

Site Analysis

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The Great Temple of Megiddo

A map locating Megiddo would be helpful

The “Great Temple” of Megiddo, located in the southern Levant, has been the discussion *give date of the temple (including calendrical dates)* of many scholars since its first discovery by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in their 1935-1939 excavations.¹ Given the designation of Area J-4 by the Megiddo Expedition during their excavations of the site from 1992-2010², the site continues to be a curiosity, not only because of its size but also its short-lived function and abandonment. The temple’s design, the cultic practices that took place there, and the socio-economic situation of the area to build such a site will be considered to hopefully shed some light on what occurred within this structure. It does need to be noted that the term cult is used here due to the repeated reference of the term by most of the authors read and cited in this work and is used generically in response to the activities that took place within the temple complex.

The Great Temple is a 1,100 sq. m, *why not include a plan of the temple?* broad-room style temple that is quite common in this region.³ The main edifice is 47.5 x 22.0 m with 3.45 m thick walls composed of mudbricks on a 1.5 m tall limestone socle.⁴ A thick mud mortar was used to secure the mudbricks and the interior was coated with a white chalk paste.⁵ It is estimated that the height of the walls was around 4 m due to the volume of mudbricks that were used as a fill to construct a later building in EB III.⁶ There may have been a second story or open roof design to this already massive temple complex, due to the discovery of the remains of a staircase on the west side of the temple.⁷ There were two exterior corridors that surrounded the main edifice of the structure to

Good clear description

¹ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 285.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p. 289.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the west and south.⁸ These corridors were inaccessible from within the sanctuary, forcing those who were to enter these areas to exit the temple and walk around the back of the temple and then enter into the desired corridor.⁹ The northern wall contained the entrance of the temple through large-leafed doors, as evidenced by a door socket found on one side of the doorway.¹⁰ Ussishkin has later stated that this feature was misidentified and no longer supports the idea of it being a door socket because it was “too roughly carved.”¹¹ However, he does agree that there were doors to the entrance but states there was not any evidence recovered to confirm this.¹² Directly opposite the entrance is a rectangular altar made of stone and mudbrick.¹³ Two plastered, mudbrick benches within the temple were found along the southern and northern walls.¹⁴ There is also a row of twelve column bases located along the longitudinal axis of the sanctuary which has two rows of twelve round and rectangular basalt slabs surrounding them.¹⁵ The columns would have supported the roof and were most likely made of wood.¹⁶ Ussishkin believes the roof to “have been made of wooden beams, tree branches, straw, and clay,”¹⁷ although he does not offer any evidence to support this claim. It is possible that the lack of evidence of a roof and ceiling could account for the use of these perishable items, but again this is speculation, and one should not be dogmatic about these things in which cannot be proven by the evidence. The large basalt stones varied in shape, some being round while others being rectangular.¹⁸

⁸ Ibid, p. 290.

⁹ Ussishkin, 2015, pp. 82-84.

¹⁰ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 290.

¹¹ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 82.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 290.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 291.

¹⁵ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 35.

¹⁶ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 82.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The entire construction of the Great Temple would be considered an engineering marvel. The building was 6 times larger than the average broad-room temple of that period, having more resemblance in size to the temples of Mesopotamian cities.¹⁹ It is not only the size of the temple that is impressive but also the geometric precision of the structure that captivates the mind. The temple was designed to exacting standards, using a grid of modules of six cubits.²⁰ The cubit used measured 52.5 cm, which is the earliest example of the use of such a cubit in the Levant and considered earlier than the demonstrated use in Egypt.²¹ The temple is a “symmetrical bipartite structure of two wings, each measuring seven modules by seven modules, and each containing six column bases, six basalt tables, and a corridor.”²² The center of the structure runs north to south from the entrance to the altar and is one module wide.²³ The columns of the temple were placed running east to west with each column base exactly one module apart.²⁴ The two innermost columns were placed off the original pattern and inset diagonally half a module away from their neighbors.²⁵ This break in symmetry was to keep the columns out of the central axis that from the door to the altar and to also allow for an extra beam of support for the ceiling over the wide space.²⁶ The basalt tables are also geometrically spaced with two flanking the columns, one to the north and one to the south, and are one module from its twin along the north to the south axis and two modules apart moving from east to west.²⁷ A key geometrical feature is that the altar is placed in the center of the entire structure; by running diagonals from the outer

illustrations would really help your discussion: easier for your reader to visualise what you are describing

¹⁹ Wiener, 2020.

²⁰ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 35.

²¹ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p.296.

²² Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 35

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 296.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 291.

²⁷ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 35.

corners, the cross-section lies directly on the main altar.²⁸ This shows the importance of the altar as the focal point of the temple.

While the design and construction of the temple are well known, the cultic practices that took place within it are more ambiguous. While the central altar is known to be of great importance for the practitioners of the temple due to its geometric centralization, its function remains unclear.²⁹ It has been suggested that it may have served as a bench or table for the placement of cult objects or the “locus of specific ritual activity.”³⁰ It was noted by Adams, Finkelstein, and Ussishkin that an ash lens was discovered at the base of the altar, however they believe it to be deposited after the temple was abandoned and not the result of primary use.³¹

A mudbrick bench was located on the west side of the altar and running a length of at least 12 m along the southern wall.³² Another mudbrick bench, this time plastered, was found along the north side of the sanctuary, running along the western side of the entrance.³³ It is unclear as to what the function of these benches would have been, but their presence within temples of this period is commonly known.³⁴

The basalt tables also appear to be important as either smaller altars for animal sacrifice or the placement of cult objects.³⁵ It is currently unclear why some of these tables are round and others rectangular,³⁶ but this probably had some symbolic significance in either design or functionality within the cultic practices that took place here. Each basalt table also varies in size

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 296.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p. 291.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 296.

³⁶ Ibid.

and weight, the largest circular one has a diameter of 1.61 m and weighing nearly 1.5 tons.³⁷ The circular tables also have a deep hole cut into the top of the table and placed off-center, favoring the north and being 12 cm deep with a 23 cm diameter.³⁸ One function of this receptacle was to possibly hold some sort of liquid; however, it is unclear whether this was for a libation or to store a liquid for some other ritual action.³⁹ Because of the receptacle being off-center, it appears that something else must have been placed in the position of prominence in the center.⁴⁰ Whether this was a cult statue or some other item is unclear, as there is no evidence to suggest what could have been placed on these basalt tables.⁴¹

Based on the observations of the central altar and the basalt tables, one could conclude that the central altar may have either held the idols associated with the god, goddess, or gods of this temple or cultic tools, such as knives and bowls, could have set upon it. One may have entered the temple with their sacrifice and presented it at the central altar. From here the animal, liquid, or possibly grain, could be taken to the basalt table designated for these specific sacrifices or libations. Libations may have been the primary practice within this temple due to a lack of current evidence supporting burnt sacrifices in these areas. Animal bones have been found in many parts of the complex,⁴² but there is no indication as to how they were sacrificed as there is very little evidence that has remained from this period.⁴³ This, also with the fact that there is no indication of ritualistic burning around the central altar, as there are no ash deposits that correlate to the use of the altar, its primary function is most probable of display. Evidence of small hearths have been found within the temple, but these are attributed to the period of abandonment

³⁷ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 82.

³⁸ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 291.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 297.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 291.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ussishkin, 2015, p. 84.

⁴³ Wiener, 2020.

that will be discussed later.⁴⁴ These are personal observations and speculations based on the current evidence of the main body of the temple.

The two corridors that run along the southern wall of the temple, also appear to have had some function within the cult and may have served as an annex of some kind to the main part of the temple.⁴⁵ Animal bones were found within these corridors, as well as in the sanctuary.⁴⁶ The bones have been identified as mostly sheep and goats, with some cattle (representing less than 20% of the bones found).⁴⁷ Small amounts of non-domesticated animals were also found in the temple, which include “one lion bone, one wolf bone, one bone apparently of a panther, and three large carnivore bones which could not be identified.”⁴⁸

Other discoveries that tie in with the animal bones were lithic materials found within and around the temple complex. These lithic materials are almost exclusively the Levant’s version of flint.⁴⁹ Two other types of knapped lithic raw material were also found, obsidian and a green siliceous material of unknown origin.⁵⁰ The assemblage of flint “includes 1608 items, 784 of which are debitage and tools.”⁵¹ Two primary types of blades that have been found, simple blades and Canaanite blades.⁵² The majority are of the simple blade group and were made by direct percussion, while the small number of Canaanite blades are represented by fragments or segmented items.⁵³ These items were shaped into various tools used within the temple for cutting and butchering animals.⁵⁴ According to Shimelmitz and Adams, “the production of tools

⁴⁴ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 295.

⁴⁵ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁹ Shimelmitz and Adams, 2014, p. 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 57.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 64-66.

in the temple complex did not focus on the production of elaborate or heavily invested items, but rather on simple technologies best characterized by the flake production relating to *ad hoc* or expedient use.”⁵⁵ This may indicate that the tools used, in and of themselves, were not as important as the acts that were being done with them. ^{good observation - possibly linked with the animal bones?} The tools may have just served a purpose and no symbolic nature was attributed to the items themselves.

Within the Open Court, located behind the temple and in the area of the corridors, there is strong evidence that lithic knapping took place in this area.⁵⁶ A strong indication of knapping taking place here is that the main area of knapping activity produces many items that relate to the first stages of production, which is seen in the Open Court.⁵⁷ While knapping may have occurred elsewhere in the temple complex, as chipped stone items were found throughout Area J, this act was primarily done within the Outer Court and away from the main parts of the temple.⁵⁸ This could indicate one of three things: (1) the act of flint knapping was not seen as a sacred event and therefore was done outside the confines of the temple to preserve its sanctity, (2) the act was seen as a sacred ritual as a part of the cultic activity that took place within the temple complex as a whole and the Outer Court was the area in which this process was to be conducted, or (3) it was a combination of both. Insoll argues that our differentiation between the sacred and the profane ^{good observation} may not have occurred during ancient times,⁵⁹ and therefore, the priests of the temple may not have taken any thought to do this act on the temple grounds, whether sacred or not. In fact, Shimelmitz and Adams also argue that the lithic assemblages show characteristics of domestic

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 70.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 66-67.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 70.

⁵⁹ Insoll, 2005, pp. 16-17.

contexts as well as ritualistic, cultic attributes.⁶⁰ They argue that since both contexts are present, that this indicated a commingling of sacred and profane activities.⁶¹

The areas in which these lithic assemblages were found also aid in understanding what may have taken place within the Great Temple. The sanctuary had the highest percentage of blades,⁶² which may indicate the need for precision in this part of the temple. If this is so, it would be likely that blood libations may have been collected and possibly placed in the receptacles of the basalt tables, but again this is merely speculation. The western interior corridor had the lowest number of blades, but the highest number of tools.⁶³ This, along with a large amount of animal bones containing cut marks, indicates that this was where the early stages of processing carcasses occurred.⁶⁴ The eastern interior corridor had a low rate of tools, but contained a high representation of spalls of tabular scrapers.⁶⁵ This, along with the discovery of burned bones with more articulations within the cutting, suggest that this was where the later stages of carcass processing occurred, namely “discards from meals and burned detritus.”⁶⁶

The purpose of these corridors that run behind the temple along the southern wall may be somewhat easier to determine than that of the main sanctuary. It appears, by the evidence stated above, that the animals which were offered as sacrifices were processed in these back rooms. This space may also have been an area solely dedicated to the priests of the temple, where they could prepare the animals for ritualistic feasting. This may explain why the entrances to this area of the temple are so closed off from the main part of the sanctuary.⁶⁷ It would also give cause for

⁶⁰ Shimelmitz and Adams, 2014, pp. 70-71.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 71.

⁶² Ibid, p. 67.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ussishkin, 2015, pp. 82-84.

the outer court area located behind the temple, where the knapping of the blades and tools took place for these events. It is also suggested that the area of the outer court may have served as a place for sacrificial preparation or was in fact the feasting grounds of the temple.⁶⁸ The offering of various types of animals, domesticated and non-domesticated, may indicate the possible economic level of the people offering at the temple. A lion or panther would probably cost more to acquire than a goat or sheep. It may also indicate a greater sacrifice being made in bringing in an animal that is seen as having more power and harder to capture. The infrequency of the bones of these wild animals implies that while they were used as sacrifices within the temple, they were very uncommon and not the norm of sacrificial activity. Once again burnt sacrifices are not indicated here, even with the burnt bones, as these are seen as refuse that was disposed of and not an offering made to a specific deity.

The question remains as to what the cultic rituals practiced here were regarding. The placement of the temple and the orientation of the entrance may give some indication as to what these practitioners were worshipping. The Great Temple was constructed over a much smaller, earlier temple.⁶⁹ While the style of the temple remained the same, the Great Temple overshadows its predecessor and later replacements.⁷⁰ The temple was placed on a summit that was leveled by cutting and terracing directly on the surface of the hill.⁷¹ To do this, strong terraces and carefully planned foundation walls were placed along the sharp bedrock angles, allowing for the expansion of the complex onto the jagged outcroppings of the hill.⁷² It is not uncommon for temples to have been placed on hills or mountains in ancient times, as seen in

⁶⁸ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 298.

⁶⁹ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 80.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 71.

⁷¹ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 293.

⁷² Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 38.

ancient Crete for example.⁷³ The face of the temple was to the northeast and entrance to the temple appears to have been from the northern slope of the mound at that time.⁷⁴ It is assumed by Ussishkin “that a large courtyard extended on the upper part of the steep slope in front of the edifice and its main entrance, as is the case of the earlier Stratum XIX / Levels J-2 – J-3 temples.”⁷⁵ The entrance of the temple is in line with the ‘Ein el-Kubbi spring, located at the bottom of the slope.⁷⁶ This could indicate that the temple and cult were associated with water and the adjacent spring.⁷⁷ It has also been suggested that the cult may have centered around fertility and grain, along with the water aspect.⁷⁸

Ussishkin believes the Great Temple is similar in function and style to the Chalcolithic – Ghassulian temple at En-Gedi.⁷⁹ He states that the setting of the temple on a hill near the En-Gedi spring with the main entrance facing the spring, just as is the case in Megiddo.⁸⁰ Both temples are of a broad-room design with an altar along the back wall that is in line with the entrance.⁸¹ Since the En-Gedi temple was an isolated structure, it would appear that this was a pilgrimage site for those who lived within the general vicinity.⁸² Based on these observations, Ussishkin believes the Great Temple was also a pilgrimage site for those in the region under the influence of the region.⁸³

There is probably some significance to the fact that the entrance to the temple was aligned with the spring at the bottom of the hill, but to the exact nature of its importance is still

⁷³ Nowicki, 2018, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 80.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wiener, 2020.

⁷⁹ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 86.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 89.

unknown. While a water cult account for this, I believe it could be possible that this spring may have acted as a space for a cleansing ritual of some sort before entering into the temple. This would bring in a functionality of the spring and its close proximity to the temple. However, without more evidence, especially some sort of text, it will be impossible to determine completely the significance of this alignment. What is more discernable is the fact that the area of the temple was considered sacred, as there are no other structures, such as a palace, near it.⁸⁴ In fact, the people of Megiddo lived about 450 m east of the temple complex in what has been dubbed Tel Megiddo East.⁸⁵ Both sites are considered to be contemporary to one another during the time of the Great Temple period.⁸⁶

The monumental leap from the Level J-3 temple to the Great Temple testifies to an increase in economic resources, and geometric and architectural knowledge to build such a structure.⁸⁷ Of first importance was to have enough raw material to build such a structure. The community must have controlled a large amount of resources of mud, straw, and water to make the bricks.⁸⁸ It is estimated that a volume of 2200 cubic m of mudbricks were used in the construction.⁸⁹ This would have required approximately 58,000 kg of straw, which would take over 100 net hectares to grow.⁹⁰ This would require over a square mile worth of arable land to grow enough straw for this building project.⁹¹ This would have required a vastly larger hinterland supporting both agricultural and pastoral activity to not only provide straw for the bricks, but to feed the large number of people involved in the construction project.⁹²

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 37.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

⁸⁷ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 300.

⁸⁸ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

The community also commanded a labor force large enough and skilled enough to complete such a task. An architect (or many) with mathematical prowess would be needed to come up with the geometrical design of the temple.⁹³ Unskilled workers would need to be utilized to move the resources to and from the construction sites of the mudbricks, basalt tables, wood beams, and any other feature that may have been created for the temple.⁹⁴ Skilled workers “who could quarry and cut stone, manufacture bricks, build walls, and sculpt basalt in a sophisticated fashion”⁹⁵ were also needed. It is possible that the priests of the temple may have established the rules for spacing and the cultic activity that was to take place within the structure.⁹⁶ If this is the case, and these priests were learned enough to know these placements and spacing of items, could they not have possibly been the architects of the temple? This is a question that could be addressed as more evidence for the structure and from the period surfaces in the future. Finally, some sort of administrative figure, such as a ruler of some kind, would be needed to coordinate all these workers and resources for the sizable construction project.⁹⁷ It has been suggested that Megiddo was able to acquire these resources and workers due to its prominence within an international trade route, but there is no current evidence to directly support such a claim.⁹⁸

The abandonment of the Great Temple is just as mysterious as the cultic practices that took place within it. Finkelstein and Ussishkin believe an earthquake was the cause of its disuse.⁹⁹ They state that there are large cracks that “run through a series of adjacent stones,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 300.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 294.

parallel to the face of the walls.”¹⁰⁰ Since later structures have no damage in this way, it is concluded that the damage occurred before their construction.¹⁰¹ Ussishkin believes the temple was partially restored and continued to be used in some cultic activity.¹⁰² However, definitive proof of continued cultic practices is still speculative. There is evidence during this period of several owl pellets, which signifies an absence of people on a regular basis.¹⁰³ Hearths were found in various levels of the temples decomposition and show that the collapse was slow enough to allow people to come and go throughout this period.¹⁰⁴ Debris from the roof and plaster walls were found throughout the structure, with significant weathering occurring due to rainwater.¹⁰⁵

The abandonment of the Great Temple was not a singular occurrence within this region. The Megiddo Hinterland Survey showed a widespread crisis in the region due to severe settlement changes at the end of EB I.¹⁰⁶ Over half of the sites in the Jezreel Valley were abandoned with those that did survive being greatly reduced in size and population.¹⁰⁷ After this dramatic change towns became fortified,¹⁰⁸ suggesting a new need of protection from outside forces that was not a concern previously. The earthquake scenario could have attributed to the large-scale abandonment within the region and also the need to protect the drastically smaller numbers of survivors. However, more research is need and the Jezreel Valley Regional Project is planning on trying to answer the question of the cause of abandonment in the future.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ussishkin, 2015, p. 86.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, Finkelstein, et al., 2014, p. 295.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Adams, David, et al., 2014, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

The Great Temple of Megiddo is a magnificent structure that will probably be the center of scholarly discussion for the EB Ib period of the Levant for several years to come. While the cultic practices within the structure are evasive at the moment, I believe with more excavations at Megiddo and in the surrounding areas that we will gain a better understanding of the people who lived in this region and how they interacted with their sacred spaces.

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Site Analysis

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

67 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This is a very well researched and clearly presented discussion of the Great Temple at Megiddo. There is a lot of thought in your essay about the activities that took place within this structure and how these relate to the architecture an also to the finds (including animal remains) within it.

My only criticism is minor - why not include some illustrations and plans? These would add to the discussion and make it easier for the reader to visualise the site.

On a minor point - perhaps some contextualisation of Megiddo in EB I might help as well - in particular for your reader to understand how unusual the temple was.

All in all though a very good piece of work. Well done!

Text Comment. A map locating Megiddo would be helpful

Text Comment. give date of the temple (including calendrical dates)

Text Comment. why not include a plan of the temple?

Text Comment. Good clear description

Text Comment. illustrations would really help your discussion: easier for your reader to visualise what you are describing



Comment 1

supporting evidence for ths practice

Text Comment. good observation - possibly linked with the animal bones?

Text Comment. good observation



Comment 2

any evidence for receptacles to collect blood?



Comment 3

Might be more difficult to procure, implying increased value. Think carefully about how value was ascribed in antiquity



Could be phrased better

could be phrased better



Comment 4

nice observation - there is quite a bit of work done on the significance to water in ancient religions.

There is a good article by Rick Wilk (available on academia.edu) about the ritual/symbolic value/meaning of water cross-culturally

