

Cult and Archaeology at Pella in Jordan: Excavating the Bronze and Iron Age Temple Precinct (1994–2001)

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Abstract: This article summarises key discoveries of the University of Sydney excavations at Pella in Jordan between 1996–2001. Work centred on the excavation of a three-phase fortress temple complex on the south side of the city mound, and in the study of changing cult practice in the temple precinct over the 800 years of its occupation (ca 1600–800 BC). A detailed analysis of changing architectural form and cult practice is presented, and appropriate regional parallels both cultic and cultural outlined.

Keywords: archaeology, near east, Jordan, Bronze Age, religion, temple, cult practice

INTRODUCTION

The sequence of human occupation on the ancient tell and in the hills that surround the main settlement of Pella in Jordan stretches back over half a million years (Edwards & Macumber 1995). This long, well-nigh unbroken cultural sequence provides ideal circumstances under which to study the long history of human culture generally, and to identify key developments in this process.

With this general aim in mind, University of Sydney archaeologists have been excavating at Pella for the last 25 years. To date, 36 individual excavation fields have been opened across the settlement site and in the hills surrounding it (Bourke 1997), with two general research monographs (McNicoll et al. 1982, 1992) and more than 100 research articles focussing on individual aspects of the archaeological record.

One of the more recent research concerns has been the investigation of the Bronze and Iron Age temple precinct. Investigations began in 1994 when chance discoveries in the South Field (Area XXXII) revealed the presence of a massive stone building, the largest pre-Classical structure discovered at the site (Bourke et al. 2003). Intensified field investigations in the temple precinct began in 1996, and have become the primary focus of excavations in the last three field seasons (1997–2001). Results

have been spectacular, and some of these form the focus of the present paper.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULT AT PELLA IN JORDAN

When the first massive stone blocks of the Bronze Age temple were revealed in 1994, little enough was known about pre-Classical religious practices at Pella. In 1984, two Iron Age (ca 850 BC) ceramic cult stands, rich in iconographic detail, had been recovered from pit deposits on the eastern edge of the site (Potts 1992). However, no trace of associated cult buildings was detected at the time, perhaps due to their being located west of the excavated area. Nonetheless, the two cult stands attested to the existence of elaborate cultic rituals associated with the worship of a female deity, in all likelihood Asherah, if iconographic details are correctly interpreted (Dever 1984). No major cult-related discoveries occurred between 1984 and 1994 to give these isolated finds any meaningful archaeological context, but the main focus of pre-Classical investigations was on earlier civic and military constructions (Bourke et al. 1994, 1998).

The discovery of the Bronze Age temple came about by accident. In trenches originally opened to intensify investigations into the rich

Fourth Millennium BC structures present along the southern edge of the site (Area XXXII), the discovery of a massive stone structure in the northeast corner of the excavated area was wholly unexpected. The importance of the structure was immediately apparent, but its sheer size (32 x 24 metres), location (under a modern cemetery precinct), and the presence of up to six metres of later occupation (dating between 200 BC and 1500 AD) across much of

the area, meant that excavation of the structure could only proceed slowly. Nonetheless, over the course of seven field seasons (1994–2001) enough of the overall structure and associated finds have been recovered to allow a first (of necessity tentative) reconstruction of the architectural history and elements of cultic practice in one of the largest and best preserved fortress temples ever discovered.

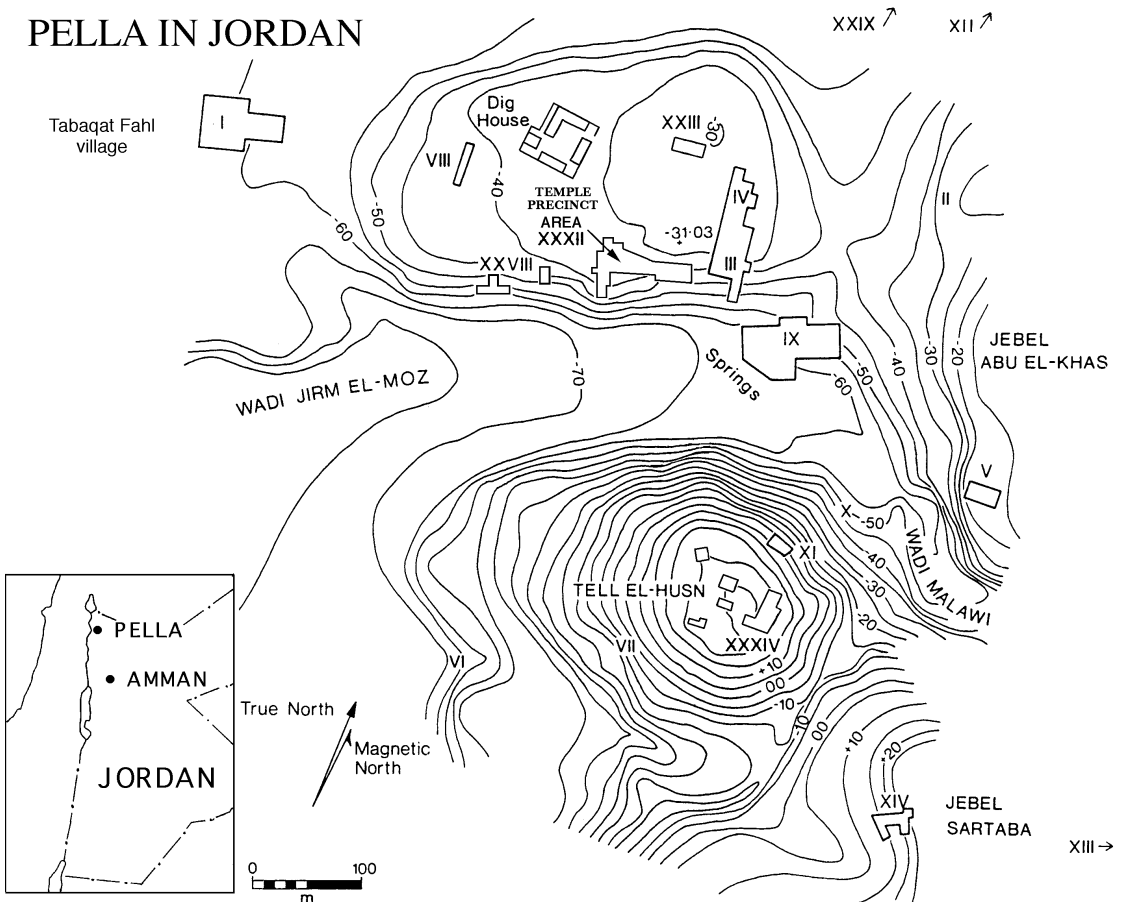


Figure 1: Pella contour plan/area locations.



Figure 2: View of Area XXXII temple precinct.

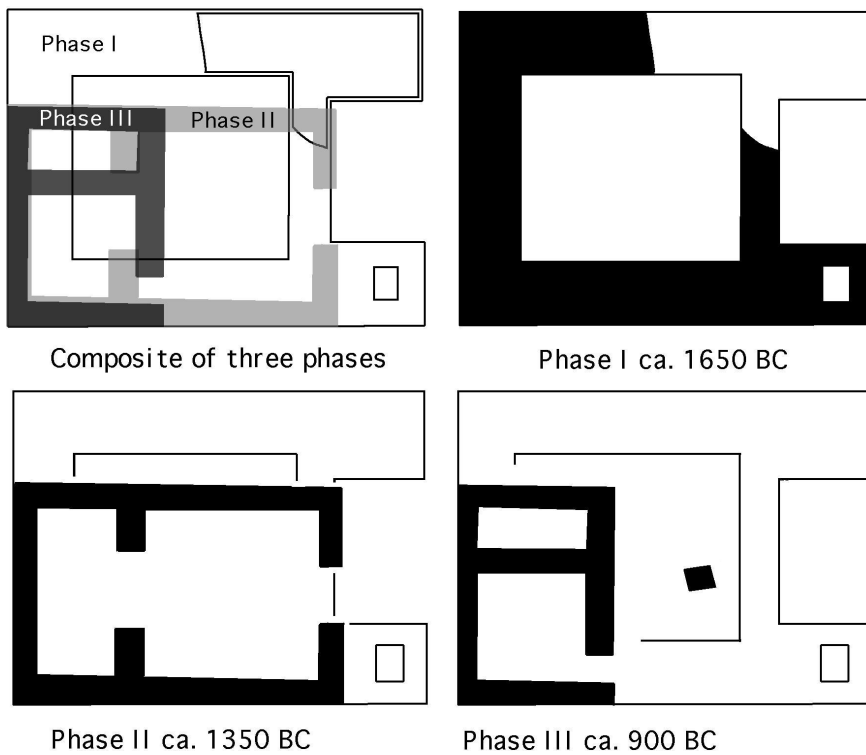


Figure 3: Schematic plans of three main phases of temple construction.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE PRECINCT

First Constructional Phase: Middle Bronze Age (ca 1650–1450 BC)

There are three distinct phases in the constructional history of the temple proper. The first phase of construction consisted of a thick-walled “hollow-box” rectangular structure. The key external features are two projecting square stone buttress/piers flanking a wide entrance way through the east wall. The interior consists of an open rectangular space provided with a neatly paved mud brick floor, but otherwise containing no internal dividing walls and apparently no ritual paraphernalia (cult statue, cult vessels or offerings) of any kind. There is no good evidence for any cult practice or offering deposits located within the temple during this early phase. The few offering deposits that have been detected are located outside the temple, to the south and east.

Cult paraphernalia favours the worship of a male deity, and the simplicity of architectural design (an empty box) would favour a numinous aniconic deity. We suggest that El, father of the gods and head of the Canaanite pantheon, best fits this description of the deity worshipped in this first phase of the Pella temple. We acknowledge that there is no consensus as to the

specific architectural, archaeological or iconographic paraphernalia to be associated with the worship of each male deity in the Canaanite pantheon (Dever 1983). The majority of Levantine archaeological literature on the subject of Bronze Age gods generally opts for Baal, Hadad or Dagan as the three most likely candidates to have been worshipped in Bronze Age Canaanite temples (Mazar 1992).

It is curious how little archaeological presence is accredited to El, given that he was the head of the Canaanite pantheon and ruler over all the gods. Contemporary mythological texts make clear the dominance of El in the Middle Bronze Age Canaanite pantheon (Lewis 1996; Pitard 2002), and yet few of the many Canaanite temples discovered over the last hundred years of excavation in the region has ever been specifically attributed to his worship. We believe this to be in error, and would like to suggest that the massive rectangular “empty-box” temple form, as represented by the Middle Bronze Age temples from Shechem, Megiddo, Hazor (Area A), Tel Kittan, Tell Hayyat and Pella be associated with the worship of Canaanite El. Given the geographical proximity of most of the abovementioned sites to each other, it seems probable that a specific inland central Levantine aspect of Canaanite El was being venerated (Albright 1968).



Figure 4: View of MBA temple south wall (looking east).



Figure 5: View of MBA temple north wall (looking east).

Figure 6: View of south tower (looking southwest).



First Refurbishment: Late Bronze I (ca 1450 – 1350 BC)

At some stage in the early Late Bronze Age (ca 1450 BC) several alterations to the temple fabric took place. The first and potentially most important change was the construction of a cross-wall in the western quarter of the original “hollow-box” cella. This had the effect of defining a formal Holy of Holies for the first time. The floor area west of the cross wall (within the newly created Holy of Holies) was removed down to a depth of 1.5 metres, re-filled with multiple layers of medium-sized fieldstones, and sealed with a thick, yellow-white, lime plaster floor surface. The cross-wall also formed the foundation course for a formal threshold and entranceway into the Holy of Holies, although the exact format of this original threshold was obscured by later reconstructions.

The eastern facade of the temple was also remodelled, with two massive 5 x 5 metre hollow square towers built upon the projecting solid stone buttresses that flanked the original entrance to the temple. The change from the original stone and (presumably) solid brick pier superstructure to a hollow tower format may have been designed to reduce weight-stress on the abutting temple facade, or perhaps to facilitate the construction of high flanking towers.

It is no easy matter to evaluate the significance of these architectural changes for cult practice and religious belief. The changed architectural form of the early Late Bronze Age temple need not reflect any significant change in cult, but we suggest that it does. The action of dividing off a Holy of Holies for the first time is a significant departure from previous practice, and bespeaks an altered view of the relationship between man and god.

The Ugaritic religious epics (Pitard 2002) contain legends that document the triumph of Baal in a war between the gods, and is generally interpreted as recording the spread of Baal worship in early Late Bronze Age Canaan. This assumed pre-eminence seems to have led to the attribution of virtually all Late Bronze Age

Canaanite temples to Baal, even though very few have any inscriptional evidence to favour such an association (Mazar 1992). Male iconography does predominate (figurines, cult statues, incense burners) so the worship of some male deity is not easily disputed. When Late Bronze Age texts do identify individual temples, they name Baal, Reshep, Hadad and Dagan as titular deities (van der Toorn et al. 1999).

As well, there is an undoubted presence (if not pre-eminence) of Baal worship in the southern Levantine Late Bronze Age, more specifically at Pella where ruling prince Mut-Balu proclaims his loyalty to Baal by his very name (Hess 1989). Thus the broad association of Baal, Hadad or Dagan worship with Late Bronze Age temples is not unreasonable. Explaining the apparent change from El to Baal worship is more of a problem, although the spread of Hurrian peoples and their distinctive religious beliefs into Canaan and southern Anatolia at this time is well documented (Na’aman 1994; Hess 1997). It may be that the spread of Baal worship into the southern Levant is broadly connected with the arrival of Hurrian immigrants and the rise of the Hurrian Mitannian empire (Klengel 1992). Indeed, it was this new presence of Hurrian Mitanni in the southern Levant that Thutmose III claimed to have provoked his first military campaigns, which ultimately brought much of Canaan (including western Jordan) under Egyptian control for the first time (Redford 1992).

South Levantine Late Bronze Age temple architecture changes from the simple “empty-box” form of the Middle Bronze Age temples at Shechem, Megiddo and Hazor (Area A), to more architecturally complex internally subdivided structures such as those at Hazor (Area H), Lachish (Acropolis Temple) and Beth Shan (Mekal). Architectural change need not reflect change in cult practice, but when these architectural changes occur across the south Levantine landscape at the same time as new North Syrian Hurrian cultural traditions appear, there is more strength to arguments that seek to link changed architectural forms with changing re-

ligious beliefs (Hess 1989). We view the early Late Bronze Age changes to the original Middle Bronze Age temple form at Pella in this context

of widespread change in cultural and religious beliefs, largely attributable to the influence of North Syrian Hurrian religious forms.



Figure 7: View of LBA temple cella Area (looking east).

Second Constructional Phase: Late Bronze Age II (ca 1350 – 1150 BC)

A major change to the re-modelled temple design occurred around 1350 BC, probably as a result of severe earthquake damage. Similar earthquake-related damage is found throughout the city and in buildings on nearby Tell Husn (Bourke et al. 1999). Two key alterations occurred thereafter. The entire temple structure was narrowed and the cella was provided with a colonnade.

The entire structure was levelled down to the stone foundations and new (much less massive) stone and mudbrick walls were built along the outer edge of the original east, south and west-

ern wall lines. However, a new north wall line was created five metres to the south of the Middle Bronze Age original, resulting in a significant narrowing of the entire structure. This was probably brought about by the sharp warping of the underlying foundations in the north temple area, still clear today from aerial photographs. At this time the original wide entrance to the Holy of Holies was narrowed and re-centred, and rebuilt using roughly dressed limestone and more carefully dressed (and drilled) basalt orthostat blocks; the latter were probably reused from earlier structures. Two small basalt column bases now flanked the re-configured entrance to the Holy of Holies. The floor of the Holy of Holies was re-laid, with new small

stone foundational layers sealed by a thick, yellow, plaster floor surface. A number of distinct Egyptian-style foundation deposits were placed in shallow pits below this re-laid floor.

The new (much narrower) rectangular cella to the east of the rebuilt Holy of Holies was provided with a central colonnade at this time, indicated by the presence of three pillar bases. The western and eastern column bases had relatively small sub-structural foundations, but the central column base was provided with a massive limestone sub-structure, implying that it was designed to be the major weight-bearing support. All three column base foundations were cut into the mud brick paving of the original cella floor. Traces of burnt wooden columns were found in direct association with both of the smaller column bases. Thin, off-white plaster floors were laid across the narrowed cella area and the lower regions of the interior wall surfaces were sealed with a thick, monochrome, pale brown mud plaster.

The eastern facade of the temple was also remodelled, although subsequent Iron Age re-use in this area has made the exact form of the Late Bronze Age structure difficult to reconstruct with any confidence. However, it seems probable that the two hollow-square towers flanking the early Late Bronze Age temple entrance collapsed in the earthquake and were not rebuilt. If this interpretation is correct, then the area to the east of the reconstructed east wall would have been an open pebble-paved plaza.

These alterations to the early Late Bronze Age temple form could be interpreted as a simple structural response to severe earthquake damage, in that virtually all changes could be seen as a necessary strengthening of the original structurally unsound “hollow-box” design. However, the construction of a pillared hall, the addition of flanking columns at the entrance to the Holy of Holies, and the presence of “Egyptianising” foundation deposits may all reflect a new cultural influence at work.

While we have no reason to posit major change in local religious beliefs in the Late Bronze Age II, the architectural remodelling

of the Pella temple coincides closely with the first presence of the Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty pharaohs in the region (Redford 1992). This Late New Kingdom dynasty profoundly changed the ways in which the Canaanite empire had been administered previously, being far more inclined to interfere directly in the running of vassal states (Weinstein 1981). From this time (ca 1300 BC) an accelerated “Egyptianisation” of local elite culture can be observed, as can direct Egyptian influence on local Canaanite architectural modes (Wimmer 1990; Higginbottom 1996). With this in mind, it may be that the Egyptianising foundation deposits and the pillared hall at Pella provide evidence for an increasingly pervasive Egyptianisation of local elite culture east of the Jordan during the later New Kingdom.

The remodelled temple remained in use until the end of the Bronze Age (ca 1150 BC), when the entire site of Pella suffered a major destruction. This may also have been due to earthquake activity, although human agency remains possible, as this is the time of the enigmatic Sea People descent on Egypt, generally (if not always reliably) associated with a widespread destruction horizon throughout the region at this time (Sandars 1978).

Iron Age I Temple Use (ca 1150 – 950 BC)

The post-destruction Iron Age I (ca 1150–950 BC) temple deposits were badly disturbed by later building activities. There is some meagre archaeological evidence for activity in and about the Holy of Holies during the two hundred years of the Iron I period, but the pillared hall and eastern facade seems to have collapsed into ruin. All areas surrounding the Holy of Holies were given over to domestic use, and much disturbed by numerous rubbish pits (Bourke et al. 2003). The immediate area in and about the Holy of Holies seems to have retained some measure of cultic function, although the mixture of cultic and domestic practice renders the precise nature of cult practice obscure.



Figure 8: View of Iron Age temple (looking east).

Third Constructional Phase: Iron Age II (ca 950 – 800 BC)

The third constructional phase marked a profound change to the form and (arguably) the function of the Pella temple. After the two hundred years of decline represented by the Iron Age I (ca 1150–950 BC), the area of the Late Bronze Age Holy of Holies was completely rebuilt as two separate storage and cultic rooms, with access to the cult room via an indirect entranceway in the southeast corner. The cult room was provided with benches around its west and north sides, and what appears to be a stepped mud brick podium was built against the eastern wall, perhaps for the display of cult paraphernalia. The northern room was filled with baskets of lentils and bags of grain, all burnt in the final destruction. Most cultic items, favissae and offering debris were located in the open courtyard area immediately to the

east of the cult room. The roughly square courtyard area was dominated by a massive stone altar, positioned roughly in the centre of the courtyard. The major cult items, which included the ceramic “Cow Box”, and associated incense cups and a chalice, were found in destruction debris beside the stone altar.

Direct architectural parallels for the Iron Age II temple form are elusive. At Shechem (Stager 1999) and Tel Kittan (Eisenberg 1977), Iron Age II structures were reconstructed directly on top of Late Bronze Age originals, although the architectural forms are not particularly close to those at Pella. However, reasonably close parallels are found with the Iron II temples from Tel Qasile (Mazar 1980) on the Palestinian coast, and some individual design elements are paralleled in Iron Age temples at nearby Beth Shan (Rowe 1940). The contemporary material culture (and cult practice) at these two sites display an eclectic mixture of lo-

cal Canaanite and “Aegean-Cypriot” influences, which many researchers equate (rather shakily) with the “Sea Peoples” (Tubb 2001), or more specifically with the better-known Biblical Philistines (Dothan 1982).

Architectural parallels are consistent with a significant change in cult practice, and offering vessels and figurines display relatively unambiguous links with the Palestinian coast for the first time during these Iron I-II horizons. Whilst it is probably unwise to equate specific politico-historical events with changing archaeological circumstances, the sharp change in cult practice at Pella does seem to indicate the presence of a major new influence in the region, with all archaeological indicators favouring a source on the Palestinian coastal plain (Singer 1994). It is difficult not to view these purely archaeological circumstances as consistent with Biblical testimony relating to the penetration of the originally coastal Philistine peoples into the eastern Jezreel Valley, which many regard as occurring at precisely this time (Raban 1991; Singer 1994).

The remodelled Iron Age II temple precinct at Pella was in use for perhaps 150 years (ca 950–800 BC) before the temple and the entire settlement was destroyed in an extensive conflagration (Bourke et al. 2003). While earthquake activity has been suggested as the likely cause for similarly dated destruction horizons at Deir 'Alla (Franken 1992), the same horizon of destruction at nearby Tell Hammeh (Cahill et al. 1987) and Tel Rehov (Mazar 1999) has been attributed to the military activities of either Egyptian (or just possibly) Aramaean invaders. At Pella, while earthquake destruction is still considered the most probable cause, significant militaria (specifically iron arrowheads and scale armour) are consistently associated with this destruction horizon. Whatever the ultimate cause, this destruction proved to be catastrophic to the long-term well-being of the city of Pella, as settlement ceased across the site for the next 500 years, only reviving with the Seleucid occupation of the region after 200 BC (Bourke 1997).

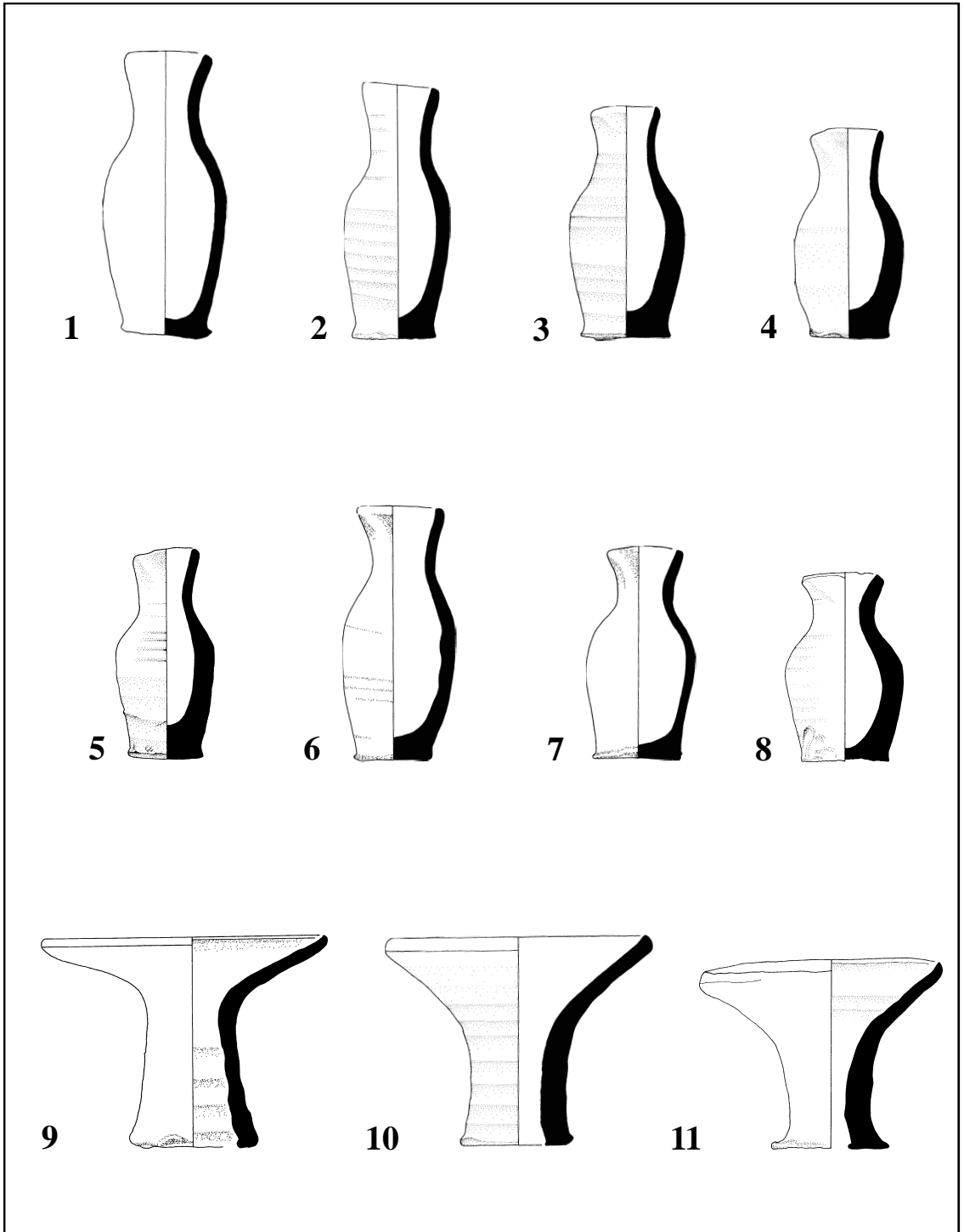


Figure 9: Pottery from MBA temple plastered bins.

ARTEFACTUAL DISCOVERIES AND CULTIC FUNCTION

The Middle Bronze Age Temple: Funerary Offerings and Libation Deposits

Elaborate offering deposits, dating to the initial Middle Bronze and early Late Bronze Age phases of the temple, were discovered some ten metres to the south of the temple. Associated with the Middle Bronze Age phase of temple use is a series of plaster-lined (and plaster-sealed) bins that showed evidence of repeated re-plastering. One contained numerous complete small and/or miniature ceramic bowls, platters, jars, juglets and plates, as well as an Egyptian faience lid. Two others held a series of rough-finished ceramic funnels, small pinch-spouted bottles, a unique locally-made gypsum bowl, and an exquisite Egyptian calcite jar, specifically associated with funerary libations in Egypt (Bourke et al. 2003).

Rough-finished ceramic funnels were found in direct association with late Middle Bronze Age tombs at Pella (Smith 1973) and Megiddo (Guy 1938). We know that funerary libations played a critical element in Levantine ancestor worship (Pitard 1994), and have come to suspect that public facilities existed to both sanctify new and purify decommissioned utensils used in such ancestor worship (Pitard 1996). Although some uncertainty must remain as to the function of the Pella bin contents, we suggest that they most probably contain examples of decommissioned funerary libation vessels. The small (but neatly constructed) mud brick room associated with the bins may be a temple repository connected with the funerary rituals (Fleming 1992).

As the bin-deposits (and the small mud brick repository) were found in close association with the main temple structure, this may suggest that a number of distinct “religious” functions took place within the one temple precinct. A similar state of affairs seems to have existed in the temple precinct at Tel Haror in southern Is-

rael (Oren 1997), where a fortress-type temple is associated with a small repository building and similar votive deposits.

The Late Bronze Age II Temple: Foundation, Offering and Destruction Deposits

Objects associated with the second major constructional phase can be divided into the three main findspot categories of foundation, offering and destruction deposits. The first category of material is that deliberately deposited as part of foundation rituals during constructional events. Materials in this category come from small shallow pits, set immediately below floor packing material and sealed by thick plaster floors.

The second (and most numerous) category consists of objects deriving from offering rituals. Materials of this sort consist of broken cult objects, generally substantially complete but shattered, found alongside a restricted range of animal and plant remains. Offering pits containing cultic objects are generally found to have been cut through earlier temple floors, and been sealed by later associated surfaces. Most offering pits are found within the temple, although some are found in the open areas immediately surrounding the temple. As yet it is not clear whether offering pits contain the residues of cyclical (seasonal) offering events, or periodic “cleansing/votive” rituals, during which various offerings were interred. While it is no easy task to differentiate between “offering” and “rubbish clean-up” pit deposits at first exposure, detailed contents analysis is normally able to highlight the presence of the typical offering assemblages that make up votive deposits.

Finally, there are materials found in situ within the destruction deposits which mark the end of the Late Bronze Age temple (ca 1150 BC). These materials are normally found upon the floor surfaces, and therefore may well instruct on the spatial patterning of cult practices, although much material is found within a thick destruction deposit that sealed the en-

tire area. Materials found within this deposit and rooftop locations, as well as lower storey floor levels.

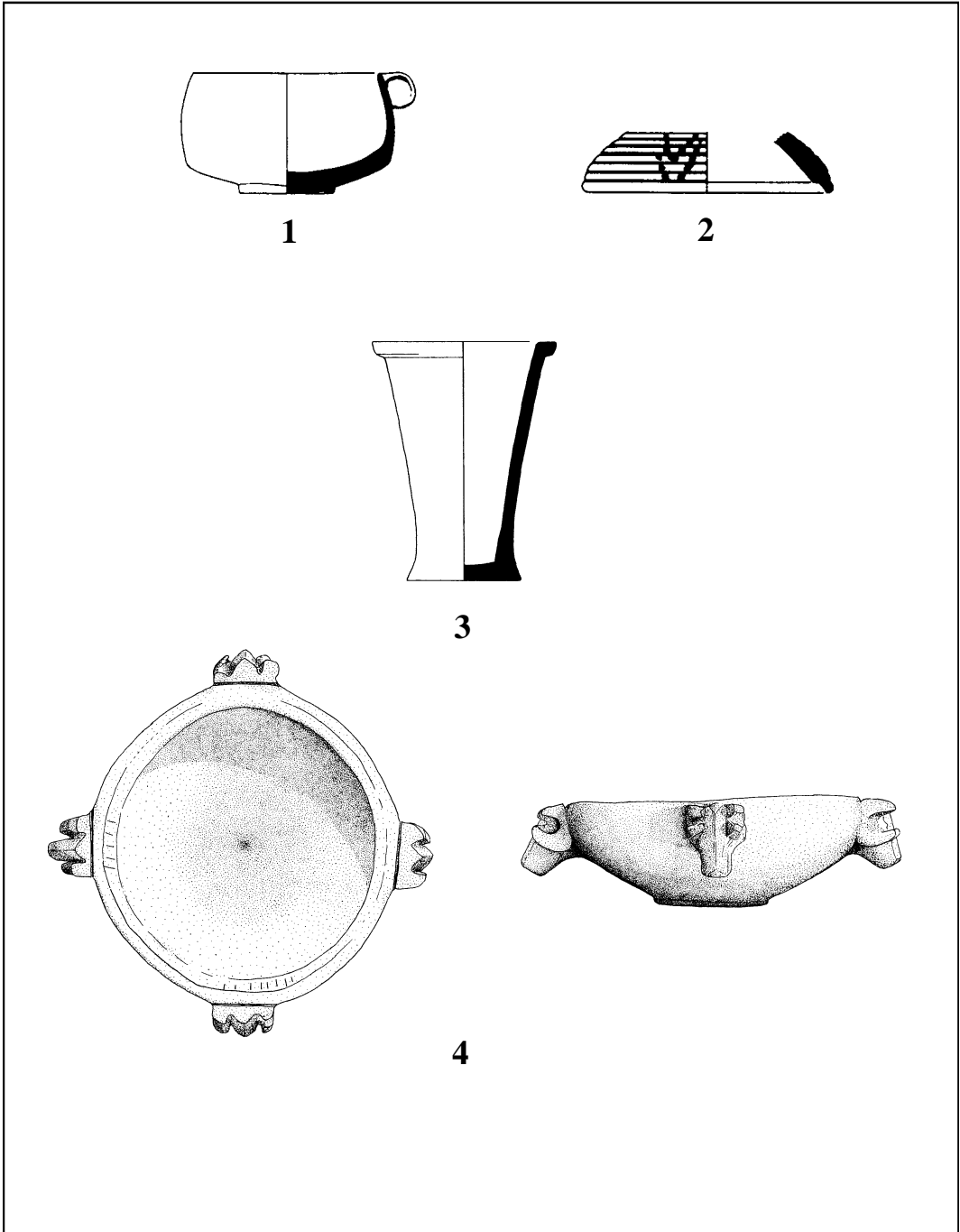


Figure 10: Non-ceramic objects from MBA temple plastered bins.

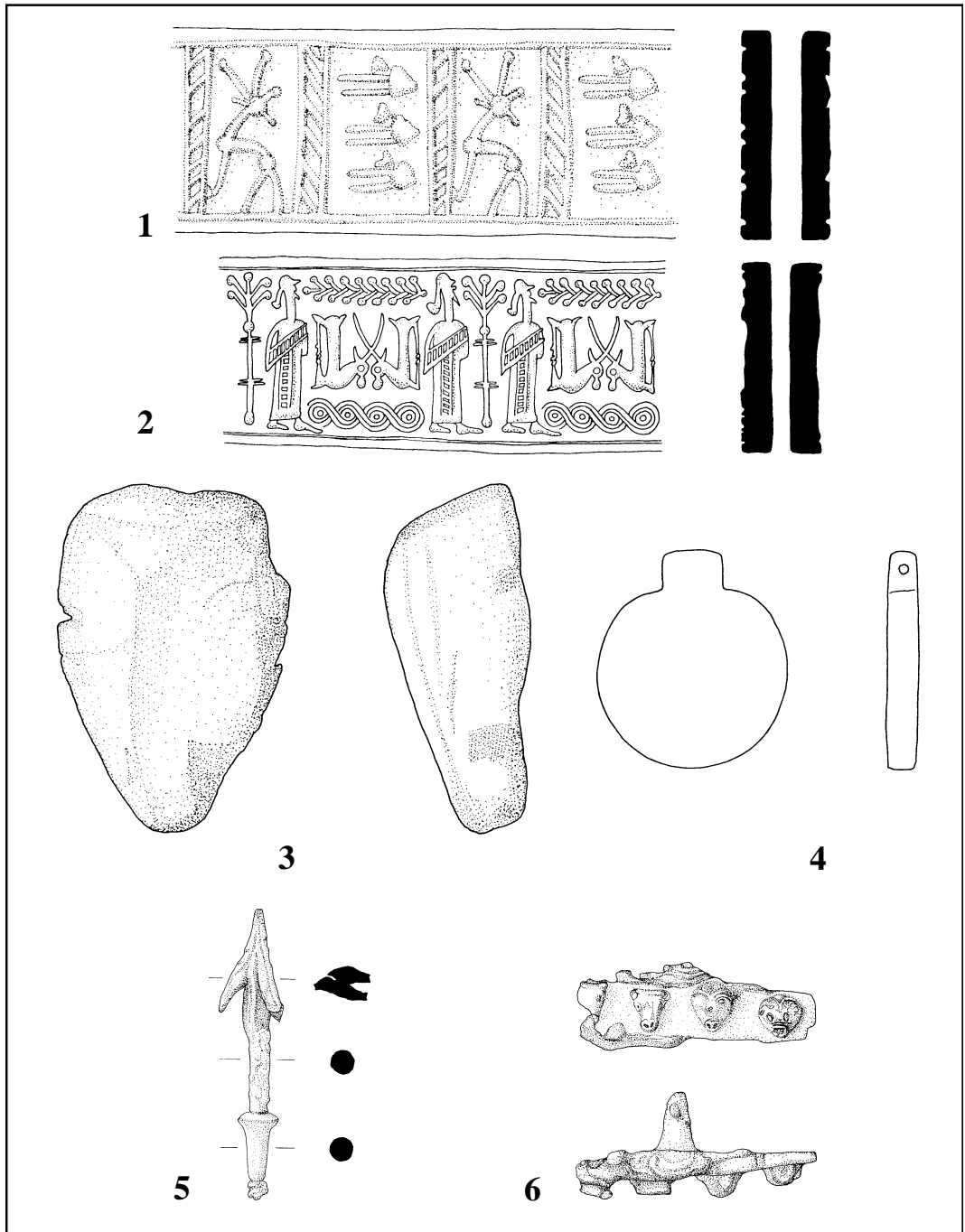


Figure 11: Objects from LBA temple foundation deposits.

Foundation Deposits

Foundation deposits were confined to the area of the Holy of Holies. The main deposits derived from a number of small (40 cm diameter x 20 cm deep) pits excavated into floor makeup layers, sealed by the small stone packing and thick, yellow, plaster floors of the LB II temple reconstruction. One small pit contained faience cylinder seals and Mycenaean Greek pottery cups. A second very shallow pit contained a glass ingot and a glass plaque, along with many faience, glass, agate and lapis beads (perhaps from a necklace). A third deposit contained a miniature bronze harpoon and a small bronze strip with modelled animal heads.

The cylinder seals are of the Mitannian Common Style, with close parallels in contemporary Beth Shan (Parker 1949; James & McGovern 1993), Megiddo (Lamon & Shipton 1939) and Gezer (Parker 1949). Cylinder seals were employed in temple foundation deposits (or as votive offerings) in the LB II temples at nearby Beth Shan (James & McGovern 1993) and at Tell Mevorakh on the Palestinian coast (Stern 1984). It is not yet clear whether the specific subject matter on each seal is significant in their selection for foundation deposits, but as no obvious religious allusions occur in the Pella examples, significance more probably resides in their broad Mitannian/Hurrian cultural association. However, in the absence of inscriptions, very many scenes remain poorly understood.

Glass ingots were found at contemporary Beth Shan (James & McGovern 1993) and Ashdod (Dothan & Porath 1993). Glass plaques of similar type to the Pella example are known from contemporary temple contexts at Beth Shan (McGovern 1985), Megiddo (Loud 1948) and Tell Mevorakh (Stern 1984). The glass plaques are normally seen as derivative of Mesopotamian lapis originals. They are tentatively identified with the planet Venus, and may indicate an offering to Ishtar. Although the exact Levantine equivalent to Mesopotamian Ishtar remains controversial, it is generally held to be Astarte, wife of Baal (van der Toorn et al. (eds) 1999).

Of the metal finds, the small spearhead resembles a barbed "harpoon" discovered in a LB II hoard at Tell Munbaqa on the Euphrates (Werner 1998). If this small spearhead is correctly identified as a miniature harpoon, the symbol of Egyptian Seth, the Canaanite Baal (Albright 1957), then the foundation offering may represent a generic offering to Baal, or a more specific offering against the chaos of earthquake. The miniature bronze strip with a beautifully modelled frieze of alternating frontal ram and bulls heads is unique. While it most probably forms a small part of a much larger furniture inlay, the continuous strip design is reminiscent of contemporary bronze-bound wooden gates. It might be that the small decorated bronze strip formed part of a miniature bronze-bound votive gateway, perhaps seeking ritually to guard the temple against intrusion.

Cultic Vessels

Offering pits are found throughout the temple, both within the Holy of Holies and the cella, as well as in areas outside the temple to the south and west of the structure. Many pits contained animal offerings, which would normally consist of young sheep or goat, more occasionally young cow or (rarely) deer and bird, but never pig, dog, horse or other domestic/wild species. Along with the meat offerings a variety of grain, pulse and fruit residues was detected. These findings are broadly in line with previous studies of animal (Wapnish and Hesse 1991) and cereal/fruit (Magness-Gardiner and Falconer 1994) offering deposits in Bronze Age temples.

Many pits contained smashed cultic vessels, broken into pieces but largely complete. These help us reconstruct both the cultic assemblage employed in offering rituals, and (very occasionally) allow us to address some of the belief structures that lay behind ritual observances. This process may best be illustrated by the description and discussion of the iconography of a unique painted ceramic fenestrated stand, described more fully below. It came from a shallow offering pit cut into the floor of the Holy of

Holies. Fragments of a large offering bowl were found in association with the stand, along with

a small quantity of fine grey ash, perhaps the residue of burnt incense.

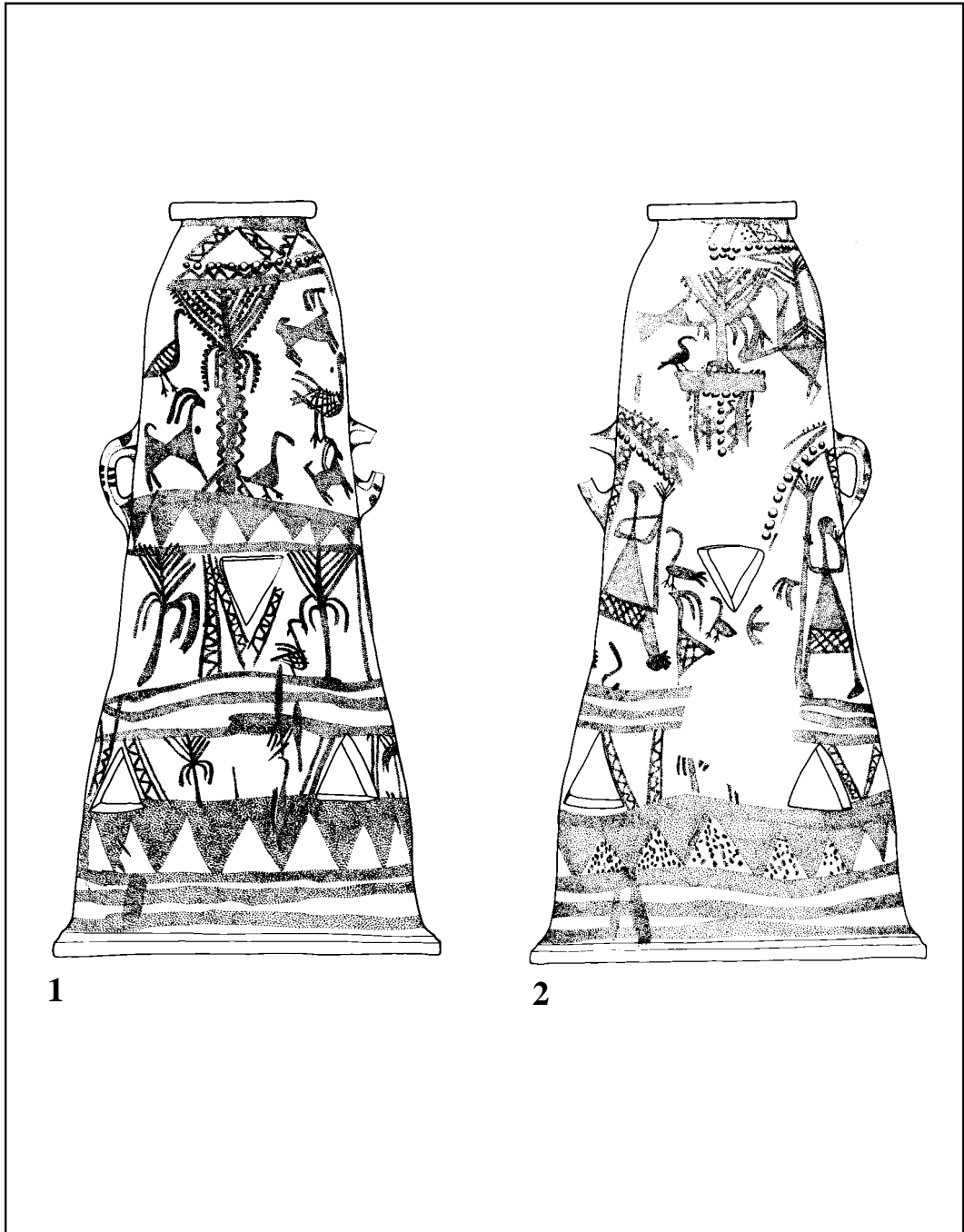


Figure 12: Ceramic fenestrated stand from LBA temple.

Ceramic Cult Stand

The cult stand is approximately 95 cm high and nearly 50 cm wide. It is conical in form, thrown in at least three pieces and joined together quite roughly. It has a double register of triangular fenestrations cut into the lower and mid body. While the form of the stand is well known at nearby Beth Shan (Rowe 1940) and Megiddo (Loud 1948), the painted decoration is uniquely interesting.

The bottom register consists of numbers of solid pendant triangles, interleaved with “spot painted” (obverse) and hollow (reverse) triangles at base. Above these, and interwoven with the first register of fenestrations, is a frieze of trees apparently framed by a latticework fence. The trees have pendant from their branches either fruit or ribbon fetishes. Either way, it seems likely that some form of sacred grove is being represented, and in Canaanite religion the grove is sacred to Astarte, the female consort of Baal, (Dever 1984; van der Toorn et al. 1999). In the frieze that runs around the mid-body, also interleaved with fenestrations is another sacred grove, this time more clearly associated with a latticework enclosure, which served to delimit sacred from secular space. Several different types of water fowl and larger birds (geese/pelicans) stand on the ground line (reverse).

The main mid-body register is dominated by two standing male figures, each holding what looks like a winnowing tool (thyrsus), although it may be the less well known “palm spear”, used to fertilise the fields during spring rituals of renewal (Pitard 2002). The figures feature geometric triangular shaped bodies, crosshatched lower garments (tasseled or pleated?), and over-large, but nonetheless, carefully delineated feet. Both figures appear to be bearded. The left-hand figure brandishes the thyrsus in the air, and the right-hand figure leans against/upon the thyrsus and touches his beard/chin with the unemployed hand, perhaps a sign of lamentation/mourning. The first has a collection of animals (birds, ibex and mouflon) facing him when he brandishes the thyrsus; the second has animals facing his back while he laments.

The first has what may be a snake beneath his legs. Both figures flank an elaborate painted swept-horn motif, delineated by a line of plastic-added ceramic “buttons”. The human figures, the variety of animals and the dominant swept-horn (ibex) motif should perhaps be seen as parts of a sequential narrative, rather than as a series of disconnected motifs. It may be that the two male figures represent lamentation (death) and triumph (rebirth) scenes within a single ritual, perhaps an annual fertility ritual marking the changing of the seasons.

The uppermost register is a combination of formal motifs and a collection of animals set in a freefield format. The obverse illustrates a garlanded altar, a small bird and a large “sacred tree” motif. This tree is flanked by two goats which reach up to nibble at the leaves of the tree – the familiar “ram in a thicket” motif. The reverse is dominated by a large sacred tree motif. The tree has a number of “streamer-like” garlands hanging from it and is surrounded by geometric-bodied ibex and mouflon (strikingly like Greek Geometric forms) and several different types of migratory water bird, some facing the sacred tree, some not.

Taken together, the painted motifs suggest a dominant male deity, connected with wild animals and migratory birds, performing some form of annual fertility ritual, perhaps promoting animal fertility. That the human figure represented is likely to be an aspect of Baal seems probable, as Baal is the source of animal fertility (Pitard 2002).

An alternative possibility would see the deity as Hauron, master of the desert lands (Albright 1936). Hauron has been associated with the earlier MBA Shechem temple (Albright 1957) and the later Iron Age Tel Qasile complex (Mazar 1980); both have close architectural and iconographic links with the Pella temple. Hauron is most commonly associated with the isolated desert communities of the Sinai, the mountainous regions east of the Jordan, and the east Syrian steppe (van Dijk 1989). In Ugaritic legend, Hauron is master of snakes and wild animals, consistent with the deity represented on the Pella cult stand.

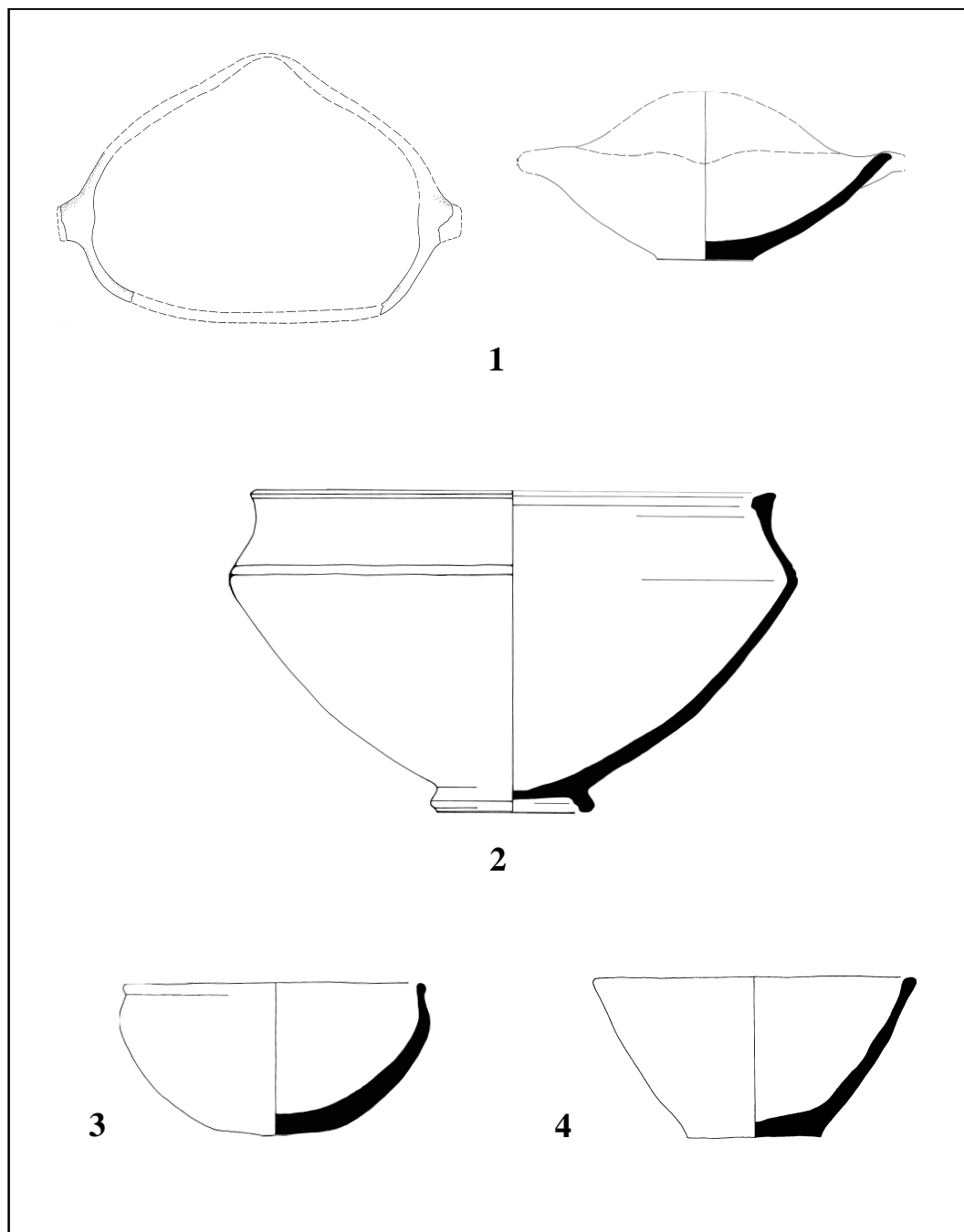


Figure 13: Pottery from destruction of LBA temple.

Destruction Deposits; Ceramic Objects

A variety of offering utensils were recovered, sometimes in pieces, sometimes more or less intact, either contained within or sealed below a thick layer of ash and brick debris. These included kidney-shaped bowls used to collect blood offerings, kraters for mixing water, wine and juice offerings, serving bowls for both solids and liquids, and chalices for libation offerings. Most bowls and platters were found in and around the entrance to the Holy of Holies, while kraters, chalices and kidney-shaped bowls were mostly confined to the cella. This might suggest that meat/solid food offerings were associated more directly with the Holy of Holies, while libations and liquid offerings occurred in the cella or towards the entrance of the temple. Similar ceramic offering vessel assemblages are well known from contemporary temples at Lachish (Tufnell et al. 1940), Beth Shan (Rowe 1940), and Megiddo (Loud 1948).

Towards the eastern end of the cella, a group of non-ceramic objects was found close together on the floor by the southern wall. The group consist of two small bronze cymbals, two small bronze balance pans and a small faience bowl. The faience bowl is of the “Kassite bucket” type,

generally associated with incense offerings. The form originated in Babylonia, although many examples found their way to Canaan (Clayden 1998). Close parallels from nearby sites include one example from the contemporary temple at Deir 'Alla (Franken 1992), and two others from Megiddo (Guy 1938; Loud 1948). Bronze cymbals are widely attested in contemporary contexts. Local parallels come from Tell Batash (Kelm & Mazar 1995), Megiddo (Loud 1948), and the temple at Tell Mevorakh (Stern 1984). Similar balance pans are known from Megiddo (Guy 1938), Ashdod (Dothan and Porath 1982) and Tel Michal (Herzog et al. 1989). The balance itself was probably made from wood, and not preserved.

It would seem that all three object types were connected. Faience vessels such as the “Kassite bucket” type contained incense offerings. Balance pans were used to measure out an exact quantity of incense, and the cymbals were probably used to summon the deity, either to witness the outlay, or to partake of the offering. Together these three items provide an insight into a specific aspect of cult practice, the offering of incense, which seems to have taken place in the eastern cella of the building.

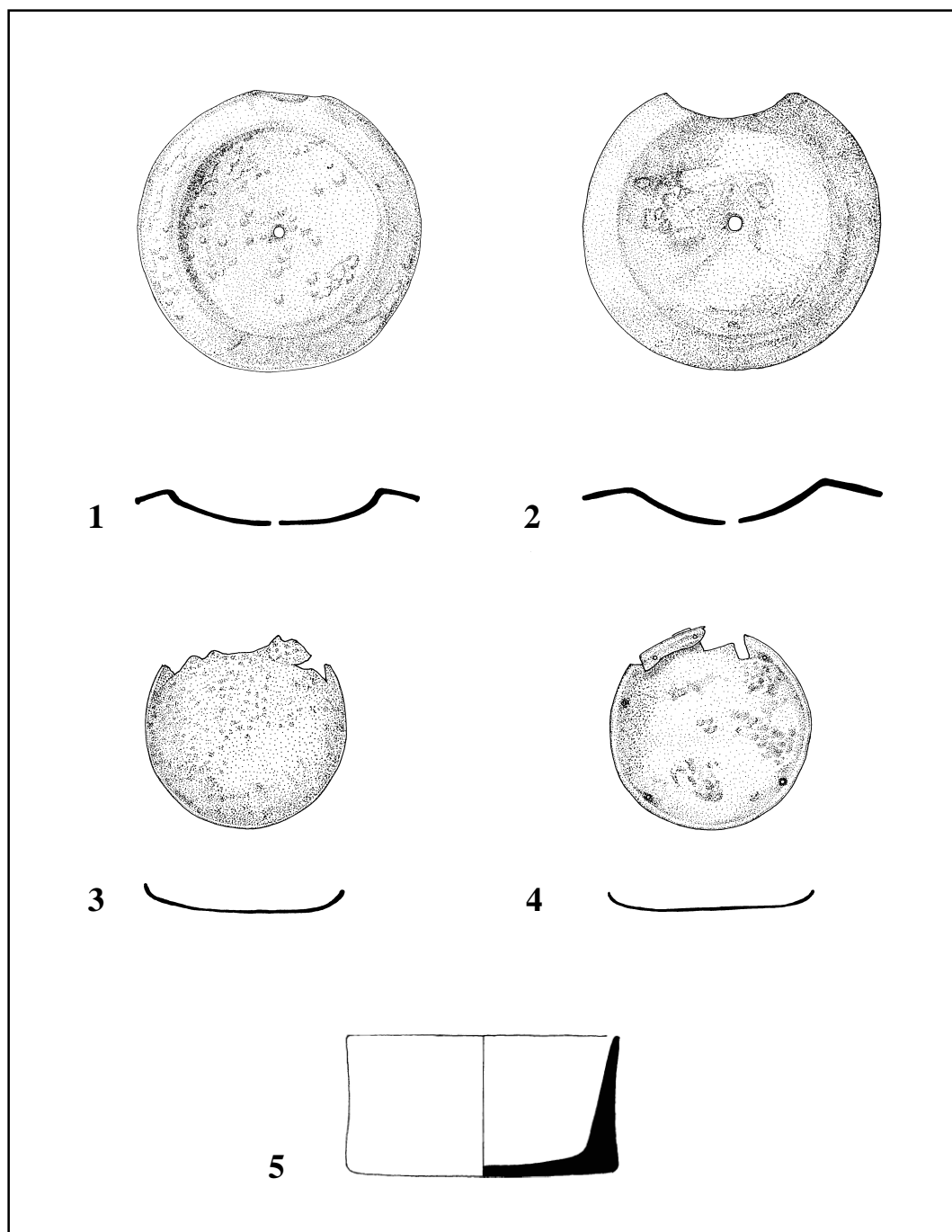


Figure 14: Non-ceramic objects from destruction of LBA temple.

The Iron Age II Temple: Offering and Destruction Deposits

The third main constructional phase Iron II temple was a much smaller edifice. The temple proper was confined to the area of the Bronze Age Holy of Holies, although the formal courtyard east of the temple contained a large centrally placed altar. Archaeological deposits associated with this phase can be divided into offering deposits and destruction deposits. There were no formal foundation deposits associated with the Iron II temple phase.

Offering Deposits

Offering deposits consisted of a large number of distinct pit fills. Many quite large pits took up virtually all of the area of the formal east courtyard, as well as much of the more open spaces to the north and south of the Iron II temple. A number of smaller pits was dug below the temple floors, but while these contained some broken cultic items, they were largely given over to the refuse of animal offerings, mostly young sheep/goats. Destruction deposits consisted of the thick layers of ash and brick debris, which lay over occupational surfaces, sealing a number of important cultic objects in situ on the floor surfaces.

Ceramic assemblages consisted of the familiar jugs, kraters and bowl types used in offering rituals. However, for the first time a fair number of domestic utensils such as cooking pots and storage jars appear within the ceramic assemblage. This suggests that sacred and secular activities may not have been so rigidly segregated in the Iron II temple precinct. Alternately, the “mixed” ceramic assemblage may reflect a genuine change in offering rituals.

Non-ceramic objects are dominated by a variety of basalt bowls, braziers and scoops. Hard stone, tripod-legged bowls were generally employed as simple braziers or to contain material burnt as part of offering rituals. Our examples are quite fine, perhaps suggestive of their use as offering vessels. Similar hard stone tripod-legged bowls were found at contemporary Hazor

(Yadin et al. 1958; Yadin et al. 1960), Megiddo (Lamon & Shipton 1939) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1943).

The two ceramic wheels are rare finds, and probably come from separate models, a four-wheeled covered wagon and a two-wheel light chariot, both generally regarded as appropriate votive offerings to a warrior or storm deity. Broad parallels can be found at Ashdod (Dothan & Porath 1993), Jerusalem (Eshel & Prag 1995) and Tell Jemmeh (Petrie 1928).

Destruction Deposits

The destruction of the Iron II temple (ca 800 BC) ended significant occupation in the area for more than five hundred years. Thick deposits of ash and brick debris sealed the temple proper and most nearby areas. Interpretation of the final Iron II destruction horizons is complicated by the large and intrusive Late Antique (ca 550 AD) foundation trenches that cut through much of the area, largely frustrating attempts to study the spatial patterning of objects found in situ below destruction horizons. The Iron II temple proper suffered quite severely from later constructional activity. However, the area of the eastern courtyard surrounding the central altar was largely undisturbed, and it was here that many cult objects were identified. These include the ceramic model shrine (the “Cow-Box”), perforated ceramic cups, used for incense offerings, and the painted ceramic chalice, used in libation offerings. This collection is described in detail below.

Ceramic Model Shrine and Associated Objects

The ceramic model shrine is made up of a hollow rectangular box with five attached bovine heads. Three heads are attached to the front wall and project above the rim of the box. Two heads are attached to the back wall of the box, and also project above the rim. Rather unexpectedly all five heads face in the same direction, providing a formidable group stare, much ameliorated by their jolly smiles. The box is painted all over in a dark red pigment, and hand

burnished in places. The inside base of the box and a sloping section of three of the inner wall surfaces are all blistered and burnt, suggesting the repetitive burning of a viscous but not quite liquid material, which we suggest to have been incense.

This surmise is bolstered by the presence of three small cups, stored within the box at the time of destruction. These tripod-based perforated cups are commonly associated with Iron II incense offerings (Michel Daviau 2001). A large painted ceramic chalice was found beside the “Cow-Box”. Together this assemblage would seem to consist of a model shrine and associated incense containers, and a chalice for liquid/libation offerings. All were found adjacent to the large square stone altar that dominated the centre of the courtyard.

This assemblage is unique as a group, although each individual element has a number of parallels within contemporaneous assemblages. The rectangular model shrine type is well known

in Canaan, although each example tends to display unique features that make the identification of close parallels well-nigh impossible. Close in concept is a ceramic box from Tell Mumbaqaat on the Euphrates (Werner 1998), and more generic parallels are known from Beth Shan (Rowe 1940) and Megiddo (May 1935). The incense cups are widely attested in contemporary Iron II deposits (Michel Daviau 2001), as is the painted chalice form (May 1935, Amiran 1970). However, found together in situ beside the altar, this group represents a unique indicator of the type of cultic activity that occurred in association with the Iron II temple. Although the disruption to much of the destruction horizon within the temple proper gives grounds for some uncertainty, it nonetheless seems reasonably secure from the surviving patterns of deposition recovered to date that the majority of cult offerings were presented at or around the stone altar in the eastern courtyard, outside of the temple proper.

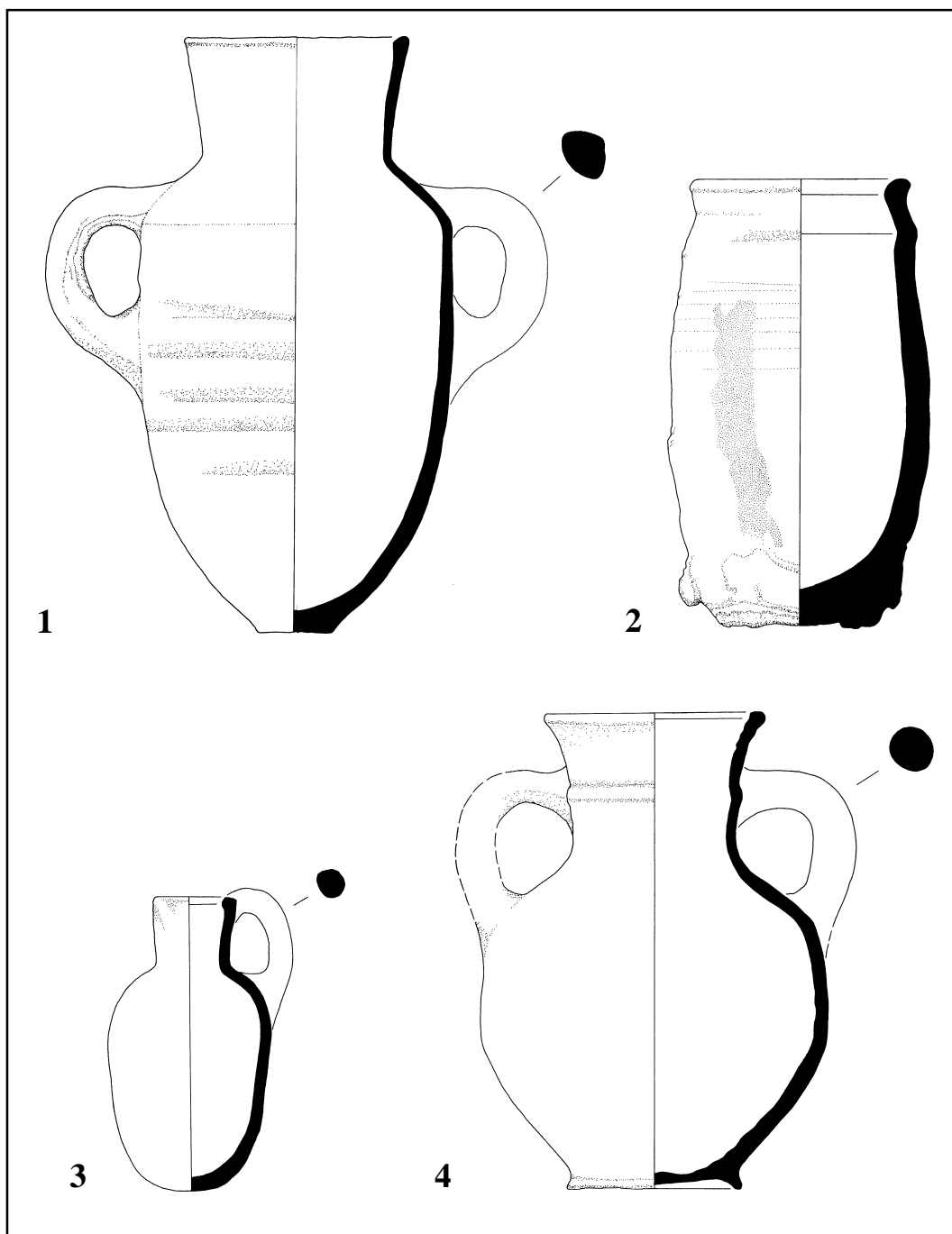


Figure 15: Pottery from Iron II temple surrounds.

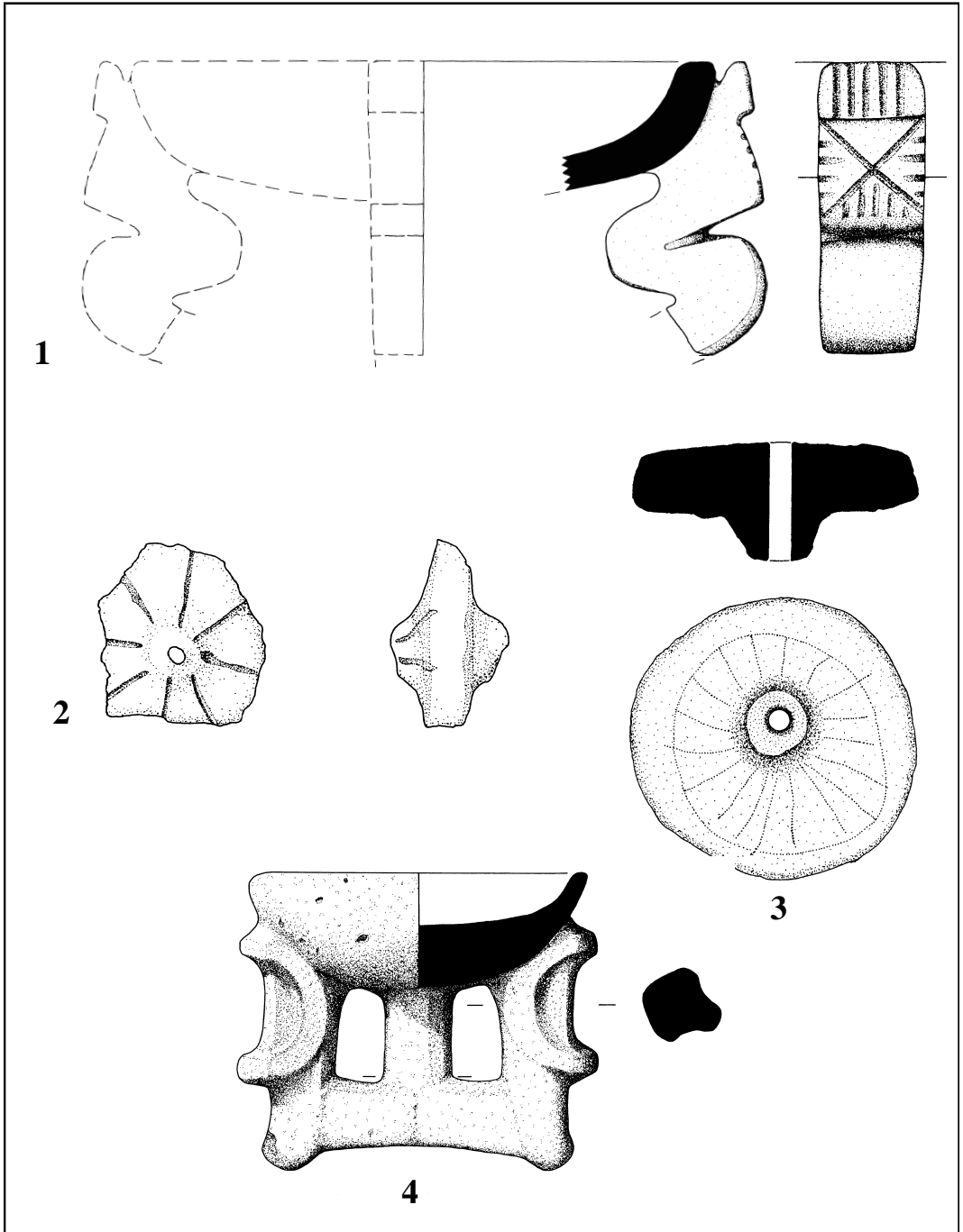


Figure 16: Non-ceramic objects from Iron II temple surrounds.

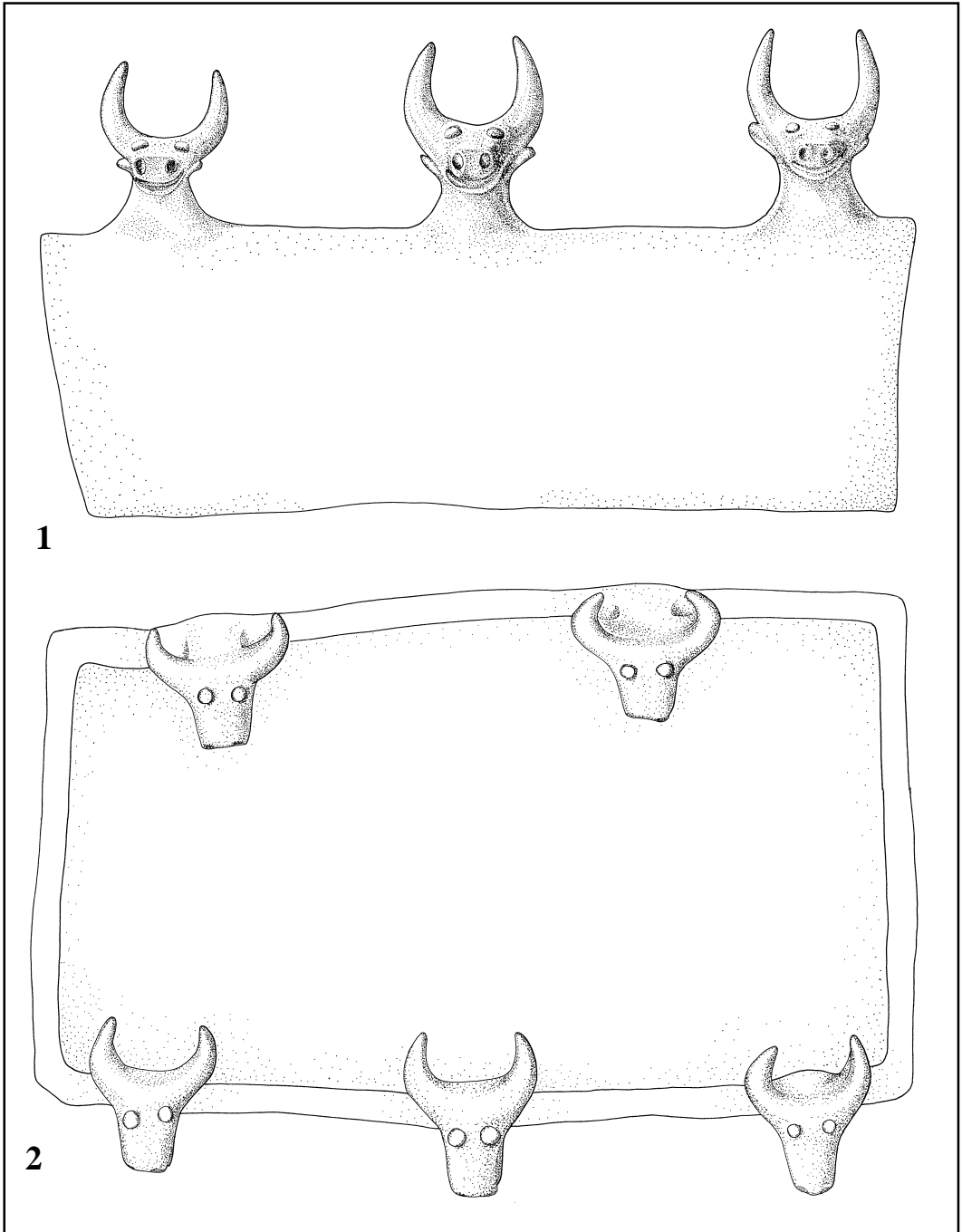


Figure 17: Ceramic model shrine from Iron II temple courtyard.

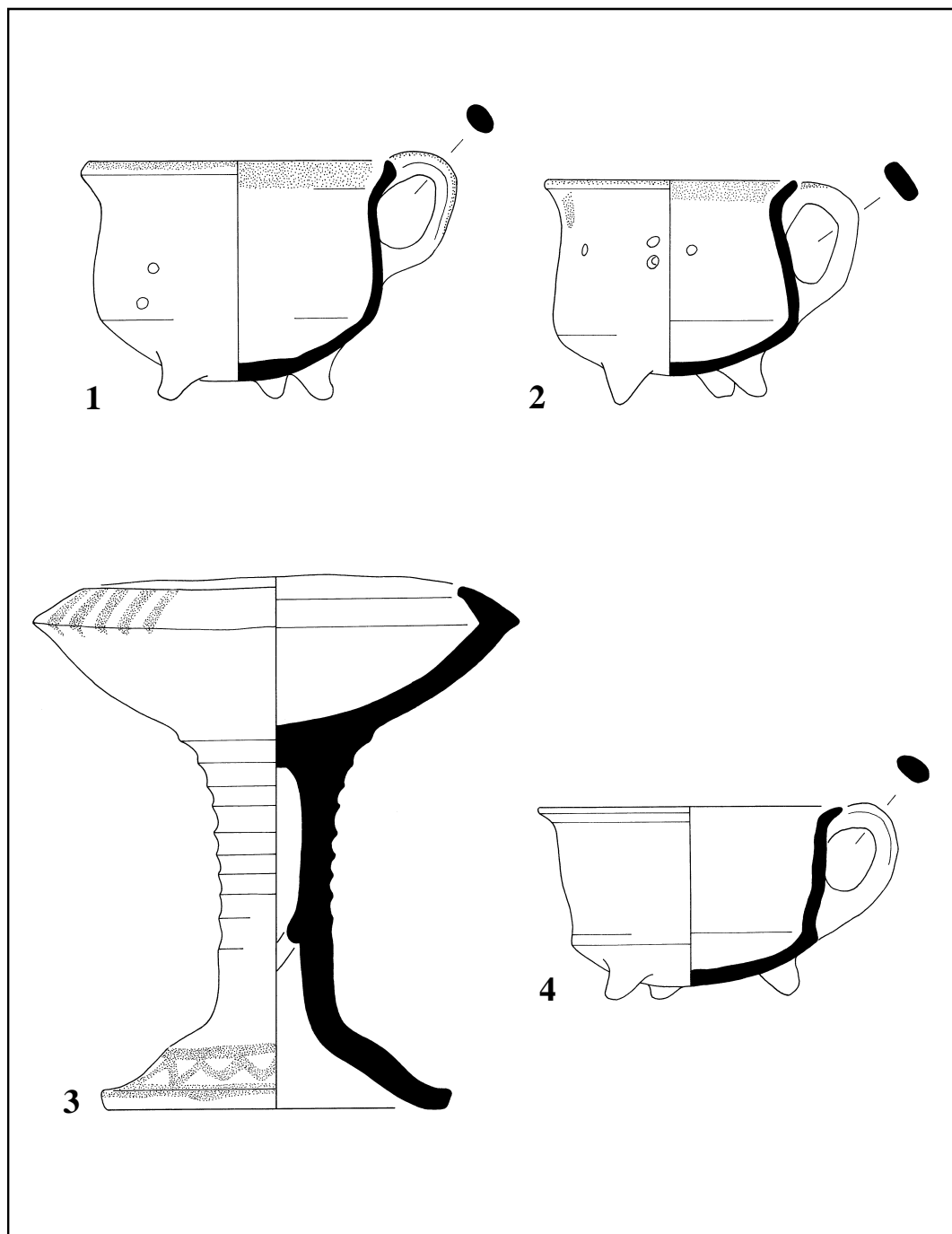


Figure 18: Ceramic incense cups and chalice from Iron II temple courtyard.

CONCLUSION

The study of changing cult practice at Pella in Jordan has only just begun. Detailed comparative analyses of the ceramic and non-ceramic materials from the many pit and occupation deposits contained within the temple precinct are far from complete. Numerous botanical and faunal samples have been processed, but these await quantitative analysis. However, the very great richness of these artefactual and zoo-botanical assemblages, and the relatively undisturbed nature of most contexts, gives promise that much can be achieved in the years to come. We aim to be able to provide firm data on changing patterns of cult practice at Pella, and through comparative analysis develop perspectives on the changing nature of regional cultic regimes over time.

This explicitly archaeological database can be employed to redress the balance of a hitherto overwhelmingly text-derived picture of Canaanite cult practice (Dever 1983). Archaeological evidence is of limited use when seeking after religious belief structures (Coogan 1987), but properly employed it can provide productive lines of enquiry on matters of cult practice, while acting as a corrective to purely literary critiques that hold out little promise of advancing knowledge of actual Canaanite cult practice. Pella is located on the eastern edge of the heartland of the Biblical world, apparently often in line of sight to major historical events recorded in Biblical and extra-Biblical sources. We anticipate results that will be broadly relevant to the continuing re-assessment of the changing religious landscapes of the Old Testament world.

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