



The Jerusalem temple between “theology” and archaeology

Fabio Porzia, Corinne Bonnet

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which issues, what dialogue?

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Abstract

Divine presence on earth constitutes an aporia. However, it is also necessary, since that which we call “religion” is simply a series of social practices which aim to establish a line of communication, benevolent if possible, between superior beings and mankind. Ontologically speaking, divine powers are “superhuman”, which means that common parameters do not apply to them. This paper explores the first temple of Jerusalem using two sources: textual and archaeological evidence. We will therefore compare the theological and archaeological data in order to analyse the interactions between these two disciplines. The place of worship appears to be an ideal laboratory where several disciplines, methodologies and issues can be brought together to understand representations of divinity. In other words, we will explore how the consideration of “discourses about the gods” (theo-logy) can enhance the work of archaeologists and raise new questions: inversely, we will highlight that which archaeology contributes to those who conduct research into the representation of divinity in the texts.

Keywords

Archaeology of religion, theology, Bible, Jerusalem temple.

For many years, archaeologists of the ancient Near-East have shown great interest in the study of the sanctuaries and temples of the Levant, in particular from architectural and iconographic perspectives (Oggiano, 2005; Wightman, 2007: 144-197; Mierse, 2010; Kamlah, 2012b, to mention but a few recent titles). However, it is rare to find works which, from an archaeological point of view, take into account the theology, in the etymological sense meaning “discourse about the gods”, which a place of worship expresses (the works of Zevit, 2001; Hundley, 2013 and Laneri, 2015 are some notable exceptions). Yet, on closer inspection, among the many variations of the discipline which have existed throughout the centuries, the one which anchors it to the religious dimension should find its place within a diachronic study of religious systems. Consequently, this paper’s aim is to reaffirm the necessity for dialogue between two disciplines, theology and archaeology, for which religion is a shared “common ground”. Our case study consists of an issue not only hotly debated, but also paradoxical. Fixed in the collective imagination, in part due to the absence of any archaeological evidence, and in part in response to texts which glorify it, the first temple in Jerusalem – built by King Solomon according to the Bible – is, in fact, a reality which obliges specialists from different fields to communicate in order to produce a historically coherent view, at the meeting point of several approaches (cf. for example, Busink, 1970; Zwickel, 1999; Kamlah, 2012a). First, we will briefly discuss the biblical “theology” relating to

the presence of Yahweh among humans. We will then demonstrate the so-called biblical archaeology's specific contributions and issues. Finally, we will explore the type of dialogue that is possible between these two approaches¹.

1 - A textual perspective

Chronology of the events and periods mentioned in the article (as in the article, all dates are before the Common Era; moreover, these dates fit into the Low Chronology and follow the chronology of Finkelstein, Silberman, 2004: 32-33).

Archaeological periods

1550-1150	Late Bronze Age
1150-900	Iron Age I
900-586	Iron Age II
586-538	Babylonian Period (exilic)
538-333	Persian Period (postexilic)

History of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and of the Temple in Jerusalem

11025-1005(?)	Saul
1005-970(?)	David
970-931(?)	Solomon – construction of the first temple?
931	The schism? : Separation of the Davidic and Solomonic Kingdoms in two: the Kingdom of Israel (with Samaria as capital) and the Kingdom of Judah (with Jerusalem as capital)
722	Conquest of Samaria by the Neo-Assyrians and end of the Kingdom of Israel
586	Fall of Jerusalem, destruction of the first temple by the Neo-Babylonians and exile of some of the Judean elite to Babylon
538	Edict of Cyrus II, allowing the Judeans to return to their country and to rebuild their temple
538-516	Reconstruction of the Temple, known as the second temple
70 CE	Destruction of the second temple by the Romans

In the numerous Old Testament texts which mention the Jerusalem temple, great importance is given to King David's intention to build it; let us recall the context which provides the background for this. The Second Book of Samuel opens with the mourning for Saul and the anointing of David at Hebron. Six sons were born to David and he made an alliance with the tribes of Israel. Next came the conquest of Jerusalem. Having seized the stronghold, David built his palace there with the help of Phoenician workers, and then fathered other sons and daughters, marking his power in space and time under the benevolent watch of Yahweh. To complete his work, David had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem from the northern edge of the territory of Judah.

1. The article is co-authored, Corinne Bonnet focused on the first section, while Fabio Porzia on the second and the third.

It was to the sound of trumpets that the precious repository of Yahweh's power arrived at its destination, accompanied by sacrifices and hymns. Suddenly, a question occurred to David, which he asked of the prophet Nathan: "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent". The prophet replied by telling him to act as he wished, for God was with him. However, that night, Yahweh appeared to the prophet and questioned the validity of the project (7:5-7):

"Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I command to shepherd my people Israel, saying: 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" (All translations of the Bible are those of the NRSV, 2006).

The next passage of the text implies that it was up to Yahweh to build a house for his people (7:10-12), while, in reality, it was Solomon, the son of David, who built a house for Yahweh (7:13). It is clear from these passages that the act of establishing divine presence on earth is an aporia and that the efforts of the king to shelter it in a temple are foolish. In a subtly controversial tone, this passage contests the possibility that Yahweh could "live" (*yšb*) in a dimension which belongs to humans. The transcendence of Yahweh differentiates him from the model of divine immanence, by virtue of which one of the main responsibilities of kings is to construct or restore the buildings where the gods "live" (Lackenbacher, 1982). By expressing his reluctance to be "settled", treated like a plant that one places in the earth, Yahweh, through the voice of this text's postexilic writer, highlights the contrast between his way of being in the world, and that of his adversaries, the numerous and immanent gods of the surrounding polytheisms. While the same term, *byt*, typically means, in the Semitic languages, the house of the king, i.e. the palace, and the house of god, i.e. the sanctuary, the Hebrew Bible, without straying from this meaning, uses a discourse which aims to divide the king and the god, the human and the divine, and to widen this gap as much as possible. As such, the duo of king's palace / national god's temple, built at the same time on a monumental acropolis (here, Zion) is called into question.

Despite the tendency towards a transcendent model of divine representation, the example from the Second Book of Samuel also reveals that "establishing" the gods on earth is a response to a practical necessity, related to the creation of lines of communication (benevolent where possible) between beings considered superior and powerful, and mankind, whose destiny depends on the former. The multiple strategies for inscribing the one or many divine powers in space, as well as the discourses which describe them, inevitably encourage discussion between archaeology and "theology". The place of worship can thus be seen as a laboratory where several disciplines, methodologies and issues can and must be brought together, to understand all that relates to the meeting of two dimensions, the human and the divine, the earthly and the heavenly, the self and the other, as it were. In other words, the material manifestation of the presence of god, or of gods, among people, calls for a resolutely interdisciplinary approach, capable of considering *all* of the theological and archaeological aspects, without separating them.

2 - An archaeological perspective

In wondering about the king's will to build a temple, the author of the Second Book of Samuel means in all likelihood to justify the fact that Solomon – and not his father David – built this temple. An initial point worth considering is that the biblical text, which recounts the construction of

the temple by Solomon, associates the building of this structure with that of the royal quarter. According to the text of the First Book of Kings, this quarter was made up of two areas within a single large edifice: the "House of the Forest of the Lebanon" (figure 1a) for public exercising of power, and the king's private residence. The description of this area (7:1-12) is book-ended by the story of the temple (5:15-16) and another about its furniture (7:13-51). By describing the project for a royal acropolis in Jerusalem, comprised of the temple and the king's palace, the biblical text carries on the Near-Eastern model of the builder-king and the typical duality between the king's *byt* and the deity's *byt*. This operation is moreover well known across this geo-cultural zone and its best attested architectural manifestation, from an archaeological perspective, is the *Bīt-Ḫilāni* type, according to the Assyrian terminology. This architectural model was widespread in the Levant in the early 1st millennium, particularly in the region between southern Anatolia and northern Syria (Lehman, Killebrew, 2010). It appears to be typical of palatial constructions, but also seems to have influenced temple architecture. The model of the *Bīt-Ḫilāni* is characterised by a portico supported by columns, above the entrance, as in the palaces of Tell Halaf and Zincirli Höyük (for a recent analysis of this model, see Osborne, 2012).

However, while the description of the temple may, to a certain extent, correspond to a number of complexes classified as *Bīt-Ḫilāni* (including the temple of Tell Tayinat), it is more difficult to associate the description of Solomon's palace with this architectural category, *pace* D. Ussishkin (1973) and A. Mazar (1990: 378-379). On the one hand, exegetical and historical considerations suggest that these texts were written in the Persian period (Jigoulov, 2010: 133-135, 148-153), while on the other hand, a more attentive analysis of the text itself demonstrates that the biblical description raises a number of issues. As I. Oggiano has rightly noted (2005: 220), the text in question mixes two distinct architectural traditions: a North Syrian model for the temple and an Achaemenid model for the palace. This typological differentiation also affects the chronology: while the temple type existed over a long period (from the 18th to 6th centuries), that of the Achaemenid palace can be dated more precisely to between the 6th and 5th centuries, as evidenced by the examples of Susa and Persepolis (Huff, 2005) (figure 1b).

The existence – in the literature at least – of a hypostyle hall in Jerusalem is echoed in archaeological examples, in particular from Sidon (Doumet-Serhal, 1999: 33-35; Stucky *et al.*, 2005: 109-115) and Byblos (Jigoulov, 2009: 144) (figure 1c), which are structures that M. Liverani calls "provincial apadana" (2002: 363)². The building of the acropolis in Jerusalem, according to the biblical description, required large quantities of material (5:6), and in particular, specialist Phoenician workers (5:17-18). As M. Dunand had previously suggested (1969), followed by K. M. Kenyon (1974: 111-112), a relationship between certain constructions in Jerusalem and the Phoenician world (especially places of worship built on podiums) can be envisaged, as well as a chronological shift in relations between the kingdom of Judah and Phoenicia from the 10th to the end of the 6th century.

Let us briefly consider the case of King Solomon, an example not simply of proverbial wisdom, but also of intense activity as a builder-king: 1 Kings 9:15 provides information about his activities in the major northern sites (Megiddo, Gezer, Hazor), while 1 Kings 5-7 informs us about the acropolis in Jerusalem which was also said to be his work. In light of recent research and excavations, the figure of Solomon as builder-king has been drastically reduced in the last few years, as a result

2. In the case of Byblos, it seems more likely that this structure was in fact a podium (Wright, 1958: 98; Rossi, 2007: 26-29; Oggiano, Pedrazzi, 2013: 63).

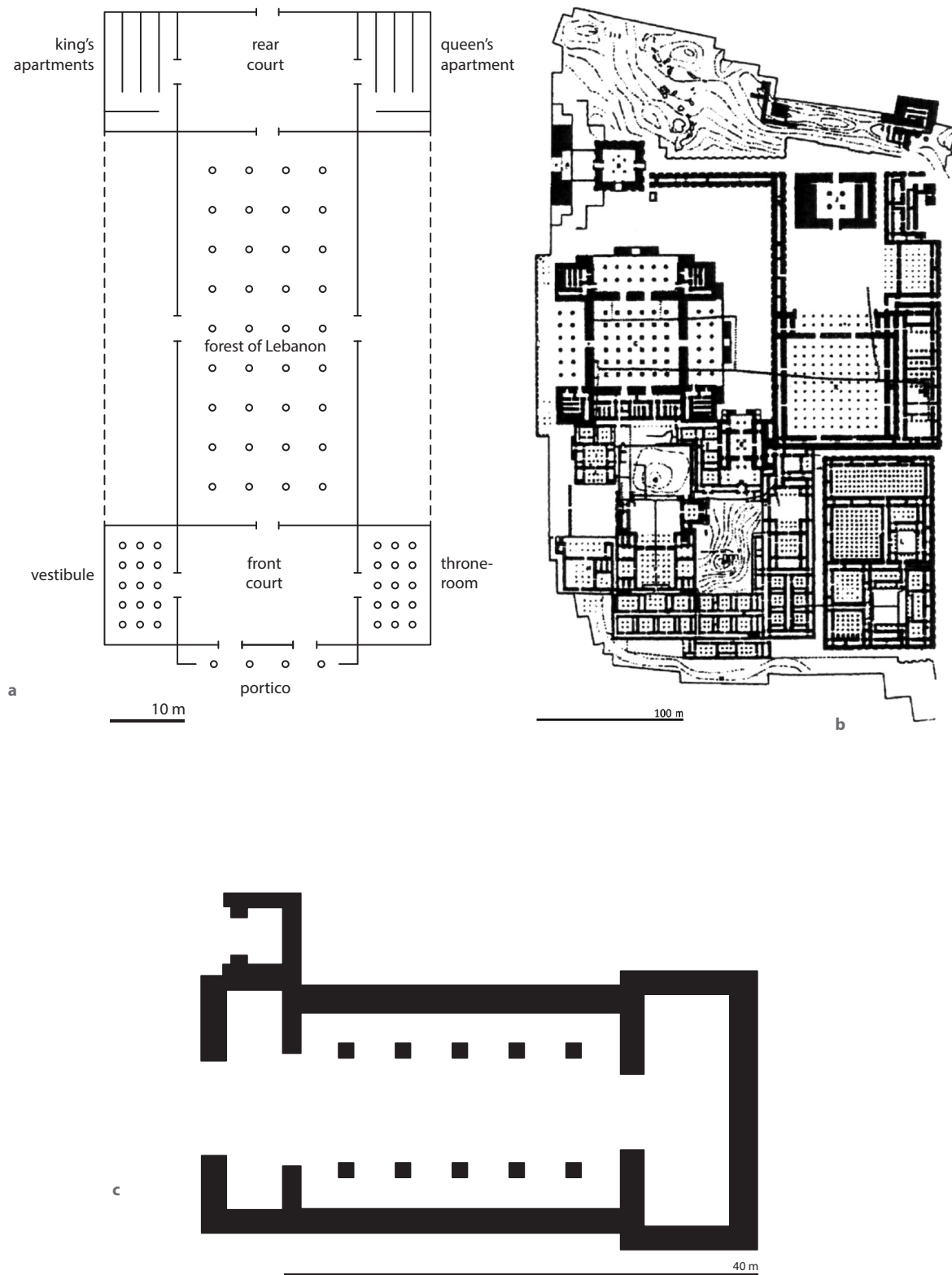


Figure 1 - Solomon's palace and the Achaemenid apadana. a: Hypothetical reconstruction of the "House of the Forest of the Lebanon" (according to 1 Kings 7:1-8), plan (after Liverani, 2003: pl. 57a); b: terrace in Persepolis with the apadana of Darius, plan (after Wilber, 1969: pl. XVIII); c: the "provincial apadana" of Byblos, plan (after Wright, 1985: pl. 201).

of a chronological argument (Finkelstein, Silberman, 2004; 2007). The chronology of the transition between Iron Age I and Iron Age II is traditionally founded on two elements: (1) the dating of Philistine Monochrome pottery to the end of the Iron Age I period; (2) the dating of layers from Iron Age IIA in the northern sites. Based on the archaeological data, independent of the biblical data, I. Finkelstein proposed a date of approximately 1135 for the Philistine pottery which had been dated to between the 13th and 12th centuries (high chronology) or between the 12th and 11th centuries (middle chronology). From there, the dates of all pottery assemblages were lowered (low chronology) by around a century, which resulted in the transition between Iron Age I and Iron Age IIA being fixed at the end of the 10th century and not the end of the 11th (for a discussion of this issue, see Finkelstein, 2005; Finkelstein, Mazar, 2007: 99-140 and, for a recent overview, Pedrazzi, 2013). The establishment of a low chronology, supported by new radiocarbon dates, also had consequences for the general chronology of the eastern Mediterranean in these periods (Fantalkin *et al.*, 2015). For the purposes of our paper, this dating enables several archaeologists today to concede that Solomon did not leave any notable architectural legacies, and that many public buildings in the north of the country which were previously attributed to him, in fact date from the 8th century. These conclusions led I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman (2004: 221) to question not only the truth of the biblical account of the Solomonic *gesta*, but also the existence of a united monarchy (encompassing the north and south of the country) during the Iron Age. Thus, if no evidence has survived of Solomonic activities in the north, and if the royal palace of Jerusalem corresponds with later models, what can be said of the Jerusalem temple (figure 2)?

It is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with an issue of a textual – and not archaeological – nature. E.-M. Laperrousaz (1988) has claimed to have identified a portion of the temple wall, at the place where he observed a “straight joint” in the eastern wall of the Haram esh-Sharif. Although a discontinuity is indeed visible in the masonry located approximately 32 metres north of the south-east corner (figure 3), various opinions have been expressed in relation to it. In any event, E.-M. Laperrousaz’s hypothesis has generally been refuted and, with it, any possibility of identifying a vestige of the first temple at that location.

Epigraphic evidence relating to the temple is equally non-existent. Two famous inscriptions, which mention a *byt yhwh*, have been reported as false several times: one of these is on the Ivory Pomegranate from the Israel Museum (Goren, Ahituv *et al.*, 2005; Ahituv *et al.*, 2007; Rollston, 2015); the other is on an ostrakon from the Moussaieff collection (Goren, Bar-Matthews *et al.*, 2005). The only authentic inscription which mentions a *byt yhwh* is ostrakon 18 (recto, line 9) from Tel Arad, from the mid-8th century, but neither the context nor the location of this temple are known (Aharoni, 1981: 35-38; Ahituv, 2008: 119-122; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al.*, 2005: 37-41) (figure 4).

Faced with a total lack of material evidence, the archaeologist must settle for rationally analysing the textual information and comparing it with remains found elsewhere. This practice nevertheless encounters an initial obstacle: we do not in fact know if the biblical description stems from actual knowledge of the temple in question (a true *autopsia*, to use Herodotus’ terminology), or from the consultation of archival documents containing such information (or even from an oral tradition). Furthermore, it appears that the description of the building’s floor plan corresponds with a religious model which was widespread in the Levant from the 2nd millennium. Despite the limitations of any typological comparisons (Oggiano, 2012: 198), it is possible to identify various major points of comparison: the long, tripartite and symmetrical layout, and an entrance on the short side (also known as *Langraum in antis*).

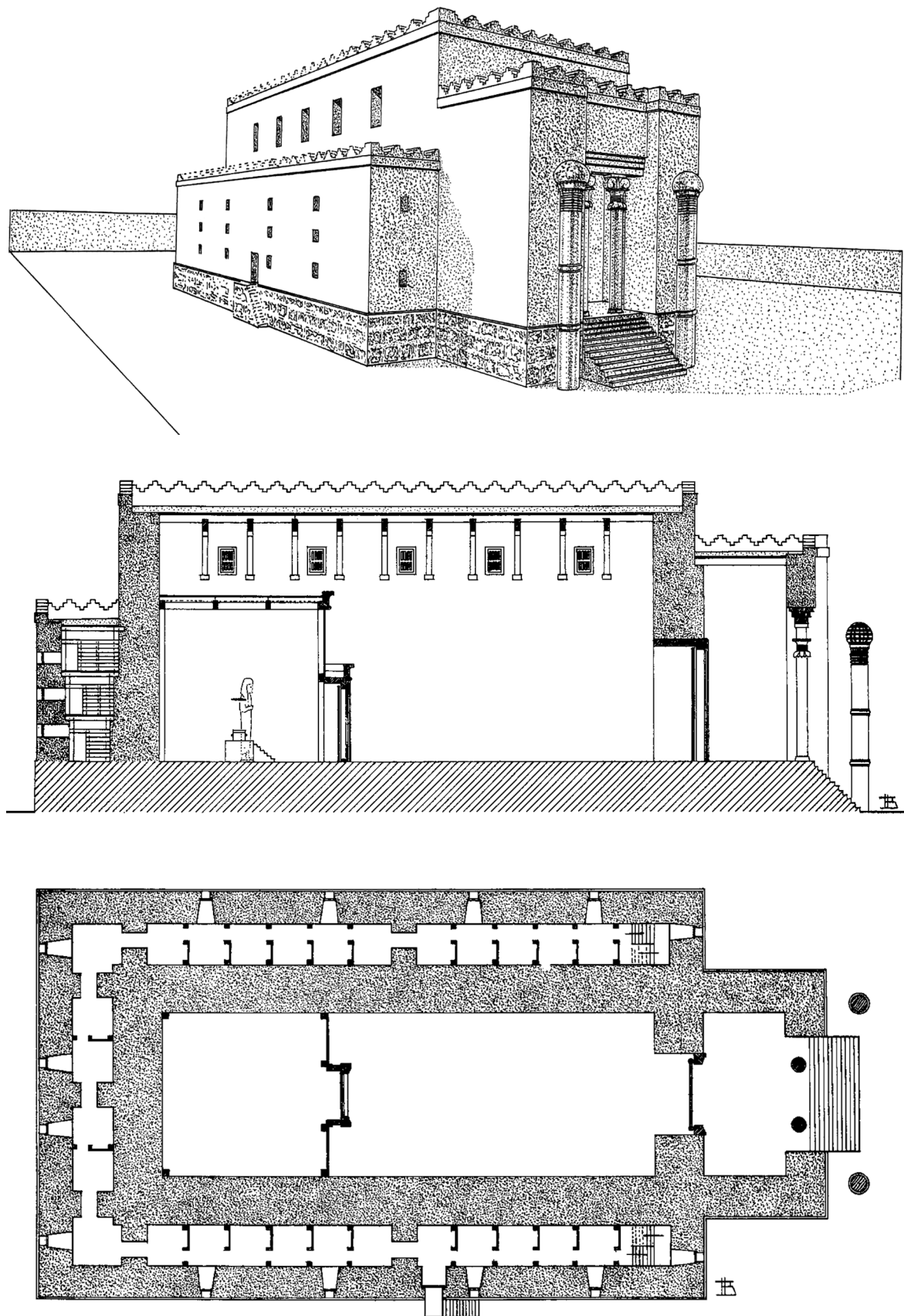


Figure 2 - Hypothetical reconstruction of the first temple in Jerusalem. a: view of the exterior (after Busnik, 1970: pl. 47); b: cross-section (after Busnik, 1970: pl. 49); c: plan (after Busnik, 1970: pl. 48).



a



b



c



d

Figure 3 - Eastern wall of the Haram esh-Sharif, seen from the south-east: the "discontinuity" between the Herodian wall and another earlier section of the wall (Solomonic, Persian-era, Hasmonean?). On the left, smooth-sided stones from the Herodian part of the wall, built up against bossages from the part of the wall located to the north of the "discontinuity": a-b. The "discontinuity" as demonstrated by E.-M. Laperrousaz, 1973: fig. 3-4; c. The "discontinuity" as it is visible today, general view of the eastern wall, looking towards the south-east corner; d. The "discontinuity" as it is visible today, detail of the lower section of the currently visible part (photograph: F. Porzia).

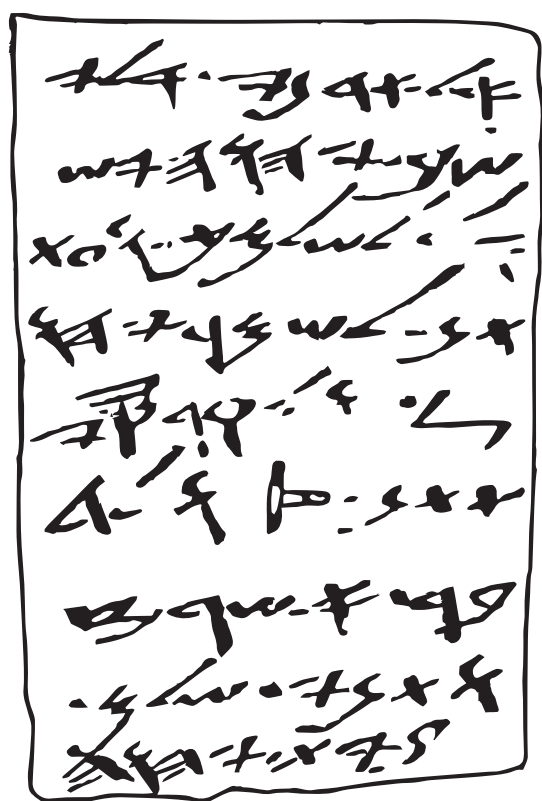
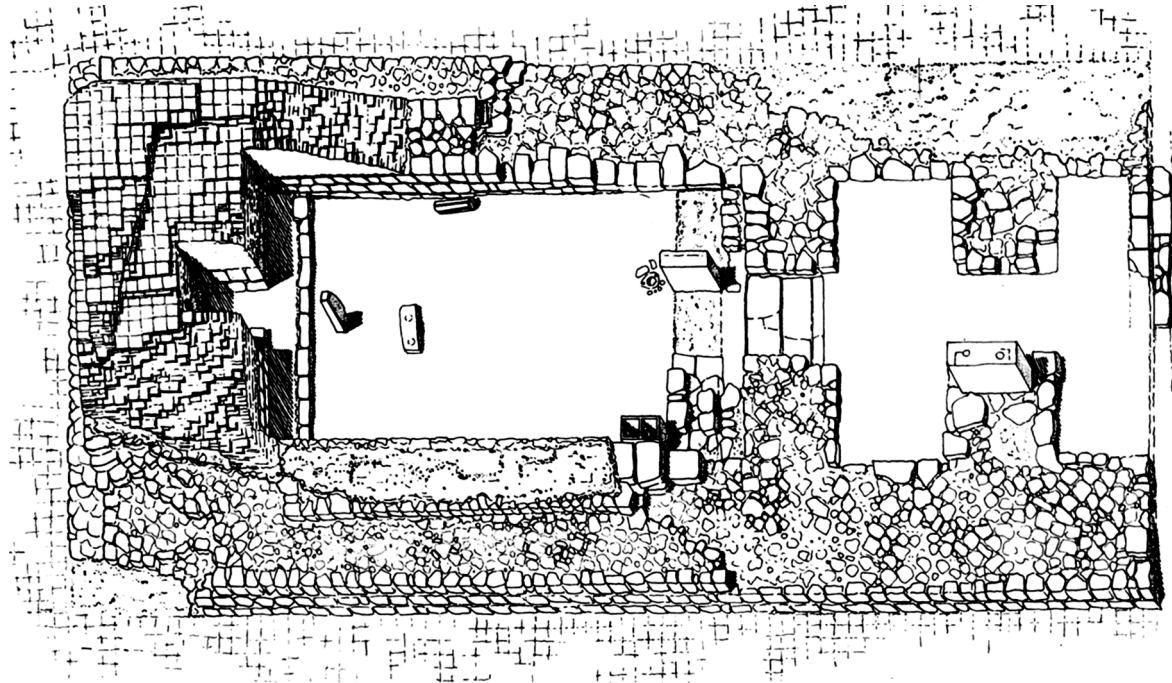


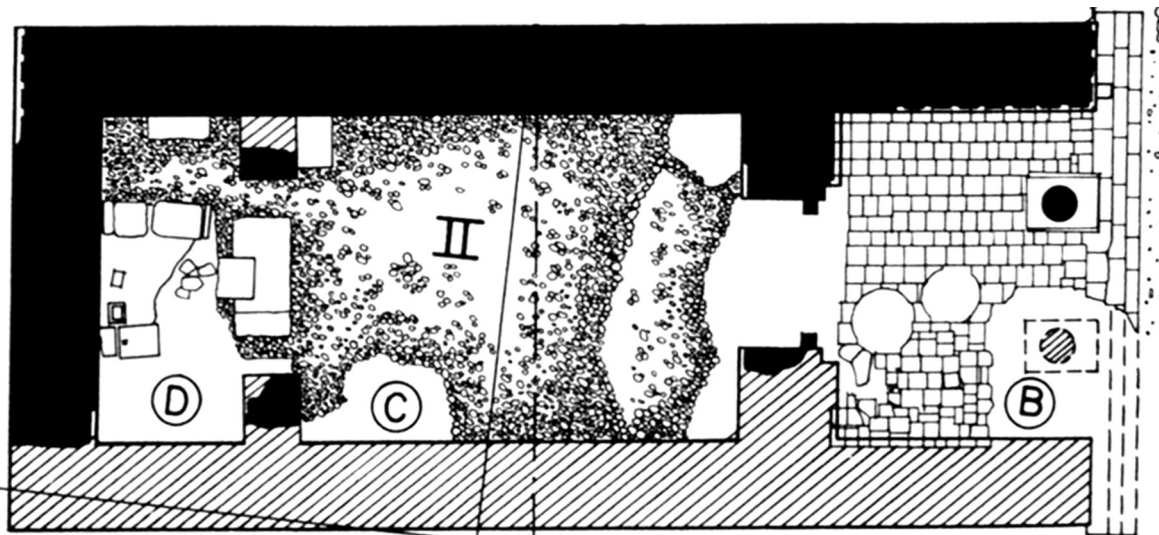
Figure 4 - Replica of the recto of the ostrakon from Tell Arad, which mentions at the very end (line 9) a *byt yhwh*, "house/temple of YHWH" (after Aharoni, 1981: 35).

As a result, the temple's layout, like the association of the royal building (palace) with the cultic building (temple) derives from models which are well-known in northern Syria from the 18th century onwards (figures 5-6). Similar complexes have been identified at Ebla (Temple D, dedicated to Ishtar) and at Alalakh (level VII) (Werner, 1994: 110-115; Matthiae, 1997: 263), with some lasting into the Late Bronze Age, such as Alalakh (level IV) and Hazor (level XIII; Mazar, 1992). In the same region, during the 1st millennium, it is worth mentioning the temple of Ain Dara (11th-10th centuries), which shares with the temple in Jerusalem the existence of an ambulatory all around the cella, and the temple of Tell Tayinat, from the late 9th century, which constitutes – chronologically speaking – the closest point of comparison, at least if one accepts the date given by the Bible (Haines, 1971: 53-55; Matthiae, 1992). These comparisons indicate that the description of the temple of Solomon fits into a typology of religious architecture which is perfectly understood and still visible at the beginning of the Iron Age in the Levant (Dever, 2001: 144-157; Matthiae, 2002; Oggiano, 2005: 215-224). The parallels are not restricted to the layout, but also concern a number of architectural elements, analysed by J. Monson (2006) and decorative details, such as the presence of two columns flanking the doorway, named in the Bible as Yakin and Boaz (Porzia, 2017), or even the practice of surrounding the doors with multiple chambranles (Garfinkel, Mumcuoglu, 2013).

Despite its great age, the temple built according to the *Langraum in antis* model is attested in the Levant up to the 8th and 7th centuries, albeit considerably more modest in size by comparison with the earlier centuries (Mazzoni, 2010: 363-364, with bibliography). In particular, archaeological evidence for the typology of the Jerusalem temple, as described in the biblical text, including the ambulatory, has been found in the North Syrian temple AI of Tel Afis which dates from the 7th-6th centuries (Mazzoni, 2010; 2012) and which S. Mazzoni associates with Assyrian models.



a



b

Figure 5 - Examples of temples of the *Langraum in antis* type in the Levant. a: Ebla, temple D (after Matthiae, 2000: 181); b: Tell Tayinat, temple II (after Haines, 1971: pl. 103).

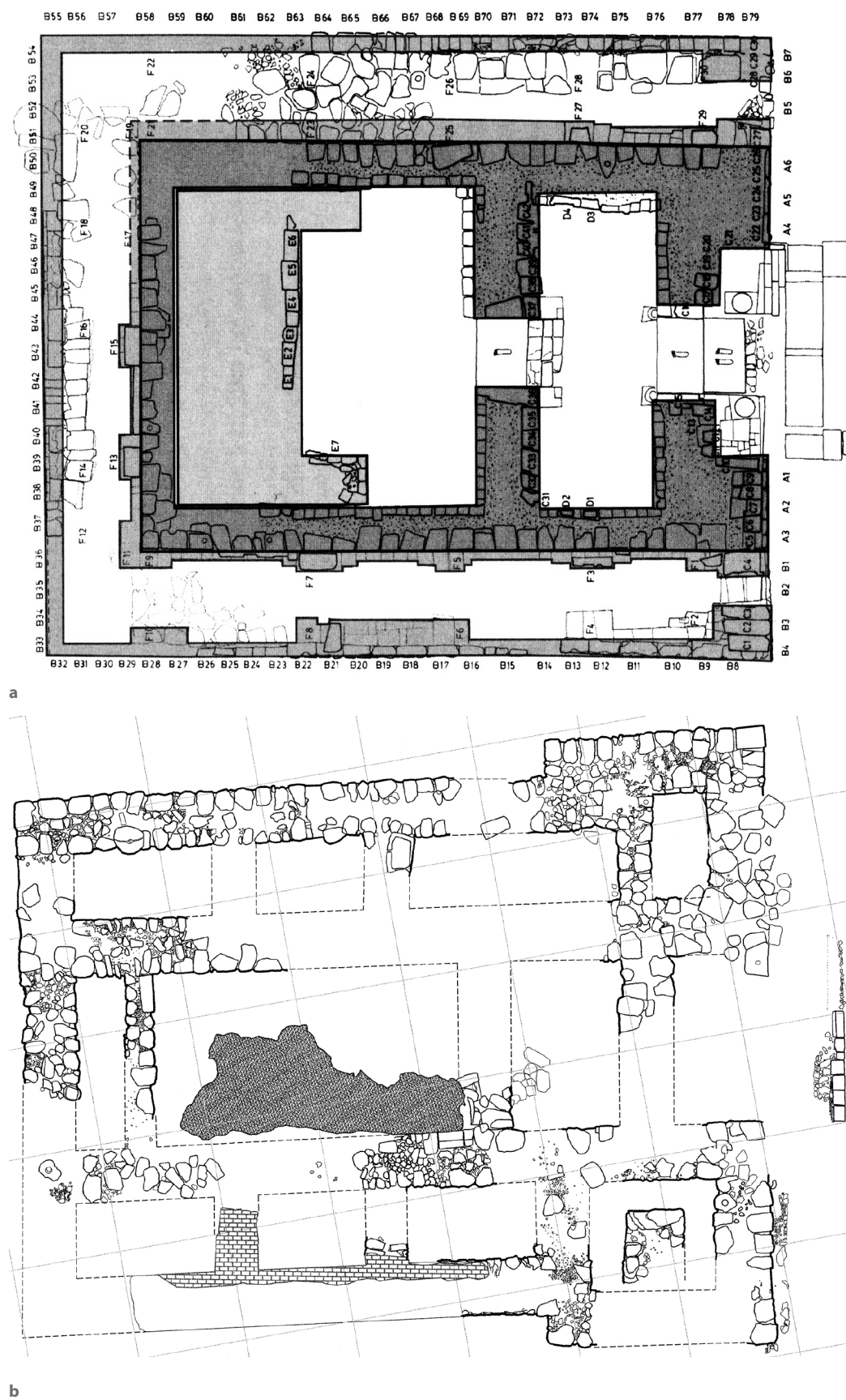


Figure 6 - Examples of temples of the *Langraum in antis* type in the Levant. a: Ain Dara, temple (after Novák, 2012: fig. 4); b: Tel Afis, temple AI (after Mazzoni, 2010: fig. 10).

3 - The need for a historical perspective

Are these comparisons sufficient to justify attributing the temple, if not to Solomon, at least approximately to his era? On close inspection, given their chronological scope, they do not contribute at all to the identification of the first temple's builder. We are forced to admit, therefore, that neither archaeology nor biblical exegesis (which places the final writing of the relevant texts several centuries after Solomon) can aid us in this operation. There is a high risk of surreptitious use of archaeological or textual data, or worse still, of a deliberate construction of a convergence (or inversely, a radical opposition). In order to avoid such a trap, we can call on a third discipline, history, which is accustomed to comparing data sourced from multiple "fields", while endeavouring to maintain an axiomatic neutrality regarding them. In other words, in the case which interests us, we need to ask ourselves at what moment in the long history of Jerusalem was a king in a position to undertake – from an political as well as an economic point of view – the design and construction of a monumental acropolis, comprising a royal palace and its temple. For the Northern Kingdom, it appears that such conditions existed in the mid-9th century, as demonstrated by the construction of the capital, Samaria, by King Omri (Finkelstein, 2013). However, for the Southern Kingdom and for the city of Jerusalem, such a project would have been later, despite the media coverage of the discovery of what E. Mazar wished to call "King David's Palace" (2006; 2009). The debate surrounding these structures is still ongoing and dates range from Iron Age I, when Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, as the Bible recounts (Faust, 2011), to the Hellenistic period (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2007; Finkelstein, 2011). In any event, the probability that the entire acropolis is covered by the current Temple Mount appears increasingly likely, which would explain its inaccessibility to archaeological excavations (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2011) (figure 7).

The example of the northern sites has enabled us to demonstrate that a Solomonic architecture does not exist, and even less so a Davidic architecture (*pace* Y. Garfinkel in relation to the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah lowlands; Na'man, 2017). Those in power during the transition between the 8th and 7th centuries seem to be more likely candidates, seeing as King Solomon was not in a position to accomplish such tasks. Jerusalem and Judea in general were going through a particularly prosperous period at this time, and undergoing significant population growth. In this context, just before or after the collapse of the rival Kingdom of Samaria in 722 and thanks to pressure from the Neo-Assyrians which caused this, the project of a royal acropolis can be understood as an attempt to project the capital Jerusalem on an "international" scale (Mazzoni, 2012: 30).

A gap therefore exists between the biblical accounts which place the temple in the 10th century and the historical considerations which tend towards the 8th and 7th centuries. Moreover, from an archaeological perspective, two later elements must be taken into account. Firstly, parallels may be observed with the Phoenician region in the 6th century, although the archaeological evidence is very limited and the dates uncertain (such as the use of podiums and bossages); secondly, the archaeological parallels suggested by the biblical description of Solomon's temple correspond more with models inspired by 8th-7th century Aram or Assyria, than with 10th century models.

Such a blend of styles and such a range of comparisons are probably due to the fact that the biblical description mixes elements related to the second temple, which was built during the Persian era, after the exile, and elements of the first temple, which most likely dates from the 8th century and which was retroactively attributed to the great ruler of the 10th century.

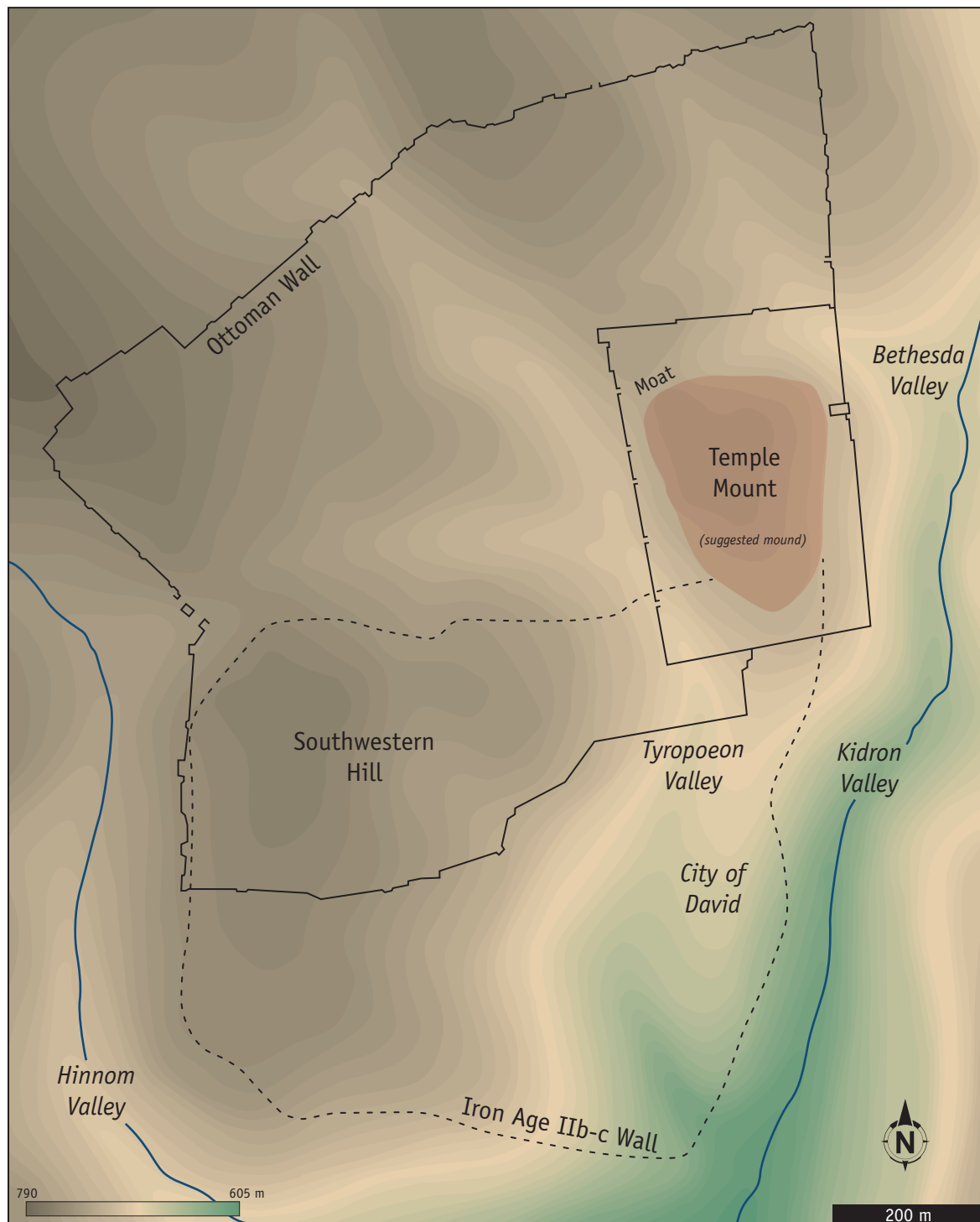


Figure 7 - Hypothetical location in the middle of the modern-day Temple Mount of the acropolis of Jerusalem during the Iron Age, containing both the royal quarter and the temple (CAD: T. Rivera-Tessier, after Finkelstein *et al.*, 2011: fig 2).

4 - Between texts and archaeology: an assessment

In order to build the temple of a dynastic and therefore national god, the sovereigns who ruled in Jerusalem adopted a model which had previously characterised poliadic divinity, the protector of a group of people, situated on an acropolis. Although the biblical text gives the Jerusalem temple an aura of exclusivity, we can state with confidence that "there is nothing new under the sun". However, this choice was not inevitable, as we know that new architectural typologies could be developed when new religions emerged, as evidenced by the site of Amrit, which was dedicated to the worship of a benevolent and therapeutic divinity (Oggiano, 2012). The royal project for a monumental acropolis has repercussions at a theological level, in relation to an implicit (but sensitive and full of meaning) parallel between the king and the god, which is attested everywhere in the region (Hurowitz, 1992; Boda, Novotny, 2010). If our analysis is correct, we can therefore conclude that the first temple – with all of its ceremonial, symbolic and theological splendour – had much more in common with the other Levantine religious establishments than with the highly theologised vision (aniconic, monotheistic, in a word, "extraordinary") constructed by the Bible. As a result, the theology of the text of the Second Book of Samuel can only be understood as a post-monarchic theology, produced after the collapse of the local dynasty and the destruction of the main temple in 586. It reflects a concept of divinity which is linked to the living conditions of a people in exile in Babylon, who favour the nomadic vision of the divinity who accompanies the tribulations of its people. Once again, the notion of divinity is based not on the God / king duo, but on a comparison between God and his people. Stripped of the protection of the king but also liberated from the limitations set by the monarchic establishment, divinity frees itself by developing greater transcendence.

As regards the methodological aspect of our inquiry, although it is limited to the example of the Jerusalem temple, it opens up a number of avenues to be explored in relation to the dynamic between archaeology and "theology" in every sense:

- a) An initial formalisation of the dialogue between the two disciplines requires that archaeologists interpret the structures they uncover in light of the ways of thinking about the "presentification" of the gods, of making the invisible visible, and that the historians of religions, but also the exegetes and theologians, take on the material as "translations" of a more or less normative thought, in order to understand the various representations of the divine that are expressed by the layout of rooms, their furniture, their decoration, etc.;
- b) Dialogue between different disciplines cannot take place harmoniously if one has hegemony over the other. With this in mind, we have highlighted the role of history, with its own methodology, as a possible means of mediation, where the archaeological field data and the exegetic inputs can be discussed and synthesised in a balanced and dialectical way;
- c) As Plato said long ago, a dialogue can only emerge from a "common ground", which he called the *koinòn*. The work of the archaeologist and that of the biblical exegete share a certain "stratigraphic method" with the "phasing" of archaeological layers on one side, and layers of writing on the other, by means of the "historical-critical method" (Dever, 1997, 2001: 1-21; Frendo, 2011: 61-67). In other words, to avoid both forced consensuses and sterile oppositions, it is consideration of the diachronic dimension into which ancient material fits which enables us to combine heterogeneous data and to formulate truly historical interpretations. In this context, not only is the object treated as a text, but the text itself is understood as an object;
- d) In the dialogue between archaeology and history, political uses of the past are an additional factor. In a region which is "sick with history" (Tommasi, 2016: 546), archaeology and politics could not remain indifferent to each other. Without engaging in a debate on the limitations of

an epistemology in which facts confront ideological dreams, it turns out that archaeology in this region has been forced to fight for its own independence in the face of narrative identities, that is, those which pay little heed to methodologically founded reconstructions, and which are produced by politics. I. Finkelstein states, significantly, that it is "completely absurd to use scientific paradigms about the history of Israel during biblical times to back up or deny a contemporary reality" (2008: 22), but also that archaeology "must be free and freed from all judgement of a theological nature" (2008: 21). Politics and theology, in the case of Israel, are often at risk of being mixed together and being confused. From a pragmatic standpoint, two extremes should therefore be avoided: the idea that archaeology must or can play a role in the definition of the identity of an Israeli or Palestinian person today is scientifically inappropriate, just as, inversely, it is equally outrageous to think that archaeology, or any other form of human knowledge, can remain in an ivory tower and not be used to define or corroborate political or religious identities, or both at the same time. In this extremely delicate context, the role of the archaeologist, the exegete, or the historian, in a word, the role of the scholar, should be to broaden the horizon of the discussion and to return to each subject its complexity, without bending it to fit roles which do not suit it.

Ultimately, the paradoxical case of the Jerusalem temple, for which archaeology appears to be of little help, has turned out to be an effective laboratory. To return one last time to our initial theme, that is, the material manifestation of divine presence on earth, the debates raised by the Jerusalem temple's "*lieux de mémoire*" (memory spaces), i.e. the Temple Mount or the Wailing Wall, also illustrate the difficulty which currently remains in freeing scientific, archaeological or exegetic research from the "utilitarian" constraint which weighs upon them. However, without prejudice and removed of any desire to favour one discipline over another, the study of the Jerusalem temple can recover a holistic historical dimension, despite, on one hand, the absence of remains and, on the other, the clearly partisan nature of the written accounts, ancient or recent, which perpetuate its memory.

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