

Cult in Transition from Achaemenid to Greek Rule: The Contribution of Achaemenid-Ptolemaic Temples of Palestine

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Résumé : Cet article analyse la contribution des trouvailles déterminées par le culte pendant le quatrième et le troisième siècle av. J.-C. en Palestine afin d'évaluer des tendances de « rupture » et de « continuité » dans le prétendu processus d'hellénisation que le pays a subi après la conquête gréco-macédonienne. Il examine les temples (et leurs trouvailles) qui sont restés en usage pendant les périodes achéménide et hellénistique, ainsi que les témoignages épigraphiques et iconographiques contemporains. Il conclut que la prédominance des traditions locales dans le culte populaire palestinien est très évidente d'après le matériel archéologique.

It was not long ago that temples of Achaemenid Palestine were confined to Lachish (in Edom) and Makhmish/Tel Mikhal (in the Sharon Plain). However, over recent decades two other temples have been excavated and published in a preliminary form: at Mount Mispe Yammim in the mountainous region of Galilee, and Mount Gerizim in central Samaria. Interestingly, all these structures (according to the accepted views) continued to exist during the Early Hellenistic period, some with modifications, but with their function unchanged. In this paper, I intend to survey the evidence of “cult in context” of Achaemenid Palestine¹, and to address the question of “break” and “continuity” in the cult practice of the

1. On the basis of the theoretic framework stressed by C. Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi, British School at Athens, Supplementary Volume 18*, London 1985, pp. 11-26.

Hellenistic period that followed, that is, under the Diadochi, Ptolemies and Seleucids.²

On the site of Mount Mišpe Yammim, which is located on the border between upper and lower Galilee, a cultic temenos was uncovered where excavations revealed two complexes, one on the west (fig. 1: 1) and one on the south (fig. 1: 3-4). The western complex (c. 25 × 25 m in size) contained the foundations of a massive courtyard building that did not survive, but would have protected the entrance to the temenos. The southern complex contained two rooms whose walls are not straight: a wide room (c. 6 × 12.3 m) paved with stone slabs and, to the east of it, a smaller, square room (c. 4 × 4.8 m), connected to it by an opening in the western wall (width c. 2 m). The entrance to the wide room (width c. 0.8 m) was in the northern wall. Three column bases were found on the floor, aligned along the central axis c. 3.5 m apart. Benches (width c. 0.5 m and height c. 0.7 m) were built along the eastern and southern wall; elevated altars (*bamot*) were built next to the southern bench and in the northwest corner. The southern *bamah*, which was partially preserved, is square (c. 1.3 × 1.7 m). Near it, two ashlar abutted the centre of the southern bench. The north-western *bamah* revealed two phases. The plan of the first was rectangular (c. 1.1 × 1.5 m; c. 0.8 m high), approached by a staircase on the east. In the second phase, after it was expanded, it was square (c. 1.5 × 1.5 m), and the protruding steps were filled in. The two stages of the *bamah* are apparently connected to the two stages discerned in the northern and western walls of the room. In the first stage, the walls were built of small and medium field stones and in the second stage they were built of larger field stones laid carelessly. The excavator believes that in the first stage the room was a wide roofed room, while in the second stage it was open-air and the north-western *bamah* became an incense altar.³

Artefacts in and around the temple were mainly ceramics and metal objects. The pottery consisted mainly of juglets (many intact), pilgrim flasks, bottles and bowls, as well as sherds of coarse, handmade Galilean vessels, which were characteristic of the area in assemblages from the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Among the metal objects was a libation vessel (*situla*) bearing Egyptian-style decoration. The decoration was divided into four panels. The three lower ones present pictures and Egyptian deities alongside hieroglyphic inscriptions noting the name of the deity. In the upper panel, which is otherwise empty, a dedicatory inscription was subsequently inscribed to the Phoenician deity Astarte, which reads “of ʿKBW son of BD ʾŠMN I am making to ʿŠTRT because (she) heard the sound (of my words)”. The *situla* seems to have been dedicated to the deity by one ʿKBW, following the granting of his petition by the goddess. The vessel, apparently manufactured in Egypt, was dated based

2. Following P. Briant, *Rois, tributs et paysans: Études sur les formations tributaires du Moyen-Orient ancien*, CRHA 43, Paris 1982, p. 8.

3. R. Frenkel (sic), “The Sanctuary from the Persian Period at Mount Mizpe Yamim”, *Qad.*, 113, 1997, pp. 46-53 (Hebrew).

on its typology and palaeography (its Phoenician lettering) to the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.⁴ Next to it, zoomorphic metal figurines were found representing the Egyptian deity Apis the bull, a reclining ram and a lion on its haunches, whose manufacture was dated to the Persian period but which remained in use into the Hellenistic period.⁵ Next to these objects, which were found prior to the excavation, additional metal artefacts were unearthed during the excavation, such as a statuette of the Egyptian deity Osiris, jewellery, arrowheads and a few coins. A schist statuette of Osiris, with Horus to the right and Isis (in the form of the goddess Hathor) on the left, and a clay (cultic?) ladle are noteworthy.⁶ In the area of the temple and to the east, numerous bones were found in tiny fragments, 94% of which were remains of sheep and 6% bovine, as well as pig and geese bones. Most of the finds at the site should apparently be dated to the late Persian period (fourth century). A Tyrian silver coin from the end of the Persian period was found in the fill of the north-western *bamah*. Hellenistic pottery and a Seleucid coin found near that *bamah* attest that the cult persisted here at least until the second century, or until the Hasmonians conquered the area. These facts, along with the artefacts at the site led the excavator to identify the wide room as a temple, and the entire site as a sacred precinct. Based on the *situla* they assume that the deity worshipped here was Astarte, and thus the temple was connected to the Phoenician world. The site's location on the south-eastern side of the Mount Meron range, the area to the west of which was apparently controlled by the Phoenician coastal towns, and its position at the top of a plateau, led the excavator to assume it served as a frontier temple.⁷

In the new excavations at the summit of Mount Gerizim, an expansive sacred precinct was unearthed (fig. 2). Access to it from the surrounding quarters was by means of broad steps. Two phases were discerned in the precinct: an early complex (c. 96 × 98 m) dated to the Persian period and the Ptolemaic period, from which a solid stone wall, a service structure and the northern gate were unearthed; and a later, larger structure (c. 132 × 212 m) dated to the Seleucid period, from which an offset-inset wall, service structures, a fortress and gates were preserved. The excavator assumes that the plan of the earlier phase was copied from the sacred

4. R. Frankel and R. Ventura, "The Mišpe Yamim Bronzes", *BASOR* 311, 1998, pp. 40-49.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-54.

6. Frenkel, *loc. cit.* (n. 3).

7. This sacred precinct may be viewed as a regional (Galilean) phenomenon, considering the discovery of another complex at Sasa, on the northwestern spur of Mount Hiram, whose date and findings are similar to those at Mišpe Yammim, see H. Smithline, "Sasa (West)", *ESI* 16, 1997, pp. 20-22. However the cultic character of the site has not been sufficiently clarified by excavation.

precinct in Jerusalem, while the later stage was rebuilt as the result of a crystallization of Samaritan cult needs.⁸

The excavator dates the establishment of the earlier complex to the Persian period – the days of Sanballat I (Sanballat the Horonite) the governor of Samaria in the days of Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem (445 BCE = 20th year of Artaxerxes I).⁹ However among the thousands of coins so far identified, only 68 were from the Persian period and only 5 are from the fifth century,¹⁰ an insufficient quantity on which to base this date. Y. Magen also argues that the plan of the precinct was apparently copied from Nehemiah's temple in Jerusalem,¹¹ thus accepting Josephus' claim that the temple on Mount Gerizim was constructed on the model of the temple of Jerusalem,¹² yet rejecting Josephus' time-frame of the days of Alexander the Great. According to Y. Magen the site on Mount Gerizim existed continuously during the transition from the Persian to the Hellenistic periods, although the town of Samaria was destroyed and became a Macedonian colony.¹³ The published data do not contradict the possibility that the earlier phase was built in the second half of the fifth or the first half of the fourth century, before the Macedonian conquest, while the later phase was built gradually during the Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods. It appears that Y. Magen's reliance on numismatic evidence is mistaken. It apparently stems from a lack of recognition that earlier coins could have remained in circulation for generations (especially at a cult site) and that in end of themselves they do not reflect continuity of settlement or lack thereof. Some scholars believe that no Persian-period temple ever existed on Mount Gerizim,¹⁴ yet the archaeological remains and finds of late Persian period occupation on the summit of Mount Gerizim strongly confirm the idea that the Hellenistic temple was a successor to an earlier cult building. The several fourth-century Samaritan coins discovered during the excavations lend support to such an assumption. Due to the coins' characteristics, "obols" and "hemiobols" (of ca. 0.6 g. and below),¹⁵ being of relatively high elemental value silver, with a circulation that was mostly confined to the border of the province of Sama-

8. Based on Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XI, 8, 1-4 [306-324]; XIII, 9, 1 [255-256]. On the site stratigraphy and architecture see the introduction in Y. Magen *et al.*, *Mount Gerizim Excavations I: The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions*, Judea and Samaria Publications 2, Jerusalem 2004, pp. 3-13.

9. Nehemiah 2:1-10.

10. Magen *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 10.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

12. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XIII, 9, 1 [255-256].

13. "Coins found at the site indicate that the temple remained in use during the time of Alexander and during the reigns of his Ptolemaic and Seleucid successors": Magen *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 12.

14. E.g. M. Mor, *From Samaria to Shechem: The Samaritan Community in Antiquity*, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 69-94 (Hebrew).

15. On the erroneous definition of these denominations for Samaritan coinage, see O. Tal, "Coin Denominations and Weight Standards in Fourth Century BCE Palestine", *INJ* 2, 2007, pp. 17-28.

ria,¹⁶ should be regarded as temple money as is the case of the Yehud coinage.¹⁷ By contrast, John Hyrcanus' destruction of the site is clearly visible in the material finds in the various excavation areas.¹⁸

In the sacred precinct, some 395 inscriptions were found. A total of 381 were written in Aramaic, in lapidary and proto-Jewish script that originated in cursive Aramaic (some originating from the same inscriptions); 8 in palaeo-Hebrew, termed neo-Hebrew to differentiate First Temple from Second Temple script (with some possibly originating from a single inscription);¹⁹ and 4 in Samaritan script. 83 Greek inscriptions were also found. In addition, ashlar were uncovered with masons' marks in Aramaic, palaeo-Hebrew and Greek. The Hebrew and Aramaic script inscriptions are germane to the discussion because most of them were attributed to the second century. The editors cautiously suggest that lapidary Aramaic inscriptions are earlier.²⁰ They were incised on building stones, and differed from each other in the quality of workmanship. Greater care was taken with the incising of the palaeo-Hebrew inscriptions. Most of the Aramaic inscriptions were primarily dedicatory or votive (containing the words ZY HQRB – “that which offered”, and LDKRN ṬB – “for good remembrance”)²¹, while most of the palaeo-Hebrew inscriptions were commemorative, made by the priestly class²². A number of inscriptions note a “temple” (MQDŠ) or a “house of sacrifice” (BYT DBH²³),²³ and others also mention a deity – ʔLH²⁴ BʔTR²⁵ DNH – “before God in this place”,²⁴ and even mention its name – YHWH.²⁵ Interestingly, there is a connection between the name of the deity and the type writing that appears in the inscription: ʔLH²⁴ in the Aramaic inscriptions, ʔDNY in the Hebrew inscriptions written in Aramaic and YHWH in the

16. On the elemental silver value and circulation of the Samaritan coinage, see H. Gitler and O. Tal, “Coins with the Aramaic Legend Šhrw and Other Unrecorded Samaritan Issues”, *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau* 85, 2006, pp. 56-60.

17. Y. Ronen, “Some Observations on the Coinage of Yehud”, *INJ* 15, 2006, pp. 29-30.

18. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XIII, 9, 1 [255-256].

19. Magen *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 8), Inscriptions Nos. 382-385, 387.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 41. The editors do not provide dating but given the site chronology one may conclude that lapidary Aramaic inscriptions began to appear in the fourth, and more likely third and early second century at the site. See in this respect J. Naveh, “The Inscriptions from Failaka and the Lapidary Aramaic Script”, *BASOR* 297, 1995, pp. 3-4; whereas proto-Jewish inscriptions can be assigned to the mid to late second century.

21. Magen *et al.*, *ibid.*, pp. 16-20.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

23. *Ibid.*, Inscriptions Nos. 150, 199.

24. *Ibid.*, Inscriptions Nos. 147, 152, 154-155, 162.

25. *Ibid.*, Inscription No. 383.

neo-Hebrew inscriptions.²⁶ The relative frequency of the title “priest” in inscriptions at the site²⁷ shows that priests officiated in the sacrifices. The inscriptions were found to have been intentionally smashed at some time during the life of the site (during the Hasmonean conquest?).²⁸

In the excavations of Makhmish (some 400 m north-east of Tel Mikhal), part of a two-room structure dated to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE was uncovered.²⁹ The plan of the structure was never published and thus is unclear; it was built over a square building that according to the excavator was unroofed and dated to the Iron Age II. It appears to have contained two spaces from three phases: during the first phase a wide room (6.5 × 15 m) was apparently built. It had a doorway in the eastern wall (width c. 1.1 m) with ashlar lintels. In the second phase the room was widened to the north by c. 2.5 m, creating an angle in the eastern wall, where a small chamber was added at a lower level than that of the room. The façade of the structure was plastered. The walls, which were made of fossilised dune sandstone, were preserved to a height of one or two courses above the floor. According to the excavator, the upper courses were of mud brick; such bricks were found throughout the site.

The courtyard to the east of the structure was partially paved and some 0.17 m higher than the floor of the room and preserved two round, plastered basins. Small finds at the site included mainly clay figurines and numerous stone statuettes, pottery (mainly open lamps, heavy bowls, basket-handled jars and straight-shouldered jars), cube-shaped stone altars, metal objects, faïence and jewellery. Many of the finds came from the small chamber in the northern part of the structure, which the excavator believes to be a *favissa*. The finds were dated to the fifth and fourth century, however the excavator was aware of the fact that some of the figurines and statuettes (not all of which were published) are also known from the Hellenistic period,³⁰ especially those of the *kourotrophos* (mother and child) type, which were fairly common at the site. It is not impossible therefore that the temple was in use at the beginning of this period; the pottery published does not contradict this assumption. During the third and latest phase in the existence of the structure, its ruins served as the foundations for an open-air cultic site. The courtyard was covered with sand, and a rectangular structure (c. 0.4 × 1 m) was built on top of it, whose four walls were plastered and whose lower course survived. This course was at foundation level, and served as a plaza around it. The excavator identified the structure as an altar and dated it to the third and second centuries, based on the ceramics and figurines discovered in its context, and the coins found on the surface.³¹

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23, 142.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28, Inscriptions Nos. 24, 25, 382, 388, 389.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

29. N. Avigad, “Excavations at Makmish, 1958: Preliminary Report”, *IEJ* 10, 1960, pp. 90-96.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93. In Eliakhin, in the Hefer Valley “on a high hill” a survey revealed the remains of a cultic center similar in its layout and time period to the one uncovered in Makhmish. The remains included portions of walls uncovered during construction work, figurative clay and stone

It has long been argued that the “Solar Shrine” in Lachish formed part of the massive construction works of Level I, dated by O. Tufnell to the mid-fifth century.³² Thus, according to O. Tufnell, the shrine, together with the rebuilt fortifications and gate, the residency and a few other public buildings, formed part of a new site plan (fig. 3). The shrine that was uncovered is a square structure (c. 27 × 17 m) with an east-west orientation. Most of its walls (c. 0.85 m wide) were built in segments of field stones on both faces, with a fill of smoothed headers, and covered with plaster on which the remains of paint could be discerned. The structure contained a courtyard, the entrance to which was in the centre of the northern wall (fig. 4, top). It also contained a row of five rooms of various sizes in the eastern wing, whose floor and walls were plastered, and a level of construction c. 1.5 m higher than the courtyard level. It had an antechamber from which two steps led up to an inner sanctuary containing a drainage opening. North of this room was an angled room and to its south, another room of proportions similar to the central room. A square stone altar was found in the courtyard of the structure. Two of its sides were decorated in bas-relief depicting a large hand and a male figure with outstretched hands. O. Tufnell believed that the altar was originally positioned in the antechamber. The orientation of the structure, the different levels in the complex, the decorated stone altar, the staircase and the drainage hole in the raised room led the excavators to conclude that this was a shrine to the sun god, and thus they dubbed it the “Solar Shrine”. They also found evidence of later use: the plaster floor of the northern and southern rooms had been dismantled, and new flooring had been laid. In the centre of the antechamber soot stains were found, and two wooden beams that the excavators believed to be beams of the vaulted roof of the western complex, were then laid at the foot of the steps of the central room. Since the foundations of the structure were not excavated, the date of its construction could not be determined and it was unclear whether it was built in the Persian period.

The similarity between the plan of the “Solar Shrine” and that of the Iron Age temple uncovered in Arad led Y. Aharoni to conduct a probe at the Lachish temple to ascertain the date of its construction and to prove the continuity of the Yahwist cult in Palestine. The excavations focused

artifacts from these periods, see Y. Porath *et al.*, *The History and Archaeology of Emek-Hefer*, Tel Aviv 1985, pp. 138-140 (Hebrew). Bronze vessels (mainly bowls) were also found at the site, bearing dedicatory inscriptions in Phoenician and Aramaic to a deity named ʿŠTRM (apparently Astarte or her male consort). The inscriptions were dated based on paleographic considerations to the second half of the fifth century, R. Deutsch and M. Heltzer, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*, Tel Aviv-Jaffa 1994, pp. 69-89, but it cannot be discounted that the cult of this deity persisted into the Hellenistic period as well.

32. O. Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age*, London 1953, pp. 141-145.

mainly on the courtyard of the temple, whose floor had already been removed by the British expedition. It was discovered that access to the structure was not via the centre of the northern wall of the courtyard, but rather through an entrance in the eastern wall of the northern room to the east of the courtyard, based on a stone threshold (c. 1.3 m long) being found there. As benches were found along the western walls of the northern rooms in the eastern wing of the courtyard, this wing probably served as entrances to the temple. Y. Aharoni rejected the dating of the structure to the Persian period, since under the foundations of the temple and its floor he had uncovered remains dating to the Persian period and therefore pre-dating its construction, while the upper stratum was dated to the Hellenistic period. He supported this theory by the fact that the structure was built in one phase and that Hellenistic pottery was found together with Persian pottery in the foundation trenches of its walls, and in pits under the floor of the courtyard. Moreover, during the excavations he uncovered the northern portion of a pillared building (100) abutting the southern wall of the temple. This building contained finds similar in all respects to those found in the temple, and the excavator believed it was used by those involved in temple maintenance.³³ Artefacts from the Persian period found in the "Solar Shrine" temple (mainly cube-shaped stone altars and incense braziers) led Y. Aharoni to seek a cult structure at the site from the Persian period. An analysis of the British expedition's report,³⁴ led to the conclusion that c. 40 m southeast of the temple, a structure had been uncovered similar to the temple in orientation, measurements and its lateral entrance. This structure contained a courtyard, rooms on the eastern and northern wings, and, in the west, a sanctuary and an inner sanctuary separated by a row of columns. Among the meagre finds in the structure were sherds from the fourth and third centuries. Y. Aharoni believed that this building went out of use at the end of the third century and its contents were moved into the above-mentioned structure. If we are to accept his architectural and stratigraphical analysis of Level I, Building 10, is in fact the temple of Level I's Achaemenid occupation based on their similar building plan, orientation and finds, among them a limestone altar that imitates a shrine.³⁵ This structure contained a courtyard, rooms in the eastern and northern wings, and, in the west, a sanc-

33. Y. Aharoni, *Lachish V: Investigations at Lachish. The Sanctuary and the Residency*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 3-6. E. Stern's contra arguments for Persian period dating for the "Solar Shrine" were based in the main on a discovery of a complete cooking-pot, found under the southern wall of the courtyard that he wrongly assigned to the Persian period, see E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.*, Warminster 1982, pp. 61-63. This type of cooking-pot (Aharoni, *ibid.*, pl. 51: 13) began to appear in the seventh century, as noted by G.L. Kelm and A. Mazar, "Tel Batash (Timnah) Excavations: Second Preliminary Report (1981-1983)", *BASOR.S* 23, 1985, p. 111, n. 9, fig. 17: 1, and is characteristic of southern Palestine, especially at coastal-plain sites. It is doubtful that it continued to appear in the Persian and Hellenistic periods since it is missing from assemblages from this period. Its attribution to the end of the Iron Age contributes nothing to the determination of the subsequent construction of the cultic site at Lachish.

34. Tufnell, *op. cit.* (n. 32), pp. 147-148, pls. 121, 123.

35. Aharoni, *op. cit.* (n. 33), pp. 6-11.

tuary and an inner sanctuary separated by a row of columns (fig. 4 bottom). In both of the Lachish temples, Building 10 and the “Solar Shrine”, cube-shaped stone altars and stands were dominant. In a recent paper we argued, based on the finds from the renewed excavations of the site, that the “Solar Shrine” may in fact be the only remnant of secure Hellenistic date in Lachish. In any case the recovery of Persian and Hellenistic pottery in pits below the temple’s courtyard floor, and in trenches outside the building, strongly suggests that its foundations post-date the massive construction works.³⁶ Furthermore, most of the finds recovered by the British expedition were dated to the second half of the second century. It should also be noted that the incense altars need not necessarily to be ascribed to the Persian period; it is not to be ruled out that they are Hellenistic implements, whose manufacturing tradition persisted from the Iron Age.³⁷

With this survey of architectural evidence in mind, let us now return to the aforementioned question: to what extent can we speak of a “change” in the cult practice of Persian versus Hellenistic period Palestine? A broader look at the evidence collected here must take into consideration the so-called Hellenisation process the country underwent after the Greco-Macedonian conquest – namely the alleged absorption of Greek cultural customs, both spiritual and material, by the local populations. In the historical and archaeological research of the Hellenistic East, the terms “break” as a synonym for the Hellenisation process and “continuity” as a synonym for local traditionalism – are often used. The four examples surveyed here in fact represent different ethnic groups: Phoenicians in Mount Mišpe Yammim and Makhmish, Samaritans in Mount Gerizim, and Edomites in Lachish. In all these examples, modifications to building plans between the Persian and Hellenistic periods can be better explained by cultic needs for social adaptation rather than a new and different cult practice. According to my understanding of the archaeological data, temples with an Achaemenid past retained traditional cultural patterns during the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The archaeological data provides evidence for the superiority of local traditions over foreign ones, and for continuity in the cult practice. Another ethnic group that can be added to this equation is the Jews. Although the archaeological evidence is very limited, the absence of figurines in Jerusalem and

36. A. Fantalkin and O. Tal, “Redating Lachish Level I: Identifying Achaemenid Imperial Policy at the Southern Frontier of the Fifth Satrapy”, in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming eds, *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, Winona Lake 2006, pp. 167-197.

37. Cf. G. Cymbalista, *Cubic Shaped Altars in Israel: From the End of the Iron Age till the Hellenistic Period*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Tel Aviv University 1997 (Hebrew, English Summary, pp. 1-13).

Judah in both the Persian and Hellenistic periods suggests that the second commandment was vigorously kept during these two periods.

Partial and limited Hellenisation did occur at a later stage, but in the archaeological record it is mainly visible in artefacts (and architecture) of royal administration. Surprisingly, all the known Greek royal inscriptions that are cult-oriented have come from sites where Persian period temples did not exist. For the purpose of this article it is important to survey the secured cultic material of the Ptolemaic period, that is the third century. As far as Greek epigraphic material is concerned, the earliest and sole “cultic” Ptolemaic inscription we have comes from Joppa (Ioppa). It was found in J. Kaplan’s excavations (Area C – west of the tell), in what he defined as the courtyard of a constructed tomb complex. The text was inscribed on a marble tablet (c. 0.19 × 0.32 m and 5 cm thick). The inscription reads:

1. βασιλέα μέγαν Πτολεμαῖον
2. θεὸν Φιλοπάτορα τὸν ἐγ βασιλέως
3. Πτολεμαίου καὶ βασιλίσσης
4. Βερενίκης Θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν,
5. Θεοῦ Πτολεμαίου βασιλέως
6. [φιλαδελφίου ἔκγονον, Ἀναξικλῆς
7. [... ἱερεὺς τοῦ βασι-
8. [λέως ἀνέθηκεν ...]

“For the great king, Ptolemy the god, Philopator, son of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice Euergetes g[ods], brother’s child of Ptolemy the king-god, Anaxikles [the p]riest of the ki[ng dedicated ...].”

This dedicatory inscription was rightfully attributed to a temple that was not discovered during the excavations. However, it gives us evidence that some kind of Ptolemaic king-cult was practised at the site in the days of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221/20-204/03), if not earlier, although our understanding of the Ptolemaic king as a religious figure is not only far from being complete, but also varied and complicated.³⁸ The inscription is conventionally dated by some scholars to the summer of 217, i.e. after the battle of Raphia at which time Ptolemy IV may have visited the site.³⁹ The fact that the inscription is carved on a marble slab, rock that is foreign to the Palestinian geological environment, may suggest that it bears a somewhat fixed formula that did not necessarily have religious or social meaning for the inhabitants of Joppa.

Other indirect evidence of a Ptolemaic temple in Joppa comes from the papyri of Zenon, the private secretary of Apollonios, the finance minister of Ptolemy II. The site is mentioned in four papyri that are dated within the years 259-257. In PSI 4, 406, Joppa is mentioned in the

38. See in this respect L. Koenen, “The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure”, in A. Bulloch *et al.* eds, *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World*, Hellenistic Culture and Society 12, Berkeley 1993, pp. 25-115.

39. B. Lifshitz, “Beiträge zur palästinischen Epigraphik”, *ZDPV* 78, 1962, pp. 82-84, pl. 10; E. Lupo, “A New Look at Three Inscriptions from Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Gaza”, *SCI* 22, 2003, pp. 193-195. See also *SEG* 20: No. 467.

context of trading female slaves; one Dionisios is said to bring *ἱερεα* (apparently *ἱερεία* = priestess) to Joppa who probably practised prostitution in a temple there.⁴⁰ Whether the deity worshipped at this temple was local is unclear.⁴¹

Private cultic Greek inscriptions that may belong to the period of Ptolemaic rule found at Tel Dan and Kafr Yasif (near Accho-Ptolemais), show evidence of people with Greek names that are worshipping Eastern deities. In Tel Dan, a bilingual dedicatory inscription, in Greek and Aramaic, carved on a limestone tablet (c. 0.15 × 0.26 m and 3 cm thick), which was found out of context, reads:

1. Θεῶι
2. τῶι ἐν Δανοις
3. [Z]ώϊλος εὐχὴν.
4. [BDN] NDR ZW³YLWS L³L[H³].

“Zwilos (in fulfilment of) a vow to the god who is in Danim”.

It seems that the partly preserved Aramaic inscription is a translation of the Greek text.⁴² More interesting is the fact that the person who dedicated the stone uses the plural form Danois (Dans), as if commemorating the biblical tribe of Dan, and implying that the Hellenistic inhabitants of the town saw themselves as their descendents.

The carved limestone (c. 0.18 × 0.17 m and c. 5.5 cm thick) dedicatory inscription found in Kafr Yasif mentions the construction of an altar to the Syrian (Phoenician) gods Hadad and Atargatis.

1. [ῬΑ]δάδωι καὶ ῬΑταργάτει
2. Θεοῖς ἐπηκόοις
3. Διόδοτος Νεοπτολέμου
4. ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ καὶ Φιλίστας
5. τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ τῶν
6. τέκνων τὸν βωμὸν
7. κατ³ εὐχὴν.

“To Hadad and Atargatis the gods who listen to prayers, Diodotos the son of Neoptolemos, on behalf of himself and Philista his wife and their children (has dedicated) the altar in fulfilment of a vow”.

40. X. Durand, *Des Grecs en Palestine au III^e siècle avant Jésus-Christ: Le dossier syrien des archives de Zénon de Caunos (261-252)*, CRB 38, Paris 1997, No. 27.

41. As far as other royal Greek Palestinian “cultic” inscriptions are concerned, where Greek deities are specifically mentioned (namely Zeus and Apollo), e.g., *SEG* 19: No. 904 (Accho-Ptolemais); *SEG* 8: No. 33 (Beth Shean-Scythopolis); *SEG* 8: Nos. 245–246 (Maresha-Marisa), and G.A. Reisner *et al.*, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria 1908-1910*, Cambridge, Mass 1924, vol. I, p. 250 and vol. II, pl. 59: a, a date in the mid to late second century is evident.

42. *SEG* 26: No. 1684; V. Tzaferis, “The “God Who is in Dan” and the Cult of Pan at Banias in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods”, *Erls* 23, 1992, pp. 129*-131*.

M. Avi-Yonah saw the inscription as evidence that Greeks who settled in the area of Ptolemais worshipped local deities, originating in this case from Syria-Aram.⁴³ Hadad and Atargatis were apparently patron-deities of Ptolemais during the Hellenistic period.⁴⁴

The cult of Palestine in its transition from Achaemenid to Greek rule may best be vouched for in plastic, pictographic art. The main expression of this art is clay and stone figurines and statuettes. The chronological accuracy of this art form is sometimes problematic as it is difficult to attribute certain examples to either the Ptolemaic or the Seleucid period. However given the commonness of this art form in Palestine throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages their dominance in both the fourth and third centuries is very much to be expected. Figurines and statuettes are found in both private and public cult-oriented structures and thus are related to both popular and royal beliefs. It is difficult to identify figurines of local deities, or even those of Greek deities that could be identified by characteristically Greek symbols mixed with local ones. Still, local deities have been identified with certainty by means of their Greek parallels from this period, and serve as tools in understanding the place of local cult among the Greeks who ruled the country. This conclusion does reflect the recognition of religious-cultic pluralism (as is evident from the private Greek inscriptions), and even limited external syncretism. But it also highlights a trend towards reciprocity between Greek royal cult and popular, traditional-local cult.⁴⁵ The limited number of classic sculptures in Hellenistic Palestine supports this trend.⁴⁶ Imported versus local, securely dated Hellenistic sculptures can be defined by the type of rock used. Imports are made of marble (a rock foreign to the Palestinian milieu), whereas Palestinian classical-styled sculptures are made of local rock. This trend attests to the existence of imported art, apparently to meet royal cultic needs, as well as to the limited Greek influence on glyptic Palestinian stone art of the period. However, since almost no other evidence of the use of marble in local architecture in this period has emerged (except for marble tables of royal inscriptions found in Ptolemais and Joppa), it seems that the use of marble was royal-oriented.

It is important to mention that we have no Palestinian epigraphic evidence of persons with Eastern names worshipping Western deities. It has long been suggested that the evidence from royal coinage provides a reliable reconstruction of the cult practised in Palestine under Ptolemaic

43. *SEG* 18: No. 622; M. Avi-Yonah, "Syrian Gods at Ptolemais-Accho", *IEJ* 9, 1959, pp. 1-12.

44. E. Friedheim, "The Syrian Pagan Cult of Ptolemais-Accho during the Hellenistic and Roman Period", in *Jerusalem and Eretz Israel: Arie Kindler Volume*, Ramat Gan-Tel Aviv 2000, pp. 89-100 (Hebrew, English Abstract, p. 104*).

45. Cf. e.g. A. Erlich, "Terracotta Figurines of Hellenistic Maresha: Between Art and Craft", *Assaph* 7, 2002, pp. 1-16.

46. Elsewhere I argued that the number of proper Hellenistic "life-size" and monumental sculptures is limited, and because most of them came from mixed assemblages, it is difficult to date them, as Roman statuary sculpted in the classical sometimes perfectly imitated Hellenistic creations, see M. Fischer and O. Tal, "Architectural Decoration in Ancient Israel in Hellenistic Times: Some Aspects of Hellenization", *ZDPV* 119, 2003, pp. 36-37.

rule.⁴⁷ However, royal Ptolemaic coinage minted in Palestine show a variety of images and motifs identified with deities from the Greek pantheon alongside portraits of the kings (and members of their family). Royal coins were minted in Jerusalem under Ptolemy I,⁴⁸ Ptolemais, Joppa, Gaza and Jerusalem under Ptolemy II, Ptolemais, Joppa and Gaza under Ptolemy III, Ptolemais and Ascalon under Ptolemy IV, and Ptolemais (?), Dor and Joppa under Ptolemy V.⁴⁹ Many of the coins show the motif of an eagle standing on a thunderbolt (symbolizing Zeus), and several others show Greek deities such as Zeus, Athena and Heracles. Nevertheless there is also evidence for combined Greek-oriental deities such as Zeus-Amon (depicted as a horned Zeus) on the bronze coins of Ptolemais under Ptolemy II and III and those of Joppa and Gaza under Ptolemy II. Royal Ptolemaic coinage minted in Palestine cannot be taken as evidence of Greek cult in the above-mentioned minting centres. The coins' royal status represents the authorities and their representatives, definitely not the populations where they were circulating. Their function was fundamentally economical – a monetary inter-urban economy at its various levels, first and foremost that of the state, a response to the needs of the government and the army, and the municipal economy at the level of the individual.⁵⁰

To summarise our arguments the following should be stressed: the dominance of local traditions in Palestinian popular cult is much evident in the archaeological record of the late Achaemenid and Diadochi/Ptolemaic rule. Evidence of Greek fingerprints under the Diadochi and Ptolemies is confined to the royal cult. In terms of Hellenisation versus Orientalisation, the epigraphic evidence allows us to assume that the Greeks who resided in Palestine, as a minority group that formed part of the governing body, were under the influence of the local populations rather than being influential themselves. The dominance of local traditions is also evident in several Hellenistic temples that were established

47. E.g. H. Seyrig, "Antiquités syriennes - Divinités de Ptolémaïs", *Syr.* 39, 1962, pp. 193-207.

48. H. Gitler and C. Lorber, "A New Chronology for the Ptolemaic Coins of Judah", *AJN* (Second Series) 18, 2006, pp. 1-41. The Ptolemaic Yehud coins are irrelevant for this argument as they show no Greek deities due to religious prohibitions. As their late Persian counterparts, these coins were produced under high elemental silver value of about 97%, a suitable currency for temple's payments, as recently suggested by Y. Ronen, "Some Observations on the Coinage of Yehud", *INJ* 15, 2003-06, pp. 28-29. The Ptolemaic Yehud coins are minted until the late 260s, during the reign of Ptolemy II.

49. E.g. J.N. Svoronos, *Τ Νομίσματα τοῦ Κράτους τῶν Πτολεμαίων*, Athens 1904-08.

50. G.K. Jenkins, "The Monetary Systems in the Early Hellenistic Time with Special Regard to the Economic Policy of the Ptolemaic Kings", in A. Kindler, ed., *International Numismatic Convention, Jerusalem 27-31 December 1963. The Patterns of Monetary Development in Phoenicia and Palestine in Antiquity, Proceedings*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem 1967, pp. 55-74.

during the Hellenistic period, such as Accho, Tel Mikhal and Beersheba (fig. 5). These show the continuous development of the local building tradition.⁵¹ This phenomenon is not unique to Palestine. To a certain extent it seems to characterise cult installations in the entire Hellenistic East.

51. See on this, O. Tal, *The Archaeology of Hellenistic Palestine: Between Tradition and Renewal*, Jerusalem 2006, pp. 48-90 (Hebrew).

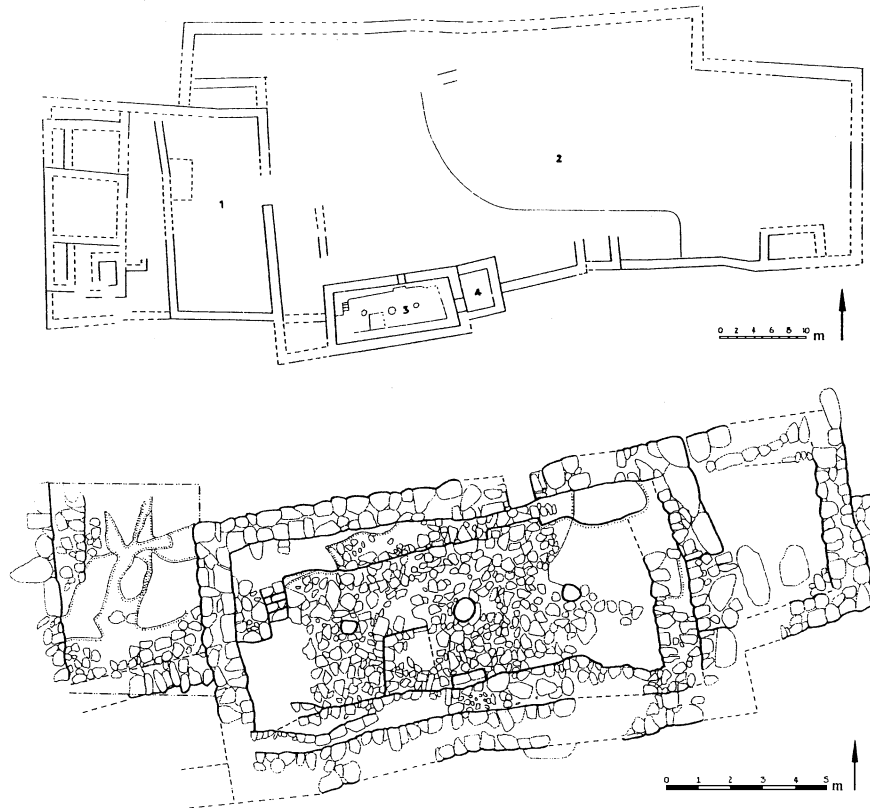


Fig. 1 : Site plan of Mount Mišpe Yammim (top) and temple (bottom)
(after Frenkel, loc. cit. [n. 3], p. 47)

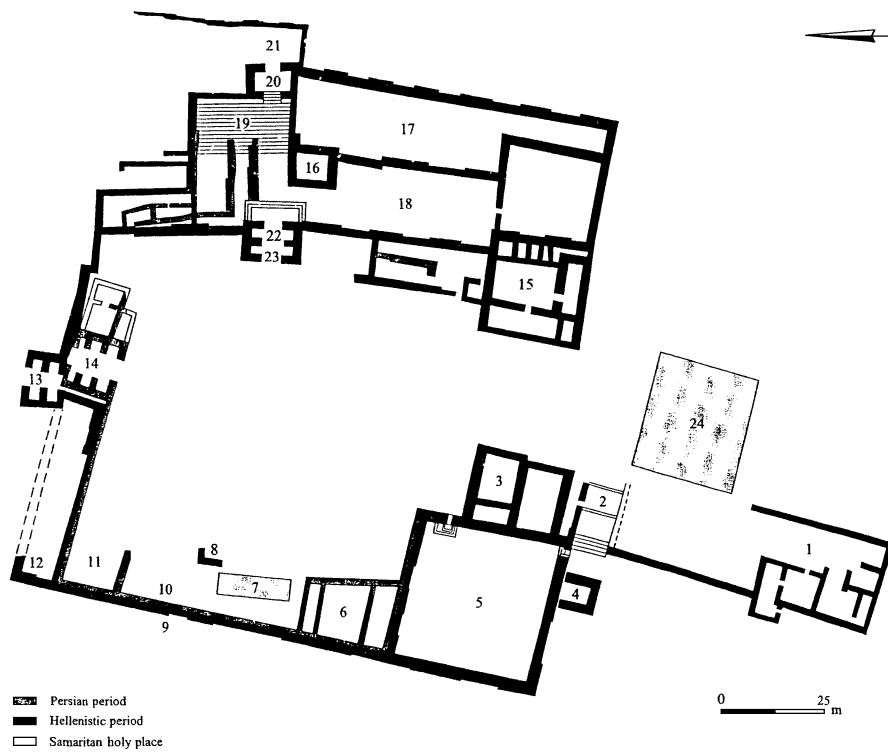


Fig. 2 : Site plan of Mount Gerizim
(after Magen et al., op. cit. [n. 8], p. 5, fig. 5)

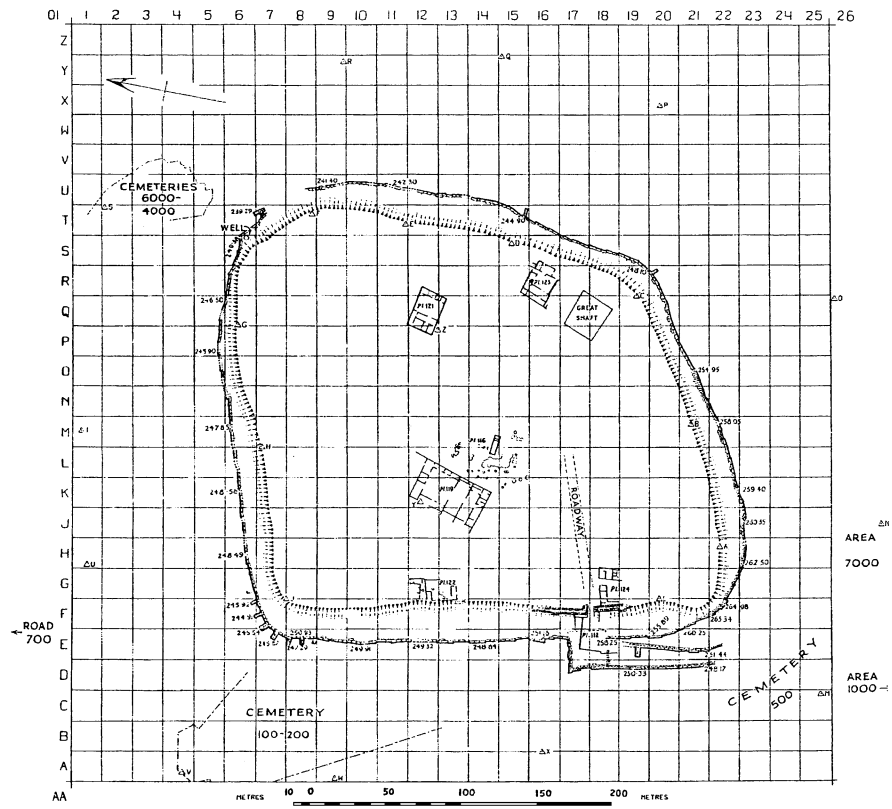


Fig. 3 : Site plan of Lachish
(after Tufnell, op. cit. [n. 32], pl. 108)

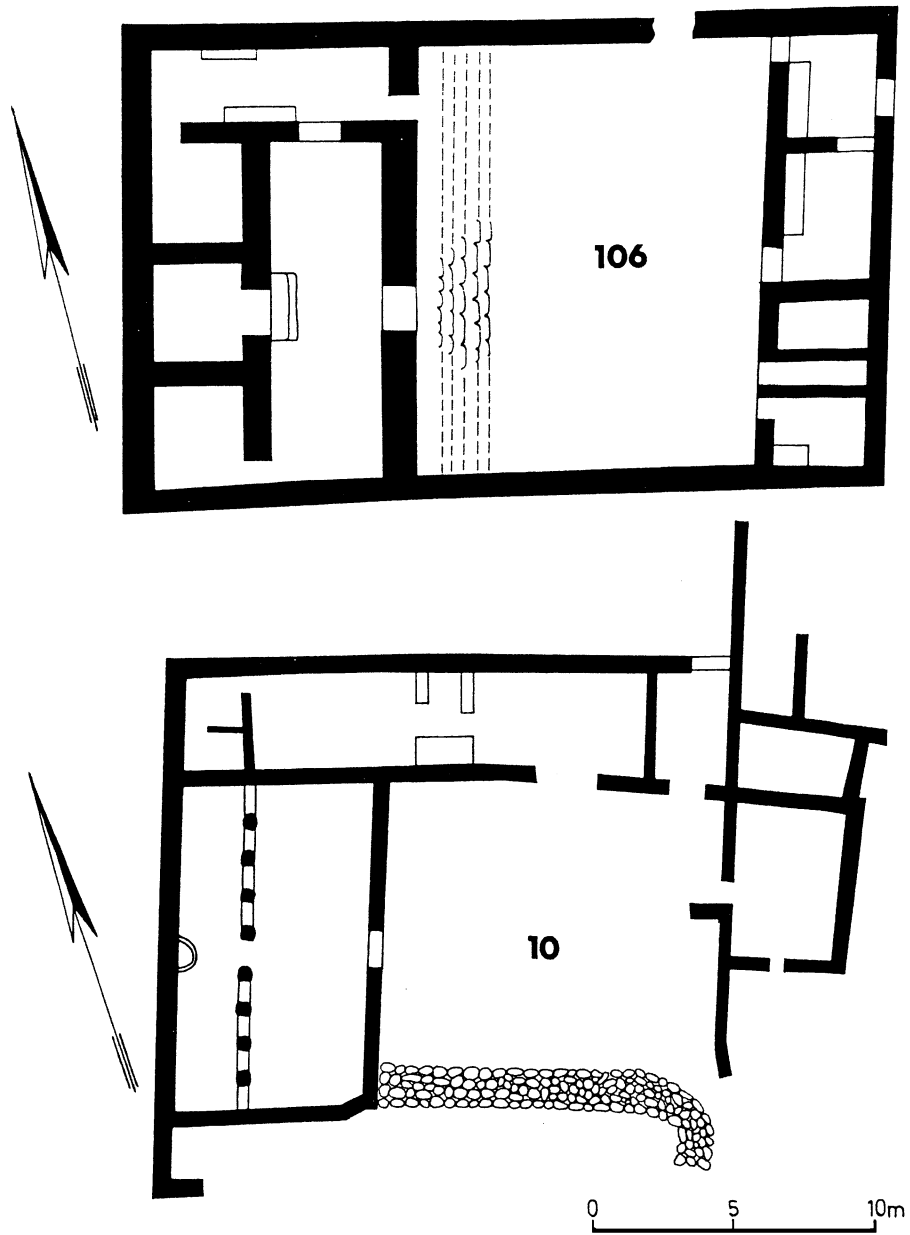


Fig. 4 : Temples of Lachish
(after Aharoni : op. cit. n. [33], p. 10, fig. 3)

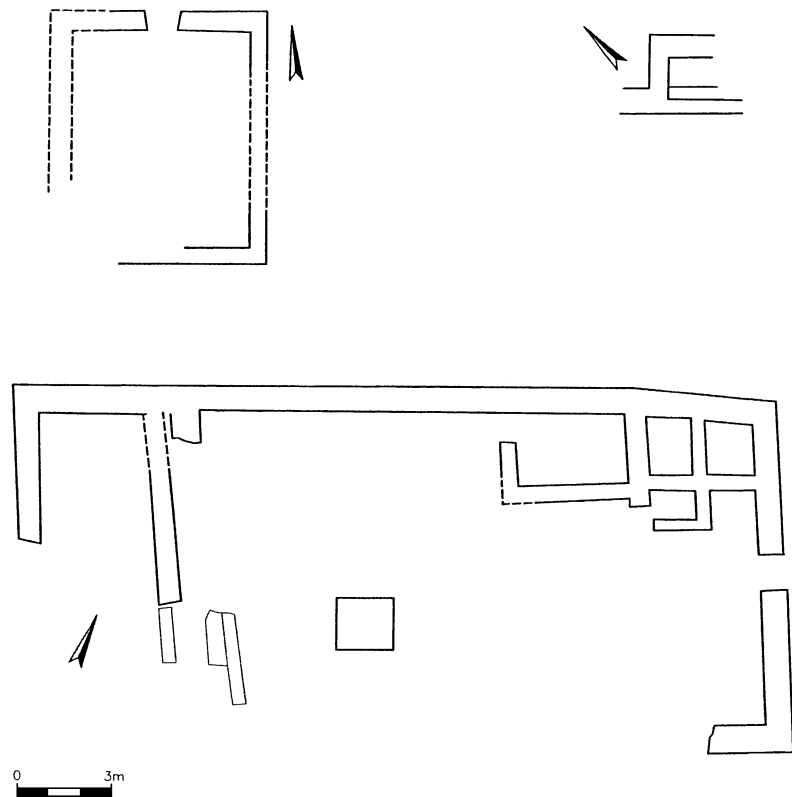


Fig. 5 : *Hellenistic Temples of Accho, Tel Mikhal and Beersheba*
(author)