DOUBLE FACE, MULTIPLE MEANINGS
THE HELLENISTIC PILLAR FIGURINES FROM MARESHA
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ABSTRACT
Maresha was a major city in Idumea during the Hellenistic period, with a mixed population of Idumeans, Sidonians, Greeks, and others. Many figurines were found in the earth fills of the numerous caves at the site, which appear to have been associated with houses above ground. This paper deals with a type found at Maresh referred to as a Hellenistic pillar figurine. The type comprises a hollow pillar with a rounded or pointed top, non-modeled backs, and plinth bases. They all portray a few types of mold-made faces, either singly or in identical pairs. These unique figurines represent a mixture of traditions: a face-type that is Eastern or Hellenistic, a body-type that recalls the Greek herm, and an overall conception rooted in the region. The Hellenistic pillar figurines make up a unique local group of terracottas, so far unknown outside Maresha and its vicinity. They present a reduction of the anthropomorphic depiction into one component, the face. A similar approach is also evident in other cultures in the region, such as the Nabatean, which generally preferred steles over figurative sculptures for the representations of their deities. The pillar figurines from Maresha illustrate the vagueness of religious iconography in the Hellenistic East.

The ancient city of Maresha (Marisa, Tel Sandahanna) in Israel, located in the Judean foothills, was a major town in the region of Idumea during the Persian and Hellenistic periods (Fig. 1). During the Hellenistic period Maresha was a bilingual town, using Greek and Aramaic simultaneously, and displaying a blend of cultures with a main Idumean identity. Maresha flourished under Ptolemaic, and later Seleucid, rule. The city’s life came to an end in the Hasmonean conquest of the late 2nd century B.C., when the local Idumeans were subdued by the Hasmoneans.

Excavations conducted during the course of the 20th century have yielded architectural and small finds dating to the Iron Age II, the Persian, and mainly the Hellenistic periods. Since the mid-1980s the excavations have been conducted on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority by Amos Kloner (1985–2001) and Ian Stern and Bernie Alpert of the Archaeological Seminars (2001–present). The site consists of a tel surrounded by a lower city of approximately 80 acres. The recent excavations at the site concentrated mostly in the lower city surrounding Tel Maresha, uncovering houses, streets, fortifications and other structures, as well as numerous rock-cut subterranean complexes, consisting of halls, cisterns, columbaria, oil presses, stables, quarries, and tombs.

An outstanding feature of Maresha is its abundance of finds, mostly from the 2nd B.C., including hundreds of terracotta figurines that date from the 5th to the 2nd centuries B.C. The figurines were primarily found in the earth fills of the numerous subterranean complexes at the site, while others were found in above-ground excavation areas, mostly in domestic contexts or shops. Those from the subterranean complexes also appear to have been associated with a residential neighborhood above. The overwhelming majority of the terracottas was manufactured in the city or its vicinity, as
is attested by the appearance of the clay, petrographic analyses, and the discovery on site of molds and sets of figurines made in the same molds.  

Generally speaking, the Persian-period types of terracottas are typical of southern Palestinian figurines of the period, and represent the local coroplastic craft of Idumea. The types of the Hellenistic period are those belonging mostly to the Eastern–Hellenistic koine, with some regional and local characteristics. Among the standard types, there is a unique type of figurine that appeared in the transition of the Persian to the Early Hellenistic period and is not known outside of Maresha or its vicinity. This endemic type, which I call Hellenistic pillar figurine, and its possible meaning is the focus of this paper.

**The Hellenistic Pillar Figurine Type and its Date**

**Technique and Typology**

The type of Hellenistic pillar figurine under discussion comprises a hollow pillar or peg with a rounded or pointed top, non-modeled back, and plinth base. All examples carry various types of mold-made faces, either singly, but more commonly in identical pairs, one below the other. The technique of manufacture involves several stages. First, each one of the two faces was cast in the same mold, and then the two were attached to a band of clay in a vertical alignment; the band was smoothed to blur the place of attachment, as shown in Figs. 2 and 3. The band was then attached to the upper half of the pillar, normally leaving the lower part bare. The unmodeled back was then attached to the front, usually resulting in a hollow base and solid top. The figurines stand steadily on a small plinth base and also can be easily grasped by hand. The height of the pillars is 10 to 15 cm, as shown by one complete specimen (Fig. 4). Several dozen pillar figurines of this type were unearthed at Maresha in different areas and caves, some of which were published in the report of the Hellenistic figurines from Maresha.
This group can be divided into subtypes, according to the facial types, of which some are feminine and others male. The first subtype has two identical faces marked by narrow eyes below heavy eyelids and a low forehead covered with a band (Fig. 5). The second type is also of a double face, but is different from the first by wide-open eyes and a thick, flat nose (Fig. 6). The third type of face is similar to the previous, but it has a Cnidian hairdo, indicating its female gender (Fig. 7).

The fourth type is an unusual pillar figurine with only one face—a fine, elongated Dionysos face crowned with a typical ivy wreath on a fillet (taenia) and abundant hair similar to Hellenistic terracottas depicting Dionysos from Susa. Below the face is a hand-modeled pair of schematic breasts (Fig. 8). The mixture of male and female in one body is not surprising considering the effeminacy or bisexuality of Dionysos. Nevertheless, the combination of a face bearing a male identity and feminine breasts is untypical of the iconography of the deity and therefore it may indicate that the coroplast did not intend to portray Dionysos himself. Rather, he used a randomly available mold for the face, which he actually intended to look feminine, and added the breasts. As Dionysos usually had a somewhat feminine appearance in Hellenistic art, such a mold served the artist’s purpose. It is uncertain how acquainted were the inhabitants of a remote, small town in the periphery of the Hellenistic world with Greek ideas of transgender and bisexuality related to Dionysos, not to say applying them to a local type by modifying it with breasts. It is therefore reasonable to interpret the Dionysos pillar with breasts as a misunderstanding or misuse of the Dionysos mold and adapting it to a local type of a pillar figurine, rather than an intended sophisticated bisexual representation of Dionysos.

The Date of the Pillar Figurines
As mentioned above, the pillar figurines were discovered throughout the site, mostly in the fills of the subterranean complexes. These fills contain finds of mostly the Persian and Hellenistic periods dated to the 5th–2nd
centuries B.C. Although in most cases the archaeological context does not provide us with a precise dating, there is enough evidence to date the origin of the type to the early days of the Hellenistic period, probably the end of the 4th century B.C.

The pillar portraying Dionysos was discovered in an occupation level in subterranean cave 75 dated to the Late Persian-Early Hellenistic periods, and the Praxitelean style of its face is typical of the Early Hellenistic period. A similar example is a head from neighboring Tel Lachish. This piece, cast in the same mold as the Maresha figurine, is hollow, and the surviving fragment is missing the breasts that are modeled on the Maresha piece. The figurine from Tel Lachish was discovered in an unstratified context, yet its provenience—the Solar Shrine—yiel ded finds from the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Another fragment of a pillar figurine with two breasts, but with its face missing, was discovered at Tel Halil south of Maresha, where the greater part of the corpus of figurines is dated to the 4th century B.C. (Fig. 9). The two parallels from Tel Lachish and Tel Halil are the only parallels we know of outside of Maresha. Another fragment of a pillar base from Maresha was uncovered in a fill outside a residence at area 930 that contained Persian and Hellenistic pottery. It should be noted that Persian pottery at Maresha is rare relative to the presence of Hellenistic ceramics, and therefore, the discovery of two pillar figurines in relation to Persian and Hellenistic pottery should not be seen as a mere coincidence.

Another reason to link the pillar type to the Persian period lies in a figurine of another type, the so-called Persian rider type. Over 50% of the Persian period types at Maresha belong to the horse and rider of the southern Idumean type. One of the riders of this type strongly resembles the face type no. 2 and was probably cast in the same mold (Fig. 10). It is plausible that Persian types continued to be produced into the early Hellenistic period, at least until the end of the 4th century B.C., if not later. The resemblance of the faces of one type of the Persian rider and one type of the pillar figurine points to the relationship between the two. This dates them to the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

Despite the Late-Persian affiliation, some of the pillar figurines are stylistically Hellenistic. The face and coiffure of the female type no. 3 are Hellenistic in style. The Dionysos head of type no. 4 is also very much Hellenized and Hellenistic in style, and has no resemblance whatsoever to any Persian types from the site. Therefore, it seems that these pillar figurines were produced as early as the Early Hellenistic period and include characteristics of both the Persian and the Hellenistic periods. They also might have been in use throughout the Hellenistic period.

The Source of the Pillar Type and Its Meaning
The iconography of the pillar figurines is vague and elusive. They fit within a long tradition of Canaanite and Syrian gods, who had no clear iconography—identifiable forms, features, stances, or attributes—a stark contrast to other visual systems, such as those of the Egyptian and Greek pantheons. The Semitic gods were obscure characters, usually identified with more than one consort and function. It was suggested that, when dealing with the realm of the East, the discussion should not center on mythological narratives or concrete deities, but on essences and varied, recurring concepts. However, some of the features in the iconography of the pillars point to a certain nature or perhaps even specific identity. The interpretation of the type and its meaning should rely on exploring similar phenomena in both cultures that are hybridized in the art of Hellenistic Maresha: the local and Greek.
The Iron Age Judean Pillar Figurines
The general idea of the pillar of type 4, with its modeled breasts, can be viewed as a reminiscence of Judean pillar figurines that were widespread in Iron Age Judah. The Judean pillar figurines are solid clay images that represent females supporting their breasts with their hands. The body is hand-made, rounded, pillar-like, and schematic, and the head is either mold-made or handmade (Fig. 11). The Judean pillar figurines date to the 8th–7th centuries B.C. and their distribution is limited to areas within the borders of Judah, which in part becomes Idumea in later times. These pillar figurines have been interpreted in various ways: as Canaanite goddesses, amulets for good luck, toys, or as representations of mortal women.

The Hellenistic pillars from Maresha and the Iron Age pillars from Judea share a key element—the reduction of the anthropomorphic depiction into one or two components, the head and breasts. However, there is no direct relationship between the two groups. First, the pillars of the two groups look different, as the Iron Age pillars are cylindrical whereas the Hellenistic pillars are thin and rectangular. Second, most of the Hellenistic pillars from Maresha have no breasts, and the one that does have breasts does not hold them. Third, the Iron Age figurines have only one head, while many of the Hellenistic pillars have two faces, one above the other. Fourth and last, one should bear in mind that despite the partial geographical overlapping of the two types, the Iron Age and the Hellenistic pillars are divided by some three centuries and historical and cultural changes such as the Judean exile and the formation of Idumea. Therefore, it seems that although the Hellenistic pillar types may have been a late successor of the Iron Age pillars, they differ tremendously and should be treated as separate phenomena.

The Greek Herm
The general form of the pillar figurine invokes queries as to its association with Greek herms. The Dionysos head of type 4 is typical of Dionysos herms and the pair of faces of the other types may be associated with the double herm type. Yet, despite the double heads, other traits rule out a direct relation to the double herm pillars: the heads are molded in relief about 1–2 cm below the top, rather than sculpted as a separate unit on top of the pillar; the faces are set one above the other, rather than on the same level on both the front and back of the pillar; there are no horizontal projections below the head resembling schematic arms, and no phalli. Moreover, double herms are rare in terracottas, due to the tendency to leave the back unmodeled. Consequently, although the outline of the Maresha pillar figurines resembles that of the Greek herm, it does not derive directly from it.

However, the herm as a sculptural form is not unfamiliar to Maresha. One terracotta from the site represents a mantle herm, and herms appear in soft-limestone and on wall reliefs in some of the caves. One small, schematic figurine from Maresha depicts a rectangular body on a wide rectangular base with incised facial features (Fig. 12). Among the reliefs on the walls of the underground chambers of Maresha are cruciform figures, one of which is carved as a large cross with short branches within a square depression, and its head has a schematic nose between two shallow depressions representing eyes and cheeks (Fig. 13). In an underground complex located roughly three kilometers north of Maresha was found an additional cross bearing a head and with a depression at the base of the vertical branch. These crosses can be interpreted as schematic herms, including both the pillar and the arms, but without a detailing of the face. Like the pillar figurines, some of these presentations are also uncanonical, and possibly had connections to the pillar figurines. But the many variations of this form at Maresha, in terracotta as well as in stone, attest to a rather local tradition that may have been assimilated with the Greek form.
Although the Nabatean eye idols differ from the Hellenistic pillar figurines in their shape and modeling, they share the reduction of the human body to a face, and the pairing of deities in some cases. The Nabatean steles and figurines are probably slightly later than the Maresha figurines, as most probably date to the 1st century B.C.–1st century C.E. The eye idols are identified with Nabataean goddesses (al-Uzza, al-Kutba) when accompanied by inscriptions, but there is not one defined scheme of correlation between the image and its identification, or in Patrick’s words, “The process of creating binding cultic formulas never reached a final stage in Nabatean society. In such an evolutionary situation, it is not surprising that we can not find any clear one-to-one relationship between the stele and the god.”

It seems that despite the small gap in time and space, i.e. Hellenistic Idumea versus early Roman Nabatea, the same can be said about the enigmatic unidentified Hellenistic pillar figurines from Maresha.

Pair, Couple or Twins?

The meaning of a pair of identical faces modeled on a single pillar is unclear; the faces may have represented two different aspects or natures of the same image or two separate figures forming a syncrletic entity. One of the enduring features throughout the Hellenistic period is the divine family, which could consist of a pair of consort gods; consort gods and their child; or a mother god and her child. Such combinations are evident in inscriptions from Hellenistic Palestine. The double-faced pillar figurines may represent the same thing as the inscriptions dedicated to two divine entities, such as Hadad and Atargatis in an inscription from Kfar Yassif near Akko, or Serapis and Isis in an inscription from Samaria. Nonetheless, if the pillars were meant to represent two different deities, we would have expected the two entities to stand side by side as in the Nabatean pairs of steles, or at least to have a different appearance, unlike the sole pillar carrying two identical faces. That leads us to believe that the faces portrayed on the pillars are not two separate figures, but rather a combined entity or two very close individuals.

The two heads may have also represented twins, a motif carrying profound symbolism in the ancient Near East. Twins occasionally appear in terracotta figurines of the ancient Near East. Twin embryos in their mother’s womb, or suckling from their mother, appear on Late Bronze plaque figurines. Twin riders or a riding female accompanied by twins were depicted on
Achaemenid figurines from northern Syria. But these sporadic examples come from distant sites and periods. In order to set the twins motif within its context one should look back into Hellenistic Maresha.

A figurine type frequent at Maresha depicts the Dioskouroi/Dioscuri, the Greek twin gods Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus and Leda and brothers of Helena. The Dioskouroi from Maresha display a rather rare type (Fig. 15). They are depicted as a pair of standing young men wearing a loosely hanging chlamys and their typical headdress, the pilos. A series of figurines from Amathus, Cyprus, echoing the frontal pose of the standing males, constitutes the closest parallels to the Maresha Dioskouroi.

The Dioskouroi were popular deities in the East, principally in Egypt and Syria, owing to their astral character, protective role, versatile tasks, and diverse identifications with local deities. Their cult was practiced in Ptolemaic Egypt and in Cyprus. In Hellenistic Palestine Dioskouroi appear in other media as well. They can be found on coins of the 2nd century BCE from Akko-Ptolemais on the north coast of Palestine. A Hellenistic inscription from Scythopolis mentions the savior deities, perhaps referring to the Dioskouroi. Two identical stone reliefs depicting only a pilos and star were unearthed at Samaria, within a wall of the Roman temple dedicated to Kore, possibly indicating an earlier, probably Hellenistic, cult of the Dioskouroi.

The Hellenistic pillar figurines are different from the Dioskouroi terracottas in composition and sometimes also in gender. Still, it is worthwhile to point at a striking similarity between the faces of one of the Dioskouroi types at Maresha and the second face type of the pillar figurines. They both have the same wide-open eyes and flat nose. This resemblance implies that they might represent the same idea of identical, if not Siamese, twins, whether male or female. The divine twins are a long lasting motif in ancient cultures. At Egypt there were Shu and Tefenet and other divine or majestic twins, which are evident also in Graeco–Roman times. The myth of twins as an astral power is evident also in the ancient Near East. In the Greek world there were Castor and Pollux, mentioned above, who were the source for the sign of the Gemini in the Zodiac. In Roman cultures there are of course Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. Often the twins were considered to be heavenly and astral, and connected to the sun and the moon or to the stars.

There is one local pair of twins which should attract our attention, the biblical Jacob and Esau, from which the people of Israel and the Edomites are said to have emerged. Although the origin of the Idumeans is obscure, Idumea in the Persian and Hellenistic periods seems to be the inheritor of biblical Edom, especially when considering the popularity of Edomite names at Maresha and Idumea. The claim of the Idumeans for south Judea is rooted in their being the successors of Esau, the deceived and deprived elder twin who did not succeed to inherit Jacob's land. The myth of the twins is interlaced in the heritage of both nations, Jews and Idumeans, after the first temple period. It could be that such an ancient local concept of twins as divine astral power, or as founders of nations, is represented in the double-faced Hellenistic pillar figurines. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all the pillars carry two faces,
and one certainly carries only one Dionysos face. Therefore, the twins interpretation may be valid only in some of the cases which form the majority of the Hellenistic pillar figurines.

Conclusions
The exact meaning and function of the double faced pillar figurines from Maresha are still vague. The pillars may represent specific deities, such as Dionysos or the Dioskouroi. They are frequently female, but in certain cases also males are represented in them. They have one or, more often, two faces. They are meant to stand on a solid base, but they are also easily held in the hand. They all share the reduction of the human body to a tall slender pillar with a face. As was maintained above, they find parallels in the concept of the Greek herm, but also in the Nabataean betyls and stele gods, which also display a preference for the elimination or reduction of the anthropomorphic element of the god figure. Another key element common to the Maresha pillars and the Nabataean steles is the flexibility of iconography; they seem to be a mere platform for altering entities and identities.

The Hellenistic pillar figurines are not found outside Maresha, except for one type found in two sites south of Maresha, Tel Lachish and Tel Halif, both in the heart of Idumea. The regionalism of the Idumean figurines is not a new feature of the Hellenistic period; Idumea has featured its own regional types as early as the Persian period. The pillar figurines are part of this regionalism, although many of the Hellenistic figurines from Maresha are koine types. The inhabitants of Maresha created a local form of figurine, using conventionalized molds. This form might have been divine or mortal, female or male, representing local deities or Greek divinities, related to the Dioskouroi twins or to another pair; we can not tell for sure. The pillars from Maresha are evident for a local and independent Idumean tradition.

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Notes
16 Erlich 2006.
17 Boardman 2000, pp. 324, 333.
20 For the syncretic nature of Hellenistic Levant see Erlich 2009, p. 107; Kouremnos, Chandrasekaran and Rossi 2011.
23 Goldman 1942.
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28 Ibid., pp. 82–86.
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31 Patrich 1990, pp. 95–96.
32 Ibid., pp. 101–106.
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36 Avi-Yonah 1959.
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38 Kuntzmann 1983.
40 Nunn 2000, pp. 44–45, pls. 15–16; Nunn 2004, pp. 151–161, type d.
42 Queyrel 1988, pls. 25, 26.
43 Barry 1906, pp. 168; Augé and Belgelonds 1986a, pp. 593.
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