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# Terracotta Figurines from the Iron IIA Temple at Moza, Judah

Shua Kisilevitz

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## Archaeological Context

- 1 During the course of three seasons of salvage excavations conducted between the summer of 2012 and 2013 at Tel Moza, a large temple complex with an assemblage of pottery, cult artifacts, and figurines, unique in Iron II Judah, was unearthed.<sup>1</sup> The site, located approximately 7 km northwest of ancient Jerusalem (the City of David), has been identified as the biblical Mozah mentioned for the first time in the book of Joshua as a city in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:26).<sup>2</sup>
- 2 The temple was constructed in the Iron IIA in an east–west orientation, along a central axis. It follows the north Syria long room plan: a large temple building with a demarcated portico in its façade, and to the east a large courtyard with a prominent stone altar, adjacent refuse pit, and a rectangular stone built installation (hereafter referred to as podium). Four figurines, of which two are anthropomorphic and two are zoomorphic, were found along with pottery and cult artifacts on the courtyard floor, adjacent to the podium. The location of the podium within the courtyard and the accumulation of fragmented figurines at its feet, suggest that it may have functioned in some manner in the cult that took place in the courtyard, most likely as an offering table on which the figurines (and plausibly additional cult artefacts) were originally placed.

## Typological and Chronological Range of the Figurines

- 3 Of the anthropomorphic figurines only the heads were preserved, and the similarity between the two, one with a stippled chin clearly depicting a male, is evident. Both are sculpted in the round out of a solid piece of clay onto which clay appliqués were added to form the hair, headdress, and facial features. The latter include a prominent straight-edged nose with pierced nostrils, large bulky ears, pierced pellet eyes, and a barely

noticeable mouth. A prominent pointed chin is evident in both figurines, and both have strands of hair that fall down their napes, curling at the bottom; the strands are mostly fragmented in one of the figurines. Both have a round headdress with raised edges, which may recall headdresses of early Iron Age Philistine figurines believed to have originated from the Aegean polos. The two figurines are similar in the style in which they are fashioned, the scale and proportions of their facial features, and in the production techniques utilized in their creation (such as the piercing used to simulate nostrils and pupil).

Fig. 1. Anthropomorphic figurines from Moza

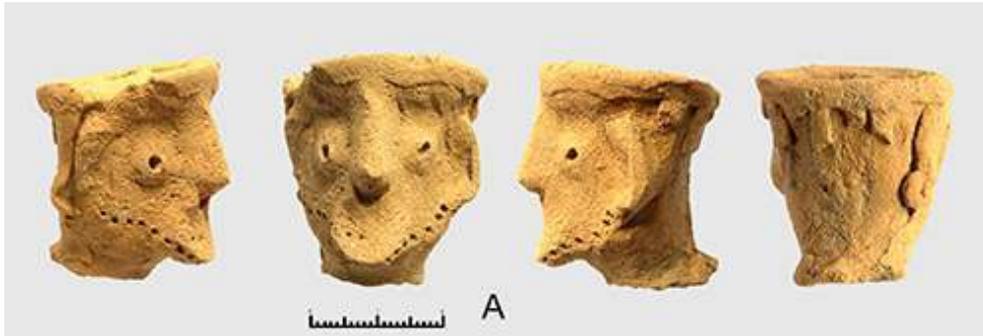


Photo: Clara Amit (Israel Antiquities Authority)

- 4 Anthropomorphic figurines are for the most part uncommon during the Iron IIA in the southern Levant and are predominantly idiosyncratic, making it difficult to find contemporary parallels, particularly in the case of male figurines. In Judah, figurines are nearly nonexistent during this time, and only a small number of schematic Iron IIA anthropomorphic figurines with pinched heads and applied pellet eyes were found at the City of David.<sup>3</sup> Given the dearth of clay figurines in Iron IIA Judah, the analogies to the figurines from Moza must be sought primarily in neighboring cultures. Intriguingly, even in Philistine sites, which exhibit a large Aegean-style assemblage during the Iron I, figurines are scant during the Iron IIA, only experiencing a certain revival (attributed to Judahite influence) in the Iron IIB.
- 5 Though the Moza figurines are in themselves unique, maintaining a local distinctiveness, with only a few contemporary parallels found, certain stylistic components and physiognomies such as facial characteristics, hairstyle, and headdress, resemble figurines found in neighboring cultures during the early Iron Age. Geographically and chronologically the closest parallel is a figurine from Iron IIA Kh. Qeiyafa<sup>4</sup> that displays the same use of the piercing technique and a raised round headdress, but differs in its proportions and detail. A figurine from Beth Shean,<sup>5</sup> probably originating in the Iron I, may be somewhat analogous, mainly in the application of clay to form hair locks. Certain Iron I figurines from Philistia, and perhaps Cyprus,<sup>6</sup> (both transmitting Aegean-style traditions) also share affinities with the figurines from Moza, particularly a figurine from Ashdod<sup>7</sup> that is similar in proportion and facial physiognomies, including pellet eyes (though not pierced) and a depiction of a beard (with the use of red color). Though chronologically later, a number of Iron Age figurines from Transjordan, such as a figurine from Deir 'Alla<sup>8</sup> and two figurines from the Busayra vicinity,<sup>9</sup> exhibit similarities to the Moza figurines, including: facial proportions and features, the use of piercing to simulate pupils, and the application of clay strands to create hair locks. These similarities can also

be observed in figures applied on Iron IIA stands found mainly in the northern valleys, expressing Canaanite iconography.

- 6 The two zoomorphic figurines are of harnessed animals, one of which originally supported a rider. Both figurines have bulging eyes pierced in the center, but this is the only feature they have in common. The first (fig. 2) is a large burnished horse figurine with a hollow body and solid head and limbs, unique in its meticulous fashioning and its somewhat realistic details. The feet of a rider, whose body is not preserved, remained attached to the horse; the trappings were created both by incision and by attaching clay appliqués. An additional piece of clay was used to form a long, perky tail extending downwards between the legs. The mouth is indicated by an incision, pierced at the center. The majority of parallels for this figurine originate in northern sites,<sup>10</sup> and its distinctive physiognomies, such as the detailed trappings and the perky tail, are derived from northern traditions that carry on in Phoenician figurines after the collapse of the northern kingdom.<sup>11</sup> The horse figurine also exhibits traits that are typical of the contemporary horse-shaped vessels (pierced mouth and a large hollow body), but are rendered un-functional since it could not have served as a container. It would seem this figurine constitutes a type of figurine that is influenced from the horse-shaped vessels in its production technique, but was ultimately utilized as a figurine.

Fig. 2. Large horse figurine from Moza



Photo: Clara Amit (Israel Antiquities Authority)

- 7 The second zoomorphic figurine (fig. 3) is a smaller solid and less meticulously crafted piece, with traces of a rider or pack on its back and applied blinkers on its head; this most likely also depicts a horse. To some extent, it is reminiscent of the horse figurines common in Judah during the Iron IIB-C 8<sup>th</sup> – early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E., although it is more detailed and less crude. It might be considered a forerunner of the prevalent Iron IIB Judahite horse figurines.
- 8 Both zoomorphic figurines are among the earliest horse figurines found in the southern Levant during the Iron Age, particularly in Judah. Additionally, in contrast to the generally schematic style exhibited in Iron II figurines from Judah, the equid figurines from Moza are more realistic and exhibit attention to detail and intricate workmanship, while they include features that are rare within the Iron IIA coroplastic sphere, namely the preserved rider's feet on the large horse and the blinkers applied to the small solid horse.

Fig. 3. Small horse figurine from Moza



Photo: Clara Amit (Israel Antiquities Authority)

- 9 The divergence between the prevalent Iron IIB Judahite figurines and the Iron IIA figurines from Moza is not only stylistic and chronological, but also contextual. Once they had served their purpose figurines were generally treated as any other household rubbish.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the Iron IIB figurines found in abundance throughout Judah, and specifically in Jerusalem, in which they are found predominantly in residential contexts (mostly discarded in fills) and tombs. However, the Moza figurines were not simply discarded. Instead, their fragments were found embedded in the pottery and cult assemblage laying on the courtyard floor beside the podium; they are attributed to the temple's original phase and were intentionally sealed by a layer of earth with lumps of plaster. The care taken in separating the figurines and the assemblage to which they belonged from the rest of the temple complex demonstrates their significance and likely attests to their sanctified nature, which persisted even after they were decommissioned. The figurines from Moza are unique, since their place in a clear religious context within a temple complex, along with additional cult artifacts, attests to their undoubtable association with the cultic activity that took place at the temple. As the entire assemblage appears to be indigenous, since this material was made from the same composition of local Moza marl clay, as indicated by an initial petrographic assessment, it seems they should be viewed as one local group of items possibly created by the same workshop. They were likely produced with the intention of serving in rituals held at the temple, and probably functioned as mediatory objects to transmit magical influence, connecting human worshippers and divine powers.<sup>13</sup>
- 10 The motifs exemplified in the figurines and cultic vessels are drawn from conventions, some prevailing since the third millennium B.C.E., prevalent in the ancient Near East; including traditions from the Aegean sphere (transmitted especially via Philistia), Phoenicia, North Syria, and possibly Transjordan.

**Author's note:**

Although terracotta figurines of the Iron Age in the ancient Near East have been discussed and analyzed extensively by various scholars, whether in individual papers, or as part of regional studies, it can be said that studies of Iron Age figurines tend to group the figurines from Israel and Judah (often including Transjordan) into one corpus, and overwhelmingly focus on Iron IIB female figurines. In most cases the figurines of the Iron IIA were not separated from those of the Iron IIB within the publication. Therefore, and in stark contrast with the latter, no study has yet been dedicated to the Iron IIA figurines in its entirety. The virtual lack of comprehensive studies of Iron IIA figurines is presumably due to the paucity of such figurines in the southern Levant; a gap in the study of coroplastic art that the Moza figurines assist in bridging.

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## ENDNOTES

1. This article is a partial synopsis of an M.A. thesis *Figurines and Cultic Vessels from the Temple at Moza, Iron IIA* under the direction of Tallay Ornan and Doron Ben-Ami at the Institute of Archaeology at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2016.
2. The excavations were carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority, directed by Anna EIRIKH, Zvi GREENHUT, Hamudi KHALAILY, and the author.
3. GILBERT-PERETZ 1996, fig 10:13, pl. 1:8.
4. GARFINKEL 2012, 164–165, fig. 41.
5. MAZAR 2009, 536–538, fig. 9.3, photo 9.3.
6. KARAGEORGHIS 1993, 26–27, 31, figs. 6, 16, pls. 17:1, 18:10.
7. BEN-SHLOMO 2005, 161, fig. 3.62:1.
8. IBRAHIM and VAN DER KOOIJ 1983, 579, fig. 1:1, pl 125:1.
9. HARDING 1937, 253-254, pls. 9–10, figs. 1–2, 6–7.
10. Such as at Tell El-Far'ah North (CHAMBON 1984, pl. 65:1), Tel Rehov (IM 2006, 92, catalogue no.16) and Tell en-Naşbeh (MCCOWN et al. 1947, 300, pl. 87:1).
11. Such as at Achziv (MAZAR 2001, 119, figs. 55, 56, 145, 146).
12. KLETTER 1996, 57–62; MOOREY 2003, 2.
13. Similarly to the manner in which the female pillar figurines with ample breasts may have served as fertility amulets (VAN DER TOORN 2002, 53).

## ABSTRACTS

Four terracotta figurines, of which two are anthropomorphic and two are zoomorphic, were found within an assemblage of cult artifacts lying on the packed earth floor of an Iron IIA temple courtyard unearthed in the course of the renewed excavations at Tel Moza. The figurines are made of local clay, and likely produced with the intention of serving in rituals held at the temple. Though they are idiosyncratic, they incorporate motifs that are drawn from conventions prevalent throughout the Ancient Near East. These figurines are among the earliest Iron II figurines found in the southern Levant, and may constitute forerunners of the ubiquitous Iron IIB figurines prevalent throughout this region.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** figurines, Iron IIA, Judah, Ancient Israelite Religion, Tel Moza

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