these sites. Zertal notes the relatively low proportion of cooking pots at Mt. Ebal as supportive of its cultic identity. Yet at 'Izbet Sartah III, where more domestic buildings have been excavated than at Giloh, for example, a very low proportion of cooking pots was also recorded. In a similar manner, the very low percentage of collared rim storejars at 'Izbet Sartah III does
not make it any less a settlement site. The fact that the site shares certain common forms of pottery with other non-cultic sites seems to be countered by the presence of new and unique forms, as well as the relatively high percentages of jugs, chalices, and small votive vessels. When the data are considered cumulatively, it does not appear to comport with a typical domestic assemblage. Gilmour agrees that "While there are no overtly cultic items such as cult stands or keroi in the assemblage, the quantitative analysis suggests it is not a domestic assemblage" (Gilmour 1995: 111). Coogan is in agreement that "significant numbers of elements of the ordinary domestic ceramic repertoire" are absent from the site (Coogan 1987: 2). Zevit also notes that, while the ceramic inventory is "conventional," it "does not exhibit a normal range of household utensils, while the spatial distribution of pottery over the site and in the installations is at odds with any known pattern of domestic use" (Zevit 2001: 201). Numbers 8, 10 and, though he does not cite it, 11, of Zevit's physical/behavioral correlates seem to comport with the pottery repertoire at el-Bumat.

**Stone and Metal Artifacts**

Stone containers and tools "present a picture relatively close to that known for other Iron Age I sites in the hill country" (Zertal 1986/87: 148), though there are important differences. Among the artifacts at el-Bumat were the usual querns, "basins," hammers, weight stones, and flint tools. An exceptional find was the pumice chalice from Pit 250 (discussed above).

In his discussion of flint tools, Zertal notes that flint sickle-blades are "conspicuous by their absence," since they are "typical of the agricultural Iron Age I sites" (Zertal 1986/87: 148). The sickle was indeed the principle tool for harvesting in
Iron Age Israel (Borowski 2002: 61-2), and flint sickle-blades have been found in Iron Age I strata at Tell Qasileh, Megiddo, Tell el-Fül, Tell Deir ‘Alla, Bethel, Beth-Shemesh, and other sites, and continued to be used in the Iron Age II (for references, cf. Borowski 2002: 62). Zertal notes that sickle-blades were found in most of the Iron Age I sites covered in the survey of Manasseh, hence the anomaly of their absence at el-Bumat. Interestingly, while sickle-blades were absent, "a number of flint knives, which are very rare in Iron Age I sites, were recovered" (Zertal 1986/87: 148). The absence of sickles and the presence of flint knives add to the unique character of the site of el-Bumat.

In the north side of the fill of the central structure, within layer C (Locus 249), a four-sided (sides A-D) trapezoidal stone seal was found. The seal, made of soft white limestone and decorated with drillings and grooves, shows poor workmanship and is poorly preserved. Sides C and D are of special interest. Side D is divided by two longitudinal lines crossed by three lines running breadthwise (Brandl 1986/87: 167, Fig. 1.1). This pattern is similar to the "grid pattern" that is particularly known from Iron Age I (Keel 1990: 380f.) but appears to have also been produced in the Iron Age II (Eggler et al. 2002: 270). A number of seals bearing this grid pattern have been found at Tall al-‘Umayri during the 1984-2000 excavation seasons (see ‘Umayri Nos. 39, 50, 64 Side A, 78; with additional drilling holes see ‘Umayri Nos. 14, 30, 58, 67). In some cases, the exact find spot of the ‘Umayri seals is not certain, making a definitive dating difficult (Eggler et al. 2002: 260).

Side C of the Ebal seal is particularly interesting. It is decorated with six lines that combine to form a rectangular structure, along with five drill marks (Brandl 1986/87: 167, Fig. 1.1) (Fig. 29). This seal bears some resemblance to ‘Umayri No. 50 (Eggler et
al. 2002: 271, Fig. 50), though the grid pattern there bears no borderline while the outside lines on the Ebal seal appear to form a rectangular shape (Brandl 1986/87: 171). The rectangular shape depicted on the Ebal seal is similar to the shape of the main building in Area A of Stratum IB, and may be intended as a depiction of the plan of the central structure (A. Zertal, personal communication). Scenes of sacred areas are common motifs
of stamp seals from a variety of contexts. The representation of a worshipper before cult symbols placed on an altar was a popular Neo-Babylonian motif (e.g., Eggler et al. 2002: 289, Fig. 75; Harding 1949: 351, Fig. 3; 1950: 46, No. 33, Pls. 13:2, 15:9; Wimmer 1987: 171f., Fig. 9; et al.), though these images are certainly stylized depictions and not site plans. Three Late Cypriote cylinder seals from Salamis seem to contain depictions of an altar in their centers (Mazoni 1986: Pis. 34:71, 72; 35:92). Of particular relevance may be the stone seal found in Stratum IX at Arad with a peculiar design that was interpreted as a representation of the general layout of the fortress (Aharoni 1968: 8) (Fig. 30). Aharoni (1968: 8) explained his interpretation of the glyptic as follows: "Visible are the wall, the narrow corridor between the store to the right and the temple to the left, the rectangular court and, behind it, the areas of the dwellings and workshops. The temple is depicted as a high, rounded structure. Had the temple really a rounded roof, or is this only an artistic expression of its outstanding importance?" If Aharoni’s understanding of the Arad seal is correct, it may be suggestive of an understanding of the glyptic on the Ebal seal as a plan of the central structure. It should be noted that the seal is decorated with dots or perforations similar to that found on the handles of the Ebal pottery (see above). If these markings on the pottery were indicative of some administrative significance (Finkelstein 1988: 287), and if Ebal were understood as a cultic site, then it may be that the Ebal seal had something to do with the cult practice or that it belonged to some cultic personnel. The discovery of the seal within Layer C of the fill of the central structure would seem to suggest an identification with this building.
Metal objects were found in abundance at el-Burnat. "Nearly fifty bronze, iron, silver and gold items were unearthed and registered in seven seasons. In comparison, only eight metal items were found in the large area excavated at 'Izbet Sartah" (Zertal 1986/87: 150). Of special interest were six bracelets of bronze, a "typical product of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Ages" (Zertal 1986/87: 150). Zertal cites parallels at 'Izbet Sartah and LB-IAI miners' shrine at Timna (Zertal 1986/87: 150). At the Timna Hathor mining sanctuary, many of these bracelets had apparently been deposited as votive offerings (Rothenberg 1993: 1483-4; 1983-84: Fig. 51). Like the flint knives, the abundance of these bronze bracelets and their parallels in clear contexts of sanctuary offerings adds to the picture of el-Burnat as a cultic site.

Faunal Remains

If el-Burnat was used for cultic purposes, which included animal sacrifices "then the faunal assemblage should reflect this and differ from that at living sites where animals were exploited for consumption, secondary products or labor" (Horwitz 1986/87: 173). The excavation yielded 2,862 bones, making it one of the largest samples ever studied in
Israel. Of these bone remains, 770 (27%) were identifiable. Analysis of these remains revealed that 96 percent (or 741 bones) of bone corpus represented four species of large mammals: sheep, goat, cattle, and fallow deer (Horwitz 1986/87: 173). The remaining 4 percent was comprised of marbled polecat, an unidentified small carnivore, hedgehog, tortoise, starred lizard, an unidentified reptile, mole rat, partridge, rock dove, an unidentified bird of prey, gray lag-goose, and an as yet unidentified species of fish. These remains were classified in eight provenances throughout the site, with a majority of them having been found in the main structure.

The Faunal Assemblage

Sheep and Goats

“Sheep and goat remains dominated the assemblage in all areas representing 65% of all the diagnostic bones” (Horwitz 1986/87: 174). The number of sheep/goat hind- and forelimbs present were almost equal.

Fallow Deer

“One of the most intriguing finds was the high incidence of fallow deer (Dama dama mesopotamica) remains, which comprised 10% of the total diagnostic bone sample” (Horwitz 1986/87: 174). These remains were highly concentrated in the main structure (20% of all bones identified from this provenance), and appear to have originated from at least six animals, one of which was male.
Cattle

Domestic cattle remains make up 21 percent of the total identifiable bone remains found at the Ebal site and, although they were present in all provenances, “there is a slightly higher concentration in the area of the main structure, northeast of the main structure (perhaps debris spilled from the fill of this structure) and west of the main structure . . . which may reflect some special activity preference” (Horwitz 1986/87: 174-5). Most of the cattle remains were from adult males.

Small Faunal Remains

Aside from the large mammals, 29 bones (4% of the diagnostic sample) represented other species (mentioned earlier). The rodent and reptile remains appear to be recent and are probably intrusive, but the fish, polecat, and bird bones seem to belong with the primary assemblage (Horwitz 1986/87: 176).

Molluscs and Shells

Various fragments were found, the most interesting of which is a fragment of a Mediterranean marine shell (*Glycymerys violacescens*), which was found west of the main structure (Horwitz 1986/87: 177).

Burnt Bones

There were 128 burnt bones (4% of the total bone sample) found, 57 (44%) of which came from the main structure and courtyards (Horwitz 1986/87: 177).
Cut Marks

"Cut marks were present on 25 bones (3% of the diagnostic material) from the site" (Horwitz 1986/87: 177). Three fallow deer antlers had deep cut marks, presumably from removing the antlers. "The cut marks on the bones of sheep, goats and cattle were primarily on lower foot bones such as metapodia, astragali, calcanea and phalanges. These cut marks take the form of parallel lines almost horizontal to the axis of the bone” (Horwitz 1986/87: 178).

Discussion of Faunal Assemblage

Horwitz brings out in her discussion the differences between the bone remains from the central structure and those from other parts of the site. She makes the following points regarding the central structure (Horwitz 1986/87: 178-179):

1. It contains a very high concentration of bone material.
2. Fallow deer make up a high concentration of the bone remains here – 21 percent compared to the 5 percent in all the other areas combined.
3. Fifty-seven of the 128 burnt bones recovered at the site were found in the main structure.
4. Nine out of the 25 bones with cut marks came from the central structure.
5. Fish remains were all from the main structure (but could have been an intrusive element).

Throughout the site, caprovines were the dominant group, followed by cattle and lastly by fallow deer. Horwitz explains that the data “suggest that this is not a function of
preservation or other such factors, but must reflect some difference in activity” at Ebal’s central structure (1986/87: 179).

Cut marks indicate that the animals were butchered or dismembered. Circular cut marks indicate the removal of skin. Other cutting is “indicative of butchery or dismemberment practices” (Horwitz 1986/87: 180) and “the burnt bones point to the use of fire, although it is impossible to tell whether this was the result of cooking, roasting, sacrificial burning or the burning of defleshed bones” (1986/87: 181).

There are a number of interesting differences between Ebal and other Iron Age habitation sites which Horwitz brings out as well.

1. *The species present.* Donkeys, horses, pigs, carnivores, and gazelles are all absent at Ebal. Absence of gazelle and pig is particularly interesting because they are present in the immediate vicinity of the site, as Liphschitz’s paleobotanical report shows (Liphschitz 1986/87: 191). Horwitz suggests that “the species represented and their frequencies suggest that only edible animals are present at Mount Ebal, while at the other sites animals possibly used for various purposes (such as equids) are present” (Horwitz 1986/87: 181). The proportion of remains from foreparts (Metatarsal, Metacarpal, Astragalus, Calcaneum, and Phalange) is higher at Ebal than at other Iron Age sites (1986/87: 182).

2. *Number and distribution of burnt or scorched bones.* In the Iron Age II levels in the City of David, only 8 out of 2,000 bones were scorched. At Ebal, 17 percent of the diagnostic sample (128 bones) is burned (Horwitz 1986/87: 182). Horwitz (1986/87: 183) writes:
This and the data from the City of David indicate that the burnt material from Mount Ebal is slightly, but not significantly, higher in proportion to the total bone sample. However, the most salient feature of the Mount Ebal burnt material is its concentration in the area of the main structure (57 of the 128 bones or 44% of the total burnt bone sample; Fig. 6A). This further suggests differences in activities between the various areas at the site.

Horwitz summarizes that the Ebal site reflects “a pastoral economy based primarily on caprovine herding and to a lesser extent cattle. In addition, the high proportion of hunted animals (fallow deer) supports the hypothesis of a nomadic or semi-nomadic society” (1986/87: 187). She suggests, however, that ”the Ebal faunal assemblage represents a narrow range of activities either in function or time” (Horwitz 1986/87: 187). Edelman suggests that “the presence of exotic materials and huge amounts of animal bones, including deer, tend to favor a cultic use for the site” (Edelman 1996: 50, n. 56).

Two Egyptianized Scarabs from Mt. Ebal

Two Egyptian-style scarabs were found at the Mt. Ebal site. These have been used to aid in establishing the Iron I date for the site. Before examining the scarabs themselves, a word of introduction about scarabs and their use in dating may be in order.

Background, Function, and Role of Scarabs in Dating

Scarabs, of Egyptian origin, were stone images of the black dung-beetle (Ateuchus sacer). The scarab was a representative of the sun-god, since the dung-beetle rolled a ball of dung across the ground in a way that recalled the way the sun-god moved the sun disk across the sky. In the hieroglyphic script, the picture of the scarab served to convey the idea of “being,” “becoming,” or “coming into existence.” This probably explains why the scarab-shaped seal continued to be very popular as jewelry, talismans,
and seals for centuries after they first appeared in the Sixth Dynasty. Scarabs used as private seals would be inscribed with the name and title of the owner, often an official, and may therefore be useful for dating purposes. However, there are complicating factors. Elizabeth Platt (Platt 1992: 829) explains:

The seal does not necessarily bear the name of the owner but can indicate relationship such as subordinate officer or servant. Also, jewelry items can be heirlooms and their styles can be replicated in commemoration or in archaizing effect along with the modern and creatively contemporary in the same workroom. This is especially true for the most popular single kind of scarab in Palestine and Egypt: that with inscriptions relating to Thutmose III, the New Kingdom pharaoh during the greatest period of Egypt's empire, in LB I. His name was evidently regarded as potent centuries after his death and scarabs were treasured and made with his inscriptions for many years.

In addition, many scarabs appear to have been inscribed with royal names because of protective powers assumed to be inherent to those names. The name of the 15th-century pharaoh, Thutmose III, mentioned by Platt above, serves as an example (Horn 1966: 509-10):

That name, *Mn-hpr-R* 'meaning “May (the sun-god) Re continue to bring into existence,” expressed the meaning of the beetle so well that scarabs with that name were copied thousands of times for centuries. During his excavations at Giza, G. A. Reisner found scarabs of this king on mummies of the second century A.D. on which they had been used as protective amulets sixteen centuries after the death of Thutmose III.

For this reason, scarabs "are a poor criteria for chronological purposes (Horn 1966: 510)"

S. Horn (1966: 510) explains:

At best they may serve to indicate the earliest date that can be given to the archaeological context in which they were found. Many archaeological reports suffer from the misconception that dated scarabs can help to settle historical questions of archaeological remains.

For the aforementioned reasons, we must exercise caution in assessing the contribution of the two Egyptianized scarabs to the date of the Mt. Ebal site.
Scarab 1

Scarab 1, found in Area A of the Ebal excavation, measures 17.5 mm in length, 13 mm in width, and 7.5 mm in height. It is a mold formed of faience with a yellowish glaze, and has been described as careless in its workmanship. Typical of scarabs, this one was pierced through prior to having been fired and, while it has a chip in its base, it is in an otherwise excellent state of preservation.

The outline of the beetle on the back is very simplified – "a bare outline of the anatomy of the beetle it is intended to represent" – (Fig. 31) and, according to the report, is common from the 12th to 26th Dynasties and later (Brandl 1986/87: 166). The execution of the side of the scarab helps to narrow the time frame. It seems to have been "carelessly executed, with only two vertical lines representing the three legs" (Brandl 1986/87: 166). This pattern is reported to have been characteristic of the 19th Dynasty in particular. The base has a symmetrical pattern enclosed within an oval frame. The pattern is comprised of a four-petal rosette, two of which are decorated with diagonal striation. Between each of the four petals is a cobra suspended from a coiled branch. Two of the cobra heads are well formed, while the other two are more stylized.
This pattern may be important for dating the scarab, as it has few parallels. The locations of the finds and their parallels are as follows:

1. **Egypt.** Tomb 202 in Cemetery E at Riqqeh produced a matching scarab (Engelbach 1915: plates XVIII; 92; XLVI; XLVIII). Despite some mixing of the contents of Tomb 202 with those of an adjacent tomb, the scarab is still believed to date to the 19th Dynasty, "as all five scarabs in Tomb 202 are dated to Ramesses II whereas the scarabs of adjacent Tomb 201 have a greater range" (Brandl 1986/87: 168).

2. **Israel.** A parallel was found in Tomb 914 at Tell el-Far‘ah, which is dated to the 19th Dynasty by two scarabs (Macdonald, Starkey, and Harding 1932: Plate XLVIII:23). One of these bears a shortened form of the name of Ramesses II, while the other bears the name of Merneptah, his son.

3. **Israel.** A second parallel was discovered at Tell el-Far‘ah, this one from Tomb 960, and spans the 19th and 20th Dynasties, as shown by scarabs with the names Ramesses II and Ramesses IV. This scarab is included in A.
Rowe’s 1936 catalogue of Egyptian scarabs, which dates it to the 19th Dynasty (Rowe 1936: No. 796).

4. *Israel.* This parallel comes from Megiddo (Loud 1948: Pl. 152, 169), and is also dated to the 19th Dynasty.

5. *Israel.* Tomb 4 at Yavneh, dated to the 19th Dynasty by four additional scarabs characteristic of that period, produced another parallel. Two of the four additional scarabs bear the name of Ramesses II – one in full and another in an abbreviated form (Unpublished: Nos. 60-950 to 60-954).

6. *Cyprus.* This final parallel comes from a tomb in Kition, in Cyprus, the end of which has been dated to ca. 1225 BCE (Leclant 1974: 149-150).

Brandl’s criteria for dating Scarab 1 are “its side type and the parallels to the motif on its base,” which, according to Rowe, “is dated exclusively to the 19th Dynasty” (Brandl 1986/87: 168). Brandl (1986/87: 168-9) concludes:

The parallels are all dated to Ramesses II and his 19th Dynasty successors, except for the scarab from Tomb 960 at Tell el-Far‘ah (S), which would, *prima facie,* indicate the continued production of the type into the reign of Ramesses IV of the 20th Dynasty. However, since there are no objects in this tomb datable to any of the kings between Ramesses II and Ramesses IV, we assume there was a gap in the use of the tomb. Of the two periods in which the tomb was used, the parallels indicate that the scarab is to be attributed to the first. In conclusion, Scarab No. 1 from Mount Ebal should be dated to the second half of the 13th century B.C.E.

**Scarab 2**

Scarab No. 2, found in the fifth season of excavation, measures 14.25 mm in length, 11 mm in width, and 6.5 mm in height, and is a mold formed of faience, coated with a white glaze, made with mediocre workmanship. Like Scarab No. 1, Scarab No. 2 was also pierced through, lengthwise, prior to having been fired. A chip has partly
damaged the design, but is otherwise well preserved. The back of Scarab 2 appears to have been “carefully executed in a highly naturalistic manner” and, according to Rowe, matches a type “common between the 12th and 25th Dynasties” (Brandl 1986/87: 169) (Fig. 32). A cartouche on the right side of the scarab encloses the name *Mn-hpr-R*, the prenommen of Thutmos III of the 18th Dynasty. An archer, squatting with a bow in hand and two ostrich feathers adorning his head, is depicted on the left side. The figure is the hieroglyph for “army,” “troop,” or “soldier” (Gardiner 1973: Sign list A-12). A lizard is located above the archer, which reads “much,” or “multitude” (Gardiner 1973: Sign list I-1). Beneath the archer is the sign for “lord” (Gardiner 1973: Sign list V-30). Brandl therefore translates the scarab title as follows: “Thutmos III, lord of many troops” (Brandl 1986/87: 169). He concludes that “the scarab thus belongs to the class of royal scarabs, and specifically to the subgroup of scarabs commemorating an event or title related to the king or to the royal family” (Brandl 1986/87: 169).

Brandl identifies four parallels, only one of which shares the same exact details. Three of the parallels are unprovenanced. The location of the finds and their parallels are as follows:

Figure 32. Scarab 2 (Brandl 1986/87: 167, Fig. 1).

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1. *The Timins collection.* This collection contains an exact parallel in both form and text, though its provenance is unknown (Newberry 1907: Pl. VIII:26).

2. *British Museum.* This scarab contains a royal name dating to the 18th Dynasty, along with an archer and a lizard (Hall 1913: no. 671). Unlike Ebal’s Scarab No. 2, in this case the cartouche is above the archer and the lizard is behind him.

3. *British Museum.* This scarab is also unprovenanced and, like the previous example, dated to the 18th Dynasty on the basis of the royal name appearing on it (Hall 1913: No. 672).

4. *Israel.* A scarab was found in Tomb 935 at Tell el-Far‘ah (S) featuring a lizard, an archer holding a simple bow, and with the sign for “lord” appearing above the archer (*Beth-peleth II*: P. LIII:220). Two other scarabs in the tomb, as well as a seal, bear the name of Ramesses II, and two additional scarabs bear an abbreviated form of his name. These artifacts, as well as a characteristic 13th-century BCE ceramic assemblage, securely date Tomb 935 to the reign of Ramesses II.

In collating the data, Brandl (1986/87: 170) concludes:

Three types of data may be used to date Scarab No. 2 from Mount Ebal: (1) the most common date of scarabs with similar formal details; (2) the most common date for commemorative scarabs of Thothmes III, and (3) the date of Tomb 935 at Tell el-Far‘ah (S).

All these dates fall within the same range – the latter part of the reign of Ramesses II, or the second half of the 13th century B.C.E.

Brandl’s dating of these rare decorative motifs is independent of the dating of the local pottery, is based on parallels from Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, and Transjordan, and seems to point to a date in the second half of the 13th century BCE. In light of the aforementioned
cautions related to using scarabs in dating, the least one could say is that the mid-to-late 13th-century date can be taken as a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the Ebal site – the site could not have been built any earlier than the 13th century BCE.

The Provenance of the Ebal Scarabs

In 1992, Brown University hosted a scholarly conference on the Egyptian evidence for the Exodus. In his paper, “Exodus and Archaeological Reality,” James Weinstein discussed the two design scarabs from Mt. Ebal. The scarabs under discussion here were attributed by Zertal to Stratum II of the Ebal site, which dates to the 13th century BCE. The later strata of the site, Stratum I, dates to the 12th century BCE. Weinstein states that “the attribution of the two scarabs to Stratum II seems less than a certainty” (Weinstein 1997: 88-9). Because of this lack of certainty, Weinstein suggests that “there is little reason to favor the late-13th-century B.C. date over the early 12th century B.C. for the beginning of the Mt. Ebal site” (Weinstein 1997: 89). He concludes that “precise dating of the Mt. Ebal building on the basis of the two design scarabs is not feasible” (Weinstein 1997: 89). While the previous discussion on the form and content of the Ebal scarabs does establish a *terminus post quem* for the site, the question of provenance could raise doubts about the 13th-century BCE date. While Weinstein does not give any reasons to justify his criticisms of the dating of the Ebal site, a word about the locations in which the two scarabs were found may help to establish the date.

**Scarab 1**

As discussed above, the main structure at Ebal was filled with layers containing earth, stones, ashes, animal bones, and potsherds – each in different combinations. Four
distinct layers were recognized, and labeled A-D, from bottom to top (Zertal 1986/87: 113-14). Scarab No. 1 was discovered in Layer C. If its association with Layer C in the main structure is correct, then Scarab No. 1, dated by Brandl to the second half of the reign of Ramesses II, can be regarded to accurately reflect a terminus post quem of the mid-to-late 13th century BCE for the founding of the site.

Scarab 2

Scarab 2 was found in association with 70 to 80 installations that were uncovered to the north, south, and east of the central complex, consisting of circles, squares, and rectangles dug into the ground and bordered with crudely arranged stones (see Fig. 11). In some cases, these installations are intermixed and built one upon the other, and “their stratigraphic relation to each other is not always clear” (Zertal 1986/87: 117-18). Many of these installations are connected to the central complex by walls. Walls 17, 44, and 22 encompass several gift installations, and it was in one of these that Scarab No. 2 was discovered (Fig. 11). Zertal explains that “the stratigraphical position of the scarab could not be fixed, because of the mixture of the Strata II and I installations, but its deep location hints at Stratum II” (Zertal 1986/87: 118). More recently, Zertal has explained that while “the installations north of the altar were in use in both strata . . . there seems to be stratification in levels for these little constructions. So I believe there is little doubt, if at all, about its (the scarab’s) dating” (Zertal 2003).

The provenance of Scarabs 1 and 2 seems relatively well established. It seems, therefore, safe to associate them with Stratum II, which points to a mid-to-late 13th-century BCE date for the founding of the Mount Ebal site. Even Israel Finkelstein – at least in 1988 (Finkelstein 1988: 321) – concluded that
unless later parallels to these scarabs will be found, they constitute the single, direct, definite piece of archaeological evidence for the existence of an Israelite Settlement site as early as the late 13th century BCE. (The theoretical possibility that these scarabs were heirlooms brought to the site later is exceedingly remote.)

The dating of the Mt. Ebal site to Iron I does not rest solely on the two scarabs, but also on the pottery. Also, it must be recalled that, in using the scarabs to aid in establishing a time frame for the site, Zertal and Brandl settle on a date within the last half of the 13th century, c. 1250-1100. Weinstein’s insistence that the site may date to the 12th century rather than the 13th is rather innocuous. Zertal has responded, “I don’t see the big difference in time (maybe 20 years!). If you show me an Iron Age I site with more accurate dating, it will surprise me” (Zertal 2003: 1). While Weinstein seems to suggest that a 12th-century date would discredit Zertal’s hypothesis, the margin between a late 13th-century date and a 12th-century date is, indeed, small. Most scholars—even those who dispute Zertal’s cultic identification of the site—accept a late 13th-century date for the Mt. Ebal installation (Ahlstrom 1993: 366; Coogan 1987: 1-8; Dever 1990: 132-3; Finkelstein 1988: 82-5; Fritz 1995: 70; Mazar 1990a: 348-50; Zevit 2001: 196-201).

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to review the archaeological data from the Mt. Ebal site, and to compare that data with both cultic and non-cultic materials in order to reach conclusions about the nature of the site itself. The site at Mt. Ebal appears to match numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 14 of Zevit's physical/behavioral correlates, which is 85 percent of the enumerated characteristics.1 Whereas various features of the site and its artifacts may be common to domestic or other types of sites, when viewed as a

1 Zevit only notes the correspondence of the site and its central structure with correlates 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13 (2001: 201), yielding a correspondence of 57%.
whole, the site seems to suggest a cultic identification. Among those who agree with a
 cultic (either general or specific) identification for the site at Mt. Ebal, either explicitly or
 implicitly, are Anbar (1985b: 352), Ben-Noon (1985); Bloch-Smith and Nakhai (1999:
CHAPTER 3

PHYSICAL PARALLELS TO EL-BURNAT

Chapter 2 gave an overview of el-Burnat itself, examining each element of the site in light of the excavator's interpretation of it as a cultic place. In this chapter, we will look at possible physical parallels to the Ebal site. The first two, village and farmstead, focus on site layout; the third and fourth, house and watchtower, focus on the Ebal site's central structure; the fifth and sixth, *gilgalim* and altars, overlap between a focus on site layout and on the central structure.

Village

Kempinski wrote that, when he visited the site, el-Bumat "appeared to be the remains of a small settlement enclosed by a wall" (Kempinski 1986: 44). He understood the site to be a three-phase village which, according to him, was "not at all rare during Iron Age I" (Kempinski 1986: 44). Some contemporary scholars have reconstructed Iron Age I villages as having been settled in three phases. In some of the earliest sites dating to the LB – Iron I transition period, there were strata devoid of any building remains other than pits, "which contained finds which indicated that they served a population which resided on the site" (Herzog 1992b: 232). Ovens were sometimes located near these pits. "It is commonly accepted that huts or tents, remains of which have not been
preserved, were the dwellings while the pits served as silos" (Herzog 1992b: 232) (Fig. 33).

Pits have sometimes been found full of pottery, mainly storage vessels, while others have been found lined with stone. Seven pits, all reaching depths of over 3 m squared, were uncovered in Stratum IX at Tel Beersheba. At Tell Deir 'Allah, pits were discovered with adjacent depressions for hut poles, while pit Number 1321 at Beersheba evidenced clear evidence of having itself been used as a dwelling. Herzog

Figure 33. Settlement consisting of huts and pits (adapted from Herzog 1992b: 232).
concludes that "the wide distribution of hut settlements leads to the conclusion that this model of settlement was used by a population in the transition stage from nomadism to permanent settlement" (Herzog 1992b: 232). Kempinski argued that an early phase of settlement could be identified at el-Burnat during which semi-nomadic peasants occupied the site. "They lived in tents or huts. Few architectural remains from these structures have survived. The principal occupational remains are pits, bins and small installations" (Kempinski 1986: 44) (Fig. 34). This reconstruction is purely hypothetical, and hinges on whether the central structure in Area A of Stratum IB was built in phases or whether it was all of a piece. This question will be addressed in the discussion of watchtowers, below.

The next step in this supposed transition to sedentarization was the establishment of elliptical sites. Villages established early in the period of Israelite settlement consisted of a band of broad-rooms arranged in an ellipse (װװװװ, khatser) with a large open space in the center. These broad-rooms faced the center and encircled the settlement, forming a courtyard, probably for penning the herds of the inhabitants at night, and also providing some measure of defense. This pattern can be seen, for example, at 'Izbet Sartah Stratum III, which was founded around the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 12th century BCE, making it one of the earliest known Israelite sites (Finkelstein 1988: 34-117). Stratum III of this site was comprised of a ring of rooms surrounding a broad central courtyard, in which several stone-lined silos were discovered (Fig. 35).

A larger settlement of this type, though following the same basic pattern, was discovered at Tel Esdar (Fig. 36). Stratum III, inhabited during the 11th century BCE,
differed from 'Izbet Sartah in that it was made up of real buildings rather than simply broad-rooms (Kochavi 1969: 23-26). Its layout, however, is the same. According to Aharoni's reconstruction, the site was comprised of about 20 of these rectangular houses, the long walls of which paralleled the perimeter of the site (Aharoni 1976: 69). Similar sites have been discovered in locations ranging from the Upper Galilee to the Negev (Herzog 1992b: 233).
The third and final phase in this transition consists of sites with a peripheral belt of pillared houses. Finkelstein argues that "this type of site-plan apparently originated in the elliptical settlements" discussed above (Finkelstein 1988: 250). In this case, however, rather than broad-rooms forming an ellipse, actual houses are arranged in an ellipse. The broad-rooms serve as the rear room of these houses, as can be clearly seen in the schematic of Beersheba Stratum VII (Fig. 37). Finkelstein understands this third stage to represent a development of phase 2, with the houses being expansions from the rear broad-rooms (Finkelstein 1988: 250-4) and continuing to be built in an
ellipses. Fritz, however, distinguishes these settlements from the elliptical villages, and explains that they are characterized by "indiscriminate construction that has taken place on the site, in the form of individual buildings or complexes consisting of several houses. Streets of varying width and irregular open areas or squares are left open between the individual units. The houses were positioned without planning of
any kind, in accordance with the agglomerated way of building, and the edge of the building is left open" (Fritz 1995: 69). Fritz terms these settlements "agglomerated villages" (Fritz 1995: 69). Similarly, Herzog understands a typical agglomerated site such as Ai to not have a peripheral belt of buildings (Herzog 1992b: 235-7) (Fig. 38), but to have developed "gradually, in an unplanned fashion, until it was entirely filled up with buildings. This settlement [Ai] is in fact an example of agglutinative growth in which a settlement that begins with sporadic houses comes to be filled up during its
entire existence" (Herzog 1992b: 235-37). Finkelstein differs, however, noting that a group of contiguous two- to four-room houses was excavated on Ai’s outer edge, and that their broad-rooms contributed toward the formation of a peripheral belt. He notes that, "seen from the outside, the wall would have appeared to have had offsets and insets" (Finkelstein 1988: 252). Whether this third group of sites is understood to be a development of the elliptically established settlements or as groupings of randomly built agglomerated houses, in either case the feature of a central court is absent. Every area of the settlement is covered with dwellings. Herzog suggests that "it may be surmised, therefore, that these settlements evolved as a result of the transition to permanent settlement, increasing the utilization of the land for cultivation while decreasing the extent of sheep and cattle herding" (Herzog 1992b: 233). Kempinski argued that the Mt. Ebal site should be understood as a three-phase village (Kempinski 1986: 42, 44-49), with specific parts of the site associated with various phases. This interpretation will be examined under the discussion of the watchtower, below. At this point, on a more general note, it can be observed that the plan of the Mt. Ebal site, in contrast to the highland villages of the period of Israelite sedentarization, is very simple. In Stratum IB, it consists merely of an enclosure with an isolated building in its center. Finkelstein notes that the plan of Giloh, which is similar to that of Ebal, "is unrelated" to that of the elliptical sites of the settlement period (1988: 244). Clearly, the site is not a hamlet or village.
Farmstead

V. Fritz identifies the "farmstead" as a separate type of settlement, aside from the ring-shaped villages and the agglomerated villages (Fritz 1995: 69-70), though this distinction seems artificial. Fritz defines a farmstead as referring "to single buildings or to a group of buildings surrounded by a widely-extending wall. This wall

Figure 38. Plan of Ai (et-Tell), an agglomerated city (Herzog 1992b: 235).
did not serve a defensive purpose but probably formed an enclosure for domestic
animals. The farmstead can consist of several buildings which were erected in the
vicinity of the main building as economic need dictated" (Fritz 1995: 70; for a more
detailed discussion of "farmsteads," see Younker 1991b: 335-342). Based on this
definition, Fritz has suggested and continues to maintain that the Mt. Ebal site should
probably be interpreted as a farmstead (Fritz 1995: 70). He writes that "the plan of the
Early Iron Age remains atop Mount Ebal clearly indicates that it was not a cultic site.
The walls excavated by A. Zertal belonged to a small domestic structure of several
strata and do not form any kind of rectangular altar. The walls enclosing a large area
to the south and to the west of the building are a well known phenomenon from other
sites of that period and can easily be understood in connection with animal
husbandry. The bones, mainly of sheep, goats, cattle and fallow deer, are common in
domestic contexts" (Fritz 1990: 185). Fritz has maintained this position, recently
summarizing that "the so-called sanctuary discovered on Mount Ebal was probably a
farmstead" (2005: 87), though the only analogy he has provided to date is the site of
Giloh (Fritz 1995: 70), the interpretation of which is more complex than simple
identification as a "farmstead" (see below, under Watchtower).

Surveys have produced an extensive body of data documenting hinterland
farmsteads (e.g., LaBianca 1991: 266-268; Younker 1991a: 269-334; 1991b: 335-
342; Christopherson 1997a: 250-290; 1997b: 291-307). David Hopkins has
synthesized much of the available information, and a complex picture of early Iron
Age highlands farming is emerging (Hopkins 1985). According to Hopkins, "surface
dating has demonstrated the association of farmsteads with periods of high-intensity
land use, a barometer of the growth of the urban sphere and its sway over the surrounding territory" (Hopkins 1997: 306). This means that "the appearance of farmsteads is related to heightened security conditions and the burgeoning demand for specialized economic goods – that is, marketable commodities" (Hopkins 1997: 306). In harmony with the design of the farmstead to meet these demands, "rock-cut wine presses, cupholes, reservoirs, cisterns, and caves, along with terrace and perimeter walls, comprise a constellation of activity loci that was probably constructed contemporaneously with the farmstead building" (Hopkins 1997: 306; LaBianca 1991: 267). Based on these and other data, Hopkins suggests that, while the term "farmstead" has generally connoted a difficult rural existence, "Iron Age farmsteads may well represent the penetration of the countryside by the managerial arm of the city-based administration" (Hopkins 1997: 307).

R. D. Miller's recent attempt to use a Gravity Model to plot interrelations between Iron I highland sites in order to reconstruct the social history of Israel in the 12th and 11th centuries BCE draws similar conclusions about the possible economic role of rural sites (Miller 2005). He identifies four administrative systems in the heartland of Iron Age Israel, the largest of which is Tell Balatah (Shechem) (2005: 29-90), in which Mt. Ebal is located. According to Miller's analysis, while most of the villages were self-sufficient, they presented tribute in cash crops or conscripted labor to higher levels of economic centers, although without a specialized administrative apparatus (Miller 2005: 97-103). Viticulture was the dominant economy in the Gerazim and Ebal Massif (Miller 2005: 59; cf. also 2003: 289-309) and, while olives were rare, they were found at el-Burnat (Liphschitz 1986/87: 100-91). Pomegranates
and figs would also be harvested on the west slopes of Mt. Ebal. Remains of caprovids and cattle were found at el-Burnat (Horwitz 1986/87: 174, 177, 179), and red deer and fallow deer could also be hunted (Horwitz 1986/87: 175). Foreign goods are found at the centers, but they are also found at the villages. Miller seems to suggest that the Rameses II scarab (Zertal 1986: 52), iron nail (Zertal 1986/87: 150), and a Mediterranean Cardium shell (Horwitz 1986/87: 173) are all "evidence for exchange" at el-Burnat. In harmony with this reconstructed role as a satellite of Tell Balatah, Miller suggests that the walls at the Mt. Ebal site must have been built "by conscripted labor" (Miller 2005: 79).

Miller's study raises important issues that are certainly worthwhile for opening up discussion regarding the reconstruction of societal structures in the highlands. He is not explicit in his reconstruction of el-Burnat, though it seems that he understands it as a center for production and exchange. This is a suggestion that has been made before. B. Rosen raised the possibility of this interpretation in 1992 when he wrote: "At the end of the Bronze Age the Egyptian administration in Canaan and the elite of the local city-states fulfilled the role of collecting and reallocating resources. During Iron Age II this role was performed by the royal system. We do not know how and to what extent such exchange mechanisms functioned during Iron Age I. Did the supposed religious centers, such as Shiloh and Mount Ebal, play this role? Did the contemporary Canaanite cities function as markets for the highlands people?" (Rosen 1992: 346). While Rosen's and Miller's hypotheses each raise important questions, an understanding of el-Burnat as a commercial center seems to go beyond the evidence. Sickle-blades, used to harvest the winter crops, along with olive presses, winepresses

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and storage facilities, used to process and store food products, are all completely absent from Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1986/87: 152).

Several of Edelman's points of criticism of Miller's book are of particular relevance for assessing el-Burnat's role as a subsidiary site of Tell Balatah. First, Edelman observes that Miller's "stated assumption that all sites were settled simultaneously during the two hundred years of the Iron I goes against common archaeological and anthropological working models and is contradicted by his observation that, according to its excavators, Tell Balatah was not occupied in the eleventh century" (Edelman 2006a: 5). Second, "the four identified chiefdoms in Mount Ephraim and the Samarian hills do not correlate with road systems going from the highlands to the coast, yet trade items make it clear that there were regular contacts with the lowlands" (Edelman 2006a: 5). Third, "the presumption that fortification walls are evidence of conscripted labor is possible but not the only option for understanding how such 'public' structures get built. If defense is a priority, a community can voluntarily work together to build a protective wall that will benefit all of them" (Edelman 2006a: 6). Edelman concludes, in part, that "it is still premature to attempt to establish the political configurations that existed at this time in this region" (Edelman 2006a: 6).

In regard to the specific interpretation of the Ebal site as a farmstead, this identification does not comport with current knowledge of animal husbandry in ancient Israel. The design of a large site encompassed by a wall expressly for use as an animal pen is unknown among Iron I settlement sites. Two types of sites facilitated the corraling of animals. The first was laid out as a cluster of pens. Herzog interprets
the design at Giloh, the only site Fritz provides as an analogy to Ebal as a farmstead (Fritz 1995: 70), as a cluster of pens, where "the settlement . . . comprised five pens which served as dwellings for five families and their herds" (Herzog 1992b: 232). He suggests that "similar pens [probably] existed at other sites in the hill country" (Herzog 1992b: 232). The other type of site facilitating the coralling of animals was the "enclosed settlement," where the entire settlement was arranged in a hatser (הַצֶּר) plan, with the houses arranged in a ring with the backs of the houses forming something of a protective belt (Herzog 1992b: 233). In these enclosed settlements, "the centre of the settlement served as a court, probably for penning the herds of the residents at night" (Herzog 1992b: 233). It is generally accepted that the village was "the home base" for ancient Palestinian transhumants (Myers 2000: 1355). In addition, at sites arranged in the hatser plan, the walls were always either formed or abutted by buildings. The walls at the Ebal site do not correspond with known features of sites where animal husbandry was practiced.

House or Other Domestic Space

This identification refers specifically to the central structure in Area A of the Ebal site, and relates back to Kempinski's interpretation of el-Burnat as a three-phase village. As discussed above, Kempinski saw the site as having been founded as a settlement of tents or huts, surrounded by pits, bins and small installations. In the second phase of this village, the settlers built "more stable habitation units" (Kempinski 1986: 44). "At this time," writes Kempinski, "a two-room or perhaps a three-room house was built in the center of the settlement" (Kempinski 1986: 44), and the site was enclosed with a wall (Fig. 39). Anson Rainey followed him in the
Figure 39. Kempinski's "Phase 2" interpretation of el-Burnat as a domestic structure (Kempinski 1986: 46).

interpretation of the central structure as a house (1986: 66). Rainey has argued that "you do not dig rooms . . . in an altar" (2005). In order to assess whether the central structure at el-Burnat might be identified as a house, we must first analyze the design and purpose of the four-room house.
The Four-Room 'Israelite' House

William F. Bade first discovered a four-room building at Tell-en-Nasbeh (Mizpah) in 1927 (Fig. 40). At first, he thought it was a temple, and he held a church service in its ruins. We now know that the type of building he discovered was actually the characteristic house of Iron Age (1200-586 B.C.) Israelites (Shiloh 1970: 180-190; 1978: 36-51; Stager 1985: 11-23). The four-room house predominated in ancient Israel. King and Stager have recently synthesized the available data on the four-room house in Life in Biblical Israel (2001).

Figure 40. The four-room house at Tell en-Nasbeh (Bunimovitz and Faust 2002: 37).
The four-room house was "rectilinear," with two, three, or four rooms (Figs. 41-43). Its basic architecture can be summarized as follows: Two rows of stone pillars separated the central, larger room from the two parallel side rooms. These three parallel rooms extended from a perpendicular "broadroom" running the width of the building. This back room formed one of the four main exterior walls of the rectangular house. The entrance to the house was on the short side and led from the exterior courtyard into the large central room. The broadroom across the back served mainly for storage (King and Stager 2001: 28-9). These houses were typically built of sun-dried mud bricks, sealed and plastered outside to prevent deterioration. The floors were made of beaten earth, and the walls were built on two or three courses of foundation stones. The first story averaged less than 2 m in height. Four-room houses tended to have simple furnishings, including bedding, kitchen utensils – such as storage jars, water jugs, cooking pots, etc. – looms, and vessels for grinding and crushing. Provisions such as grain would be kept in large storage jars. Hearth were sometimes simply holes in the ground where fires would be built for cooking or for warmth. In other cases, the hearths were raised or even freestanding features. The central corridor on the ground level of the four-room house would often be occupied by storage, livestock, and/or workshops, while the narrower siderooms served as stables and shelters for livestock. The floors of the central room were made up of either beaten earth or plaster, while the side rooms were often paved with cobbles or flagstones. The roof and upper story, accessed by an outdoor stairway, served as the main living area. The roof was often used for sleeping in warmer months, and
Figure 41. Reconstruction of the four-room house (King and Stager 2001: 29).
Figure 42. Four-room house floor plans (Bunimovitz and Faust 2002: 34).
Figure 43. Ubiquity of the four-room house plan in Israel (adapted from Faust and Bunimovitz 2003: 23).
worship was sometimes carried out there as well. One would enter through a wooden
doors from an outside courtyard, where a mud-brick oven for baking and cooking was
located. Most of the cooking would be done in this outer courtyard. Occasionally the
oven was located in the central room of the house. The four-room house design was
ubiquitous for 600 years, appearing in all strata of Israelite society from the period of
the settlement until the exile (Fig. 43). The ubiquitousness of the style testifies to its
successful design for a people “requiring facilities for managing mixed agricultural
pursuits” (Holladay 1992: 316; see also Holladay 1997). Ethnographic analogies led
to the conclusion that has continued to hold sway to the present time, that the four-
room house was first and foremost a successful adaptation to farm life:

The ground floor had space allocated for food processing, small craft
production, stabling and storage; the second floor was suitable for dining,
sleeping, and other activities. . . . Its longevity attests to its continuing
suitability not only to the environment . . . but also for the socioeconomic unit
housed in it – for the most part, rural families who farmed and raised
livestock.” (Stager 1985: 17)

Bunimovitz and Faust argue, however, that the “functional explanation” of the four-
room house leaves several questions unanswered. They write:

Attributing the success of the four-room house to its suitability to peasant
daily life is a highly compelling argument, yet it falls short of conveying the
full story of the structure’s exceptional dominance as an architectural form
during the Iron Age, and beyond that, as a cultural phenomenon. There were
houses typical of other periods that functioned well, but none of them
achieved such a dominant position in the architectural landscape of their time.
Moreover, none were so uniform in plan. (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003: 25)

Faust and Bunimovitz suggest that this ubiquity argues against the functional
theory (2003: 25), which they move beyond to explore social aspects of the four-room
house. Bunimovitz and Faust have argued that the four-room house is indicative of
ancient Israel. It is not just a style of architecture that evolved from functional
necessity, but it actually reflects the Israelite mind. They identify four ways in which
the four-room house does this (Bunimovitz and Faust: 2003: 415-19).

1. *Purity and Space Syntax.* Extending a path of thought previously taken by
Moshe Weinfeld, Bunimovitz and Faust suggest that the four-room house
may have facilitated the separation between purity and impurity. An
eexample of this would be the avoidance of a woman during menstruation.
“Indeed, on examining the four-room plan one can immediately recognize
its greatest merit, which is maximum privacy. Once the central space of
the building, whether an open or roofed courtyard was entered, each of the
rooms could be entered directly without going through adjacent spaces”
(Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 415) Even if an “unclean” person lived in
the house, purity could be strictly maintained, since each room could be
entered directly from the central space without passing through other
rooms. This special quality does not seem to be present in other ancient
Israelite dwelling structures in the LBA and IA.

2. *Ideology.* Another implication of this “access analysis” “is the
correspondence between its nonhierarchical configuration and the
'democratic' or egalitarian ethos of Israelite society” (Bunimovitz and
Faust 2003: 416). While houses in many contemporary ethnographic
examples often manifest “a hierarchical grading of accessibility and
structural depth of spaces within the house related to generational and in
some cases gender-based status distinctions (or both),” the four-room
house "lacks 'depth' or access hierarchy and expresses a more egalitarian spirit than . . . contemporaneous" examples (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 417).

3. **Nonverbal Communication.** Using the terms "canonical" and "indexical," Bunimovitz and Faust suggest that the four-room house both reminds the occupants of the principles (discussed in points 1-2) embodied in the house's architecture and communicates a message to others – both in and outside the community – that identifies the occupants as part of the community and enhances the coherence of the community (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 417-18).

4. **Order and Dominance.** Drawing on Mary Douglas’s theory that many of the holiness laws were actually about order (Douglas 1966), Bunimovitz and Faust suggest the same interpretive schema for understanding "the astonishing dominance of the four-room house plan on almost all levels of Israelite architectural design" (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 419). They explain that, "if the Israelites were deeply engaged with unity and 'order' as a negation of separateness and confusion, then these concepts must have percolated through all spheres of daily life, including material culture" (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 419).

Bunimovitz and Faust conclude, "Thus, it can be surmised that once the four-room house took shape and was formalized as the container and embodiment of the Israelite lifestyle and symbolic 'order,' it became the 'right' house type and, hence, its great popularity. Building according to other architectural schemes must have been
considered a deviation from the norm and possibly a violation of the holy 'order'” (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003: 419).

The Central Structure at Mt. Ebal and the Four-Room House

The review of the data on the four-room house has shown that the four-room house and its derivatives are the most predominant house plan in Iron Age Israel. When one compares the plan of Mt. Ebal's central structure with the four-room house floor plans included above (Figs. 41-43), as well as with the discussion of the construction and nature of the four-room house, it seems clear that "the architecture of the main complex is completely different from that of any known domestic building" (Zertal 1986/87: 151). Zertal notes three features of early Iron Age domestic structures that are conspicuously absent from Ebal:

1. *Column construction.* This is widely recognized as one of the major innovations of the time, and its origin is widely debated (see Finkelstein 1988: 254-9; Mazar 1992a: 288-89). The interior spaces of most houses in the early Iron Age contained free-standing pillars, which were apparently used to divide the courtyards of the houses into roofed and unroofed areas (Mazar 1992a: 288), as well as to support the roof. Columns were also built into the walls to reinforce the frame and were used as doorposts. There were no columns discovered in the main structure at Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1986/87: 152).

2. *Doorway construction.* The northern courtyard of el-Burnat appears to have been entered by three steps, "built along the width of the courtyard" (Zertal 1986/87: 117), with Wall 3 (Fig. 11) apparently serving as the top step of
this broad stairway. This opening was "built on the same level as the paving of the northern courtyard" (Zertal 1986/87: 117). This is completely different, however, from typical Iron Age I doorways. Doorways in Iron Age I were typically constructed of stone pillars, and included a threshold and lintels of large stones (Breamer 1982: 130-33). In most cases of the four-room house, the entrance was in the central space (Netzer 1992: 194). No doorway or entryway of any kind was found in the central structure of el-Bumat.

3. Stairways. Though this has been debated, it appears that the standard Israelite house included a staircase leading up to a second story (Holladay 1997: 105-9; Netzer 1992: 193-201). In Iron Age houses, stairways consisted of a thick wall built against one of the walls of the house, with steps either of field stones or of hewn stones (Reich 1992a: 14; Netzer 1992: 197-98). The central structure of el-Bumat did not contain a stairway. "In fact," Zertal notes, "the only way to reach the main structure from the courtyards, (unless wooden ladders are proposed) was by the stone ramp between them" (Zertal 1986/87: 152).

In addition to the lack of these features, there are other problems with the identification of el-Bumat as a house. It does not seem to have had a floor. It appears that the Stratum II surface would not have functioned well as a floor because of its irregularity. Also, installation 94 creates an obstacle between Walls 13 and 16 (see Fig. 11).
The most prominent alternative understanding of the Mt. Ebal site is that it was an isolated watchtower. Kempinski first argued that the Mt. Ebal site should be understood as a three-phase village (Kempinski 1986: 42, 44-49). He argued that the central structure at Mt. Ebal was the second of three phases, and should be understood as a two-room or three-room house. This second phase was followed by a third, which Kempinski (1986: 44) explains as follows:

The third phase of the settlement followed the destruction of phase 2, perhaps by the Canaanites from nearby Shechem or possibly by the Philistines who invaded the area in about 1070 B.C. Or was this phase destroyed in an Israelite intertribal clash? In any event, the phase 2 settlement was destroyed, thus demonstrating the need to improve security with a watchtower. In phase 3, a watchtower was built; debris was probably added to the inside of the phase 2 building to create a podium for the watchtower – a common feature of Iron Age watchtowers as, for example, at Giloh. The remains of the phase 2 building were also used for the courtyard of the watchtower. In Kempinski's third phase, therefore, the central structure is to be understood as the foundation of a watchtower, built on top of the earlier domestic structure (Fig. 44). The material inside the structure that Zertal interpreted as layers A-D was "simply destruction debris from the destroyed watchtower" (Kempinski 1986: 48). G. Ahlström, A. A. Burke, W. G. Dever, V. Fritz, N. Na’aman, and A. Rainey all followed this interpretation of the site (Ahlström 1993: 366; Burke 2007: 44; Dever 1992: 32-4; Fritz 1993: 185; Na’aman 1986: 259-80; Rainey 1986: 66).
Figure 44. Kempinski's reconstruction of el-Burnat as a phase 3 "tower" (Kempinski 1986: 46).
In order to evaluate the hypothetical reconstruction of el-Burnat as a watchtower, the meaning of the term "watchtower" itself will be reviewed, followed by a discussion of watchtowers in Iron Age I. The site of Giloh will then be examined in some detail, after which we will consider a possible cultic meaning that may be attached to towers in some cases. This section will then conclude with a discussion of the extent to which el-Burnat may or may not comport with these data.

The Biblical Term 'Migdal' and Ancient Watchtowers

The Hebrew term *migdal* (מגדל), "tower," is a derivative of *gadal* (גדל) "to become great or important," "probably deriving from early times when the tower was the largest (greatest) structure in a town" (Smick 1980: 151). Aside from its appearance as a component of proper names, the term *migdal* is used 34 times in the Hebrew Bible, and is used to describe structures with a variety of uses. E. B. Banning has categorized different types of towers into four groups (Banning 1992: 622-23):

1. *Agricultural Field Buildings, Farm Houses, and Field Clearances.*

   Banning writes that "modern examples suggest that the most common function for isolated rural towers was agricultural" (Banning 1992: 622). This comports well with the biblical usage of the term, which often occurs in close association with fields, orchards, vineyards, and winepresses (Isa 5:2; 2 Chr 26:10; et al.). While these towers could be state sponsored and, therefore, make an important political statement (Borowski 2002: 106), Banning explains that "the most common function of these towers may have been to store agricultural equipment and produce, to provide a lookout for farmers protecting their crops from thieves or animals, to
house farmers temporarily while they worked in fields at a distance from
their home villages, and only incidentally to hide villagers during times of
Some small rural towers probably had pastoral functions while, in some
stony areas, large stone "towers" are human dwellings. The most common
stone "structures" are actually stone clearance heaps, which could easily
be mistaken for a *migdal* since they often range in height from a few feet
up to as much as 27 feet (Negev and Gibson 2001: 479).

2. **Route Markers, Tombs, and Memorials.** Both stone heaps and towers were
sometimes erected to mark roads in the desert (Banning 1992: 623). "Such
waymarkers are necessary where there is only an indistinct track across
the desert" (Banning 1992: 623). The usual Hebrew word for these heaps
was *tsiyyun*. Stone heaps also often functioned as burial monuments (e.g.,
Gen 35:20; 2 Kgs 23:17; et al.).

3. **Defensive Towers.** This is one of the most common interpretations of
towers, that they served within military defense and communication
networks (Banning 1992: 623). Towers are often mentioned in the Hebrew
Bible in such contexts (2 Kgs 17:9; 2 Chr 14:7; 20:24; et al.). Similarly, it
is also clear from Pre-Islamic sources that some towers did indeed
function within chains of fire-signal stations (for references, see Banning
2001: 623). In the Hebrew Bible, *migdal* is used to describe a variety of
structures, including towers in the fortifications of a town or city (e.g., 2
Kgs 14:7), a stronghold inside a town (e.g., Judg 9:51), or a remote
fortress (e.g., 2 Chr 27:4). In the hinterland of the Madaba Plains, fortified farmsteads included central "towers" or buildings ranging in size from ca. 3.00 m x 3.00 m to ca. 15.00 m x 16.00 m and larger, most of which were initially built in the Iron II (Younker 1991b: 337).

4. **Place Names and Temple Towers.** The term *migdal* also occurs in the Hebrew Bible as a component of a number of place names, such as Migdal Eder (Gen 35:21); Migdal El (Josh 19:38); Migdal Gad (Josh 15:37); Migdal Penuel (Judg 8:8-9, 17); etc. These were places that bore cultic traditions prior to the Israelite period, which led B. Mazar to conclude that *migdal* could have a cultic meaning as well (Mazar 1962: 634-5). Banning suggests that these place names may refer to "fortresses, fortified towns, or towns dominated by a towered temple" (Banning 1992: 623). The terms *migdal* or *magdal* are also used on the toponym lists of Thutmosis III (*ANET*: 243, 247, 259) and in the Tell el-Amarna tablets (e.g., *EA* 69.20; 70.9; 185.29; 186.28; 234; 256.26).

In Kempinski's hypothetical reconstruction, the central structure of Mt. Ebal originated as a dwelling and was later converted into what Rainey described as "a typical watchtower" (Rainey 1986: 66). It is not clear that a "typical" form can be established for watchtowers in Iron Age I, for very few have been discovered – if any. The archaeological data for towers in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I will be reviewed below for the purpose of comparison with the central structure of el-Burnat.
Towers in the Late Bronze Age

Free-standing towers and forts are unknown from the Late Bronze Age. Towers were usually connected with fortification systems or temples. In both the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age, city gate systems often included towers. Town fortifications have been found at Hazor, Megiddo, Jericho, Shechem, Lachish, Gezer, Tell el-Jarish, Tell el-Far'ah (south), Tell el-Ajjul, and Tell en-Nejileh, and gate fortifications have been found at Tel Dan, Ashkelon, Megiddo, Hazor, Shechem, Tell el-Far'ah (north), Beth Shemesh, and Gezer. Towers at Tell el-Far'ah (south), Beth Shemesh, and Hazor were subdivided into rooms. Numerous examples of temples are known from Syria-Palestine (Fig. 45). In Syria, there are the temples of Baal and Dagan at Ugarit (C. F. A. Schaeffer 1931: 9, Fig. 2); of Carchemish (C. L. Woolley 1952: 167-71); of Ebenda II-I (Naumann 1971: 464, Fig. 600); of Kamid el-Lôz (Naumann 1982: 17-29, Figs. 3-4); of Mumbaqt (Orthmann and Kuhne 1974: 53-97); and of Meskene (Margueron 1975: 53-85). In Palestine, there are the Stratum VIIA Temple 2048 at Megiddo (Loud 1948); the Strata IX, VIII, and VII temples at Beth-Shean (Rowe 1940: 6-12, Fig. 3); the Fosse I-III temples at Lachish (Tufnell 1940); the Area C Stele, Area H Orthostat, Area A Longroom, and Area F Square temples at Hazor (Hazor 1972; 1975); the Field V Migdal temple 2 at Shechem (Wright 1965: 95-102); the "Airport Temple" at Amman (Hennessey 1966: 155-62; Herr 1984); the Mt. Gerazim/Tananir temple (Boling 1975: 33-85); the Deir 'Alla Sanctuary (Franken 1962: 378-82; 1969: 19-22); the Timnah Temple (Rothenberg 1972: 125-79); the Jaffa "Lion Temple" (Kaplan 1974: 135-6); the
Late Bronze and Iron I temples from Palestine.

Figure 45. Late Bronze and Iron Age I temples from Palestine (Dever 1987: 224, fig. 15).
temples at Shiqmonah (Elgavish 1977: 122-3); at Tel Kittan III (Eisenberg 1977: 77-
81), and at Tel Mevorakh XI-IX (Stern 1984) and the Level VII "Summit Temple" at
Lachish (Ussishkin et al.: 1978). These temples are mostly of the Langbau type, with
either two or three rooms along a central axis.

At three of the Palestinian temples, however, are of a type "noteworthy for its
monumental dimensions and standard plan have been discovered" (Gonen 1992: 223-
29). These temples, termed "Migdol temples," have been discovered at Megiddo,
Shechem, and Hazor. The walls of the migdol temples are very thick, which give
them the appearance of a fortress. This impression is heightened by the well-built
towers bordering the entrance to the building. The layout is symmetrical along
alongitudinal alignment, on which the entrances are situated. The focus of the cult – a
niche or altar – was located at the far end of this axis, adjacent to or within the rear
wall of the temple. Gonen notes that three sites, Beth Shean, Lachish, and Timna,
have temples that show Egyptian influence either in their layout or in some details of
their construction (Gonen 1992: 229-31). This should be expected, in light of
Egyptian hegemony in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. In light of this, "it is
astonishing to discover how small the influence of Egypt was on Canaanite temples
and cult" (Gonen 1992: 229; for Egyptian temples, see Gundlach 2001: 363-79;

Towers in the Iron Age I

In the latter stages of the Bronze Age, many of the great warfaring empires
declined. An apparent result was a decline in Canaanite fortifications in the Iron Age
I. As shown in the discussion of the village (above), there were no fortifications that

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can be attributed to the period of the Iron Age I highland settlements. Again, these settlements consisted primarily of houses arranged in a circle that formed only a superficial barrier. The earliest known Iron Age fortifications in the central hill-country and in the Shephelah are the casemate walls at Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Beteh Shemesh, but these do not appear until Iron Age II (Herzog 1992b: 271). Until very recently, no examples of free-standing towers had been found in the surveys of Manasseh or Ephraim (Finkelstein 1988: 119-204). In 1995, Zertal reported on three Iron Age road fortresses with watchtowers, located in the Jordan Valley, that had recently been surveyed and studied by the Manasseh Hill Country Project (Zertal 1995: 255-273).

The first of these sites was Khirbet es-Saqq (M. R. 1975 1945), an Iron Age II site consisting of a (presumed) casemate wall, a rectangular building, and a circular tower (Fig. 46). The possible casemate wall is visible in several locations on the site, and the presumed area enclosed within the wall amounts to 1,600 square m. The circular tower measures 19.8 m in diameter and is an almost perfect circle and is "undoubtedly the main part of the site" (Zertal 1995: 258). Its design is made up of three concentric stone walls. The outside wall measures 1 m in width, while the inner ones are both ca. 0.8 m. The three walls form inner rings, which contain "cells" or "chambers," which are connected by entrances. There are also entrances that lead into the inner courtyard. An entrance to the entire structure is located on the eastern side of the building. The rectangular building measures 14 x 9 m and consists of six chambers or rooms surrounding a central hallway with an entrance on the western
Figure 46. Khirbet es-Saqq (Zertal 1995: 257, fig. 4).
side. The pottery discovered at Khirbet eš-Šaqq dates the site to the Iron Age II, between the tenth to seventh centuries BCE (Zertal 1995: 258). The site seems to have been "strategically located to guard the entrance to the ancient road climbing up the Wadi Malîh pass from the Beth Shean Valley to the central hill country" (Zertal 1995: 258).

The second site, Khirbet el-Makhruq (M.R. 1983 1710), is located 25 km south of Khirbet eš-Šaqq, on a rocky escarpment above the Jordan Valley to the east and the Wadi Far'ah to the south. This location places it in a strategic position to guard "the most important crossroad of the Jordan Valley between Beth Shean and Jericho" (Zertal 1995: 258). The site was occupied during the EB II and was later overlaid by an Iron Age II fortress, which was made up of a rectangular building and a circular tower, both of which were virtually the same as the buildings at Khirbet eš-Šaqq. The rectangular building in Area A, which was built in two phases, was described in its second phase as a "tower" by the original excavator, Z. Yeivin (Fig. 47). It measured at 15 x 10 m in its earliest phase, and was later enlarged to 24 x 20 in the latter phase. Area B contains a circular tower, measuring at 19.5 m in diameter, built atop a brick EB II building (Fig. 48). This tower, like the one at Khirbet eš-Šaqq, is made up of three concentric stone walls. The outside wall is 19.5 m in diameter, the second ca. 10 m in diameter, and the inner circle 8 m in diameter. The interior of the tower was level and paved with small stones. Yeivin understood the buildings as "isolated towers" (Zertal 1995: 260-261).

The third fortress site explored by the survey team was Rujm Abu Mukheir (M. R. 1898 1626), situated 10 km southwest of Khirbet el-Makhruq, which placed it
Figure 47. Rectangular building at Khirbet el-Makhrug (Zertal 1995: 259, fig. 5).
Figure 48. Circular tower at Khirbet el-Makhruq (Zertal 1995: 260, fig. 6).
in a strategic position guarding a pass from the Jordan Valley with a well-paved Roman road nearby. This site apparently consisted of a sole tower, 19 m in diameter, constructed of large fieldstones, with remains of a wall nearby. Like the aforementioned towers, this one was also built according to a plan which consisted of three concentric circles (Fig. 49). The tower was 10.4 m in diameter, with an inner circle measuring 8.7 m in diameter. The walls are 1.2 m thick and were preserved to a height of 3 m. The Manasseh survey found remains of walls near the circular tower, but they were covered by the earlier excavation dumps. "It seems, therefore, likely that Rujm Abu Mukheir contained a rectangular building as well" (Zertal 1995: 262).

Khirbet eš-Šaqq, Khirbet el-Makhruq, and Rujm Abu Mukheir all share a similar architectural layout. This suggests that "they were part of a royal fortification system" (Zertal 1995: 263). The earliest pottery found at Khirbet eš-Šaqq dates to the tenth century BCE, while Khirbet el-Kakhrub has yielded the latest pottery, dating from the tenth to ninth centuries BCE. An earlier fortress may have been located at Munțar eš-Šaqq, where the pottery dated from the end of the 12th century BCE to the end of the 11th century BCE. At this small site, remnants of a casemate wall were found encircling a heap of stones which may cover a main building (Fig. 50). This earlier fortress may have been "intended to dominate the entire region and the road," while the site of Khirbet eš-Šaqq, lower and closer to the road, was then later chosen as part of the new royal system of fortification. Zertal concludes that, "if this is the case, the last quarter of the tenth century BCE should be proposed as a terminus post quem for the construction of the entire new defense system that included Kh. eš-Šaqq."
Figure 49. The circular tower at Rujm Abu Mukheir (Zertal 1995: 261, Fig. 8).
Kh. el-Makhruf, and Rujum Abu Mukheir. The latest possible date for the construction is probably in the first quarter of the ninth century BCE" (Zertal 1995: 263-65). Zertal suggests that, based upon the dates indicated by the pottery, these three fortresses may be dated to the reign of King Solomon (965-928 BCE), though the reigns of Jeroboam I (928-907 BCE) and Ahab (871-851 BCE) would be viable alternatives as well.
These Iron Age I towers in the Jordan Valley are unique, and no circular towers were found in Israel until the Hellenistic period (the Neolithic tower at Jericho is a unique exception [Kenyon 1981: 6-7]). Circular towers did begin to appear east of the Jordan in Ammon during the Iron Age II, and it has been suggested by Zertal that these may have been modeled on the Iron Age I towers of the Jordan Valley (Zertal 1995: 271). Bronze and Iron Age towers in Palestine are either square or semi-circular (Yadin 1963: 313, 322-330).

A fortified Iron Age I site was discovered in 1992 by the survey of Manasseh (Zertal and Romano 1999: 32-34; Finkelstein 2002: 187-199 argues that the walls date to the Roman period). A tower was found in the Mediterranean maquis about 150 m west of the site (Fig. 51). The tower apparently functioned as a foreguard post, raising the guard high above the forest (Zertal 2002: 20). The el-Ahwat tower is square in plan, is hollow, and is not built on a platform.

As seen from this discussion, there is a dearth of Iron Age I towers with which to compare el-Bumat. While towers did exist as components of fortifications or temples in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, they did not exist as free-standing units. In Iron Age I, no examples of fortifications and temples have been found, and it appears that they were not built in Palestine during this period.

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1 The Neolithic tower at Jericho is a unique exception (Kenyon 1981: 6-7). Rogem Hiri (Rujm el-Hiri), in the central Lower Golan, is a circular megalithic monument, though its plan, function, and date all differ from the Iron Age I towers. Rogem Hiri is essentially a central cairn, which functioned as a burial chamber, surrounded by four concentric walls. Though Iron Age potsherds were recovered at the site, its primary periods of use appear to have been the Early Bronze Age and the later phases of the Late Bronze Age (Mizrachi and Zohar 1993: 1286-87; Zohar 2007: 828-30).
The Tower of Shechem

A special case is the "tower of Shechem" (מגידל-שקים, migdal-shekem), which is, together with its stronghold (שריאת, seriah), named in the Hebrew Bible as "the house of El-berith" or "the temple of El-berith" (בֵּית אֵל בֶּרִית, bet 'el bērīt) (Judg 9:46-49). The book of Judges describes the destruction of this site by Abimelech (vs. 49). E. Sellin carried out excavations at Shechem (Tell Balatah, M.R. 177 179) from 1913-14 and 1926-27, followed by G. E. Wright and B. W. Anderson from 1956-68 (Campbell 1993: 1347). Robert Bull was the field supervisor of Field VI, the location of the sacred precinct. Over the course of these excavations, a series of four temples was identified, consisting of four consecutive stages of buildings (Tower-temple 1-a to 2-b). Wright and Bull understood the fortress-temple as having existed in phases. They dated the construction of the first phase, which they designated Temple 1, to the end of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1650-1550 BCE). According to their reckoning,
Temple 1 only existed for about 100 years, after which it experienced a gap in occupation until about 1450 BCE, at which time it was replaced with a smaller and completely different temple built on its ruins. This second temple was designated Temple 2 (G. E. Wright 1965: 87-100). Despite its smaller size and the difference in plan, the LB Temple 2-b was identified as a migdal temple and as the temple of Elberith mentioned in Judg 9 (Wright 1965: 95-100; cf. the stratigraphy chart in Campbell 2002: 8-9). Lawrence Stager, however, has recently argued that there never was a Temple 2, and that Wright and Bull had misidentified it, in part, because of the difficulties created by the excavation methods of the Austro-German team that had preceded them (Stager 1999: 229-30). Wright and Bull, therefore, identified Temple 2 on inadequate remains, just two walls, which they believed formed a 200 m² room (Wright 1965: 66-84). Stager has argued that Walls 5703 and 5704 were simply the lower courses of Walls 5903 and 5904 and were part of the Building 5900, which was dubbed as the Granary. By reclaiming Walls 5703 and 5704 for Building 5900, "Temple 2" is eliminated. Based on this and other evidence, Stager argues that Temple 1 continued in use from the Middle Bronze Age II into Iron Age I and that it is the temple referred to in Judg 9 (Stager 1999: 233-34). Temple 1 measured 21.2 x 26.3 m, with walls measuring at more than 5 m thick. Two rows of three pillars each supported the roof, and massive towers flanked the entrance beside the single entrance. The towers appear to have contained stairwells. The cella included six column bases and an alcove for an image of the god. The entire building was oriented precisely to the four cardinal points of the compass.
The Judges narrative, however, has raised some questions about the identification of Shechem Temple 1 as the Tower of Shechem. In the narrative, Abimelech had attempted to establish a monarchy in the city-state of Shechem (Judg 9:1-6). When the people failed to maintain their loyalty to him, however, he laid siege to the city (vss. 22-41). The text then relates how the people of Shechem tried to resume their normal activities:

42 On the following day the people went out into the fields. When Abimelech was told, 43 he took his troops and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the fields. When he looked and saw the people coming out of the city, he rose against them and killed them. 44 Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed on all who were in the fields and killed them. 45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city, and killed the people that were in it; and he razed the city and sowed it with salt. (Judg 9:42-45)

Abimelech attacked the citizens of Shechem as they worked in the fields, and then attacked the city itself. He and the troops with him took up positions outside the city gate and, after fighting all day, captured the city. Abimelech then slaughtered the inhabitants of Shechem, leveled the city, and spread salt over it. The paragraph that follows raises interesting questions about the identification of the Tower of Shechem:

46 When all the lords of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the temple of El-berith. 47 Abimelech was told that all the lords of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the troops that were with him. Abimelech took an ax in his hand, cut down a bundle of brushwood, and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the troops with him, "What you have seen me do, do quickly, as I have done." 49 So every one of the troops cut down a bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women. (Judg 9:46-49)

Within the narrative, the final destruction of the city of Shechem seems to be recounted in vs. 45. Only afterward does the gathering in the Tower of Shechem
occur (vs. 46). Several commentators have concluded that the Tower must have been located "apart from the city of Shechem" (Burney 1930: 286; Soggin 1984: 181; 1998: 116; Na’aman 1986). Soggin suggests that the Tower of Shechem was a suburb of Shechem, and he tentatively identifies it with the Iron Age I site on Mt. Ebal (Soggin 1984: 181), arguing that the Mt. Ebal site is a migdal temple (Soggin 1984: 181). N. Na’aman has also identified el-Burnat as the Tower of Shechem (1986: 259-80).

D. I. Block has noted the seeming confusion between vss. 42-45, which portray Abimelech as having completely destroyed Shechem, after which vss. 46-49 report the destruction of the Tower of Shechem. Block harmonizes these paragraphs by proposing that Abimelech had won a resounding victory over Shechem, but that "not every corner of the city had fallen to him" (Block 1999: 331). He suggests that "the previous verses seem to have involved his destruction of the lower part of the city, as opposed to the acropolis on which the temple fortress stood. The former, which represented the areas where people lived and carried on their daily activities, took up the larger portion of the city, to be sure, but the last line of defensive personnel and structures still remained. Situated at the top of the acropolis, the citadel and the temple of El-Berith had so far escaped the destructive terror of Abimelech, and the lords of Shechem who were responsible for its defense were holed up in one of the inner rooms" (Block 1999: 331). This seems to be the most natural understanding of the text (Reed 1962: 315), and the Shechem Temple 1 seems to continue to be the most likely candidate for the Tower of Shechem.
The identification of el-Burnat as the Tower of Shechem does not seem possible, as its architecture has no resemblance to that of a migdal temple, nor does it evidence any destruction levels (Zertal 1992d: 1187). While the Tower of Shechem may have been a suburb of Shechem, as Soggin proposes, it seems extremely unlikely that it can be identified with el-Burnat. The only site with any real similarity to that of the Mt. Ebal site is that of Giloh, which will now be examined in some detail.

Giloh

The site of Giloh is located at the center of a suburb of the same name located southwest of Jerusalem (M. R. 1676 1264). The site is situated on the high point of a long ridge at an elevation of 835 m above sea-level, overlooking the surroundings of Jerusalem. The location of the site is out of accordance with the normal features that influenced site selection: There is no water-supply nearby, no good fertile land, and the main north-south road is 2 km away. Mazar observes that "it forms a most inconvenient surface: it is split into huge boulders and cavities, which make the area difficult for movement, not to speak of agriculture. The fact that the site was inhabited for only a short time, and was deserted before the period of the Monarchy, shows how unsuitable it was for permanent settlement" (A. Mazar 1981: 4). He goes on to explain, however, that "other sites which can be attributed to the early Israelite settlers are located in similar remote places which have natural defensive characteristics and extensive views, like Tell el-Fül and Kh. Raddanah north of Jerusalem, or Kh. Umm et-Tala', the only other single-period Iron Age I site discovered in the Judean mountains so far. Similar locations have been noted for settlement sites in the Galilee and the Samaria mountains. Such locations were
probably dictated by security considerations, which led the settlers to look for sites which provided natural defence and observation" (A. Mazar 1981: 4).

Excavations were carried out at the site in 1978, 1979, and 1982-84 (Fig. 52). In Area A, located at the summit of the site, a square watchtower was uncovered. The structure was constructed in Iron Age II and was reused during the Middle Ages (A. Mazar 1981: 5). While this tower was founded on bedrock, between its foundations and sealed under its floor were discovered Iron Age I building remains, which consisted of "a corner of two walls built of large unworked stones" (A. Mazar 1981: 5).

Sherds of collar-rimmed jars and cooking pots dating to Iron I were found in association with these remains. Subsequent soundings led to the discovery of Iron Age walls, though no further building activity was discerned here. Area C revealed a large dwelling (Building 8), and Area D exposed fragmentary building remains, disturbed by Byzantine or medieval construction activities. Despite the disturbances from later building activities, two thin segments here did reveal an immense double wall, "which looked like the remains of a fortified building or an outer fortification of the site" (A. Mazar 1981: 5). At the eastern edges of the site, in Area F, a survey was conducted and short soundings made "along what seemed to be a fortification wall" at the south-southeastern edges of the site (A. Mazar 1981: 5).
The Building Remains

Building 8

The best-preserved construction on the site is building 8, which appears to be an early example of a four-room house (Fig. 53). Wall 55, the southern exterior wall, is the best preserved, still standing to a height of two or three courses. Wall 55
Figure 53. Plan of building 8, Area C (A. Mazar 1981: 7, fig. 3).
demonstrates the "crude building technique" used in the construction of the building, which utilized large unworked stones, 0.5-0.7 m in length and width. These stones were not laid in any order. The width of the wall was only one of these stones wide, and the gaps between the stones were not filled in. The entrance was at the southern end of the building, between Wall 55 and Wall 43. The outside dimensions of the building are about 13.6 x 11.2 m (for a full discussion of the interior layout, see A. Mazar 1981: 6-11).

The Iron Age I tower (Building 105)

At the northern hillock of the site, overlooking the Valley of Rephaim (Area G), was a structure that is unique in Iron Age I, and has been interpreted as the foundation of a tower (Figs. 54-55). The structure had been "massively disturbed" (Mazar 1990b: 77) but, in spite of later intrusions, "the lowest courses of the Iron Age I stone structure were well preserved just below the topsoil, particularly in the northern part of the hillock" (Mazar 1990b: 78). The structure, designated Building 105, was built directly on bedrock, and its remains are comprised of a solid stone foundation, which measures to 11.24 m at its eastern side, 11.58 m at its western side, and 11 m on its northern side. The southern side had been destroyed by later building. The structure is almost an exact square, totaling about 125 square m in area (A. Mazar 1990b: 79). The interior of the structure was filled with field stones of different sizes, all positioned arbitrarily. Mazar describes the structure as follows:

"This stone fill was preserved in the centre to 1.1 m., higher than the top of the foundation in the north-eastern corner, showing that the structure was heavily eroded; the stone foundation must have originally stood at least as high as the highest
Figure 54. Plan and section of the structure in Area G (A. Mazar 1990b: 79, fig. 2).
preserved point of its core. As the structure is built on a slope running north-south, it may be conjectured that its northern face had at least six courses of stones, reaching a height of about 2 m. above the surrounding bedrock" (Mazar 1990b: 80). A shallow layer of topsoil covered the structure, in which were found some sherds of collar-rimmed jars.

The area on the northern and eastern sides of this structure is made up of rocky terrain which does not show evidence of settlement. This structure was,
therefore, situated at the northeastern perimeter of the site. The site was not completely isolated however, a fact which is evidenced by the discovery of insubstantial remains of buildings that had been attached to this structure at its southwestern corner. These remains included a corner of two stone walls, perpendicular and parallel to the square structure, that had been build on bedrock. These remains included a beaten earth floor (Locus 107) that included sherds of cooking pots, a bowl, and a collar-rimmed jar. These finds, along with those found above the stone construction, "indicate that the tower in Area G was part of the Iron Age I settlement found in other areas at Giloh" (A. Mazar 1990b: 82). Also included among the finds from Locus 107 was a well-preserved 22 cm long bronze dagger "of a type common in the Late Bronze Age which continues into the Iron Age I" (A. Mazar 1990b: 82). Mazar interprets the dagger as reinforcing the military function of Building 105.

Mazar concludes that this large, well-built stone structure should be interpreted "either as a raised platform or as the foundation of a tower" (A. Mazar 1990b: 82). In considering these options, Mazar writes: "The first explanation does not seem plausible to me, as I cannot think of a function for such an immense platform. The structure should thus be interpreted as the foundation of a large free-standing tower" (A. Mazar 1990b: 82). Mazar suggests that the stone structure was perhaps a podium for a superstructure which may have been constructed of perishable materials such as timber or mud bricks, though no evidence supporting either of these interpretations was discovered.
The Iron Age II tower

In the first two seasons of excavation (1978-1979), the square foundation of an Iron Age II tower was uncovered in Area A (Fig. 52). This structure was built at the highest topographical point of the site, which gave it a wide-ranging view in several directions, which was probably an important factor in the selection of this particular location for the construction of a tower.

The remains of this tower include a raised stone plinth (Fig. 56-57), built without mortar as a perfect square measuring 11.15 x 11.15 m (A. Mazar 1990b: 96). The outer walls, built mostly on bedrock, are 2.10-2.20 m wide, and are built of large dressed stones, roughly dressed on their exterior side. Wall 52, 1.65 m wide and built of smaller stones, served as a partition wall within this structure. The stone walls served as the framework for a solid stone fill, which Walls 53 and 56 also helped to support. The height of the preservation of the outer walls varies. The interior of the structure was filled with field stones, densely arranged, 1.40 m at its deepest point. Mazar concludes that the structure must have been "a free-standing podium which carried a superstructure, perhaps built of timber," and that "the massiveness of the stone podium and its size indicate that the tower may have reached a height of some 6-8 m. It may have had several floors, and thus a considerable internal area" (A. Mazar 1990b: 98). It is postulated that a staircase provided entrance on the northern side, where the badly disturbed foundation of a wall may have functioned as the base of a staircase.

Mazar points to towers found at Tell en-Naṣbeh and Hazor for parallels. Two free-standing towers probably dating to the late tenth century BCE were found out-
Figure 56. The Iron Age II tower in Area A (A. Mazar 1993: 519).
Figure 56. The Iron Age II plinth in Giloh's Area A (A. Mazar 1990: 97, fig. 10).
-side the early city wall and inside the Iron Age II wall (McCown 1947). A similar
tower was found at the northern end of Hazor, just outside the Strata IX-V citadel
(Yadin et al. 1960: Pl. CCV). While these two towers are similar in plan to the Giloh
Iron Age II tower, Mazar notes that neither of them are free-standing but are, instead,
part of the fortification systems of these cities (A. Mazar 1990b: 100). Free-standing
parallels are known, however, from the Iron Age II, and Mazar points to examples
from Tell el-Ful (Graham 1981: 5-11, 23-27) and at French Hill (Negbi 1969). These
two towers, along with the one at Giloh, are all positioned on elevated crests looking
out over Jerusalem and the various routes to the capital city.

Mazar notes that the building of solid stone plinths was a characteristic feature
of Iron Age II construction, pointing to the platform for the "palace fort" at Lachish
and in the cultic area at Dan, as well as smaller examples from French Hill, En Gedi,
and Hazor (A. Mazar 1990b: 100). Significantly for this study, he suggests that "the
Iron Age I tower at Giloh (Area G) . . . and perhaps also the main structure at Mt.
Ebal, are the earliest examples of this Iron Age architectural tradition" (A. Mazar
1990b: 100-1).

The inner enclosures

Remains of a wide, open courtyard encircled by enclosure walls were
discovered south of Building 8. The eastern wall was able to be traced for 15 m south
of Building 8. To the west of this wall lay the courtyard, a low, smooth area,
measuring 9 x 26 m. The courtyard was bordered on its western side by another wall
made of large, unhewn stones (Fig. 52). The courtyard was enclosed by the outer wall
of the settlement to the south. A stone installation of unknown function lay at the
northeast corner. Mazar suggests that "the large closed courtyard could have been a pen for the flocks and herds of a family or small clan who lived in the surrounding buildings. The secure and sheltered courtyard protected the livestock and could serve as a centre for clan or family activities. Such a relationship between a fenced open space and a built-up area is not known in other sites of the period, and provides an interesting contribution to the study of the planning of such settlement sites" (A. Mazar 1981: 12). Mazar goes on to suggest that other walls discovered in the excavation and survey "hint at the existence of a pattern of division walls, dividing the whole area of the site into several large units, probably similar to the one just described" (A. Mazar 1981: 12).

The outer fortification walls

The survey and excavations exposed a double outer wall that surrounded the site on its southern, eastern, and northeastern sides. The walls were first discovered in Area E, where two massive walls were discovered, parallel to one another (A. Mazar 1981: 12-13). The northern, outer wall (Wall 66), built of large stones laid in a double row, was preserved to a height of only one course and to 1.9 m in width. Wall 65 was discovered 2.5 m south of Wall 66. It was built of two rows of large stones, with a fill of smaller stones in between, and measured 1.85 m wide and 1 m high. The walls continue for 12.8 m, and their arrangement "recalls the later casemate walls surrounding Israelite cities and fortresses" (A. Mazar 1981: 13). Mazar cites the corner of the fort at Tell el-Fül as closest in similarity, both in date and location (A. Mazar 1981: 13-14). However, the walls at Giloh cannot yet be identified as casemate walls, as no partition walls have yet been found in the excavated areas. Mazar
proposes, instead, the definition of "double wall" for the walls at Giloh until the matter is further clarified. This double wall continued east for about 12 m, where it then angled south, where it was able to be followed for approximately 100 m. Partial excavations were carried out along this length (Area F), which revealed traces of the outer wall and some adjacent buildings (Fig. 58), though it was all badly eroded. A 6-m section of Wall 91, the outermost wall of the site, was exposed here. At this particular point, the wall was well-preserved, built of large unhewn stones, and measured 1.5 m wide. The wall was badly eroded north and south of this section, though the foundation was discernible for 20 m. The foundation of the wall in this area was poorly constructed with unevenly laid stones and apparently with no utilization of the double-wall plan found at the northern part of the site, though scanty remains of a dwelling (Building 80) were preserved inside the outer wall in Squares B:10-11 (A. Mazar 1981: 14). These remains included Wall 89, which was preserved for 8 m, and Walls 90 and 96, which extend west from Wall 89. It may be assumed that these walls continue toward the west, though they reach bedrock after just a few meters; their remains beyond this point were destroyed by erosion. Partially enclosed by these three walls was a room with a beaten earth floor, where fragments of two collar-rimmed storage jars were found lying "in layers of organic material and ashes" (A. Mazar 1981: 16). A 1.8-m gap passed between the outer wall and Building 80, which apparently served as a passageway. The wall could not be defined on the western and northwestern sides of the site. The internal chronology of the site is unclear, so at what point in Giloh's history the walls were built is unknown. The differences in the quality of the outer wall suggest to Mazar that it was not a
Figure 58. Giloh's outer fortification wall (A. Mazar 1981: 15, fig. 5).
homogenous project but was, instead, built in parts "perhaps by different sections of the population" (A. Mazar 1981: 16). Mazar suggests that "we may postulate that a number of clans or families which inhabited the site were responsible for the construction of the wall in the various areas, thus explaining the heterogeneity in building techniques" (A. Mazar 1981: 16). In any case, there seems to be little doubt that "the remains described can be defined as fortifications" (A. Mazar 1981: 16). As discussed above, fortifications are seldom found in Iron Age I strata in Israel, though Mazar does point to massive city walls that were found in association with collar-rimmed fragments at Bethel, Beth-Zur, Gibeon, and possibly also Shiloh. Although the evidence from all these sites is partial, Mazar argues that they all point to a phenomenon which "cannot be ignored: it seems that during the twelfth-eleventh centuries B.C.E. fortified towns did exist in the central Judean mountains and north of Jerusalem" (A. Mazar 1981: 17). A. Mazar explains (1981: 17) that

the complicated ethno-political situation in the region of Jerusalem, where Israelites of certain tribes (Benjamin, Judah, and further south Caleb), Jebusites and Hivites (Gibeonites) lived side by side, as well as external dangers (the rise of Philistine power, Midianite raids etc.) necessitated the building of fortification walls even around villages like our site. The story of the Gibeah war in Judg. 20 is just one illustration of similar activity in this region during the period of the Judges. We may assume that other settlement sites were also defended, either by a defensive wall as in our site or by constructing the outer buildings in a continuous strip.

Settlement villages that have been excavated at Ai, Khirbet Raddanah, and Tell el-Fül have not revealed fortifications of this kind. 'Izbet Sartah, however, apparently was surrounded by a defensive wall similar to that found at Giloh (Finkelstein 1993: 652-3), though this wall does not appear to have been continuous. In any case, it appears
that, at least in some cases, the Israelites built fortifications even at very early stages of their settlement.

The Pottery

The pottery repertoire from Giloh is similar to that of other central hill-country sites, and includes collar-rimmed storage jars, small storage jars, and cooking pots. The ceramic assemblage is quite limited and follows local Canaanite traditions. No decorated pottery was found. The pottery suggests that the site was settled in the 12th century BCE and may have been abandoned in the 11th century BCE (A. Mazar 1981: 18-31; 1990b: 80-82, 84-89, 90-92, 98-99).

Additional Finds

Stone objects

Few other finds were made at Giloh apart from the pottery sherds and the bronze dagger from Area G. Limestone saddle querns (Area C), flint or limestone pestles ranging from 6-8 cm in diameter, and one flint knife (A. Mazar 1990b: 89) were also found.

Animal bones

There were very few animal remains and no botanical remains found at Giloh, "perhaps due to the proximity of the occupation debris to the surface soil" (A. Mazar 1990: 89). Ten bones were identified as those of cow (6), sheep or goats (2), and donkeys (2).
Middle Bronze Age pottery

In Area F, a few sherds of Middle Bronze Age II pottery were found, including a slim bowl, some molded jar rims, the base of a dipper juglet, and some fragments of cooking pots with straight sides and rope decoration. Mazar explains that "these sherds indicate some activity at our site during the MB II, a time when large villages prospered along the Valley of Rephaim, due north of Giloh" (Mazar 1990b: 90).

Identification of the Site

No source exists for the precise association of Giloh with any known historical place name. Mazar proposes an identification with Baal Perazim as a "speculative" possibility, based on David's defeat of the Philistines at Baal Perazim, which is said to be near the Valley of Rephaim (2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chr 14:11). A "Mount Perazim" is also mentioned in Isaiah in association with the "Valley of Gibeon." Giloh is situated on the summit of a major ridge overlooking the Valley of Rephaim, and it does contain remains from the time of the Judges and the time of David. Mazar therefore suggests that Giloh be identified with ancient Baal Perazim (A. Mazar 1981: 31-2). He also notes that "the component 'Baal,' known from other place names in the Israelite settlement territory, must signify a cult of Baal which took place here and left its traces in the name" (A. Mazar 1981: 32; see further Mazar 1994: 89-90).

Nature of the Site

Based on the architectural features and the generally poor material culture, Mazar initially identified the site of Giloh as a "fortified herdsmen's village" (A.
Mazar 1981: 32). The fortification wall was apparently only partial, surrounding the southern area (Areas B, C, F, and E), but not the vicinity north of Area E, though habitation was evidenced in this area (Areas D and A). Mazar suggests that the site was comprised of two parts: "the southern part was defended by a defence wall and included a few dwellings constructed beside large pens where herds were probably kept, while the northern part included the massive tower and perhaps a few adjacent buildings. There is no evidence that the latter part was surrounded by a defence wall" (A. Mazar 1990b: 92). The economic base of the inhabitants of Giloh is unclear. The absence of animal bones and botanical remains contributes to this obscurity. The presence of grinding stones suggests that flour was ground at the site, though the absence of fertile land at the site and the distance from a regular water source point away from any kind of agricultural function for the site and may explain its eventual abandonment in the Iron Age I. Instead, the apparent division of the site into pens has suggested to Mazar "the significant role of animal husbandry at the site" (A. Mazar 1994: 89).

Mazar's identification of Iron Age I Giloh as a "fortified herdsman's village" is difficult (as already noted by Mazar). Its primary area of difficulty is the unsuitability of the topography. Farms were rarely located on the tops of hills in the central hill-country. In antiquity, vineyards thrived on hillsides and the farms were typically located either on the slopes or at the foot of the mountain. Cato, the third-century Roman agronomist, said that the ideal farm should be located at the foot of a mountain so that the slopes can be used for vineyards. Hillside vineyards would thrive because of the natural drainage system created by location; could be easily guarded
from the hilltop; and, since fruit cultivation required an investment of several years, slope cultivation kept the vineyards out of the way, freeing up the valley beds for grain (the valley beds, too, typically had the more fertile soils). Cultivation on hillsides required special techniques to prevent soil erosion and water runoff. Israelites constructed tiers of flat earthen terraces on the slopes, with stone retaining walls to support them. This transformed the hillsides into a series of flat, narrow plains suitable for farming. Today, agricultural terraces cover more than 50 percent of Judean hills around Jerusalem, and they must have been more common in antiquity.

The location of Iron Age I Giloh on the top of a ridge composed of hard Cenomanian dolomite, a "most inconvenient" surface "which makes[s] the area difficult for movement, not to speak of agriculture" (A. Mazar 1981: 4), seems to mitigate against the farm interpretation. This will be discussed further below.

In the Iron Age II, a large tower was built at the highest topographical point of the site, from which there is a line of sight in multiple directions. Bethlehem and the Judean Desert are visible to the southeast; the ridges west, north, and northeast of Jerusalem, including the ridges of Nebi Samwil, Tell el-Ful, Mt. Scopus, the Mount of Olives, and the Temple Mount, are all visible. This visibility may have been one of the chief reasons for the construction of the watchtower at Iron Age II Giloh. Mazar suggests that Iron Age II Giloh may, therefore, have been "part of a planned system intended to protect the approaches to Jerusalem and serve as the 'eyes' of the capital, which is located on a low saddle surrounded by higher ridges on almost all sides" (A. Mazar 1990b: 96). One of the main purposes of such a system of towers and forts, Mazar suggested elsewhere, "was to create a continuous line along which fire signals
could easily be transmitted" (A. Mazar 1990b: 96; see also A. Mazar 1994: 78-91). A. Mazar (1990: 96) described this line of site as follows:

From the tower at Giloh one can easily see an Iron Age fort at H. ‘Eres, west of Kibbutz Ma‘aleh ha-Hamishah, from which one can see the coastal plain and the Beth Horon ascent, where the main road leading to Jerusalem from the coastal plain passed. The Iron Age towers discovered at Tell el-Ful and on French Hill and the palace-fort at Ramat Rahel are also visible from Giloh, thus establishing eye contact within a chain of strategic positions around Jerusalem. This location of the watch tower at Giloh explains its strategic importance, although it is about two kilometers west of the main road leading from Jerusalem to Hebron.

This understanding of the Iron Age II tower at Giloh comports well with the developing understanding of the fortified boundaries of the Judaean monarchy (Stern 2001: 130-65; Barkay, Fantalkin, and Tal 2002: 49-71).

The Special Case of Building 105 and the Relationship of Giloh to Mt. Ebal

The discovery of the Iron Age I structure (Building 105) since Mazar's initial publication on Giloh in 1981 raises special questions about the nature of Giloh in the Iron Age I. Mazar suggested three alternate understandings of the site in this period (A. Mazar 1990b: 92-3):

1. The tower may have been the stronghold of a feudal landowner or owner of herds, such as Nabal, whom the Bible describes as a "great man" (יָשׁוֹעַ, 'ish gadol me'od).

2. It may have been built by an egalitarian community for the purpose of establishing a common stronghold against potential danger.

3. The Iron Age I tower may have been an outlying position of Canaanite-Jebusite Jerusalem.
Regardless of which specific interpretation is chosen for the site, Mazar understands it to have had at least a partial military purpose in Iron Age I. He explains that, "whatever interpretation is chosen, the existence of such a solid public structure in one, and perhaps two, of the Iron Age I hill-country villages, and the discovery of bronze weapons in several sites of this period (the bronze dagger at Giloh, the bronze dagger at Hazor Stratum IX, and perhaps the el-Khadr arrowheads), add a new dimension to the nature of these sites. It appears that some sort of military organization and defence activities were an essential part of the culture to which these villages belong" (A. Mazar 1990b: 93).

Mazar notes that Building 105, which he interprets as a "solid tower," "is a unique architectural feature in the Iron Age I" (A. Mazar 1990b: 84). The only structure for which Mazar finds comparison is the central structure of Area A at Mt. Ebal. Together, these two structures are the sole public buildings known from any of the Iron Age I settlement sites of the central hill-country. Some who have disagreed with a cultic interpretation of the Ebal site have tended to point to the identification of Giloh's Building 105 as a tower as an assured result. By analogy, they then identify the central structure at Ebal as a watchtower as well (Kempinski 1986: 44; A. Mazar 1990b: 84, 92-3; 1992a: 294; 1994: 85-6).

The identification of Building 105 as a tower, however, is not certain. Mazar does cite three examples of Iron Age I buildings with military functions, including the casemate fortress on Har Adir in Upper Galilee, the great fortress-palace at Tell el-Ful, and the fort-like Building 402 at Tel Masos (A. Mazar 1990b: 84). The fortress at Har Adir is one of three excavated settlements out of 25 discovered in the Upper
Galilee (A. Mazar 1992a: 285). Most of the sites surveyed are small villages of 4-5 dunams. The Har Adir site, by contrast, is a well-planned fortress that is an exception to the typical settlement pattern of this region (Davies 1980: 4). It does not, however, contain any free-standing towers, and it dates from the 12th/11th centuries BCE. Tell el-Ful is also a large fortress, also dating from the 12th to the 11th centuries BCE (Lapp 1993: 445-48). This site also contains no free-standing towers. The building to which Mazar points at Tel Masos, Building 402, was also a fortress (Fritz and Kempinski: 1983; for an overview of the excavations, see Kempinski 1993: 986-89).

In comparing these structures to Building 105 at Giloh, Mazar already noted that these structures "all belong to the eleventh century B.C.E. and are more complex in plan than ours" (A. Mazar 1990b: 84).

The only other contemporaneous parallel suggested by Mazar is that of the Mt. Ebal site. There are several problems with comparing Mt. Ebal with Giloh:

1. Giloh's Building 105 is positioned 55 m to the north on the outside of the "double-wall" which surrounds the site (Zertal 1995: 272).

2. Whereas the Iron Age II tower at Giloh stands on its summit, Building 105, like the central structure at Mt. Ebal, is positioned some distance (3 m) below the peak of the northern slope of the knoll (Zertal 1995: 273).

3. Building 105 is completely different from that of the central structure of Ebal's Area A. Whereas Building 105 consists of a "foundation block" of solid stone fill, Ebal's central structure is a building built of walls with both inner and outer faces and filled with a structural "fill."
This is a difference already noted by Mazar (1990b: 84), though he suggests that "the final result in both cases is similar, i.e. a solid foundation for a possible superstructure" (A. Mazar 1990b: 84). It does not seem warranted, either, to draw conclusions about the nature of Building 105 based on the design of the Iron Age II tower in Giloh's Area A. This tower has one interior partition wall reinforced with two crosswalls. It is not, therefore, an exact parallel either. In addition, it postdates the Iron Age I structures by up to 500 years.

4. The solid base of Building 105 seems to complicate its identification as a watchtower. "All that a 'watch-tower' necessitated in that particular topography," notes Zevit, "was a very narrow hollow structure a few meters high. It could not have been intended to withstand sieges and assaults" (Zevit 2001: 198, n. 122).

5. The nature of the superstructure that may have been built atop the foundation of Building 105 remains uncertain (Zertal 1995: 273).
   a. An elevated superstructure built of mudbrick would likely have left some remains. Mazar noted that "no evidence [of a mudbrick superstructure] was detected" (A. Mazar 1990b: 82).
   b. A superstructure of wood apparently would have been unlikely due to the paucity of wood in the environs (stressed in A. Mazar 1981: 4).

In light of these possible difficulties with identifying Giloh as a watchtower, Z. Zevit has suggested that, if el-Burnat is accepted as a cultic site, it may be that
Giloh should be reexamined "with Renfrew's list of behavioral correlates in hand and the Mt. Ebal site in mind" (Zevit 2001: 197). Zevit offers the following points for a hypothetical reconstruction of Iron Age I Giloh as a cultic site:

1. If Giloh were understood as an altar or offering platform, then the flimsy structures attached to it "may have served purposes similar to the installations within the ramps at the Ebal structure" (Zevit 2001: 198, n. 122).

2. The bronze dagger found in Locus 107, adjacent to Building 105, "may have been used for butchering or slaughtering. At any rate, in and of itself the dagger does not qualify this structure as a military one" (Zevit 2001: 198, n. 122), as Mazar suggests (A. Mazar 1990b: 82). Knives are often found in sanctuaries (e.g., Tell Mevorakh, Tell Kitan).

3. If a cultic identification of some kind were accepted in place of a military one, then "the adjacent 'farm' and other structures may be considered domiciles for a family of priests who tended the site that was most likely located outside of a sacred area delimited by a low wall" (Zevit 2001: 198, n. 122).

While this reconstruction may be speculative, the least that can be said is that at least a partial cultic function is not out of the realm of possibility for Giloh. In fact, as Zertal has noted (1995: 273), while Mazar postulated an identification of the site as a fortified herdsmen's village, he also suggested at least a partial cultic understanding of the site in his identification of it with Baal Perazim (2 Sam 5:20; 1 Chr 14:11) and
Mount Perazim (Isa 28:21). Assuming the correctness of the toponymic association, Mazar suggested that "the component 'Baal,' known from other place names in the Israelite settlement territory, must signify a cult of Baal which took place here and left its traces in the name" (A. Mazar 1981: 32). Zertal suggests that, "in this case, the stone building 105 could be a *bamah* or other cultic structure. It may well suit its position and lack of superstructure material, as well as the term 'Baal' used in the probable identification of the site" (Zertal 1995: 273). In any case, while the nature of Giloh may be unclear, what does seem clear is that Kempinski's citation of Giloh as his only example for the ubiquity of the building of podiums for watchtowers in the Iron Age I (Kempinski 1986: 44) is insufficient.

The Central Structure of El-Burnat and Its Possible Identification as a Watchtower

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is appropriate now to ask whether the central structure of Area A at Mt. Ebal may or may not be identified as a watchtower. Central to its identification as such by Kempinski and others has been an understanding of the site as having been built in stages, as well as an identification of the site as a watchtower by analogy. The fill of the main structure, which consisted of distinct layers rather than the random collapse that would normally result from destruction debris falling from an upper story, appears to suggest that the central structure of Stratum IB was built as a single unit (see chapter 2) rather than in phases. Consequently, the structure must be evaluated on the basis of its architecture.
Was El-Burnat an Iron Age I Watchtower?

The question of whether the central structure at Mt. Ebal might be identified as an Iron Age I watchtower has, in the main, been dealt with above. Already in his preliminary report, Zertal noted a number of difficulties to the identification of the main building as a watchtower (Zertal 1986/87: 153).

1. Towers usually functioned as part of a fortification system related to a centralized military institution. Though the Manasseh survey did reveal a network of towers in the Jordan Valley in Iron Age II, there is no evidence of any kind of centralized military network in Iron Age I.

2. The topographical location of the Ebal site does not comport with that necessitated by a tower. As noted in chapter 1, el-Burnat is located on a high hill, far from any roads, and it does not appear that security conditions were considered in the selection of the site. There are no roads nearby for a watchtower to observe.

3. The Ebal site is not surrounded by a defensive wall. The western side of the site, which is the most vulnerable, has only an insubstantial enclosure wall around it. In addition, the entrance to the site does not comport with concerns of defensibility.

4. As discussed above, the architectural elements "have nothing in common with the concept of a tower" (Zertal 1986/87: 153).

5. There is no evidence that the central structure was "a basement or foundation" for a superstructure of some other unknown function. Zertal
notes that "there is insufficient stone debris for a second storey and no
evidence at all of bricks or brick material" (Zertal 1986/87: 153).

As discussed above, there have been no watchtowers dating to the Iron Age I found in
the surveys of either Manasseh or Ephriam (except for the one outside el-Ahwat,
which is probably not to be identified as Israelite). Zertal suggests that "the reason
may lie in the socio-economic structure of the farmers and herders who occupied the
hill country at this time" (Zertal 1986: 153). As discussed above, the pattern of
settlement found in the surveys consists primarily of remote, small sites, with
restricted cultivation areas neighboring the villages. Only during Iron Age II, when
the fields expanded further away from the village centers, did watchtowers for the
purpose of guarding the crops appear.

In light of these points, the identification of the central structure in Area A as
a watchtower does not seem likely.

Gilgalim

In terms of the layout of the site as a whole, the Ebal site most closely
resembles a number of other sites discovered by the survey of Manasseh, all in the
Jordan Valley, whose enclosures are designed in the shape of a "sandal," the shape of
which is not directed by the topography. These sites include el-'Unuq (Zertal 1996:
394-97), Bedhat esh-Sha'ab (Zertal 2005: 238-42), Masu’a (Zertal 2005: 305-7),
Yafit (3) (Zertal 2005: 333-37), and possibly Wadi Ahmar (7) (Zertal 2005: 529-32),
all of which have been typed by the survey as "enclosures." Each of these sites shares
a number of characteristics with the Mt. Ebal site.
The first of these sites to be published was El-‘Unuq (Zertal 1991: 42-43; 1996: 394-97) (Fig. 59). This site is a large enclosure (3.73 acres) on an isolated hilltop, in the Wadi el-Far‘ah valley. The enclosure is elliptical in shape, measuring 250 m long and 70 m wide. It is surrounded by a well-built wall of large unworked field stones, constructed in a double row. The enclosure is subdivided into two unequal parts, with the smaller division in the north and the larger one in the south. While other structures may have been built on the inside, no buildings have been discerned. There is, however, a round stone pile 5 m in diameter located in the southern tip. Zertal suggests that this heap probably covered a round structure (Zertal 1996: 395). The enclosure is not a village, town, or settlement, as it does not seem to have had any permanent residential structures inside it, and the wall seems too monumental for the site to have been designed for the coralling of sheep or for other agricultural purposes (Zertal 1991: 43). Considerable pottery was found at the site; however, the repertoire of which was very similar to that of Stratum 2 at Mt. Ebal: 70% Iron IA, 20% "Einun," and 10% Iron II (Zertal 1996: 395). Many of the shards bore the indentations common among the Manassite and Ephraimite pottery (Zertal 1994: 54-55; 1996: 395; cf. Finkelstein 1988: 286-87).

Bedhat esh-Sha‘ab was explored by the survey in 1989 (Zertal 2005: 238-42) and excavated over two seasons during 2002-2003 (Ben-Yosef 2005: 724-70). The site is 13 dunams in area and is elliptical or "sandal"-shaped, with a larger quadrant in the top part of the site (Area A) and a smaller quadrant in the lower area (Area B) (Fig. 60). These two areas are partially separated by two subdivided spaces between them (Areas D and E), though there is an open space that connects them.
Figure 59. Plan of el-'Unuq (Zertal 1996: 396).
Figure 60. Plan of Bedhat esh-Sha‘ab (Zertal 2005: 728).

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(Area C). A round structure is located in the top right quadrant of the site (section A4) that has been dubbed a bāmāh (Fig. 61). The bāmāh has a floor around most of it, which was covered with a concentration of animal bones, as well as pottery and cooking vessels. A cut was made next to the bāmāh, revealing early Iron Age I pottery under the floor. The pottery was a homogeneous assemblage dating to the late 13th and early 12th centuries BCE (Zertal 2005: 743-52). Aside from the bāmāh, no other structures are located in the site. Bedhat esh-Sha’a’ab is surrounded by a wall made of two lines of stones similar to that at El-’Unuq, and the site as a whole is located under a slope that partially encircles the complex, forming something like a huge amphitheatre (Fig. 62). If Bedhat esh-Sha’a’ab had some kind of cultic function, the slopes around and above it would have made ideal places for a large assembly to see and hear proceedings.
El-'Unuq, Bedhat esh-Sha’ab, and the other enclosures are all located in the low ground of the plains, some of them have internal divisions, and all contain Iron Age I and, in some cases, Iron Age II, pottery sherds. These structures are unique in the Mediterranean region in this period and appear to have been built by semi-nomads who utilized a pottery repertoire similar to that of the new population group that entered Canaan from the east (see chapter 5). Zertal (1991: 42-43; 1998: 247) has suggested calling these sites *gilgalim*, a term that connotes gathering places (Kotter 1992: 1022-24; Levine 2007: 572-73). It has long been recognized that “Gilgal” is not a place name but, more probably, a type of fortified encampment. Rather than
identifying it as a site name, Waltke simply defines it "a circle of stones" (though with a question mark) (Waltke 1980: 164). The name seems to mean something like "circle (of stones)," a meaning apparently derived from a duplication of the root ֶלַש (galal) "to roll" (cf. Josh 5:9). The MT refers to at least three, and possibly five, different locations identified as "Gilgal" in both the north and south (Kotter 1992: 1022). Most of these gilgalim appear to have had a cultic function. A Gilgal served as the site of the circumcision of the generation of Hebrews born during the wilderness wanderings (Josh 5:2-9) as well as their celebration of the Passover (Josh 5:10-11). A Gilgal was located near Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (Deut 11:30), where the Israelites renewed the covenant with Yahweh in the midst of the settlement (Josh 8:30-35). A Gilgal served as the site where the Israelites camped and from which they launched their sorties during the period of the settlement (Merling 1997: 199-205), and where the tribal territories were allotted (Josh 15-19). A Gilgal became an important cultic center during the time of Samuel (1 Sam 7:16) and a Gilgal was the site where some men of Judah welcomed David back from exile following his son Absalom's death (2 Sam 19:15). Gilgal is not mentioned again until it appears in the Minor Prophets.

Although Micah cites Gilgal positively in a rehearsal of Yahweh's deliverance of the early Hebrews (Mic 6:5), it features in Hosea and Amos as a site of apostate worship (Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4-5, 15). Many of the aforementioned sites had some cultic function. If the fortified encampments of the Jordan Valley, located among the earliest sites of the Israelite settlement (see chapter 5), are understood as gilgalim, then they may represent the movement of early Israel's cultic center as it migrated westward. In the earliest sites, the settlers constructed simple bāmōt whereas, when

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they began to sedentarize in the central hill-country of Manasseh, they then
constructed a cultic site that could function in a more central capacity.

Altars

Throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age, archaeological data in Canaan
attest to the importance of sacrifice as the principal method of performing ritual.
Alpert Nakhai (2003b: 347) notes that, "for Canaanites, sacrifice was the sacred rite,
the primary focus of religious ritual, and the means by which people defined their
relationship to each other and to their gods." The emphasis on sacrifice continued
among the Iron Age Israelites (cf. Anderson 1992: 870-86), though worship appears
to have been somewhat idiosyncratic in that religion and places of worship seem to
have been "tailored to meet the customs and needs of individual worshiping groups"
(Alpert Nakhai 2001: 192). Accordingly, the "altar" appears throughout all the
aforementioned periods as a key appurtenance of cultic sites. The Hebrew word,
מִזְבַּח (mizbe 'ah), comes from the root מָזָה (zavah), which means "to slaughter."
The altar was originally the place where sacrificial slaughter was performed, though
by biblical times animals were no longer slaughtered on the altar itself but nearby
(Milgrom 1971: 760). In ancient Israel, in addition to animal offerings, grain, wine,
and incense offerings were made on the altar, and the altar also served non-sacrificial
purposes, such as serving as a witness (e.g., Josh 22:26-29) and providing asylum (1
Kgs 1:50; 2:28). Altars are found everywhere throughout the ancient Near East, and
here I will look at selected altars as possible physical parallels to the Ebal site. This
will not be a comprehensive study of all altars, but will consider only altars that are
closest in time and place.
At the outset, the difficulties with terminology should be noted. LaRocca-Pitts has recently explored these issues in her published dissertation, "Of Wood and Stone": The Significance of Israelite Cultic Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters (2001), and has noted the inconsistency with which archaeologists have used the terms bāmāḥ and mizbe 'āḥ (2001: 130-33, 229-30, 241-42). Archaeologists have identified platforms, structures, enclosures, altars, and tumuli dating from the Early Bronze Age through the Iron Age as bāmōt, basically treating bāmāḥ and mizbe 'āḥ as synonyms. Larocca-Pitts (2001: 132) writes that

the use of the term bāmāḥ . . . simply illustrates the complication of ancient Hebrew terms being borrowed into Modern Hebrew without a specific semantic range or specialized usage being borrowed along with them. Unfortunately, Israeli archaeologists often use the archaic biblical Hebrew term bāmāḥ to identify all types of open air cultic sites, without regard to formal or architectural criteria. This has led to a multiplicity of excavators reporting the presence of bāmōt without a general consensus of what the term actually means, either in modern or ancient usage.

Likewise, biblical commentators often indiscriminately understand references to bāmōt without any architectural specificity (Barrick 1996: 621, 623, n. 14). Alpert Nakhai (2001: 162) has summarized four interpretations of the bāmāḥ that have predominated among both archaeologists and biblical interpreters until very recently: (1) a primitive, open-air installation located on a natural hilltop equipped with some combination of sacred pole(s), standing stones, and possibly altar(s) (e.g., Macalister 1912: 381-406), (2) an artificially elevated platform upon which religious rites were carried out (e.g., Biran 1981: 142-45; Miller 1985: 228; Vaughan 1974: 55), (3) an altar (e.g., Yadin 1976: 8; Haran 1981: 33; 1988), and (4) a mortuary installation (e.g., Albright 1957; 1969: 102). While Nakhai (2001: 162) suggests (citing Dever 1994) that the first interpretation is probably the most prevalent, the third seems just 182
as widely held and, as Barrick (1996: 641) notes, dates at least as far back as Jerome. Barrick (1996: 641) argues, however, that bāmāḥ and mizbe ‘ah are not synonyms, and he suggests that the bāmāḥ was the sanctuary complex that contained the mizbe ‘ah. It is not clear, however, that such clear distinctions can be made. As LaRocca-Pits (2001: 133) has noted, "at present, no studies have successfully identified any archaeological installations specifically as bāmāḥt as opposed to shrines or temples or other types of cultic structures." While recognizing the fact that the definitions of both the terms bāmāḥ and mizbe ‘ah have not been definitively clarified and that they are not consistently used, I will follow the usages of the excavators in relation to their respective sites.

**Early to Middle Bronze Age**

**Megiddo**

The sacred precinct at Megiddo (Area BB) contains temples dating back into the Early Bronze Age (see Ussishkin 1997: 460-69). A large circular structure, measuring 8 m in diameter and 1.5 m high, dates to the Early Bronze II (Fig. 63). A flight of steps led to the top of the structure on its southeast side, and an enclosure wall was built around it, apparently accessed by an entrance on the southeast. Within this wall large quantities of animal bones and broken pottery were discovered. The structure was identified as an altar (4017) (Loud 1948: 57-105), an interpretation reinforced by the renewed excavations at Megiddo by Tel Aviv University and Pennsylvania State University (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000: 71). The center of cultic activity at Megiddo was apparently at altar 4017 from the later part of the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age I. At some time during stratum XVII,
Figure 64. Altar 4017 at Megiddo (Courtesy of Ralph K. Hawkins).

Temple 4040 was built north of the altar (Fig. 64). This new temple was an innovation in the architectural forms of Palestine, and is similar to the Anatolian "Megaron" temples (Kempinski 1989: 175-76). Temple 4040 is of a broadroom type with a platform (or altar) set against the wall directly opposite the doorway (cf. Ben-Tor 1992: 87; A. Mazar 1980: 62-68; Stern 1984: 28-36). In the Middle Bronze I village, temple 4040 was restored on a modest scale with an altar and a number of stelae, each about 1 m in height (Kempinski 1989: 178-80).

Tell el-Ḥayyat

This Bronze Age village, located 2 km east of the Jordan River and 7 km southwest of Pella, was occupied during the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Ages (cf. Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1997: 487-88; Falconer 2001: 278-79). Tell
el-Ḥayyat measured only about one-half hectare and would have housed approximately 150 people or less. The earliest architecture in the hamlet consists of a small mudbrick shrine, built in a central location (MB IIA), which was enlarged throughout the Middle Bronze Age (MB IIB and C) (Fig. 65). As the sanctuaries were modified, they exceeded the size of Ḥayyat's dwellings. The sanctuaries correspond with the Levantine, Syrian, and Egyptian Migdal temples (Falconer 2001: 278). In addition to a low bench, stone pedestal, and one or more massebōt, a stepped, mudbrick altar was built in the northeast corner just inside the door.

Falconer and Magness-Gardiner have carried out a detailed study of the quality, quantity, and distribution of the contents of the temple "in order to assess the
Figure 65. Phases of the temple at Tell el-Hayyat (Magness-Gardiner and Falconer 1994: 137).

structural distinction between the temple and non-temple on the site" (1994: 140).
Highlighting their agreement with Renfrew's suggestion that ritual is conducted in a special, distinctive manner of action (Renfrew 1994: 51), they note that "depositional patterns of faunal and floral remains, and ceramic vessels for processing and storing food illuminate ritual activities and their integration in village economies" (Falconer 186).
and Magness-Gardiner 1994: 140). In discussing the patterns of bone deposition, Falconer and Magness-Gardiner report that approximately 95 percent of the animal bones that were identifiable belonged to domesticated sheep, goat, pig, and cattle. Fundamental distinctions emerge when the domestic bone assemblages are compared with those of the temple. Within the temple interiors, sheep and goat remains predominate, while ovicaprid and pig bones predominate in the domestic structures (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1994: 142). Since goats generate more "secondary products" and are thus well-suited for transport and exchange, the increase in sheep-to-goat ratios in temple and domestic contexts suggests that ovicaprid husbandry at Tell el-Ḫayyat was not completely market oriented. Instead, the excavators conclude that "the dearth of pig bones in temple settings, particularly by virtue of its stark contrast to sheep and goat, probably signals an effect of ritual proscription" (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1994: 146). This is in harmony with textual descriptions from Mari, Ugarit, Emar, and Israel that specify sheep, goat, and cattle as appropriate sacrifices. Deposition of macrobotanical remains shows that consumption of plant foods was a major focus of activity in the temple compound (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1994: 146-48). Ceramic assemblages are quite similar for both temple and domestic contexts, though they exhibit significant functional distinctions, probably indicating different household and ritual use of ceramics (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1994: 148-54). A study of the patterning of objects of symbolic and intrinsic value also shows some similarities and contrasts between domestic and temple use (Magness-Gardiner 1994: 154-56). The physical remains and their patterning at Tell
el-Ḥayyat serve as material correlates for the partial reconstruction of the village's ritual beliefs and behavior.

Tell ed-Dabʿa

At Tell ed-Dabʿa, the Hyksos capital of Avaris, M. Bietak excavated the largest Canaanite temple ever discovered. Rather than a migdal temple, however, this was the more typical long-axis Canaanite temple, divided into three separate rooms with the innermost room serving as the "holy of holies" (Bietak 1979: 247-53, Figs. 8-9; see Mazar 1980: 62-68). The temple measured ca. 32.7 x 21.4 m and its double walls were 4-5 m thick. In front of the temple was a large, open-air courtyard measuring 21.5 x 33.8 m, along with favissae filled with bones and pottery. In the courtyard, about 70 feet from the main entrance, stood a large altar for animal sacrifice (Bietak 1996: 36-40, Fig. 30). The altar was built of mudbricks and was covered with ashes and bones. Tree pits were found next to the altar, and several charred acorns were found on the altar. This combination suggests the presence of sacred trees in the temple courtyard, a common phenomenon in ancient cultic sites (see LaRocca-Pits 2001: 161-249). The acorn pits on the altar suggest that the sacred trees must have been evergreen oaks transplanted from Canaan (Bietak 1996: 36-40). The temple likely served the Asiatic immigrants who were settled to the south of the Middle Kingdom town (stratum II) around 1800 BCE and following.

Shechem

Shechem's Migdal Temple was located just inside the northern city gate (Fig. 66). In the courtyard in front of the temple, about 6.5 m before the entrance, Sellin
uncovered what was either the platform for an altar or the altar itself (G. E. Wright 1965: 83; Gallong 1937: 14). The large rectangular structure, made of earth and stone, measured 2.20 m long, 1.65 m wide, and 35 cm high. The stones had been flattened on top. An open-air altar of this size was likely meant for animal sacrifice. In accordance with his argument that Temple 1 continued in use until the general destruction of the city (ca. 1100 BCE), so also did the altar and other cultic appurtenances (Stager 1999: 232).
Ugarit

The administrative center of a kingdom on the Syrian coast, Ugarit was a center of trade, government, and religion (cf. DeVries 1997: 83-89). The importance of Ugarit has been brought to light by thousands of clay tablets containing information about its culture, government, and religion (e.g., Young 1981; Craige 1983). Ugarit contained many temples, among which the best known are the Temples of Baal and Dagon (Pardee and Bordreuil 1992: 695-721). Other religious structures were located across the tell, interspersed with shops and workshops. One of these was the Temple of the Rhytons, so called because of the large number of rhytons found inside it. The building's architecture is typical of Late Bronze Age Near Eastern sanctuaries (Yon 2006: Figs. 44, 47). A vestibule leads into a main hall, rectangular in shape (6 x 7 m). A sacristy is located in the northeastern corner, and benches line the northern and western walls. A stepped structure is located in the center of the eastern wall (Fig. 67). The structure consists of four stone steps, though only three are visible in their final state. The fourth step is surrounded by the most recent floor. Marquerite Yon describes the platform and its construction as follows:

The upper row, 2.30 m. long by 43.5 to 44.5 cm. wide, is made of two identical carefully cut blocks. The quality of the upper step in comparison to the others is a good indication that it had a particular function, whereas the others merely supported it. Thus this is not a stairway; it does not give on to a passageway and the lower row leans against a wall which, at the time of excavation, rose higher than the upper "step" (today's degradation has caused the upper rubble stones to fall).

Based on the position of this structure on the central axis of the room, Yon concludes that it had some "important role in the use of the room and the activities pertaining to
it" (Yon 1996: 410). She notes that the upper, flat surface (2.30 m by almost 45 cm) "was enough room to support offerings, figurines and even steles or statues," and that "a comparison with other contemporary cult places (in Palestine for example) suggests that it was an offering platform" (1996: 410). If the structure is correctly identified as an altar, then its construction with three tiers should especially be noted.

**Hazor**

Throughout much of the second millennium BCE, Hazor was the largest city in the southern Levant and was closely associated with the large and powerful Bronze Age city-states in Syria. Texts discovered at Mari, in Syria, Tel el-Amarna, Egypt, and in Hazor itself describe the role of the Canaanite city in international trade and diplomacy and suggest that, during the New Kingdom period, while most of Canaan was under Egyptian control, Hazor maintained independence. The Late Bronze Age
city was destroyed sometime in the 13th century BCE. Garstang conducted soundings at the site of Hazor in 1928, but excavations were not carried out until almost 30 years later, when the James A. Rothschild Expedition was launched under the direction of the late Yigal Yadin (cf. Yadin 1970; 1975; 1993: 594-603; Ben-Tor 1993: 604-606). Excavations have since been renewed under A. Ben-Tor (1997: 107-27; 1998: 457-67). The renewed excavation project has focused much attention on the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550-1200 BCE) remains at Hazor, especially the Canaanite palace discovered in Area A of the Upper City. Yadin had uncovered a corner of this massive structure during his excavations and dated it to the Middle Bronze Age; the current excavations have shown, however, that it should be dated to the Late Bronze Age. The palace exterior features decorative, Syrian-style basalt orthostats forming a zigzag-shaped outer wall, a paved outdoor courtyard with a cultic platform or altar in its center, a raised entrance porch with the remains of two huge column bases, and two guard rooms flanking the entrance. The palace core is dominated by a central throne room, which was constructed of mudbrick walls faced with basalt orthostats and a floor built of planks of expensive cedar of Lebanon. The architectural plan parallels those of Syrian palaces, especially that of Alalakh in northwestern Syria (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999: 28-29). Among the many artifacts recovered from the palace are fragments of ivory plaques and boxes, cylinder seals and beads, figurines, two bronze statues of kings or deities, and the largest Bronze Age anthropomorphic statue ever found in Israel, made of basalt and standing over 3 feet tall.

The platform or podium in the center of the courtyard in front of the palace (Fig. 68) does seem to have served as an altar (S. Zuckerman, personal...
communication, 2007). Although the final report of the architecture and related finds at Hazor is still in preparation, J. Lev-Tov and K. McGeough (2007: 85-111) have published a study based on the archaeozoological finds associated with the podium and courtyard and their interpretation. The authors note several factors that point to its identification as an altar. First, in addition to being the location of the podium, the courtyard connected the palace and an adjacent temple (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2007: 89). The courtyard-with-altar arrangement is similar to contemporary sites in Syria (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999: 29). This arrangement suggests an association of the podium with ritual events. Second, the size and context of the faunal assemblage associated with the courtyard and altar suggest a cultic identification of the structure.
Almost 17,000 pieces of bone were found in the course of the excavation of the
courtyard. Rather than being strewn around the courtyard, the vast majority of them
were found in contexts abutting the altar (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2007: 89). A third
indicator of the cultic nature of the installation may be the six polished astragali
(ankle bones) found in the assemblage associated with the courtyard and altar (Lev-
appear to have been used for divination in the ancient Near East and elsewhere.

Lev-Tov and McGeough conclude that, "given the assemblage's size and
inclusion of special bones, we assert that this faunal assemblage resulted from
sacrifices and associated feasts" (2007: 95). The authors note the demonstration by a
number of prior studies (e.g., Fleming 1996; Lambert 1993: Leichty 1993; et al.) that
feasts held for religious occasions were used as tools for social inclusion and
exclusion. Lev-Tov and McGeough draw on cuneiform texts from Emar, in which
numerous festivals are described, to show how identity was created and manipulated
through ancient Near Eastern religious feasts. Focusing on three festivals in
particular, the installation of the NIN.DINGIR priestess, the Mashartu Festival, and
the Zukru Festivals, the authors note a number of features related to identity
formation. The Emar festivals appear to have been characterized by wide-ranging
community participation. Apparently the majority of the residents of the community
participated in the NIN.DINGIR installation and the Zukru Festival. In addition,
many of the residents supported these feasts through labor contribution as well as
through provision of materials, especially food products. While other studies (e.g.,
Fleming 1996) have emphasized the creation of unity, based on the democratic nature

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of these festivals, Lev-Tov and McGeough (2007: 93) emphasize the aspect of identity formation that features in some of these feasts. The NIN.DINGIR festival, in which the identity of a young woman was transferred from the secular to the sacred realm, seems to have had identity formation as the center of its purpose. In the Zukru Festival, social relationships were reified "by reaffirming the centrality of the worship of Dagan and unifying the town through religious feasts."

Forms of hierarchy were also publicly enacted or publicly recognized at the Emar feasts. The monarch was the major provider of fare, and the participation of the community, therefore, meant that they "actively recognized the power and generosity of the king, reifying his role as leader" (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2007: 93). Some persons were allowed to feast inside temple confines, while others were limited to the areas outside. The wealth of the cult was secured by extending its influence beyond the sacred precinct. In summary, Lev-Tov and McGeough (2007: 94) note that "at Emar, the feast within the festival was a period of broad communal participation in public rituals. Such feasts were organized hierarchically, and while they allowed the community to participate in collective activities, they were nonetheless events at which social roles were demonstrated and reaffirmed rather than leveled." The Emar texts are also very explicit about which portions of sacrificial animals were to be given to various participants or groups of participants during the course of the festival, further contributing to the creation or reifying of the social identities of festival participants (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2007: 104-5). The various feasts at Emar were "parts of larger ceremonies designed to move individuals from one
identity to another" or to "reify the social identities of all the participants, collectively and as individuals" (2007: 107).

By analogy, Lev-Tov and McGeough (2007: 95) assert that the altar in the courtyard of the Canaanite palace at Hazor was the product of sacrifices and associated feasts. They suggest that the location of the feasting in the courtyard had implications for identity expression, in that "those doing the feasting chose an exclusive area to which only temple personnel and royalty would have had access."
The feasts in the courtyard, therefore, "defined a separate identity based partly on their exclusivity." The location of the feast and the proportion of cattle bones suggest the sponsorship and possible participation of the king or other important figures at Hazor. The courtyard assemblage also suggests that nonroyal residents also brought food for the feasts (2001: 100, 107). In light of the fact that many of the altar sites included in this study show evidence of the preparation of food in the sacred area, the study of Lev-Tov and McGeough makes an important contribution in considering the possible functions of such meals.

Tel Mevorakh

Tel Mevorakh is a small mound (1 dunam) on the south bank of the Crocodile River (nahal hatanninim), which runs between the Plain of Sharon and the Carmel Coast (Stern 1984: 1-2). Strata XI-X contained the remains of a large building that covered the entire mound (Stern 1984: 4-9). The building is oriented east-west and measures 10 x 5 m. Beaten-lime plaster covered both the floors and walls. An altar with five steps leading up to it was located along the rear wall (Fig. 69). The altar was rectangular in shape and measured 1.5 m long by 1 m wide and 1 m high. The
imprint of a small column was found in the lime floor in the corner of the platform, suggesting that it may have been canopied. Sunk into the floor in one of the altar's lower surfaces was a storejar. Benches were built along parts of the western, northern, and eastern walls, extending more than 8 m total in length, and a limestone libation table was incorporated into wall 36 of stratum VI (Stem 1978: Fig. 26). A round refuse pit, identified as a favissa (locus 256), was found to have been cut through the lime floor. It measured ca. 0.5 m in depth and was found to be empty (Stem 1984: 5). The finds in the building include Mitannian-style cylinder seals, two faience plaques, two cups, bronze cymbals, a bronze knife, a ring decorated with a palmette, a knife, javelin, and arrowheads (Stem 1984: 22-27). The pottery repertoire included a number of imported white-slip Cypriote "milk bowls," as well as local ware, including a tankard, Cypriot base-ring and monochrome bowls, and jars, jugs, juglets, bowls, lamps, and decorated chalices and goblets (Stem 1984: 10-21). The majority
of the vessels were open in form, and would therefore have been suitable for food presentation and/or consumption. The only find that may be indicative of the nature of the cult practice carried out here was a 20 cm long bronze snake that resembles others found in the Hazor and Timnah temples (Stern 1984: 22).

When one considers the cumulative data from the Mevorakh public building, "its form, interior installations, and especially its finds leave no doubt that it should be interpreted as a sanctuary" (Stern 1993: 1032-33). The site apparently served as a wayside sanctuary from the 15\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} centuries BCE.

**Lachish**

In the Late Bronze Age, a temple was built in the abandoned fosse near the northwest corner of the mound (Tufnell et al. 1940: 14). The temple underwent three phases (phases I-III) (Fig. 70). Fosse Temple I was a modest building made up of a main hall (5 x 10 m) and two side rooms. Fosse Temple II was larger and consisted of a main hall enlarged into a square (10 x 10 m), the ceiling for which was supported by four columns. The walls of the phase II temple were lined with benches where offerings could be placed, and an altar was built abutting the southern wall. Additional rooms, located to the north and south of the main hall, were constructed. Fosse Temple III followed the same basic plan of Fosse Temple II, but another room, located in the south side of the building, was added during this phase. A cultic niche was built into the southern wall and an altar of mudbricks was built against the front and slightly higher than its platform. Three steps were added on the west side, and the whole structure was plastered white (Tufnell et al. 1940: 40). A facing of mudbricks
was added to the back of the Shrine. A hearth was located at the base of the altar, and
to the west of the Shrine stood a narrow cupboard of plastered mud containing lamps.
Between the cupboard and the steps stood a tall ceramic libation stand and, on the
east side of the Shrine, a large four-handled pottery bin. The libation stand was for
liquid offerings and the bin for solid offerings. The assemblage found in Fosse
Temple III was very rich, and included cultic pottery vessels, offering bowls,
imported Cypriot and Mycenaean ware, ivory objects and fragments of figurines,
jewelry, scarabs, and vessels made of alabaster, faience, and glass. In addition other
exotic finds (see Tufnell et al. 1940: 59-87), a ring with the name of Ramesses II
imprinted on it was found in a pit connected with Temple III.

Of special interest were data that indicated that food was prepared and that
sacral meals were eaten in the Fosse Temple. These data include a food whisk and a
knife made of bronze (Tufnell 1940: 65), as well as quantities of bones from the
offerings found among the bowls around the altar (Tufnell 1940: 93-94). The animal
bones included sheep (or goat), ox, and gazelle or ibex. The excavators note that "two

Figure 70. Phases I-III of the Fosse Temple, Lachish (Ussishkin 1993: 899).
remarkable features are observed, that the animals are all very young, and practically all the identifiable bones are metacarpals of the right foreleg," and that "this applies to the bones from all three structures" (Tufnell 1940: 93).

Iron Age

B. Alpert-Nakhai describes sacred places of the Iron Age I as "eclectic" (2001: 176). These included a sanctuary at Shiloh (which has not been recovered archaeologically), and open-air sites at Dhahrat et-Tawileh (the "Bull Site") and possibly Mt. Ebal (Alpert-Nakhai does not include the latter). Cultic installations or sanctuaries also often stood in the midst of domestic structures, in gateways, and sometimes in contexts associated with metalworking. The religious landscape began to change in Iron Age II. Alpert-Nakhai (2001: 176) summarizes:

Once a king was installed in Jerusalem, the constellation of sacred places at which Israelites worshipped began to change. Sanctuaries from the tenth century, the period of the United Monarchy, display an increasing uniformity as reflected in their architecture, in the cultic artifacts that they contain and in the choice of locations in which they were situated. The town sanctuary became the predominant place of worship in Israel but it also increasingly became a political tool of the monarchy.

Sites that include altars with a possible relevance to our discussion include the following.

The Altar near Shiloh

An altar hewn out of the natural rock has recently been discovered in the hill-country near Shiloh (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003: 30-36) (Fig. 71). The altar, cut from a large piece of limestone that must have broken off from the natural rock on the hillside above, is located 1.5 km west of Tell Shiloh, about 120 m above the bed of
Figure 71. The altar near Shiloh (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2004: 34).
the wadi (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003: 30). The altar is nearly square, and its corners point toward the four cardinal points of the compass while its sides are aligned with the diagonal directions (northeast, northwest, southwest, and southeast). Four horns are carved from the original rock on top of the structure. The sides of the top of the altar, between the bases of the horns, measure 2.20 m (southeast), 2.10 m (northeast), 2.15 m (northwest), and 3.25 m (southwest). The height of the altar is not consistent, and ranges from 2.20 m to 2.50 m in its center (see Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003: 31 for more measurements from more points on the altar). The heights of the horns are 53 cm (east), 37 cm (north), 75 cm (west), and 65 cm (south). The circumferences of the horns are 2.68 m (east), 2.32 m (north), 2.95 m (west), and 2.80 m (south). A piece of rock (ca. 7 x 8 cm and 2-3 cm thick) was found at the base of the altar that appears to have been part of the upper layer of the altar. This fragment was blackened and had been "clearly burnt at a very high temperature" (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003: 32).

The dating of this altar is unclear due to the lack of any archaeological context and the absence of any associated finds. The altar does have one other parallel, however, which is a rock-hewn altar found at Tel Sera, on the slope below ancient Zorah, that has been dubbed "Manoah's altar" (Yeivin 1964: 150-52). Manoah's altar is also hewn from the natural rock outside an ancient settlement, and it shares similar dimensions with the altar near Shiloh. Elitzur and Nir-Zevi (2003: 34) draw the following conclusions about the altar near Shiloh:

It is reasonable to assume that an altar in this region must be a relatively early artifact – at any rate, it cannot be post-exilic. In an attempt to narrow down the time span, one might point to the orientational similarities with the Ebal altar and that of the Shechem temple, perhaps venturing the tentative conjecture that our altar, too, and possibly also "Manoah's altar," belong to the same

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period: Late Bronze or Iron I, when, according to the Bible, the sanctuary at Shiloh was built and in use.

Megiddo

At tenth-century Megiddo, a number of shrines were discovered in Stratum VA-IVB, which appear to have been part of a massive royal building project. Shrines 338 and 2081 mirrored the palace complexes with which they were associated (Palace 1723 and Palace 6000) in terms of their construction materials and style. Shrine 2081 was itself a massive building, with walls about 1 m thick. Two upright stones, each about 1.5 m high, were found embedded in the stone-paved floor of the entrance. These probably had a cultic function similar to the large stelae found in Schumacher’s shrine (Ussishkin 1989: 170). The monumental doorway was made of ashlar masonry and may have been decorated with proto-Ionic capitals, suggested by the discovery of such a capital reused as a building stone in the wall of a Stratum III room (1051) (Ussishkin 1989: 171). The shrine contained numerous finds that identify the building as cultic, including portable horned altars, an offering table, chalices, juglets and other vessels, burned grain, and a bowl of astragali (sheep or goat).

A number of stones cut in one-eighth segments of a sphere with a radius of 0.5 m were found in square L8 of Stratum IV. Lamon and Shipton noted the similarity of these stones with those of horned altars, but included them as part of the reconstruction of the Palace 1723 tower. Ussishkin notes their similarity to the horns of the altar in Tel Beer-Sheba (Aharoni 1974: 2-6) and to a similar stone found in the cultic complex at Tel Dan (Biran 1994: 202, Fig. 161). Ussishkin (1989: 172) concludes that "it seems quite probable that the stones in Megiddo belonged to such
an altar. Zevit (2001: 226) considers them to belong to at least one and possibly two
large altars, which he has calculated would have had a surface area of 2.25 sq m
minimum, making it slightly smaller than the altars at Arad and Beersheba. Zevit
notes, however, that the Megiddo horns "are larger than those on the Beer Sheba altar,
and this factor alone suggests that a more massive structure should be imagined." He
concludes that "even the minimal size proposed above allows that if my interpretation
of these artifacts is correct, they might have been part of a large altar used for blood
offerings" (Zevit 2001: 226). Nakhai (2001: 177) concludes that "the thickness of the
building's walls, the possibility that the ashlar doorway was capped with a proto-Ionic
capital, the large horned altar in the courtyard and the building's location indicate that
Shrine 2081's function was public rather than domestic."

Tel Rehov

Tel Rehov (Tell es-Sarem) is a major 25 acre mound located about 3 miles
south of Beth Shean and 6 miles west of Pella (Negev and Gibson 2001: 433-35).
The location of the site at the intersection of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys likely
made it an important site in antiquity. Tel Rehov was occupied from the Late Bronze
Age to Iron Age II. After the destruction of the Canaanite village, an Israelite town
was established in the early tenth century BCE (Stratum VI), and new buildings were
erected at Tel Rehov during the later tenth century BCE (Stratum V), including a
sanctuary located on the northeastern part of the mound. The sanctuary was
discovered in Area E (A. Mazar 1999: 23-28), where parts of a well-preserved
building were exposed in the south, with a courtyard in the northwest and a cultic
corner and a building to its west (Fig. 72). The building consisted of two rooms,
one (the western) poorly preserved and the other (eastern) well-preserved, built of mudbrick and coated with plaster. The courtyard to the north and west of the building consisted of a compact earth floor along with bits of gravel. A number of ovens and circular clay installations similar to ovens were discovered in this area and may attest to the preparation of sacred meals (A. Mazar 1999: 23-24). A square mudbrick
platform was found in Squares D-E15, measuring 3 x 3.55 m. It was elevated to a height of about 0.4 m above the surrounding pavement. A smaller square installation (1.0 x 1.0 m), constructed of fieldstones and large river pebbles, was built on top of the platform and rose to a height of 0.33 m. Four larger stones stood on the southern side of the platform, and a large flat slab of limestone (0.7 x 0.5 m) was positioned on top of five smaller stones in front of it. The limestone slab may have served as an offering table. Debris next to the platform contained fragments of a ceramic cult stand (A. Mazar 1999: 25-26). A. Mazar has interpreted this complex as a cultic complex:

It appears that this complex was a high place (bamah) serving the vicinity. The standing stones can be interpreted as massebot standing on a ritual platform at the edge of a spacious courtyard, where a number of ovens and other installations were used for preparing sacred meals. The flat stone in front of the platform may be an offering table, with the pottery cult stand being used similarly to the small stone altars known from Megiddo and elsewhere. The flat top of these stands could be used for burning offerings, such as pigeons. (A. Mazar 1999: 27)

In front and east of the podium numerous animal bones were found, including many bones of wild goat, "suggesting that this animal was used specifically for ritual here" (A. Mazar 1999: 27). Several chalices were found among the pottery to the southeast of the open area, "a further indication of cultic activity." A. Mazar concludes that the area "provides evidence for a cultic centre which may have served a small community – perhaps an extended family living in this neighbourhood" (1999: 28).

Tell Qasile

Tell Qasile is a small mound of approximately 16 dunams (4 acres) located about 1.5 km east of the Mediterranean coast on a ridge on the northern bank of the Yarkon River. The close proximity of Tell Qasile to the river and the coast made the site a center of maritime trade, which, along with agriculture, was an important
feature of the city's economy (A. Mazar 1997c: 373). The major period of occupation at Tell Qasile was during the Iron Age I, when the site was probably founded by the Philistines "in the framework of their expansion from the nucleus of their settlement area in the heart of Philistia" (Negev and Gibson 2001: 415). The Iron Age sacred area at Tell Qasile is of special importance, since it is the only one in ancient Philistia that has been fully excavated. What began as a modest shrine in Stratum XII (1150-1100 BCE) went out of use in Stratum XI (1100-1050 BCE), when it was replaced by a larger temple with stone walls, benches along its walls, an inner room that apparently functioned as a treasury, and a holy-of-holies in a niche on the opposite side of the building from the entrance (A. Mazar 1997c: 375).

In Stratum X, the previous temple was rebuilt and enlarged to form Temple 131 (Fig. 73). On the eastern side of the building, an antechamber was added, increasing the building's outer dimensions to 8.00 x 14.50 m with an area of 116 sq m (A. Mazar 1980: 33). The antechamber created a bent-axis approach to the main hall. Within the antechamber and the main hall, stepped benches were built along the walls, and the walls, benches, and floor were plastered. Two cylindrical stone bases supporting wooden columns were installed in the long axis of the hall, and an elevated platform was constructed in the center of the western wall on the opposite side of the room from the entrance into the main hall. This location created an unobstructed line of sight to the raised platform from the entrance to the sanctuary. The platform was made of brick and measured 1.12 x 1.30 m, with an original height of 0.90 m (A. Mazar 1980: 38). Two steps on the southern side of the platform led to its upper surface. The structure and its steps were plastered on all sides.
Most of the artifacts discovered within Temple 131 were found lying around the aforementioned raised platform or in a nearby locus (Locus 134). East of the raised platform, a ceramic naos was found on the floor and, near the middle of the southern bench, a cult stand decorated with animal figures. Other finds in the vicinity included an iron bracelet, a bronze axe-adze, the top part of a cylindrical cult stand.
decorated with human figures, a fragment of a large ritual bowl, and a ceramic lamp. Other ceramic remains were scattered about, suggesting that "during the destruction of the temple cult objects were smashed and scattered about" (A. Mazar 1980: 39).

A narrow cell (Room 188) was situated behind the elevated platform to serve as a treasury. In contrast to the rest of the temple, the floors of the 1.35 x 3.20 m room were made of beaten earth and the walls were not plastered. Over 100 pottery vessels were found on the floor. A pile at the northern end included bowls, jugs, juglets, flasks, decorated Philistine vessels, a cult bowl with a tube-shaped rim, and a vessel in the shape of a pomegranate. Other pottery fragments were found in the northeast and center of the chamber. It seems clear that this room served as a storage room for offering vessels (A. Mazar 1980: 40).

North and east of Temple 131 a stone wall formed a courtyard and thus enclosed the sacred building. A square foundation was found within the courtyard measuring 1.30 x 1.50 m and built of stones measuring 0.35-0.57 m in length. The structure is flat on top and juts 0.10-0.15 m above the level of the courtyard floor. The form and position of the structure "indicated that it was the foundation of a sacrificial altar, the location of which was carefully considered" (A. Mazar 1980: 41). While the altar was located at the front of the temple, it was positioned off to one side "so as to leave the area before the entrance free for movement." No special finds came from the altar itself or nearby loci.

**Dan**

The earliest archaeological evidence of cultic practice at Tell Dan dates to the tenth century BCE, the time of Jeroboam I, who established the northern kingdom of
Israel following the death of Solomon. In order to legitimize his kingdom and create an alternative to the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:27-31), he built sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan. The late tenth to early ninth century BCE cultic precinct at Dan occupied about 60 x 45 m (Biran 1994: 168, 182-83, Figs. 143-144). In the northern part of this precinct, remains of a massive structure built of large, dressed blocks were uncovered. The face of this structure, dubbed "Bamah A," has been exposed for about 18 m on its southern side. A 28 x 17 m complex was located south of Bamah A, which included a main building, roofed storerooms, a cobbled courtyard, a pool installation, and a sunken basin. Three storerooms were located at the northern end of the central complex (Biran 1985: 187-89).

The main feature of the central complex is an approximately 7.5 x 5 m structure of basalt boulders, incompletely covered with two layers of massive travertine blocks (Biran 1994: 172-73). This may have been the foundation of a sacrificial altar that originally reached a greater height. A courtyard of cobbled stones originally surrounded the structure. On this surface were found a decorated incense stand, the head of a male figurine, and a ceramic bowl containing small animal bones incised on its base with a trident. Biran (1994: 173) concludes that "since no signs of burning, collapsed brick or roofing were found here, the cobbling appears to have been part of an open-air interior courtyard in the middle of which may have stood the central altar."

The central structure was renovated in the mid-ninth century and again in the early eighth century BCE (Biran 1982: 15-43). During Stratum III, Bamah B was
constructed, measuring 18.03 m (north face), 18.63 m (west face), 18.39 m (south face), and 18.82 m (west face), with diagonals measuring at 26.1 m (northeast-southwest) and 26.05 (northwest-southeast). The structure is built on three sides with finely dressed ashlars laid in header-and-stretcher fashion, while only the corners of the northern side are built of ashlars, the rest being constructed of rough basalt boulders. The stones are dressed in the classical technique that was common for Israelite royal buildings in the ninth-eighth centuries BCE. In the northwest corner of the temenos a 1 x 1 m installation, probably an altar, was found, and, in the southwest corner, a large, horn-shaped stone that may have been part of an altar was also found. The horn-shaped stone was 50 cm high with a base diameter of 39 cm. Biran notes the similarity of this horn with the one found at Megiddo (see above), and conjectures that "if we are right in assuming that the proportion of the horn to the height of the altar is about 1:6, the altar would have been 3 m., or 6 royal cubits, high" (Biran 1994: 203).

Arad

Tell Arad is located in the northeastern Negev desert, on the border of Judah, on the main road to Edom. In Iron Age II (Stratum X), a tripartite-style sanctuary, oriented on an east-west axis, was built in the northwestern corner of the royal fortress (Fig. 74). The building consisted of a main broadroom hall with plastered benches along its walls. In the center of the western long wall was a compartment that served as the naos, accessed by four shallow steps. Two limestone incense altars flanked the steps and a rounded stela showing traces of red paint was found inside the naos (Herzog 1997: 175). A rectangular courtyard (12.00 x 7.50 m) with a stone
pavement lay in front of the sanctuary. Rooms flanked the courtyard on three sides. A large altar of unhewn fieldstones laid in mud mortar (Fig. 75) stood on the east side of the courtyard. A flint slab with plastered channels covered the top of the altar. The altar measured 2.40 x 2.20 m and was elevated about 1.50 m above the floor. A stone step, or bench, was positioned at its base on the southern side, and a small compartment was found next to the altar on its western side, where a red-slipped clay incense burner was found, suggesting the compartment's function as a storage area for cultic appurtenances (Herzog 1997: 175).

There is no doubt about the cultic nature of this building and its identity as an Israelite temple (Dever 2006: 310-16). Cultic paraphernalia were found in and around the sanctuary and its courtyard, including a ceramic stand, a stone basin, and a small bronze figurine of a lion. Pottery kilns were found near the entrance to the sanctuary,
which apparently supplied its sacral vessels (Herzog 1997: 175). Over 200 ostraca dating to the time of the monarchy were found, several of which contain the theophoric Yahwistic component "yau," such as in Gadyau and Ghemaryau (Aharoni 1968: 11). Some ostraca were found in rooms adjacent to the temple and apparently connected to it. Seven of these contain the names of individual persons (e.g., Eshyahu son of Ezer, Son of Hemda), and two contain the names of the priestly families of Meremoth and Ashur, both of which are well known from the Bible (Aharoni 1968: 11). These may have been related to the assignment of temple duties. Two offering dishes found at the base of the altar bear the inscribed letters gop and kap, which F. M. Cross understood to be an abbreviation for the phrase שְׁכִיָּה, meaning "holy
to the priests" (1979: 75-78), and suggested that these bowls may have been used for the portions of the offerings that were dedicated to the temple priesthood, thus attesting to cultic consumption at the site. The site clearly served as a kind of royal border sanctuary (Aharoni 1968: 27-32).

**Tell Beersheba**

Tell Beersheba is located in the northern Negev, on a hill above the Beersheba and Hebron valleys. The principle period represented on the mound is that of Iron Age II, when the settlement was fortified and expanded so that it covered the entire surface of the summit of the tell (2.8 a). Throughout Iron Age II, the city was built and destroyed four times, the stages of which are termed Strata V-II. The best preserved of these periods is Stratum II, which has been excavated almost completely. Excavations have exposed one of the most complete plans of a small Israelite city (Herzog 1993: 170-73). A square surrounded by several rooms, interpreted as an inn, was located inside the city gate. The western quarter of the city contained three four-room houses. A building constructed of ashlars was located close to the gate and may have been the governor's residence. Other structures located near the gate have been interpreted as storehouses. The city contained a sophisticated water supply system and an elaborate system of drainage that emptied outside the gate.

A series of large ashlars was found in secondary usage in the construction of the walls of one of the aforementioned storehouses. When reassembled, they formed a large horned altar measuring 1.6 x 1.6 m (Fig. 76). Aharoni believed that the presence of the altar attested to the presence of a temple in the city during the early centuries of the Divided Monarchy (1974: 2-6). He suggested that the temple had been dismantled.
Figure 76. The Tell Beersheba altar (Courtesy of Ralph K. Hawkins).
during the cultic reform of King Hezekiah of Judah, similar to the cessation of use of the temple at Arad, though its location is not certain. Herzog (1978: 40) and Rainey (1994: 333-54) have proposed that it would have likely stood in the place where Building 32 was later built. Four stones from the upper surface of the altar, found during the eighth season of excavation, showed clear signs of burning, "an indication that the altar had in fact been used for sacrifices" (Herzog 1993: 172).

Discussion

The survey above includes several types of altars, all of which can be discussed in the context of the altar typology outlined by Robert Haak (1992: 162-67; 1997: 80-81). Haak divides altars into two basic categories: those found outside of buildings (type I) and those found inside structures. Each of these categories then has several subcategories.

1. **Rock altars: type Ia.** The rock altar is a free-standing altar carved from the natural rock, unassociated with any structure. The altars near Shiloh and Tel Sera are both examples of the rock altar. Haak notes the difficulty in dating these kinds of structures (see above).

2. **Open altars: type Ib.** This kind of altar was similar to the rock altar, in that it was unassociated with a sacred building, though it was constructed with stones rather than carved from the natural rock. Altar 4017 at Megiddo is an example of the type Ib open altar.

3. **Enclosed altars: type Ic.** These altars were located within the forecourt of temple complexes, apparently intended for burnt offerings. Haak notes that
this kind of altar was especially common in the Bronze and Iron ages (Haak 1997: 80).

4. **Incense altars: type IIa.** This category consists of stone or ceramic stands use for the burning of incense.

5. **Presentation altars: type IIb.** Haak suggests that this kind of altar is also found within temples and related buildings but that it is not associated with burning. Instead, offerings, such as grain, could be placed on the type IIb altar, which sometimes took the form of plastered benches or tables, or even ceramic stands.

6. **Libation altars: type IIc.** This group is made up of installations with depressions, such as large stone basins, stone tables, or bowls positioned on ceramic stands, designed to receive liquid offerings. The type IIc altar is found both in and outside of temples.

As noted in this partial survey, many of the altars located in Israel and Syria during the Bronze and Iron Ages were associated with temples. Many of these were type IIb altars, located inside the temple, including the ones at Megiddo Temple 4040 (MBA), Tell el-Hayyat (MBA), Tell el-Dab’a (MBA), the Temple of the Rhytons (LBA), Tell Mevorakh (LBA), Lachish (LBA), Tell Qasile (IA1), Arad (IAII), and Beersheba (IAII). Type Ic altars, located in a courtyard associated with a cultic building or palace, include those connected with the Migdal Temple at Shechem (MBA), the Canaanite palace at Hazor (LBA), Megiddo Shrine 2081 (IA1), Tell Rehov (IA1), and Dan (IAII). Type Ia and Ib altars, which appear to have been completely free-standing, include the large round altar (4017) in Early Bronze Age
Megiddo (type Ib) and the possibly Late Bronze or Iron Age I four-horned altar near
Shiloh (type Ia).

In the Iron Age I, no Israelite temples or undisputed public sanctuary sites
have been discovered. A pilgrimage site apparently existed at Shiloh, but it has not
survived (Finkelstein, Bunimovitz, and Lederman 1993: 385-88). The "Bull Site" was
likely an open-air sanctuary, though it did not contain an altar. If the central structure
of Stratum IB at Mt. Ebal is identified as an altar, it would feature here as a type Ib
altar. Two type Ia altars may date to the Iron Age I (if not the LBA): "Manoah's
altar," near Zorah, and the four-horned altar discovered near Shiloh. The most
common cultic sites were village sanctuaries, small and devoid of architectural
features, and known primarily from assemblages of cultic objects (Nakhai 2001: 170,
176).

In the Iron Age II, during the period of the United Monarchy, sanctuaries
began to display "an increasing uniformity as reflected in their architecture, in the
cultic artifacts that they contain and in the choice of locations in which they were
situated" (Alpert-Nakhai 2001: 176). Alpert-Nakhai notes that "the town became the
predominant place of worship in Israel but it also increasingly became a political tool
of the monarchy" (2001: 176). This is consistent with the methodology of J. S.
Holladay for the identification of cult sites in Iron Age II (1987: 272, Table 2).

A few features of the altars surveyed are of particular interest for an analysis
of the central structure of Stratum IB at Mt. Ebal.
Association with Sacred Meals

Many of the sanctuaries and their associated altars yielded evidence that food was prepared and sacral meals were consumed in their vicinity, a feature shared by the Ebal site. As discussed in chapter 2, the faunal remains at Ebal, which made up one of the largest samples ever studied in Israel, suggested that a narrow range of activities took place at the site, and that these activities clearly included both food and water consumption (Horwitz 1986/87: 187). The material remains that led Dever to jokingly dismiss the site as "a picnic site where barbecues were enjoyed by families on Saturday afternoons" (Dever 1992: 34) may in fact reinforce the cultic nature of the site.

Orientation

Most altars discovered in Palestine are oriented with their sides aligned east-west. The altar at Arad, for example, which stands in the court of a temple, is oriented east-west. The biblical Tabernacle and the Temple were both understood to have been aligned east-west (Zebahim 62B). Interestingly, the newly discovered altar near Shiloh, the Tel Sera' altar (Manoah’s altar), the Shechem altar, and the Mt. Ebal structure all share an orientation of their corners with the compass points. The alignment of the corners with the four points of the compass and the sides with the diagonal directions seems to be a characteristic of Mesopotamian temples (Margueron 1997: 165-69; Roaf 1995: 423-41). It is not clear why the altar near Shiloh, Manoah’s altar, the Shechem altar, and the Mt. Ebal structure are oriented this way. Elitzur and Nir-Zevi suggest that these three altars may have been oriented as they are to distinguish them from altars that stood in the courts of a temple (2003: 34).
Steps

A third feature is the presence or absence of steps. W. F. Albright thought that the idea for an altar with steps had been derived from the components of the Mesopotamian ziggurat (Albright 1920: 139), though it is now clear that a Syro-Palestinian background can be established for such traditions. In Syria-Palestine there have been a number of altars discovered that were mounted by steps, including the Early Bronze Age altar (4017) at Megiddo, which was ascended by a flight of seven steps; the altar in the Late Bronze Age Temple of the Rhytons was mounted by three steps; and the one at Tell Mevorakh by five.

Horns

Horns, projections from the corners, were another feature of Israelite altars that Albright believed was derived from Mesopotamia, particularly from the architecture of the ziggurat (Albright 1942: 150-52). These are found in numerous examples of smaller incense altars (see Gitin 2002: 95-123), as well as in the altar near Shiloh and the Beer-Sheba altar, surveyed above. While the precise significance of the horns is not known (DeVries 2000: 608; Zevit 2001: 306-9), they seem to have derived from a general ancient Near Eastern background that included astral cults and bull worship (see Süring 1980). In Israel, the horns may have symbolized the strength of the deity or a type of holy mountain, i.e., the dwelling place of the deity (DeVries 2000: 608). Regardless of the exact meaning of the symbol, it is now known that they need not have derived from Mesopotamia. They are known from Canaanite contexts (Stendebach 1976: 190-92), from excavations in Cyprus (cf. Karageorghis 1981; Ionas 1985), and other locations throughout the Near East (cf. Yavis 1949: 165-66).
The survey above included two horned altars, the altar near Shiloh (LB-IA1) and the Beer-Sheba altar (Stratum II). In addition, it was noted that horn-shaped stones were found, attesting to the presence of horned altars, at tenth century Megiddo (Shrine 2081) and at eighth century Dan (Stratum II).

The central structure at Mt. Ebal was not found with horns on its corners. Several large stones were found spread around the structure that could have served as horns. None of these, however, were shaped or worked, and so they cannot conclusively be identified or ruled out as horns (A. Zertal, private communication, 2007). Stone-shaped horns located on the top corners of an altar of unhewn stones would seem to be in a vulnerable position, and it would not be surprising for these to be dislodged over time. In the cases of Megiddo and Dan, horn-shaped stones found lying on the ground in the sacred area have suggested the presence of horned altars that did not survive. In the case of the altar at Arad, which was, like the Ebal structure, also built of unhewn stones, horns are also lacking. Interestingly, in both the case of Ebal and Arad, the structures appear to have been covered over when they went out of use. In addition, the removal of horns appears to have been a sign of the decommissioning or destruction of altars in the biblical tradition (e.g., Amos 3:14).

Whether the presence of horns was optional on variously built altars (which does not seem likely, due to their importance in the biblical tradition), or whether they simply did not survive, their absence does not preclude the identification of the Ebal structure as an altar, since they were also absent from altars at Zorah (Manoah's altar), Arad, and other structures clearly identified as altars.
Size

In terms of comparing the sizes of the altar structures, the review of altars above provides some comparative finds. The Late Bronze Age altars found at the temples of Shechem, Megiddo, and other sites are all cube-like in shape and medium in size, ranging from 1-2 m on each side. These are all different from the large structure at Mt. Ebal. The altar in Stratum X of the Israelite fortress at Arad (ninth century BCE) is similar in terms of its construction. It is built of unhewn stones with a fill. The Arad construction, however, is a medium-sized altar and does not have the special characteristics of the larger structure at Mt. Ebal. The eighth-century altar from Tell Beer-Sheba (Stratum II) is small by comparison.

Distribution

Zertal (1994: 63) suggests that "large burnt-offering altars were erected in central cultic places, such as Gibeon, Bethel, Shechem and probably Dan, whereas smaller and less complex structures were used in secondary sites, such as Arad." One of the chief aims of the religious reforms of Hezekiah (Kuan 2007: 818-21) and Josiah (Althann 1992: 1015-18) during the eighth and seventh centuries was to demolish "the high places and the altars" (2 Kgs 18:4; 23:1-20; 2 Chr 31:1; 34:3). Aside from the recovery of the altars of Arad and Beersheba, which appear to have been buried and/or dismantled during the reforms, no other such sites have survived. "The high place at Mt. Ebal went out of use long before the organization of the monarchy, and was therefore excluded from these later reforms" (Zertal 1994: 63).
Conclusions

This chapter has considered physical parallels for the Iron Age I site at Mt. Ebal, including the village, farmstead, house, watchtower, and altar. I reviewed Kempinski's reconstruction of the site as a three-phase village, with the earliest phase consisting of a cluster of huts and pits, followed by a second phase in which a domestic structure was built in the center of the settlement, and then a third, in which a watchtower was built atop the earlier house. It was suggested that the simple plan of the Ebal site – an enclosure with an isolated building in its center – did not comport with the layout of the typical highland village. The identification of Ebal as a farmstead was then considered and ruled out on the basis of known features of sites where animal husbandry was practiced. Domestic architecture was then considered and, based on substantial data that we have on the form and function of the four-room house, it seems clear that the central structure of Ebal's Area A cannot be understood as such. The possibility of understanding this building as an isolated watchtower was considered and, in light of the absence of parallels in Iron Age I as well as the several special architectural elements of the main structure at Mt. Ebal, this identification was deemed unlikely. There are some similarities between the central structure of Stratum IB with Building 105 at the site of Giloh, the function of which is unclear. The overall layout of the Mt. Ebal site most closely resembles the Jordan Valley *gilgalim*, and the central structure itself a type Ib open altar. While some parallels therefore exist, they are partial, and Mt. Ebal essentially remains unique among the Iron Age I settlement sites.
CHAPTER 4

LITERARY PARALLELS

In this chapter we will turn to literary sources, comparing the various elements of the Iron Age I site at Mt. Ebal and its central structure with biblical and other literary data relevant to a possible interpretation of the site as a cultic installation. The outline of the chapter will essentially follow that of chapter 1, in that each element of the site in both Stratum II and Stratum IA will be compared with the biblical materials. A particular focus of this chapter will be the review of the Hebrew architectural tradition of altars in an effort to determine the potential veracity of identifying the Ebal structure as an altar. A comparative analysis will be undertaken toward this end, beginning in the First Temple period and working forwards through the altar descriptions in the Hebrew Bible. This will include a study of the Tabernacle altar, the First Temple altar, Ahaz’s new altar, Ezekiel’s visionary altar, and Mishnah tractate Middot. The architectural traditions of Mesopotamia will also be considered. The question that will be addressed here will be whether a uniform tradition of altar architecture can be detected and, if so, whether it can help in determining the nature and function of the Ebal site.
Location of the Site

The location of the site has been one of the reasons some have protested any association of it with the altar of Joshua 8:30-35 (Ahlström 1993: 366; Rainey 1986: 66). In his 1986 article, Kempinski argued that the earliest versions of Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8 “probably placed the altar on nearby Mt. Gerizim, which is where the Samaritan version placed it” (Kempinski 1986: 48; cf. also 1993a: 177-79). Without offering any reasons why the Samaritan version should be considered more reliable than the biblical materials, Kempinski simply notes that “the Samaritans still preserve and celebrate what they believe to be the traditional site of Joshua’s altar” on Mt. Gerizim (Kempinski 1986: 48), which has been associated with Jebel et-Tor (M.R. 175 178). Kempinski’s reference is to the Samaritan Pentateuch (henceforth SP), which consists of the Samaritan version of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and comprises the canon of the Samaritan community. The SP differs from the MT in various ideological, phonological, and orthographic particulars (see Tov 1992: 80-100; Würthwein 1979: 42-44), with its main ideological change having to do with the place of worship. In Pentateuchal verses referring to the central place of worship, the SP contains the name of their own cultic center, Mt. Gerizim. Of particular relevance here is that the SP’s version of Deut 27:4, where the Israelites were commanded to build an altar upon their entrance into the land, reads “Mt. Gerizim” instead of “Mt. Ebal.” Debate about the presumed change from Ebal to Gerazim is quite ancient (cf. Josephus, Ant. 13.3.4, secs. 74-79). Van der Meer has carried out a detailed study of Josh 8:30-35, in which he concluded that the Vorlage of this passage was essentially identical to the MT (van der Meer 2004: 479-522; see, however, McKenzie 2005; De Troyer 2006), and Waltke has shown that the SP probably
originated as a sectarian recension ca. 100 BCE (Waltke 1970: 212-239; 1992: 932-40). E. Eshel and H. Eshel have recently dated it to the second century BCE generally (Eshel and Eshel 2003: 215-40). Though a detailed analysis of the Samaritan Pentateuch goes beyond the scope of this study, it may be noted that while there are contemporary scholars who accept the reading “Mount Gerizim” (e.g., Tov 1992: 95, n. 67; Tov accepts it based on its inclusion in the Vetus Latina), the original reading of “Mt. Ebal” has wide support (Tigay 1985: 81, n. 64; see the recent discussion of Rofé 2003: 778-80).

Additionally, it may be possible that the current location of Mt. Gerizim may not have been the same in ancient times (Pitkanen 2004: 184). Eusebius believed that the Samaritan identification of Jebel et-Tor as Mt. Gerizim was incorrect (Onom. 65; for a detailed discussion and the proposal of an alternate identification for Mt. Gerizim, see Zertal 2000: 225-39). No Iron Age remains have been discovered on Jebel et-Tor (Negev and Gibson 2001: 195; Magen 1993: 484-92).

Assuming that Deut 11:29-30 and 27:2-8 reflect the original reading of “Mt. Ebal,” then the location of el-Bumat does raise questions. It is not on the very peak of Mt. Ebal; instead, it is located on the second of the four terraces descending the eastern side of the mountain. Mt. Gerazim cannot even be seen from the site (Zertal 1985: 41-42) (Fig. 77). This may seem to be in contradiction to the injunction of Deut 11:29-30 and 27:2-8. However, as Zertal himself noted, while Deut 11:29 does state that the curses are to be read בּלַי הָרֶבֶת, or "on Mount Ebal," Deut 27:4 states that the structure is to be built בּוֹדַר נֵיַרְבֵּת. Both the instruction in Deut 27:4 and the account of its fulfillment in Josh 8:30 begin with the preposition ב, which has "in" as its primary meaning (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979: 88). The MT typically uses the preposition ב in cases where
English would use "on" or "upon" (e.g., Exod 24:17; Deut 1:16; 1 Kgs 11:7; 19:11; et al.). BDB explains this as a Hebrew idiom used "even in cases where we could hardly avoid saying 'on'" (1979: 88). The preposition ר can also be translated by the English "at" (Holladay 1988: 32), for which the JPS translation opts in Deut 11:29. Biblical commentators do not comment on the significance or lack thereof of the use of different prepositions in Deut 11:29, 27:4, and Josh 8:30. Zertal has suggested, however, that the use of the ר rather than מ may hint "that Joshua's altar was not at the top of the mountain" (Zertal 1985: 43), and that it could have been located on one of the slopes. It need not have taken place at the site of the altar (Pitkänen 2004: 184).
Stratum II

Stratum II included partial remains uncovered in Areas A and an inner enclosure wall abutted by a four-room house in Area B.

Area A

Partial remains of the Stratum II occupation of the site were uncovered beneath the central structure of Straum IB and beneath the southern courtyard connected with the central structure. These remains included fragmentary remains of Walls 18 and 36, Surface 61, Pit 250, and Installation 94. Installation 94 (Fig. 6), located precisely in the center of the overlying building, between Walls 13 and 16, may have been cultic in nature. This platform had been built on bedrock and contained remnants of ash and animal bones. It appears to have been used for sacrifice at the earliest period of the site.

Ben-Noon suggests that "foundation offerings" were made in Installation 94 (Ben-Noon 1985: 142) preceding the construction of the Stratum IA cultic structure. Foundation offerings were well-known in the ancient world, particularly at the foundation of a city or a building. Sometimes a human victim would be walled up alive or an animal would be slaughtered, and its blood poured over the foundation stone (Gaster 1962: 154).

The general omission of foundation offerings in the various building descriptions in the Hebrew Bible probably indicate Israelite opposition to the concept because of its pagan notions (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). The death of the sons of Hiel when he rebuilt the city of Jericho in the ninth century may have been due to his sacrifice of them as foundation offerings (1 Kgs 16:34). The note about Hiel occurs at the end of the deuteronomistic condemnation of Ahab (1 Kgs 16:32-33) and as an example of how the people of Israel at large had come to completely ignore Yahweh's direct commands. The foundation of the
Temple is specifically mentioned in biblical descriptions and in later prophecies (1 Kgs 6:37; Ezra 3:1-11; Hag 2:15, 18), but in none of these passages is a foundation offering specifically mentioned. The construction of an altar for the Second Temple did precede the building of the divine shrine itself and, once this altar had been constructed, offerings were made upon it (Ezra 3:3-6). It may be that the inaugural offering served as a foundation offering for the Second Temple, which remained to be built. However, Ezra 3:6 indicates that these sacrifices were not connected to the laying of the Temple's foundations because of fear of the neighboring peoples. According to Ezra 3:10-11, it was not until the second year after the Israelites had arrived at Jerusalem that the foundations were laid, and this process was indeed accompanied by worship:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (NRSV).

It may be that, in the case of the laying of the foundations for the Second Temple, the responsive singing (vs. 11) served as the sanctifying offering. Or, again, it may be that the foundation offering was shunned altogether. The text does specify that the Second
Temple altar was erected on its old foundations (Ezra 3:3), which certainly reinforced its continuity with the First Temple.

The phenomenon of a foundation offering may possibly be illustrated in the offering made by Gideon during his encounter with the angel of the Lord in Judg 6:11-32 (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). Not recognizing that it is the angel of the Lord who is speaking with him, Gideon argues with the envoy over whether or not the Lord is really with him and his people (Judg 6:13, 15). Following the envoy's reassurances, Gideon asks him to wait while he prepares an offering for Yahweh (vss. 18-19). The nature and size of the presents prepared by Gideon suggest that he was preparing them as an offering for the gods/a god (Block 1999: 263). He brought the offering to him on a rock under the oak "and presented them" (vs. 19, NRSV), or "he worshiped" (LXX). After Gideon had placed the offerings on the rock, they then burst into flames and were consumed, and the envoy disappeared in the flames as well (vs. 21). Gideon immediately realized he had seen the Lord's face (vs. 22), and he built an altar atop the stone where he had made the initial offering (vs. 24) in order to commemorate this theophany.

Ben-Noon suggests that the account in Judg 6 is similar to the case of offerings made in Locus 94 during Stratum II, followed by the construction of a more permanent cultic structure in Stratum IA (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). The initial offering may have been connected to the establishment of the site and the sanctifying of it, "perhaps by a group of people that were sent for this purpose" (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). The main structure was then built on top of the first platform at a later stage. Whether offerings made here are to be understood as foundation offerings or not, the continuity between Stratum II's Locus 94 and the subsequently built cultic structure of Stratum IA is clear. The main structure

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seems to have been intentionally located directly over Locus 94, apparently because of the consecrated nature of the site.

Area B

In Stratum II, Area B contained an inner enclosure wall (Wall 29) with an adjacent domestic dwelling. This recalls the Tabernacle structure, the interior space of which was subdivided into three zones. These are, in descending order of holiness: the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Outer Court (Exod 25:1-31:17). These three zones were distributed within the Tabernacle in two unequal sections, which were separated by a dividing curtain called the parokhet (םֵרוֹקֵ֣חַ) (Exod 26:31), which may be derived from a stem that means "to bar the way" or to "mark off an area" (Sarna 1991: 171). A second screen, the masakh (מָ֫סָּקָ֖ה), on the eastern side of the Holy Place, cordoned it off from the Outer Court. The inner enclosure walls at Ebal do not seem to have served a clear purpose, other than to divide the site into demarcated areas. Both Ben-Noon (1985: 142-3) and Zevit (2001: 200) identify the wall as a temenos and suggest a purpose similar to that of the tabernacle partitions. The adjacent domestic dwelling may have been a lishkah (לִשׁ֫כָּה), a term the author(s) of the book of Judges used for a structure or room connected with the bāmāh where Samuel presided over ceremonies (1 Sam 9:19). The term is most often used in the Hebrew Bible with reference to the three tiers of rooms allocated to priests, singers, and keepers of the Temple (Ezek 40:17, 38, 44-46; 41:10; et al.), though it came to be used of storerooms (Ezra 8:29; Neh 10:38-40) and personal chambers (Ezra 10:6; Neh 13:4, 5, 8, 9) during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The term is also used in the book of Jeremiah to refer to the scribe's room.
within the palace (Jer 36:12, 20, 21). Biran appropriates the term for the long tripartite building (Room 2746) west of the high place at Dan (1994: 210-14), though he acknowledged the uncertainty of whether or not the biblical *lishkah* were similar to the one at Dan (1994: 213).

**Stratum IB**

The primary feature of Stratum IB is the central structure with its surrounding walls, courtyards, a double wall between the courtyards, and the installations around the structure. The ways each of these constructions may correspond with biblical and other descriptions of cultic paraphernalia will be examined in turn.

**The Central Structure**

Chapter 1 ruled out the identification of the central structure as an ordinary building and, instead, accepted that it appears to have been built as an elevated stage of some kind. The excavator's identification of the structure as an altar must be considered in relation to biblical traditions regarding altar construction. The section that follows will review traditions from both the First and Second Temple periods.
Biblical Altar Descriptions in the First Temple Period

The earthen altar

Instructions for the construction of the earthen altar are given in Exod 20:24-26:

24 You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. 25 But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it. 26 You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it (NRSV).

These verses make mention of two kinds of altars, one of which was made by the heaping up of a pile of earth in an open field (vs. 24), and the other by assembling unworked stones (vs. 25). The specification of an earthen altar and an altar of unworked stones has generally been taken as a sign of the antiquity of these instructions (Wellhausen 1957: 29-30; Noth 1966: 176-77). Heger has recently argued, on the basis of the usage of the term "sword" (חרב) rather than an "iron" (ביל) tool, that the Exod 20 law is very early, probably dating from the Late Bronze Age (Heger 1999: 100). Sarna suggests that "these laws [were] addressed to the individual, [and they] reflect and regulate the altars and worship that characterized the popular lay religion before the implementation of Deuteronomical law concentrated all sacrificial worship exclusively in one official

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national-religious center" (Sarna 1991: 116). The altars referred to here belong to the category of those built impromptu by Noah (Gen 8:20), the patriarchs (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; et al.), Gideon (Judg 6:20-21), Manoah (Judg 13:19-20), and others (cf. also the discussion in Zevit 1996: 53-62).

Conspicuous by its absence here are "the absence of any specifications concerning the dimensions of the altar, its length, width, and height, whether it was round, square or oblong, whether its base and the top were equal or there was a gradual decrease of its size, and whether there were horns" (Heger 1999: 106). In addition, the orientation of the structure is not stipulated. One concern the text does specifically address is the height of these stone altars, which would likely prevent persons from ascending them without "some form of boost" (Zevit 2001: 199). The only stipulation the biblical text makes here is that steps not be used (Exod 20:26). This explicit prohibition "implies that another means such as a ramp would be acceptable" (Zevit 2001: 199).

The Tabernacle altar

The traditions about the Tabernacle are "generally regarded as the literary creation of the Priestly writer (P), whose design incorporates features from various Israelite sanctuaries" (Koester 2000: 1270). The fact that the Tabernacle altar was itself "a movable replica of the altar in the Temple" also raised suspicion in De Vaux's mind (De Vaux 1997: 410). De Vaux (1997: 296) writes: "It is only too obvious that much of this description is merely an idealization: the desert sanctuary is conceived as a collapsible temple, exactly half as big as the Temple of Jerusalem, which served as a model for this reconstruction. However, not everything in the description is made up, and the notion of a "prefabricated" sanctuary clashes with the idea - so firmly rooted in
tradition that the authors of this description could not wholly remove it – that the dwelling was a tent." He suggests that the ancestors of the Israelites would have had a portable sanctuary, but that it was a much more simple tent, "like their own dwelling-places" (De Vaux 1997: 297). Koester agrees, noting that "the covering of goat hair and leather recalls the simple tent sanctuary mentioned in the earlier sources" (Koester 2000: 1270). Koester notes the argument of some, who have claimed that "the Priestly writer sought to legitimate the cult of his own time by projecting it back into the wilderness period" (Koester 2000: 1270). Patrick Miller, however, points to other material outside the Tabernacle tradition that substantiates that the central symbol of Yahweh’s presence seems to have been a tent (Miller 2000: 90-93), and Gordon notes the substantial archaeological and historical evidence for such portable tent shrines (Gordon and Rendsberg 1997: 166; cf. also Singer 1978: 16-25; Sarna 1986: 190-220). In addition, the Priestly report of the building of the Tabernacle may be more reliable than has been recognized (Hurowitz 1985: 21-30).

The instructions for the design and building of the Tabernacle altar are given in Exod 27:1-8:

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You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and it shall be three cubits high. You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze; and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. You shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net shall extend halfway down the altar. You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze; the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. You shall make it hollow, with boards. They shall be made just as you were shown on the mountain (NRSV).

The dimensions of this altar are fairly unambiguous, c. 7 x 7 x 4 ft. Four horns crowned the top, one at each of the four corners. The grate, or strainer, was to be placed halfway up the height of the altar, with the four rings attached to its four corners. The grate, therefore, would bear the brunt of the altar’s weight, rather than the four side planks.

Durham speculates that the presence of the grate inside the altar necessitated its hollowness (Durham 1987: 376). While the grate would reinforce the structure, the altar was probably designed with a hollow interior in order to be filled with earth when it was in use, “since any fire built inside the upper half would have eventually destroyed the altar from the intense heat” (Kaiser 1990: 463).

Similar to the previously discussed altars, in addition to the four horns crowning the top of the structure, the grate was placed midway between the top and the bottom of the squarish structure. This created a “stepped” appearance, again, similar (if only loosely) to those mentioned before.
The First Temple altar

The account of the First Temple contained in 1 Kgs 6-7 contains no description of the altar of burnt offering. De Vaux argued that the description of Solomon's altar was "suppressed" by the later editor of these passages, possibly "because it was not the kind of altar demanded by the customs and laws of Israel (Ex. 20.24-26); it was, in fact, a type used by the Phoenicians" (De Vaux 1997: 410). Dillard, on the other hand, suggests that the "omission in Kings should probably be attributed to a homoioarchon with wyazh at 1 Kgs 7.22-23" (Dillard 1987: 34). The phenomenon of homoioarcton refers to the "erroneous omission of a section" due to the repeated appearance of the "identical beginning" one or more words in the same context in a similar way. E. Tov explains that, "in these cases, the eye of the copyist (or translator) jumped from the first appearance of a word (or words) to its (their) second appearance, so that in the copied text (or translation) the intervening section was omitted together with one of the repeated elements" (1992: 238). This may be a viable possibility, based on the repeated occurrence of נָשׂלפ ("to do, fashion") in the text. If the author or editor of 1 Kings was working from a source in which the lines in the description of the Temple furnishings each began with נָשׂלפ (as is the case in 2 Chr 4:1-18), then a homoioarcton could have occurred. Another possible reason for the absence of a description of the sacrificial altar in the account of the building of the First Temple may be that Solomon did not build an altar but instead utilized the one used or made by King David (2 Sam 16:17; 24:21; Milgrom 1971: 762). The silence of the text with regard to this important feature of the First Temple is enigmatic.
The brief description of the altar by the Chronicler, reads as follows:

2 Chronicles 4:1

He made an altar of bronze, twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. (NRSV)

The dimensions are similar to those described by Ezekiel (Ezek 43:13-17). The altar described by the Chronicler appears also to have been a step-altar with a square base of 20 cubits on each side, with several smaller platforms above, reaching a height of 10 cubits above the base. The altar seems to have shared the appearance of the aforementioned altars – at least in a general way.

Ahaz's New Altar

The Bible reports that, during the eighth century BCE, a new altar for the Temple displaced the old. This occurred when the Judean king, Ahaz, traveled to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria and was impressed by the altar there. The account in 2 Kgs 16:10-14 reads:

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When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. King Ahaz sent to the priest Uriah a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. The priest Uriah built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, just so did the priest Uriah build it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. When the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar, went up on it, and offered his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured his drink offering, and dashed the blood of his offerings of well-being against the altar. The bronze altar that was before the LORD he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of his altar (NRSV).

While this may have involved a move away from Yahwism, it may have simply been “an aesthetic preference for a Syro-Phoenician or Aram type altar reused for Yahweh worship” (Wiseman 1993: 262). In any case, although there is no physical description of the new altar, the text clearly suggests a Syro-Palestine-Mesopotamian influence on the Israelite altar (see further below).

Ezekiel's future temple altar

Writing some time in the sixth century BCE, Ezekiel described what he envisioned the altar in the future Temple would look like. In explicit detail, he presents the design of the altar and its dimensions.

Ezekiel 43:13-17

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These are the dimensions of the altar by cubits (the cubit being one cubit and a handbreadth): its base shall be one cubit high, and one cubit wide, with a rim of one span around its edge. This shall be the height of the altar: 14 From the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits, with a width of one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits, with a width of one cubit; 15 and the altar hearth, four cubits; and from the altar hearth projecting upward, four horns. 16 The altar hearth shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve wide. 17 The ledge also shall be square, fourteen cubits long by fourteen wide, with a rim around it half a cubit wide, and its surrounding base, one cubit. Its steps shall face east.

Ezekiel’s altar was to have a number of ledges (vs. 14), creating a stepped tower (Fig. 78).

As early as 1920, William F. Albright noted that the Israelite altar had a striking resemblance to the Babylonian stage-tower (Albright 1920: 139). He concluded that “the Jewish altar . . . was certainly based on Mesopotamian models, coming through Phoenicia” (Albright 1920: 139). In his classic work, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Albright made linguistic connections between the various components of Ezekiel’s altar and the complementary components of the Mesopotamian ziggurat (Albright 1942: 150-52). The “base on the ground” (vs. 14) is יֶבֶד הַאָרץ (heq ha’arets), which Albright understands to be the foundation of the altar. He derives it from the Assyrian irt kigalli, “commonly used to denote the foundation of a temple tower” (Albright 1920: 140). According to this interpretation, יֶבֶד would then be a foundation for the altar, “set into the ground” (Andre 1980: 356). The “altar hearth” (vs. 15),
referring to the highest stage of the altar, is אֶרֶץ ('ari'el, or har'el). According to Albright, the translation “hearth” is erroneous, and should be seen to derive from the Accadian Arallu. Albright (1942: 151) explains that Arallu "has the dual sense of "underworld" and "mountain of the gods," the cosmic mountain in which the gods were born and reared according to an Assyrian text. The expression har 'el actually means "mountain of God"; it is thus a slight popular etymology of the Accadian loan-word."

Albright (1942: 152) explains further that: "These parallels become intelligible as soon as we recall that the Mesopotamian temple-tower was also built in stages and that its summit
was similarly called ziqquratu, literally 'mountain-peak,' while Sumerian names of
temple-towers very often refer to them as cosmic mountains (khursag or kur). . . . It is,
accordingly, not surprising that the foundation-platform (Accadian temennu) should also
receive the same unusual designation 'bosom of the earth' in both the Mesopotamian
temple-tower and the Israelite altar."

Other parallels between the Mesopotamian temple-towers and the Israelite altar
include adornment of the summit with four horns, as well as an orientation to the points
of the compass. “In any case,” Albright concludes, “we may safely regard the form of
the altar, together with its symbolism, as derived from Phoenicia, where it went back to
older Canaanite borrowings from Mesopotamia” (Albright 1942: 152).

Albright's argument for a Mesopotamian derivation of the Israelite's architectural
traditions was fashionable for some time (cf. references in Block 1998: 596), though
many scholars have contested it in more recent times (e.g., Zimmerli 1980: 425-427).
Syrian-Palestinian culture did have a “generally hybrid nature,” often influenced by
Mesopotamian and even Egyptian traditions (Noth 1960: 208; cf. Wood 1935; Zevit
2007: 189), and so common architectural elements should not be surprising. However, as
Block has recently noted, while some of the technical vocabulary in Ezekiel's altar
description may be illuminated by Akkadian cognates, "the resemblances with the
Solomonic altar are much more striking" (1998: 596). Block explains:

The total length of the sides, 18 x 18 cubits, compares with the 20-cubit square of
the first temple altar (2 Chr. 4:1); the horns, familiar from 1 K. 2:28, were a
common feature of Palestinian altars; its height, measured from the bottom of the
gutter to the top of the horns (9 cubits?), is similar to Solomon's 10 cubits.
Accordingly, the details of Ezekiel's altar reflect either firsthand familiarity with
the preexilic altar, or an ancient document or tradition describing it. (Block 1998:
596)
Indeed, it appears that temples and altars were renovated with great conservatism (e.g., Ezra 3:3; 1 Macc 4:47). It may therefore be that the building instructions for Ezekiel's altar "reflect the traditional form of the altar in the temple of Jerusalem" (Block 1998: 596, n. 52). In any case, the features of the altar described in Ezekiel all have parallels in the altar architecture of the western Mediterranean and the southern Levant (chapter 3, above).

The Second Temple altar

The Hebrew Bible does not give any information about the Second Temple altar. There are, however, four non-biblical sources that provide some information: The Letter of Aristeas, Pseudo-Hecataeus, the Temple Scroll, and the Mishnah.

The Letter of Aristeas. This source gives little specific information. It simply reports:

"Ἡ τε τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου κατασκευὴ [αὐτοῦ ἐξουσια] πρὸς τὸν τόπον καὶ τὰ θύματα διὰ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξαναλούμενα τὴν διοικοδομὴν ἔχει, τῆς δ' ἀναβάσεως τῆς πρὸς αὐτό, πρὸς τὴν ἐκκομιάν ἑκοτὸς τοῦ τόπου καθηκόντως τὸ κλίμα τῶν λειτουργοῦντων ἱερέων κεκαλυμμένως μέχρι τῶν στυρῶν βυσσίνως χιτώσιν. (Let. Aris. 87)

The altar was built of a size in keeping with the place and with the sacrifices which were consumed by fire, and the ascent to it was on a like scale. The place was approached by a gradual slope from a proper regard for decency, and the ministering priests were clad in "coats of fine linen" reaching to the ankles. (Thackeray 1918: 41)

The size of the altar is generalized. Aristeas makes reference to the fact that sacrifices were consumed thereon (ἐξαναλούμενα) and that the structure had a means of "ascent" (τῆς δ' ἀναβάσεως). It is not stated whether this ascent consisted of stairs or a ramp,
though Aristeas does mention that the ascent was provided "for decency" (τὴν εὐκοσμίαν), probably in allusion to Exod 20:26.

The extent to which the Letter of Aristeas can be regarded as reliable is unclear. While it claims to be an eyewitness account of events that occurred in the third century BCE, it seems instead to have been a work of Jewish propaganda written at Alexandria, probably just after 200 BCE (Eissfeldt 1965: 603-606; Greenspoon 2006: 260-61; Mueller 2000: 101; Shutt 1992: 380-82). This may not necessarily imply unreliability in every respect, however. For, while the Letter of Aristeas was, to some degree, propagandistic, "given the extended reflections on Jewish Law, the temple, Palestine, and the wise counsel of the translators, it seems clear that the primary purpose was to promote a better understanding of Judaism in an Egyptian environment" (Mueller 2000: 101). This would suggest that the author would have wanted to maintain as much accuracy as possible. Due to the lack of details about the Temple and its appurtenances, however, the Letter of Aristeas has little to contribute to the discussion of Second Temple altar.

**Pseudo-Hecataeus.** Pseudo-Hecataeus is more specific than the Letter of Aristeas. Unfortunately, the text is not extant but is preserved only in part within Josephus, who quotes Hecataeus as follows:

μυριάδες καλούσι δ’ αυτὴν 'Ιεροούλιμα ἐνταῦθα δ’ ἐστὶ κατὰ μέσον μάλιστα τῆς πόλεως περίβολος λίθων μήκος ὡς πεντάπλεθρος εὑρὸς δὲ πεντάπλεθρος διπλὰς πύλας ἐν ὃ βωμός ἐστι τετράγωνος ἀτμήτων συλλέκτων ἀργών λίθων ἄτως συγκείμενος πλευράς μὲν ἕκαστην εἴκοσι πεντάπλεθρος δὲ διπλὴν καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν οὐκήμα μέγα ὁ βωμός ἐστι καὶ λυχνίαν ἄφιότερα χρυσά. (Ag. Ap. 1: 198)

There is about the middle of the city, a wall of stone, the length of which is five hundred feet, and the breadth a hundred cubits, with double cloisters; wherein there is a square altar, not made of hewn stone, but composed of white stones gathered together, having each side twenty cubits long, and its altitude ten cubits. Hard by it is a large edifice, wherein there is an altar and a candlestick, both of gold, and in weight two talents. (Whiston 1987: 785-86)
The account indicates that a square altar stood in the court of the Temple. This altar, according to the text, was built of untrimmed stones. Hecataeus reports the dimensions of the sacrificial altar as having been 20 cubits in width and 10 cubits in height. These are the same dimensions as those given in 2 Chr 4:1. In addition, the description is given as if it had been built in accordance with the law of Exod 20:25.

Hecataeus is generally not considered to be a very reliable historical source (see P. M. Fraser 1972: 496-505; A. Burton 1972). Hecataeus of Abdera was a Greek who came to Egypt at the end of the fourth century BCE, where he wrote his Aegyptiaca, from which Josephus quotes. Hecataeus apparently immigrated to Egypt as one of the Greek conquerors who had come to settle following Alexander's conquests. These Hellenists, at least in part, could be described as "intellectuals and officials who were bilingual, knew the heritage of both cultures, created religious syncretisms, and, most importantly, invented a new national identity" (Mendels 1992: 21). As part of this class, Hecataeus would have been looking for a history that would provide ties to their new homeland. Consequently, explains Mendels (1992: 39), "Hecataeus reworked the data that he received from his sources and from his own investigations in Egypt, and blended them with his Greek knowledge. The outcome was a mixture of Egyptian and Greek concepts, which were given a unified, linear, chronological framework. This new history represented the melting pot of Hellenism, but was far from being "real" history. . . . For its greater part, Hecataeus's Aegyptiaca is a fabricated history with many sentimental overtones, political and social." As a Greek immigrant to the Near East, Hecataeus may not have known the language or the sites or the indigenous people. Again, the description of the dimensions matches those given in 2 Chr 4:1. This does not necessarily imply

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unreliability. While the facts of Hecataeus match those of the biblical text, this could reveal either dependence or simply the actual details of the Temple altar (see Mueller 2000: 1096-7). Due to the authorship, provenance, and the nature of the source, however, it seems that Hecataeus's knowledge of the Jerusalem Temple would likely have been limited. However, while scholars may consider Hecataeus's work to be more propagandistic than historical, it does at least accurately reflect the tradition of the altar dimensions as given in 2 Chronicles.

**Josephus.** There are two passages in Josephus which give brief descriptions of the Temple altar. The first appears in his book, *The Wars of the Jews*, and follows a general description of the appearance of the outside of the Temple (5.222-224), before which the altar stood:

> πρὸ αὐτοῦ δ’ ὁ βωμὸς πεντεκαίδεκα μὲν ύψος ἦν πῆχεων εὐρος δὲ καὶ μήκος ἐκτείρων ἰσον ἀνὰ πεντήκοντα πῆχες τετράγωνος ἵδρυτο κερατοειδεῖς προανέχων γωνίας καὶ ἀπὸ μεσομβρίας ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἁνόδος ἡρέμα προπάντης ὑπάνταστο κατεσκευάσθη δὲ ἀνευ σιδήρου καὶ οὐδέσποτ’ ἐξαυμεν αὐτοῦ σίδηρος. (J.W. 5.225)

Before this temple stood the altar, fifteen cubits high, and equal both in length and breadth; each of which dimensions was fifty cubits. The figure it was built in was a square, and it had corners like horns; and the passage up to it was by an insensible acclivity. It was formed without any iron tool, nor did any such iron tool so much as touch it at any time. (Whiston 1987: 708)

In his second description, in *Against Apion*, Josephus actually quotes Hecataeus of Abdera, whose passage was discussed, in part, above. The description of the altar appears in Josephus's quote of Hecataeus's report of the city of Jerusalem:

> 196 ἐστὶν ἄλλα μὴν ὅτι καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτὴν τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καλλίστην τε καὶ μεγίστην ἐκ παλαιοτάτου κατασκευῆς καὶ περὶ πληθυντὶς ἀνδρῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ νεὼς κατασκευῆς αὐτῶς αὐτός διηγεῖται. 197 ἐστὶ γὰρ τῶν Ἰουδαίων τὰ μὲν πολλὰ ὀχυρώματα κατὰ τὴν χώραν καὶ κώμας μία δὲ πόλις ὀχυρὰ πεντήκοντα μάλιστα σταδίων τὴν περιμετρὸν ἦν οἰκοῦσι μὲν ἀνθρώπους περὶ δώδεκα 198 μυριάδες καλοῦσι δ’ αὐτὴν Ἱεροσόλυμα ἐνταῦθα δ’ ἐστὶ κατὰ μέσον μάλιστα τῆς

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The same man [Hecataeus] describes our city Jerusalem also itself as of a most excellent structure, and very large, and inhabited from the most ancient times. He also discourses of the multitude of men in it, and of the construction of our temple, after the following manner: "There are many strong places and villages (says he) in the country of Judea: but one strong city there is, about fifty furlongs in circumference, which is inhabited by a hundred and twenty thousand men, or thereabouts; they call it Jerusalem. There is about the middle of the city, a wall of stone, the length of which is five hundred feet, and the breadth a hundred cubits, with double cloisters; wherein there is a square altar, not made of hewn stone, but composed of white stones gathered together, having each side twenty cubits long, and its altitude ten cubits. Hard by it is a large edifice, wherein there is an altar and a candlestick, both of gold, and in weight two talents. (Whiston 1987: 785-86)

The reliability of the works of Josephus has long been a subject of debate. He seems to have been ignored by secular writers in the earliest centuries CE, though he was considered highly influential by the Church Fathers (Feldman 1992: 995). The accounts of Josephus are often "highly rhetorical and cannot be taken at face value" (Mason 2000: 737). Indeed, some of his works contain self-contradictions and other disparities (Feldman 1992: 983ff.). There are, however, some reasons that Josephus's works should be taken seriously and not dismissed too lightly. For example, in his Against Apion (Barclay 1998: 196), Josephus declares at the outset "that his primary concern is to prove the antiquity of the Jews in the face of persistent doubts arising from the lack of reference to Jews in Greek literature (1.1-5). The tone with which he introduces this topic indicates that the apparent novelty of the Jews is a topic of 'slander,' perpetuated by those whom Josephus considers motivated by malice. In other words, the reputation of the Jews is at stake." These concerns, along with precautions necessary to avoid damning charges by his detractors (Wacholder 1993: 383-4), may have led to a concern for accuracy on the
part of Josephus. In addition, Josephus's description of the Temple in *The Wars of the Jews* may have been based on his own participation in it as a priest (Feldman 1989: 409). These points are not to say that Josephus should be regarded as completely reliable and unbiased, but simply that he should be treated seriously as a historical source.

In *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus describes the altar as built of unhewn stones, with horns on its corners, square in shape, measuring 15 cubits on all sides, and with an "insensible acclivity" for use in ascending to its surface. In *Against Apion*, Josephus quotes from Hecataeus, who describes the altar as a square structure, built of unhewn stones. The measurement varies, however, from that given in *The Wars of the Jews* and is given here as 20 cubits long on its side and 10 cubits in height. The reason for the disparity between the measurements is not entirely clear. The cubit was a standard form of measurement used throughout the ancient Near East, based on the lengths of forearms (cubits) or portions thereof, and subdivided into palms of four or five fingers and sometimes smaller subdivisions (Bienkowski 2000: 318). It appears, however, that varying metrological standards were used in biblical and post-biblical Jewish sources, making the determination of the exact size of cubits in these materials problematic (Powell 1992: 899-900). Hubbard suggested that Josephus may not have measured the buildings which he described himself, but may instead have quoted from the ancient records that were available to him (Hubbard 1966: 130-54). Either one or a combination of these factors may contribute toward an explanation for the disparity in Josephus's description of the measurements of the Second Temple altar.

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The Temple Scroll. The instructions regarding the building of the Temple altar appear in Column 12 of the Temple Scroll, a portion that was in such a poor state of preservation that Geza Vermes chose not to translate them in his English translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Vermes 1997: 190). In the principle edition, Yigael Yadin (1983b: 47-49) offers the following reconstruction and translation:

1. [...] [...]
2. [...] [...]
3. [...] [...]
4. [...] [...]
5. [...] [...]
6. [...] [...]
7. [...] [...]
8. [...] [...]
9. [...] [...]
10. [...] [...]
11. [...] [...]
12. [...] [...]
13. [...] [...]
14. [...] [...]
15. [...] [...]

its measurements(?) shall be
XX [ ] corner, and a cubit
XX [ ] all built of
ston[es]
you shall make all
(its) courses(?) X
and its(?) XX [ ] and [its] corners you shall make for it
... [ ] X X
its(?) [b]owls(?)... and you shall make(?) X
Yadin (1985: 145-146) suggests that "a few surviving decipherable words offered an opening suggestion for a possible reconstruction of the plan of this altar, such as that its horns and its corners . . . all built of [unhewn?] stones," or "twenty[cubits from cor]ner to corner." These were only enough to indicate that it was to be a stone altar, or an altar of stones, at least 20 x 20 cubits." Yadin turns to other references to the altar in the descriptions in other parts of the scroll to supplement the description from Column 12. The description of the ritual of the burnt offerings on the day of ordination in Column XVI gives some additional details about the altar (Yadin 1983b: 71):

16. with the bull for the assembly; he shall put some of its blood with his finger on the horns of the [altar, and all the rest of]
17. its blood he shall sprinkle on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and [its fat and]

Any remaining blood was to be carefully dispensed with in ritual fashion (Yadin 1983b: 68):

12. blood on the altar in a bason, and pu[t some of] its blood with his finger on the four horns of the alta[r]
13. of the burnt offering and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and pour its blood on the base.
14. of the ledge of the altar all around; and its fat he shall burn upon the altar, the fat that covers the. (Col. XXIII:12-14)

Yadin notes that the only other occurrence of the expression “the four corners of the ledge of the altar” is found in Ezekiel’s description of the altar, the wording of which is very similar to that of the Temple Scroll (Ezek 43:20):

Ezekiel 43:20

20 And you shall take some of its blood, and put it on the four horns of the altar, and on the four corners of the ledge, and upon the rim all around; thus you shall purify it and make atonement for it. (NRSV)

He also notes that Ezekiel’s mention of the “altar ledge” occurs in the context of the giving of the details for the construction of the altar:

Ezekiel 43:14-17

14 From the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits, with a width of one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits, with a width of one cubit; 15 and the altar hearth, four cubits; and from the altar hearth projecting upward, four horns. 16 The altar hearth shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve wide. 17 The ledge also shall be square, fourteen cubits long by fourteen wide, with a rim around it half a cubit wide, and its surrounding base, one cubit. Its steps shall face east. (NRSV)
Based on these correspondences, Yadin (1983: 240) argues that "it is evident . . . that the altar of burnt offerings described in the scroll is similar to that in Ezekiel [and] based on the above restoration . . . it becomes clear that the subject matter of the column is the great altar of burnt offering, built of stone, with a ledge, corners and horns, and at least 20 cubits in dimension."

The question of the reliability of the Temple Scroll centers on its genre, method, and sources. The text has been called a pseudepigraph, a Book of the Law, and a "Rewritten Bible" (for recent bibliography on the Temple Scroll, see Zahn 2005: 435-58). Stegemann (1989: 134) argues that, though "this part of the Temple Scroll is no reworking of one specific section of the Bible . . . all its ingredients are gathered together from biblical passages, mainly from the cultic instructions of the Pentateuch, from the description of the temple of Solomon in 1 Kings 6-8, from the ideas of Ezekiel 40-48, and from some other sources related to the temple and to the areas of holiness for Israel." The resemblance of the Temple Scroll's altar description with that of Ezekiel is close, though, if Yadin's translation of 20 x 20 cubits is correct, then the dimensions of Ezekiel's altar are different – 12 x 12 (Ezek 43:13-17). (The 20 x 20 dimensions do appear in 2 Chr 4:1, however, which states that Solomon built "an altar of bronze, twenty cubits long, and twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high.") Yadin suggests that the author of the Temple Scroll may have been trying to harmonize the descriptions in Ezekiel and Chronicles (Yadin 1985: 146).

One of the interesting features of the Temple Scroll is that when it quotes a biblical passage that presents God's words in the third person, it changes it to the first
person. It seems clear that the author intended to make a claim for the inspiration of the Temple Scroll (VanderKam 1994: 59). VanderKam (1994: 157) explains:

The Qumran literature is the only example that we have of a Jewish library from the last centuries B.C. and the first century A.D. in which we can examine the evidence for a “canonical” consciousness. The texts prove that the books of the Law and Prophets were paid high honor there, as were Psalms and Daniel . . . . They also demonstrate that other books were authoritative: Jubilees and parts of 1 Enoch in particular but also the Temple Scroll and probably others such as the commentaries. Thus, one gets the impression that the Qumranites did not have a closed, precisely defined list of books that constituted a Bible; or, perhaps more precisely, we sense that the residents of Qumran included in their category of authoritative books several works that never became parts of the Hebrew Bible. The community certainly believed that revelation continued to be given in their time (the Teacher was inspired).

The fact that the Temple Scroll was never accepted as “canonical” “is not as important as the fact that the possibility of its being accepted was expected” (Swanson 1995: 7). The Temple Scroll was apparently written with the intention of being authoritative (see Stegemann 1987: 28-35).

The use of the biblical text for source material and a possible pseudoepigraphic genre do not necessarily preclude accuracy. The Temple Scroll may have been a product of scribal activity within priestly circles (Brook 1992: 282) or, even more specifically, of disaffected Levitical priestly circles (Mink 1987: 28). These recent theories warrant consideration, as the author(s) of the Temple Scroll clearly had to have possessed vast knowledge of the Torah, the Temple, and its cult. While these theories do not prove the reliability of the Temple Scroll, they suggest that its production did not simply involve a reworking of biblical sources, and that it may have drawn on firsthand or communal knowledge of the Temple itself.
The Mishnah. The fifth source, the Mishnah, gives a much more detailed description. It describes the Herodian altar as consisting of four blocks that increased from 24 x 24 cubits at the top to a base of 32 x 32. The text reads as follows:

A. The altar was thirty-two by thirty-two [cubits] [at the base].
B. It rose by one cubit and drew in by one cubit [on every side].
C. This is the foundation.
D. Thus was left [an area] thirty cubits by thirty [on every side].
E. It rose by five cubits and drew in by one cubit.
F. This is the circuit.
G. Thus was left [an area] twenty-eight by twenty-eight.
H. The area of the horns is a cubit on this side and a cubit on that side.
I. Thus was left [an area] twenty-six by twenty-six.
J. The place for the passage of the priests is a cubit on this side and a cubit on that side.
K. Thus was left [an area] twenty-four by twenty-four [as] the place for the [altar] fire.
L. Said R. Yose, “At the outset it was only twenty-eight by twenty-eight. It draws in and rises in this same measure, so that the area for the altar fire turns out to be twenty by twenty [II Chron. 4.1].
M. "But when the men of the Exile came up, they added four cubits at the south and four cubits at the west, in the shape of a gamma,
N. "since it is said, And the altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square (Ezek. 43.16).
O. "Is it possible that it should be only twelve by twelve?
P. "But when it also says, In the four quarters thereof, it teaches that from the middle one measures twelve cubits in all directions” [so that the area for the altar fire must be twenty-four by twenty-four].
Q. And a red line goes around it at the middle, to effect a separation between the drops of blood which are tossed on the top and the drops of blood which are tossed on the bottom.
R. And the foundation extended all the length of the north side and all the length of the west side,
S. and projects one cubit to the south and one cubit to the east (Neusner 1988: 877-88).

According to this description, the square altar had a base, a ledge, and an upper tier. The base, called the נלד, measured 32 cubits wide. One cubit from the base, the altar narrowed to 30 cubits, leaving a two-cubit ledge. The Mishnah calls this ledge a “circuit” (line F), or a “surround.” The word נלד literally means "that which surrounds" (Scherman and Zlotowitz 2005: 83). Five cubits higher, the altar again narrowed to 28 cubits, leaving another two-cubit ledge or surround. This second ledge, created by the second narrowing, curved around and down the ramp leading up to the altar. This “small ramp” seems to have been made for the priest to ascend to the “surround” (Fig. 79). The Mishnah seems to envision an altar that followed a progression of ascending and indenting for its base, ledge, place of the horns, and walkway for the priests.

Discussions about the reliability of the Mishnah are complex. Roland De Vaux suggested that the “perfect harmony” of the Mishnaic description with the biblical texts is "disconcerting rather than probative” (De Vaux 1997: 412-13). Jacob Neusner, the undisputed dean of Mishnaic studies, has recently argued that the Mishnah is to be
Figure 79. A reconstruction of the Second Temple altar from Middot 3:1 (Zertal 1985: 37).

understood, in many ways, as philosophy (Neusner 1991; 1981). This does not mean, however, that Neusner understands the contents of the Mishnah to be subjective or unreliable. On the contrary, he argues for “one whole Torah,” oral and written, and which should be read as a single, coherent statement. Each of these components of the Torah – the oral and the written – states the same message as the other, the written part consisting in particular of stories and cases, and the oral part being comprised of generalizations and rules. Neusner (1999: 1) explains that "the Oral Torah then identifies the moral of the stories of the Written Torah and recasts the moral into social norms, and the Oral Torah further translates Scripture’s cases into governing rules yielding uniform procedures and regulations." For Neusner, the Mishnah “simply recapitulates and
[refines], without contributing more than mere amplification or extension, than Halakhic statements of Scripture . . . ” (Neusner 1999: 1). This is an important understanding because, with it, “we narrow the limits of what the Oral Torah (in theory at least) can have contributed” (Neusner 1999: 1). Throughout the various divisions of the Mishnah, Neusner finds nothing new invented by the writers. He concludes (Neusner 1999: 1-2): "In those recapitulative and subordinate category-formations, we find ourselves wholly within the framework of the ideas systematically spelled out of the Written Torah . . . I find nothing in the Halakhah that contributes other than a derivative refinement of Scripture’s own facts within Scripture’s own hermeneutics for the topic at hand."

While many interpreters – particularly Christian scholars – would likely disagree with Neusner’s understandings of the Mishna’s relationship to the written Torah, his arguments for the conservatism of the Mishnaic authors are important. The Mishnah does tend to be “concise, usually citing only accepted decisions and major dissents,” and has as its aim “to preserve and enhance the oral tradition rather than supplant it” (Klatzkin 2000: 906). In light of this tendency, it may be that the Mishnaic description, as described in Middot, preserved an accurate description of the Second Temple altar. Apparent contradictions between the Mishnah and Josephus may not indicate that either source is wholly wrong but that the layout of the building changed over time (Goodman 2005: 460).

Israelite Altar Architecture and Mt. Ebal

Despite disagreements about the dating of the materials, the traditions about Israelite altar architecture seem to reveal a striking degree of continuity. From the descriptions given in the various sources, Zertal compiles some basic attributes and
specifications of a burnt offering altar, including size, design, building materials, stairs (or ramps), and horns. He summarizes as follows (Zertal 1986/87: 155-56):

Burnt offering altars are large, square structures. Their length and breadth range from 9 to 10 m. (Solomon and Ezekiel altars) and their height from 5 to 6 m. They are designed in two or three steps (or ledges), each ledge higher and smaller than the one below. According to Albright, this stepped arrangement is an essential feature of the altar, probably originating in Mesopotamian cultic structures.

Zertal comments on the implications of the regularity of these general features: “The similarity of both the general concept of the burnt offering altars and their individual attributes indicates continuity from the First to the Second Temple periods, a common phenomenon in sacred structures” (Zertal 1986/87: 156). Based on this continuity, it seems that a uniform tradition of altar architecture is detected.

Ben-Noon (1985: 140-141) has reviewed biblical passages relevant to the aforementioned features of altars, and has compiled a list of principles that could be said to generally characterize biblical altars:

1. 4 horns
2. Square shaped in its corners
3. Identical length and width
4. A foundation or base
5. An inclined ramp
6. Whole stones (while altars of earth and the altar of brass also exist, whole stones are specifically mentioned in regard to the altar on Mt. Ebal).

With regard to number 1, the characteristic four horns were not found on the central structure at the Ebal site. However, as mentioned above (chapter 3), several large stones were found spread around the structure that could have served as horns. These were all
unworked, however, and so cannot be decisively identified as horns. The possibility that the central structure originally had four horns must be left open.

With regard to number 3, the width of the structure at Ebal is not equal to its length, i.e., it is not "square." Instead, it is rectangular in shape. Ben-Noon seeks to explain the variance of the Ebal structure with his third criterion through an unusual exegetical approach. The altar descriptions in both the Pentateuch and in Ezekiel specify that these altars "shall be square" (NRSV). Ben-Noon notes that, in both of these passages, the specification of "square" appears in addition to the measurements. Since dimensional specifications have already been given, he suggests that this expression may refer not to the measurements but, instead, to the straight angle of the corners (Ben-Noon 1985: 139). Ben-Noon's criterion 3, however, does not seem to me to be applicable throughout the Bible. Specific altar measurements are mentioned in the Bible only with regard to the Tabernacle (Exod 27:1-2; 30) and Temple (2 Chr 4:1; 7:7; 1 Kgs 8:64) altars. While these altars are square, with their length and width identical, there are no fixed measurements given for altars in general throughout the Bible, and the dimensions do seem to change from one altar to the next. A more plausible explanation for the rectangular shape of the Ebal structure in contrast to the square altars of the Tabernacle and Temple altars may be that it is reminiscent of the altar of unworked stones (Exod 20:25) rather than the latter structures.

An additional factor not listed in Ben-Noon's six criteria has to do with the orientation of the altar in relation to the compass points. As we have seen, the corners of the Ebal structure, like the Mesopotamian temple-towers, face the cardinal points of the compass. Nothing clear is stated in the biblical texts, however, about the position of the
altar in relation to the compass points, with the exception of the fact that the burnt-offering altar was located in the courtyard of the Tabernacle, which is usually explained to mean that the altar is placed on the north-south axis with its northern side opposite the entrance (Exod 26; cf. Ben-Noon 1985: 141). The orientation of the corners of the Iron Age I structure on Mt. Ebal does not seem to contradict biblical commands about altar building.

Thus, only one of the six biblical principles is not fulfilled in the present site – the width is not identical to its length – and I have sought to show that this criterion is not applicable. Ben-Noon concludes, "It appears to me that the similarities tip the scales with the reality of a ramp and foundations, four corners, the building with unworked stones, together with the lack of an entrance, combine to make a description that only an 'altar' can explain" (Ben-Noon 1985: 141, my translation). The Mt. Ebal structure is most reminiscent of the altar of unworked stones described in Exodus. The prohibition of Exod 20:25 against working the stones to be used in the construction of a stone altar is repeated in Deut 27:5-6 and in the command to build an altar on Mt. Ebal. Joshua 8:31, in turn, specifically cites Exod 20:24-25 in its report of Joshua's fulfillment of that command.

While the Iron Age I structure cannot definitely be associated with the structure described in Josh 8:30-35, the structure can be compared "to what is implied by the early altar law of Exod. 20:25 and may be considered a most elaborate example of the stone field altar" (Zevit 2001: 199-200) (Fig. 80).
Surrounding Wall Complex

In all temples and sanctuaries, "the sacred area must be well demarcated to separate it from the profane space outside" (Sarna 1991: 173; cf. also Zevit 2002: 73-81). The Tabernacle structure itself was divided into three zones, which are, in descending order of holiness: the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Outer Court (Exod 25:1-31:17). Each of these zones was demarcated by a curtain, and detailed instructions are given for the enclosure of the entire Tabernacle compound as a hatser (נַחַל) (Exod 27:9-19). The entire area constituted a quadrangle measuring 100 cubits on the north and south sides, and 50 cubits on the east and west sides, yielding a total of 5,000 square cubits. In the commandments regulating the eating of offerings, the Torah distinguishes between meals that are to be eaten in the courtyard of the Tabernacle (Lev 6:9-10; 7:6; cf. Milgrom 1991: 392-4, 754-5) and meals that have a lesser degree of holiness and may,
therefore, be eaten outside the courtyard (Lev 7:11-20; 10:14; cf. Levine 1989: 42-4). As discussed in chapter 2, the outer walls of the Ebal site are built of medium-sized fieldstones to a height of about 90 cm, with foundations laid in shallow trenches rather than on bedrock. They seem to serve as a temenus rather than as a defensive wall, and may recall the Torah's aforementioned prescriptions about the demarcation of space (Fig. 81).

![Figure 81. Artist's reconstruction of the inner and outer enclosures at Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1986/87: 159).](image)

The Ramps between the Courtyards

See the discussion of the "earthen altar," above.

The Installations

Some of the installations surrounding the central structure contained ashes and bones, while others contained a single vessel or a flat rock. Ben-Noon has drawn attention to the great concentration of these installations on the northwestern and
southwestern sides of the central structure. The Torah stipulates that, when a burnt offering is made, "it shall be slaughtered on the north side of the altar before the Lord" (Lev 1:11). Since the Tabernacle and Temple faced the west, "before the Lord," therefore, hints to the west as the place of slaughter (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). This is the place of the greatest concentration of these installations, specifically those consisting of a flat rock, which may have been slaughtering installations.

Area B: Courtyard 139 and Entrance Structure 220

The large entrance is located in the surrounding wall precisely to the west of the western corner of the central structure (Fig. 19). Ben-Noon suggests that it might be assumed that this orientation is not accidental, since the west is such an important direction in the Torah (Ben-Noon 1985: 143). Like many ancient peoples, the rising sun gave the Hebrews their basic direction (Childs 1962: 608). The West, therefore, was the "rear" (ז'נה, 'ahor). It was also referred to simply as the "sea" (ים) or, more frequently, as the "place of the setting sun" (ים Moines מכם מארב, mabo 'semeš ma'arab). Both the Tabernacle and Temple faced the west. In addition to the location of Entrance Structure 220 to the west of the western corner of the central structure, the west is also the direction of the pinnacle of Mount Ebal.

Area C

Area C, located in the northernmost corner from the central structure, was comprised of open ground (Fig. 15) and has been dubbed the "corral." Zevit has suggested that "the arrangement of the inner temenos suggests that its northernmost corner, cut off from the altar area, may have been used for some specialized activity such
as the storage or perhaps the butchering of animals prior to their parts being presented on the altar” (Zevit 2001: 200).

The Faunal Assemblage from Mt. Ebal

In the last several pages of her report, Horwitz discusses two problems raised by Zertal’s dating of the site to the Early Israelite period and his interpretation of its main structure as an altar. These problems are associated with the relation between the animal remains found at the Ebal site and the Mosaic laws. The laws pertaining to animals permitted for consumption and/or sacrifice, Deuteronomy 14 and Leviticus 11, allow for the use of domesticated sheep, goats, and cattle. Wild animals allowed by the legislation include gazelles and deer (Deut 14:5). Exactly what kind of deer is unclear, since three species are known from this region: fallow deer, red deer, and roe deer. Many translations use “fallow deer.” Sheep, goat, cattle, and fallow deer, all regarded by the Law as consumable animals, are present at Mt. Ebal. All other animals found at the site are listed as unclean (Deut 14; Lev 11), “but it is uncertain if they belong to the Iron Age deposits” (Horwitz 1986/87: 186). The problem arises when collating the Ebal bone remains with the biblical materials (Horwitz 1986/87: 186): "The two passages (Deut. 27 and Jos. 8) that mention the building of an altar on Mount Ebal refer to two types of sacrificial offerings: the burnt offering and the peace offering. Both offerings refer only to domesticated animals (sheep, goats, and cattle) as well as turtledoves and pigeons. No mention is made concerning the acceptability of wild animals for sacrifice, even if they were permitted for consumption." After describing the burnt and peace offerings, Horwitz concludes (1986/87: 186):
The Mount Ebal faunal assemblage is comprised mainly of sheep, goats and cattle, all of which are prescribed sacrificial animals. However, the fallow deer remains appear to fall outside of the prescribed laws for offerings as stated in Deuteronomy, Joshua and Leviticus. It was not possible to determine the age or sex of the domestic animals, although the fallow deer remains show great homogeneity of age (prime adults) and the presence of at least one male animal. In addition, the distribution of body parts of the various species shows no significant differences to those from other Iron Age sites, a feature that would be expected from a ritual/sacrificial site as opposed to a settlement. The cut marks on the fallow deer cranium are suggestive of skinning, and the presence of burnt fallow deer antlers is of interest in the light of the practice of burning the whole animal (including the head) for the burnt offering. However, the use of wild animals, such as fallow deer, for sacrifice does not appear to be sanctioned by Mosaic law.

While fallow deer were not intended for sacrifice, they are kosher in the Hebrew Bible. Zertal has suggested that "it may be that in this early stage of religion they [the ancient Israelites] sacrificed deer" (Zertal 1998a). Diana Edelman is inclined to see the Ebal site as cultic in nature despite the presence of the deer remains. She suggests that "the presence of exotic materials and huge amounts of animal bones, including deer, tend to favor a cultic use for the site" (Edelman 1996: 50, n. 56).

There does not seem to be sufficient basis, however, for postulating that at some point fallow deer and other deer were offered. Ben-Noon has proposed an alternative understanding of these deer remains that seems more promising. He suggested that there was a quasi-gift offering of the leftover vessels and feasts that were eaten in purity or holiness. These were brought as a popular voluntary donation for the filling of the interior of the altar. Or they may have been leftovers of the holy feast of those who inaugurated the site (Ben-Noon 1985: 142). This may be reminiscent of the offerings of the leaders of Israel at the inauguration of the altar in Numbers 7. These offerings included vessels of silver filled with fine flour, a golden spoon filled with incense, and a list of burnt
offerings and peace offerings. Another possible parallel is the general donation that was given for the establishing of the Tabernacle (Exod 35:21-36:7).

Aside from these issues, the faunal assemblage provides additional data that are suggestive of a cultic identification for the site. Among the faunal materials, the proportion of remains from foreparts (Metatarsal, Metacarpal, Astragalus, Calcaneum, and Phalange) is higher at Ebal than at other Iron Age sites. This higher proportion may be related to the biblical traditions that the Israelites were to sacrifice the right foreleg of the animal and to give the right hind leg to the priests (Exod 29:22; Lev 7:28-36; Horwitz 1986/87: 182; cf. Ben-Tor 1980: 31-48).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have taken the data from chapter 1 and compared it with the literary traditions of the Hebrew Bible and extra-biblical Second Temple sources which include descriptions of ancient Israelite altar sites. This included a review of the instructions regarding the Tabernacle altar, the First Temple altar, Ahaz's altar, Ezekiel's Future Temple altar, and the Second Temple altar. Many of the features of the Ebal site in its entirety are best explained by a cultic explanation, and the central structure itself was shown to conform to most of the biblical principles of Israelite altar architecture (Ben-Noon 1985: 141). Among those who accept a general identification of the site as cultic in nature without comment on the specific character of the site as "Israelite" or as an "altar" are Anbar (1985b: 352) and Lemaire (1990: 199-201). Those who seem to accept an identification for the site at Mt. Ebal as either an Israelite altar or other cultic installation are Ben-Noon (1985), Block (1998: 602), Browning (1998: 33-4), Christensen (2002: 654), Edelmann (1996: 50, n. 56), Elitzur and Nir-Zevi (2003: 34), Faust (2006: 114),
CHAPTER 5


In this chapter, we will review the possibility that the site on Mt. Ebal may have functioned as a tribal cultic center for the central hill-country settlers in Iron Age I. Scholarly responses to this idea will be briefly considered, along with the biblical notion of "all Israel." Most importantly, we will seek to understand the Ebal site by looking at it in the context of the new picture of the Iron Age I settlement process of the central hill-country that is emerging from archaeological surveys.

Historical and Sociological Considerations of the Mt. Ebal Site

The Mt. Ebal site is one of the earliest of the new settlement sites in the central hill-country in Iron Age I. Zertal suggests that "the existence of a cultic-center should be interpreted as an indicator of social organization" (Zertal 1988c: 144). As seen in chapters 1-2, food and water were both expended at the site, though they do not appear to have been produced there. Sickle-blades for use in the harvesting of winter crops were completely absent from the site, as were olive presses, winepresses, and storage facilities, all of which would have been required for the process and storage of food products. The pottery repertoire, too, points away from an identification of the site as one involved in food production. About 70 percent of the pottery was comprised of large collar-rimmed
storage jars, which are known to have been the principle storage vessels of the newly settled Israelites. As discussed earlier, Ahlström argued that the prevalence of collar-rimmed pithoi at the site mitigated against the identification of el-Burnat as a cultic site (Ahlström 1993: 366). As Zertal has shown, however, the collar-rimmed pithoi appear to have been the main vessel for storing water at the highland sites (Zertal 1988b: 350-2) and, therefore, it would seem that a high percentage of this vessel type would appear at any settlement site, whether it was cultic in nature or not. About 20 percent of the pottery vessels are jugs and chalices. The balance of the pottery consisted of small vessels, mostly votive, made especially for ritual use. The percentage of domestic vessels was very small, and cooking pots made up only 5 percent of the total pottery repertoire. In addition to these types, several new kinds of pottery appear at the Ebal site, including the three-handled jar-jug, the three-handled jug, and votive vessels. A number of chalices of types attested in other cultic contexts were found. A quantitative analysis suggests the Ebal pottery repertoire does not represent a domestic assemblage (Coogan 1987: 2; Gilmour 1995: 111; Zevit 2001: 201). The faunal remains made up one of the largest samples ever studied in Israel, and also suggested that a narrow range of activities took place at the site either in function or time (Horwitz 1986/87: 187). These activities clearly included both food and water consumption.

Zertal has suggested that when the size of the enclosure and its main building are considered together with the amount of the specific types of pottery and bones, these factors may hint at a tribal or multi-tribal society (Zertal 1988c: 144). The reason for this is that the aforementioned elements would have to have been collected and disseminated in some kind of organized way, which implies some kind of federalized leadership for the
operation of the site. The transition from Stratum II to Stratum IB may attest to social developments such as these. The Stratum II occupation was comprised primarily of Locus 94, a nearby favissa, a four-room house, and a retaining wall. During this earliest phase, the site may have been a small cult site where feasts or ceremonies were held and sacrifices were offered. Since the site was fairly small in size during this phase, it might be assumed that it served as either a family or tribal cult site whose attendants lived in the four-room house bordering it in Area B.

In Stratum IB, the site underwent substantial modification, which included the removal of the domestic building in Area B, the construction of the central structure in Area A, and the building of an enclosure wall surrounding the central structure. It may be that in this phase the site evolved into a main cult site of area settlers, with the main structure built either as an altar or a paved bāmāh, which served as the focal point of ceremonies for assembled groups. The low height of the western enclosure wall would have allowed for continued visibility of the central structure for those in the outer areas (Zertal 1986/87: 157). Additionally, this is suggested by the large number of pottery vessels found in the depositories around the central structure, which may have been the remains of offerings that had been brought either by pilgrims or local visitors to the site.

The Mt. Ebal Site and Biblical Tradition

The Hebrew Bible does contain two traditions regarding an altar site on Mt. Ebal, one in Deut 27, where YHWH commands that such a structure be built upon entry into the land of Canaan, and the other in Josh 8:30-35, which purports to record the Israelites' construction of the aforementioned structure. The building of the altar was to be followed by a recitation by "all Israel" (Josh 8:33) of the Law and of its attendant blessings and
curses (Deut 27:11-13). The fact that a ceremonial site is mentioned in both of these sources warrants discussion about the compositional history of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, both of which have been important factors for those who have discussed the Ebal site. It appears that Soggin's chief objection to an association of el-Bumat with the altar of Josh 8:30-35 was driven by an understanding of the book as having a late date, "something about which all non-'fundamentalist' scholars agree" (1988: 117).

The assumption of a late date for the composition of the book of Joshua was one of the reasons Kempinski could not accept a cultic identification for the site in the first place. He argued that el-Burnat could not be the site of the ceremonies described in Josh 8:30-35 because there were no Persian period remains found there (Kempinski 1986: 48) and that the site should be understood, instead, as a Canaanite site. Coogan, who did accept the cultic nature of the site, could not accept it as Israelite because of his understanding of Joshua as part of an idealized retrojection by the Deuteronomistic Historian (Coogan 1990: 27). Dever's rejection of the cultic nature of the site, too, appears to have been informed by an acceptance of postexilic origins for the biblical materials (1992: 28).

As mentioned above (chapter 1), evangelical scholars who argue for an exodus-conquest in the 15th century also find the cultic identification difficult to accept. In a short article on the Mt. Ebal site in the recently published *Archaeological Study Bible*, it is stated that "the current dating of the site does not fit with Biblical chronology, which suggests an earlier, fourteenth century (ca. 1400 B.C.) date for Joshua and the conquest" (Kaiser and Garret 2005: 288). Pitkänen raised the possibility that the Stratum IB
structure could have served as a monument, though he saw it as possibly an improved version of the Stratum II structure (Pitkänen 2004: 182). Other biblical texts do describe structures that were built as monuments (e.g., Josh 4; 22:9-34). Pitkänen suggests that the lack of living quarters in association with Stratum IB could corroborate the interpretation of the altar as a monument (2004: 183). Pitkänen recognizes, however, that animal bones were found in Stratum IB as well, which seems to suggest a continued cultic usage (Pitkänen 2004: 183). While the possibility might be held out that the Iron Age I structure on Mt. Ebal commemorates some earlier, more transient structure, there is at present no archaeological evidence to support this hypothesis.

The issues of the composition of Deuteronomy (e.g., the collected articles in Christenson 1993) and of the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., the collected articles in Knoppers and McConville 2000), as well as other questions of biblical chronology, go beyond the scope of this dissertation. My purpose here, however, is not to analyze the Ebal site on the basis of the biblical text, but rather on the basis of archaeological data and in relation to the large picture of the central hill-country settlement in Iron Age I (below). In any case, neither Deuteronomy 27 nor Joshua 8:30-35 provides details about what role a cultic site such as the one they describe might play in the ongoing life of Israelite society (beyond the initial founding ceremony they describe).

Zertal suggests that the biblical traditions of Shiloh (1 Sam 1-10), which are considered by most scholars to date to or before the tenth century BCE (Halpern 1992: 1214-5), may supplement our knowledge regarding the usage of such cultic centers (Zertal 1986/87: 157). Among the activities carried out at the Shiloh shrine were:
1. Annual pilgrimages. This appears to be a private, personal pilgrimage distinct from the requirement for males to appear three times a year before Yahweh as part of a national festival (Exod 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Deut 16:16; cf. Haran 1969: 11-22).

2. A yearly sacrifice.

3. Payment of a tithe.

4. Offerings including bulls, an ephah of flour, and a vessel containing wine (1 Sam 1:24). The Hebrew word נבל (nevel), usually translated as "skin" (e.g., NRSV), can also refer to a large storage jar used especially for wine, oil, and grain. Kelso notes that, in references in the historical books, נבל appears to mean wine skin, though in the later prophetic books and in Lamentations it apparently refers to a storage-jar. "This is, of course, only a coincidence, for nevel must have had both usages throughout the entire Old Testament period" (Kelso 1948: 25). Meyers argues that "a case could be made for the replacement of skins with jars for the storage and transport of commodities once taxation and trade became part of the economic picture and the stamping of ownership emerged (as evidenced in the stamped jar handles of the Iron II period)" (Meyers 1995: 84, n. 23). However, jar rims stamped with a potter's mark in the shape of an upside-down "V" and dating to the Iron Age I have been found at both Mt. Ebal (Zertal 1986/87: 147) and Tall al-ʿUmayri (Herr 2002: 135-55). In addition, many vessels at Mt. Ebal bear puncturing or incising marks that seem to be typical of the period of the settlement of the Manassite hill country (Zertal 1986/87: 135, 145-147), also found in Ephraim.
(Finkelstein 1988: 285-287) and in the Jezreel Valley, though it is not clear whether this feature may have had some administrative significance or whether it was purely decorative (Finkelstein 1988: 287).

5. Parts of the meat eaten by the people (1 Sam 9:13) following the sacrifice of the animal.

The layout of the Ebal site in Stratum IB, again, does suggest that it was intended to accommodate numerous persons. The vessels in the installations may have been deposited as offerings. The burned bones and indications of cooking in some of the installations point to the possibility of the consumption of sacrificial meat on the site.

The biblical traditions specifically associated easting with the ceremonial activities undertaken at Mt. Ebal (Deut 27:7; cf. also 12:7, 17-18). Dever's joking dismissal of the possible cultic nature of the site as "a picnic site where barbecues were enjoyed by families on Saturday afternoons" (Dever 1992: 34) may, in fact, reinforce the cultic nature of the site. As Zertal has observed, "though he intended to curse, he blessed!" (Zertal 1998a).

Finkelstein, however, remains unconvinced about the possible identification of the Ebal site as the main cult site for the settlers of the area. He argues that, "historically, it is difficult to envision a supratribal Israelite cultic center as early as Zertal proposes, and none of the finds indicate that this site was a center for all of Israel" (Finkelstein 1988: 85). This raises the question as to what the biblical writer(s) meant by the expression “all Israel” (מִּיַּֽהלָּמָּדָאיה) (Josh 8:33). Did it include every person who considered himself or herself an Israelite? The phrase “all Israel,” read literally, would suggest a comprehensive reference to the “whole” of Israel, or to “all” (ָֽכּ) of those...
persons of whom Israel was comprised (Sauer 1997: 615). Obviously, however, “the
sense in which ’all’ is to be taken must be gathered from the context” (Oswalt 1980: 441),
and this phrase has its own set of usages that must be respected. In Josh 3:1 and 17, it
refers to “all” the Israelites as crossing the Jordan. However, even there, the families of
Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh are excluded. In this case, it is clearly not a reference
to every man, woman, and child, but to a limited representation. In Josh 10:15 and 43,
“all Israel” is used to refer to the raiding force that carried out battles from its base camp
at Gilgal. It is clear, however, that this raiding force does not make up the totality of the
Israelite tribes. This would be impossible, since the text earlier reported that the families
of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh were left in Transjordan when the Hebrews crossed
into Canaan. Instead, the raiding force of Josh 10 is drawn from the tribes. That the
expression “Israel” did not have to refer to the entire Hebrew populace, but that it could
refer to the overall confederal identity of Israel, is made clear by its usage in the “Song
of Deborah.” Deborah’s hymn assumes a tribal structure with a confederal identity as
“Israel,” despite the fact that, technically, not “all Israel” responded to her summons to
join in defending the people against Sisera (Judg 4-5).

Toward the end of the book of Joshua, a usage of the term “all Israel” occurs that
is particularly illuminating. On at least one occasion, “all Israel” may be understood in a
representative fashion that does not refer to every man, woman, and child that made up
the Hebrew populace. When Joshua prepared to deliver his farewell address, the text
reports that "Joshua summoned all Israel (that is, their elders, their chiefs, their judges,
and their officers) and said to them" (Boling 1982: 519). Boling restores an explicative
waw ( prefixed) from the LXX and the Syriac to the word "their elders" (יִשְׂרָאֵל יִנְשָׁה), which he
renders as "that is" in the parenthetical statement. The explicative waw suggests to him that “all Israel” is explicitly defined as “their elders, leaders, judges and officers” (Boling 1982: 522). A similar instance occurs at the covenant renewal at the end of the book of Joshua. The text reports: “Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God” (Josh 24:1). There is no explicative waw in any of the versions, however, and so the phrase “all Israel” could be intended to refer to the entire Hebrew populace.

Even if the expression "all Israel" could be understood as consisting here of a smaller body made up of representative groups from each tribe, the geography of the Mt. Ebal site does not necessitate reducing the number of those present. Between the summit of Mt. Ebal and the slope on which the Iron Age I site is located, there is an expansive recession or dip in the mountain that might be described as a natural amphitheatre. After walking parts of this large area, it seems to me that it could have easily accommodated tens of thousands and, in fact, was strewn with Iron Age I sherds throughout. In addition, the areas between Mt. Ebal and the Samaritan Mt. Gerizim as well as between Mt. Ebal and Jebel Kebir are situated in such a way that their acoustic and visual capacity made them ideal places for a large assembly to hear and see public proceedings (for Ebal and the Samaritan Mt. Gerizim, see Crisler 1976: 139). Finkelstein's difficulty in seeing the site as "a supratribal cultic center . . . for all Israel" (1988: 85, italics mine) is not a difficulty raised by the geography.

In any case, Josh 8:33 notes that the gathering of “all Israel” included those who were “alien as well as citizen.” Howard notes that “the word here for ‘alien’ (נָּ֣ר, ger)
refers to those foreigners who lived as permanent residents within Israel" (Howard 1998: 216). In contrast with those who came into incidental contact with Israel (i.e., travelers, traders, etc., who had few rights within Israel. Cf. Exod 12:43; Lev 22:25; Deut 14:21; 15:3), these were “resident aliens” who, even though they were not Israelites by birth, did enjoy certain rights among the Hebrew people (for example, see Howard 1998: 216-17). Some of these foreigners present with the Hebrews at their entrance into the land of Canaan may have descended from the “mixed rabble” who joined them during their exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:38; 19:6).¹ Among other privileges, these resident aliens could participate in various cultic celebrations – providing they had been circumcised (Exod 12:43-49).

However, not only had the resident aliens among the generation of Israelites undertaken the “conquest,” but the Israelites themselves had not even been circumcised. As Josh 5:2-12 makes clear, the exodus generation failed to circumcise their male children. It appears, therefore, that upon its entrance into the land of Canaan, the whole of Israel was not in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, though this is not explicitly stated in the book of Joshua. If this is the case, however, then the covenant ceremony of Josh 8:30-35 is really a covenant renewal ceremony (so Barker 1998: 277; Craige 1976: 326-329; Hill 1988: 405-406; Soggin 1972: 240; cf. Driver 1901: 294; Anbar 1985a: 306; Butler 1983: 95), as the Hebrews (including the resident aliens) present had never had their relationship with Yahweh ratified through a covenant ceremony.² While the exodus

¹ This is speculation, however, as the word "" is not used.
² They would, however, have been included in the covenant based on the idea of corporate solidarity (see Neyrey 1993: 88-91; Malina 2006: 699-700), whereas subsequently generations continually made the experiences of the first exodus generation their own by regular observance of the Passover and other feasts and observances (Verhey 1992: 668). The wilderness generation did not circumcise children born after the Exodus (Josh 5:7), which may imply that the Passover was not celebrated during the

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generation had experienced the seminal event of the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, that generation had died. This generation, consisting of Hebrews along with a "mixed rabble" that had attached themselves to them during the period of the exodus and wilderness wandering, gathered for the Ebal/Gerizim ceremony, in which they would agree to follow Yahweh. Altars played an important role in centralizing peoples in the ancient world (Haak 1992: 162-7) and, here, it was not the kinship of the people that mattered, but their common faith in Yahweh, whom they had all agreed to follow (Hawkins 2005: 33-36). According to the portrayal in Josh 8:30-35 a cultic site on Mt. Ebal played a central role in crystallizing ancient Israel's national consciousness at this early stage in their history. This begs the question of whether the Iron Age I site on Mt. Ebal may have some connection with these biblical traditions.

Scholarly Response


wilderness wandering, since circumcision was a prerequisite for participation in the celebration of the Passover (Exod 12:43-49; cf. Sarna 1991: 63-64). In Josh 5, the generation of the exodus is contrasted with the generation of the conquest/settlement, whose circumcision and celebration of the Passover serve to identify the Hebrews with Yahweh and his covenantal promises and as an anticipation of their settlement in the land (cf. Hess 1996: 118-25).
246), and Zevit (2001: 196-201). M. D. Coogan accepted a cultic interpretation of the
site, but argued that "it is misleading and ultimately unhelpful for the larger historical
task of a biblical archaeologists . . . to presume that [the Mt. Ebal site] was Israelite"
(Coogan 1987: 1-8).

However, as Christensen has noted, "the fact remains that the site fits all four of
his own criteria for a cultic site from archaeological remains as well as the general picture
in terms of the biblical account" (2002: 654). In a helpful article reviewing recent survey
and excavation data, Hess concluded that "evidence for cult centers at Mount Ebal and at
Shiloh, as well as details such as the diet of the hill country inhabitants, do correlate in a
variety of points with the picture of early Israel's worship as suggested both by Biblical
law codes and by the narratives of Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel" (Hess 1993:
139). Hess suggests that, ultimately, Ebal should be understood both in its Palestinian
context and "in terms of the biblical recollections" (1993: 137). An examination of the
Ebal site in light of the "biblical recollections" is not necessarily decisive, as there is
disagreement about the nature and date of the biblical materials. Whether or not the
biblical materials even preserve traditions rooted in the early settlement is not agreed
upon. Though he acknowledges these difficulties, A. Mazar has written that "the
excavator's arguments supporting his identification of the site as a cult place are
persuasive, even if we do not accept them to the last detail" (Mazar 1992a: 295). He
continues (Mazar 1992a: 295):

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As this is the only Iron Age site encountered in Zertal's rigorous survey on Mount Ebal, it is likely that the biblical tradition refers to it. And the lack of remains from the period of the monarchy supports the antiquity of the biblical tradition in the books of Joshua and Deuteronomy (Deut. 11:29, 27:4-8). This conclusion alone may be of great importance in any attempt to evaluate finds and biblical traditions of this period.

Mazar's conclusions here may bear great import for our understanding of Israelite historiography. Elsewhere, Mazar writes that "even if the traditions were not introduced into Israelite historiography until a much later period, memories from the settlement period that relate to this site could have constituted the background for the traditions concerning the covenant ceremony at Mount Ebal" (Mazar 2003: 88).

While the evidence seems to be strongly suggestive for an identification of the Ebal site as either an altar or a bāmāh, "its origin is consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill country early in the twelfth century B.C." (Kelm 1991: 197). To understand the site in relationship to this settlement activity, we must set it in the broader context of the survey of Manasseh.

**An Overview of the Survey of Manasseh**

**The Importance of the Manassite Territory**

It has long been recognized that Manasseh played a central role in the early history of Israel (Alt 1967: 175-221; De Gues 1992: 494-96; B. Mazar 1986a: 25-49). Manasseh was given the largest allotment of territory of all the tribes in the central hill-country (Josh 17:1-13). Seventy percent of all Iron Age I sites in the country of Israel are located in the territory of the tribes of Ephraim; with the oldest having been discovered in Manasseh (Finkelstein 1988: 65-91; 353-56). De Geus (1992: 495) has suggested a number of factors that made Manasseh unique and contributed to its history:
1. A high percentage of Canaanite towns were located within its territory.

2. Manasseh was engaged to some degree in a competition with its brother-tribe, Ephraim.¹

3. Each of the three successive capitals of the kingdom of Israel was located within the territory of Manasseh.

4. The natural passageways to the Transjordan and to the King’s Highway are in the territory of Manasseh – through the Wadi Far‘ah and along the Wadi Zerqa.

The biblical data suggest a picture of Manasseh as “the cradle of the Israelite clans and tribes that originated from there” (Kochavi 1985: 56). Because of the abundance of biblical material on Manasseh, scholars have been drawn to the study of Manasseh since the earliest years of the 20th century (Albright 1931: 241-51).

The Survey of Manasseh

Geographic and archaeological surveys in western Palestine in the 20th century mostly concentrated on Transjordan, the Negev, and the Galilee. While these are important areas, they are actually on the biblical periphery. Though it was widely agreed that the origins of Israel should be sought in the central hill-country, these decades produced little fresh archaeological material on which to build upon or evaluate current theories of Israelite origins. For these and other reasons, the Manasseh survey was begun

¹ De Geus notes the granting of the blessing by Jacob to the younger Ephraim instead of to the elder Manassh (Gen 48:13-14), whereas at other times Manasseh appears before Ephraim (e.g., Josh 16:4). De Geus also cites the exclusion of the Manassites from the list of allies of Gideon in the war against the Midianites (Judg 8:1) and the conflict between Gilead and Ephraim known as the sibboleth incident (Judg 12:1-6), and Ephraim’s apparent rise to dominance by the time of the monarchy (see further De Geus 1976: 79-80).
in 1978, under the direction of Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal, and has continued now for over a quarter of a century (Zertal 1993b: 1311-12).

The Manasseh survey team has covered more than 2,500 square kilometers by foot, which is about 80 percent of the central hill-country area. The survey territory extends from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean coastal plain, which provides a cross-section of western Palestine. This makes a comparison among different geographical units possible. More than 200 Iron Age I sites were processed (Zertal 1998b: 240; this number has continued to increase over the years as the survey has continued), producing a wealth of data regarding the central hill-country settlement from ca. 1250-1000 BCE.

Due to the large quantity of new data produced, the survey of Manasseh has been called "one of the most important ever undertaken in the land of Israel" (Finkelstein 1988: 89). However, while four volumes reporting the survey findings have been published in Hebrew (Zertal 1992a, 1996, 2005; Zertal and Mirkam 2000), along with other Hebrew volumes in which Zertal (1988b, 2000) interprets Israelite origins in light of the findings of the survey of Manasseh, only a few American scholars have used this material so far in reconstructing the origins of early Israel or those producing commentaries on the biblical book of Joshua (examples of those who do not cite the survey include Callaway 1991: 53-84; Howard 1998; Kaiser 1998; Nelson 1997; Rasmussen 2003: 138-59; et al. The commentary on Joshua by Hess [1996] appears to

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1By processing these sites, a computer-generated profile of an Iron Age I site was created using a seven-point methodology. "An Iron I site was defined as one yielding Iron Age I pottery, in some cases with characteristic architecture and settlement pattern, based upon past excavations of hill-country sites with remains dated to 1250-1000 BCE" (Zertal 1998: 240).
have been the first to incorporate these materials; Provan, Long, and Longman give some attention to regional surface surveys [2003; 187-8]; Younger [1999: 179] considers them in his evaluation of the current state of scholarship on the history of early Israel). With the recent publication of a number of articles in English summarizing the Manasseh survey findings (Zertal 1993b: 1311-12; 1994: 46-69; 1998: 238-50), and the publication of the first two volumes of *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey* in English (Zertal 2004, 2007), the survey data will now be more accessible to a wider readership. Archaeologists and biblical scholars will now have a large body of new data to work with in seeking to reconstruct Israelite origins. In the pages that follow, I will review certain of the findings of the survey that may have a direct relevance to our understanding of Israel’s appearance in Canaan and to the possible place of the Mt. Ebal site within that settlement process.

Discoveries Related to the Emergence of Israel

Settlement Patterns

The survey team examined the pattern of settlement in the Manasseh territory from the beginning of the Calcolithic (ca. 4500-3150 BCE) to the end of the Ottoman (156-1917 BCE) periods. For the purposes of this study, the periods ranging from the Middle Bronze Age II to Iron Age II are of particular interest:

1. *Middle Bronze Age IIb (ca. 1750-1550 BCE).* This was a prosperous time in Canaan. The population was high, lived in fortified towns, and had a rich material culture. Seventy-two settlements were established in the Manassite territory during this period, as a result of “a considerable ‘wave’ of settlement” which began in this period (Zertal 2004: 52). This number is double that of the Early Bronze Age I.
2. *Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE).* The number of settlements "sharply declined" in this period, with only a quarter of the MB IIB sites remaining. Zertal attributes this decline "mainly to the destruction of the highland settlements by the pharaohs of the New Kingdom who eliminated the 'Hyksos' entity" (Zertal 2004: 53). This accords well with the general historical picture, since the New Kingdom pharaohs incorporated Canaan into the Egyptian Empire during this period, draining the region through taxation and, occasionally stamped out rebellions and implemented deportation tactics. The fact that culture suffered and that populations and the number of settlements declined during this period is now well-known (Gonen 1992: 212-57). No new sites were established during the Manassite territory during this period.

3. *Iron Age I (1250-1000 BCE).* During the Iron Age I there was a large increase in settlements. Fifty-six settlements with pottery of this period were found in the Shechem syncline, three times the number of Late Bronze sites. Thirty-eight of these sites were established on virgin soil or rebuilt after having been abandoned for some time. In the Manassite territory overall, over 200 Iron Age I sites were registered. This considerable increase in settlements has been interpreted as "the penetration of an outside population" (Zertal 2004: 54). El-Burnat was one of the new sites discovered dating to this period.

4. *Iron Age II (1000-721 BCE).* This period witnesses a peak of settlement expansion in the Shechem syncline, with "most of the Iron Age II sites
[being] a direct continuation of the sites of the preceding period" (Zertal 2004: 56). It appears that, in most of these sites, “life continued uninterrupted” from the time of their establishment in the LB/Iron I into Iron II (2004: 56). The survey of Manasseh has discovered a number of new sites in this period, all of which were concentrated in the Wadi She‘ir region, particularly in the Sebastiyeh section, where Samaria would become the new capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. There were 35 new sites in these areas, 26 of which were founded de novo. Zertal concludes that the new settlements, and the density of the sites in their respective areas, can be attributed “mainly to the rapid rise in the importance of Samaria” (2004: 56).

Viewing this settlement pattern over the millennium from the start of Middle Bronze IIB to the end of Iron II has led Zertal to conclude that “the Iron Age I settlements were sites of Israelite settlement in the Manasseh Hill Country” (2004: 56).

This is crucial, in light of recent claims by Finkelstein (1991: 56) that “there was no political entity named Israel before the late-11th century.” In addition, Finkelstein and Na‘aman (1994: 17) argue that “any effort to distinguish between ‘Israelite’ and ‘non-Israelite’ hill-country sites during the twelfth to eleventh centuries BCE according to their finds is doomed to failure.” Finkelstein argues, instead, that the Iron I settlement in the

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1A. Faust (2003: 147-50), followed by E. Bloch-Smith (2003: 410-11), has recently argued that many Iron Age I rural sites were either abandoned, destroyed, or deserted about 50 years after having been founded. Faust argues that, following this highland abandonment, the concentration of the population then shifted to larger urban settlements (Faust 2003: 147-50), a demographic change which he associates with the process of state formation. Faust’s study cites the surveys in Judah and Samaria but not, however, those of Northern Samaria and the highlands of Benjamin, and thus will not be dealt with in this discussion (see the detailed critique in Finkelstein 2005: 202-8).
central hill-country was simply the “third wave of settlement” in the long-term history of the area, and that “the material culture of the Iron I sites should not be viewed in ethnic perspectives” (Finkelstein 1994: 169). However, when the continuity between the Iron I and Iron II sites is viewed in contrast to the discontinuity between the Late Bronze Age and Iron I sites, it “may be interpreted as an indicator of the ethnic homogeneity of the two societies” (Zertal 1998b: 242). In addition, the Merneptah Stele made it clear that, by 1209 BCE, a group called Israel existed in Canaan, most likely in the hill-country (Hasel 1994: 54, 56, n. 12; Albright 1939: 22; Williams 1958: 140-41; Bimson 1991: 22-24). The origin of the Mt. Ebal site, therefore, is consistent with the Israelite sedentarization in the central hill-country early in the 12th century BCE.

**Chronology of the Settlement Process**

A second important conclusion drawn from the survey of Manasseh arose from the analysis of the pottery assemblage from the aforementioned periods. The pottery of the more than 200 Iron I sites was analyzed according to the percentages of different kinds of cooking pots, with special attention to the development of their rims. Three types of cooking pots were identified in the Manasseh territory, as follows:

**Type A (Fig. 82)**

The Type A cooking pot is a direct continuation of the Late Bronze cooking pot, and has been solidly dated to the 13th century BCE, when it was used throughout Canaan (A. Mazar 1981: 21). This cooking pot has an everted, triangular, or “folded rim,” and is “a very thick vessel, made of dark brown clay with pieces of quartz in it” (Zertal 1991a:
42). This Type A cooking pot predominates in the eastern areas of the Manassite territory, near the Jordan Valley. Forty-eight sites in the Jordan Valley and in the desert fringes had high percentages of these vessels. In addition, sites along the wadis Far‘ah and Malih, which were the ecological pipelines leading westwards from Transjordan and the Jordan Valley, were replete with Type A cooking pots (Zertal 1998: 242-43).

Type B (Fig. 83)

The Type B cooking pot has a sharp, adze-shaped rim, and is assigned primarily to the 12th century BCE (A. Mazar 1981: 21-22). The use of Type B cooking pots rose in the syncline’s interior – in the eastern valleys and in central Manasseh – while the use of Type A declined (Zertal 1991a: 43).
Type C (Fig. 84)

The Type C cooking pot has a low ridge, and is the latest in the series, dating to the 11th and 10th centuries BCE (Zertal 1994: 52-53). These pots tended to be found in sites farther into the interior of the Manassite territory, while Types A and B were virtually absent (Zertal 1991a: 43).
These findings were used by Zertal to trace the settlement process chronologically. The eastern sites are replete with the earliest Type A pottery; the sites in the interior contain smaller percentages of Type A and higher percentages of the subsequent pottery style, Type B; the western sites contain only the later style of pottery, Type C (Fig. 85). These data "may be interpreted as a gradual infiltration, or entrance, of elements of the Iron I hill-country culture from east to west" (Zertal 1998b: 243). In light of these and other data,¹ Zertal postulates a three-staged process of geographic expansion (Fig. 86).

¹Eleven points are marshaled from the survey data to argue for a distinction between the Manasseh population and the other central-hill and Galilean populations. These are: settlement pattern, site size, architecture, continuity from LB into Iron II, limited pottery inventory, size and inner division, diet, metallurgical finds, cult and possible cult sites, place names, population size, and cultural connections.
1. The settlement process began in the Jordan Valley and eastern Manasseh (stage A). In this region, sites were discovered mainly along the Wadis Far‘ah and Malih (Zertal 1994: 58-59). During this stage, dating to approximately the middle of the 13th to the middle of the 12th centuries BCE, the settlers were seminomads, with an economy based on sheep husbandry, in the process of sedentarization.

2. The second phase of settlement occurred in the desert fringes and eastern valleys of Manasseh (stage B), and seems to have been a later phase than the first. Many of the sites – enclosures and villages – discovered in this phase of settlement were founded adjacent to Late Bronze Age sites. This may suggest, to some degree, a complementary existence (Zertal 1994: 59). During this phase, the settlers moved to an economy based on a mixture of sheep-raising, wheat and barley farming, and they may have cultivated some olive groves and vineyards. This phase involved the first step in the process toward sedentarization: "The Iron I people grazed their flocks in the forest park of the evergreen oak, which apparently covered these valleys. Intensification of sedentary agriculture came with the settlement along the fringes of the central valleys – Sanur, Dothan, and er-Rama – where Iron I sites were founded on virgin soil or on remains of deserted Middle Bronze sites." (Zertal 1994: 59)
3. The final stage of the settlement process, and the latest in the series, involved penetration into the western and northern hill-country (stage C). While the sites in the valleys were ecologically rich, Zertal (1994: 59) concludes that “the population growth there necessitated expansion into new niches.” In this final stage, the settlers utilized terrace agriculture, and cultivated crops that were well-suited for the terra-rossa soil such as olive trees and vineyards (Fig. 86).
While the degree to which the proposed reconstruction of the Israelite settlement by the Manasseh survey comports with the biblical account is not yet clear, the implications could be profound. While many opinions have been proffered in the debate about Israelite origins, no entrance from the east has ever been identified archaeologically. The traditions reflected in Pentateuchal sources and in Joshua, however, speak of such an entrance. Zertal (1991a: 37) suggests that

we now have archaeological evidence of movement from the east, which dovetails with the ecological evidence: Seminomads from the east entered the northern Jordan Valley, probably from Transjordan, grazing their flocks in the desert fringe and watering them in the streams.

In no other region of the land of Israel has such evidence been discerned so far – not in the Negev, nor the Galilee, nor the desert fringes of Ephraim and Judah, all of which are more-or-less archaeologically well known. . . . With this conclusion, evidence was found for a possible outside origin of the Israelites.

Objections

Zertal’s picture of the outside origins of Israel, and especially the theory of an east-to-west migration pattern, has not been without opponents. More centrist, mainstream scholars have dismissed it as unconvincing (Stager 1998: 134-35). More conservative scholars, associating it with Albrecht Alt’s “peaceful infiltration” theory, have not given it much attention (Younger 1999: 179-80). William G. Dever is the only archaeologist who has specifically sought to rebut Zertal’s reconstructions. His criticisms occur on three fronts: the survey approach, the hypothesized east-to-west movement based on the ceramic inventory, and the idea of a Transjordanian origin for the settlers.

Dever’s first criticism is that the conclusions were drawn from surveys. He writes that “statistics of this sort, based as they are solely on scant materials from surface surveys, are meaningless. They certainly cannot bear the weight of Zertal’s sweeping
generalizations about a Transjordanian, pastoral-nomadic origin for early Israel" (Dever 1993: 32*). He argues that “surface surveys are notorious for yielding results that are statistically invalid, or even at best somewhat misleading” (Dever 1998b: 227). This seems to be an overstatement, as the archaeological survey method is not new and, over many years, survey methods have become highly developed and surveys have become widely accepted tools for the study of regions (Banning 2003: 164-67; Holladay 2003: 33-47; Kautz 1988: 209-22) and settlement patterns within those regions (Mattingly 1988: 389-400). Nelson Glueck, Yohannan Aharoni, Zvi Gal, Moshe Kochavi, Israel Finkelstein, and other researchers have adopted the survey as a basic archaeological
research tool. The Archaeological Survey of Israel has been surveying the country consistently since 1965, and the Archaeological Survey Society has established fixed procedures for carrying out scientific surveys. All surveys share the assumption that surface pottery represents archaeological periods buried in the site (Banning 2003: 164).

Second, Dever (1993) criticizes Zertal's "fallacious" hypothesis of an east-to-west movement of the early hill-country settlers. Dever notes that the Type A cooking pots "occur at nearly all Zertal's sites: only the percentages differ (over 20% to the east, 5-20% to the west)" (Dever 1993: 32). Even at the easternmost sites there was some of the Type B pottery present, albeit a smaller percentage. Dever (1992: 51) argues that "if there are any early cooking pots there at all, then the site was established in the early 12th century. It may have been small, it may have grown later; but it has to have been established in the earliest phase of settlement. In short, there was no general movement of peoples from east to west." Dever (1992: 84) writes that Zertal's postulation of an east-to-west settlement pattern is "bogus," and that he has "been seduced by the later biblical notion of outside immigration, against all current archaeological evidence" (Dever 1993: 27). Postulating the movement or spread of populations through the use of pottery-finds, however, is not "fallacious" or "bogus." This is, in fact, a methodology - called "width stratigraphy" (Zertal 1991b: 39-41) - that has been used by many scholars, including Kenyon (e.g., 1979: 119ff.; 212ff.), Gerstenblith (e.g., 1980: 65-84), Dothan (e.g., 1982; 1988a; 1988b; 2000), Caubet (e.g., 2000: 35-51), Stager (e.g., 1995: 334-34), et al., in following population movements (Zertal n.d.: 65). The theory of an east-to-west settlement pattern, based upon such a wide geographical area as the Manassite territory, does not seem unreasonable.
Dever insists here, as well, that the presence of any Type A pottery in a site in zone B or C means that it must have been founded in the early 12th century. He uses this argument to argue that there was no east-to-west movement, but that all the sites were founded in the 13th to 12th centuries BCE. This argument, however, ignores the fact that pottery sequences always overlap. Typically, one form gradually declines as another increases (Lapp 1992: 433-44). The distribution of Types A, B, and C cooking pots across zones A, B, and C of the Manassite territory may best be understood as revealing a settlement pattern. As Ziony Zevit (2001: 103, n. 35) has recently argued, “this distribution cannot be accounted for if all these settlements were established at the same time, if the pattern of settlement was random, or if it moved . . . from west to east.”

Kitchen (2003: 228) has concluded that the explanation for the ceramic inventory of the survey of Manasseh is “humiliatingly simple (which restless, oversophisticated minds hate).” He explains that “the biblical traditions overall are unanimous that Israel came from Egypt and that they entered Canaan – prior to Joshua they had not lived in Canaan, by tradition, for centuries when their claimed ancestors passed that way ending up in Egypt. . . . Problem in essence solved” (Kitchen 2003: 228).

Third, in a Brown symposium lecture, later published as *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, Dever (1997: 75) criticizes the hypothesis that “the early Israelites were nomads from Transjordan, gradually moving across the Jordan in the process of becoming sedentarized.” The Bible indeed presents Transjordan and the Jordan Valley as key entry routes for the early Israelites (e.g., Deut 11:29-30; 27:2, 4). In 1925, Alt (1967: 175-221) had already argued that Israel’s entrance into Canaan must have been through the Jordan Valley. Dever (1997: 75) writes, however:
But if there is little Late Bronze Age context for urban sites in Transjordan, there is none whatsoever for pastoral nomads. In my view, these attempts to provide archaeological justification for the nomadic ideal in ancient Israel are simply nostalgia for a biblical past that never was.

He argues that "all the evidence" shows that "there is simply no archaeological evidence that 'Earliest Israel' was ever in Transjordan" [emphasis mine] (Dever 1991: 88, n. 7).

The noted Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen (1998: 105) calls Dever's chapter "the saddest point in the volume" of collected essays from the Brown symposium. Kitchen argues that Dever's treatment of the Transjordanian phase of early Israel's travels is "superficial," and Kitchen points to recent intensive surveys which have revealed much new information over the last ten years. Indeed, recent studies of the settlement patterns and accompanying archaeological data demonstrate that there was an increase in settlement in central and northern Transjordan in the Late Bronze II (Ji 1998: 1-21; LaBianca and Younker 1995: 399-411; van der Steen 1995: 141-58). The process of sedentarization is evidenced by the establishment of a series of both walled and unwalled settlements (Ji 1996: 61-7). The number of sites increased in the early Iron Age I (Ji 1996: 65; van der Steen 1999: 176-192). Collared-rim jars and four-room houses appeared at a number of these sites (Ji 1997: 19-30), a fact which, though it does not prove the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of these sites, is characteristic of the Israelite settlement in Canaan (Ji 1997: 30-2). Herr has noted the strong similarities of the material culture at Tell al-ʿUmayri with that of the highlands of Cisjordan (Herr 1998: 251-264; 2000: 167-179). It is one of the earliest Iron I sites in Palestine, contemporary with Mt. Ebal and Giloh, contains the same limited repertoire of pottery and finds as highland sites in Cisjordan, and shares a material culture most similar to the hill-country north of Jerusalem, particularly from the region of Shechem. The most frequent bowl
type at 'Umayri is the "Manasseh bowl"; two collared-rim storage jars bear the same potter's mark as some jar rims from Ebal; some of the seals from 'Umayri are similar to trapezoidal seals from Ebal; and over 30 seals are similar to a kind of Cisjordanian seal (Herr 2000: 175-176). It appears that finds from Ḥesban, Jawa, and Jalul are virtually identical to 'Umayri in several respects, and "one may entertain the possibility that these four sites represent a contemporaneous regional cultural entity" (Herr 2000: 177). Rainey and Notley have organized a chart that demonstrates the derivation of the Cisjordanian pottery forms from those of Transjordan (Rainey and Notley 2006: 130), in contrast to that of Dever, which portrays the forms as having evolved from Canaanite predecessors (Dever 2003: 121-125). The archaeological data do not rule out the biblical tradition that the Hebrews migrated north from the outskirts of Moab to the Mishor plains, through southern and northern Gilead, and into Bashan. Indeed, it seems to clearly support it (Rainey and Notley 2006: 111-112).

In this debate, the survey of Manasseh has provided completely new material regarding the Jordan Valley, heretofore completely unknown archaeologically (Zertal 1998b: 238-50; 2005). As mentioned earlier, in the Jordan Valley, from Wadi Shubash to Wadi Aujeh, forty-eight sites were found, some of which were fortified enclosures and others of which were cave sites (Zertal 1998b: 245-48). One hundred and eight Type A pots, 17 Type B, and 21 Type C cooking pots were collected from these sites. The Type A cooking pot makes up 95 percent of the total cooking pots in the fortified enclosures. "The results show some connection between the enclosures and CP type A, indicating that the enclosures, in the most part, were the earliest sites to be built west of the Jordan" (A. Zertal, personal communication). When stages A, B, and C are examined together, it
does not seem unreasonable to conclude that they may point to a general east-to-west pattern of settlement.

The alternative understanding of Israelite origins proposed by Dever is that ancient Israel was made up of disaffected Canaanites who withdrew to the hill-country during and following the LB/Iron I transition (Dever 2003: 191-221; Hawkins 2003: 118-9). Dever (2003: 178) proposes a modified form of the “peasant revolt” theory, explaining that the withdrawal of the hill-country settlers from Canaan was not a “flight from intolerable conditions or necessarily a revolutionary Yahwistic fervor . . . but rather simply a quest for a new society and a new lifestyle. They wanted to start over. And in the end, that was revolutionary.” Dever’s early Israelites were not, therefore, violent revolutionaries, but peaceful utopianists. He summarizes, “To my mind, land reform must have been the driving force behind, and the ultimate goal of, the early Israelite movement” (Dever 2003: 188). Dever (2003: 189) compares the hill-country settlement to the establishment of the 19th-century Oneida Community, the New Harmony community in southwestern Indiana during the same period, and the 18th-century Shaker movement, but finally admits that, in regard to the reasons behind the withdrawal and settlement of his “proto-Israelites,” “my theory is speculative . . . [with] little archaeological evidence to support it” (Dever 2003: 179).

This is true. There is no archaeological evidence for a peasant rebellion in the 14th century BCE. The Amarna Letters, which contain diplomatic correspondence between Canaanite city-kings and their Pharaonic overlords, Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, do attest to power factions between the rulers of the Canaanite city-states (Moran 1992: xiii-xxxix). They do not, however, give evidence for a peasant rebellion
(as claimed in Mendenhall 1962: 66-87; Gottwald 1979: 401-410. It has been argued that the ‘apiru of the Amarna Letters may be associated with the invading Israelites [Waterhouse 2001: 31-42; Wood 2003: 269-271; 2005: 489], though Rainey has argued that there are linguistic and sociological problems with such an association [Rainey 1995: 481-496; 2005]). In addition, there is no evidence of a settlement process in the central hill-country during the 14th century BCE. Instead, “the harmony of the Biblical text with the material finds at the survey sites . . . support the view that the Iron Age I settlements were sites of Israelite settlement in the Manasseh Hill Country” (Zertal 2004: 56). Moshe Kochavi (1985: 56) has concluded that “what emerges from the archaeological evidence from the territory of Manasseh supports the biblical passages alluding to it as the cradle of the Israelite clans and tribes that eventually originated from there.”

In the end, Dever’s criticisms of the theories generated by the survey of Manasseh seem to be as laden with the kinds of ideological bias which he so heartily rebukes in his own writings (Dever 1998a: 39-52), for he concludes by calling Zertal a “secular fundamentalist” whose ideas are “dangerous” (Dever 1992: 84). What is dangerous about the idea of an east-to-west migration for the ancient Israelites? It may be that it harmonizes so well with the biblical account, to which we will now turn.

The Survey of Manasseh Compared with Joshua, Judges, and the Question of Israelite Origins

Since the 19th century, scholars have assumed that the book of Joshua painted a picture of a sweeping military conquest of Canaan, while the book of Judges presented a more accurate, “alternative” account (cf. Dillard and Longman 1994: 109-10; see also the recent discussion and bibliography in Meier 2005: 425-9). While the study of Joshua
has moved from literary critical approaches to tradition-historical approaches, this
understanding of the relationship between Joshua and Judges continues to predominate in
much of contemporary scholarly literature (e.g., Callaway 1988: 53-84; Coote 1998:
In place of this focus on a supposed tension between the books of Joshua and Judges,
however, some scholars have recently argued that the idea of a sweeping conquest is a
modern scholarly construct imposed on the book of Joshua and that, when it is read with
greater nuance, it is seen to acknowledge a more complex and protracted settlement
process (e.g., Davidson 1995: 100; Dillard and Longman 1994: 111-12; Hawkins 2005:
237, 310-21; 1999: 200-5). The text does not claim that the ancient Israelites occupied
the land, but that they made sorties into and planned its apportionment. Merling has
written at length about Gilgal, the site where the Israelites camped and from where they
launched their sorties (Merling 1997a: 199-205). Gilgal had been the place where the
Israelites camped after having crossed the Jordan (Josh 4:19), where they circumcised the
new generation (Josh 5:1-9), and celebrated the Passover (Josh 5:10-12). After each
circumambulation of Jericho, the Israelites returned to Gilgal (Josh 5:14), where the
Gibeonites sought Joshua out in order to establish a covenant with him (Josh 9:6). After
defeating a coalition of the kings of five key southern city-states which had formed in
response to the consorting of the Gibeonites with the Israelites (Josh 10:1-5), "Joshua
returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal" (Josh 10:15). Even after the
southern (chaps. 9-10) and northern campaigns (chap. 11), and after the Israelites are said to have "possessed" the land (chap. 12), they are also still said to have been residing in Gilgal (Josh 14:6). As discussed above (chapter 3), there was likely more than one Gilgal.

The book of Joshua also includes accounts of partial and unsuccessful settlements. Joshua 14-15 reports the activities of Judah, the tribe that Judg 1 identifies with subsequent efforts at settlement. Joshua 16 recounts similar failed efforts at conquest by the Ephraimites, chap. 17 by the Manassites, and 18-22 how the remaining tribes were given land from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah because they were unable to settle the land allotted to them. Joshua 18 then reports that only four tribes had actually received their inheritance. The difficulty in undertaking a “conquest” of the lowlands was that the Canaanite cities were located there, and that “all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel” (Josh 17:16).

The text acknowledges the fact that Canaanite cities were mainly in the lowland, and that this was apparently one of the reasons that the Israelites settled primarily in the hill-country (Josh 17:14ff.). The central hill-country was sparsely populated, with entire wood-covered areas uninhabited, where the Israelites could clear land and “switch over from a semi-nomadic existence based mainly on the breeding and growing of flocks to agriculture and permanent settlement” (Aharoni 1971: 96). As the foregoing discussion of the analysis of the pottery assemblage showed, the Israelites gradually penetrated the central hill-country in an east-to-west movement. In their gradual settlement of the central hill-country, however, the Israelites did not secure complete control over all this territory, and the Canaanites apparently continued to occupy Hebron (Josh 14:12),
Jerusalem (15.63), Beth-shean, Ibleam, Dor, Endor, Ta‘anach, Megiddo, and Napheth (Josh 17:11-12). As we have seen, in the initial stages of sedentarization, many of the sites in the eastern valleys of Manasseh were founded opposite Late Bronze Age sites, which may suggest a complementary existence. Zertal (1994: 60) reasons that the older, Canaanite towns would have had control over the perennial water sources: "The new settlers had to reach agreement with the local Canaanites on the usage of their water resources. Such agreements today typify the relationships between the fellahin – the owners of the water sources – and the Bedouin – the consumers. The second stage of the settlement of the region – that in the inner valleys – was fully dependent on such agreements." ¹

The results of the Manasseh survey do not necessarily preclude conflict or military engagement between the Israelites and the indigenous peoples. Indeed, Zertal (1994: 60) himself suggests that, “in a later stage of the Iron I settlement process, the Israelites achieved control over the water sources, either by military superiority or by a process of assimilation with the autochthonous population.” The water-factor was a key role in Israel’s rise to prominence in the land and, when the cistern was developed, it “made possible a new independence of the Israelites that soon became a political superiority” (Zertal 1988b: 352).

Many current readings of the book of Joshua understand that the book of Joshua simply records the Hebrew entrance into Canaan without occupation. Although the Hebrews undertook some military campaigns, “these campaigns were essentially disabling raids; they were not territorial conquests with instant Hebrew occupation. The

¹We see a similar dependence of the Israelites on the Philistines for Iron in 1 Sam 13:21.
text is very clear about this” (Kitchen 2003: 162; cf. also the nuanced reading of Davidson 1995: 100). Again, throughout the book, Gilgal is used as something of a “staging ground” (Merling 1997a: 199-205) and the first indication of a real move in occupation beyond Gilgal does not come until Josh 18.4. Kitchen (2003: 163) concludes:

This is not the sweeping, instant conquest-with-occupation that some hasty scholars would foist upon the text of Joshua, without any factual justification. Insofar as only Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were explicitly allowed to have been burned into nonoccupation, it is also pointless going for extensive conflagration levels at any other Late Bronze sites (of any phase) to identify them with any Israelite impact. Onto this initial picture Judges follows directly and easily, with no inherent contradiction: it contradicts only the bogus and superficial construction that some modern commentators have willfully thrust upon the biblical text of Joshua without adequate reason.

Taken as a whole, the book of Joshua provides a much more balanced view of the Israelite settlement and/or conquest (Merling 1997b: 7-28). The Israelites migrated into Canaan from the east and, because of the Canaanite presence in the lowlands, they concentrated their settlements in the hill-country. But despite the fact that Israel’s process of settlement was such that they confined themselves to the hill-country for some time, this turned out to be propitious. Yohanan Aharoni’s observations, written over 30 years ago, describe the long-term ramifications of their initial geographic location: "It is true that during the achievement of the settlement process the blocks of tribes became separated and non-Israelite elements existed in various localities. But in the final analysis, there emerged a continuous settlement over the entire country, in the plains as well as in the hill-country, and the conditions so created made for the political and demographical unity of the land of Israel" (Aharoni 1971: 127; see also Younger 1999: 200). The settlement in the hill-country, which began as a necessity, ultimately became the means by which Israel arose to prominence in the region. "The necessity to settle in
the mountain areas was responsible for the fact that the Israelite occupation became more than a conquest. For the first time the center of gravity of the country moved to the mountain districts, creating conditions propitious for the establishment of an independent and strong monarchy" (Aharoni 1971: 128).

If the interpretation of the Iron Age I site at Mt. Ebal as a cultic site – and particularly as an altar – is correct, then it may be that Israel's national consciousness was crystalized there. When the covenant was made at Horeb (Sinai), Moses told the people that "this very day you have become the people of YHWH your God" (Deut 27:9). Similarly, the covenant renewal at Mt. Ebal would have solidified Israel's national awareness.

Conclusions

When the Mt. Ebal site is set on the larger stage of the Israelite settlement, its origin is seen to be consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill-country during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I. When considered in light of the traditions of Deuteronomy 27, Joshua 8:30-35, and 1 Samuel 1-10, el-Bumat may be seen to have had an important role in the early religious life of the central hill-country settlers. In light of the important role that altars played in centralizing peoples in the ancient world, the Ebal site may have contributed toward the crystalization of Israel's national consciousness. Joshua 8:30-35 echoes two occasions when Israel was declared to have become the people of Yahweh. The first was at Horeb (Sinai) (Exod 19:3-8), and the second was on the plains of Moab (Deut 26:16-19; 27:9-10). In both of these instances, aspects of the covenant formula are present. When Israel renewed the
covenant with Yahweh in Canaan, it could again be said to have "become a nation" (Keil and Delitzsch 1866-91: 1.961), or to have reaffirmed its identity as a nation.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

On April 6, 1980, during the course of the survey of Manasseh, Adam Zertal discovered a site on Mt. Ebal dating to the Iron Age I. The site, known in Arabic as el-Burnat Sitti Salamiyya, is essentially a one-period site, founded in the Late Bronze as Stratum II (ca. 1250 BCE), remodeled in the Iron Age I as Stratum IB (ca. 1200-1140 BCE) and, finally, abandoned in Stratum IA (ca. 1140 BCE). In Stratum II, the earliest stratum, the site consisted of a circular stone repository 2 m in diameter with a nearby favissa, both located in Area A, and a retaining wall abutted by a four-room house, in Area B. The Area A repository and the floor around it contained a layer of ash and animal bones. The favissa held hammerstones and a chalice, and a sounding conducted nearby revealed an area that contained scattered plain hearths, excessive ash, potsherds and animal bones, all resting on bedrock. Southwest of Area A, in Area B, a retaining wall built of large stones abutted by a 16 x 9 m four-room house was discovered. The site underwent significant modifications in Stratum IB. The prominent feature during this phase was a square structure built of unhewn stones and measuring 9 x 14 m, which was built above the earlier construction in Area A. This structure had no floor and no entrance, and its interior seems to have been deliberately filled with layers of bones of male bulls, caprovids, fallow deer, ash, and Iron I pottery. On its outside, the main structure includes a small ledge that partially encircles the entire structure. A structure
that has been interpreted as a ramp is located on the southeastern site, measuring 1.2 m wide and descending for 7 m at a 22-degree incline. Adjoining this ramp on each side is a paved courtyard, totaling 27 x 7 m. Stone installations were located in each of these courtyards, filled with bones, ash, jars, jugs, juglets, and pyxides. The entire area of the four-room house was paved over to make a paved court in front of the main structure, and the entire complex was surrounded by a thin enclosure wall. In the final phase of the site, Stratum IA, the entire site appears to have been deliberately covered over with stones, possibly to protect the site.

The excavator, Adam Zertal, understood the site to have been cultic in both of its phases. Stratum II was understood to have been a small cultic site where feasts or ceremonies were held and sacrifices were offered. Because of the small size of the site during this phase, it was assumed that it served as either a family or tribal cult site whose attendants lived in the adjoining four-room house in Area B. During Stratum IB, the site was understood to have evolved into a main cult site for the Israelite settlers. Residential structures were removed and a bāmāh or altar was erected on top of the Area A repository. This main structure was understood to have been the focal point of ceremonies for a large assembly, who could enter processionally through the staired entryway in Area B. The installations around the central structure were regarded as having been built as places for the deposit of offerings by those in attendance.

The biblical tradition does contain two passages that describe the construction of an altar on Mt. Ebal, one commanding its construction (Deut 27) and another purporting to relate it (Josh 8:30-35). The presence of these traditions suggested to Zertal that "the question must be raised as to whether there is a connection between the biblical tradition
and the finds from the site" (Zertal 1986/87: 158). Zertal's presentation of the data have included an understanding of the site as having been related to these traditions (e.g., Zertal 1985: 35-41). The overall interpretation of the site as cultic and as having a possible association with the altar of Josh 8:30-35 has been a point of scholarly controversy. Some scholars have derided both the excavator and even the possibility of a biblical association for the Ebal site, and others have been reluctant to take a position on its interpretation. As I reviewed the available data on Mt. Ebal, it seemed to me that there had been little discussion of the actual archaeological data related to the site. Instead, the objections of both archaeologists and biblical scholars alike seemed to return to arguments about the nature and date of the book of the biblical materials as the primary reason for ruling out any biblical connection for the site. It seemed to me that conventional understandings of Israel's history and the composition of the Deuteronomistic History predetermined a negative conclusion regarding any association of the Ebal site with Deuteronomy 27 and Josh 8:30-35. The common assumption in biblical scholarship today is that Israel emerged from the indigenous peoples of Canaan (Younger 1999: 176-206), and that the biblical books of Joshua-Judges were written in the Josianic period as political propaganda to solidify Israel's national identity (e.g., Soggin 1972: 131). Since Martin Noth first proposed his theory of the "Deuteronomistic History," it has become more or less standard for theories of Israel's origins to be built

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1Martin Noth articulated these ideas in A History of Pentateuchal Traditions (1972), and The History of Israel (1960). Noth believed that, since the books immediately following Deuteronomy shared its theology and style, the same author(s) or editor(s) must have composed them. In this theory, the entire section from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings has, therefore, come to be known as the "Deuteronomistic History." Writing during the Josianic era, the author(s) or editor(s) of this history were influenced by the prophets. In composing their history, they were attempting to show how the downfall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel was the result of the nation's repeated violation of the covenant.
on these foundations. Even archaeologists, pointing to continuity in material culture,
have argued that the idea of an early Israel must have been a later fabrication, and that
later Israelites originated from the autochthonous population (e.g., Hayes and Miller
1977: 255, 262). Finkelstein and Na'aman (1994: 13) have recently argued that:

[A] combination of archaeological and historical research demonstrates that the
biblical account of the conquest and occupation of Canaan is entirely divorced
from historical reality. Instead, it proves the correctness of the literary-critical
approach to the biblical text. The biblical descriptions of the origin and early
history of the people of Israel are not dissimilar from narratives on the origins of
other peoples, which likewise do not withstand the test of historical criticism.

These authors go on to suggest that equating any material culture remains from the Iron I
highlands with an Israelite ethnic identity is “dubious,” “since there was no political
entity named Israel before the late eleventh century BCE” (Finkelstein and Na'aman
1994: 13). Na’aman himself suggests that the literary sources on which Joshua was
based do not originate until the eighth century BCE, “and are thus hundreds of years
remote from the time when the events described therein took place” (Na’aman 1994:
222). John Van Seters has argued that the account of the history of Israel was a complete
invention (Van Seters 1983).

If Zertal’s Iron I structure on Ebal were to be identified with the altar of Josh
8:30-35, there could be important implications for the understanding of Israelite origins
and for understanding the Deuteronomistic History. Writing about the importance of the
discussion of the nature of the Ebal site, Zertal (1997: 77-78) has said:

It is not by chance that not a single archaeologist has responded seriously to my
scientific report on Mt. Ebal. It is not by chance that a serious congress has never
been convened to address openly the Mt. Ebal finds, even though many less
important matters have been discussed. The reason is that Mt. Ebal presents hard
evidence for the existence of an early Israelite cult place, presumably related to
the biblical account of Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8:30-35. The reason is that if
Mt. Ebal so powerfully corroborates the Bible, some of the highly sophisticated

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theories based on ongoing intellectual speculation (without really examining the field data) will have to go back to square one.

While not taking a position on the cultic nature of the Ebal site, Lawrence Stager of Harvard has concurred about the potential significance of the site, if the cultic nature and its connection with Josh 8:30-35 were verified. In an interview, he said that, under those circumstances, Old Testament scholars would have to “go back to kindergarten” (Machlin 1991: 235). The potentially controversial implications of the interpretation of the site may be part of the reason that it has not received more than a cursory mention in the literature and that debate about it has been so rancorous.

In this study, I have sought to consider the archaeological data independently of the biblical text in order to determine whether the data itself may point to a specific interpretation of the site. This raises the question of the process of the identification of cultic activity in archaeological contexts, a subject with its own long history of controversy. In this dissertation, I relied on Colin Renfrew's system of behavioral correlates as modified by Ziony Zevit (Zevit 2001: 82, adapted from Renfrew 1985: 19-20), in order to seek to determine a cultic identification. In chapter 1, I analyzed the archaeological data from the Mt. Ebal site, without reference to the biblical traditions, and compared that data with both cultic and non-cultic materials in order to reach conclusions about the nature of the site itself. The Iron Age I site at Mt. Ebal appears to match numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 14 of Zevit's physical/behavioral correlates, which amounts to 85 percent of his enumerated characteristics. The site was located in a place of natural and historical significance (1 and 2); the site consisted of an enclosure (3); the architecture of the site seems to reflect both cultic usage (5) and public participation (4); architecture and appurtances appear to reflect the points of concern and
a focus of attention (6); the site included special facilities (8); sacrifice appears to have been practiced at the site (9); food and drink were prepared and consumed at the site (10); the material remains included votives and other objects that appear to have served as offerings (11); the physical plan of the site seems to reflect partitioning, possibly reflecting gradations of sanctity (13); and the structure reflects a substantial investment in terms of labor (14). While various features of the site and its artifacts may be common to domestic or other types of sites, the Iron Age I site at Mt. Ebal, when viewed as a whole, seems to suggest a cultic identification.

Chapter 2 considered physical parallels for the Ebal site, including the village, farmstead, house, watchtower, *gilgalim* and altars. Kempinski had reconstructed the site as a three-phase village, with the earliest phase consisting of a cluster of huts and pits, followed by a second phase in which a domestic structure was built in the center of the settlement, and then a third, in which a watchtower was built atop of the earlier domestic building. I suggested that the simple plan of the Ebal site, as an enclosure with an isolated building at its center, did not comport with the layout of the typical highland village. I then compared the Ebal site with known features of sites where animal husbandry was practiced, and it appeared that the site cannot be understood as a farmstead. I then compared el-Bumat with domestic buildings and, based on the extensive data that we have on the form and function of the four-room house, it seems apparent that the main structure in Area A of the Mt. Ebal site cannot be interpreted as such. It was then considered whether el-Bumat might be understood as an isolated watchtower, but this understanding was concluded to be unlikely based on the lack of parallels in the Iron Age I as well as in light of the special architectural elements of the central structure. I
considered certain similarities with the Iron Age I Building 105 at Giloh, but concluded that the Mt. Ebal site continues as a fundamentally exceptional site among those of the Iron Age I settlement. The Mt. Ebal site was then compared with a number of fortified encampments, or *gilgalim*, discovered in the Jordan Valley, which appear to have served as cultic sites of some kind with simple *ḥāmōt* located within them. The Ebal site was seen to have shared the basic layout of these sites, though its central structure was more complex. Lastly, a series of altars ranging from the Middle Bronze Age to the Iron Age II was surveyed, and it was seen that many of the features of these altars were mirrored in the main building at the Mt. Ebal site, which seemed to correspond with the type Ib open altar. While physical parallels were found for the central structure at Mt. Ebal among the altars surveyed, these parallels were still partial. The main building at Mt. Ebal remains essentially unique among the Iron Age I settlement sites.

In chapter 3, I followed the same general outline of chapter 1, here comparing each of the physical elements of the Mt. Ebal site with biblical and other literary data relevant to a possible interpretation of the site as a cultic installation. In Stratum II, the fragmentary remains of Walls 18 and 36, Surface 61, Pit 250, and Installation 94 were discussed in relation to foundation offerings in the ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible, with the conclusion that the site was initially used for the making of offerings and that it was due to this consecrated nature of the site that the cultic structure of Stratum IA was later built on top of it. An enclosure wall (Wall 29) located in Area B may, based on an analogy with the Pentateuchal descriptions of the tabernacle *parohket* (נֶפֶרְחַק) and *masakh* (םָחָק), may have functioned as a *temenos*, demarcating the space closest to the cultic installation.
The predominant feature of Stratum IB was the central structure with its surrounding walls, courtyards, a double wall between the courtyards, and the installations around the structure. Parallels for the Mt. Ebal site were found primarily among the *gilgalim* of the Jordan Valley and, for the central structure, among Syro-Palestinian altars. The central structure itself shares similarities with the type lb open-air altar, although the Ebal structure is, itself, more elaborate and lacks exact parallels. In light of the limited physical parallels for this main structure, and in view of the excavator's identification of it as an altar, I compared the structure with biblical and extrabiblical traditions regarding altar architecture. This comparison included the earthen altar (Exod 20:24-26), the tabernacle altar (Exod 27:1-8), the First Temple altar (2 Chr 4:1), Ahaz's new altar (2 Kgs 16:10-14), Ezekiel's Future Temple altar (Ezek 43:13-17), and the Second Temple altar (*Let. Aris.* 87-88; *Ag. Ap.* 1:196-198; *J.W.* 5.222-225; 11QT® XVI. 3, 16-17; XXIII. 12-14; *Mid.* 3:1). In light of these continuous traditions about Israelite altar architecture, the Mt. Ebal site appears to meet all the criteria for identification as an altar.

The central structure is most redolent of the altar of unworked stones described in Exod 20:24-26 which is, in fact, specifically cited in the report of Joshua's building of the altar in Josh 8:31. Despite these citations by the biblical author(s), the Iron Age I structure cannot unquestionably be associated with the altar of Josh 8:30-35. However, it can be compared "to what is implied by the early altar law of Exod. 20:25 and may be considered a most elaborate example of the stone field altar" (Zevit 2001: 199-200). The surrounding wall complex, installations, courtyard, entrance, and faunal assemblage were also considered in light of textual data. When considered as a whole, the Ebal site seems
best explained as cultic in nature, and the main structure of Area A appears to conform to most of the biblical principles of Israelite altar architecture (Ben-Noon 1985: 141).

In chapter 4, I sought to examine the Ebal site from another angle, this time in its historical and sociological position among the new settlement sites of the central hill-country in Iron Age I. In Stratum II, the site was comprised mainly of Locus 94, a nearby favissa, a four-room house, and a retaining wall, and may have served as either a family or tribal cult site whose attendants lived in the four-room house adjoining it in Area B. The site was modified substantially in Stratum IB by the removal of the domestic structure and the building of the main structure in Area A, along with an enclosure to surround it. It may be that, during this period, the site evolved into a main cult site of area settlers, with the main structure built either as an altar or a paved bāmāh, which provided the focus of rituals for groups that had gathered there. Joshua 8:30-35 does claim that an altar functioned in such a capacity for "all Israel" during the earliest period of the Israelite settlement, though it does not explain how. By analogy, the Shiloh traditions (1 Sam 1-10) suggest that, if the Ebal site were a cultic installation, it may have functioned as the site of annual pilgrimages where sacrifices were made and tithes were paid, including such gifts as bulls, flour, and wine, and where sacrificial meals were eaten. In light of the important role that altars played in centralizing peoples in the ancient world, the cultic site on Mt. Ebal may have played a fundamental role in crystallizing ancient Israel's national consciousness even at this early stage in its history. El-Bum at, therefore, seems to fit not only the criteria for a cultic site from archaeological remains, but also the general picture in terms of the biblical accounts. However, while the site appears to have been either an altar or a paved bāmāh, it cannot definitively be associated with
Deuteronomy 27 or Josh 8:30-35. It must, rather, ultimately be understood in relation to the overall settlement picture of the Manassite territory in which it is located. When the Ebal site is set on the larger stage of the Israelite settlement, its origin is seen to be consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill-country during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I.

When considered in light of the traditions of Deuteronomy 27, Josh 8:30-35, and 1 Sam 1-10, el-Burnat may be seen to have had an important role in the early religious life of the central hill-country settlers. Altars played an important role in centralizing peoples in the ancient world and, thus, the Ebal site may have contributed toward the crystallization of Israel's national consciousness. The religious factor in the origins of Israel's tribal unity has often been underestimated or dismissed in favor of materialistic explanations (Herion 1986: 3-33; cf. also Hess 1993: 125-33). Positivistic and reductionistic views have generally seen religion as dependent on social processes instead of causing them (Herion 1986: 17). Familial, circumstantial, and economic explanations have typically been sought to explain the coalescence of the disparate Israelite tribes into a unified confederation, or "nation." However, as David Merling has pointed out (Merling 1997a: 229), "religion, for good or bad, is a powerful motivator. Some may suppose that much YHWHism was a late development; even so, the peoples of earlier times had religion and it did affect their lives and history." I have argued that, even as early as the Iron Age I, it may have affected their unity (Hawkins 2005: 27-39). In light of the claim of the biblical tradition that a cultic site located on Mt. Ebal played such a centralizing role in the process of the Israelite sedentarization (Josh 8:33), it does not
seem unreasonable to suppose that a single site, such as el-Burnat, may have functioned in a central capacity.

Our final verdict on the Mt. Ebal site must remain, in the words of Kenneth Kitchen, "strictly, non liquet" (2003: 234). But while there may be "no final proof or disproof for either a watchtower or an altar complex (of Joshua or otherwise)" (Kitchen 2003: 234), the data, as we have seen, are suggestive of an interpretation of the site either as an altar or a bāmāh. Anne Killebrew (Killebrew 2005: 160) has suggested that, while there may still be disagreement about whether the site might be identified as an altar, "the consensus today tends to support the cultic interpretation of this early Iron I site."
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