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Research Article

The Shiloh Favissa: Israel's Only Levitically Sanctioned Cultic Deposit

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Abstract

The discovery of a controlled cultic deposit in Area D at Shiloh, near the presumed Tabernacle location, provides a rare archaeological window into early Israelite ritual practice. First excavated by Israel Finkelstein and later by Scott Stripling, the assemblage includes ash layers, approximately 10,000 bones from clean species, cultic vessels, ceramic stands, and eight gold and silver objects. Stratigraphic analysis, ceramic typology, and radiocarbon data place the deposit within the Late Bronze Age II horizon (ca. 1400–1200 BC), aligning with early Israelite occupation. While over forty favissae are known in the southern Levant, most reflect Canaanite or Philistine traditions. The Shiloh assemblage differs in its restricted composition, near absence of iconography, and controlled deposition within a central cultic zone. These features align with biblical prescriptions for the disposal of sanctified materials (Lev. 4:11–12; 6:10–11) and an earlier precedent (Gen. 35). We argue that the Shiloh favissa represents a coherent, in situ expression of early Israelite sacred deposition.

Introduction

Almost five decades after its discovery, the Shiloh favissa remains insufficiently analyzed. The deposit has yet to be evaluated in relation to the wider phenomenon of Near Eastern *favissae* or the biblical paradigm of sacred disposal. As a result, its significance has remained largely unrecognized, even as excavations have continued to reveal its complexity (Stripling et al. 2025, 4–5).

Favissae themselves are not unique to Israel; Nicole Strassburger (2015, 200) notes more than forty documented examples throughout the Levant, Egypt, and the broader ancient Near East. Yet, these deposits vary widely in form and purpose, and scholars have, at times, used the term favissa so loosely that it obscures more than it clarifies. Often archaeologists use the term loosely, applying it to pits or chambers containing ritual debris. But Raz Kletter (2015, 199–216) and Nicole Strassburger (2015) have demonstrated that broad application of the term favissa has produced considerable interpretive confusion. Deposits functioning as trash pits, demolition fills, foundation deposits, and formal sacred repositories have all been incorrectly labeled favissae.

Previous Excavation of Area D

Finkelstein conducted a large-scale investigation of Shiloh between 1981 and 1984. During these excavations, Area D on the northeastern slope of the tell produced a dense accumulation of ash, animal bone, pottery [1], and cultic objects. Finkelstein et al. (1985, 166) described the deposit as secondary and classified it as dumped Late Bronze Age cultic debris from the summit, rather than interpreting it as an in situ cultic deposit. They (1985, 166) summarized this relocation as follows:

Sometime in Late Bronze Age II, but more likely in Iron Age I, while preparing the ground for new buildings, a favissa of the Late Bronze Age cult place (or perhaps the cult place itself) was cleared out and thrown into pits on the slope. Shortly afterwards the Iron Age silos were cut into these dumps.

Finkelstein did not base his interpretation of the deposit's secondary or displaced character primarily on the presence of Iron Age silos cut into the material—though such silos are archaeologically attested in Area D. Stripling et al. (2025, 4–5) document that numerous grain silos were cut into the favissa during the Iron Age I–IIa horizon (Strata 5–4c, ca. 1050–900 BC), disrupting its original stratigraphy and displacing sacrificial material radially outward from the core [2]. Finkelstein's primary argument for secondary deposition rested on his observation that later occupants removed or reused stones from nearby walls (M321 and M332), suggesting disturbance of an earlier context (Finkelstein et al. 1993, 45).

At the same time, he was explicit in identifying the deposit as cultic. As he states, "in view of these finds, the Late Bronze Age debris is interpreted as a favissa of offerings which were brought to a shrine" (Finkelstein 1993, 45).

ABR Excavation of Area D

Renewed excavation in Area D by ABR has clarified the favissa's stratigraphy, chronology, and contents. Removal of intact balks and an unexcavated portion of the core favissa left by BIU revealed stratified deposits [3], demonstrating repeated deposition over multiple phases. While Finkelstein et al. (1985, 45–47) suggested that Iron Age I Israelites relocated the Late Bronze Age I/IIA favissa from the summit to Area D, Stripling et al. (2025, 4–5) interpret the deposit as an in situ Late Bronze Age II favissa (Figure 1), arguing that the observed stratigraphic disturbance results primarily from later intrusive Iron Age silos rather than from secondary dumping.

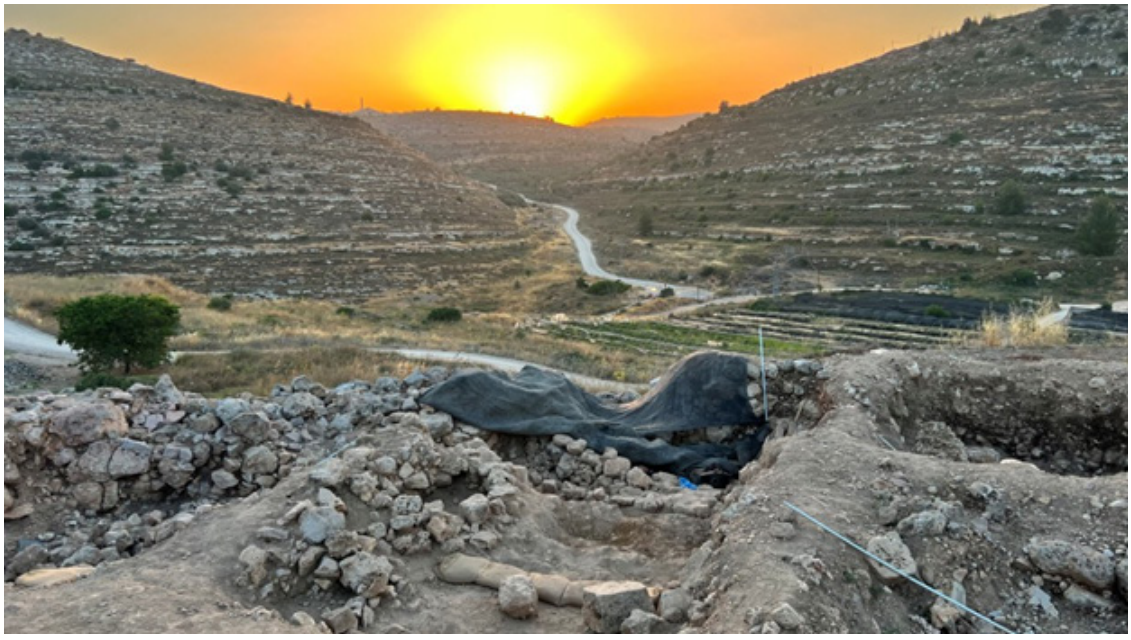

Figure 1:

Our central research questions are straightforward: Is the Shiloh deposit a favissa, and if so, does its content and context reflect a uniquely Israelite theology of sacred disposal? Answering these questions requires careful attention to archaeological data, cross-cultural comparison, and biblical ritual texts. It demands engagement with a central interpretive question of whether the Shiloh deposit reflects a distinctly Israelite theology of sacred disposal, one in which sanctified or contaminated materials are permanently withdrawn from use to safeguard the holiness of the sanctuary [4], rather than the Canaanite pattern of preserving and perpetuating cultic objects within ongoing systems of idol-based worship [5]. While the archaeological evidence is suggestive, a definitive distinction between these two ritual logics cannot be established on material grounds alone [6]. The same depositional act may carry fundamentally different theological meanings depending on the cultural and religious framework within which it occurs.

What the material record can offer is a profile of the contents, context [7], and composition of the deposit, against which both Canaanite and Israelite ritual paradigms may be evaluated. By analyzing the Shiloh favissa via an integrative framework, we aim to demonstrate that it represents Israel's only archaeologically attested [8], theologically consistent favissa—one that aligns with ancient Near Eastern ritual practices while embodying Israel's distinctive approach to purity, sacrifice, and the retirement of sacred objects.

Methods

We apply Kletter's (1995, 13–18) diagnostic criteria for identifying favissae: they connect with cult places; they contain votive materials and/or temple paraphernalia; they may include remains of sacrificed animals; they exhibit stratigraphic integrity in which objects are not refuse [9]; cultic items are deliberately retired from use []", frequently through intentional breakage; and cultic materials commonly display evidence of burning, likely from incense. Our analysis of the Shiloh favissa focuses on the published archaeological record generated through two distinct excavations in Area D. The first dataset derives from the BIU excavation, which exposed an ash-rich deposit containing faunal remains, cultic ceramics, and rare prestige objects on the northeastern slope of the tell (Finkelstein et al. 1985, 166–168; Finkelstein 1993, 396). The ABR excavation has produced a second and more refined dataset, with expanded horizontal and vertical excavation, systematic wet-sifting of soil [11], and controlled metal detection (Stripling et al. 2025, 1–6). Ceramic, faunal, radiocarbon, and artifact analyses form our evidentiary basis Figure 2.

Figure 2:

The burial or controlled disposal of cultic materials was a widespread phenomenon in Bronze and Iron Age ritual systems, though the theological meaning attached to such practices varied across cultures. A guiding methodological principle in this comparative analysis is resemanticization—the transformation of shared material forms into distinct theological expressions [12]. This study assumes neither cultural isolation nor syncretism but examines how Israelite ritual practice appropriated familiar depositional practices while investing them with new meaning. Our comparative method distinguishes form from meaning, recognizing that similar vessels or objects may appear across cultures while functioning within fundamentally different ritual paradigms [13].

Finally, we incorporate biblical analogues to clarify the conceptual framework of sacred disposal within early Israel. These include Genesis 35, when Jacob buries foreign gods and earrings at Shechem in an act of covenantal purification; Levitical legislation governing the disposal of sacrificial remains outside the camp (Lev. 4:11–12; 6:10–11); the storage of red heifer ashes in a ritually clean location (Num. 19:9); the complete decommissioning of the golden calf (Exod. 32:20); the votive dedication of earrings and precious metal objects permanently withdrawn from use as a memorial before the Lord (Num. 31:50–54); and the altar installation at Mount Ebal as a proto-favissa of early Israelite sacred deposition (Josh. 8:30–35). Together, these texts form the interpretive basis for evaluating the Shiloh favissa within its biblical and ritual context [14]. By integrating Kletter's criteria with a biblical–Levitical paradigm for evaluating cultic legitimacy, we can determine whether the Shiloh deposit qualifies as a favissa [15] and, if so, whether it reflects an authentically Israelite expression of the practice.

Results

BIU opened thirteen squares in Area D, leaving one-meter balks

on their north and east. Their work yielded approximately 3,000 animal bones interspersed with abundant Late Bronze Age pottery (2,621 sherds and 104 restorable vessels), along with a gold floral medallion (Stripling 2026) Figure 3.

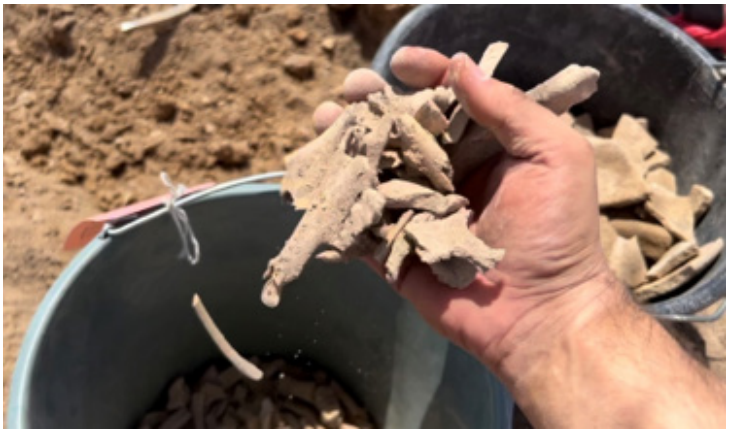

Figure 3:

ABR's excavation expanded the assemblage[1]. We recovered approximately 7,000 additional animal bones and fragments, together with abundant Late Bronze Age II pottery (1,468 sherds and eight restorable vessels). When combined with the earlier Bar-Ilan material, the favissa assemblage comprises 10,000 animal bones [16-22], approximately 4,100 Late Bronze Age pottery sherds, and 112 restorable vessels, many of which are cultic, including chalices, lamps, cones, and related ritual forms (Snyder et al. 2025, 65–84). The contents exhibited pervasive burning.

Systematic metal detecting and wet sifting methods, not employed during the 1980s, resulted in the recovery of additional precious-metal objects. Taken together, the two excavations recovered seven gold objects and one silver object from the favissa. The gold assemblage includes thin sheet-gold ornaments manufactured using the repoussé technique, including star or floral/rosette-shaped appliqués and a gold pendant with a rear suspension loop recovered by ABR [23-24]. BIU recovered a small sheet-gold floral garment or hair ornament. In addition, ABR recovered a single lunate style silver earring, typologically consistent with Late Bronze Age prestige adornment.

Discussion

Area D excavations reveal a series of intentional deposits consisting of ash, burned animal bone, cultic ceramics, and a corpus of precious-metal objects placed within a confined zone on the northeastern slope of the tell, approximately 35 meters east of the proposed Tabernacle plateau (Stripling 2025, 10–11). The stratigraphic profile of the deposit demonstrates gradual deposition [25]. Distinct ash lenses, patterned bone concentrations, and dateable ceramic assemblages exist across multiple stratigraphic layers with notable internal consistency (Finkelstein et al. 1985, 166–168; Stripling et al. 2025, 4–5).

Ceramic Assemblage

The favissa's ceramic assemblage is substantial, consisting primarily of bowls, chalices, juglets, lamps, goblets, and kraters—forms commonly associated with cultic activity in Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age contexts (Greenfield et al., forthcoming) [26]. Several vessels retained ash or bones within or in concentration surrounding the broken vessel, ...suggesting sacrifice (Figure 4).

Equally significant is what the deposit does not contain: storage jars, cooking vessels, grinding stones, and other utilitarian indicators [27]. This suggests cultic rather than domestic use (Stripling et al. 2025, 4). The lack of occupational debris, combined with the exclusive presence of cultic vessels and sacrificial remains, distinguishes the Shiloh deposit from refuse pits, destruction layers [28], or domestic dumps in both form and function (Finkelstein 1993, 396)[2].

[1]Jordan McClinton served as the Area D supervisor.

[2]"Occupational debris" refers to the stratified accumulation of domestic activity, such as cooking wares, storage jars, grinding stones, architectural collapse, and mixed refuse, resulting from sustained habitation rather than intentional ritual deposition.

Figure 4:

Faunal Assemblage

Approximately 10,000 bones, overwhelmingly from clean animals (e.g., sheep, goats, and cattle), comprise the faunal assemblage (Stripling 2025, 4). Burning patterns range from superficial charring to full calcination Figure 5, reflecting deliberate sacrificial treatment rather than domestic food consumption [29]. Of particular importance is the right-side bias in the assemblage, a pattern that distinguishes the deposit from ordinary dietary refuse[3].

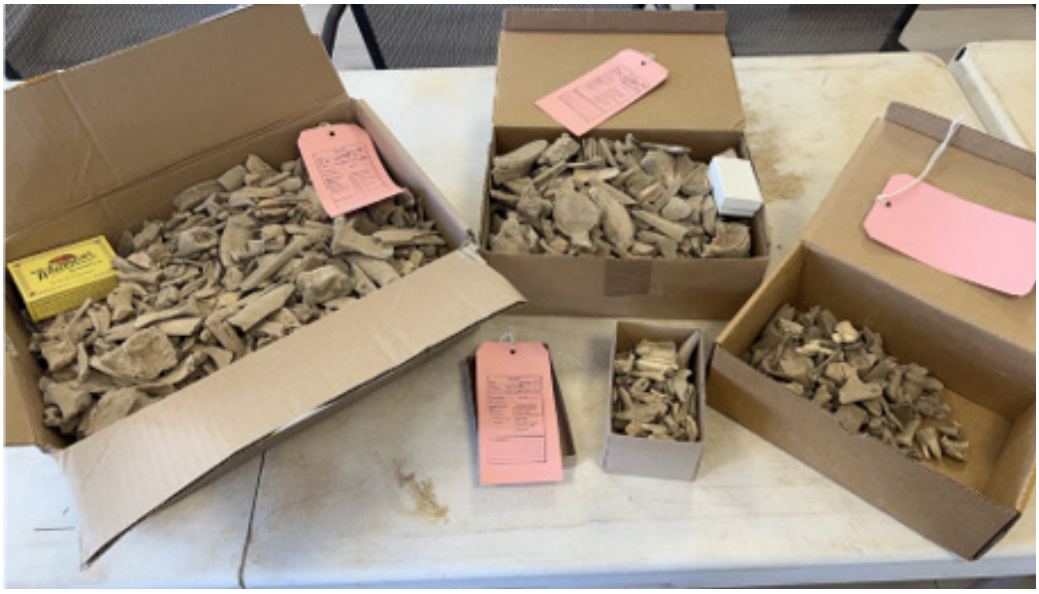

Figure 5:

[3]Zooarchaeological analysis indicates a consistent predominance of right-side skeletal elements. Hellwing et al. (1993, 314–315) observed that approximately 53% of the identifiable bones derived from the animals' right side. Analysis of the expanded assemblage recovered during the renewed ABR excavations shows 55% of the diagnostic elements deriving from the right side of the overall assemblage and 57% among caprines (Greenfield et al., forthcoming).

Gold Stars in the Shiloh Favissa (Table 1)

Among the Shiloh gold objects are a floral/rosette pendant (Finkelstein et al. 1993, 266) from BIU, along with six pieces from ABR [30]. Of the latter, two are intricately fashioned eight or nine-pointed stars. Such imagery recalls the astral aspects of goddesses such as Astarte/Ishtar, deities linked with fertility [31], warfare, and the morning/evening star (Venus). Star iconography, associated with celestial symbolism, was typical in the Near East during the Late Bronze Age (Tufnell et al. 1940, 24).

Table 1: Precious-Metal Objects from Area D, Shiloh (All Excavations).

Excavation Phase	Object Type	Description	Provenience	Citation (page nos.)
BIU	Floral/Rosette	Thin sheet-gold ornament, pierced at apex for attachment; three-petaled floral/rosette form; approx. 2 × 2.5 cm; weight 0.54 g; interpreted as garment, wig, or hair ornament	Area D, Locus 1415 (Debris 407), Stratum VI	Finkelstein et al. 1985, 148, 166; Finkelstein 1993, 11, 396; Sass 1993, 266
ABR (2022–2026)	Star-Shaped Appliqué	Thin sheet-gold star/rosette appliqué; repoussé manufacture; with suspension loop	Area D favissa	Snyder et al. 2025, 73
ABR (2022–2026)	Star-Shaped Appliqué	Thin sheet-gold star/rosette appliqué; repoussé manufacture; without suspension loop	Area D favissa	Snyder et al. 2025, 74
ABR (2022–2026)	Tubular gold bead or loop	Cylindrical gold bead or tubular suspension loop; repoussé manufacture;	Area D favissa	Snyder et al. 2025, 71–72
ABR (2022–2026)	Bearded Man Face Appliqué	Thin sheet-gold depicting a bearded man's face; repoussé manufacture; without suspension loop	Area D favissa	Stripling et al. 2026, 4
ABR (2022–2026)	Misshapen Gold Object	Nondescript scrap of gold or spillage	Area D favissa	Snyder et al. 2025, 77–78
ABR (2022–2026)	Pendant	Gold pendant (almond/leaf or spoon-shaped), with rear suspension loop	Area D favissa	Snyder et al. 2025, 76–77
ABR (2022–2026)	Earring	Single silver wire earring; lunate form; Late Bronze typology	Area D favissa	Stripling et al. 2025, 4

Lachish Gold Stars

At Lachish, one of the most significant Late Bronze Age cultic centers in southern Canaan, Olga Tufnell's (1940, pl. 26, nos. 10–12, 14–15) excavations of the Lachish Fosse Temple (Level VI) revealed five gold eight-pointed star pendants among a cluster of votive offerings[4]. Given their elite material, aesthetic quality, and celestial iconography [32], these stars likely carried religious connotations(.) Figure 6. These objects reflect a broader iconographic convention in Canaanite and Egyptianized cults, where astral motifs like the star and rosette symbolized the divine feminine, fertility, and celestial power (Ussishkin 2004, 269–270; Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 178–180). The eight-pointed star's connection to Ishtar (Astarte) also appears in Egyptian decorative motifs and as a symbol of divinity more broadly (Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 74)[5].

Figure 6:

[4]The Lachish Fosse Temple favissa securely dates to Late Bronze Age IIB. It contained polytheistic cultic items over multiple phases, including figurines, cult stands, libation vessels, and prestigious metal objects (Ussishkin 2004, 57–76). Tufnell et al. recovered small repoussé gold appliqué pendants (1940, pl. 26.45), along with two stylized palm-tree pendants (1940, pl. 26.6–7).

[5]In the case of Lachish, Tufnell et al. note that while certain figurines may reflect Astarte–Ishtar imagery, other small finds—such as a gold ring and a scarab depicting a Hathor-fetish flanked by cats—indicate Egyptian Hathoric influence (Tufnell et al. 1940, pl. 17.9). The BIU excavation of Area D also recovered a Hyksos-style scarab (Reg. No. 7257) from Stratum VII, carved from steatite and mounted on a bronze ring. The scarab's base decoration reflects Tufnell's Design Classes 6B2a and 8A with a symmetrical rope-and-bar pattern surrounding a central X design—typology consistent with the beginning of the MB II–III horizon and characteristic of Hyksos administrative and apotropaic practice (Finkelstein et al. 1993, 205).

Whether these pendants were pagan objects or whether Israelites repurposed them remains uncertain. Regardless, their deliberate deposition within a ritual pit devoid of overt pagan iconography [33] suggests that they were sacred items requiring formal decommissioning.

This pattern of sacred deposition also situates the Lachish material within a broader Late Bronze Age context. The gold artifacts, found alongside clay figurines (pl. 28, nos. 3 and 7) and scarabs bearing the name of Amenhotep III (Tufnell et al. 1940, 24, pl. 32B, nos. 36–39), suggest a terminus post quem in the 14th–13th century BC [34], placing them in the Late Bronze Age II, similar to the Shiloh favissa.

Though separated by geography and theological outlook, the gold star pendants of Lachish and Shiloh offer a compelling material dialogue across contemporary sacred spaces [35]. The typological similarity between the Lachish and Shiloh stars suggests a common symbolic vocabulary shared by Canaanites and Israelites.

Tell el-'Ajjul Gold Stars

At Tell el-'Ajjul, Petrie (1934, pls. 13; 14.13–15; 36; 17.112) unearthed at least seven eight-pointed gold star pendants in two separate hoards. The gold pendants were part of a Late Bronze Age hoard [36], not within a defined ritual pit or sacred depository like at Shiloh, Lachish, or Yavneh. Thus, while Tell el-'Ajjul produced valuable cultic material and serves as a useful comparative site Figure 7, it does not meet the full criteria for a favissa.

Female Figurine / Zoomorphic Object

Finkelstein recovered a single Canaanite-style female figurine in Area D[6]. The yellowish, mold-made object, broken across the waist and legs [37], preserves the lower torso and pubic triangle of a reclining nude female (Finkelstein 1985, 128–131; 1993, 230). Its measurements (5.1 × 3.55 × 1.55 cm) match Late Bronze Age II Hathor-Astarte fertility plaques from Gezer (Macalister 1912, 221), Hazor (Yadin 1960, pl. 195.7; 1961, pl. 242.4), Shechem (Kerkhof 1969, 80–81, Fig. 24:10), and Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1939, pl. 26.9). This common figurine was part of the Late Bronze Age group known as "Hathor-Ashtoreth" or "Astarte plaques," typically associated with fertility cults. Albright (1939), Pritchard (1943), and Tadmor (1982) classify these into standing and reclining types, with the reclining figures generally interpreted as representations of mortal women rather than goddesses. The Shiloh specimen, with its bed-like back, belongs to this latter group. The figurine's typology and its stratigraphic association suggest a Late Bronze Age II date (Finkelstein 1993, 230). The inclusion of such figurines within the favissa does not necessarily indicate endorsement of iconographic worship. It may, rather [38], indicate ritual disposal after its removal from cultic use, consistent with Israelite practice.

Figure 7:

[6]The Late Bronze Age female plaque figurine (No. 7214; K11289) derives from Area D. Finkelstein (1993, 229) originally listed it under Locus 733, though he later associated it and a related pendant with the favissa.

The zoomorphic object from Area D is a small, crudely hand-molded clay figurine, likely representing a bovid (bull or calf), consistent with Late Bronze Age Levantine votive traditions. The figurine's form, fabric, and decorative elements closely parallel known Cypriot examples from the Late Bronze Age. Its simplified form, with applied facial features and minimal anatomical detail, closely parallels cult figurines from Lachish, Hazor, and Megiddo [39]. Its presence within the Shiloh favissa—alongside burned faunal remains, restricted ceramic forms, and a limited number of decommissioned valuable objects—suggests an object removed from use and deliberately deposited.

Miscellaneous Gold Objects

The other four gold items found in the Shiloh favissa include a broken pendant suspension loop, a misshapen gold object [40], a small scoop pendant, and a thin sheet gold pendant with an impression of a bearded man on its obverse side (Stripling 2025, 17). The bearded figurine, like the other gold objects Figure 8, represents an item of personal or ritual significance that may have once served a pagan or syncretistic function [41].

Shiloh's Silver Earring

The 2025 favissa excavations yielded a single silver lunate style earring (Stripling et al. 2025, 5). The archaeological evidence suggests that earrings, especially those made of precious metals, held not only personal but also religious significance (Figure 9). (Tufnell 1940, 28, 65; Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 71–73, 128–130).

Figure 8:

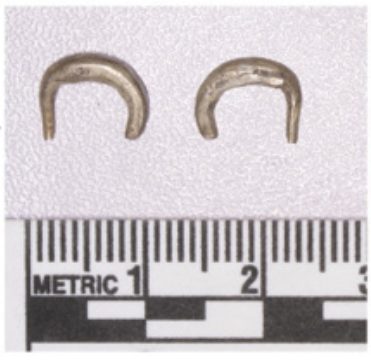

Figure 9:

Earrings at Lachish

At Lachish, Tufnell uncovered a rich array of earrings in the Fosse Temple. As detailed in Tufnell et al.'s (1940, 65) report, the earrings were ritually significant. Although limited in number, these items are striking for their consistency in form, underscoring the symbolic and cultic importance of earrings in non-Israelite religious practice. These included twisted gold wires (no. 18), plain 18th Dynasty-style hoops (nos. 16–17), and pendants with human and star-shaped motifs. Some were leaf-shaped (nos. 1–3), and others were repoussé star disks (nos. 9–15). Parallels to some of these ornaments derive from Tell el-'Ajjul and other sites. The repoussé plaques from Lachish (nos. 4–5) show human features and likely represent a stylized "mother goddess," pertaining to a fertility cult (Tufnell et al. 1940, 43–45, pl. 22–23). Their deposition beneath Structure III's altar suggests ritual burial[7].

Earrings at Mount Ebal

Adam Zertal also discovered a gold earring during his Mount Ebal excavation (1982–1989), within Stratum IB, dated to the late 13th–early 12th century BC, the transition between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age I periods. Zertal recovered the finely worked gold earring adjacent to the large cultic installation (Structure 99), which he identified as an Iron Age I altar Figure 10. Zertal (1986–87, 135–136) interpreted the earring as a personal offering, possibly deposited during ritual activity, consistent with other finds at the site such as burnt bones of kosher animals, storage jars, and stone installations which he viewed as characteristic of early Israelite cultic practice.

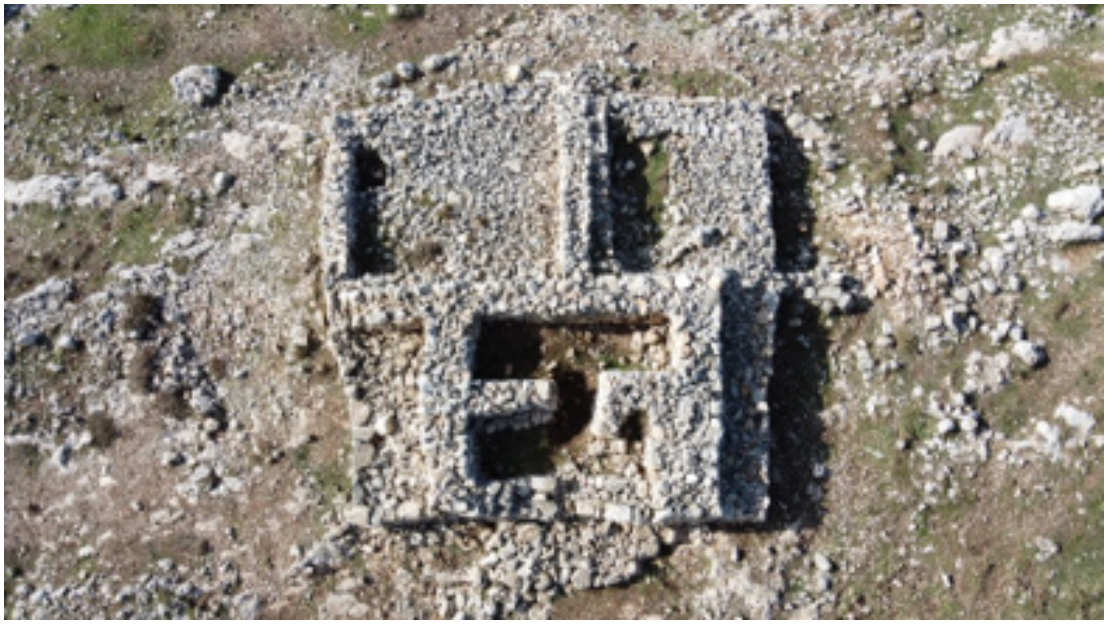

Figure 10:

However, Stripling et al.'s (2023, 2–3) subsequent reassessment of the Mount Ebal stratigraphy indicates that the fill of Stratum IB derived from Stratum II, the earlier round altar phase. This stratigraphic relationship suggests that small finds such as the earring may plausibly originate from a Late Bronze Age II context rather than the later Iron Age I horizon. This distinction is significant considering it is a cultic site. Jewelry and other votive objects recovered within these contexts support the interpretation that several small, circular installations functioned, at least in part [42], as intentional favissa-like deposits associated with offerings. The gold earring is a significant cultic example of Late Bronze Age precious-metal items.

[7]Tufnell et al. (1940, 42–46) interpreted this deposition as a ritual burial.

Earrings in Numbers 31

A direct biblical parallel for the votive deposition of earrings within an Israelite cultic framework appears in Numbers 31:50–54. Following the campaign against Midian, Israelite officers brought Moses a voluntary offering consisting of gold objects including earrings, anklets, bracelets, signet rings, and pendants taken as plunder from Canaanites "to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord" (Num. 31:50). Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold and brought it into the tent of meeting as a memorial before the Lord (Num. 31:54). Critically, these objects—foreign in origin and associated with pagan cultic culture—were not destroyed, melted down, or redistributed. They were permanently withdrawn from personal use and formally deposited within the sacred precinct. The expiatory language is significant, suggesting the act of permanent sacred deposition itself carried purificatory force [43]. The earring recovered from the Shiloh favissa, which was silver, lunate in form, and typologically consistent with Late Bronze Age prestige adornment, may reflect a comparable act of deliberate votive withdrawal, in which an object of foreign or personal significance was permanently relinquished within Israel's central sanctuary precinct.

The sites discussed above reflect a broader ancient Near Eastern pattern in which personal adornments, particularly those associated with foreign deities, protective rituals, or pagan cultic systems, required formal relinquishment rather than casual discard. Whether deposited within a Canaanite ritual matrix as at Lachish, within an early Israelite cultic context as at Mount Ebal, or as a votive offering permanently withdrawn from use as at the tent of meeting (Num. 31:50–54), earrings consistently appear as objects of spiritual significance requiring intentional, controlled deposition. The Shiloh silver earring participates in a broader depositional pattern while reflecting a distinctly Yahwistic theological logic—not the preservation of sacred power, as in Canaanite practice, but the permanent withdrawal of a ritually significant object from further use, consistent with the purity concerns that shaped Israel's approach to sanctified and potentially contaminated material.

Ceramic and Radiometric Assessment

The analysis of nine radiocarbon samples derived from Bos Taurus bone collagen from Square AW34/35 (Figure 11), Locus 3 (see Table 2) provide a Late Bronze Age II *terminus post quem* for the favissa[8].

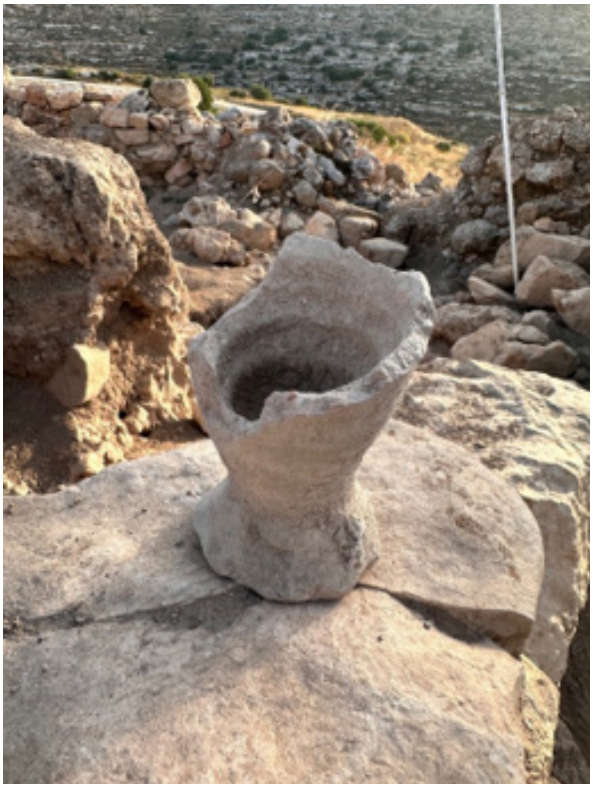

Figure 11:

[8]BetaAnalytic performed the analysis using the following calibration formula: BetaCal4.20: HPD method: INTCAL20. All dates are +/- 30 years.

Table 2: Bone Collagen Samples from Area D at Shiloh.

Sample #	Beta Lab #	Calibrated Date
1	679805	1422–1263 BC
2	679807	1412–1257 BC
3	679808	1422–1263 BC
4	679809	1422–1263 BC
5	679810	1426–1269 BC
6	679811	1401–1216 BC
7	679812	1629–1501 BC
8	679813	1300–1111 BC
9	679814	1323–1194 BC

Samples 1–6 produce calibrated ranges extending from the Late Bronze Age IB/IIA transition through the mid-to-late thirteenth century BC. Samples 8 and 9 yield slightly later calibrated ranges, spanning the late fourteenth through twelfth centuries BC, yet remain fully compatible with and overlap the calibrated results of Samples 1–6. Sample 7 constitutes an outlier, with a calibrated range of 1629–1501 BC and is likely contamination from underlying Stratum 7 (Middle Bronze Age III) [44], upon which the favissa rested.

The eight dates consistently indicate that the primary deposition within the favissa occurred during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC. This timeframe matches the ceramic assemblage recovered from the core deposit, reinforcing the conclusion that the favissa belongs to the Late Bronze Age II horizon (Stripling, forthcoming).

This chronological assessment differs from Finkelstein, who dated the favissa to the Late Bronze Age I/IIA horizon and assigned it a *terminus post quem* as early as 1550 BC. By contrast, Stripling assigns the *terminus post quem* to the early fourteenth century BC, based on the refined stratigraphic and material evidence.

Finkelstein (Finkelstein et al. 1985, 166–168; 1993, 396) derived his date from his ceramic analysis, and his presupposition that the Israelites did not arrive until around 1200 BC [45]; he did not utilize radiocarbon dating. ABR examined the newly recovered pottery and re-examined Finkelstein's original assemblage considering broader regional ceramic parallels and securely stratified radiocarbon samples. This resulted in a clearer chronological framework for the favissa[9].

Proximity to Proposed Tabernacle Plateau

The monumental structure, which spans Areas H and K, dates to approximately 1250 BC, or possibly as early as 1300. Therefore, the fourteenth-century favissa derived from the earlier tent-Tabernacle. Whether the tent sanctuary stood precisely where the monumental building now stands or on the summit or northern platform, the deposit lies within Shiloh's central cultic zone.

[9]Oren Ackerman from Ariel University performed OSL tests in 2023, but results are still pending. This additional dating metric will provide another helpful chronological assessment.

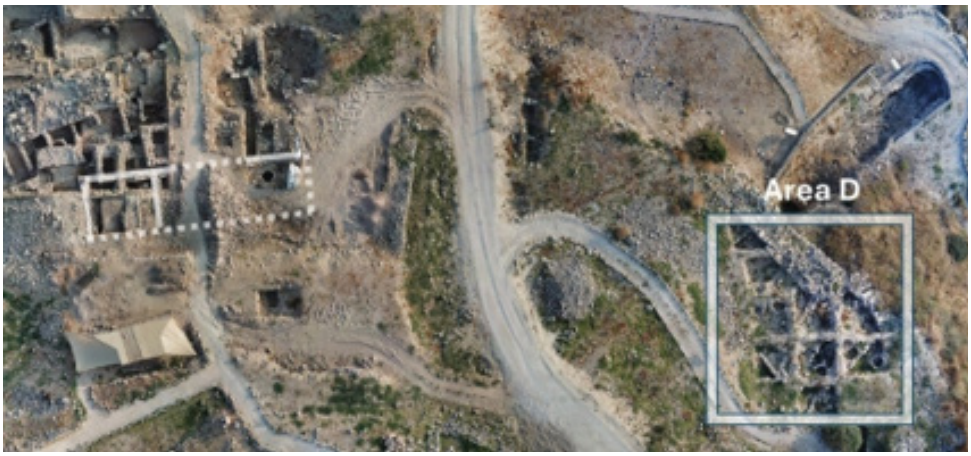

Figure 12:

Stripling (Stripling et al. 2025, 1–2) first identified remains of the proposed Tabernacle complex within the fortification system in 2017 Figure 12, when he linked the northern wall (Wall 10) in Area H with BIU Wall U281 in Area K (Finkelstein 1993, 76). The discovery of a perpendicular wall (Wall 11) demonstrated that this was a freestanding architectural complex rather than a retaining feature. Subsequent excavations between 2019 and 2023 exposed the western and southern walls (Walls 47 and 49) [46], including their intersection, confirming a precisely squared western room with three interconnected rooms that reflect multiple construction phases built upon an original Tabernacle plan, with the earliest elements suggesting a Late Bronze Age II construction.

All rooms shared the same stratigraphic sequence: thick sloping fill (up to 1.5 m) intentionally sealing a compacted reddish beaten-earth floor at a uniform elevation (ca. 704.9 m) [47], with no artifacts on the floor surfaces, indicating deliberate filling rather than abandonment. Foundation trenches marked by dark soil bands along the walls yielded Iron IIA pottery, and large stones at about 704.6 meters likely functioned as a threshold. The recovery of cultic objects, including altar horns, a ceramic pomegranate (Lopez et al. 2019, 37–56), a faience pomegranate pendant, and a murex shell, supports a ritual function for the complex, while a first-century AD limestone lamp mold, pottery, and coins in the structure's eastern portion indicate continued activity or potential repurposing of the structure, into the Early Roman period.

Theological Uniqueness of Shiloh: The Favissa's Origin and Function

The Shiloh favissa does not stand in isolation. The theological coherence reflected in its contents, stratification, and its material assemblage point to a cultic tradition shaped by patriarchal precedent, wilderness experience, Levitical instruction, and interaction with Egyptian and Canaanite ritual practices. The convergence of these ritual and theological streams produced a practice that fulfilled the same purpose yet did so in fidelity to covenantal law. Recognizing this convergence is crucial for understanding why the Shiloh deposit stands apart from other Southern Levantine favissae.

Patriarchal and Covenant Foundations

The cultural and theological impulse behind the Shiloh favissa derives from Israel's ancestral memory and covenant experiences[10]. Long before Levitical legislation formalized procedures for sacred disposal, Genesis 35:4 records a seminal episode in which Jacob ritually purges foreign gods and associated ornaments: "So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. And Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem" (Gen. 35:4, ESV).

Jacob's act of ritual concealment follows his rededication to Yahweh and precedes the building of an altar at Bethel. In this context, Jacob's burial of the idols, earrings, and amulets [48], objects associated with foreign sancta, represents a deliberate act of ritual separation and purification that would have been intelligible within Canaanite cultural norms, yet it was theologically distinct from them.

[10]See Ronald Hendel (2005, 3–5, 112–15) and Jan Assmann (2011, 46–54).

Where Canaanite sanctuaries such as Hazor and Lachish employed burial or sealing of cultic remains to preserve and perpetuate sacred power within ongoing systems of worship, Jacob's act does the opposite: purging idolatry in preparation for renewed covenantal encounter with Yahweh (Gen. 35:5–7). This same logic extends into the wilderness period, when Israelite officers permanently dedicated gold objects taken from Midian—including earrings and ornaments—to the tent of meeting as a votive offering "to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord" (Num. 31:50). In both instances, objects of foreign association are not preserved within an ongoing cultic system but permanently withdrawn, foreshadowing the Israelite practice of removing rather than retaining the sacred or defiled. Jacob's act was a proto-Israelite resemanticization of Canaanite ritual language[11]. While embedded in the same geographical and cultural setting as Bronze Age Canaanite religion, Jacob's burial of cult objects appears to express a Yahwistic theology of holiness that transforms the practice of sacred deposition from veneration to purification. This pattern foreshadows the Levitical system's later concern for containment of sanctified or defiled matter (cf. Lev. 6:10–11; 10:17).

Jacob's Shechemite deposit, therefore, represents the earliest proto-favissa. His burial of pagan figurines and ornaments constitutes the first example of a sanctified burial pit, functioning not as an offering to a deity but as an expression of covenantal purity. As Kletter (2018, 5) observes, intentional burial beneath sacred or liminal locations often marked "the transition from profane to holy or the ritual conclusion of an object's sacred service." Jacob's act thus represents a proto-favissa paradigm, a decommissioning that transforms foreign cultic items into inert matter, foreshadowing later Iron Age practices of controlled ritual deposition (Kletter 1996, 1–21)[12].

Considering this context, the inclusion of gold star-shaped ornaments, the figurine, and the earring in the Shiloh favissa may reflect not active ritual use but a deliberate act of separation [49], like Jacob's burial ritual. The inclusion of these items in Shiloh's sacred depository suggests a deliberate renunciation of personal or cultic items, possibly foreign or idolatrous in origin.

Egypt

Egyptologists have found temple deposits of broken or decommissioned cultic objects, including foundation deposits, and carefully arranged caches of broken ritual implements interred near sacred spaces and beneath temple thresholds (Pinch 1993, 105–113; Quirke 2001, 90–92). These deposits had both dedicatory and purificatory functions. The impulse behind the ritual retirement of consecrated objects in Egyptian "proto-favissae" may lie in the logic of Maat, the cosmic order that required purity, balance, and the careful separation of sacred from profane (Faulkner 1972; Allen 2014, 111–13). Because Egyptians believed that cult images and implements became ritually "alive" through consecration, they could not discard them in ordinary ways but instead required controlled deposition within temple precincts (Assmann 2001, 55–59; Teeter 2011, 53–55). While expressed through distinct Egyptian theological categories, this disciplined treatment of sacred materials reflects a broader ancient Near Eastern concern for the proper decommissioning of holy objects that likely influenced Israelite ritual practices.

At Sinai, Israel received a template for sacred disposal. Leviticus 6:28 commands that earthen vessels used in sin offerings be broken and metal vessels scoured and rinsed with water, reflecting the principle that objects coming into direct contact with holy offerings acquire sanctity and must be decommissioned to prevent their profanation through ordinary reuse. Furthermore, Leviticus 11:33 stipulates that if an unclean animal falls into an earthen vessel, the vessel must be broken, "and whatever is in it shall be unclean[13]." Similarly, Leviticus 15:12 requires a person with a bodily discharge to shatter earthenware vessels with which he or she comes in contact, thus rendering the vessel unusable. These laws demonstrate a consistent concern for preserving the boundary between sacred and profane.

Leviticus 4:11–12 commands priests to burn the remains of the sin offering—hide, flesh, blood, and dung—outside the camp. This practice reinforces the principle that the remnants of sacrifice, though once holy, must not be left to decay within the sacred camp. Numbers 19:9 further instructs priests to store the ashes of the red heifer, a key rite of purification, in a clean place outside the camp for mixing with the water of purification. Even sacred residue like ash required proper processing.

Exodus 32:20 records another example. Following the sin of worshipping the golden calf, Moses took the idol, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and scattered it on water [50]. This dramatic act modeled a complete decommissioning of an object associated with false worship. The gold was not reused, ensuring that its former idolatrous function could never be recovered.

[11]Cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 310.

[12]We believe this extends back to the Late Bronze Age II.

[13]On the halakhic interpretation of Leviticus 11:33 in the late Second Temple period, see Jodi Magness (2011, 87–89), who outlines the divergent approaches to the purity of pottery vessels—namely, the Sadducean allowance for immersion versus the Pharisaic and Qumranic requirement to break impure vessels (cf. 11QT 49:8; 50:17–19).

These texts collectively establish a pattern: ritual objects or remains, once used in sacred contexts, require reverence through destruction or burial in a ritually pure location. The Shiloh favissa reflects this law. As Stripling (2026, forthcoming) observes, "Shiloh's favissa represents the physical manifestation of Israel's theology of holiness—where sacred items were laid to rest, not discarded." At Shiloh, the favissa contains not only broken cultic vessels, but also burned animal bones—disproportionately from the animals' right side, consistent with sacrificial regulations (cf. Lev. 7:32). Furthermore, the selective inclusion of valuable but ritually defunct objects such as gold pendants or a silver earring reflects intentional deposition.

Proto-Favissa Traditions in Canaan and Canaanite Influence

While Israel's cultic system was theologically distinct, pagans already ritually buried cultic objects in the southern Levant prior to Israel's emergence. Well-documented examples of intentional sacred deposition occur at Hazor, Lachish (Fosse Temple), Megiddo, Tel Shimron, Tell Qasile, En Ḥaẓeva, and Nahal Patish. Israel's encounter with these practices provided a cultural framework for ritual decommissioning. Unlike Canaanite and Philistine examples, which routinely include figurines, idols, and fertility symbolism, the Shiloh deposit exhibits a selective and theologically constrained pattern of deposition, signaling continuity in form but divergence in meaning.

Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 49–53) observe that Canaanite temples at Hazor, Megiddo, and Lachish reveal "small cultic installations and assemblages of broken figurines, libation vessels, and votive items," which they identify as "remnants of rituals of consecration and disposal of sacred implements." These often intentionally broken objects interred beneath temple floors reveal an early favissal pattern of ritual retirement for sacred objects. At Hazor, Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 49–52) note substantial evidence of ritual life: temples with orthostat architecture, anthropomorphic figurines, and a favissa (Locus 2140) that included a lion orthostat and a bronze pendant, suggestive of offerings and sacred burial of cultic items (Yadin 1961, pls. 324–325; Ben-Tor 1989, 240–257).

This phenomenon also occurs at Megiddo and Lachish, where excavation of Late Bronze Age temples yielded caches of smashed votive figurines, miniature vessels, and animal bones, each apparently representing a form of sacrificial decommissioning. These ritual acts of burial constitute the earliest favissae analogues.

By the transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age (ca. 1200), material evidence across the Levant shows a marked decline in anthropomorphic cultic representations and a corresponding rise in abstract or symbolic forms of religious expression. Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 128–135) attribute these shifts to both iconoclastic currents and evolving conceptions of divine transcendence.

The broader cultural landscape reflects processes of ritual borrowing and transformation. The temples at Tell Qasile exhibit architectural and material features reflecting Aegean-influenced symbolic systems, including distinctive cultic assemblages and temple plans (Mazar 1980, 20–32). A Philistine favissa at Tell Qasile contained a substantial assemblage of cult vessels and fertility figurines (Mazar 1980, 20–32; Ben-Arieh 2011, 111). Shiloh has also produced fertility figurines—one from Area D and another from the northern platform dating to approximately 940–900 BC (Iron Age IIA) or possibly earlier (Yeivin 1992, 95–110). However, unlike the deposit at Qasile—where such objects formed part of an active cultic assemblage—the Area D figurine appears to be within a context of controlled burial alongside cultic refuse and almost exclusively kosher faunal remains. While certainty is not possible, the archaeological context suggests that the figurine had been deliberately removed from ritual use prior to deposition.

The likely Judahite shrine at 'En Ḥaṣevah features altars and pomegranate ornaments, with architectural and ritual traits reflecting interaction between Judahite Yahwism and regional Edomite traditions (Cohen 1994; Cohen and Yisrael 1995). The ceramic assemblage included 27 stands—three of them anthropomorphic—alongside 19 bowls, 13 goblets, four perforated incense cups, and six decorative pomegranate-shaped ornaments all deposited whole and carefully arranged, reflecting reverence and intentionality (Ben-Arieh 2011:111–166; Cohen and Yisrael 1995b, 26). This is particularly significant given that some Edomites venerated Yahweh, suggesting shared devotion and cultural exchange[14].

The bone deposit in the Late Bronze Age complex at Tel Burna, a Canaanite site in the Shephelah, derives from an active cultic courtyard rather than a disposal pit or favissa (Shai et al. 2015, 129). Excavations in Area B1 uncovered a large 13th-century BC building (Building 29305) with in situ cultic vessels, chalices, goblets, a Cypriot triple-bowl votive vessel, figurines, and imported wares, all indicating ongoing ritual performance within a built cultic space rather than secondary deposition (Shai et al. 2015, 124–130).

[14]See Ze'ev Meshel (2012, 75–89). The primary publication of the inscriptions containing the blessing formula invoking "Yahweh of Teman." See also, Mark S. Smith (2002, 32–41, 146–49).

Recent discoveries at Tel Shimron significantly enhance Canaanite comparanda. Excavations atop the tell exposed a monumental Middle Bronze Age structure coated in white chalk and dating to approximately 1800 BC. Within this megastructure, archaeologists uncovered a large mudbrick deposit that, after its initial construction, had its access points intentionally blocked and was subsequently used as a favissa. The fill contained approximately 40,000 burned animal bones, tens of thousands of pottery fragments—many from miniature temple vessels—imported ceramics from Crete, and two bronze bull figurines representing El or Baal. The absence of internal stratification and the overt iconographic content suggest that ritual burial was rapid and symbolic. The assemblage is explicitly votive and iconographic in character, embedded within a monumental cultic landscape and oriented toward divine representation, thereby exemplifying fully developed Canaanite ritual logic.

Iron Age Philistine repositories, most notably the Yavneh pit dated to the ninth–eighth centuries BC, represent a later iteration of votive deposition. The Yavneh assemblage contained hundreds of cult stands, shrine models, fire pans, zoomorphic vessels, imported wares, and iconographic motifs. It reflects an incense-oriented cultic system in which burial functioned as part of ongoing ritual practice rather than as sacred retirement (Kletter 2010, 192–210). As Strassburger (2015) has noted, the Yavneh deposit represents a classic example of a temple favissa—a repository pit containing large quantities of cultic objects and votive offerings that had previously been dedicated within a sanctuary and intentionally buried after use. The assemblage therefore reflects the ritual disposal of temple votives within an ongoing cultic system—a pattern that contrasts with, though cannot definitively be distinguished from, the purity-based neutralization of sacred materials that the Shiloh deposit may represent.

While Yahweh explicitly commanded the destruction of high places and cult images (Deut. 12:2–3), such injunctions presuppose familiarity with these systems rather than ignorance of them. Within this cultural milieu, Israel's later use of ritual burial should not be viewed as an innovation *de novo* but as a Yahwistic reorientation of an established practice of cultic decommissioning.

Kletter did not identify the associated temple from which these objects originated but inferred its existence based on the nature of the assemblage. As he observes, the material "must be from a public temple," though its precise location remains uncertain, whether on the same hill as the pit or at the nearby tell of Yavneh (Kletter 2010, 198–200). This observation is significant, as it demonstrates that a favissa need not be physically contiguous with its associated sanctuary. The absence of a clearly identified temple at Yavneh therefore does not undermine the cultic interpretation of the deposit but instead supports a model in which devotees transport votive materials from a cult site and redeposit them. A comparable spatial arrangement is evident at Shiloh, where the favissa in Area D lies along the northeastern perimeter near the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall, while the proposed cultic installation in Areas H and K is situated within the interior of that same Middle Bronze Age fortification system. In both cases, the physical separation between the cult installation and the repository does not weaken the cultic interpretation.

The Shiloh favissa stands precisely at this intersection. The deposit includes objects with unmistakably pagan iconography like astral gold stars associated with Astarte/Ishtar, a Canaanite-style female figurine, and personal ornaments such as a silver earring. Unlike the Canaanite cultic deposits at Lachish, Megiddo, Tell Qasile, Yavneh, Ashkelon, and Nahal Patish—where ritual objects formed part of ongoing polytheistic systems—the Shiloh deposit may reflect deliberate removal from circulation in accordance with emerging Yahwistic purity principles. The absence of domestic refuse, the restriction to kosher animals, the burning and right-side selection of bones, and the formal deposition of elite cultic objects together suggest priestly or Levitical oversight consistent with Torah purity legislation (Exod. 23:24; Lev. 18:3; Deut. 12:30–31).

Proto-Favissa at Mount Ebal: Ritual Burial and Covenant Deposition in Early Israelite Cult

Jacob's Shechem precedent likely survived in Israel's cultural memory, especially in the Shechem region. By the time the Israelites reentered Canaan, they did not see themselves as invaders but covenantal heirs reenacting the sanctifying processes of their forefathers. This trajectory finds an echo in Joshua 8, when Joshua builds an altar to Yahweh on Mount Ebal, as Moses had commanded (Deut. 27:4–8). There, in the presence of "all Israel," Joshua inscribes the law onto stone, offers burnt offerings, and initiates a covenant renewal ceremony. The altar, constructed of unhewn stones, and the accompanying liturgical acts like the blessings and curses are not isolated religious gestures. They represent a public commitment to Yahweh and a rejection of any lingering Egyptian syncretistic practices.

Excavated by Adam Zertal from 1982–1987 on the northeastern slope of the mountain opposite ancient Shechem, El-Burnat A contained a small (2 × 2 m) round altar (Installation 94) superimposed by a larger (9 × 7 m) rectangular altar. Zertal (1993, 25) described the smaller round altar as "the first stage in the cultic development" and the larger rectangular altar as its monumental successor, reflecting an evolution in ritual tradition. Within and beneath these structures were massive deposits of ash, animal bone, and shattered vessels, which Zertal interpreted as sacrificial refuse subsequently buried to preserve ritual purity. These remains, coupled with the later discovery of a defixio (Stripling et al. 2023), provide compelling evidence for a structured system of sacrifice, deposition, and ritual burial that anticipates the Israelite favissa[15]. Zertal (1986, 37–40; 1993, 23–24) identified both structures as altars and placed their main occupation in the Late Bronze Age IIB/Iron Age I (ca. 1250–1150 BC) horizon. He did not perform radiocarbon analysis.

Stripling et al. (2023) published the text and analysis of the lead defixio, which derived from the dump of the circular altar phase (Stratum II), not the later Iron Age I altar (pp. 3-6). The material included diagnostic Late Bronze Age IIA cooking pots, storage jars, and a scarab of Thutmose III, which Stripling et al. (2023, 22) argue provides a *terminus post quem* around 1400 BC for the earliest cultic activity. Thus, while Zertal interpreted the first altar as Late Bronze Age IIB and the second altar as Iron Age IA, Stripling et al.'s (2023, 7) paleographic study revealed a proto-alphabetic script dating no later than the Late Bronze Age II period (ca. 1400–1200 BC). Stripling and Van der Veen favor Late Bronze Age IIA, while Gallil suggests Late Bronze Age IIB. Ceramic and glyptic evidence support this reassessment.

When builders constructed the rectangular altar, they filled the cavity of the earlier altar with ash, soil, bone, and cultic debris, effectively interring the earlier installation. Likewise, they filled the rectangular altar with Stratum II remains before sealing it (Stripling 2021, 35–72). Zertal (1986, 44) described this "fill" as a deliberate, homogeneous deposit "consisting of ashes, animal bones, and smashed pottery," not random occupational refuse.

Numerous stone-lined pits and installations encircled the central structure. These contained ash, animal bones, and cultic vessels such as chalices and juglets. Zertal interpreted these features as receptacles for offerings—ritual pits serving as favissae, where priests or functionaries buried sacrificial remains and vessels after their use. Ralph Hawkins's (2007, 263–266) later analysis confirmed this interpretation, describing the installations as "deposit areas for offerings" integral to the site's cultic function. Together, these findings indicate that Mount Ebal was not only the location of a monumental altar but also a complex cultic center with multiple favissae-like pits surrounding the main structure, representing an early Israelite tradition of sacred deposition (Zertal 1986, 154–156).

Zertal (1986, 44–45) identified over 3,000 bone fragments, 96% from sheep, goats, and cattle, biblically clean species. The bones were calcined white, signifying full combustion on an open altar. Within this fill Zertal discovered a chalice-shaped pumice incense stand in Pit 250 (Bar and Rosenberg 2022, 2–3). Both Zertal (1986, 105–65) and Stripling et al. (2023, 5, 22) interpreted it as a ritually decommissioned cultic object.

Stripling et al. (2023, 9) correlate this fill event with a ritual closure. The act of sealing the earlier altar within the later one symbolically preserved the holiness of the site while inaugurating its next stage of use.

The superimposed altar and the burial of sacred debris under a later phase corresponds closely to Late Bronze Age II Canaanite cultic practices at Hazor, Megiddo, and Lachish, where priests ritually entombed sacred objects beneath temple courts (Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 154–158). Yet, Mount Ebal diverges decisively from these precedents: no figurines, no divine effigies, and no idols. The cult was entirely aniconic, implementing Israel's Levitical theology.

Mount Ebal transforms a Canaanite form into an Israelite theology of sanctity and separation. Thus, it is another example of resemanticization.

Functionally, the burial of the earlier altar within the later one accomplishes the same goal as the Shiloh favissa, the ritual retirement of sacred implements under controlled, holy conditions. Both reflect the conviction that sacred objects, once consecrated, remain under divine ownership and cannot be discarded profanely. They are, in effect, *herem* or "under the ban."

If the Shiloh favissa reflects an institutionalized Yahwistic pattern of sacred deposition (Kletter 1995, 13–17), Mount Ebal may represent a roughly contemporaneous cultic installation reflecting a similar pattern of sacred deposition. Within an early Exodus framework, Joshua's altar ceremony (Josh. 8:30–35) would date to the late fifteenth or early-to-mid fourteenth century BC, prior to the establishment of the central sanctuary at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). The Area D favissa at Shiloh dates to the fourteenth century BC and may therefore represent a contemporary and closely related expression of early Israelite sacred deposition within an emerging Yahwistic cultic framework. As Stripling et al. (2023, 9) summarize, "Mount Ebal stands at the cusp between Canaanite cultic custom and Israelite covenantal theology."

Conclusion

The Shiloh favissa is significant because it satisfies all of Kletter's criteria for identifying a true favissa: intentional deposition, cultic association, deliberate burial, restricted assemblage, and ritual closure. Its contents appear to reflect purposeful sacred retirement rather than secondary refuse. The motivational framework behind such deposition finds a compelling biblical parallel in the votive offering, most explicitly in Numbers 31:50–54, where Israelite officers permanently dedicated gold objects and earrings taken from Midian to the tent of meeting "to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord" (Num. 31:50, ESV). This suggests that the Shiloh deposit reflects not mere disposal but deliberate expiatory relinquishment—objects of foreign or idolatrous association permanently withdrawn from use as an act of atonement and covenantal fidelity within Israel's central sanctuary precinct.

[15]The tablet derived from the fill of the earlier round altar (Stratum II) beneath the later rectangular altar, indicating deliberate deposition during the Late Bronze Age II phase (Stripling et al. 2023, 2–3).

Theologically, this practice echoes earlier Yahwistic precedents at Shechem where Jacob buried foreign cult objects (Gen. 35) and Joshua's altar at Mount Ebal where controlled deposition provided a covenantal separation. At Shiloh, a widespread ancient Near Eastern ritual mechanism was resemanticized within a Torah-shaped framework. The Shiloh favissa thus stands as the clearest archaeological expression of early Israel's theology of sacred retirement and covenantal distinctiveness.

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