

EDOM AND IDUMEA: SITES AND ARTIFACTS

—9—

A MONUMENTAL HELLENISTIC-PERIOD RITUAL COMPOUND IN UPPER IDUMEA: NEW FINDINGS FROM ḤORBAT ‘AMUDA

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1. Introduction

In 2017, following nearly a decade’s worth of excavations at the southern Judean Shephelah (Lowland) site of Ḥorbat Beit Lehi, the greater Beit Lehi Regional Project (BLRP) was inaugurated.¹ The project comprises a large-scale, multi-disciplinary endeavor that involves the mapping, surveying and pin-pointed excavation of a designated area south of Maresha. Within the research area – encompassing approximately 36 sq km – are numerous archaeological sites ranging in date from the Iron Age II until the Mamluk period, including a network of small- and medium-sized forts dating to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (Figures 9.1–9.2).

¹ The ancient village of Ḥorbat Beit Lehi (also known as Beit Loya) was excavated between 2005 and 2014 by Oren Gutfeld and Yakov Kalman on behalf of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and found to have been settled, with only a few gaps, from the late Iron Age II until the Mamluk period; see Gutfeld and Haber, *Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi)*; Gutfeld and Kalman, “Ḥorbat Bet Loya”; Gutfeld and Kalman, “Secrets of Ḥorbat Beit Loya.” The Beit Lehi Regional Project is a joint effort co-directed by Gutfeld and Michal Haber of The Hebrew University and Pablo Betzer of the Israel Antiquities Authority, in collaboration with Darin Taylor and Michael Harper of the Departments of Architectural and Engineering Design and Digital Media of Utah Valley University. The project is assisted by Debby Sandhaus-Reem (pottery identification) and Andrea Berlin (pottery identification and Hellenistic-era consultation), Mendel Kahan (surveyor), Assaf Peretz and Tal Rogovski (photography), Yoav Farhi (numismatic identification), and Mimi Lavi (finds conservation). The excavators extend their deep thanks to Alan Rudd and Gary Rudd, founders of the Beit Lehi Foundation, and to Matthew S. Holland, president of Utah Valley University (2009–2018), for their strong support throughout the years.



Figure 9.1. Location map of Ḥorbat ʿAmuda during the Hellenistic period.

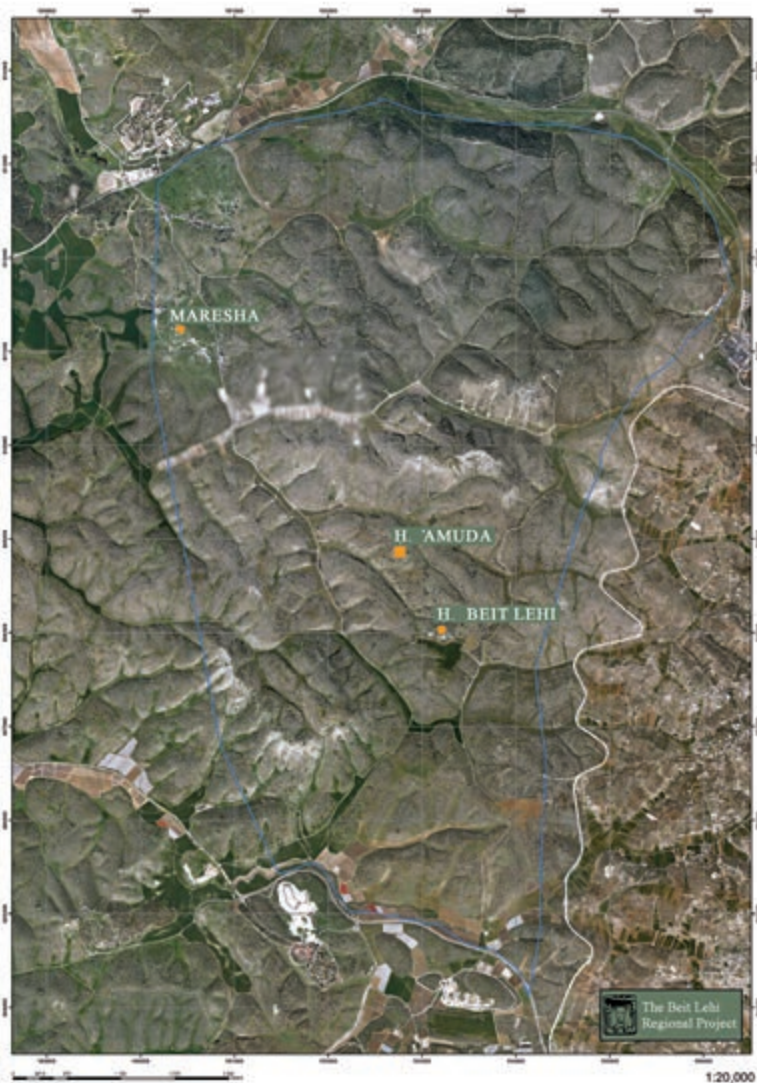


Figure 9.2. The designated study area of the Beit Lehi Regional Project.

Additionally, preliminary drone surveys undertaken within the project framework revealed extensive agricultural fields alongside an intricate road system that linked the various sites with one another and, to a certain extent, with the main regional highways. Accompanying ground surveys have exposed numerous subterranean installations, such as dovecotes, oil presses, burial caves and massive quarries, along with hiding tunnels likely used both the First Jewish-Roman War (66–70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 CE).

At the center of the current discussion are the remains of a sprawling structure, first discerned by air, just south of the ancient village of Ḥorbat ‘Amuda, or “Ruins of the Pillar” (Figure 9. 3). Located some 4 km southeast of Tel Maresha and only 1 km northwest of Beit Lehi (NIG 192670/608760), the site lies on a low ridge, approximately 360 m above sea level, between two tributaries of Naḥal Maresha. It was first mapped toward the end of the nineteenth century by Conder and Kitchener on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund, recorded as *Khūrbet Umm el ‘Amdân*. The two suggested a dating of the Byzantine period for the “cisterns, caves, foundations and heaps of stones,” and remarked on the absence of any pillars implied by the site name.² Around the same time Clermont-Ganneau also surveyed the area. His account of *Ēʿrak Abuʿl-‘Amed*, a spacious “cavern” inscribed with graffiti and containing a dovecote found a few hundred meters to the south of the same ridge, may well refer to Ḥorbat ‘Amuda.³ Over a century later, in the early 1990s, the site and its surroundings were surveyed by Dagan under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Although Dagan observed a wealth of archaeological features – including quarries, winepresses, caves, agricultural plots and installations – he made no mention of any large structure.⁴

As a result of the drone findings, four excavation seasons within the framework of BLRP have subsequently taken place at the site, beginning in Fall 2017.⁵ Further progress has unfortunately been halted due to COVID-19, and thus the findings and conclusions presented here are preliminary. The excavations have revealed an enormous, finely built compound dated by the ceramic, numismatic, and architectural evidence from the early third to the second quarter of the second century BCE; i.e., from the height of Ptolemaic rule in the region, past the rise of the Seleucid Empire and Classical Idumea, and until the outbreak of the Hasmonean Revolt (167–164 BCE).

The structure lies approximately 145 m northeast of a massive subterranean quarry, dubbed by the authors the “Seven-Pillar Cave.” Although perhaps a fanciful notion, it may have served as the original inspiration behind the toponym. This quarry comprises one out of seven soft limestone (*kirton*) quarries found beneath the remains of the village and its immediate environs.

About 155 m north of the structure is a large, multi-functional cave complex containing a quarry, stable oil press, Jewish ritual bath (*miqweh*), and a sophisticated hiding tunnel network. It has yielded rich finds dating from the Hellenistic period to the Bar Kokhba uprising. Among the many artifacts retrieved are the soft limestone vessels typical of the Late Second Temple period and which, like the ritual bath, unequivocally attest to a Jewish presence (see Discussion below).

² Conder and Kitchener, *Survey of Western Palestine*, 369–70.

³ Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine*, 444.

⁴ Dagan, *Map of Amazyra*, 110*–14*.

⁵ Gutfeld et al., “Horbat ‘Ammuda.”



Figure 9.3. The monumental compound at the end of the Fall 2019 excavation season, looking northwest.

2. The Monumental Compound

The huge structure, extending over an area measuring at least 75×57 m, is divided into a number of different wings containing chambers of various sizes and at least one large inner courtyard. While it has yet to be uncovered in its entirety (primarily in its western part), we are nevertheless able to identify three primary construction phases (Figures 9.4–9.5). We cannot, however, yet determine to what extent the transition between each phase was chronological or technical.

2.1 Phase I – The Small Sanctuary

In the early third century BCE, a small (7×14 m) rectangular-shaped structure was erected on the western end of the ridge, overlooking Naḥal Maresha. Oriented northwest to southeast, it was constructed of expertly hewn narrow ashlar of hard limestone (*nari*) set as headers and stretchers: one stone comprising the header and a set of three stones, one behind the other, serving as the stretcher (Figure 9.6).⁶ Both *kirton* and *nari* are readily available locally.

⁶ During the Hellenistic period headers and stretchers were widely used in public structures and fortifications, and are known locally from such sites as Akko, Dor, Samaria-Sebaste, Mount Gerizim and Maresha. For a brief survey of this construction technique in the Land of Israel, see Tal, *Archaeology of Hellenistic Palestine*, 33–37, Table 3a and further references therein.



Figure 9.4. Plan of the monumental compound and its primary construction phases.

The structure has been preserved to a height of only two courses, including a well-made foundation course laid directly on bedrock. No floor has survived. Several of the stones bear drafted margins and a few have a protruding boss. Two additional stones were placed as headers abutting the outer face of the structure's southwestern corner, thus extending the line of its western lengthwise wall. A mirror image is possibly seen in the southeastern corner as well (not yet excavated) and would indicate that entrance was from the south. This simple element recalls the clearly more complex antae typical of the façade of Hellenistic temples; indeed, the structure's impressive construction has led us to tentatively assign it a unique function, ceremonial or cultic, and it was thus named the "Small Sanctuary." Fragments of imported West Slope Ware were retrieved from the earth fill corresponding to its foundation level.⁷

⁷ Rosenthal-Heginbottom, "Hellenistic Period Imported Pottery," 677, Pl. 6.2.1; see also Rotroff, "West Slope in the East."



Figure 9.5. The “Small Sanctuary” of Phase I, looking east. Note how it is enveloped by later construction.

2.2 Phase II – The Main Compound and Southern Sanctuary

Sometime later in the third century BCE, the Small Sanctuary was enclosed within the northwestern corner of a large, square-shaped compound (45 × 54 m) containing an open courtyard at its center. Several rooms were discovered in the northern part of the new compound, enclosed by the same wall along its entire length, some of which may have opened southward onto the courtyard. A row of several small rooms was built south of the sanctuary as well, flanking the courtyard from the west. The northern enclosure wall was found also to abut the outer face of the sanctuary along its entire length, clearly signifying later construction. In addition, the southern end of the sanctuary’s western “anta” is also abutted by a later wall attributed to this phase (see Figure 9.4).

From the southern end of the courtyard (23 × 17 m), one would have ascended an imposing staircase, preserved to a height of three steps above a thick foundation wall. Stretching along the courtyard’s entire width (23 m), it in turn led into a series of three spacious, elongated chambers, situated one behind the other. The northwest–southeast axis of the three cohesive elements – the courtyard, staircase and three halls – is identical to that of the Small Sanctuary in the northwest, demonstrating that they coexisted, although in what capacity remains unclear. We term the three halls the “Southern Sanctuary” and



Figure 9.6. The staircase leading to “Southern Sanctuary,” looking southeast.

suggest viewing their layout as a local, far more modest adaptation of the pronaos, naos, and opisthodomos of a Hellenistic temple; or, alternatively, as the “broad rooms” identified by Aharoni in the temples at Arad, Lachish, and Beer-sheba (Figure 9.6; see Discussion below).⁸

It is noteworthy that the dividing wall between the Southern Sanctuary’s two northern halls is also built of headers and stretchers, albeit in a different method than that of the Small Sanctuary – which may have provided stylistic inspiration of a kind. Here we find a series of cubes built of two headers and two stretchers enclosing a core of small fieldstones. The wall’s state of preservation is poor, with most of the outer stretchers apparently looted long ago.

Traces of simple plastered floors were uncovered in its two southern halls, while all three halls are flanked on both east and west by a row of smaller rooms, also featuring plaster floors. One room in the eastern row was found to contain two shallow plastered vats. In a neighboring room the remains of five amphorae and storage jars were revealed, dating to the third century BCE. The presence of the latter is somewhat surprising, given the overall paucity of small finds in the compound.

⁸ Aharoni, “Solar Shrine,” 160–61; “Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba,” 163.

2.3 Phase III – The Eastern and Western Wings

Toward the end of the third century BCE a narrow row of rooms was erected along the entire eastern side of the compound. Based on a series of preliminary probes, it is possible that at this time, too, a more substantial wing was added along its entire western side; at this stage, we have exposed its southern and western bounds, but its westernmost bounds and precise dating remain to be determined.

In our first excavation season, a *kirton*-built, rectangular-shaped feature resembling a podium or platform was uncovered in what would turn out to be the northernmost chamber of the Phase III eastern wing (Figure 9.7). Measuring approximately 4 × 2 m and oriented northwest–southeast (parallel to the chamber’s western wall), its northern and southern ends abut the inner face of the chamber’s southern and northern walls. The feature comprises two parallel rows of narrow hewn stones placed lengthwise, enclosed on the east and west by narrow stones laid breadthwise, one such row on the east and two on the west. As in the case of nearly all the surrounding walls, it has been preserved to a height of two courses. A crude, narrow channel for fluids of some kind was hewn into the leveled bedrock to its west.



Figure 9.7. The northern podium, looking southeast. A small votive assemblage was discovered in the chamber to its west.



Figures 9.8a (above) and 9.8b (opposite) The two limestone incense burners found adjacent to the northern podium (photo credit: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority).

A small votive assemblage was discovered adjacent to the western face of the podium, slightly above the channel, containing five ceramic oil or perfume unguentaria and two cuboid incense burners made of soft limestone (Figure 9.8).⁹ The pottery comprises local Shephelah production, spanning the late fourth/early third to early/mid-second centuries BCE. Of the incense burners, the smaller is unadorned (about 6 cm high), while the larger (12 cm high) bears two images carved in relief on its faces. The central, striking image is that of a bull in the façade of a temple, standing between two columns and below an abstracted architrave; meeting above the architrave are two diagonal lines that descend from the upper corners. The same façade is seen also on the panel to its right, but between the two columns is what

⁹ More than 300 cuboid incense burners are known from the Land of Israel, dating almost exclusively to the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods. Most were found in the Shephelah and southern coastal plain; see Frevel and Pyschny, “Cuboid Incense Burners,” esp. 93–94. For further discussion and background, see Stern, *Material Culture* and O’Dwyer Shea, “Small Cuboid Incense-Burner.” Among the earliest examples of small stone cuboid altars from southern Israel come from the Late Iron Age (8th–7th centuries BCE) temple precinct at ‘En Hāzeva, some 70 km south of Beersheba in the central Arava Valley; see Ben-Arieh, “Temple Furniture from a Favissa at ‘En Hāzeva.”



appears to be the head of a horse. The two remaining faces feature the same entablature and diagonal lines but were left blank below.

During our Fall 2019 excavation season, a similar podium was unearthed in the eastern wing's southernmost room, approximately 42 m south of the northern podium and along its same axis. Measuring approximately 4 × 4 m and also of *kirton*, it has been preserved to a height of four courses. Its uppermost layer is composed of an inner spine made of one row of narrow stones laid breadthwise, flanked on either side by one row of seven or eight stones inserted lengthwise. The entire element stands flush against the room's northern wall. Two narrow stones, one facing the other and with a space of about 0.4 m between



Figure 9.9. The southern podium, looking southwest. Note the two narrow stones to its east, acting as a type of marker or entryway.

them, were placed about 1.2 m east of the podium. Perhaps this was a marker or entryway of sorts intended to emphasize the separation between the sacred “high place” of the podium and the rest of the room (Figure 9.9).

Two curious objects were discovered in relation to the podium: a roughly carved, octagonal cylindrical stone (13 × 19 cm); and a rounded, medium-sized fieldstone, its outer face slightly flattened, inserted into the lowest course of the podium’s eastern face and directly facing the center of the “entryway” (Figures 9.10–9.11). Both may have functioned as sacred standing stones (*masseboth*). A simple, undecorated incense burner was also found in the room, larger than its two northern counterparts.¹⁰

¹⁰ A near identical incense burner was unearthed in what has been identified as a Persian-period administrative center near Rosh Ha-‘Ayin, located between the western Samarian Foothills and the Coastal Plain. It was constructed during the fifth or fourth century and quietly abandoned sometime in the early third century BCE; see Haddad et al., “An Administrative Building,” 58, fig. 8. See also n. 16 below.



Figure 9.10. The rounded stone inserted into the eastern face of the podium, directly across the “entryway.”



Figure 9.11. The octagonal-shaped “standing stone” found near the northern podium (photo credit: Tal Rogovski).

3. Discussion

The sheer scale of the compound, alongside its unique construction techniques and various ritual/ceremonial features, have led us to identify it as a regional cultic and/or administrative center serving the hinterlands of Maresha. It was first established under Ptolemaic rule of Coele-Syria, expanding during the Seleucid era and ultimately meeting its end over the course of the Hasmonean Revolt. One can imagine it as a gleaming white edifice commanding the hilltop upon which it sits and the main road it overlooks, no doubt plainly visible from its surroundings. No contemporaneous public or cultic structure is known from the adjacent village of Beit Lehi, nor from any other settlement in the near vicinity, and thus the inhabitants would have almost certainly visited it.¹¹

In searching for a parallel for its earliest phase – the lone “Small Sanctuary” – a striking possibility may be found at Samaria-Sebaste. Revealed beneath the foundations of Herod’s Temple of Kore was a finely built, single-room elongated structure, measuring approximately 15 × 20 m and oriented east to west (Figure 9.12). Based on the dedicatory Greek inscription mentioning Isis and Sarapis discovered in its near vicinity – along with Rhodian amphora, other ceramic vessels and ten third-century-BCE coins – it was identified by Crowfoot, director of the Harvard University-led expedition to the site, as a Ptolemaic shrine to these two Egyptian deities, ultimately destroyed by John Hyrcanus.¹²

Returning to the Judean Lowlands, a close regional parallel for the larger Phase II and III compound may be found about 8 km to the west, in the Hellenistic-period temple at Tel Lachish. Dubbed the “Solar Shrine” by the original British expedition led by Tufnell, it was revisited in 1966 by Aharoni following his excavation of the Iron Age temple at Arad and after noting the “surprising similarity” between the two (Figure 9.13).¹³ Tufnell dated the establishment of the Lachish temple to the Persian period and the pottery found inside it to the second half of the second century BCE; while Aharoni assigned a dating of ca. 200 BCE for the former, rejecting any earlier phase.¹⁴

Measuring about 27 × 17 m and oriented east to west, the Lachish compound consists of a large courtyard with a series of small rooms along its eastern side and a staircase ascending westward from the courtyard to a broad antechamber, which in turn led into what Aharoni termed the “Holy-of-Holies.” Nine cuboid incense burners, all incised with simple drawings and a few with Aramaic inscriptions etched on their sides, were discovered inside the temple; while 213 (!) such burners, nearly all broken, had apparently been discarded into three pits located just beyond the southwestern corner of the tel.¹⁵ Strongly in-

¹¹ As yet unpublished, a large structure (measuring approximately 25 × 21 m) uncovered in the southeastern part of Maresha’s Lower City (Area 800) had been identified by the late Prof. Amos Kloner as a Hellenistic temple on the basis of its size, east-west axis, and presence of monumental architectural elements. In her doctoral dissertation, Graicer accepts the identification and attributes its construction to Ptolemy IV Philopator following his defeat of Antiochus III at Raphia in 217 BCE and in honor of his wife, Arsinoë III, as the embodiment of the goddess Isis; see “Urban Planning and Building,” 183–93, 373–76, fig. 2.263.

¹² Crowfoot et al., *Buildings at Samaria*, 65–66, fig. 29; *Objects from Samaria*, Pl. 5.1. It should be noted that the inscription was not discovered in a clear stratigraphic context corresponding to the earlier structure. Magness accepts the existence of an earlier Hellenistic shrine at the site, but disputes its attribution to Isis; see “Cults of Isis and Kore.”

¹³ Aharoni, “Solar Shrine,” 160.

¹⁴ Aharoni, *Lachish V*, 9; cf. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, 141–45. Stern and Ussishkin are also proponents of an earlier, Persian-period phase; see Ussishkin, *Biblical Lachish*, 340–42. For more on the debate behind the temple’s dating, see Tal, *Archaeology of Hellenistic Palestine*, 68–71.

¹⁵ Ussishkin, *Biblical Lachish*, 342–43. Contrary to Ussishkin, Stern and others, Frevel and Katharina Pyschny dismiss any cultic significance behind the existence of the depositories, instead attributing the fragments to a local workshop; see “Cuboid Incense Burners,” 93.

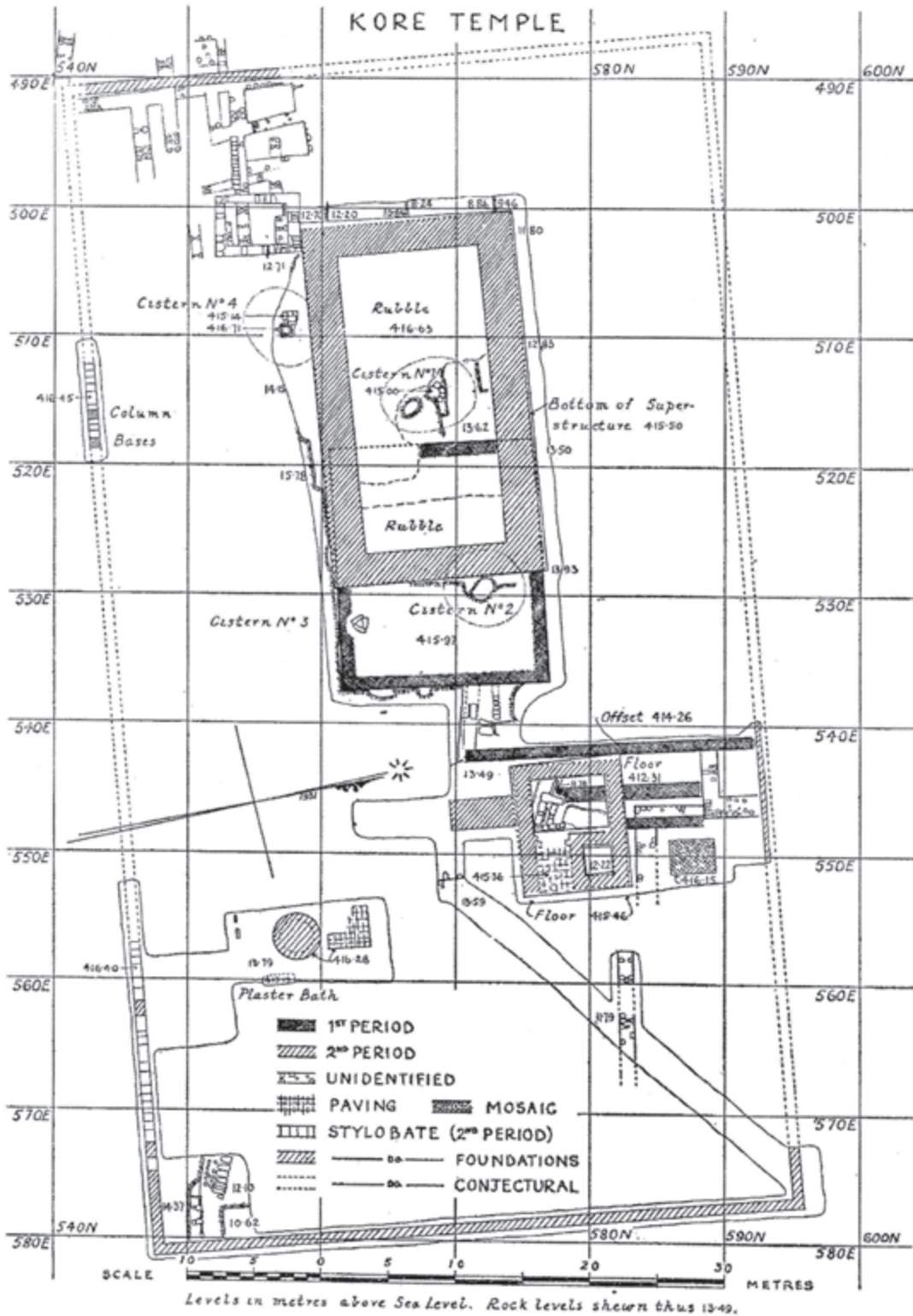


Figure 9.12. The Early Hellenistic-period shrine beneath the later Temple of Kore at Samaria-Sebaste (Crowfoot et al., *Buildings at Samaria*, fig. 29; credit: The Palestine Exploration Fund).

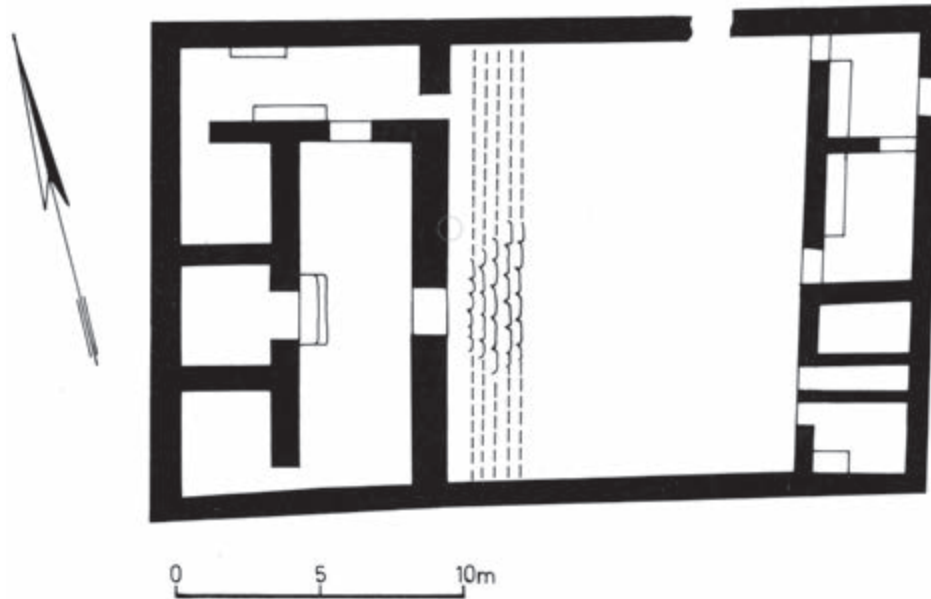


Figure 9.13. The Solar Shrine at Lachish (adapted from Aharoni, *Investigations at Lachish*, 10, fig. 3).

fluenced by his findings at Arad, Aharoni attributed the Hellenistic-period cult at Lachish to descendants of the Jews who remained in the area after its conquest by the Edomites following the fall of the First Temple, and who continued to practice an existing “Yahwistic” tradition.¹⁶

Another intriguing parallel, though slightly farther afield, is the Hellenistic temple at Tel Beer-sheba, also excavated by Aharoni (Figure 9.14). Here, in the southern edge of “Upper Idumea,”¹⁷ was an enclosed compound, also oriented east to west, with a spacious open courtyard (18 × 10 m) flanked on the east and west by a “broad room” and with a grouping of smaller chambers in one corner. The courtyard was found to contain a small stone-built platform (2 × 2 m) at its center, as well as two steps leading into the western broad room.¹⁸ Based on the numismatic evidence, Aharoni dated the temple from the mid-third century BCE to the conquest of Alexander Jannaeus in the early first century BCE, preceded by an earlier Persian- and Early Hellenistic-period “high place.” Although he noted the later structure’s similarity to

¹⁶ Aharoni, “Solar Shrine,” 161–63. In their thorough reinterpretation of Lachish during the Persian period (Level I), namely a discussion of the “Residency,” Fantalkin and Tal accept Aharoni’s identification of the structure as a “Yahwistic shrine” that served the Jewish inhabitants of the region. They maintain that it is the only structure at the site with “a secure Hellenistic date” (Level IC), going out of use in the second half of the second century BCE – but do not delve into the reasons behind its abandonment; see “Redating Lachish,” esp. 176–77. While we recognize that the layout of both the Lachish “Residency” and the Persian-period “administrative building” near Rosh Ha-‘Ayin (see n. 10 above) is similar in certain respects to that of the Phase II compound at ‘Amuda, due to space constraints, and coupled with our own unfinished excavation, at present we have chosen to focus solely on the Hellenistic period (cf. Figure 9.4 in this article; “Redating Lachish,” Fig. 2; Haddad et al., “An Administrative Building,” Fig. 2).

¹⁷ Josephus writes of “the city called Bersübee it is the furthest city in that part of the territory of the tribe of Judah which borders on the country of the Idumaeans” (*Antiquities* 8.348).

¹⁸ Aharoni identified the podium the base “of an altar of burnt offering”; see “Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba,” 164, Pl. 32:1.

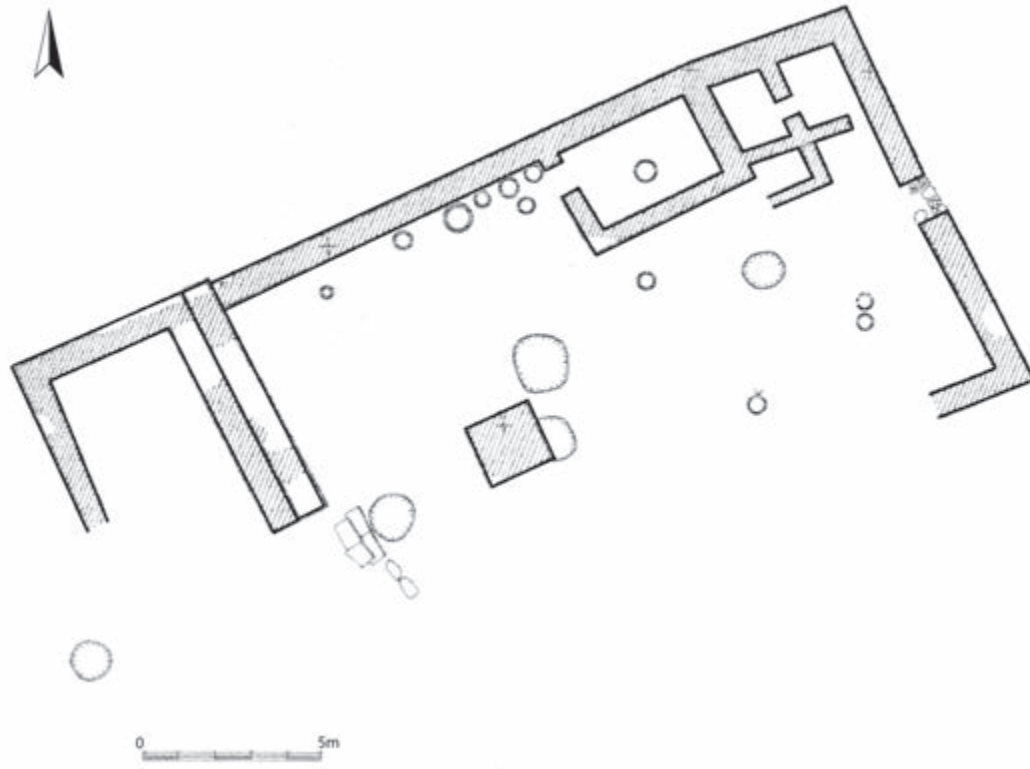


Figure 9.14. The Hellenistic-period temple at Tel Beer-sheba (adapted from Aharoni, “Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba,” fig. 8).

the “Israelite shrines” at both Arad and Lachish, he identified the rite practiced at Beer-sheba as a polytheistic cult incorporating assorted Aegean, Egyptian and Assyrian elements.¹⁹

We do not dispute that the north-south orientation of the various elements at Ḥorbat ‘Amuda comes in clear contrast to that of Samaria, Lachish, and Beer-sheba. Nevertheless, we cannot discount the unique, ritual/ceremonial characteristics of the former, and thus propose that this different alignment perhaps reflected a local flavor. Indeed, based on the proximity of the site to Maresha, alongside the total absence of Hasmonean-period finds from the compound itself, we view the latter firmly through the lens of pagan Idumea (albeit Hellenized). This conclusion is strengthened by the iconography of the larger cuboid incense burner from the northern podium room, namely that of the bull. In searching for the influences behind this specific image, we have tentatively arrived at two possibilities.

The first is its identification as Apis, one of several bull cults active in the Mediterranean and Near East throughout antiquity and which reached its epoch in Ptolemaic Egypt, continuing into the Late Roman period. The second relies on three artifacts that originated in the Qatabanian kingdom of South Arabia (modern Yemen), all bearing a carved image of a bull that is remarkably similar in form to that from Ḥorbat ‘Amuda. One of the three is a calcite-alabaster funerary stele from Bayhan al-Qasib, Yemen, dated

¹⁹ Aharoni, 163–65. The compound was later comprehensively reexamined by Steven Derfler, who believes that in its second and last phase, following the conquest of Hyrcanus and until the Roman period, the temple reverted to a Yahwistic shrine; see *Hellenistic Temple at Beersheva*. Tal rejects this argument, citing the large quantities of small finds that reflect a pagan ritual; see *Archaeology of Hellenistic Palestine*, 70–71.



Figure 9.15. A Qatabanian alabaster funerary stele from Bayhan al-Qasib, Yemen, dated to the second or first century BCE (photo credit: The Trustees of the British Museum).

to the second or first century BCE and found in the collections of the British Museum (Figure 9.15).²⁰ The other two had been sold through Christie's auction house and thus their exact provenance remains unknown: an inscribed limestone incense burner, dated ca. first century CE, and another inscribed alabaster funerary stele, attributed to the first century BCE–first century CE.²¹

It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that, in such a climate of cultural diffusion that was the Hellenistic period, the Idumeans – via the Incense Route of their Nabatean neighbors – would have been exposed to and easily adopted this motif. Indeed, the eclectic votive artifacts from the Beer-sheba temple attest to the acceptance of interregional ritual influences, with trade networks originating in South Arabia believed to have passed through the Beersheba Valley, onward to southern coastal plain, as early as the eighth century BCE.²² In this same light, we also propose that the two diagonal lines seen on the

²⁰ Lombardi, *South Arabian Funerary Stelae*, 99-104, 116. See also British Museum, "Calcite panel."

²¹ Christie's Auctions and Private Sales, "South Arabian Limestone Incense Burner"; "South Arabian Alabaster Funerary Stele." As an entity, Qataban came into existence already in the late eighth century BCE, reaching the height of its power between the fifth/fourth and first centuries BCE, and coming to an end toward the end of the second century CE; for more, see O'Neill, "South Arabian Funerary Artefacts," 81–84.

²² The topic of long-distance trade with South Arabia lies beyond the scope of the current study; for more on its origins, see Singer-Avitz, "Beersheba." She notes that, due to its location in a region nearly devoid of any particularly challenging physical obstacles, the Beersheba Valley served as a natural artery through which trade could pass.



Figure 9.16. The ceramic vessels of the votive assemblage from the northern podium chamber. Note the missing rims (photo credit: Tal Rogovski).

‘Amuda burners are possibly a schematic rendering of the step-gables (two staircases facing each other) known from the decorative façades of Nabatean tombs.²³

As for the ceramic vessels found alongside the two burners, it should be noted that three of their rims had been snapped off, seemingly a deliberate, symbolic gesture meant to ensure an end to any potency they may have once possessed (Figure 9.16). We cannot know whether this act was carried out by the local Idumeans who participated in the rite or by the Hasmonean soldiers of Judah Maccabee. An identical phenomenon was also observed, in greater quantities, at the Persian-period sanctuary at Mizpe Yammin in the Upper Galilee, active until the mid-fourth century BCE.²⁴

Also of particular significance is the striking dearth of small finds from the compound as a whole (including a near total lack of cooking ware), which appears to hint at the sweeping evacuation carried out by local officials ahead of the Hasmoneans’ arrival and the compound’s subsequent destruction. The few coins retrieved from the compound all date prior to the outbreak of the Hasmonean Revolt and include one issue each of Ptolemy I Soter (305–283 BCE), Ptolemy II Philadelphus (275/4 BCE), and Seleucus IV Philopater (175–173/2 BCE).²⁵ We wish to stress that a similar picture has emerged at Beit Lehi, also supported by the numismatic evidence: its abandonment as a result of the Hasmonean Revolt, and not, as long had been accepted, by Hyrcanus during his forays into Idumea nearly half a century later, ultimately conquering Maresha ca. 112/111 BCE. Indeed, Josephus recounts:

²³ The original classification of the Petra monuments and their ornamented façades, compiled in 1904, is still referenced today; see Brünnow and von Domaszewski, *Provincia Arabia*.

²⁴ Berlin and Frankel, “Sanctuary of Mizpe Yammin,” 69, figs. 22–23, 26. Many thanks are due Prof. Andrea Berlin of Boston University for her assistance in identifying the pottery at Horbat ‘Amuda as well as for calling our attention to the identical phenomenon of vessel “beheadings” observed in the sanctuary at Mizpe Yammin.

²⁵ The one exception is a silver denarius, dated ca. 137 BCE, retrieved from topsoil.

Meanwhile Judas and his brothers were warring on the Idumaeans without ceasing and pressed them closely on all sides; and after taking the city of Hebron, they destroyed all its fortifications and burned its towers; and they ravaged the foreign territory, including the city of Marisa.²⁶

Beit Lehi would be resettled by Jews sometime during the reign of Herod; based on the large quantities of Late Second Temple-period finds from the “multi-functional cave” (see above), Ḥorbat ‘Amuda was also resettled by a Jewish population, though we have yet to determine whether this took place under Hasmonean or Herodian rule. The monumental compound, however, would forever lie desolate.

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²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.353; cf. 13.257. Maccabees gives a similar account, emphasizing, as does Josephus, the ungodly nature of the Idumeans (2 Macc 5:65).

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