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A PILGRIMAGE TO IRON AGE II TEL DAN

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Abstract

Pilgrimage—a journey to a shrine or other sacred place undertaken to gain divine aid, as an act of thanksgiving or penance, or to demonstrate devotion within a particular religious system—has been the subject of archeological investigation in recent years. The site of Tel Dan (Tell el-Qāḍi), Israel, provides a unique opportunity to explore pilgrimage because its remains have been exposed over a wide expanse and it has produced a great deal of archeological data. Dan is also remembered in the Hebrew Bible as an Israelite pilgrimage destination. In this paper we attempt to recreate the experience of a pilgrim moving through the stations of the pilgrimage itinerary of Holy Dan. We end by providing a synthetic analysis of pilgrimage at the site invoking biblical, archeological, iconographic, and ancient Near Eastern textual data, viewed through a phenomenological lens.

Les pèlerinages – des voyages à destination d'un tombeau ou d'un autre lieu saint, entrepris pour obtenir de l'aide divine, comme acte d'actions de grâce ou de repentance, ou pour montrer sa dévotion à un système religieux particulier—ont récemment été l'objet de recherches archéologiques. Le site de Tel Dan (Tell el-Qadi), en Israël, offre une opportunité unique d'étudier le pèlerinage, car ses vestiges ont été excavés sur une grande surface, et ont donné lieu à un grand nombre de données archéologiques. La Bible hébraïque fait également mémoire de Dan, comme une destination de pèlerinage israélite. Dans cette contribution, nous essayons de recréer l'expérience d'un·e pèlerin·e qui se déplacerait à travers les stations de l'itinéraire du pèlerinage pour le lieu saint de Dan. Nous terminons en offrant une analyse synthétique du pèlerinage sur le site, en utilisant des données bibliques, archéologiques, iconographiques ainsi que des éléments textuels du Proche-Orient Ancien, analysés à travers un prisme phénoménologique.

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Pilgrimage is a hallmark of many religious systems, past and present, and a topic of particular interest to archeologists because ritual actions often leave material traces. If "pilgrimage" is defined as a journey to a sacred *place*, undertaken as an act of worship, the materiality of that physical space, accessible to archeology, will provide data that will facilitate our understanding of the religious experience. The artifacts and ecofacts encountered at pilgrimage destinations allow us to reconstruct the connections between things and spaces—the nature and sequences of ritual action.[1] These reconstructions, in turn, allow us to speculate about the cognitive and emotive dimensions of the pilgrim's experience.

The topic of pilgrimage has also received much attention from biblical scholars. The emphasis in the literature is primarily on the prescriptive and descriptive accounts in the Pentateuch/Torah of celebrations of biblical festivals. Much of the discussion focuses on the dating of textual strata,[2] though some studies have ventured into phenomenological

[1] For example, Zevit 2001, 81–83; Blake 2005; Hesse, Wapnish, and Greer 2012; Mandell and Smoak 2019.

[2] For example, de Vaux 1961; Wagenaar 2005.

Figure 1. Location of Tel Dan (courtesy of Conn Herriott)

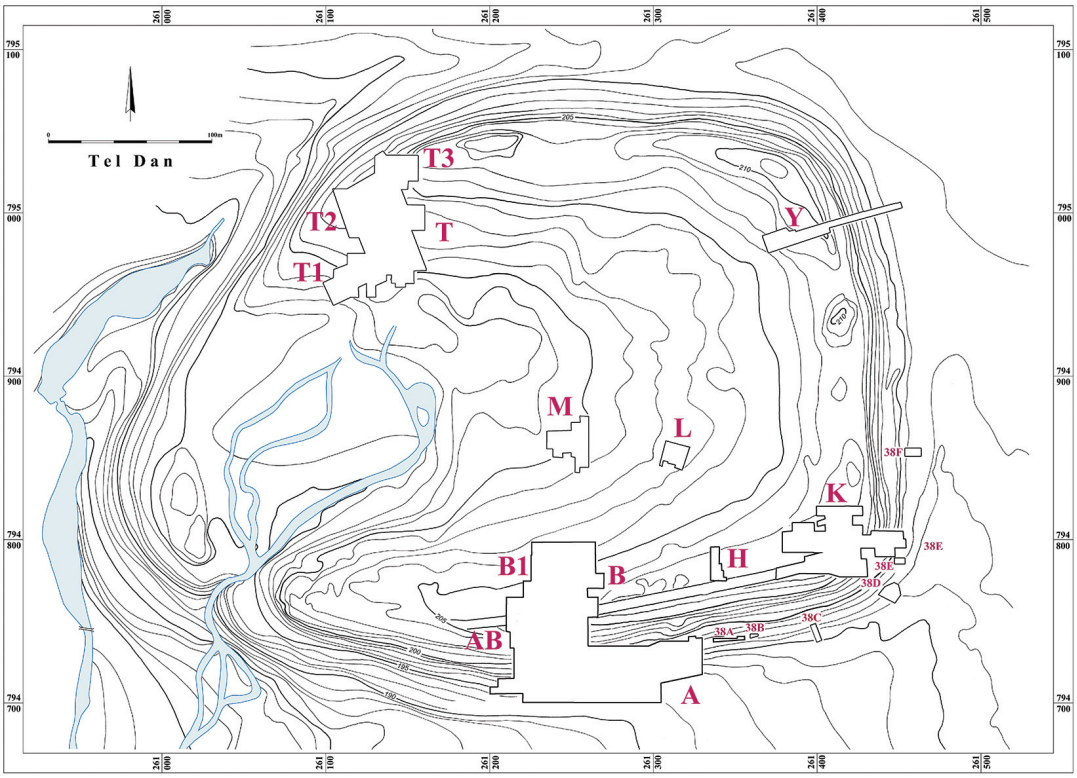

Figure 2. Site plan of Tel Dan with pilgrimage stations labeled (courtesy of Dov Porotsky)

dimensions of religious experience.[3] The majority of textual inquiries, however, are carried out without reference to archeology. While largely a symptom of a long-recognized methodological disconnect,[4] the neglect is also understandable in that there are no undisputed material remains of a temple in Iron Age Jerusalem—the primary destination of pilgrimage mentioned in the Hebrew Bible—during any phase that may correspond to the composition of these texts. Thus, any correlations between text and archeology simply lack a "space" in which they might be explored.

The site of Tel Dan (Tell el-Qāḍi, Figures 1–2) in northern Israel has been long recognized as the city of the same name in the Hebrew Bible (Robinson and Smith 1841). In the biblical text, Dan is identified in several places as an ancient Yahwistic worship center, albeit not in an entirely positive light. In the foundation story in Judges 17–18, the shrine

[3] For example, Haran 1978; Klingbeil 1995.

[4] See Dever 1997; Levy 2010.

is established by marauding Danites, outfitted with a silver image, and serviced by a Levitical priesthood of Yahweh. In 1 Kgs 12:26–33, the shrine is revivified as one of two royal Yahwistic cult centers of northern Israel, housing a golden calf. Most importantly for the purposes of the discussion here, it is explicitly identified as a destination of festal pilgrimage. In Amos 8:14, its religious status, and perhaps pilgrimage association, is assumed.[5]

From an archeological perspective, even without the biblical description and discourse concerning Israelite pilgrimage to Dan, we would identify much of what we find in the Iron Age levels as ceremonial in nature. Many of the site's finds meet generally accepted criteria for identifying cultic sites and assemblages,[6] including altars, votives, stelae, and other cultic paraphernalia (Biran 1994). Yet the potential contribution of Tel Dan to the study of Israelite religion is still largely untapped.[7]

In this article, we seek to explore the experience of pilgrimage to Tel Dan through an integrated analysis of the archeological remains, relevant texts, and iconography. There is some question as to whether Tel Dan was "Israelite" in the earlier part of the Iron Age II period, in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE, and it was certainly ruled by Aram-Damascus in at least part of the ninth and early eighth centuries BCE.[8] That said, there is consensus that Tel Dan was a Yahwistic cult

[5] Another ancient testament to the religious importance of the site occurs in LXX 2 Sam 20:18, thought to be a better reading, recounting memories of oracular inquiries at Abel "and at Dan." See discussion in McCarter 1980, 428–29.

[6] Cf. the archeological correlates for ritual behavior laid out by Colin Renfrew (1985) adapted to the field of Israelite religion by Ziony Zevit (2001, 81–83), and specifically to the Tel Dan assemblage by Andrew Davis (2013, 22–28).

[7] Note the lack of any mention of Tel Dan in Rainer Albertz's (1994) classic study, highlighted by Dever's (1996) review. Even in more recent treatments, the site is minimized (e.g., Faust 2019, 7–8) or overlooked (e.g., Garfinkel and Mumcuoglu 2016).

[8] Arie 2008; Ilan 2019. See Thareani 2019a; 2019b; Greer 2017b. Note, however, that the crux of Eran Arie's (2008) argument for rejecting an Israelite association with the earliest Iron Age phases—i.e., a proposed gap in the archeological record corresponding to the Iron IIA—has not been substantiated by further excavations, as has been addressed most comprehensively by Yifat Thareani (2019a, 2019b).

center at least in the eighth century BCE, and likely long after,[9] and the following exploration lies within that context. Archeologically, we are focusing on Stratum II, though many of the relevant features are present in Stratum III as well, albeit in a less distinct expression. Thus, Tel Dan will serve as the theater for the unfolding ritual drama we reconstruct—or perhaps more accurately *construct*—with our informed imaginations.

We will walk the reader through the archeologically defined physical spaces of the site (Figures 2–3), pausing at various "stations" along the way to consider the experiential dimension of those spaces.

Figure 3. Aerial photo of Tel Dan, looking north, marking the first stations of the onsite pilgrim itinerary (courtesy of Albatross Aerial Photography)

Thus, many of the reconstructions based on that assumption (e.g., Berlejung 2009; Finkelstein and Schmid 2017; Römer 2017) may need to be revised.

[9] Evidence for later veneration is the Hellenisitic Zoilos inscription dedicated to the "God who is in Dan" (Biran 1981), most likely Yahweh, and an explicit association with divine revelation from Yahweh in 1 Enoch 12–16. Some have also suggested that the region of Tel Dan is depicted as the site of revelation in the Testament of Levi 2–7, though this is not certain; Shechem may be implied (see discussion and references in Ackerman 2013, 157 n. 13).

Approaching Holy Dan

For travelers anticipating the pilgrimage to Dan, the journey itself would have been sacred.[10] Nestled at the base of Mount Hermon, which towers above the Hula Valley at over 2,700 m above sea level, the site is located next to the largest spring in the Levant (Figures 3–4). Both written sources and archeological remains suggest that the entire region may have been considered holy—from Ugaritic texts[11] to 1 Enoch (and the Bible), from Dan to Banias to the Iturian summit shrine on Mount Hermon, and a number of other shrines as well.[12] A case has been made for an *in antis*, or *migdal* temple dating to the Middle Bronze Age

Figure 4. The Dan spring: the most effluent in the Middle East (courtesy of David Ilan)

[10] van Gennep 1960, 184–85; Coleman and Elsner 1995, 6, 205–7; McCorriston 2011, 34–35; Greenia 2018, 10.

[11] Dussaud 1936; Lipinski 1971.

[12] For example, Clermont-Ganneau 1903; Dar 1993; Ma'oz 1993; Wilson 2004; Tzaferis 2008.

(ca. eighteenth century) under the Iron Age temple platform at Tel Dan itself (Ilan 2018). In the Iron II, Persian, Hellenistic, and Late Roman periods the temple complex and other ritual installations—those discussed in this article—were certainly well known.

The ancient city of Laish/Dan lay at an important crossroads, including one branch of the international highway connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. The road from Tyre (joined by a branch from Sidon) to Damascus passed just north of Dan, connecting maritime and inland centers, as well as another road running north and south through the Hula and Beqa'a Valleys (Figure 5). The only Iron II gate identified thus far is located on the southern edge of the city, and so our itinerary will begin there.

Figure 5. The roads leading to Tel Dan (courtesy of Conn Herriot)

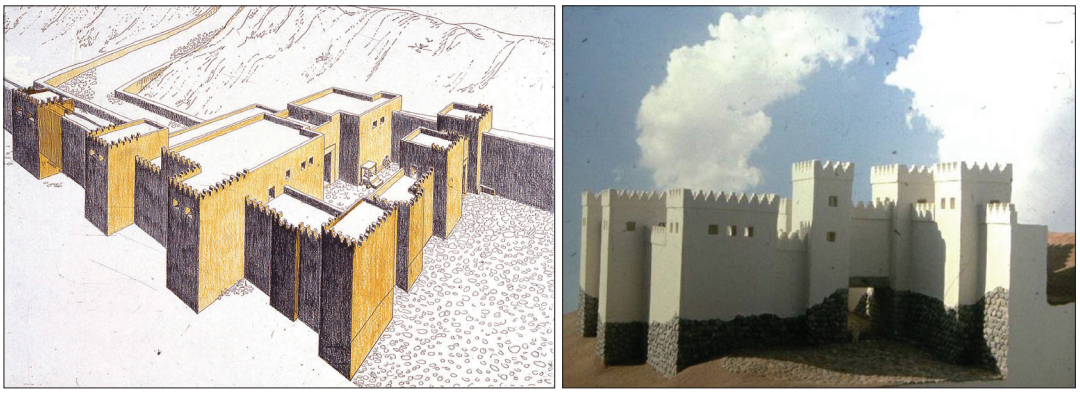

Figure 6. The Dan fortifications (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Approaching from the south, the Iron II pilgrim would have spotted Dan's towering fortifications from afar (Figure 6).[13] The lower portion of the buttressed wall was constructed of basalt boulders and the upper portion with mudbricks. The highest current point of preservation is 3.5 m, but the original height would have been at least 8 m, the height required to match the height of the ascending road (Biran 1994, 249–50). The walls were plastered and topped by crenellations (Figure 7). Massive towers flanked the gate. Extensive pavements abutted the walls along the southern circumference of the site, forming streets and a large open plaza in front of the gate itself (Figure 8). These monumental walls and towers would have meant more to the pilgrim than physical protection and a projection of power; they symbolically delimited the dwelling compound of the resident deity—the divine monarch. The various ritual installations along the city's roads and plazas marked stages of transition between the outside world and the deity's inner sanctum, liminal zones through which the pilgrim passed from one state of being to another—from prosaic day-to-day existence and subsistence to the transcendent realm of the deity: spirit, cosmos, and ecstasy.

[13] The walls were built in two main phases; the first is currently dated to the ninth century BCE, attributed to the Omrides by Biran (1994, 246) and to Aram-Damascus by Ilan (2019, 121–22). The second is dated to the eighth century BCE, and was likely commissioned by Jeroboam II (Biran 1994, 249–53).

Figure 7. Crenellations found near the upper fortification wall in Area AB. Similar crenellations were found in Area T and may have adorned the altar compound wall in the Persian period (courtesy of David Ilan)

Arriving at the gate plaza, the pilgrim encountered the *ḥuṣṣot* (חוצות), a complex of structures initially understood as market stalls (Biran 1999, 50–52, based on 1 Kgs 20:34). However, alternative interpretations are to be preferred in light of the inconsistency in the size and spacing of the rooms, the lack of redundancy of artifacts or commodities, and the absence of weights. The frequency of bowls and lamps is high, with a smaller component of jars and jugs. This suggests small-scale consumption and nocturnal activity; the structures could be understood as lodging facilities. Perhaps more likely, though, is a ritual function, even sacred feasting. Most importantly, two bronze plaques featuring deity representations (Figure 9) were discovered in adjacent spaces, one of which may represent Yahweh (or Baal-Hadad).[14] Whether the plaques

[14] On a possible identification with Yahweh, see Smith 2007, 387–88; Greer 2013, 22–24 (and note the connection to the Taanach cult stand discussed there). Tallay

Figure 8. Aerial photo (looking west) showing the eighth century BCE gate, the plaza outside the gate and fortification wall, and the external annex (*ḥuṣṣot*), which we interpret as the headquarters of ritual personnel (courtesy of Albatross Aerial Photography)

Figure 9. The bronze plaques from the *ḥuṣṣot*. These may have been mounted on poles or staffs held by ritual personnel who lead processions of pilgrims into the holy city (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

functioned as ceremonial standards or fixed icons, the images may have served as "focusing devices" for pilgrims preparing to enter the holy city. Their portability invites speculation that they were mounted on standards and carried by priests leading pilgrims into the city after meeting them at the so-called *ḥuṣṣot*.

Station 1: The First Imprint of the Deity

The first clearly cultic installation the pilgrim would have encountered would have been a shrine along the southern face of the city wall consisting of five small vertical basalt slabs identified as "standing stones," or *maṣṣebot* (מצבות Figure 10). The stones were set up against the city wall with the pavement built up to them, demonstrating conscientious placement, though no other signs of veneration have been recovered.[15]

Ornan (2006, 302–03), following Biran's original suggestion (Biran 1999, 54), argues that the deity is best understood as a goddess based on the small triangles adorning her clothing and what may be a mirror in her hand typical of female deities. Though noting that male deities were more frequently associated with bovine iconography in the first millennium, she draws a parallel to the Malatya 13 image interpreted as depicting Kubaba on a bull. However, we find the morphological characteristics of the animal on Malatya 13 to fit better with a goat or with the traditional identification of a stag (thus, illustrating an "animal-vehicle swap" between Kubaba and Karhuhas). Further, the figure on the plaque is depicted with wings typical of Baal-type deities of the first millennium (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 248–62; cf. Cornelius 1994), and the garment is ambiguous. If, indeed, the plaque depicts a male deity on the back of a (young?) bull, perhaps 1 Kgs 12 is a reflection of a Danite association of the deity with bovine iconography. If the iconography represents an Aramean deity, however, Baal-Hadad would be the most likely candidate.

[15] A new installation was constructed in the seventh century BCE, closer to the gate, over the debris of the destruction of the late eighth century—the result of the Assyrian campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III or of an earthquake (Biran 2002, 9–11). Here, only three (or possibly four) *maṣṣebot* were uncovered, fronted by a basalt bowl filled with ashes resting on a stone pedestal, along with two juglets and three lamps. Thus, we can say that ritual action continued in the plaza, though how it related to eighth-century ritual and religion is unclear.

Figure 10. The first group of five *maṣṣebot*. We interpret these as personifying the foot of the deity (El/Yahweh) (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

This installation is, in fact, the first of three groups of five small *maṣṣebot* (Biran 1998), each group dating to the eighth century BCE.[16] As for the significance of the number five, we can, of course, only speculate. They may represent five deities, but little in either the textual record or the archeological record supports this. They may represent people, either individuals or groups, but which ones? A more tactile explanation is that they represent the fingers of the worshipper in a gesture of obeisance, following the imagery on the Late Bronze Age stele found in the Hazor Area C Temple (Yadin 1972, 67–74). In a similar way, the five *maṣṣebot* may represent the hands of the deity, perhaps

[16] One group of *maṣṣebot* (at Station 5) was identified only years after being excavated, suggesting the possibility that others may have gone unnoticed or have even been dismantled.

Yahweh himself, in a gesture of blessing.[17] However, the interpretation suggested here is that the five slabs represent the feet of the deity (the slabs are the toes) as his immanence enters the sacred place together with the pilgrim. The inspiration for this proposal is found in the great footsteps carved into the thresholds of the ʿAin Dara Temple in Syria,[18] and may reflect biblical imagery of Yahweh's presence (e.g., Ezek 43:7 where Yahweh identified the Temple as his throne and "the place for the soles of my feet" (את מקום כפות רגלי); see also the irony in Mic 1:2–7 in which footprints would be left in the treading of the shrines).

Crossing through the Outer Gate

The pilgrim would then have continued to the west, perhaps physically following a priest holding a raised standard, symbolically following the unshod deity, toward the first encountered, outermost gate. Passing through flanking pilasters topped with proto-Aeolic capitals (Figure 11), the worshipper would have passed a hexagonal freestanding column installed in the gate passage (Figure 12), probably to preclude the entry of wheeled vehicles.[19] More significantly, the pilgrim would have entered a liminal zone—the symbolic threshold between "outside" and "inside." We suggest that the contrast was not so stark as to suggest a transition from "profane" to "sacred," but rather a movement of graded contrast, moving from less holy to more holy, as one progressed along the pilgrim trail, coming one step closer to the temple itself.[20]

[17] Note, in this respect, the suggestion of Judith Hadley (1987) that the image of the "hand" (Heb. יד) at Khirbet el-Qom may have been intended to connote the notion of a "memorial" or "monument," another meaning of יד. This idea has been expanded by Alice Mandell and Justin Smoak (2019), who see the hand as a way of marking out sacred space.

[18] Abu Assaf 1990; Monson 2006; Novak 2012.

[19] The lower gateway is also significantly narrower than most other Iron Age gates: 3.7 m vs. a standard of 4.2 m (Dorsey 1991, 21), which may further indicate that vehicular traffic was disallowed.

[20] See Haran 1978, 175–88; Jenson 1992. See also Mandell and Smoak 2019, building on Frankfurter 2008; Tweed 2011.

Figure 11. The pilasters (a) of the outer gate and one of the proto-Aeolic capitals (b) found in the outer plaza that probably rested on one of the pilasters (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology).

Figure 12. The four-paneled, freestanding column, set just outside the entrance to the outer gate. This would have blocked wheeled vehicles from entering the city (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Station 2: The Second Imprint of the Deity

In this liminal zone, just inside the outer gate (Figure 13), the second set of five *maṣṣebot* is found, situated directly on the pilgrim's right as they would have entered the inner plaza, quite literally "one (deity) step" closer to the temple (Figure 14). It is as if the stride of the deity itself symbolically delimits and distinguishes these zones of holiness. Here again, we draw a parallel to the 'Ain Dara prints, with a pair on the threshold of the porch, followed by a left-footed imprint on the threshold before the hall, and a right-footed imprint on the threshold before the inner sanctum, each stride marking out the sacred sectors of graded holiness. Perhaps pilgrims sang songs glorifying their divine king as they passed through each series of gates.[21]

[21] For example, Ps 24:7–10. See Bloch-Smith 1994 regarding the Temple in Jerusalem.

Figure 13. An artist's reconstruction of the inner plaza (courtesy of Balage Balogh/ archaeologyillustrated.com)

Figure 14. The second group of five *maṣṣebot*. These were fronted by a bench associated with a series of ritual vessels (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

In front of and attached to the five *maṣṣebot* is a low bench, flanked by attached additional benches on either side. Under the debris of the eighth-century destruction were found bowls, lamps, tripod incense cups, and animal bones (Biran 1994, Fig. 205). Of particular interest was the discovery of seven-spouted oil lamps (Figure 15), which were found only here and in the temple compound in Area T (see below). Similar seven-spouted vessels have been found at other Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Age sites throughout the southern Levant, usually in ritual contexts (Naeh 2012), possibly antecedents to the biblical menorah (Meyers 1976). The presence of lamps reminds us again that activities associated with the installation may have taken place at night.

Figure 15. One of the seven-spouted lamps found in the inner gateway plaza and in the *temenos* of Area T (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Station 3: The Podium

As the pilgrim entered the inner plaza, facing west, the northern tower of the largest gate would have loomed above them. Appended to the tower is an ashlar podium and an ashlar bench extending to the right.[22] At each of the four corners of the podium were decorated column bases, into which wooden poles or columns would have been mounted. A chalkstone capital found in the plaza, possibly in the form of a grape cluster (Biran 1994, Fig. 202), probably represents one of four that were mounted on the wooden columns. It is likely that a canopy was mounted over the capitals. The pilgrim's attention would have been focused on whatever was placed on this podium. A deep slot on the surface of the podium indicates that something was inserted here. We agree with Wolfgang Zwickel's (1997, 226) suggestion that this would have been a stele—such as the famous Aramaic Tel Dan stele of the ninth century BCE (Biran and Naveh 1993, 1995) or one like the bull-god stele from et-Tell/Bethsaida (Bernett and Keel 1998)—or, perhaps, a cult image or an offering table.[23] The somewhat earlier outer gate shrine at nearby et-Tell/Bethsaida shows striking similarities in its comparable size, approach by steps, proximity to benches, and location on the right side of the gate along with various stelae.

Facing the stele, image, or offering table, the pilgrim may have paid homage to the deity and left votive offerings on the benches. The complex as a whole, with its *maṣṣebot* installation and its associated artifacts, the podium, and the offering bench, would have been a sacred place, a place of liminality—perhaps an illustration of "the shrines of the gate" (במות השערים) mentioned in the reforms of Josiah.[24]

[22] Figure 16; Biran 1994, Figs. 197–99.

[23] It is not likely to have been a throne, as reconstructed by Biran (1994, Fig. 198). It is too small. The podium may have served both ninth-century and eighth-century BCE pilgrims, possibly worshippers of different gods at different times—perhaps El or Baal-Hadad under Aramean control, and Yahweh under Israelite control.

[24] 2 Kgs 23:8; Biran 1994. See Blomquist 1999.

Figure 16. The podium in the first inner plaza, with column bases and appended bench. This podium appears to have had more than one iteration. We suggest that a *maṣṣebah* may have been inserted into the top slot (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Crossing through the Inner Gate

Following our hypothetical pilgrim itinerary, the worshipper would have continued up the processional way after singing praises and leaving initial offerings at the inner plaza. They would have crossed over the three thresholds of the monumental ninth-century gate, passing by a single *maṣṣebah* (מצבה) to their right just before the first threshold (Figure 17). This single *maṣṣebah* likely implied something different than the groups of five. Perhaps it was thought to contain the immanence of the deity who was witnessing, even guarding, the entry into his holy city (cf. Avner 2006, 54), and marking out the next grade of sanctity.

Climbing the Processional Way

The pilgrim would have then continued toward the west for some 17 m along the processional way, at which point the route veered sharply

Figure 17. The single *maṣṣebah* at the southeast corner of the northern monumental gate tower, which would have been to the visitors' right as they entered (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

to the right and up a steep incline. With a pitch of 28 degrees, they would have been forced to slow their pace, perhaps chanting alongside others as they physically and spiritually ascended.[25] Though little remains of the third gate complex, a fragment of another proto-Aeolic capital found nearby (Biran 1994, Fig. 209) suggests that such decoration adorned these gates like it did the outer gates.

In the ninth century BCE, visitors would have accessed the upper gate straight ahead. But in the eighth century, pilgrims would have taken a switchback to the east. Such an alteration slowed and eased the pace of the ascent; a materialist approach might suggest that this required pilgrims to pass by vendors hawking their wares. This includes a room located in the second story of the monumental four-chambered gate, which contained a cache of more than three hundred juglets

[25] Cf. the "psalm of ascent" (שיר המעלות) of Ps 120–34, and many more (e.g., Ps 24:3; 42:4).

(Figure 18). This may have been a sacred oil shop, much like the shops that line the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem or the town of Assisi in Italy, for example. Biran (1994, 255) notes that the way the juglets were arrayed suggests that they were on shelves. A Hebrew inscription reading *l'Amotz* (לאמץ), "belonging to Amotz," was also found in this chamber, perhaps identifying the owner of the shop.

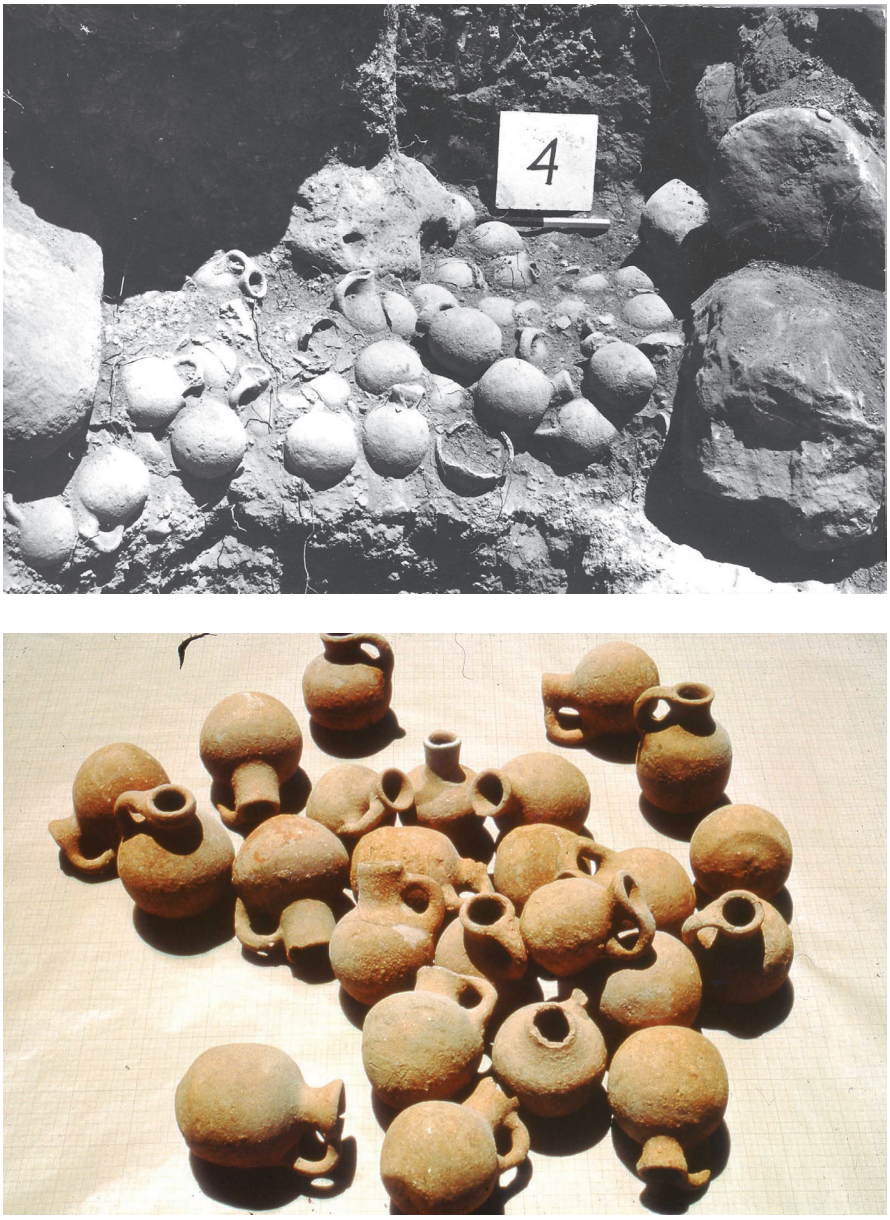

Figure 18. A cache of more than 300 juglets found in a chamber above the northern tower of the monumental four-chambered gate. We propose that this was a shop accessed from the road above (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

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Station 4: The Upper Gate Shrine

The pilgrim then would have made another 180 degree turn to the west. Directly in front of them, to the west, was a small, enclosed, rectangular shrine (Figure 19). At the center of the 5 x 2 m space was a shallow rectangular basin of carved tufa. In the left back corner was another podium, similar to the podium found in the inner plaza below, but higher, with two or three steps up. Perhaps another image, a *maṣṣebah*, or offering table stood at the top. Here, again, parallels may be drawn with the podium outside the ninth-century BCE four-chambered gate of et-Tell/Bethsaida, where a basin stood before the moon god stele.[26] The chamber is lined with low stone benches, similar to those of the shrine of the inner plaza below, upon which worshippers may have deposited votive offerings.

Figure 19. The upper shrine, outside (south of) the west tower of the upper gate (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

[26] It is also worth noting that et-Tell/Bethsaida also has an inner shrine in addition to the outer shine, similar to Dan (Arav 2009).

Station 5: The Third Imprint of the Deity

Turning now toward the upper city gate, the pilgrim would have beheld the third installation of five *maṣṣebot* (Figure 20). These were installed atop one of the massive retaining walls that supported and protected the eastern tower of the upper gate. Thus, another stride of Yahweh is marked at the crest of the fortifications. Perhaps there is also a defensive aspect to this "imprint."

The pilgrim then would have crossed over the thresholds of the upper gate, again consisting of four chambers of dressed ashlars whose piers were probably decorated with proto-Aeolic capitals (Biran 1994, Fig. 209).

Figure 20. The third group of *maṣṣebot*, just outside (south of) the east tower of the upper gate (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Station 6: The Great Plaza

Following our reconstruction of the pilgrimage itinerary within the city walls, one imagines the pilgrim descending to a great plaza of

Figure 21. Part of the great plaza of Area M, at the center of the site (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

meticulously laid flagstones (Figure 21). More than 130 m^2 of this has been exposed, though its limits have not yet been determined. It was certainly much larger—perhaps 1000 m^2. Such a space would have been communal in nature, allowing for large gatherings. The extensive faunal remains suggest feasting from locally sourced flocks (Arnold et al. 2021), and we may imagine celebrations that were perhaps accompanied by festal music and dancing in anticipation of the final procession to Yahweh's abode, which was next to the upper spring. The sacrificial animals would have been tethered here, pending their slaughter. Urban and rural people, the rich and the poor, would have mingled in this place and rejoiced before their deity, the trappings of status and rank now removed. The plaza likely served as an extended liminal zone of excited preparation and anticipation.[27]

[27] The material culture from the inner city (Areas B, H, K, L, and M) will be published by Thareani in a forthcoming final report (*Dan VI* or *Dan VII*).

Approaching the Temple Compound

The plaza, or a paved way leading from it, allowed a short walk of 100 m or so to the temple compound. The pilgrim throng would have passed the spring bubbling up along the western edge, and would thereby have been reminded of the Edenic connections between the temple compound and its environment.[28] Perhaps they would have drunk the water of the sacred spring and recited blessings and moved forward.

The beautiful temple towered above everything else on the northwest sector of the mound (though the entire superstructure of the temple is lacking archeologically). We know the western and northern limits of the temple compound; the southern portion probably bordered the Ein Leshem (Ain el-Qāḍi) spring. The eastern limits have not been determined. Nevertheless, the existing side chambers and the architectural features recovered throughout the precinct allow us to suggest a plausible reconstruction of the compound (Figure 22). Notably, there are a number of correspondences to the description of the Jerusalem Temple described in 1 Kgs 6–7 (see, e.g., Greer 2013, 108–16).

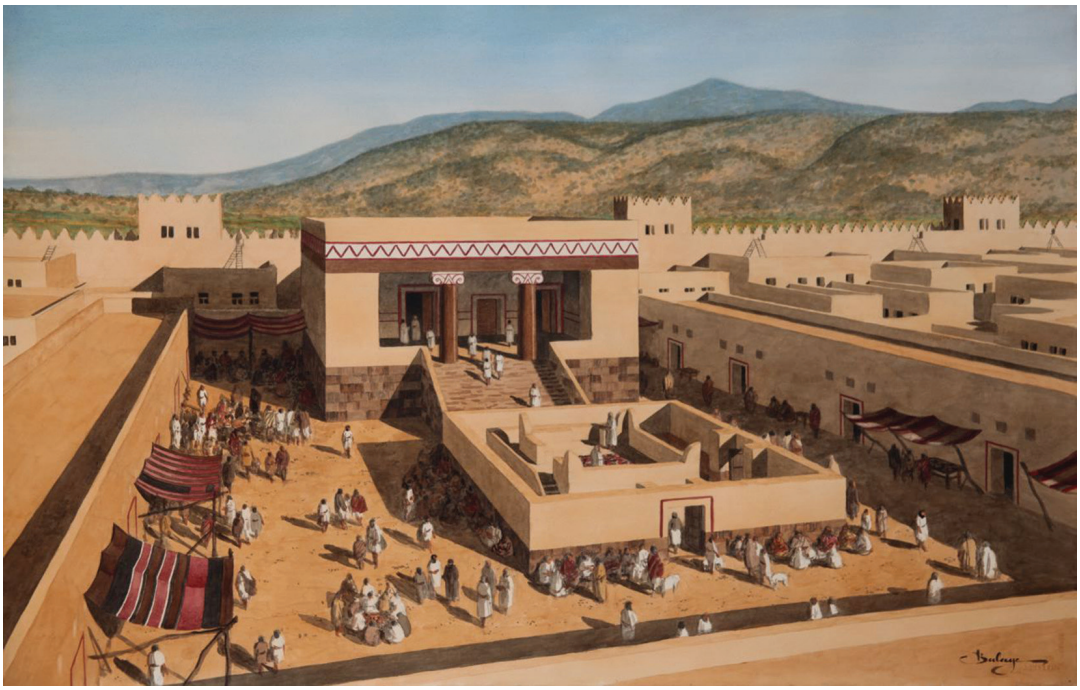

Figure 22. A reconstruction of the Dan temple compound (courtesy of Balage Balogh/ archaeologyillustrated.com)

[28] Ackerman 2013; cf. Stager 1999.

Station 7: Purification Pools

Before crossing the threshold of Yahweh's abode, the worshipper may have purified themselves in the cold, gushing waters of the Ein Leshem spring (Figure 23). Just inside where the compound gates likely stood, remains of what may have been a stepped pool were found (Biran 1994, 174), perhaps functioning as a purification installation reserved for the priests;[29] a ceramic bathtub discovered 20 m north of this may have served the same purpose (Figure 24). The symbolic act of submersion and return is known in other ancient and contemporary religions (cf. Weinfeld 1983), marking another transformation from one state of holiness to the next.

The Temple Courtyard

The temple courtyard would have been a bustle of activity; the pilgrim's senses would have been barraged. The temple would have appeared

Figure 23. The Ein Leshem spring on top of the *tel*, just south of the Area T *temenos* (courtesy of David Ilan)

[29] cf. Exod 29:4; 30:17–21; Lev 16:4.

Figure 24. The restored tub found on the pavement north of the spring pool (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

without impediment and the great altar before it. The priests, dressed in exotic garments, perhaps even draped in animal skins,[30] would be seen coming and going from the side chambers. Cooking fires would have been seen spread throughout the precinct along with small altars and ritual vessels (including seven-spouted lamps and painted stands).[31]

[30] Bones from the paws of both lions and bears have been recovered here; contemporary Neo-Assyrian iconography shows priests dressed in carnivore skins (as, of course, does the iconography of Egypt), though these remains may have been from rugs or wall hangings. See Greer 2013, 94–95.

[31] We are describing the eighth-century BCE assemblage, essentially what Biran identified as Stratum II, discussed in detail in Davis 2013 and Greer 2013. Note, however, that some material currently being analyzed for publication by Levana Zias may be redated to the Persian/Hellenistic period. The earlier strata (IVA and III), too, which include additional smaller structures, ovens, an olive press, water installations, "snake *pithoi*," incense stands, anthropomorphic figurines, are also being processed for publication by Thareani. While the stratigraphic assignments

Those partaking in the festivities would have heard bleating animals and buzzing flies, alongside prayers and songs. They would have smelled the fresh blood of slaughter and the reek of burning flesh and innards, the sweet smell of incense and savory stews. They would have inhaled the whiff of spiced wine and scented oil.

Station 8: The Great Altar

The focus of the pilgrim's gaze would have been the massive central altar. The stone base of this structure has been found (Figure 25).[32] The latest incarnation of this altar was dated by Avraham Biran to the time of Jeroboam II in the eighth century BCE (1994, 191–209).[33] The remains of staircases ascending the north and west faces of the altar allow for reconstruction of an altar 4.75 m on a side and 3 m high. This may be the largest altar discovered anywhere in the Levant. A single basalt horn of this altar has been recovered (Figure 26), used as repurposed building material in a Hellenistic period wall. It was clearly a horned altar of the type well known in the southern Levant (Gitin 2002). The altar is marked off from the rest of the sanctuary by a low *temenos* wall, delimiting sacred space and restricting movement (Davis 2013, 72–75), which would have been entered into through small openings to the east and the south.

Priestly texts[34] guide our reconstruction of the slaughter of the sacrificial victim as taking place in front of the altar—if it is a bovine—

may change, the essence of the pilgrimage experience will most likely remain intact. Sacred space and ritual action are remarkably conservative.

[32] Figure 25; Biran 1994, Figs. 143–44 (Stratum IVA); Figs. 149–50 (Stratum III); Fig. 163 (Stratum II).

[33] As in the previous note, much of the Stratum II assemblage may date to the Persian or early Hellenistic period, but the architectural and artifactual components are essentially those that existed in the earlier strata. We reference the last phase, what Biran called "Bamah C," as the most visible and evocative.

[34] Some may rightly challenge the correlation of so-called "priestly texts" of the Pentateuch with Iron Age material remains based on the assumption that such texts date to the Persian period. While we do not contest the claim that the current form

Figure 25. The stone base of the central altar (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

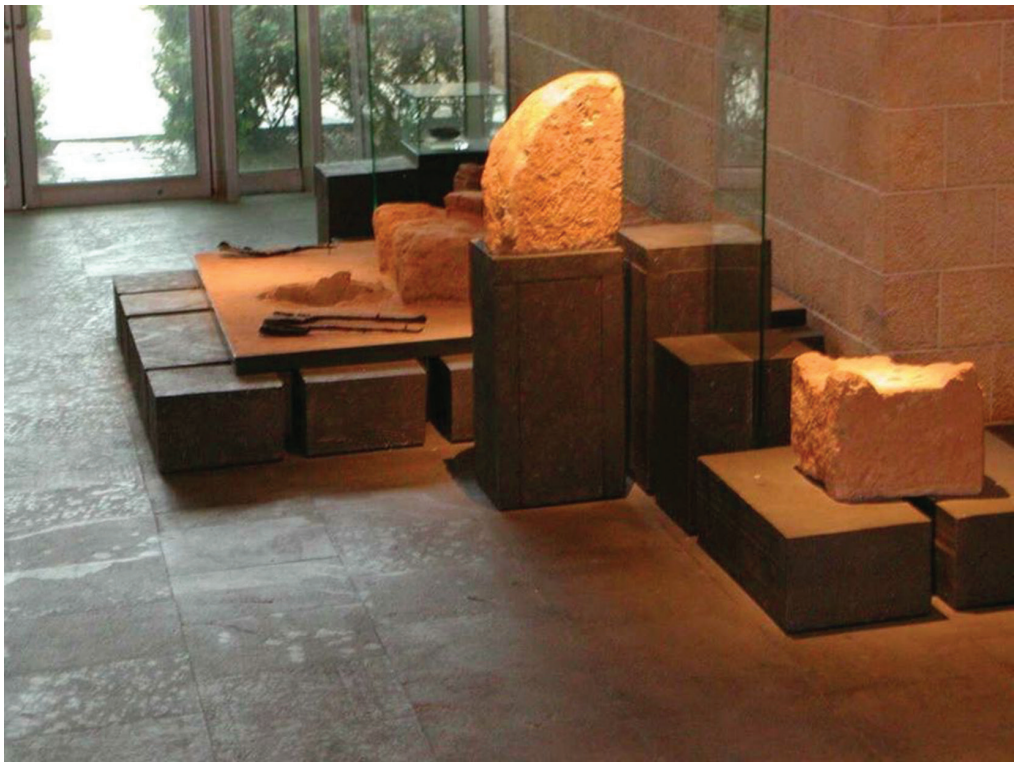

Figure 26. The stone horn, most likely part of the original central altar, found in secondary use (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

between the entrance and the altar (Lev 1:3–9). For sheep and goats, a designated place is marked out to the right side of the altar (Lev 1:11; cf. *m. Mid.* 3:5). Those bringing an offering placed their hands upon the animals, and blessings were likely recited. The throat of the animal was slit, and the blood spilled out, some of it collected in a sacrificial bowl (a *mizraq* [מזרק]; see Greer 2010) and splashed upon a low extended step (the *yesod* [יסוד])[35] protruding from the base of the altar on these two sides.

For the burnt offering, the animal was skinned and quartered (Lev 1:6), and the whole of the animal, save the skin (cf. Lev 7:8), was surrendered to the priest for immolation on the altar (Lev 1:8). The opening and the staircase here correspond precisely with approaching the altar from this direction.[36] After the carcass or portions were burned, the priest would have descended from the altar to deposit the ashes in a designated spot between the altar and the entrance to the court (Lev 1:16; 6:3)—again, this itinerary is marked by the second staircase and the opening in the altar *temenos* wall.

of the received text dates to the fifth century BCE (with some degree of fluidity extending even into the next century or so), evidence derived from comparative linguistic studies, source critical analysis, and archeological sources suggests an earlier core of ritual materials rooted in preexilic times (see, e.g., Haran 1978, 132–48; Milgrom 1991, 3–13; Zevit 1995; Friedman 1997; Hurvitz 2000). Further, the cultic practices and paraphernalia described in these texts exhibit close parallels with those described even earlier in Late Bronze Age texts from Emar, Mari, and Hattussa especially (see, e.g., Fleming 2000; Feder 2011; Knohl 2015), suggesting that the biblical practices may be rooted in earlier realities. Thus, even if the current forms of the biblical texts postdate the archeological discoveries at Tel Dan, the congruence between text and archeology likely reflects a shared reality of an earlier cultic tradition. Cult, again, is remarkably conservative.

[35] See Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 29, 34; 5:9.

[36] There is a disconnect here with the Judahite tradition: the Mishnah (*m. Mid.* 3:1–2) reconstructs a ramp leading up to the altar in Jerusalem from the left side, and the altars at the archeological sites of Arad (Aharoni 1968) and Motza (Kisilevitz 2015), likewise, suggest approaches from this direction, and thus do not correspond with the layout at Tel Dan or the descriptions in the biblical text. Jonathan Greer (2017a) has argued, based on this evidence and more, that priestly ritual texts preserve northern traditions in regards to the approach of the altar and blood manipulation.

While the priest burned the carcass, the worshipper would likely have circumnavigated the altar, perhaps depositing the priestly portion of the sacrifice—the hide, in the case of a burnt offering, or a right-sided meaty limb portion, in the case of a fellowship offering (Greer 2019)—in the western chambers, where evidence of such deposits has been discovered (Greer 2013, 100–106).

A complete priestly "altar kit" (כלי המזבח)[37] was also discovered in the central chamber of these halls surrounding a small altar (Figure 27).[38] The finds have been interpreted as specific ritual items described in such kits: a bronze blood bowl known as a *mizraq* (מזרק), a pair of iron shovels for removing the ashes known as *yaim* (יעים), an incense pan known as a *makhtah* (מחתה), and a sunken pot filled with charred animal remains understood to be a form of a *sir* (סיר). A long metal handle, perhaps the remains of the meat fork known as a *mazleg* (מזלג), was also discovered in this space.

These artifacts, along with an analysis of the animal bone and ceramic remains, suggest that this area was the sphere of the priests, where they would have dined on their sacrificial meaty portions and stockpiled the skins of their priestly due.[39] The function of the small altar may have been as a supplemental burning location for offerings that were still holy but not holy enough to be burned on the main altar, such as leftovers from sacrificial meals (cf. Lev 19:5–8). The presence of oil lamps here too suggests feasting long into the night.

When the Party Is Over

What did pilgrims do when the sacrificial meal was finished? Are there any archeological correlates of departure, or of the pilgrimage experi-

[37] See, for example, Exod 38:3, 30; Num 4:14.

[38] See Exod 27:1–8; Num 4:13–15; cf. 1 Kgs 7:40, 45; Biran 1994, 192–99; Greer 2010.

[39] Alternatively, Davis (2013, 101–107) suggests that these chambers served the people as a "non-elite" worship space at a time when the main altar was restricted to priests.

Figure 27. The priestly "altar kit" found in one of the chambers to the west of the central altar (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

ence upon return home? Evidence for departure is, by definition, difficult to come by; after all, departure is mostly defined by removing a presence and taking things with you. Still, evidence of a pilgrimage experience should be detectable, if not easily so.[40]

A departure scenario may be imagined as follows: The sacrificial meal is finished, and pilgrims have said their after-meal prayers, all together, fervently, as a community. It is getting dark. They might have cleansed themselves in the spring, drunk deeply of the cold water, and walked over to the hostels, just inside the upper city gate, to sleep for the night.

Just inside the upper city gate—to the east of the paved road (though perhaps on the west as well)—is a battery of at least three large, long buildings, each containing two rows of pillars and paved aisles (Figure 28). Tripartite pillared buildings of this kind are found at a number of other Iron II sites and have been attributed various functions—storehouses (Figure 29), stables, barracks, and closed markets (summarized in Routledge 1995). At Dan, their preservation is very poor, and they gave up no intact artifact assemblages that might divulge their function. The hallmarks of stables are lacking (troughs and hitching posts, in particular), but storage and commercial functions are both possible. They could also be pens for sacrificial animals (viz. the conclusions in Arnold et al. 2021). Perhaps they served as hostels for pilgrims. If so, sleeping within the deity's sacred city would have encouraged discussion and the exchange of information, bolstering the sense of *communitas* (cf. Turner and Turner 1978: Location 2949).

Lying on straw bedding, covered by blankets they brought with them, the pilgrims may have reminisced over the day's events—the ecstatic singing, dancing, the visions seen in the smoke, the flavors of the meat stew, the strength felt within. They may have talked about their villages and their families, their crops and their leaders, their enemies to the

[40] This is an avenue for further exploration. Were keepsakes taken as reminders of the pilgrimage? An example is the Monza-Bobbio flasks of the Byzantine period—flasks manufactured for pilgrims in Jerusalem that were brought back to communities in Europe (Barag and Wilkinson 1972).

Figure 28. The remains of one of the three large (poorly preserved) tripartite buildings that were uncovered in Area B, just inside the upper gate. Lacking preserved small finds, we speculate that these may have been pilgrim hostels (courtesy of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology)

Figure 29. A partially reconstructed tripartite storehouse at Iron II Tel Beersheba (courtesy of David Ilan)

north and south. Then they would have slept. Enhanced by the absorption of sanctity, perhaps they were granted revealing dreams.[41]

The next day, the visiting pilgrim would have descended the processional way, stopping to pray again at each station. They might have stopped at the oil merchant to buy holy olive oil pressed by the priests contained in little spherical juglets (Figure 18). This would have been valuable (it might have been held to have special properties), and a souvenir, back home. They would have exited the gates and headed east to the highway that ran along the shores of the Waters of Merom (Lake Hula), perhaps pausing to look back at Dan's magnificent fortifications. And a final prayer might have poured forth from their lips: "May the yields be good this year!"

Broader Implications of the Tel Dan Itinerary for the Archeology of Pilgrimage

The archeology of pilgrimage is a broad topic with an extensive literature, covering most of the earth's continents. Indeed, the field can be embraced by different perspectives, and no single one of these will cover all the bases (Coleman 2002, 2013). Furthermore, pilgrims embark on pilgrimage with a wide variety of motivations such as those noted by Michael Winkelman and Jill Dubisch: "Making contact with the sacred, fulfilling a vow, seeking healing for physical or spiritual ailments, marking a life passage, doing penance, affirming cultural identity, and simple curiosity are among the diverse motivations for undertaking pilgrimage" (2005, xiii). So too "[p]ilgrimages instigate relationships—they entangle humans, places, deities, spirits, practices, objects, monuments, and more in efficacious ways" (Skousen 2018, 262). Pilgrimage is, further, a transformational quest (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xix–xxii).

The above sketch (and it is only a sketch) of the pilgrimage itinerary at Tel Dan illustrates a number of axioms shared by the pilgrimage phenomenon. To begin with, pilgrimage sites are typically places of

[41] cf. Turner and Turner 1978: Location 4401; Petsalis-Diomidis 2017: Location 3279.

power. This power may derive from association with historical events, persons, deities, or natural phenomena. Regarding power derived from historical-religious associations, we recall traditions contained in the Hebrew Bible concerning the establishment of shrines in the early days of ancient Israel (see Judg 17–18 and 1 Kgs 12). In terms of power derived from natural features, we highlight the fact that Tel Dan is located at the main source of the Jordan River—water is obviously a crucial element, as it is in so many pilgrimage destinations (at Varanasi, Cahokia, and Mayan Cenotes, for example). The spring and the site are positioned at the foot of Mount Hermon, a mountain likely identified as the deity's abode (see the introductory section above).

Pilgrimage, by definition, requires movement. To cite one archeological example of its detection, the journey along the Emerald Avenue to the Cahokia mound in Illinois likely involved a series of way stations or stopping points, all locales where special rituals and performances took place (Pauketat 2013). Movement creates relationships—it is the mechanism or quality through which phenomena of all kinds continually align or position themselves in relation to others (Skousen 2018, 265). Simon Coleman and John Elsner remark that "it is the experience of travel and the constant possibility of encountering the new which makes pilgrimage distinct from other forms of ritual" (1995, 206). In this way, pilgrimage is also tourism.

At Dan, we have "detected" movement based on the spatial array of symbol-laden ritual installations and their resonance in the biblical text. We have proposed an onsite itinerary. Admittedly, there is an element of circular argumentation here—the reader will have to be the judge.[42]

The number of focusing devices and spaces for public gathering at Dan and the multiple opportunities for sensory stimulation testify to the totality of the pilgrimage experience (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xv).

[42] A forthcoming study will entail a more in-depth description and analysis of the practices we have inferred and their relational qualities. Why, for example, are there so few, or no, *ex-votos* at Dan? It would be interesting to carry out a provenience analysis on a massive scale to see how much was imported to Tel Dan from elsewhere and, perhaps more interestingly, whether certain items (oil juglets?) are cropping up at other sites.

It tends to be sensually and emotionally consuming. Pilgrimage is often experienced as hierophany (Eliade 1959)—a sacred, enchanting experience.[43] As B. Jacob Skousen emphasizes, "the senses are integral to experience; they create affects that, as defined here, are embodied, subjective emotions, feelings, dispositions, and states of consciousness that change the way humans perceive the world and give meaning to their experiences" (2018, 266). This often includes the experience of ecstatic states and altered states of consciousness, which are cleansing (both physically and psychologically) and transformational.

Pilgrimage frequently involves a process of healing of, or the alleviation of, suffering from ailments both personal and societal (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, x–xi, xxvi–xxxiv). A pilgrimage is a new start and a shared experience, both private and public. Pilgrimage instigates *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978), which results in the social validation of the self and an accompanying reduction of stress and anxiety (e.g., Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xxxii–xxxiv). As a shared experience, pilgrimage is a form of popular empowerment (Winkelman and Dubisch 2005, xxii–xxvi), which can create social and political solidarity, but which can also endanger established power structures. The sacred can be contested.[44] This was certainly true of ancient Israel and Judah, especially as one considers the reality of multiple Yahwistic royal cult places. Skousen argues that:

> pilgrimage scholars should focus on the relational qualities of pilgrimage in order to rethink and produce more detailed, sensuous descriptions and analyses of this practice. This can be done by employing "relational approaches," seen here as perspectives that recognize and prioritize the interconnections among persons, places, things, and substances. I further suggest that focusing on movement, the vitality of places and materials, and the senses is useful in thinking about the relational aspects of pilgrimage. (Skousen 2018, 261)

We agree wholeheartedly with this approach, and we have taken a step in this direction in our outline of pilgrimage to Dan. There is, of course,

[43] Gell 1992; Bennett 2001.

[44] Coleman and Elsner 1991; Eade and Sallnow 1991.

much more to be done; one has the feeling that the *archeology* of pilgrimage to Dan will become a kind of pilgrimage in its own right.

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