Hezekiah's Cultic Reforms according to the Archaeological Evidence

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Religious reforms during King Hezekiah's reign based on archaeological records from the various Iron Age II Judean sites such as Tel Arad, Beersheba, Lachish, and others reveal cultic changes from a new point of view. At these sites remains of the Iron Age II cultic places were discovered. Among them the altars, incense burners, standing stones, shrines, and more findings were found during the last few decades. No later than the end of the eighth century BCE shrines were dismantled and destroyed under the influence of only one reform—probably Hezekiah's religious, military, and economic reforms. Nevertheless, events at Lachish occurred earlier than the end of the eighth century BCE. This could be considered a long-term process that might have been finished before Assyria's campaign against Judah in 701 BCE. However, the performance took different forms at every site, which shows that the command from Jerusalem required eliminating cultic activity outside the capital. How to realize reforms was not clearly defined and it probably depended on local authority.

7.1. Introduction

The most important cultic events of the late eighth century BCE took place during the reign of King Hezekiah. According to the biblical text it is possible to classify him as an archetype of King David (1 Kgs 18:3). He achieved fame for his reforms (not only cultic reformation) and for now this fact is the most significant. We read in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles the following descriptions about his activities:

> He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made,

for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan. (2 Kgs 18:4 NRSV)

Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, all to their individual properties. (2 Chr 31:1 NRSV)

The biblical text does not give the details of the destruction of cultic places, images, and high places. We do not know when, where, and exactly how it happened. For more details it is necessary to focus on archaeological records. It is clear according to archaeological evidence that in the eighth century BCE official cultic places existed in Judah. In the same century it is believed that these places were dismantled (e.g., Tel Arad, Beersheba, Motza, and likely Tel Lachish). Two Judahite shrines of the First Temple period were discovered at Tel Arad (in 1963) and Tel Motza (in 2012). Besides this, archaeologists unearthed a large, dismantled incense altar at Beersheba and cultic rooms at Lachish and Tel Halif. All of these sites, with the exception of Tel Halif, were characteristically part of the official Judahite cult under royal control.

7.2. Tel Motza Temple

On the western periphery of modern Jerusalem sits the site of Tel Motza. In 2012 a most fascinating building was excavated—an Iron Age II temple. This temple is the second Judahite temple ever uncovered in Israel up to now. Archaeologists initially thought that they had found two strata of a comparable composition that looked similar to two historical phases known from the Arad temple. The first stratum of Building 500 was identified as a temple complex and was dated by Shua Kisilevitz to the early Iron Age II period, tenth–ninth century BCE. Due to unclear evidence for the continuation of the building in its second phase as a temple, it is called the monumental public "Building 500" and is dated to the seventh or the early sixth century BCE.[1] Originally the sanctuary consisted of a main hall, a

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1. Shua Kisilevitz, "The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza," *TA* 42 (2015): 148–50.

courtyard with an altar, and five standing stones (cultic stelae). Later when the building was rebuilt, the same situation occurred as at Arad. The floor level was filled and raised with a thick layer of fill and clusters of plaster. Building 500 was built up over the new level and cultic artifacts (as lower levels of the temple walls, altar, refuse pit and podium) were buried under the late Iron Age II walls.[2] Close to the sacrificial altar were bones of cultic animals, cultic objects, and also pottery that was found in a pit that was covered with a layer of ash. Some of these objects had cultic character. Nearby this pit the fragments of pottery figurines and the lower part of an incense burner with petals were found. A similar type is known from Tel Arad. All cultic objects were deliberately damaged and covered by a layer of ash.

This cultic place is the first evidence of changes in the religion during the Iron Age II of Judah, specifically a Judahite temple. The main altar and temple were covered with a layer of earth during the eighth century BCE.[3] It is impossible to date it better due to the unclear relations between two strata of the temple and Building 500. The process that ended the cultic site at Motza shares similarities to what happened with the Arad temple but more than one hundred years later. If we suspect that Building 500 did not serve as the temple, the reform happened sometime during the eighth century BCE. Motza could be the earliest sign of the long-term process or natural development of the official Judahite religion. The temple itself is the earliest Iron Age II shrine ever found in Judah. The cultic changes could be dated before the reign of King Hezekiah, but likely to the time of his rule over the kingdom of Judah as another Judahite site with cultic remains.

7.3. Tel Arad Temple

Tel Arad was one of the largest Canaanite city-states and was abandoned at the end of the Early Bronze Age II. It was again occupied after more

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2. Kisilevitz, "Iron IIA Judahite Temple," 156.

3. Shua Kisilevitz, "Cultic Finds from the Iron Age in the Excavations at Moza," *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region: Collected Papers*, ed. Guy D. Stiebel et al., vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; The Jerusalem Development Authority, 2014), 38–43; and Zvi Greenhut and Alon De Groot, *Salvage Excavations at Tel Moza: The Bronze and Iron Age Settlements and Later Occupations*, IAAR 39 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009), 50–54, 219–27.

than 1,500 years during the eleventh century BCE. A small open village (Stratum XII) was built on the southeastern ridge of Canaanite Arad. According to Yohanan Aharoni the village was transformed into a fortress in the tenth century BCE (Stratum XI).[4] From the same period the Israelite shrine and a square sacrificial altar were discovered in the northern corner of the fortress.[5] The sanctuary was partly enlarged in Stratum X after demolition. Furthermore, the altar was abolished in the late eighth century BCE (Stratum VIII) by Hezekiah, but the shrine was used until the end of the seventh century BCE (Stratum VII). The last chance to see the complete temple was in the next Stratum (VI). In Stratum VI the casemate wall was cut into the temple, which supported Aharoni's idea that the sanctuary was not functioning at that time. Aharoni arrived at the conclusion that this was evidence of two phases of the cultic centralization under Hezekiah and Josiah, as is written in the Old Testament. The first step was Hezekiah's prohibition of sacrifice, while the second step was the centralization of worship in Jerusalem during the time of Josiah.[6] The Arad researchers later moved the decommissioned temple and the altar to the same time as Stratum VIII at around 715 BCE in the first year of Hezekiah's reign.[7] Ze'ev Herzog after his revision, claimed that the sanctuary and the offering altar existed in only two layers (Strata X and IX) that he postdated to the middle and the second half of the eighth century BCE.[8] The temple complex was already buried in Strata VIII and VII. There is no connection between the abolishment of the temple and Stratum VI because the casemate wall that Aharoni dated to this stratum belonged to the later Hellenistic period.[9] Inside the temple area it is possible to distinguish only two floors (the lower floor is from Stratum X and above it is the floor from Stratum IX). According to Herzog the abolishment of the sanc-

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4. Yohanan Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," *BA* 31 (1968): 4–5.

5. Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," 6, 18–19.

6. Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," 26.

7. Yohanan Aharoni, "Arad," in *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Michael Avi-Yonah (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 76; Ze'ev Herzog et al., "The Israelite Fortress at Arad," *BASOR* 254 (1984): 19–22.

8. Ze'ev Herzog, "The Fortress Mound at Arad: An Interim Report," *TA* 29 (2002): 14, 50.

9. Ze'ev Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization: Arad and Beer-sheba," in *One God–One Cult–One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, BZAW 405 (Berlin:* de Gruyter, 2010), 169, 172.

tuary is stratigraphically clear because the floor of Stratum VIII covered all parts of the temple walls, whose height was reduced before Stratum VIII.[10]

Some scholars disagree with the conclusions of the Arad team and they suggest that the shrine was used until after the end of Stratum IX when the city was destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 BCE (e.g., Nadav Na'aman).[11] Diana Edelman suggests that the end of the shrine was under the influence of new occupiers in Stratum VII.[12] The new political regime controlled the Arad fortress and it closed the temple that had been dedicated to the defeated deity—YHWH. The new inhabitants respected the sanctity of the fallen god. They buried his cultic objects such as altars and *masseboth* (standing stones). They did not need to rebuild a sanctuary for their deity over the previous holy site. The stratigraphy of many loci is unclear, and it is impossible to determine if there was any destruction between Strata IX and VIII. Arad was probably not destroyed by Sennacherib, but rather Hezekiah surrendered it and Stratum VIII may have been controlled by the Arab leader Asuhili. This possibility is plausible, because there is no proof that the city was destroyed during Sennacherib's campaign.[13]

The temple area (a main room [*hekal*], a broad room and a holy of holies [*debir*], standing stones, two incense altars, a square stone altar, and a courtyard with side rooms) was well preserved (figs. 7.1 and 7.2). This could be a sign that it was preventively saved and buried from the enemy's eyes so that later it could be restored and reused. Such a practice protected holy places and ritual objects in ancient times before attackers defiled them. Usually sacred places were buried after destruction and it had a fate similar to human burial—burial forever. According to Herzog's revision, the Arad sanctuary and its altar were covered by dirt by order of Hezekiah before Sennacherib's campaign through Judah. The altars and *massebah* were buried in a pit above the steps. The pit was dug into

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10. It is impossible to imagine that the courtyard with the altar and surrounding area filled with approximately 0.9–1.3 m thick layer of soil that the main hall was still in use. The difference in elevation between these two parts of the temple made it unapproachable, and, moreover, no stairs were found there. See Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 173–74.

11. Nadav Na'aman, "The Abandonment of Cult Places in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah as Acts of Cult Reform," *UF* 34 (2002): 589–92.

12. Diana Edelman, "Hezekiah's Alleged Cultic Centralization," *JSOT* 32 (2008): 407.

13. Edelman, "Hezekiah's Alleged Cultic Centralization," 410.

Please reword sentence 1 in n. 10 for clarity.

the floor of Stratum X.[14] It is very difficult to determine why and when this change occurred, but most scholars agree that it was abandoned in the second half of the eighth century BCE. Despite the fact that the fortress of Stratum IX indicated evidence of destruction, inside the temple itself nothing was found to be reminiscent of destruction or burning. This means that the sanctuary and its cultic objects were abolished and buried before the Arad fortress was attacked and destroyed by the Assyrian army after only a short period of existence of fifty to eighty years.[15] At Arad we have an accurate example of controlled decommissioning and the burying ritual typical of cultic objects across the ancient Near East. This style of burying and sealing parts of the sacred architecture and equipment is characteristic of other places, however every site is characterized by different ritual customs (see below).

7.4. Beersheba Altar

The large horned burning altar from the ninth century BCE (Stratum III) was discovered at Beersheba in 1973. It was not found pillared, but it was dismantled, and its ashlar stones were reused for a public storehouse (also known as the "pillared house") in the eighth century BCE (Stratum II). Three of the four horns were discovered intact in the wall and the fourth horn was removed. Other stones were found in the same wall and others lay in the fill of the rampart on the slope outside the gate.[16] The secondary use of these stones for public buildings and the removal of the single horn indicate that they were not meant for inhabitants because they did not have sacred importance.[17] Aharoni concluded that the horned altar was dismantled during Hezekiah's reign (fig. 7.3). At the same time the storehouse was built as a new project associated with guarding and protecting one of the strategic sites when the Assyrians threatened Judah. The public storehouse was finally destroyed by the Assyrian army under Sennacherib in 701 BCE.[18]

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14. The same remains of plaster were discovered on the altars and close to the wall where they were standing originally. Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 169, 174.

15. Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 175.

16. Yohanan Aharoni, "The Horned Altar of Beer-sheba," *BA* 37 (1974): 2–3.

17. Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 176.

18. Aharoni, "Horned Altar of Beer-sheba," 6.

Fig. 7.1. Tel Arad, holy of holies. Photograph by author.

Fig. 7.2. Tel Arad, offering altar (reconstruction at the site). Photograph by author.
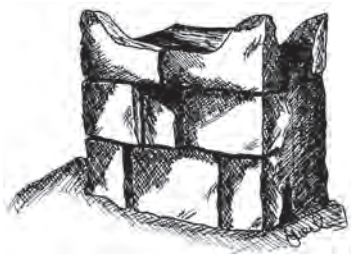
Fig. 7.3. Reconstruction of the Beersheba altar. Drawing by author.

Other later theories questioned some of the conclusions. For example, dating the end of Stratum II (701 BCE) is problematic; the location of the altar and the possible sanctuary that was never discovered is highly debated (fig. 7.4).[19] There is no destruction layer between Strata II and III that would help to distinguish two different levels. According to Aharoni, two different phases were identified at some structures. These two phases of the same city existed almost two hundred years.[20] During these years the altar was dismantled, and its stones were transferred for secondary use. Although one of the altar's stones was discovered in the retaining wall that is dated to Stratum III, this wall could have fallen, and therefore it was fixed with later material from Stratum II.[21] The storehouse was used in Stratum III and II and Aharoni claimed that it was difficult to see the differences between these strata. For example, the line of the wall of Stratum II has a different position than the previous one. This is a significant fact as to the separation of the two different strata.[22] Although there is no direct archaeological evidence about the existence of the temple at Beersheba during the Iron Age IIA period, it is very difficult to imagine such an urbanist city without a legitimate sanctuary. Instead of the main cultic object (the altar), in Beer-sheba an Iron Age krater was discovered with an inscription of three Hebrew letters *q-d-sh* meaning *qodesh* (*holiness* or *holy*).[23] The inscription means

19. Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, VTSup 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 96.

20. Yohanan Aharoni, "Stratification of the Site," in *Beer-Sheba I: Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba, 1969–1971 Seasons*, ed. Yohanan Aharoni, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology 2 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1973), 5.

21. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 97.

22. Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 176.

23. Yohanan Aharoni, "Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba," *BA* 35 (1972): 126.

that the object belonged to or was dedicated to the temple. Usually it was used by a priest in a cultic ceremony. Similar inscriptions were found on two identical ceramic bowls from Arad Stratum X. The second interpretation means *kodesh kohanim* (*holy to the priests*—letters *qoph* and *kaph* rather than *qoph* and *shin*).[24] If this is correct the first or the second interpretation of the letters both had very close relation with cult or temple staff.

Fig. 7.4. Beersheba, possible place where the altar and shrine were located. Photograph by author.

Changes in the Beersheba cult could evince similarities with Arad. Some parts of the sacrifice altar were buried, but were not sealed, but rather were used for secular public construction. More significant is that everything was completely dismantled without any visible remembrance of the holiness of the objects (compared to Arad and Motza).

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24. Herzog, "Fortress Mound at Tel Arad," 56.

7.5. Lachish Cultic Assemblages and the "Gate-Shrine"

Lachish was the second most important city in Judah after Jerusalem. It was a military and administrative center in the Shephelah. We know almost nothing about the Iron Age official cult that was in the Lachish stronghold. Since the city was besieged and destroyed by the Assyrians in 701 BCE and we also have extrabiblical sources (the relief at the royal palace at Nineveh and annals), it is easier to work with archaeological data from this site. The question is what was depicted on the relief at Nineveh. There is no doubt that Lachish is really mentioned on the relief because a cuneiform text states the name of the city as Lachish. Depicted on the relief, Assyrian soldiers are carrying an incense burner. Where was the incense burner originally stored? We also do not know if this was only a symbolic act or if the army really plundered some cultic place; from the relief it is impossible to say something specific about the supposed existence of a Judahite sanctuary. Aharoni claimed that he found a Judahite sanctuary (cult room 49) and a high place in Stratum V. Stratum V was the first Iron Age settlement that was transformed into the fortified city of Stratum IV. Both Strata V and IV are dated to the Iron Age IIA. Stratum IV was probably destroyed by an earthquake in 760 BCE.[25] According to Aharoni this small broad room was a sanctuary with benches along the walls. A raised platform (*bamah*) was found in the corner. Furthermore, a broken stele (*massebah*), a limestone altar, pottery vessels, chalices, incense burners, lamps, and more ceramic equipment were uncovered among cultic objects in the area of a later Hellenistic temple.[26] Close to the *bamah* a black ash-dump was identified by Aharoni as an olive tree—*asherah*.[27] Revision of the sanctuary leads to the conclusion that this structure consisted of several structures of different strata (at least four phases). The *bamah* was probably part of the mud-brick wall. From the original photographs there is no clear evidence of destruction. Moreover, the cultic objects were buried in a circle at different elevations. Some

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25. David Ussishkin, "Synopsis of Stratigraphical, Chronological, and Historical Issues," in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, ed. David Ussishkin, 4 vols., Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology Monograph Series 22 (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004), 1:76.

26. Yohanan Aharoni, "The Sanctuary and High Place," in *Investigation at Lachish? The Sanctuary and the Residency (Lachish V)*, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology 4 (Tel Aviv: Gateway, 1975), 26–28.

27. Aharoni, "Sanctuary and High Place," 30.

of them mimicked the shape of the edge of the rounded pit. The collection of vessels is very unique; therefore, it is impossible to assign it to a specific stratum. It seems that it was deposited into a pit not later than the beginning of Stratum III, when palace C was erected.[28] Ussishkin claimed that the sanctuary was part of the palace-fort courtyard and its cultic vessels, altar, and standing stone were all buried in the pit sometime in Stratum IV (IA IIB). At this time, it is believed that the cult room was not being used.[29] When the cultic objects were buried is still up for discussion, nevertheless it could have been during the reign of King Hezekiah as a "prelude" to other cultic changes. Robb Young states that it is unverifiable because there is no evidence of destruction by fire and Stratum IV is dated before Hezekiah's reign.[30] When we focus on the incense burner that is portrayed in the Lachish relief, it suggests the theory that it would have been an approved cultic object outside the official Solomon's temple in Jerusalem because at Arad the incense burners were found covered with fill. We are able to verify that the burner from Lachish was not an object from the temple, but it may have been confiscated by Assyrians from the palace.[31]

Another cultic structure was excavated in the area of the gate in 2016. This gate-shrine served as a small cultic room inside one of the chambers of the six-chamber gate. The excavators under the direction of Sa'ar Ganor and Yosef Garfinkel unearthed pottery bowls, oil lamps, and two small altars, originally with horns in their corners, however since cut off as a result of cultic reforms. The shrine consists of benches and the holy of holies. Findings of the stamp impressions (*lmlk* and *lnhm avadi*) helped to date the structure to the eighth century BCE when King Hezekiah ruled over Judah.[32] A different style of desecration is evident on two altars without former horns and a toilet that was put over the shrine. This form of desecration is also known from the Old Testament and it is described as an act of King Jehu (ninth century BCE) from the northern kingdom of Israel: "Then they demolished

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28. Ussishkin, "Synopsis of Stratigraphical, Chronological, and Historical Issues," 105 and 107. Stratum III was destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 BCE, p. 76.

29. Ussishkin, "Synopsis of Stratigraphical, Chronological, and Historical Issues," 109.

30. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 98.

31. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 99–100.

32. Israel Antiquities Authority, "A Gate-Shrine Dating to the First Temple Period Was Exposed in Excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority in the Tel Lachish National Park," https://tinyurl.com/SBL2643e.

the pillar of Baal, and destroyed the temple of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel" (2 Kgs 10:27–28 NRSV).

A completely new scenario of cultic reforms was uncovered at Lachish. The cultic objects, which were buried under the palace much earlier than the gate-shrine, were abandoned. Due to this, it is not possible to see some connection between these two remains of cultic life. If an official temple existed at Lachish, then, on the one hand, the cultic assemblages from the area of cultic room 49 had their origin in this shrine. The conclusion would be warranted that they were just buried in the rounded pit as cultic artifacts at Motza and Arad. On the other hand, another convincing deduction is that the gate-shrine was abandoned later, and it had its own cultic objects, which were uncovered in 2016. Thus we have two events in different years but in the same century having occurred again as a longer process of cultic reforms and its centralization.

7.6. Tel Halif Private Shrine

This archaeological site to the south of Lachish is positioned very close to Tel Arad and Beersheba. In 1992, the shrine room was discovered in Stratum VIB in one of the typical Iron Age four-room houses as part of a casemate wall. It was originally a domestic house, but later in the second phase it was remodeled into a shrine. A doorway was moved to the south side, more walls were added, and benches were likely built on the walls. The room contained pottery vessels, such as jars, a bowl, juglets and cooking pots, bone implements, pieces of pumice, and arrowheads as military objects from the time when Stratum VIB was destroyed. Other organic materials that were discovered included carbonized grape pips, cereals, legumes, and fish bones. The remains from the food lead us to the conclusion that everything was consumed or used in cultic rituals. As cultic artifacts it is possible to identify a white painted head of a female figurine (Judean/Judahite pillar figurine), a pottery stand from an incense altar, two flat stones with signs of fire (offering tables), and two limestone blocks. They could have served as standing stones or as a stand for cultic vessels.

The small shrine as a part of the private house was controlled and operated by women during the late eighth century BCE. It was destroyed with other Judahite sites by Sennacherib, at the same time.[33]

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33. Oded Borowski, "Hezekiah's Reforms and the Revolt against Assyria," *BA* 58 (1995): 151.

How is it possible that this shrine was active later than other cultic sites in Judah? There are two possible answers. The first answer is that King Hezekiah reformed predominantly official state shrines and that he did not care about household cults. The second answer is that Hezekiah tolerated incense burning at the places where there were no sacrificial altars. This theory is supported by the Lachish reliefs from the Sennacherib palace at Nineveh.[34] We can see on the relief how the Assyrian army confiscated important objects of the kingdom (i.e., a king's throne) and cultic objects (incense burners). This scenery shows us that it occurred after 701 BCE at the time when we do not expect official shrines.

It is assumed that we have two archaeological sites (Tel Halif and Lachish) where the cults were not absolutely abolished. It is possible that at Tel Halif the cult was outside of the king's control and the reform did not affect its local private shrine.

7.7. Summary

Archaeological evidence of Hezekiah's reform had four potential sites: Tel Arad, Beersheba, Lachish, and Tel Motza. At Arad, Motza, and Lachish a similar situation was unearthed, the remains of the sanctuaries were discovered at these sites. They were partly dismantled at the end of their use and cultic objects, as well as altars, were carefully covered by earth (at Lachish by a stone object—a toilet was put over the sanctuary). This poses a question as to the style and how the cultic reform was practiced. The holy sites were abolished and desacralized but not dishonored or completely removed as in Beersheba and Lachish. For an overview of the cultic background, it is possible to use archaeological data from another Judahite site (Tel Halif) that indicates a different situation—the cult continued until Sennacherib's destruction in 701 BCE. We are able to identify four types of cultic changes or reforms according to archaeology in the kingdom of Judah. First, some sanctuaries were partly dismantled, and they were then buried with their components with respect to the holiness of these sites. This occurred at Arad and Motza. Second, some cultic objects (the altar at Beersheba and also shrines at Beersheba and Lachish—if we assume their existence in royal cities) were completely removed. Third, the sanctuary was strongly desecrated in the gate-shrine at Lachish. Fourth, at Tel Halif,

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34. Borowski, "Hezekiah's Reforms and the Revolt against Assyria," 152.

we have something that was described as a household cult. According to finds from this site it is clear that this place was tolerated by authorities—the king—because nothing more "dangerous" than incense was sacrificed at this location. The best candidate for most of these cultic eliminations is King Hezekiah. He probably issued an order for the abolishment of all official cultic sites and also sites where various gods were worshiped by burning offerings, except for the Jerusalem temple and small household private shrines. Apparently, the king did not specify how to abolish them. Therefore, we have two close sites at Tel Arad and Beersheba where we have a totally different method of termination and removal of cultic installations. Hezekiah's cultic centralization had many aspects. Many of them are debatable and some direct connections are missing. First of all, the centralization had political and economic aims. During the end of the eighth century BCE it was necessary for King Hezekiah to centralize the government, military and religion to the capital city of Jerusalem.[35] Hezekiah prepared the kingdom of Judah for the Assyrian attack and, as it had been associated with control over the economy, to gather taxes and revenues from the cultic activity (pilgrims coming from across the country to worship in Jerusalem). He began new urbanism projects for the protection of Jerusalem (he fortified the Western Hill and the Siloam pool; he probably built a new tunnel from the Gihon Spring), he built new storehouses (Lachish), and others. He needed enough money, which the centralization was able to provide. For this paper it is not important if Hezekiah tried to organize the revolt against Assyria. It is without doubt that Assyria as an enemy of Judah had its role in Hezekiah's cultic reforms. Indeed, some cultic changes also happened before Hezekiah became the king of Judah (Lachish and Motza) and it may open a new question about the Judahite cult and its development. No doubt it is possible to claim that archaeological evidence uncovered a long-term process of the decline of official cultic places. To complete a mosaic of cultic changes and reforms, it will be necessary to find more "pieces of glass" to understand better what really happened in religion during the Judean kingdom from the tenth century BCE to the end of the eighth century BCE.

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35. Herzog, "Perspectives on Southern Israel's Cult Centralization," 197.