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Temples in the Ghassulian Culture: Terminology and social implications*

Abstract: Archaeological discussions on prehistoric ritual are largely concerned with their material remains, including architectural debris. The first step in interpretation of such remains is their precise identification and categorization. There are numerous terms for objects and architectural remains that are widely utilized in the archaeological jargon, including, but not limited to, the terms *temple*, *sanctuary* and *shrine*. During almost a century of studying the Chalcolithic Ghassulian culture of the southern Levant, various architectural structures excavated at the sites of Teleilat Ghassul, Gilat and En Gedi have all been interpreted as temples, sanctuaries, or shrines – terms that in case of the Ghassulian culture are used as synonymous of temples. However, the actual architectural remains from these sites differ significantly and explicit definitions on what is meant by the terms used are rare. Apart from demonstrating the importance of properly defining a term in a context in which it is used, the aim of the present paper is to compare these various architectural remains, as well as various interpretations of Ghassulian society and the role the presumed temples played in them. This will be the basis for evaluating how classifying archaeological structures as temples has influenced interpretations of Ghassulian social organization.

Keywords: temple, Chalcolithic, terminology, ritual, social complexity, Ghassulian, Levant.

Introduction

When studying what is perceived as architectural remnants of ritual, one inevitably finds himself in a situation of choosing how to define the ritualistic nature of the structure. Among the terms offered, probably the most common are either *temple*, *sanctuary* or *shrine*. However, what is exactly meant under these terms is

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rarely defined. While, in the broadest sense, we could say that all these places are defined as locations where ritual practices and worship took place, it seems that a more specific, context related definition is essential. Such a definition is important for the understanding of ritual and social dynamics of the society that used them.

It has been claimed that the earliest temple is the Pre-Pottery Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe in Anatolia, Turkey (Schmidt 2006), a claim that has been contested by Banning (2011). Temples are frequently discussed in later archaeological periods, especially the historical ones, in places such as Egypt (Arnold and Shaffer 1997; Wilkinson 2000), Mesopotamia (Foster 1981; George 1993) and in the Levant, in the context of the so-called “Biblical archaeology” (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006; Kaufman 1983). However, the above mentioned research does not offer us a definition of a temple, shrine or sanctuary that would fit into all similar contexts. Possibly because such a definition would be too wide and general to have informative meaning in all cases. However, even without a strict definition, we can probably agree that there is a certain understanding among archaeologists that a temple is, or at least should be, architecturally and/or functionally different from a habitation structure. That being said, I will try to show here that even if we cannot define ritual architecture in a universal manner, it is important to explicitly define the terms in the context they are used in, as well as the criteria for differentiating them from other structures, sacral or profane, in the same cultural contexts. The cultural background is that of the Ghassulian culture of the southern Levant. The Ghassulian culture has been studied extensively since the late 1920s, offering a considerable amount of data for discussing ritual practices in and outside of temples. Thus, it is a useful example to demonstrate how different understanding of ritual architecture can affect interpretations of ritual and social organization.

Defining the Terms

Although understanding past ritual practices from their material remains, including architecture, is a prominent topic in archaeological theory (e.g. Insoll 2004; Levy 2006b; Mirocshedji 1993; Renfrew 1994), little has been said on the terminology used to designate the architectural remains. In the Case of Ghassulian archaeology, which will be used as a case study, it has already been pointed out by (Gilead 2002, 106) that the terms *temple* and *sanctuary* have been used interchangeably in relation to architecturally very different Ghassulian features.

Temple

The Oxford English Dictionary defines temple as “an edifice or place regarded primarily as the dwelling-place or ‘house’ of a deity or deities; hence, an edifice devoted to divine worship” (OED Online, June 2016). A similar definition

is offered in *The architecture of Ancient Israel*. The book's glossary (Reich and Katzenstein 1992, 321) defines *temples*, *sanctuaries* and *shrines* under the same entry as: "The dwelling of the god. A public building to house the god, in which the god's statue was erected and his cult and rites performed." I will use the term as defined by Gilead (2002, 106) as:

"an enclosed sacred space, a complex with a building or buildings set apart from the ordinary. The nature of the architecture suggests it was for public use although it may have restricted sections. The artifacts in a temple suggest that domestic activities were neither the only nor the principal function of the structure."

Defining temples in relation to other structures at the site or a wider area enables us to differentiate between temple-related ritual practices and those performed in domestic contexts.

Sanctuary

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sanctuary as "A building or place set apart for the worship of God or of one or more divinities: applied, e.g., to a Christian church, the Jewish temple and the Mosaic tabernacle, a heathen temple or site of local worship, and the like" or as "a specially holy place within a temple or a church" (OED Online, June 2016). Thus, the term sanctuary might be used either as synonymous with temple or in reference to the holiest part of a temple. The above cited definition of the term *temple* in *The Architecture of ancient Israel* considers *temple*, *sanctuary* and *shrine* as synonymous. Since the fact that neither of the authors that are using the term 'sanctuary' in the Ghassulian context, defines it explicitly as different from temple, as they use it in reference for both the whole complexes at En Gedi and Teleilat Ghassul and for parts of their structure (see below), its meaning will be considered here the same as *temple*.

Shrine

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term *shrine* as "A place where worship is offered or devotions are paid to a saint or deity; a temple, church" (OED Online, June 2016). It is therefore understood here, following the definition cited above, as synonymous with *temple* and *sanctuary*. Presently, I will use the term *temple* in a broad meaning that includes also *sanctuary* and *shrine*.

Ritual structures of the Ghassulian Culture

The term Ghassulian was coined by Neuville (1930b, 202–203), in relation to the site of Teleilat Ghassul, the remains of which are considered in the present discussion. The Ghassulian sites are characterized by rectilinear architec-

ture, subterranean architecture in a number of cases, off-site community burial grounds, basalt vessels, copper metallurgy, narrow-backed sickle blades, fan scrapers and characteristic pottery vessels such as V-shaped bowls, cornets and churns (Gilead 2009, 349). The Ghassulian culture can be divided into two chronological phases, with the earlier phase dated approximately between 4500–4300 BCE and the later phase dated from 4300/420 to 4000/3900 BCE (Gilead 2009, 349–350; 2011, 14). The most prominent radiometrically dated sites of the earlier phase are Gilat (Levy and Burton 2006, 865) and Teleilat Ghassul (Bourke et al. 2001, 1221), with the latter being occupied during the later phase as well, albeit to a lesser extent. The later phase of the Ghassulian culture is best represented by sites clustered along Nahal Beer Sheva (Eldar and Baumgarten 1985; Gilead and Fabian 2001; Gilead, Rosen, and Fabian 1991; Levy and Alon 1987a; Levy et al. 1993; Perrot 1955), including Abu Matar, Bir es-Safadi, Horvat Beter, Nevatim and Shiqmim.

Various Ghassulian ritual practices have been discussed extensively, focusing either on a particular assemblage and site (e.g. Drabsch 2015a; Joffe, Dessel, and Hallote 2001; Levy 2006a; Levy and Golden 1996; Ussishkin 2014), or on the general ideas related to Ghassulian ritual behavior (e.g. Elliott 1977; Epstein 1978; Ilan and Rowan 2012; Rowan and Ilan 2007). In order to understand the implications that such vague definitions have on our understanding of Ghassulian society, it is crucial to present a detailed overview of the sites and remains that were regarded as temples, sanctuaries or shrines: En Gedi, Teleilat Ghassul, Gilat and Shiqmim.

En Gedi

The Ghassulian site of En Gedi is located in the Judean Desert, northwest of the Dead Sea, on a prominent, high rock terrace between the En Gedi and Nahal David springs. The site was excavated in 1961 by Ussishkin, who defines it as a shrine (Ussishkin 1980) or a temple (Ussishkin 1971, 2014), defining one, of the two rectangular buildings that are a part of the complex, as a sanctuary (Ussishkin 1971, 28–29; 1980, 4). While describing the excavation, Ussishkin (2014, 15) also referred to the whole structure as a sanctuary, suggesting that he used these three terms as synonymous. No explicit definition is provided for either of the terms, in the papers he published in English (Ussishkin 1971, 1980, 2014).

The possible reason why En Gedi is widely considered to be a temple (e.g. Amiran 1989; Gilead 2002; Ilan and Rowan 2012; Rowan and Ilan 2007), is that its plan (Fig. 1) serves as a good example for temple architecture when compared to the definitions discussed above. It appears there has never been much debate on whether it should indeed be regarded as a temple. En Gedi is enclosed by a wall featuring two gates and consists of four clearly defined structures.

These structures are an elongated rectangular main building – the above-mentioned sanctuary, a smaller rectangular side chamber, a circular installation that was built in the middle of the courtyard and a wall featuring two gates. The main gate was situated at the very edge of the terrace, overlooking the Dead Sea (Ussishkin 1980, 4). The main building was a broadroom, with an altar on its inner wall, opposite the entrance. It is possible that the main gate, the door of the main building, and the altar were all positioned in a way that allowed the altar to be visible from the main gate at a certain angle (Chanteau 2014). The function of the circular installation in the middle of the courtyard is disputed. The excavator proposes that it was constructed to hold liquids (Ussishkin 1980, 11), while Mazar (2000) suggests that the installation was a place for a sacred tree, an idea supported also by Chanteau (2014). Both interpretations are problematic; it is difficult to imagine a water collecting installation constructed on the highest point in the courtyard. However, it is possible that liquid was poured into the installation for ritual purposes, but was not meant to be collected or directed there. Such use of the installation is supported by the discovery of the drain-channel (Ussishkin 1980, 11). As for the sacred tree, it is important to remember that the site is located in a desert and it seems, based on the pottery assemblage, that it was not permanently occupied (Gilead 2002, 111). While springs are located in the vicinity, albeit far down the slope, it is unlikely that a tree could have survived unattended on a prominent rock terrace, devoid of a steady water source.

Once it is agreed that the Ghassulian site of En Gedi was a temple, the question that poses itself is what kind of ritual was conducted there and by whom. As stated above, the nature of the pottery assemblage suggests that the site was not permanently settled, implying periodical activity (Gilead 2002). The petrographic studies of the pottery assemblage show local clay from the Judean desert was used for the production of the vessels (Goren 1995), but no production remains were found at the site itself. It seems likely that the temple was used by inhabitants of a nearby settlement. The closest permanent settlement is Teleilat Ghassul, but it is possible another one existed in the vicinity. Ghassulian remains have been excavated at the Moringa Cave located not far from the temple, but limited evidence of architecture, and a pottery assemblage comparable to the one found at the temple (Lisker et al. 2007), suggest that the cave was either inhabited periodically or for a brief time.

Ussishkin (1971, 2014) repeatedly suggests that the Nahal Mishmar hoard, located in the Judean Desert not far from the En Gedi temple, originated in the temple. The hoard, which was discovered in a small natural crevice in a cave in Nahal Mishmar in 1961, contained over 400 metal artifacts, produced either from pure copper or from copper alloyed with arsenic, nickel and antimony. The most numerous type of artifact in the hoard are maceheads, followed by often elaborately decorated standards. Other artifacts include scepters, cylinders, ves-

sels, chisels, adzes and axes (Bar-Adon 1980). Human burials, which have been discovered in the same cave, as well as in two adjacent caves, show evidence of violence (Haas and Nathan 1973). These remains have certainly contributed to the suggestion that refugees from the En Gedi temple hid the hoard while fleeing. However, considering that the caves were also used as hide-outs during the Jewish revolt against the Romans and that there was no stratigraphic correlation between the hoard and the skeletons, it appears that they might actually be of a much later date (Gilead and Gošić 2014, 229–230).

The interpretation that the hoard actually comes from the En Gedi temple has been contested, suggesting not only that the hoard does not come from the En Gedi temple, but that the two sites are actually not contemporaneous (Gilead and Gošić 2014, 234). That being said, the description of priests collecting the items and hiding them in the cave, is a rare reference given by the excavator to the priests, or events at the temple (Ussishkin 1971, 34; 2014, 22). While not explicitly suggested, the existence of priests presumes a certain level of ritual specialization, which is further advocated by Ussishkin's notion that the benches along the inner side of the walls of the main building were built "for the convenience of priests and believers arriving to the temple" (2014, 16) while the small side chamber functioned as a "service or store room used by the priests" (Ussishkin 2014, 17). It is thus clear that he differentiates between the people performing the ritual and those that observed it, though their social status is not discussed.

That the activities happening at the En Gedi temple involved priests is also maintained by Rowan and Ilan (2007), but any further interpretations regarding the rituals that might have occurred are overly speculative, especially suggestion that the temple was systematically cleared, before it was abandoned, leaving but a few artifacts; among them a figurine of a bull laden with two churns (Ussishkin 2014, 21–22), which are now used as sources for the study of ritual iconography. And even though there have been attempts to identify deities from historical period in Ghassulian ritual assemblages (e.g. Amiran 1981; Miroshedji 1993), the only justified conclusions we can currently draw on the Ghassulian site of En Gedi is that it was a temple in which rituals were performed periodically, by people who came to the temple from permanently settled villages.

Teleilat Ghassul

Teleilat Ghassul, the eponymous site of the Ghassulian culture, is located not far from the northern tip of the Dead Sea. It is a large settlement, spread over 12 hillocks. First excavations were conducted between 1929 and 1936 by Mallon, Koepfel and Neuville (Koepfel et al. 1940; Mallon, Koepfel, and Neuville 1934) and in 1960 by North (1961). Excavations were continued by Hennessy in the late 1960s and 1970s (Hennessy 1982). Work at the site was once again

renewed by Bourke in 1994 (Seaton 2008, 17). It becomes clear even from this short overview of the history of the excavations that Teleilat Ghassul is a site much larger than En Gedi, with complex stratigraphy that has been the subject of much debate (Bourke et al. 2000; Gilead 2007; Lovell 2001). The features of the site, that are of particular relevance to the present paper, are the structures in which the famous wall paintings were discovered (Cameron 1981; Drabsch 2015a) and the Area E Temple, labeled as a *sanctuary* by Seaton (2008).

The Area E structures were excavated mainly during the 1990s. The area consists of two buildings, named Sanctuary A and Sanctuary B. They consist of a round structure labeled altar, and remains of a wall on the northwestern side of the so-called temenos (Bourke 2001, 130). There are two main architectural phases: the “Classic Courtyard Phase” (Fig. 2) and a “Rebuild Phase,” in which there is no paved path between Sanctuary A and the circular installation. The similarities between En Gedi and the Area E structures lead Bourke (2001, 132) to suggest that such an outline, consisting of two broadrooms, circular installation and temenos wall, can be regarded as a “blueprint” for Chalcolithic temples. And as is the case with En Gedi, the Area E structures are regarded as a temple in the present paper as well.

The Area E temple at Teleilat Ghassul is similar to the temple at En Gedi with regards to the pottery and small find assemblages as well as in the lack of large storage vessels and flints common for habitations. Cornets are common; 49% of all cornets from the site originate from Area E, which includes the temple and the so-called industrial area, as well as 70% of rare forms, including goblets, fenestrated stands, and anthropomorphic figurines (Seaton 2008, 53). This industrial area is located outside of the temple temenos wall and consists largely of refuse pits filled with pottery and other debris related to temple cult activities (Seaton 2008, 99).

Two animal-shaped vessels have been found associated with Sanctuary B: a spouted quadruped, probably a cow, and another quadruped, possibly a dog that may have been attached to a vessel lid (Seaton 2008, 78–79, Plate 96a-b). While at En Gedi only the stone foundations of walls were found, with no remains of superstructures, during the initial excavations of Area E, Hennessy (1982, 56), found polychrome wall painting fragments in association with the Sanctuary A buildings, but those were too small to be recovered.

Better preserved wall paintings are found in other parts of the site, making up a total of nine wall paintings which could be at least partially reconstructed (Drabsch 2015a, 50). The most famous paintings are “the Star” and “the Procession”. The room at Teleilat Ghassul, where the famous “the Star” wall painting is located and was found in the first campaign, is regarded by excavators as a dwelling (Mallon, Koeppel, and Neuville 1934, 137). The wall-painting with “the Procession” was discovered later on (Cameron 1981, 4), and was first

interpreted as showing a procession of three masked figures walking towards a building (Hennessy 1982, 56), while a more recent reconstruction proposes that the mural features seven individuals (Drabsch 2015a, 119). North (1961) and Bourke (2001, 132) suggest the buildings in which paintings were found served cultic functions, but nevertheless, they are not designated temples. According to Bourke (2001, 133) Teleilat Ghassul paintings belong to an earlier phase than the temple complex. However, the pottery of both areas is similar, implying that these features date, more or less to the same span of time (Seaton 2008, 66). In addition, ¹⁴C dates, which are discussed below in detail, place the Area E Temple as part of the earlier phases of Teleilat Ghassul.

Thus, it appears that ritual activities at the temple were contemporary with activities related to the wall paintings, found in dwellings, though they might have existed in the temple as well. A connection between the temple and the paintings can be drawn from several painted compositions. Drabsch (2015a, 32) suggests that the purpose of the eight-rayed star in “the Star” painting was to designate that the structure shown in the bottom left corner of the same composition is a temple devoted to a star, or to a deity, symbolized by a star. Another depiction of a temple in the Ghassul paintings can be seen in “the Procession” where figures of ritual participants, possibly initiates, are shown next to a temple (Drabsch 2015a, 161). According to Drabsch (2015b, 55) the houses in which the murals were located were of domestic character, but over an extended period of continual use, also contained ritual activities related to the murals. There is also a possibility that the rituals conducted in the temple, and those depicted in the wall-paintings, are closely related, as Drabsch (2015a, 161–162) suggests that wall paintings are showing initiations of priests and other rituals taking place in the temple. Thus, although the structures are habitations, it is possible that they were lineage houses belonging to family of priests (Drabsch 2015a, 172). Central to this idea is the concept of lineage houses, borrowed by Drabsch from Düring (2005). Lineage houses are originally domestic houses that have gained a symbolic status crucial for the formation and upkeep of the groups identity through continual use by the same family. This does not mean that each house becomes a lineage house once it has been occupied for a certain amount of time, as the status of the houses is produced by cultural practices (Düring 2005, 9).

To summarize, it is clear that there was not a single ritual practice conducted at Teleilat Ghassul. Seaton (2008, 127) sees the evidence for the existence of different practices at the site simultaneously as uncomplimentary, and as indication of different religions and beliefs practiced at the site, by different groups. However, there is no indication that different cultural or religious groups lived at Teleilat Ghassul and the different practices that flourished side by side might have been different manifestations of the same religious ideas.

Gilat

Gilat is a Ghassulian settlement, located along Nahal Patish in the northern Negev, close to its border with the Coastal Plain. A claim that there is a Ghassulian temple at Gilat followed the first excavations at the site (Alon 1977) and was extended to assert that the site was a regional cult center, labeled as a sanctuary (Alon and Levy 1989; Levy 2006a). In order to explain why the structures at Gilat are defined as a sanctuary, Levy (2006b, 1–16) relied on Renfrew's "checklist" of archaeological correlates for ritual activity, especially for ritual architecture. Levy (2006b, 14) stated that: "The architectural plan of a suspected sanctuary or ritual site should show similarities with contemporary temples or sanctuary architecture from the research area." By saying "temples or sanctuaries," he implies that these terms are different, yet does not explain why the term "temple", first used by Alon (1977) was replaced by "sanctuary" in a later publication (Alon and Levy 1989; Levy 2006a). In another publication Alon and Levy (1989) describe archaeological correlates for "temples and sanctuaries" suggesting that these terms might be used as synonyms. It is interesting to note that an architectural complex clearly separated from domestic context and devoted to ritual activity is the first on the list of what is expected (Alon and Levy 1989, 174), yet it will be clear below that the temple at Gilat does not fit this description and neither does it resemble the architecture of other Ghassulian temples, i.e. En Gedi and the Area E Temple at Teleilat Ghassul.

Levy *et al.* (2006, 97, Fig. 5.5, 5.16, 5.21.a-b.) notes that at Gilat, the "integrated architectural complex ... a sanctuary", consists of a central building and three exterior courtyards. However, this interpretation is contested (Gilead 2002, 107–109), since, different parts of what is supposed to be a sanctuary are actually not contemporary, meaning they do not compose a single building, but are actually remains from different strata. In addition, some of the walls of the structures are partially reconstructed on the basis of scattered stones, others appear to be of mudbrick (Levy *et al.* 2006, Fig. 5.5). The general impression is that Stratum IIIA is similar to Stratum IIC and that the architecture of both levels is similar to domestic architecture structures at Teleilat Ghassul and Grar (Gilead 2002, 109–110). It appears that, architecturally speaking, interpreting these remains as those of a temple, or a sanctuary, is not justified (Gilead 2002, 109). Nothing that can be compared either to En Gedi temple or to Area E temple at Teleilat Ghassul has been excavated at Gilat. Even though possible mortuary rituals performed at Gilat attracted the attention of participants from different regions, those rituals are not the subject of the present paper.

Shiqmim

Shiqmim is also located in the northern Negev, along Nahal Beer Sheva, south of Gilat and Nahal Patish. While there are no claims that a temple existed at Shiqmim, it is necessary to mention the site, and especially two of its features; open air features labeled as altars and a large building regarded as public. While neither feature was or should be regarded as a temple, both are related to ritual and their usage is regarded as public. More importantly, they have been interpreted as relating to social ranking and overall complexity (Levy 1986, 88) and making Shiqmim a ritual center (Levy and Alon 1985, 81).

The two altars belong to the oldest strata of Shiqmim, the so-called pioneer settlement and only altar No. 1 has been described in some detail (Levy, Grigson, et al. 1991, 400–403). It is an open-air place of worship, consisting of a crescent-shaped stone platform and featuring a cache including a fenestrated bowl and a unique high-necked jar. It is also mentioned that four other caches have been discovered at Shiqmim, all consisting of approximately the same pottery vessels (Levy, Grigson, et al. 1991, 403). However, the context of the other caches is not mentioned and neither is the other of the two altars.

The second construction worth mentioning is Room 13, described as a “corporate building” which was “a locus of cultic activities” (Levy and Golden 1996, 152). Even though neither of the terms *temple* or *sanctuary* were used, such phrasing leads a reader to conclude that something of the sort is what the authors had in mind. The word *corporate*, otherwise not commonly used in reference to Ghassulian architecture, is defined by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as “Of or belonging to a body politic, or corporation, or to a body of persons” (OED Online, June 2016). Levy and Golden (1996) do not explain what they mean when they use the term *corporate*, but it can be presumed that it is, in this context, an opposite of a domestic family unit, as it lacks finds typical for such a structure. Thus, it is either a public building, as are the storages they associate it with (Levy and Golden 1996, 154) or possibly it belongs to a social group.

This structure, which had a plastered floor, is described as cultic, based on the lack of habitation related artifacts and its vague association with an anthropomorphic ivory figurine recovered at the site; this fragment was discovered in a pit located close to an underground chamber that is interpreted as a storage room for Room 13. Levy and Golden (1996, 152) also claim that Room 13 resembles the temple at En Gedi, yet no details of this presumed resemblance have been provided. Differences are, however, obvious. The temple at En Gedi is an isolated complex, composed of two buildings and a circular installation, encompassed by a temenos wall featuring two gates, while Room 13 is a single rectangular structure found in a large settlement that features a number of similar buildings (cf. Levy and Alon 1987b; Levy et al. 1993; Levy, Alon, et

al. 1991). Although a more detailed publication of the excavations at Shiqmim village is needed before we can draw decisive conclusions about its architecture, it appears that it does resemble other sites in the Nahal Beer Sheva region, with both underground and surface architecture in the form of rectangular buildings, which show no indication of planning or social hierarchy (Gilead 1988, 418).

The interpretative significance of the comparison between Room 13 and the En Gedi temple, and the implications it has for understanding the Ghassulian social structure, becomes obvious when the Ghassulian social organizations are considered. However, before proceeding to consider these implications, it is necessary to consider the chronological aspects of the Ghassulian sites relevant for the discussion.

Ghassulian Ritual Practices: The chronological aspect

The chronology of the Ghassulian culture, which is based on numerous ^{14}C dates from settlements and burial grounds, is an extensively debated topic (Aardsma 2001; Bourke 2007; Bourke et al. 2001; Bourke et al. 2004; Burton and Levy 2001, 2011; Carmi and Boaretto 2004; Fabian, Scheftelowitz, and Gilead 2015; Gilead 1994; Levy and Burton 2006; Segal et al. 1998; Shalem, Gal, and Smithline 2013; Weinstein 1984). Going into the details of the debate is beyond the scope of the present paper. Yet, it is important to emphasize a few points regarding the dating of the sites that are mentioned here: Teleilat Ghassul, En Gedi, Gilat and Shiqmim.

Teleilat Ghassul was occupied prior to the Ghassulian culture (Bourke et al. 2001; Lovell 2001). The Ghassulian occupation at Teleilat Ghassul starts at about 4500 BCE (Gilead 2011, 14) and ends at around 3900/3800 BCE (Bourke and Lovell 2004, 322). This would imply Teleilat Ghassul covers the full range of the Ghassulian culture, however, Gilead (2011, 20) suggests that the majority of the dates available for the Ghassulian sequence at the site cluster at ca. 4400–4300 BCE. Therefore, the main Ghassulian occupation is contemporary with Gilat and thus, belongs to the earlier phase of the culture. Also, dates coming from samples taken from a collapsed wooden beam which held the roof of Sanctuary A date the temple to the early Ghassulian phase (Bourke et al. 2004, 317) and the later dates of Area E are from contexts not related to the temple (Bourke et al. 2004, 319).

No Carbon-14 dates are available from the En Gedi temple. It is clearly a site belonging to the Chalcolithic period (Ussishkin 2014), yet not much has been said regarding its dating within the period. Here it will be considered as early, based on its comparability with the temple at Teleilat Ghassul and its material culture. As is the case with the temple at Area E temple in Ghassul, the most

frequent ceramic type are cornets (Ussishkin 1980, 20). However, it is not common only in temples and should not be interpreted as a vessel strictly associated with temples. Regardless of chronological considerations, cornets are generally a ceramic type common at early Ghassulian sites and less frequent in the later sites (Golden 2009, 75). Zoomorphic vessel in the shape of a bull, laden with two churns found at En Gedi (Ussishkin 1980, 35) is also comparable with a vessel shaped as a ram laden with three corners from Gilat (Commence et al. 2006, 746) and zoomorphic vessels from Teleilat Ghassul (Seaton 2008, 79), both of which are dated to the early phases of the culture. If En Gedi is indeed early, that would mean that temples are a feature of the early phase of the Ghassulian culture. However, this does not mean that there was a uniformity in early Ghassulian ritual practices. Various rituals are present simultaneously at Teleilat Ghassul, while the mortuary rituals of Gilat, which are not found on any other of the early sites, also belong to the early phase. The two later dates (Levy and Burton 2006, 866) should be considered as outliers (cf. Gilead 2011, 20).

Of the sites mentioned, only Shiqmim belongs to the late phase, as it was founded in the later phase of the Ghassulian and was abandoned at its end, during the beginning of the 4th millennium BCE (Burton and Levy 2011, 179). It is also the only site discussed here with remains of metalworking (Golden, Levy, and Hauptmann 2001; Shalev and Northover 1987). Other sites of the later phase of the Ghassulian are also located along Nahal Beer Sheva, and several of them feature remains of metalworking, underground architecture as well as rectangular buildings (see Eldar and Baumgarten 1985; Gilead and Fabian 2001; Gilead, Rosen, and Fabian 1991; Perrot 1955, 1984). No structure at either of these extensively excavated and published sites has been interpreted as a temple.

Temples and Social Organization: Did priests rule Ghassulian villages?

To summarize, the Ghassulian culture featured two architecturally similar temples: one at En Gedi, isolated from the settlement and frequented periodically, and another at Area E in Teleilat Ghassul, located within the settlement's perimeter, yet clearly separated from it by a temenos wall and distinguished by small finds comparable to the ones at En Gedi. To the contrary, considering Gilat as a temple seems unjustified, as is the comparison between the temple at En Gedi and Room 13 at Shiqmim. Thus, temples were far from a common feature of Ghassulian sites and, if the suggested dating of En Gedi is valid, are limited to the early phase of the culture.

With this in mind, it is difficult to imagine a temple to be an institution of crucial importance for Ghassulian social structure and organization, at least not

at every site or during both early and late phases. Nevertheless, the social position of temples and ritual to their practitioners is an important part of the discussion of Ghassulian social organization. The question is whether it was a society led by a council of household heads or a chiefdom? While there is a great deal written on the subject of Ghassulian social organization, I will present here only a summary of that discussion, with emphasis on the role of temples and the position priests are given in various interpretations.

The leading proponent of the Ghassulian chiefdom is Levy (1986, 1995, 2006c). According to his model of chiefdom (Levy 1986, 87–89), which is based on Service's definition and Renfrew's list of archaeological correlates. According to this view the Northern Negev settlements were organized into a two-tier hierarchy, with smaller subsidiary sites (including Abu Matar and Bir es-Safadi) dependent on larger, planned settlement centers (e.g. Gilat, Shiqmim, Nevatim and Horvat Beter). While such a model is not supported by archaeological data (Gilead 1988, 418), it also disregards the chronological differences between some of the sites presented above.

Cultic localities are of central importance for Levy's chiefdom model, regardless of whether he refers to them as temples (Alon and Levy 1989; Levy 1995, 2006a) or as a corporate building that is a locus of cultic activity (Levy and Golden 1996, 152). For example, Levy (1995, 239) states that Gilat, En Gedi and Teleilat Ghassul were cult centers established as symbols of control over land and pastoral resources and that Gilat was a regional cult center that had the task of regulating pastoral activities. The importance granted to the sanctuary at Gilat in relation to social complexity and stratification reaches its peak in the final report (Levy 2006c, 831–835), where it is considered to be the cult center of the Levant and as such, crucial for the formation and ideology of ranked societies. Also, cult practices at Gilat are described as being specialized ritual and religious practices performed by priests (Levy 2006c, 839). When such statements regarding the social significance of Gilat are combined with claims of existence of a sanctuary precinct, as an archaeologically established architectural unit featuring three strata (Levy et al. 2006, 133–139), there is an impression of an implicit claim that a temple-like institution was a crucial element of Chalcolithic chiefdom. Thus, the case of Gilat becomes an example of how vaguely defined are the archaeological features, termed *temple* or *sanctuary*, and hence this becomes the corner-stone of an argument about social complexity. In discussing the architectural remains of Gilat, I have argued, primarily on stratigraphic considerations, against describing them as temples, which leads to the necessary reexamination of the interpretations of their social significance. The following section presents alternative interpretations of Ghassulian ritual practices, which are also, related to the different understandings of Ghassulian society.

While it is conclusive that the famous wall paintings from Teleilat Ghassul do not come from a temple, the data from the more recently published Area E Temple from Teleilat Ghassul has received various interpretations. Seaton (2008, 170) claims that there are no signs of chiefs' houses, i.e. chiefs, which are invisible prior to establishment of the Area E Temple. He suggests that the establishment of the temple is a sign of the rise of an elite, consisting of leaders that came to power due to environmental and social turmoil. The temple is thus viewed as an important institution crucial for the formation of social complexity and it is plausible that, considering its location within the settlement, it had a strong day-to-day influence on the community's decision making processes. However, there are no indications that a specialized social class of priests existed and that the temple might have been maintained and utilized by members of households in a way that did not entail the existence of social stratification and division between elite and the rest of the population. Alternatively, Bourke (2002) suggests that the Area E Temple is an indication of social stratification and he describes Ghassulian society as an "egalitarianizing" chiefdom, which is basically a socially stratified society in which the difference between the social strata are not drastic, which also means they are not necessarily obvious in archaeological materials.

Drabsch (2015a, 19–20) also sees the Area E Temple as a sign of increasing social complexity and suggests that the priestly lineage, whose members inhabited the houses with the wall paintings, acquired technological knowledge related to wall painting and metallurgy, which gave them legitimacy and established them as the social elite. However, even though metallurgy has been established as a ritual practice during the later phase of the Ghassulian culture (Gošić 2015; Gošić and Gilead 2015), there are no indications it should be related to priests of the Area E Temple. The Temple is dated to the early Ghassulian phase and features no finds suggesting Ghassulian metalworking was either practiced at the site or contemporary to it. The circular gold-colored metallic ornament which was placed in the section of the Procession wall painting, depicting a headpiece, was not analyzed, but it could be either of electrum or copper (Drabsch 2015a). However, such a small piece of metal is hardly evidence for metallurgy and native copper is known to have been present in Neolithic contexts as well (Garfinkel et al. 2014).

It is noteworthy that even though there is a wide consensus that the En Gedi complex functioned as a temple (Gilead 2002, 106–107; Ilan and Rowan 2012, 94–95; Rowan and Golden 2009, 57; Rowan and Ilan 2007, 251–252; Ussishkin 2014), no author claims it was a source of social and/or political power. Possibly this is due to its isolated location. In addition, there is an increasing tendency to see Ghassulian ritual behavior as consisting of various practices performed by people who occupied different social roles, yet operated in a common religious belief system with shared iconography (Rowan and Ilan 2007, 254).

Throughout different regions and phases of the Ghassulian culture there were various other manifestations of rituals, including ivory figurines (Perrot 1959), painted pebbles (Perrot 1955), violin-shape figurines (Commengé et al. 2006) and secondary burial caves (Perrot and Ladiray 1980; Shalem, Gal, and Smithline 2013). The centers of Gilat, Teleilat Ghassul and En Gedi, as well as the Nahal Mishmar hoard, are discussed here because they are related to the discussion on Ghassulian temples. Also, findings from these sites serve well to demonstrate that different Ghassulian ritual practices existed (Gilead 2002, 113). Gilat was a habitation site where numerous unusual finds were found and was probably devoted to mortuary rituals (Gilead 2002, 122), yet with no signs of social stratification of the deceased. The En Gedi temple was a central place where ritual was practiced periodically. Participants were not settled at the site permanently, meaning that their day-to-day influence on the society was limited (Gilead 2002, 111) or, at least, not defined by their role in the temple. While the existence of temples might be linked to social hierarchies (e.g. Levy 1995), various studies show us that complex social organization does not necessarily hierarchically organized (Ehrenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995); offering heterarchy as an alternative framework for discussing social organization. Although an in-depth analysis of heterarchy is beyond the scope of the present paper, it is obvious that the pluralistic view of Ghassulian ritual practices and acknowledgement of the variations between the sites cannot foster an interpretation in which an institution embodied in a temple would be at the center of Ghassulian social stratification. Gilead (1993) describes Ghassulian communities as household based agricultural societies. Villages were made up of household clusters and the decision-making body consisted of a council of household heads (Gilead 1988, 434).

Conclusions

The various interpretations of Ghassulian ritual structures, all of which have in the past been interpreted as temples/sanctuaries/shrines, illustrate that terms used when naming excavated structures and materials influences the conclusions about these structures and their social significance. Explicitly defining the terms used, makes our interpretation not only more understandable for the reader, but also prevents us from building complex social reconstructions based on vaguely defined archaeological remains.

The case of En Gedi illustrates the fact that, on the one hand, temples should not automatically be treated as indicators of social complexity and development of political power. On the other hand, the various ritual structures of the Ghassulian culture, serve to demonstrate that temples and their ritual practitioners do not need to be the overarching rulers of ritual in a prehistoric culture, although

various practices can flourish simultaneously. The continuation of the Ghassulian culture after the abandonment of the Ghassulian temples, in the later phase, further demonstrates that temples and rituals in general, are only one facet of a society. Ritual practices are a significant part of any society and influence the material culture, but they are by no means its only defining element. Finally, existence, and co-existence, of all these various ritual practices within the same cultural context show that societies can be rather complexly organized, even if their social stratification is not hierarchical. After all, a social structure that enables various practices yet prevents their practitioners from gaining power over others, does not sound like a simple one.

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Hram u Gasulskoj kulturi: terminologija i društvene implikacije

Arheološke diskusije o ritualima, naročito u kontekstu praistorijske arheologije, tiču se najčešće njihovih materijalnih ostataka, uključujući i ostatke sakralne arhitekture. Prvi, a ujedno i suštinski važan korak u interpretaciji takvih ostataka jeste njihova precizna identifikacija i kategorizacija. U arheološkom žargonu postoji mnoštvo termina koji se mogu primeniti na arheološke predmete i ostatke arhitekture za koje se pretpostavlja da su bili od ritualnog značaja, među kojima su i termini *hram* i *svetilište*. Tokom bezmalo jednog veka istraživanja Gasulske kulture južnog Levanta, razni ostaci arhitekture koji su iskopani na lokalitetima poput Teleilat Gasula, Gilata i En Gedija, interpretirani su kao *hramovi* ili *svetilišta*, pri čemu su ova dva termina korišćena uglavnom kao sinonimi. Poređenjem pretpostavljene sakralne arhitekture ovih lokaliteta dolazi se do zaključka da se oni među sobom umnogome razlikuju, dok su eksplicitne definicija termina koji se koriste retke. Cilj ovog rada je da, poredeći arhitekturu ovih lokaliteta, ali i različite interpretacije gasulskog društva i mesta koje institucija hrama u njemu zauzima, istraži na koji je način interpretiranje arheoloških ostataka kao hramova uticalo na razumevanje društvene organizacije Gasulske kulture i da, s tim u vezi, ukaže na važnost jasnog definisanja šta termini kojim se označava neka arhitektonska celina znače u specifičnom kontekstu koji se istražuje.

Ključne reči: hram, halkolit, terminologija, ritual, društvena kompleksnost, gasulien, Levant

Temples dans la culture Gasul: terminologie et implications sociales

Dans le contexte de l'archéologie préhistorique, les discussions archéologiques sur les rites se réfèrent le plus souvent aux traces matérielles et à l'architecture sacrée. Le premier pas, en même temps primordial dans les interpré-

tations de ces traces, consiste à préciser leur identification et leur classement. Dans le jargon des archéologues il existe maints termes pour désigner les objets archéologiques et les vestiges architecturaux pour lesquels on pré suppose une signification rituelle, et parmi lesquels on trouve les termes de « temple » et « sanctuaire ». Pendant un siècle de recherche sur la culture Gasul au sud du Levant, les sites découverts comme Tal Eilat Gasul, Gilat et Ein Gedi ont été interprétés comme *temples* ou *sanctuaires* alors que ces deux termes ont été utilisés comme synonymes. En comparant les sites d'architecture sacrée, on arrive à la conclusion qu'ils sont très différents, tandis que leurs définitions explicites restent rares. L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner de quelle manière l'interprétation des traces archéologiques a influencé la compréhension des communautés Gasul, tout en comparant l'architecture de ces sites, les différentes interprétations de la société Gasul et la position que ces temples occupaient. Il faudrait souligner surtout l'importance d'une définition précise des termes avec lesquels on mentionne une entité architecturale dans un contexte de recherche.

Mots clefs: temple, chalcosine, terminologie, rituel, complexité sociale, Gasul, Levant.

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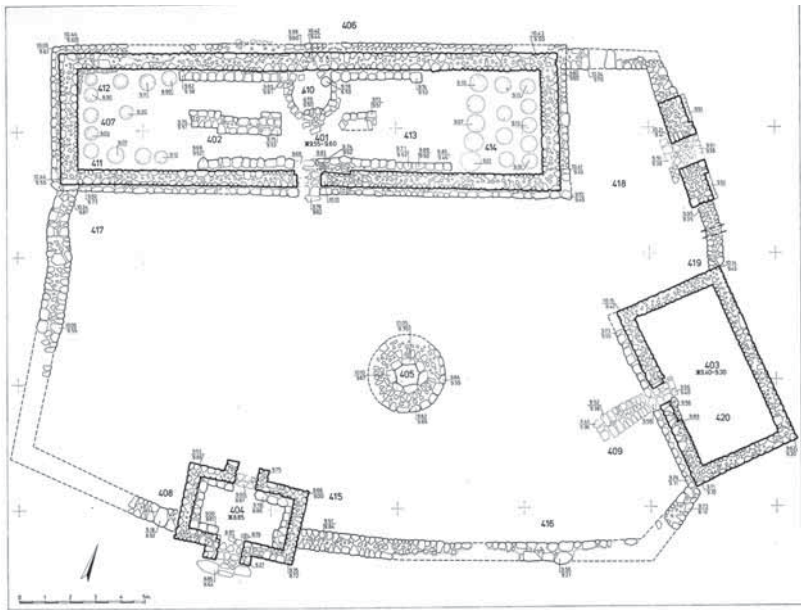


Fig. 1. Plan of the En Gedi temple. Prepared by Immanuel Dunayevsky and provided by courtesy of David Ussishkin and the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

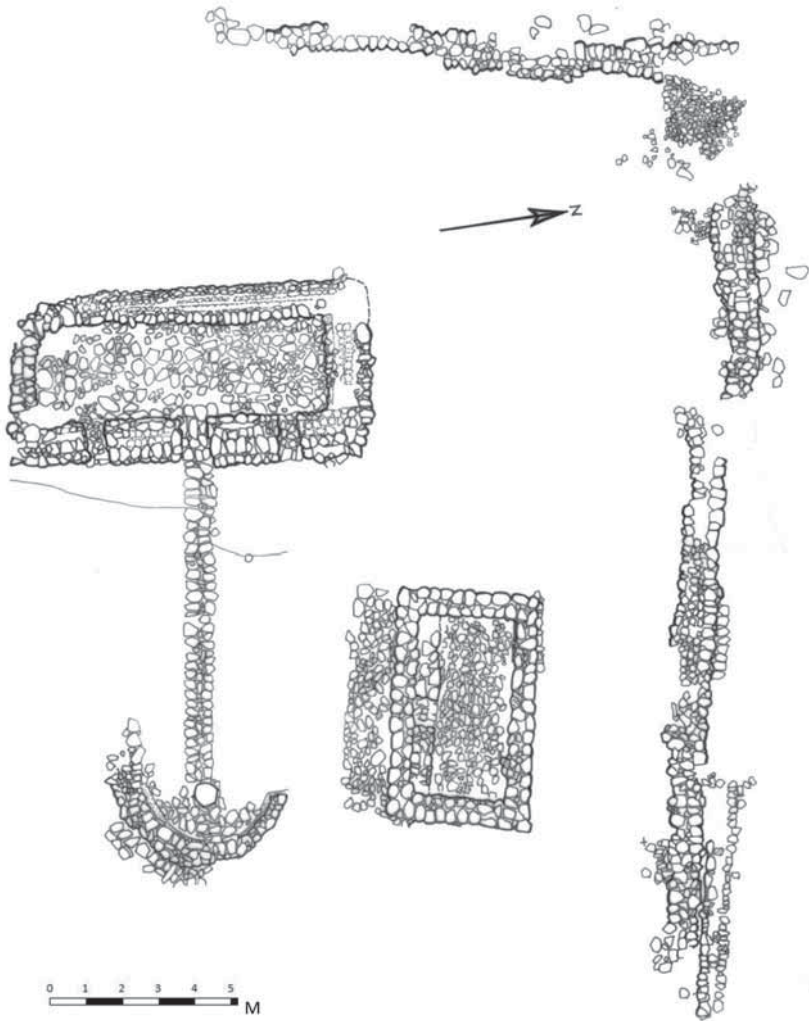


Fig. 2. Plan of the Area E temple of Teleilat Ghassul.
Prepared by Peta Seaton and provided by her courtesy.