

A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE OFFERING DEPOSIT FROM TEL DAN AND THE POLITICS OF CULTIC GIFTING¹

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Introduction

A small group of objects, including bronze weapons, stick pins, fragments of other bronze items, animal bones, beads and miniature pottery vessels, was uncovered at Tel Dan in 1972 amongst the stones of the massive battered stone structure underlying the Middle Bronze Age earthen embankment in Area Y (Locus 1017) (Figs. 1–3) (see summary in Biran 1992). The finds were concentrated in a diameter of approximately one metre (Fig. 2). Three “cupmarks” were found in adjacent stones, in some cases containing the artifacts. This deposit was one of a series of features, including infant burials in jars and possible storage bins, dating to the Middle Bronze Age I (Albright’s MB IIA). It is not clear from the stratigraphic context whether these features were originally placed directly on and amongst the exposed stones of the battered structure, or interred as a subfloor deposit from subsequently eroded surfaces.

This cache was first surmised to be the remains of a decimated tomb deposit. However, the lack of human skeletal remains, together with the deposit’s context and components, suggest an intentional cache. Following a discussion of the finds and their chronological and cultural attribution, an attempt will be made to lay out some of the social and cultic implications involved.

The following objects were recovered in the deposit: two miniature pottery goblets; two bronze daggers, two bronze socketed spearheads, two bronze flat hafted axes, one bronze fenestrated “duckbill” axe, ten bronze stick pins (intact or nearly so), three bronze belt buckle fittings or dress fasteners, two bronze spatulae, one bronze penannular ring or armlet (?), 23 miscellaneous bronze fragments (pins, awls, rivets, etc.), one silver sheet metal female figurine (in three fragments), one silver strip in six fragments, one silver penannular ring or armlet (?), 48 beads (36 carnelian, 1 rock crystal, 11 frit).

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Fig. 1. Tel Dan Area Y: The battered stone structure (EB III or MB I) and Locus 1017 (lower third of photo).



Fig. 2. Locus 1017. The axeheads are located below the 20 cm. scale.

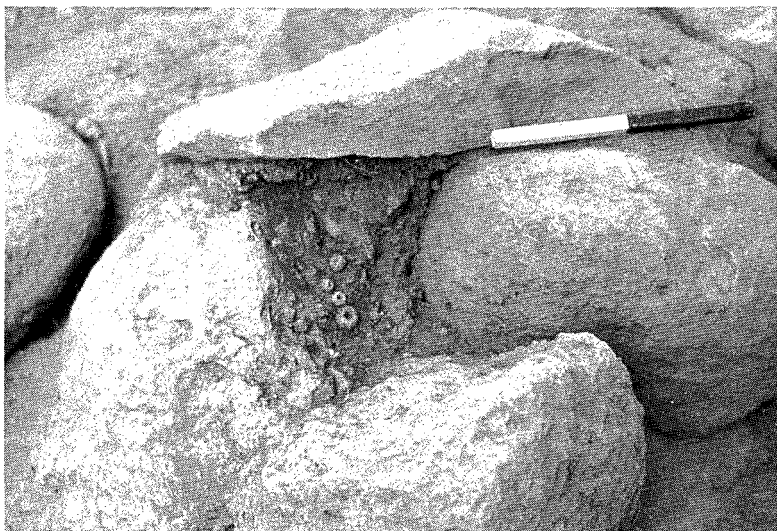


Fig. 3. Locus 1017. Beads in situ. The stick pins were found under the beads.

Typological Discussion

Pottery goblets (Fig. 10:1–2): These miniature goblets belong to the Syrian cultural sphere where the type appears from the late third to the mid-second millennium B.C.E., exemplifying the stylistic conservatism inherent to that region (for a summary review and parallels see Gerstenblith 1983:76–78; Figs. 26–27). Miniature forms of the same concept are found in similar archaeological contexts at Byblos and Nahariya (e.g., Dothan 1965: Fig. 4).

Daggers (Figs. 4:6–7; 5:6): Corrosion has obscured some of the salient features but these daggers should be assigned to the flat-bladed and not the veined type (Gerstenblith 1983:93–94). One has a rounded butt while the other is straight-edged. Neither has a tang (which is why they are not represented in Maxwell-Hyslop's [1946] type list). Two rivet holes are discernable in the dagger depicted in Fig. 4:6, although corrosion may conceal one other perforation as seems to be the case in Fig. 4:7. This type developed out of a narrower dagger with round sloping shoulders and triple rivets that characterized the Early and Intermediate Bronze Ages (Gerstenblith 1983:93–94). While similar to the IB dagger type (e.g., that common amongst the Dagger-type tombs at Jericho [*Jericho I*: Fig. 22:1–5; *Jericho II*: Fig. 70]), their broad form belongs to the Middle Bronze Age, in particular the MB I.

Spearheads (Figs. 4:4–5; 5:4–5; 8:3–4): These belong to a standard MB I type with a socketed shaft, narrow midrib and tapering form (Gerstenblith 1983:91–92), although Fig. 8:3 shows the socket wrapping more characteristic of the Intermediate Bronze Age (e.g., Dever 1985: Fig. 15). Fig. 8:4 seems to be part of a pried-open

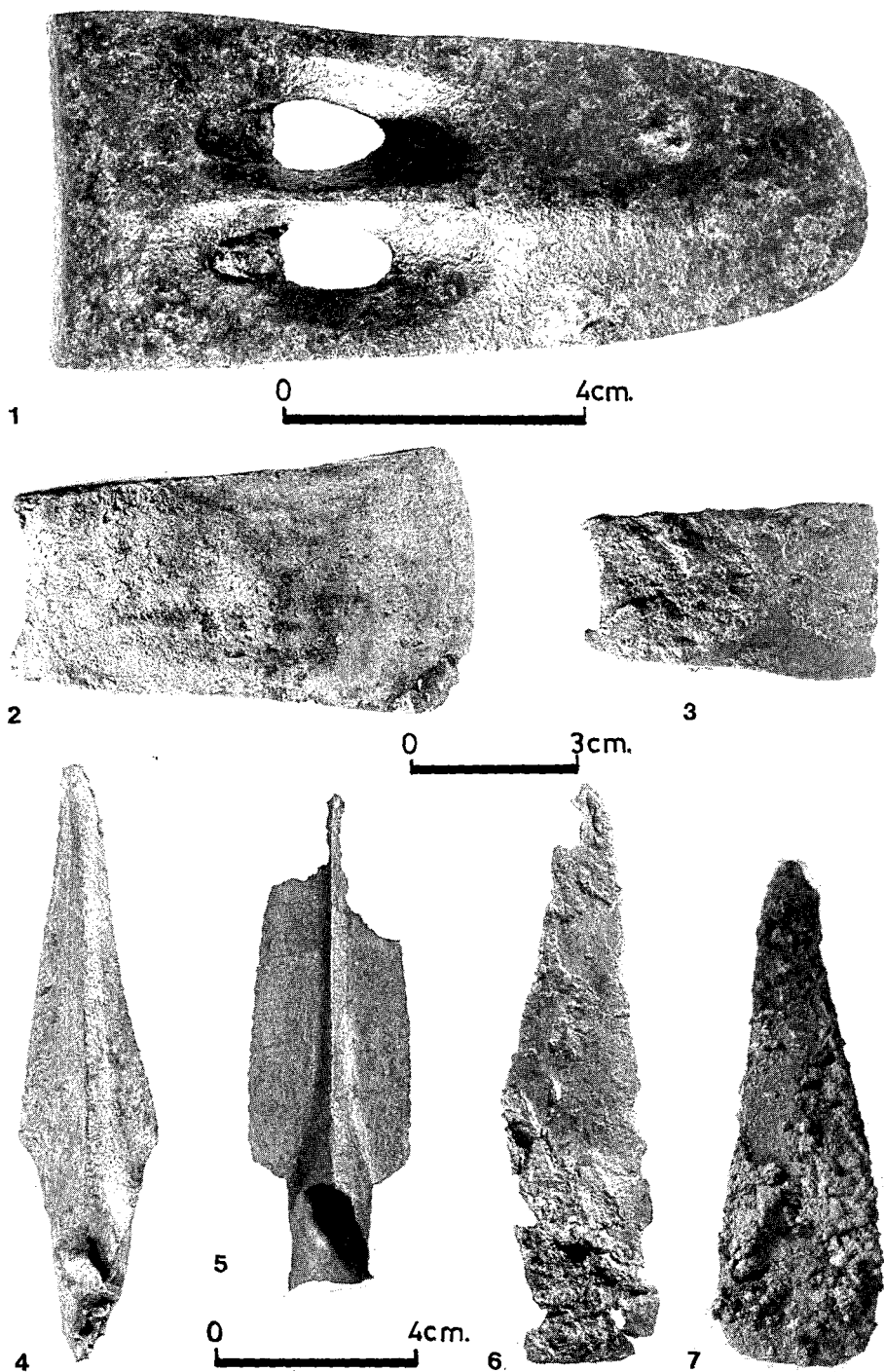


Fig. 4. Weapons.

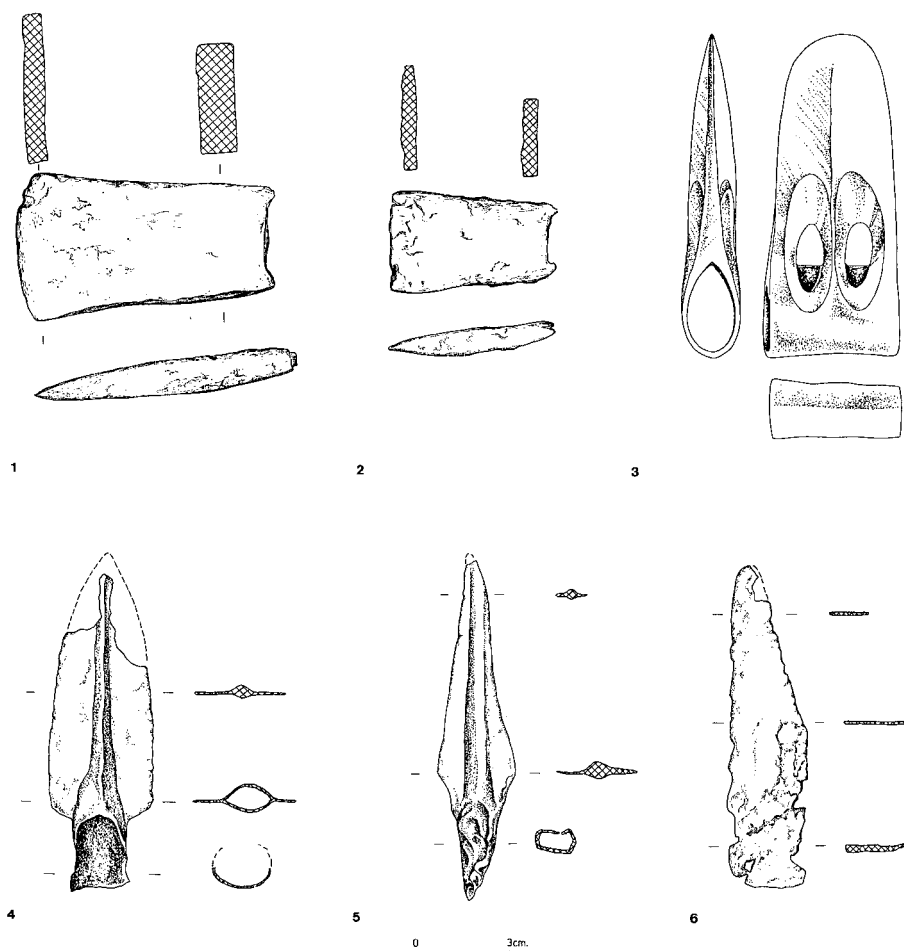


Fig. 5. Line drawings of weapons. IAA Nos. as follows: 1) 76-1575; 2) 76-1572; 3) 76-915; 4) 72-459; 5) 72-1573; 6) 76-1574.

spearhead socket. The spearhead in Fig. 4:5 was found with the tip broken off, and chemical treatment has inadvertently removed additional material. The socketed type is widely paralleled throughout the Levant and northern Mesopotamia and illustrates the rapid transmission of advances in metallurgical technology that is a hallmark of the MB I (Gerstenblith 1983:91-92 and see parallels there).

Shafted duckbill axe (Figs. 4:1; 5:3): This axe was published two decades ago (e.g., Biran 1973; 1974). Similar axes are found throughout the Levant and are recognized as one of the type-fossils of the MB I (e.g., Oren 1971:111-114; Dever 1975; Gerstenblith 1983:89-91; Miron 1985:93-112; Philip 1989).

Shafted flat axes or adzes (Figs. 4:2-3; 5:1-2): The object illustrated in Fig. 4:2 (the larger of the two) is probably an axe, while that in Fig. 4:3 may be an adze. As

Miron has shown, simple-blade tools of this type are difficult to categorize as either axes or adzes. Indeed, they seem to be multi-purpose utensils and comprise the most frequent axe type from the Chalcolithic period onward. Lack of standardization in form is due largely to the casting techniques employed, beating, tool use and resharpening (Miron 1985:42–64). Hence it is not surprising that these particular items have no close parallels (the best being some probable MB examples from Tell el-‘Ajjul [Miron 1985: Catalogue Nos. 103, 108, 158, pp. 29–30, 39, 63; Pls. IV:9; XXI:5; XXII:2]). For the present, it is impossible to date them typologically.

The two projections at the butt-end corners are unusual and perhaps related to hafting reinforcement using animal sinews. However, the larger axe's butt may be broken and the projections fortuitous.

Stick ("toggle") pins (Figs. 6–7): All the stick pins have a shank that tapers downwards to the point. They range from ca. 7.3 to 15.7 cm. in length, averaging 11.2 cm. The eyelet in the shank is usually located at or around the midpoint. Only

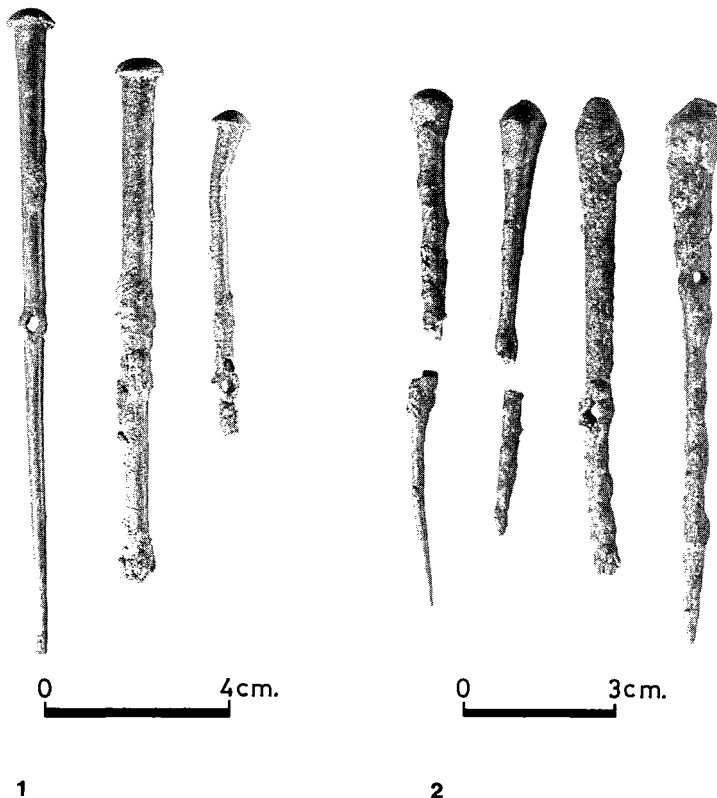


Fig. 6. Stick pins: 1) with "mushroom" head; 2) with "club" head.

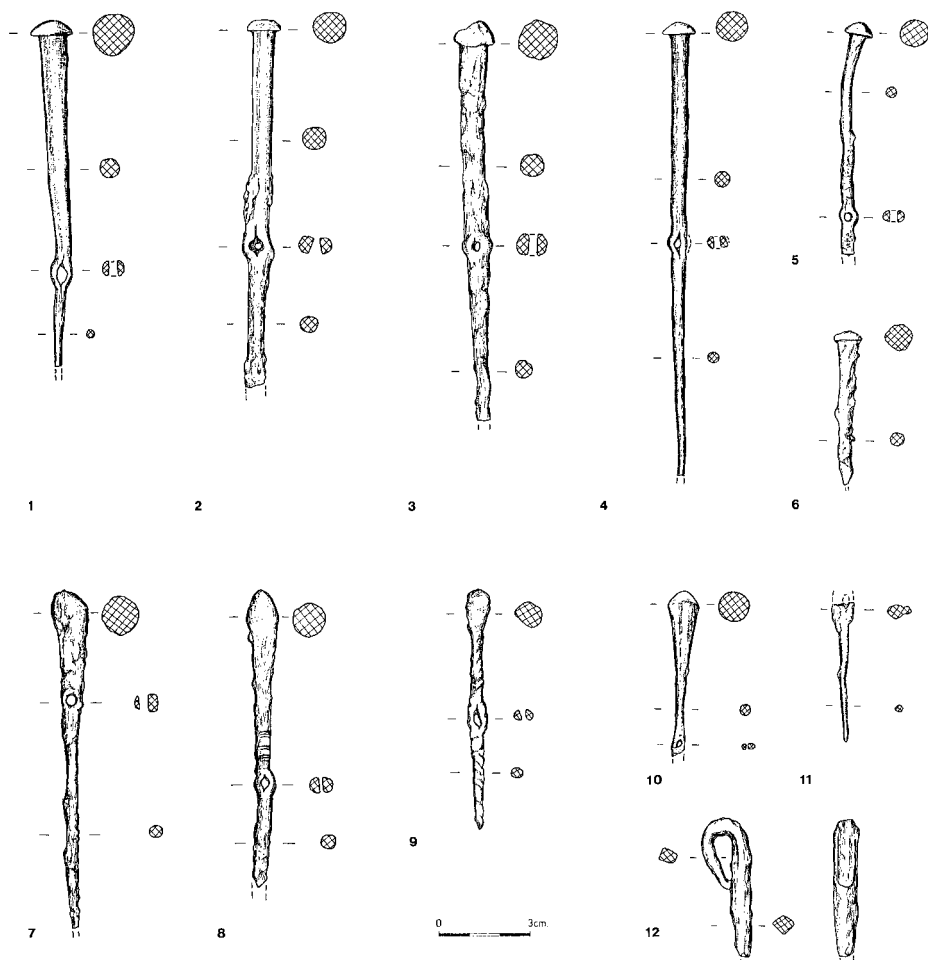


Fig. 7. Line drawings of stick pins. Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) Nos. as follows: 1) 72-456; 2) 76-1495; 3) 72-457; 4) 76-1496; 5) 76-1499; 6) 76-1575; 7) 76-1497; 8) 76-1498; 9) 77-458; 10) 76-1530; 11) ?; 12) 72-451.

the pin in Fig. 7:8 bears a horizontal ribbing around its upper shank, although the corroded pins may also have been decorated. Two basic types are present: bulbous or “club” heads: Henschel-Simon’s Type 2 (five pins), and “mushroom” heads: Henschel-Simon’s Type 1 (three pins) (Henschel-Simon 1937). The curl-, simple- and nail-headed types most frequent in Intermediate Bronze Age assemblages of northern Israel (e.g., Tadmor 1978:26; Fig. 10; Eisenberg 1985:71; Fig. 10; Epstein 1985:44–45; Fig. 2:8) are apparently absent, although some of the smaller metal fragments in Fig. 8 may belong to such pins. These types were omitted by Henschel-Simon in her classification, perhaps they were less conspicuous and poorly represented in the Palestine Archaeological Museum at the time.

There is no doubt that the use of metal stick pins originated in Mesopotamia and Syria in the third millennium B.C.E. (e.g., Henschel-Simon 1937; Schaeffer 1948:49–120; Gerstenblith 1983:94–95). In Canaan the bulbous and mushroom head types tend to be associated with IB assemblages (e.g., Henschel-Simon 1937; Dever 1985:132; Fig. 15; Eisenberg 1985: Fig. 10:59), although they sometimes appear in MB I assemblages (e.g., *Megiddo II*: Figs. 219:15; 220:24; Dothan 1956: Pl. 3E; Garfinkel and Bonfil 1990). In any event, the two types are rare in the southern Levant, in contrast to their predominance in the northern Levant, Mesopotamia and Anatolia (Henschel-Simon 1937; Gerstenblith 1983:94–95). The length of the pins from the deposit in Locus 1017 also indicates an IB or early MB date (Tufnell and Ward 1966:220).

Belt fittings or dress fasteners ("fibulae") (Fig. 8:1, 10): If these objects did belong to belts they would have been buckle attachments. However, the latter interpretation (dress fasteners) is perhaps more likely since little other evidence for belts was found here (for dress fasteners or "brooches" see Ziffer 1990:60*–61*; parallels come from Jericho Tomb Groups I–II [*Jericho II*: Fig. 103]. For belt fittings see Ziffer 1990:75*–77* and accompanying illustrations).

Spatulae (Fig. 8:5–6): These have been tentatively defined as spatulae on the basis of somewhat later parallels from Alalakh (Woolley 1955: Pl. 73). Spatulae are infrequently reported in publications of MB material; parallels have been found at Byblos, in the Temple "Syrien" (e.g., Schaeffer 1948: Fig. 61v), but conspicuously, none have been reported, for example, from Hama, Megiddo, Gibeon, or Jericho.

Penannular rings (Fig. 8:7–8): The ring in Fig. 8:7 is silver, that in Fig. 8:8 is either bronze or copper. These are too large for finger rings, too small to be armlets unless intended for an infant, and are not closed. Conversely, they might be some other fitting, or most probably a form of capital whose value lay in its metal content. Corrosion was advanced and no decoration could be discerned. This type of object is often found together with stick pins in Intermediate and Middle Bronze Age votive and tomb deposits, e.g., at Ras Shamra, Byblos, Tel As and Baghouz (Schaeffer 1948: Figs. 59; 61; 104–105; Pls. V, Level L; XIII; du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: Pl. LXII).

Miscellaneous metal fragments (Fig. 8): One relatively thick, bent bronze or copper object with a rhomboid section, broken at one end (Figs. 8:9; 7:12) might be either the tang of an EB type projectile head, or an EB type awl (Ilan and Sebbane 1989). The rest of the objects illustrated in Fig. 8 are various fragments of pins, rivets, hinge fittings, etc. (cf. *Jericho II*: Figs. 56; 74; 81), probably integrated into various sorts of apparel or receptacles (e.g., jewelry boxes) of by now decomposed organic material.

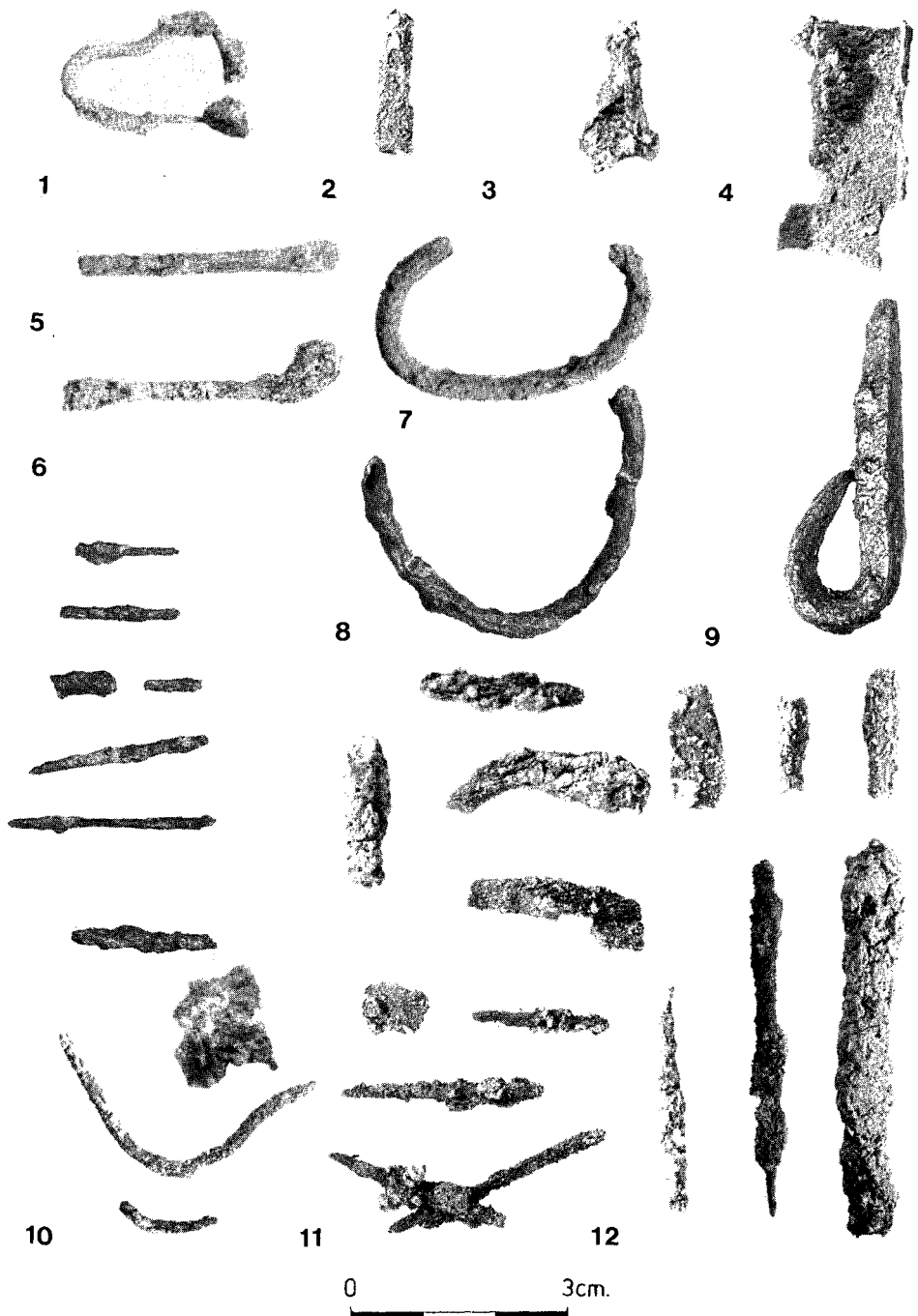


Fig. 8. Miscellaneous metal objects.

Beads (Figs. 9; 10): The following descriptive table adopts the classification system set down by Beck (1928):

<i>Beck no. Name</i>	<i>Perforation</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Colour*</i>	<i>N=</i>	<i>Figure</i>
I.B.1.b short barrel (large)	I (double cone)	carnelian	red to light red	9	10:4
I.B.1.b short barrel (small)	I	carnelian	red to light red	9	10:3
I.B.4.b.d short cylinder with one convex end	IV (plain)	rock crystal	transparent	1	10:9
I.C.1.a-b circular or (large) standard barrel	I	carnelian	dark to light red	6	10:5
I.C.1.a circular (small)	I	carnelian	red to light red	7	10:10
I.D.1.a ellipsoid	IV	frit	white	10	10:8
I.D.1.b long barrel (large)	II (drilled from both ends)	carnelian	red	1	10:6
I.D.1.b long barrel (small)	II	frit	white	1	—
I.D.1.f long truncated convex biconical	II	carnelian	light red	3	10:11
V.C.1.a regular rounded plano-convex	II	carnelian	dark red to red yellow and white vein	1	10:7

* Adopted from the Munsell Soil Color Charts, 1954 edition.

Beads are usually not chronologically diagnostic; from the fourth millennium onward the same shapes (circular, barrel, ellipsoid), materials (carnelian and frit being the most common), and perforations (biconical for circular and short barrel beads, drilled straight from two sides for long barrel beads of hard minerals, and plain perforations for frit barrel beads), are consistently present (e.g., EB, IB and MB bead groups from Jericho: *Jericho I*: Figs. 28; 55; 65 [EB]; 72; 90 [IB]; 138; 166; 175 [MB]; *Jericho II*: Figs. 51; 82 [IB]; 104 [MB]). However, standard, circular and short barrel beads with a diameter of more than 10 mm. seem to be rare in the



Fig. 9. Carnelian beads and flint blade (broken).

southern Levant in the fourth and third millennia B.C.E., but become more commonplace in the early second millennium B.C.E. (e.g., *Jericho I*: Figs. 138; 166; 173; *Jericho II*: Figs. 104; 181; *Megiddo Tombs*: 179–181; Table IV; *Megiddo II*: Pls. 207–208; *Lachish IV*: Pl. 29). This may have something to do with the greater availability of raw material and the wider range of trade systems that characterized the Middle Bronze Age (e.g., Gerstenblith 1983:118–119).

Figurine (Fig. 11): The small silver sheet metal figurine belongs to Negbi's Figurine Type VI Class Ac — the "Palestinian-Representational" Group (Negbi 1970; 1976:96–97; Figs. 111–113; 133 from the LB strata of Hazor and Megiddo; Seger 1976:138–139). Moorey judges figurines of this type to be jewelry, separating them from the three-dimensional varieties (Moorey and Fleming 1984:68). These are invariably dagger-shaped female portrayals exhibiting breasts and pubis to varying degrees of schemata, conical headresses (termed the "Syrian-Hittite" headdress by Moorey [*ibid.*:70]), and fairly prominent eyes and noses. Arms and legs are not indicated. Additional fragments of a plain, narrow, silver strip (Fig. 11:2) were found next to the figurine; its purpose is unclear although its dimensions can be reconstructed as matching those of the figurine.

These figurines' prominent features have led Negbi (1976:117–119) to propose

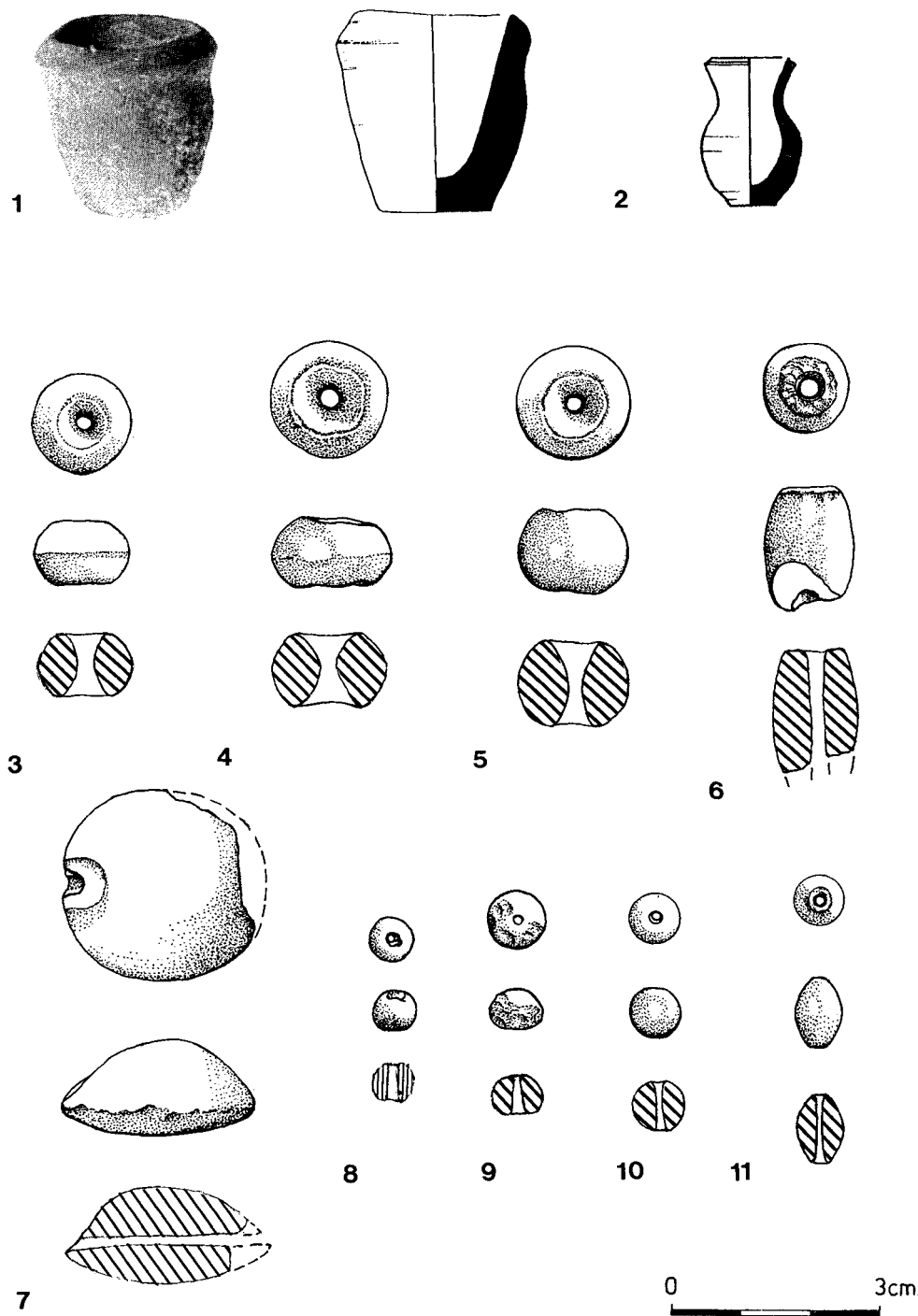


Fig. 10. 1-2) Miniature votive pottery vessels, IAA Nos. 72-443, 72-447; 3-11) beads.

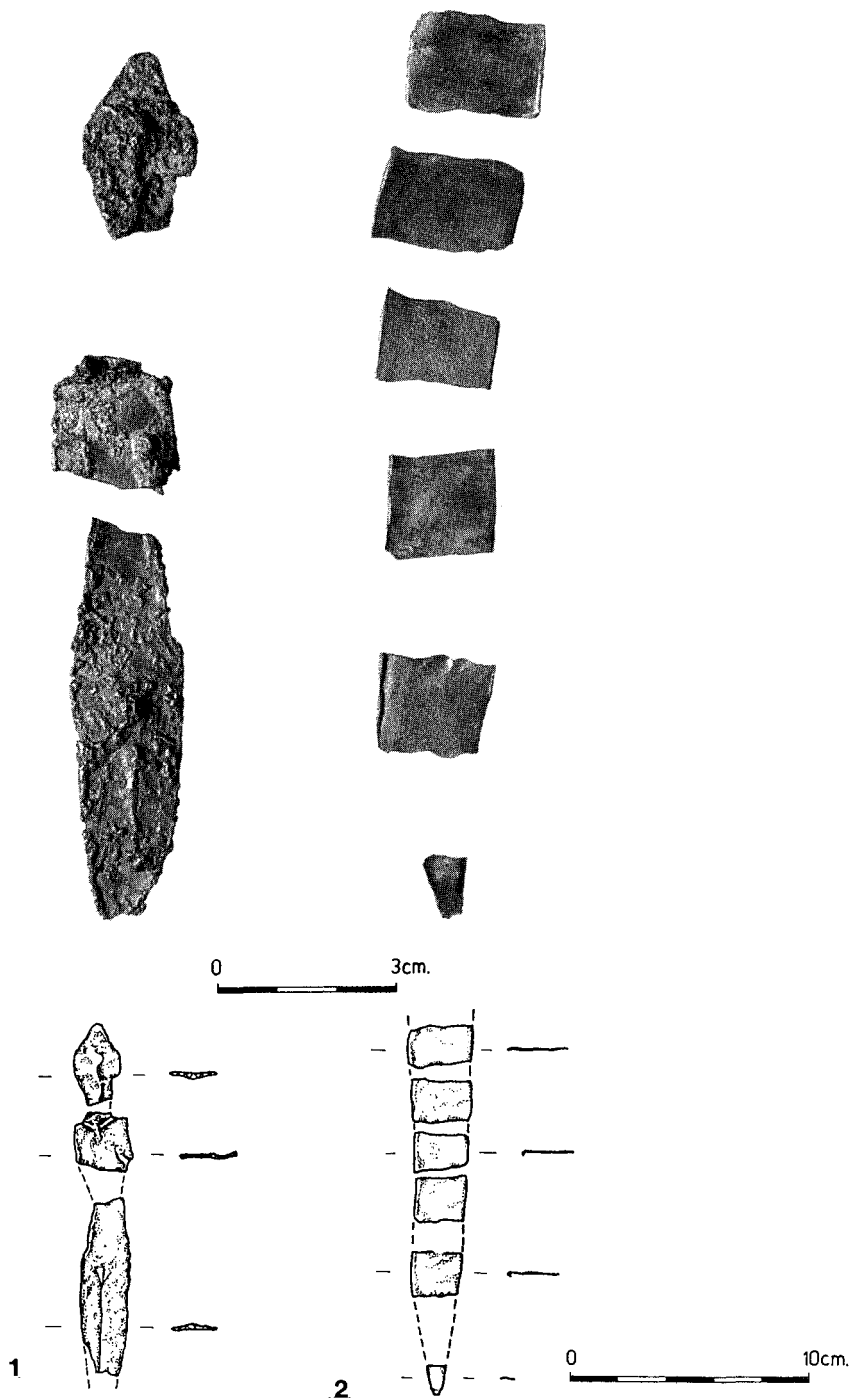


Fig. 11. 1) Sheet metal figurine, IAA No. 76-1571; 2) fragmentary sheet metal strip, IAA No. 76-1571.

that they are fertility goddess figurines, and to tentatively suggest Anat as the specific deity. The Anat identification is problematic for a number of reasons, but chiefly because in portrayals where the goddess' name is mentioned, (i.e., in cases of positive identification), Anat stands clothed (e.g., Wyatt 1984), unlike the figurine type under discussion. By the same token, Seger's (1976) Astarte attribution is equally weak. The figure's identity can only be surmised by means of a methodical and comprehensive iconographic survey the scope of which is beyond the present paper. However, it is perhaps no accident that most sheet metal figurines and pendants have a clear dagger shape. This, and the emphasis on the sexual organs, express the deity's dual function. These features should be expected to pertain to the nature and purpose of the deposit.

Interpretation

While the archaeological context is of little assistance in determining the purpose of the deposit, the typological components suggest several possible explanations, the most likely of which can be selected by process of elimination. Recent studies of Bronze Age "hoards" in the Levant by Philip (1988) and in Cyprus by Knapp, Muhly and Muhly (1988) provide a useful framework for inference.²

1) *Foundation deposit*. The cache was set into the battered stone structure that underlies the rampart's earthen embankment. This, and the presence of at least seven weapons might suggest either an attempt to imbue the fortification with strength *via* some sort of sympathetic magic, or a supplication to the deity of war — perhaps represented by the female dagger-shaped figurine — to protect the city.

However, no parallel exists in our region for an MB I foundation deposit associated with fortifications, and no fortification seems to have been constructed at Tel Dan during this period (Biran 1990). In addition, foundation deposits in the ancient Near East "consist of a relatively limited range of special items such as tablets, clay cones and prisms, and various kinds of nails and pegs generally built into the very structure of the edifice" (Philip 1988:191, citing Ellis 1968).

2) *Mortuary deposit*. Metal weapons, stick pins, ornaments, beads, special ceramic types and animal bones are frequently encountered in burial assemblages of the Middle Bronze Age (Ilan, in press). However, a mortuary explanation can be

2 The terms "hoard" and less often "cache" are used for contexts of this kind, but correct terminology can only be determined by knowledge of the assemblage's function. Hoards are essentially secular in nature and meant for future recovery, while "cultic deposit", "offering" or "gift" imply deposits that are "non-refundable". The latter terms are the correct ones for the deposits discussed by Philip (1988), and that under consideration here. However, the word cache is used in this paper at times to avoid excessive repetition. For discussions of terminology see for example: Reece 1988:263; Rissman 1988:210; Knapp, Muhly and Muhly 1988: Table 1; and see below.

discounted as no human bones were identified, and no structural remains of a tomb or grave were encountered here. This kind of repertoire would be associated with the interment of an adult male, almost always in a large cist or chamber tomb (an exception being nearby Shaft Tomb 3126, see Ilan, in press). Moreover, MB mortuary assemblages rarely, if ever, include figurines.

3) *Founder's Hoard*. The repertoire of a metalworking craftsman would include mostly broken and defective fragments (for recycling) and ingots. One might also expect to find a full range of tool types, and perhaps molds, blowpipe nozzles and other metalworking utensils (Moorey 1971:63; Levy 1982:21–22; Knapp, Muhly and Muhly 1988:237).

Our deposit contains some fragmentary material, but many of the artifacts are complete, and certain types are predominant (weapons, stick pins, figurines and dress accessories). It is the rare metal hoard that can be unequivocally attributed to metallurgical activities (Rowlands 1971:210–214).

4) *Merchant's Hoard*. This type of deposit “should consist of complete objects, especially multiples of one type of object...Newly made material, especially in multiples, may be taken as evidence for standardisation (Bradley 1985:35), also typical of merchants' hoards” (Knapp, Muhly and Muhly 1988:237).

5) *Cultic Offering*. In a cultic offering one should expect evidence for interaction with a deity or deities. This can be expressed archaeologically in a number of ways, the most important of which for our purposes are: (a) figurative representation of the deity, (b) a specialized artifactual repertoire — often with symbolic and prestige-bearing elements and displays of conspicuous consumption, and (c) a set of components that are found consistently in other loci or sites showing similar correlates (Levy 1982:20; Renfrew 1985:11–26).

A similar repertoire is found, albeit in more significant quantities, in contemporary MB levels at Byblos, Ras Shamra, Nahariya, Megiddo, and Tell Mumbaqaq (e.g., Negbi 1970; 1976; Philip 1988). Philip (1988:191) succinctly laid out the components and cultic associations of 'hoards' found at these sites, noting that the differences from assemblage to assemblage are quantitative and not qualitative; in other words, all were intentional deposits with the same general or specific cultic and social purposes. He proposed that all the MB deposits mentioned above embodied a combination of two social mechanisms: conspicuous consumption and gift-giving.

In the Middle Bronze Age, metal production and trade seem to have been largely controlled by the social elite and its bureaucracy (Zaccagnini 1983; Renger 1984). The metal supply (together with other forms of wealth) — especially finished tools — was controlled in order to “maintain the exclusiveness and value [of metal objects] by restricting supply...” (Philip 1988:202–203). By hoarding metal — i.e., by taking some out of circulation — its supply and value were regulated

(Bradley:1985:31). Moreover, by controlling wealth the elite's dominant position was perpetuated since others were less able to make valuable gifts and thus create debt in their favour (Mauss 1954; Gregory 1982). The beneficiary (or victim) of a gift that could not be returned in kind was often obligated to remedy his debt by other means: a pledge of alliance or allegiance, exclusive trade privileges, supply of *corvée* labour, military conscription, crop yields, and so on.

When metal was offered to a deity, further aims were achieved. Most importantly, an offering was perceived as reciprocation for gifts given by the deity (e.g., rain, a healthy birth, a victory etc.), to the polity, its elite, and its populace (e.g., Jacobsen 1976:23–73; Levy 1982:20). The greater the gift, the greater the influence upon the deity. Since the possession and control of wealth lends status, its conspicuous display and interment as an offering would lend prestige to the giver. Beyond the purely economic sphere highlighted by Philip, the wider inference here is that man's relationship with deity should be examined in terms of gifting and reciprocity.

What precisely the Locus 1017 offering was meant to reciprocate or affect is hard to discern. The sheet metal figurine may perhaps be a key to this question. The Western Semitic goddesses most often referred to in the literature are Asherah/Astarte/Ishtar, Anat, and Qudshu. Their chief functions were connected with fertility and warfare (e.g., Patai 1967:53–100; Cassuto 1971; Cross 1973:117–119, Chap. 3, III; Negbi 1976:117–119; Wyatt 1984). On the basis of the Byblos temples and deposits, Negbi (1976:122–130) concluded that weapons and male figurines were more often associated with the male deity and temple, while jewelry, masks and female figurines were usually connected with the female deity and temple. However, at Byblos, the “male” deposits also contained some female figurines (consorts?) and *vice versa*. Although Moorey casts doubt on Negbi's attribution of gender to the Byblos temples on the basis of figurine gender and distribution (Moorey and Fleming 1984:72), the Tel Dan assemblage indicates at least an association between goddess and weapons.

Other objects of the cache were probably imbued with related symbolic values; Hallo (1983:11) studied the matrimonial symbolism of stick pins; Miron (1985:109–111) and Philip (1988:195) examined additional symbolic aspects embodied in weapons deposits. In sum, most of the Tel Dan assemblage seems to emphasize a mixed fertility and warlike aspect, as do caches at Nahariya, Megiddo and Ugarit.

Inferring Archaeological Context

Adopting the premise that the Tel Dan deposit is cultic in nature the following interpretations are possible:

- a) If the cultic offering was militaristic or defensive in nature it may have been

associated with the rampart, (perhaps the old, still-standing, EB fortification), though not as a foundation deposit *per se*.

b) While Locus 1017 is not a tomb deposit *per se*, mortuary assemblages found several metres to the west (Chamber Tomb 1025 and associated Shaft Tomb 3126, [Ilan, in press]), may be somehow connected with the Locus 1017 cache, and thus a mortuary function can perhaps be attributed to this deposit.³ The expression of fertility in the MB funerary practices of Tel Dan has been discussed elsewhere (Ilan, in press: Chapter 4); perhaps the figurine reflects such an association. This interpretation posits subsequent erosion and/or embankment construction as processes that obscured the cache's original context.

Both alternatives suggest the likelihood of a *bothros* originating from the surface of a sanctuary. Votive deposits and figurines most often occur in cultic contexts in, or near, a "holy of holies" (Moorey and Fleming 1984:76; Philip 1988).

Conclusion

The components and context of the Locus 1017 deposit can be categorized with a number of contemporary cultic offering deposits. They represent a gifting ritual between an elite individual, or social structure, and a deity, in which both warrior and fertility/matrimonial facets are present. Such deposits are of a dual nature, one aspect being economic (the regulating of scarce resources), the other being votive (interaction with deity). Both functions served to affirm dominance of the elite. The cache may have been interred from the surface of a cultic structure or open space, and may have been associated with mortuary practices.

With the addition of another votive offering to the corpus collected by Philip, a chronological pattern begins to emerge: all the datable MB deposits can be assigned to the MB I, with few or no examples from the MB II–III. This pattern may be a reflection of changing political and economic conditions, coupled perhaps with expedient changes in cultic practice. Concerning the hoards of terminal Late Bronze Age Cyprus, it has been proposed that both utilitarian and non-utilitarian deposits should be seen "as an attempt to maintain social boundaries or economic position in an era of crisis" (cf. Knapp, Muhly and Muhly 1988:257–258). The opposite trend observable in the Levant may imply a transition from turmoil to tranquility, paralleled by increased social and political complexity.

3 Moorey notes that sheet metal figurines, which he sees as jewelry, tend to come from burial contexts, unlike three-dimensional figurines.

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