

# RECENTLY DISCOVERED IRON AGE LION FIGURINES FROM JERUSALEM

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## **Summary: Recently Discovered Iron Age Lion Figurines from Jerusalem**

More than 500 Iron Age figurines were discovered in the 2005–2010 Western Wall Plaza excavations in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The excavations revealed a large building, probably of the four-room type. Many figurines were discovered in this building, others in fills below and above it, dating in general to the eighth-sixth centuries BCE. Here we focus on two heads most likely depicting lions, one of them exceptional—holding another animal in its mouth. We discuss the identification of these figurines as lions, the lion motif in a variety of media in the Southern Levant, and finally recent theories concerning lions in the Hebrew Bible and their relation to Yahweh. We suggest that the two Western Wall Plaza figurines represent lions as wild animals, in similarity to other figurines of wild animals made on occasion by Judean coroplasts.

**Keywords:** Lion – Figurine – Judah – Yahweh

<sup>1</sup> As in every other excavation, the vast majority of the figurines are fragmented. However, the type can be identified in most cases. For convenience, we call them “figurines” and will not add the word fragment in each case.

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## **Resumen: Estatuillas de león de la Era de Hierro recientemente descubiertas provenientes de Jerusalén**

Más de 500 estatuillas de la Edad del Hierro fueron descubiertas en las excavaciones de la Plaza del Muro Occidental de 2005–2010, en Jerusalén. Las excavaciones revelaron un gran edificio, probablemente del tipo de cuatro habitaciones. Se descubrieron muchas estatuillas en este edificio, otras en rellenos debajo y por encima de éste, datadas en general en los siglos VIII–VI a.C. Aquí nos focalizamos en dos cabezas que muy posiblemente representen leones, una de ellas excepcional—sosteniendo otro animal en su boca. Discutimos la identificación de estas estatuillas como leones, el motivo del león en una variedad de medios en el sur del Levante, y finalmente, teorías recientes concernientes a los leones en la Biblia Hebrea y su relación con Yavé. Sugerimos que las dos estatuillas de la Plaza del Muro Occidental representan leones como animales salvajes, de manera similar a otras estatuillas de animales salvajes realizadas en ocasiones por alfareros judaítas.

**Palabras clave:** León – Estatuilla – Judá – Yahvé.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Western Wall Plaza salvage excavations, initiated by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation and carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, took place between 2005 and 2010 on the northeastern slope of the western hill of Iron Age Jerusalem, c. 100 m west of the Western Wall (**Figs. 1–3**). In the course of the excavations, a building, probably of the four-room house type, was partly uncovered.<sup>2</sup> It was built in the seventh century BCE above an abandoned quarry and its foundations were laid on the exposed bedrock (**Figs. 2–4**). The building is very well preserved—its walls (including foundations) still stand 4–5 m high (**Fig. 4**, sections 1–1, 2–2). Concurrently with its construction, earthen fills were intentionally laid between the walls, up to floor levels, about 2.5 m above the bedrock. The original floors, which had risen 10–15 cm during the lifetime of the building, were preserved in all rooms. In Rooms 1–2 the floors were sealed by a thick collapse layer—in Room 1 interspersed with yellowish-white clayey lumps; in Room 2 containing building stones that lay like fallen dominoes, indicating a sudden, violent collapse. The absence of a collapse layer in Rooms 4–6 probably implies that only Rooms 1–2 had a second storey (perhaps also Room 3, but it is mostly reconstructed). Material that probably originates from the Iron Age settlement

<sup>2</sup> Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009; 2012: 37–41; Ornan *et al.* 2008; 2012.

upslope was deposited on top of the collapse layer (in Rooms 1–2) and above the floors (in Rooms 4–6). Finds within this fill included numerous pottery sherds dating between the eighth–sixth centuries BCE, terracotta figurines, and seven personal seals. The Roman *cardo* level sealed the Iron Age remains.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 553 figurines were found in the excavations, mostly in fills related to the late Iron Age building (Loci 6000–7000, eighth–early sixth centuries BCE). Of the c. 400 figurines from the building, half were found in fills sealed under the floors of the building and the rest were found in fills that accumulated above the floors. There was no discernible difference between the two assemblages.

The debris from the Iron Age fills was sent for wet sieving. Quite many figurines were retrieved by the sieving (153, or 28% of all figurines), most of them very small, worn-out fragments. Only 27 (c. 17.6%) of the 153 sieved items are large (50 mm or more in any dimension). Among the 400 figurines found without sieving, 203 (c. 50.8%) are large. All the types found by sieving were found also in the “regular” excavation.<sup>4</sup>

The figurines from the Western Wall Plaza excavations belong mostly to well-known types. Judean Pillar Figurines (56 items) (**Fig. 5**) form the vast majority among anthropomorphic figurines. With animal figurines (excluding fragments and legs that cannot be attributed to specific types with certainty), the most common types are solid animals, mostly equids (**Fig. 6**) (181 items, including 63 heads and 118 body parts), and horses and riders (23 items). Bird figurines, zoomorphic vessels, and bed-models are much less common. The figurines have a distinctive local Judean character.<sup>5</sup> Most of them are solid, made of brown-red clay with dark gray cores and white and gray grits.

Although in this article we focus on two feline heads, there were some other rare or even unique figurines in the assemblage. They include a few double-headed horses and riders—a type that was first noticed at Ramat Rahel by Antonia Ciasca.<sup>6</sup> Comparable ‘double’ figurines are found in neigh-

<sup>3</sup> Ornan *et al.* 2008; 2012; Ornan 2012. For the complex issue of the Neo-Babylonian period in Jerusalem see Tebes 2011, with references.

<sup>4</sup> Finds retrieved by sieving lose the exact context, even if the Locus is known. In addition, workers might be less careful if they perceive sieving as a “security net.” Therefore, sieving should be an added measure, never a tool for hastening the pace of excavating.

<sup>5</sup> Kletter 1996; Darby 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Ciasca 1964: 96, Figs. 35:3; 36:4.

boring regions at roughly the same time, for example in Cyprus.<sup>7</sup> Among hundreds of figurines of horses and of horses and riders from Iron Age Judah,<sup>8</sup> there are only about a dozen “double-headed” fragments, which we interpret as pairs of horses and riders.<sup>9</sup>

## DESCRIPTION OF TWO NEW FIGURINES FROM JERUSALEM

The first head (**Figs. 7–8**) is small and worn out, made of brown-orange ware with gray core and white and gray grits (B71342, L6186, 28x16 mm). It was found in an earthen fill interspersed with gravel below the lower floor level of Room 5, c. 20 cm above bedrock (**Fig. 4**, section 1–1). The eyes are deeply impressed; there are scant remains of very small ears set widely apart. The muzzle is broken as well as the neck.

The second head (**Figs. 9–12**) was found in Room 1, c. 50 cm above the upper floor (L6114, B60790). It was discovered inside a thick (70 cm) layer of earthen fill, interspersed with yellowish-white clayey lumps that probably originated from the collapse of the roof or a second floor (**Fig. 4**: section 2–2). The head could originate from the building itself, or from the slope-wash.<sup>10</sup>

This head is quite large and rounded (59 mm high and 23 mm thick at the muzzle). It is made of light brown ware with light gray core and gray grits. There are small rounded ears at the top of the head, both damaged. Perhaps there are incised lines at the lower end of the left ear, but if so, they are very faint. The eyes are deeply impressed and placed low on the sides of the head. The forehead is wide and on it there is an applied mane, which is at present partially broken off. The neck is oval in section. There is a wide, open mouth. The edge is plastically rendered and there is no trace of teeth. The animal holds in its mouth a small animal, which is placed horizontally. This animal is, unfortunately, very badly broken; only its body survives. After placing the

<sup>7</sup> Crouwel and Tatton-Brown 1988: 78–84; Karageorghis 1995: 69–70, nos. 49–52, Pls. 34:8–9, 35:1; Karageorghis 1996: 23, 28, Cat. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Wenning 1991; Uehlinger 1999; Im 2006; Cornelius 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Kletter and Saarelainen 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the fill above the floor in this room contained two seals: one depicting an Assyrian archer with the name לִהְגָּב, the other broken and inscribed ...לַעֲטָרָה (Ornan *et al.* 2008: nos. 2, 4).

animal inside the mouth, the potter closed it by pushing clay around the little animal, blurring some of its details. We cannot determine the exact species of the small animal, but it appears to be a quadruple. Its head (left of the mouth) is missing; so is the tail at the opposite side, but broken areas of two rear legs are still noticeable.

## DISCUSSION

Iron Age figurines from Judah (except molded heads of pillar figurines) are usually very schematic.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true in regard to animal figurines, affecting our ability to identify the species. Animal figurines are also less studied than anthropomorphic ones.<sup>12</sup> In old excavations fragments of animal figurines were often discarded. In publications animal figurines are usually accompanied by fewer photographs and drawings, and often more briefly described, than anthropomorphic ones.

Exact identification is in many cases impossible for closely related species. To give an example, horses, donkeys, and mules have similar features. Strictly speaking, we should define Judean figurines as equids, not horse figurines. However, the horse occupied a much more important military and economic position in comparison to all other equids. This is reflected in the numerous allusions to horses in biblical and other written sources, as well as in pictorial evidence.<sup>13</sup> Therefore we can be confident that most Judean equid figurines represent horses. The significant number of such figurines with riders attached to their backs strengthens this identification: they are horses and riders, reflecting the growing importance of cavalry during the Iron Age.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding felines, several species lived in the Southern Levant during the Iron Age, including lions (*Panthera leo*), panthers (*Panthera pardus*) and cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*). The schematic nature of Judean figurines means that at least in theory, the heads discussed here can belong to any one of these species, and perhaps even to smaller cats and to hyenas. However, only one of these animals—the lion—occupied an important place in the literature and iconography of the Southern Levant. All the other felines are very rarely men-

<sup>11</sup> Kletter 1996: 50; 2004: 2080; Kletter and Saarelainen 2014: 197.

<sup>12</sup> The only general catalogue for animal figurines from Iron Age Palestine is Holland 1975.

<sup>13</sup> McKay 2002; Klingbeil 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Dalley 1985; Drews 2004: 83–87; Kletter and Saarelainen 2014.

tioned or portrayed. Thus, if these heads are feline, they are much more likely to represent lions than other feline species.

How did we reach the conclusion that these heads portray felines? We start from a basis of close knowledge of Judean terracottas. Over the years we classified and prepared for publication something in the region of 1800 Judean clay figurines from various sites,<sup>15</sup> and read a considerable amount of related literature. Types of animal figurines can be recognized even when only a fragment survives, as long as there are some indicative features. While it is hard to identify body parts, especially middle body parts (trunks) that have few or no telltale features, heads are easier to identify, since they usually include features such as ears, eyes, muzzle, nostrils, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Among Judean animal figurines, equids occupy a dominant place and are well-defined.<sup>17</sup> Comparison to Judean equid/horse figurines (**Fig. 6**) shows immediately that the present heads from Jerusalem are not heads of equids. Heads of Judean equid/horse figurines have large pointed ears and cylindrical muzzles. The nostrils, if portrayed, are formed as two punctures at the end of the muzzle. The mouth, when it exists, is depicted by a horizontal incision. Usually the nostrils and the mouth are not portrayed and there is just a simple, cylindrical muzzle.

The present heads are not heads of bovines/bulls either. Bovines are seldom represented in Iron Age II clay figurines and zoomorphic vessels.<sup>18</sup> They are recognizable (among other features) by their horns. When the horns are broken off, areas of breakage are left on the heads. We do not have such areas in the present figurines.

The small animal placed in the mouth of head B60790 (**Figs. 8–11**) considerably narrows the possible candidates for identification. There are two possibilities. If it portrays prey, the larger animal is a predator, hence ruling out identification with most domesticated quadruples (except perhaps dogs) and with grazing animals, like horses, bovines, deer, etc. However, the small animal in the mouth could also be a cub, since felines (also Hyenas) frequently carry their offspring in their mouth, usually by the neck, but sometimes by the middle body.

Considering the animal held in the mouth, the lack of head precludes exact identification. The remaining parts and the size fit best a *caprid* (sheep/goat).

<sup>15</sup> Jerusalem, Lachish, Moza, Beth Shemesh, Beer Sheba, Malhata, Kh. 'Uzza, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Compare Holland 1975: 301.

<sup>17</sup> Tchernov 1996: 85.

If the potter did not consider proportion a problem, a young bovine (calf) is a possibility too, or wild game such as deer. Alternatively, it could be a lion cub.

Another important part of identifying animal figurines concerns cooperation with archaeozoologists.<sup>19</sup> Such cooperation is highly recommended, as it improves the identification and raises awareness of species that could have been overlooked otherwise. In the present case, we asked Liora Kolska-Horwitz of the Hebrew University to look at the Western Wall Plaza animal figurines, and she identified the two heads as lions.

The leonine character of head B60790 (**Figs. 9–12**) is clear (compare with **Fig. 13**). Indicative features, as noted by Horwitz, are:

1. The shape of the small rounded ears, located widely apart of each other.
2. The muzzle with a flat, wide mouth.
3. The lock of hair (mane) at the top of the head.
4. The remnants of an animal held in the mouth.
5. The position of the eyes.

Whether this head represents a lion or a lioness is impossible to say. However, both probably held similar significance in the eyes of Judeans. The lack of a massive mane would suggest that a lioness is depicted, but this is not conclusive. We notice that this head is quite big for Judean animal figurines. Nothing survives from the body, though, so we cannot tell if the head belonged to a larger than usual figurine, or was attached perhaps to a vessel/object.

The identification of head B71342 (**Figs. 7–8**) is more tentative. Though at a first glance it looks different than the second head, this is partly due to its bad state of conservation. Both heads share the wide face, the deeply punctured eyes, and the small, rounded ears, features that fit felines.<sup>20</sup> However, head B71342 does not carry an animal in its mouth.

Of course, it is possible that there is a mismatch between the zoological features we identify and what the ancient potter meant to portray. For example, take a potter who normally makes horse figurines, but is asked to produce a hippopotamus. The result might be a clumsily-made, unrealistic creation, depending on the potter's skill and on her/his knowledge of hippopotami. However, the present heads from Jerusalem are not very clumsily-made or highly unrealistic, and there is no reason to suspect that something of the sort happened in this case.

<sup>18</sup> Holland 1975: 247–251, 281, etc.; Kletter 2004: 2076, nos. 42–43.

<sup>19</sup> Tchernov 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Compare a lion head from Gibeon, Pritchard 1961: 122, Fig. 93.

In sum, head B71342 probably depicts a lion and head B60790 depicts a lion in a unique way for Judah—either carrying off or devouring its prey, or carrying a cub.

## LION REPRESENTATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT (LATE BRONZE TO PERSIAN PERIODS)

A lion devouring an animal or carrying a cub is a new type of figurine, the first of its kind ever found in Iron Age Judah. We discuss briefly possible comparisons, since data published up to c. 2000 AD was mostly compiled by Strawn—though with different conclusions.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the ancient Near East the lion was a symbol of power and status, attribute of divinities and kings in a variety of media. Lions are shown hunting other animals or being hunted, guarding entrances, trampling human enemies, serving as attributes of deities, etc. When lions are depicted hunting domesticated or wild animals, they are shown biting their necks, or pouncing on their backs.<sup>22</sup>

### *Various Representations – Late Bronze Age*

In Late Bronze Age Palestine lions are depicted on *orthostats* from Hazor and Beth Shean. They appear on a cult stand from Tell el Far‘ah South, on ivories from Megiddo and on various seals. We also find lions as attributive animals of a female deity in Egyptian reliefs and on gold and clay plaques found in various locations, including Palestine.<sup>23</sup>

### *Various Representations – Iron Age II*

In the Iron Age II, an ivory from Samaria depicts a lion attacking a bull from the back, while another shows a lion grasping a bull by its throat. Two crouching lion sculptures from Samaria were possibly attached in origin to a throne or a bed.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Strawn 2001; 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Strawn 2001: 103–104; 2005: 101–102, Fig. 3.94, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Rowe 1930: Frontispiece; Mazar 2010: 250; Beck 2002: 347–349; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 50, 58, 62, 82; Cornelius 2004: nos. 5.1–5.10, 5.20–23, etc.; Press 2012: 175–176.

<sup>24</sup> Crowfoot and Crowfoot 1938: Pls. 9–10; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 188, 190; Schroer 1987: 382–385.



In Iron Age II Judah lions appear in various media, though rarely. Keel and Uehlinger related a few bone seals featuring striding lions with Judah.<sup>25</sup> Yet, these seals are found all over Palestine. A seal depicting a roaring lion, carrying a Hebrew name Nawâ (?), was found 6–7 m east of the four-room building in the Western Wall Plaza excavations (**Fig. 4**).<sup>26</sup> Though found in a fill of a Roman quarry, it undoubtedly originates from the late Iron Age stratum. Two limestone objects from Tell Beit Mirsim—a statue (50 cm long) and a libation tray—depict lions. Albright dated them to the LB period, but Amiran ascribed them to the Iron Age II and suggested that the statue was part of a pair of standing lions.<sup>27</sup> Two guarding creatures—perhaps lions—were carved on the entrance of a tomb at Tel ‘Eton.<sup>28</sup> Lions/lionesses appear on the Pithoi from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, a site with mixed Judean and Israelite material features.<sup>29</sup>

### *Various Representations – The Persian Period*

Lion motifs seem to be more numerable in the Persian period. Lions appear on decorated cuboid incense altars found at Gezer, Lachish and Tel Jemmeh, probably related to the incense trade (they show other wild and/or desert animals, such as camels, scorpions, and ibexes). These objects are hardly found in the area of Yehud, though.<sup>30</sup> In Yehud, Samaria (Wadi ed-Daliyeh), and elsewhere in Palestine, lions appear in seals in several positions and styles.<sup>31</sup> They also appear on Samarian coins striding, sitting in profile, looking backwards, attacking prey, and as heads. The motifs in these coins are mostly copied or adapted from foreign mints, so it is hard to assess their local meanings.<sup>32</sup> A lion striding above a bull appears in a coin from Yehud. This motif, however, originates from Tarsos.<sup>33</sup> Finally, we notice one unusual head of a clay figurine from Lachish that probably portrays a lion-masked figure.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 268–269.

<sup>26</sup> Ornan *et al.* 2012: 5–8, no. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Albright 1938: 65–68, Pls. 23–24, 52; Amiran 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Ussishkin 1974: 113, Fig. 4, Pl. 21:1–3.

<sup>29</sup> Beck 2002: 109–112, Figs. 4c, 4h; Beck 2012: 156–158, Figs. 6.1, 6.3–4, 6.13.

<sup>30</sup> Frevel and Pyschny 2014: 174.

<sup>31</sup> Stern 2001: 540–542; Lipschits and Koch 2010; Grabbe 2014: 25–26; Schroer and Lippke 2014: 319–322, 329, 342–344. According to Schroer and Lippke (2014: n. 88), Jürg Eggler of Fribourg University is preparing a comprehensive catalogue of lion representations.

<sup>32</sup> Meshorer and Qedar 1999: 61–62; Grabbe 2014: 27, 31; Leith 2014: 281–284; Wyssmann 2014: 228, 238 n. 54, 240, 252.

<sup>33</sup> Wyssmann 2014: 245, Fig. 189.

<sup>34</sup> Tufnell 1953: Pl. 31:19; Cornelius 2014: Fig. 8. We did not forget one lion item from Arad.

### *Small Figurines – Surrounding Regions*

To the best of our knowledge there is no comparable figurine of a lion carrying an animal in its mouth from the Southern Levant. In Jordan, two bowl fragments from Tell Deir ‘Alla (in the Jordan Valley) have complete figures of lions sitting on the rim. Unfortunately, both are unstratified.<sup>35</sup> A complete, small (standing) lion figurine from Tell Abu al-Kharaz was attributed to the Iron I period.<sup>36</sup> One well preserved clay lion figurine is known from an Iron Age IIC level at Tell Jalul, and a few more figurines were found at Tell es-Sai’idiyeh and Tel Mazar, but none can be considered a close comparison to the Jerusalem figurines.<sup>37</sup>

From northern Israel, a metal figurine of a standing quadruped from Beth Shean Level VI was interpreted as a dog (c. 12th century BCE).<sup>38</sup> It is holding something, maybe a small animal, in its mouth. However, it is not similar to the Western Wall Plaza lion figurine. A solid body fragment of a crouching animal from Beth-Shean was tentatively identified as a lion.<sup>39</sup> A lion head applied to a rim of a bowl was discovered at Tell el-Far‘ah North.<sup>40</sup> Few Iron Age solid clay figurines from other areas may represent lions, but their date is doubtful.<sup>41</sup>

Several small clay figurines from Cyprus of the Cypro-Archaic period are interpreted as lions, but none is depicted holding another animal.<sup>42</sup> Other figurines are interpreted as dogs, and a few among them are eating or catching something in their mouth. One perhaps holds a bone;<sup>43</sup> another is biting the hind part of an animal (maybe hare).<sup>44</sup> Yet another is shown sitting and biting

Since it is a weight, not a figurine (as believed at first); made of metal, not of clay; and probably Assyrian, not local, we do not think that it merits discussion here (Kletter 1998: 125–126, Fig. 28).

<sup>35</sup> Franken 1961: Pl. 21; Holland 1975: 301, Fig. 67:1–2.

<sup>36</sup> Bürge 2013: 526–527, Fig. 463:1.

<sup>37</sup> Herr *et al.* 1996: 72, Fig. 9c; Amr 1980: 231–3, Figs. 185–187; Yassine 1988: Pl. 13:3, bottom right; Yassine and van der Steen 2012: 157, CAT013.

<sup>38</sup> Rowe 1940: Pl. 53a:5.

<sup>39</sup> Yahalom-Mack and Mazar 2006: Fig. 13.1:2; cf. a figurine from Ta’anach, Sellin 1904: Fig. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Chambon 1984: Pl. 64:5.

<sup>41</sup> Holland 1975: 255–256, 301; add a schematic head from Gezer, which may represent a lion, but it is not certain, Macalister 1912: Pl. 125:13; Holland 1975: 255–256.

<sup>42</sup> Karageorghis 1987: 33, Pl. 33: no. 186; 1996: Pl. 10:1–3; Monloup 1984: 103, no. 430.

<sup>43</sup> Karageorghis 1996: 44, Cat. 26, Pl. 27:3.

<sup>44</sup> Karageorghis 1996: 45, Cat. 29, Pl. 27:5.

an animal standing in front of it.<sup>45</sup> The identification as dogs is based on comparison to Boeotia, where figurines interpreted as dogs are shown carrying their youth in the mouth.<sup>46</sup> These possible dog figurines lack the distinctive leonine features that appear in the Western Wall Plaza heads.

In Iron Age Philistia lion figurines are extremely rare, though lion-headed cups and a head of a lion statue are known.<sup>47</sup> A few figurines from Tell Jemmeh were identified as lions by Petrie, but their identification is not secure.<sup>48</sup> Among the c. 200 figurines published from Ashkelon, only one lion head was found, ascribed to a post Iron Age context; while another head is possibly from a hollow lion vessel.<sup>49</sup>

### *Small Figurines – Judah*

In the Iron Age II, one clay lion head was found at Gibeon (date and context unclear); Holland suggested that it was modeled after a metal prototype.<sup>50</sup> A clay figurine depicting a roaring lion, now in the Hecht Museum (Haifa), was allegedly found at Beit Aula, dated to the eighth or seventh centuries BCE.<sup>51</sup> No lions are identified among hundreds of animal figurines from the Ophel, Jewish Quarter, and City of David excavations in Jerusalem, though other wild species such as hyena or hippopotamus have been identified.<sup>52</sup> We mention here also one terracotta lion figurine from the Late Bronze Age Fosse Temple at Lachish.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Karageorghis 1996: 45, Pl. 27:6, Cat. 30; cf. Karageorghis 1987: 34, no. 174.

<sup>46</sup> French 1971: 160–161, Figs. 12–13; Szabo 1994: 35, Pl. 21.

<sup>47</sup> Ben-Shlomo 2010: 125–131; Meiberg 2013; Stern 2013: 50–52.

<sup>48</sup> Petrie 1928: 18, Pl. 38:1–2, 7; Holland 1975: 308, L.V.d.9, Fig. 68:4, Pl. 40:1.

<sup>49</sup> Press 2012: 122–123, 187; Cat. Nos. 165–166; both are not similar to the present figurines.

<sup>50</sup> Pritchard 1961: 122, Fig. 93; Holland 1975: 107, L.V.d.6.

<sup>51</sup> Keel and Uehlinger 1998: Fig. 206a; Strawn 2001: Fig. 3:101; Strawn 2005: 105, Fig. 3:101.

<sup>52</sup> Holland 1977; Gilbert-Perez 1996; Tchernov 1996; Yezerski and Geva 2003. Izaak de Hulster (pers. comm.) identifies one body-part from Jerusalem as a lion. For possible Persian Period figurines from Jerusalem, see Hulster 2012; but they may be residual Iron Age pieces.

<sup>53</sup> Tufnell 1940: Pl. 28:7.

### *Lions in Iron Age Cult Stands*

Lions in various forms are found on clay cult stands (or altars) from Palestine, not devouring other animals, but guarding, flanking other entities or serving as bases or pedestals for female figures. We find them at Pella and Ta'anach, Yavneh, Tel Rekhes, Tel Rehov (a shrine model), and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> The anthropomorphic figures on the cult stands are predominantly female, and if one accepts they represent deities, the lions on such stands are perhaps related to female deities. However, the cult stands themselves could be votive objects dedicated to various deities, male or female.<sup>55</sup> In any case, figurative cult stands with lions are hardly known from Iron II Judah; the sole example is a crude, round cult stand recently found at Moza, west of Jerusalem, with remains of two very badly preserved figurines that appear to be lions.<sup>56</sup>

### DISCUSSION

How should we interpret the lion heads from the Western Wall Plaza excavations? Lions have a great variety of representation and meanings in Ancient Near Eastern sources, such as attributive animals of deities or symbols of royals.<sup>57</sup> In Assyrian reliefs lions are depicted in various positions—running, leaping, standing, or fallen; but none carries prey (or cubs) in their mouth.<sup>58</sup>

In Egyptian art lions appear from early periods, but mainly during the New Kingdom time, as representing Egypt or the Pharaoh devouring the enemy. Yet, this enemy is human and is attacked and bitten on the head or neck, not carried in the mouth.<sup>59</sup>

Recently Strawn has reviewed the biblical association of lions with Yahweh.<sup>60</sup> Lions appear as metaphors for Yahweh, as favorites of Yahweh (Ps.

<sup>54</sup> McNicoll *et al.* 1992: 97–99, Pl. 71; Sellin 1904: 76, Fig. 4.8; Lapp 1969: 42, Fig. 4.9; Beck 2002: 399–400, 403–407; Ziffer 2010: 67–68, 83–84; Kletter, Ziffer and Zwickel 2010: Stands 1–3, 28, 56; Pls. 8:1; 9:2; 50–52; 98:3; 155: 1–2; Zori 1977: 117, Pl. 33, Nos. 3–5; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2008; Katz 2006: 208–209.

<sup>55</sup> Kletter, Ziffer and Zwickel 2010: 188.

<sup>56</sup> Kisilevitz 2013: 43, Fig. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Ornan *et al.* 2012: 6\*–7\*.

<sup>58</sup> Albenda 1974.

<sup>59</sup> David 2011: 90–92, Fig. 4; the language of devouring an enemy as metaphor for its annihilation is not limited to Egypt; see for example Jeremiah 51:34 (Noegel 2010: 38).

<sup>60</sup> Strawn 2001; 2005; 2009; also Way 2006: 33–34.

104: 21–22; Job 38: 39–40), as punishing tools of Yahweh (1 Kings 13; II Kings 17: 25–26; Isa. 15:9 etc.), and as divine beings with leonine aspects that serve Yahweh (Ezek. 1:10; 1 Kings. 7:29, etc.).<sup>61</sup> Strawn has suggested that Yahweh may be termed “a Lion-God”, and that the biblical concept of Yahweh as a “Lion God” originates from ancient Near Eastern objects depicting lions. However, the biblical verses do not necessarily need to be understood as turning Yahweh into “a Lion-God” in any literal sense. They can be interpreted as figurative speech, which uses the lion imagery to demonstrate characteristics of God. Yahweh devours his enemies *like* a lion or roars *like* one; this does not mean that he was thought of as having the shape of a lion. As Strawn stresses, the “leonine aspects” of Yahweh are often found in prophetic literature.<sup>62</sup> Lion imagery in this literature is likely not based on iconographic sources (material objects), but on real, living lions, since, as we have seen, material representation of lions is rare in Iron Age II Judah.

Another recent study identified the image of a lion, when a single motif on stamps from Judah, as an attribute of Yahweh. This was based on the Hebrew seal with a lion motif found in the Western Wall plaza excavations, and on a few other seals found elsewhere.<sup>63</sup> Ornan et al. identified other Judean seal motifs—the two-winged disc, the four-winged beetle, and the winged *uraeus* as Yahwistic emblems. The *uraeus* depicted not Yahweh himself but a member of his entourage, perhaps the שרף mentioned in biblical sources (Isa. 6:2, etc.).<sup>64</sup> Others identify the Cherubim in the Jerusalem Temple (whether guardians or throne bearers) as winged lion creatures.<sup>65</sup>

Lions are extremely rare in seals from Iron Age Jerusalem in particular and from Judah as a whole.<sup>66</sup> They are also rare as clay figurines, though figurines of horses, or of horses and riders are common.<sup>67</sup> The seals with lions, some of which relate to monarchy (like the seal of *sm' 'bd Yrb 'm* from Megiddo), can also be interpreted as royal symbols. Given Yahweh's central religious position in Judah (for example, as seen from private names), if the lion was his symbol, we would expect that more leonine objects and motifs would appear

<sup>61</sup> In some verses Yahweh appears as a lion-hunter (Ezek. 12:13, 17:20)—such a role hardly fits a “Lion God”.

<sup>62</sup> Strawn 2005: 25–26; 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Ornan et al. 2012: 5–7\*, Fig. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ornan et al. 2012: 8\*; cf. Keel 1977: 74–79.

<sup>65</sup> Wood 2008, with references; see also Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 188, 190–191.

<sup>66</sup> Ornan et al. 2012: 1\*, n. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Bürge 2013: 527.

over a wider variety of media. This complex question requires a separate discussion. However, concerning the two lion figurines from the Western Wall Plaza, we do not think that they are images or symbols of Yahweh.

## CONCLUSIONS

We suggest that the two Western Wall Plaza figurines depict lions. As scholars of iconography we often see objects as symbols that point to a higher, deeper reality, which we want to decipher. In this case, we suggest that the signified and the signifier are similar. Namely, the lion clay figurines refer to living wild lions, not to a divinity.

What could be the meaning and function of such lion figurines? Why were they manufactured and how were they used?<sup>68</sup> We can suggest some possibilities, but the lack of direct data bearing on these questions prevents definite answers. The figurines could refer to a scene from a folkloristic story, which did not survive in writing. They could refer to situations in daily life. Figurines that depict daily-life scenes appear in Phoenician and Cypriote contexts (women grinding wheat or washing), but we do not know their functions. Lion figurines could be used in rituals, for example to protect herds against wild animals.

Lions are not entirely out of place in the figurine assemblage of Judah, since figurines of other wild animals are found, though rarely. Suggested identifications include hyena, hippopotamus, deer, ibex, gazelle, ostrich, elephant, and bear.<sup>69</sup> Such rarely portrayed wild animals are not likely to be emblems or representations of deities in Judah (as also rarely portrayed domestic animals, like dogs and camels).<sup>70</sup> Similarly, there is no compelling reason why the present lion figurines should be seen in this role.

After researching lion figurines from ancient Judah, one can easily identify leonine features elsewhere (**Fig. 14**). The features that enable us to identify the ancient figurines as lions are apparent here too.

<sup>68</sup> On possible meanings of clay figurines, including magical figures and toys see Voigt 1984: 186–187.

<sup>69</sup> Gilbert-Peretz 1996: various Type B1 subtypes, Fig. 14: 8–11, 13–17; Pls. 5: 6–9, 11–15, 17–18; Holland 1975: 251, 254–255.

<sup>70</sup> Holland 1975: 252–253.

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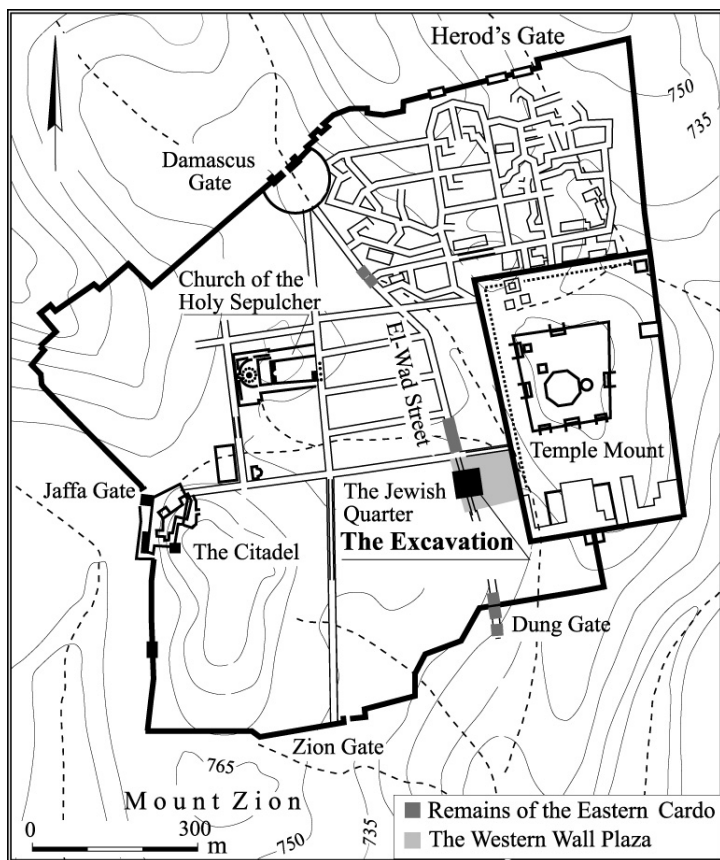
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## FIGURES



**Fig. 1.** The Western Wall Plaza Excavations – location map (drawing Natalia Zak).

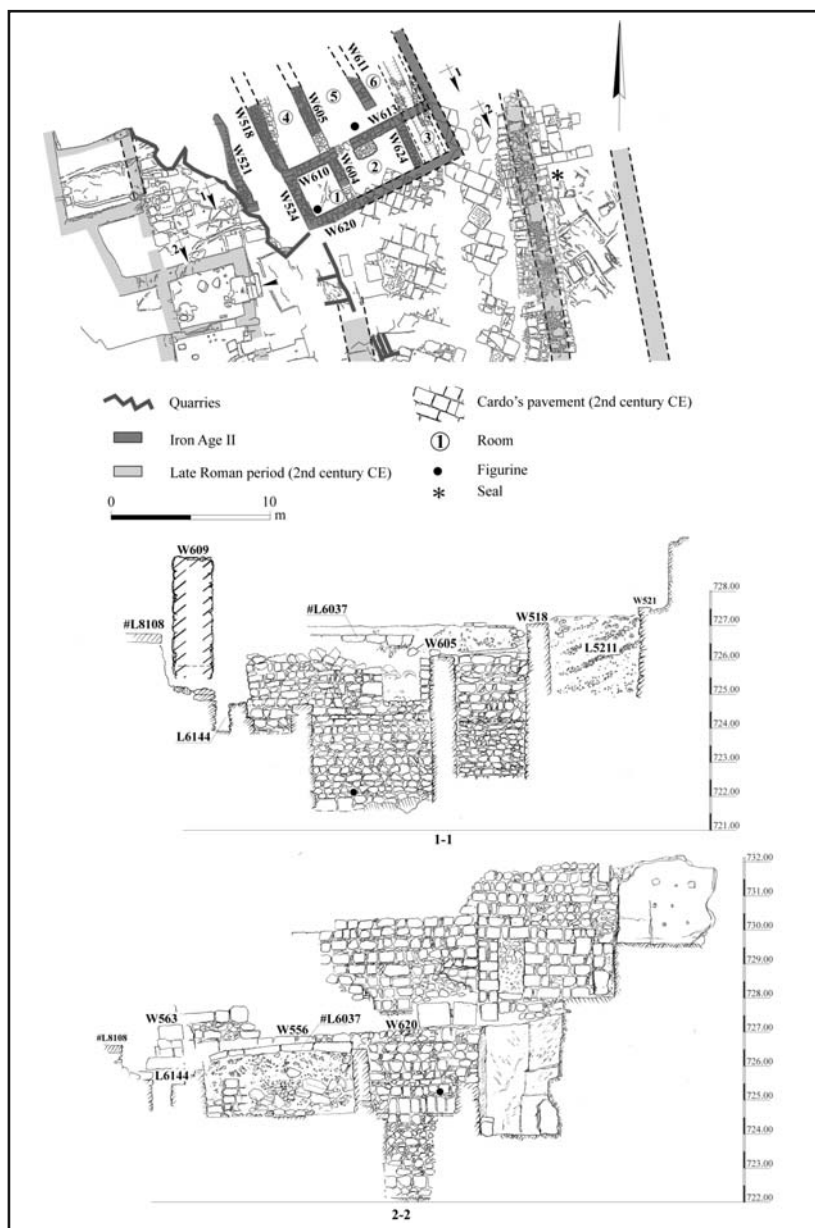


**Fig. 2.** Western Wall Plaza, view northeast in January 2009; the Temple Mount at the right (photo Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).



**Fig. 3.** Western Wall Plaza, view southwest. Iron Age building lower right; Roman eastern cardo left (photo Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

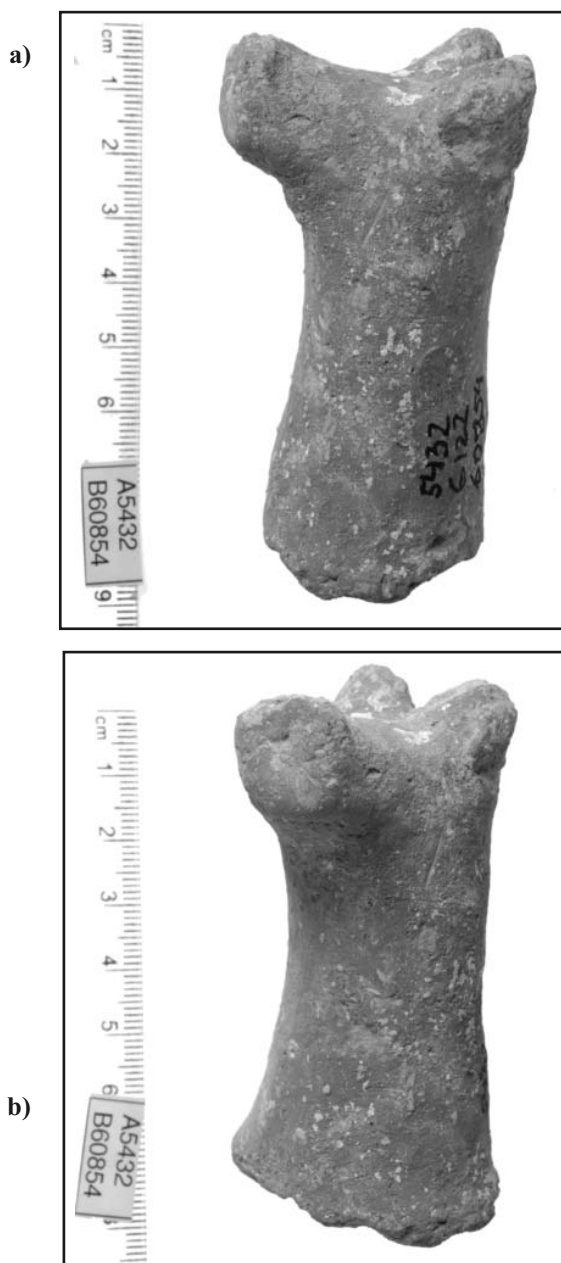




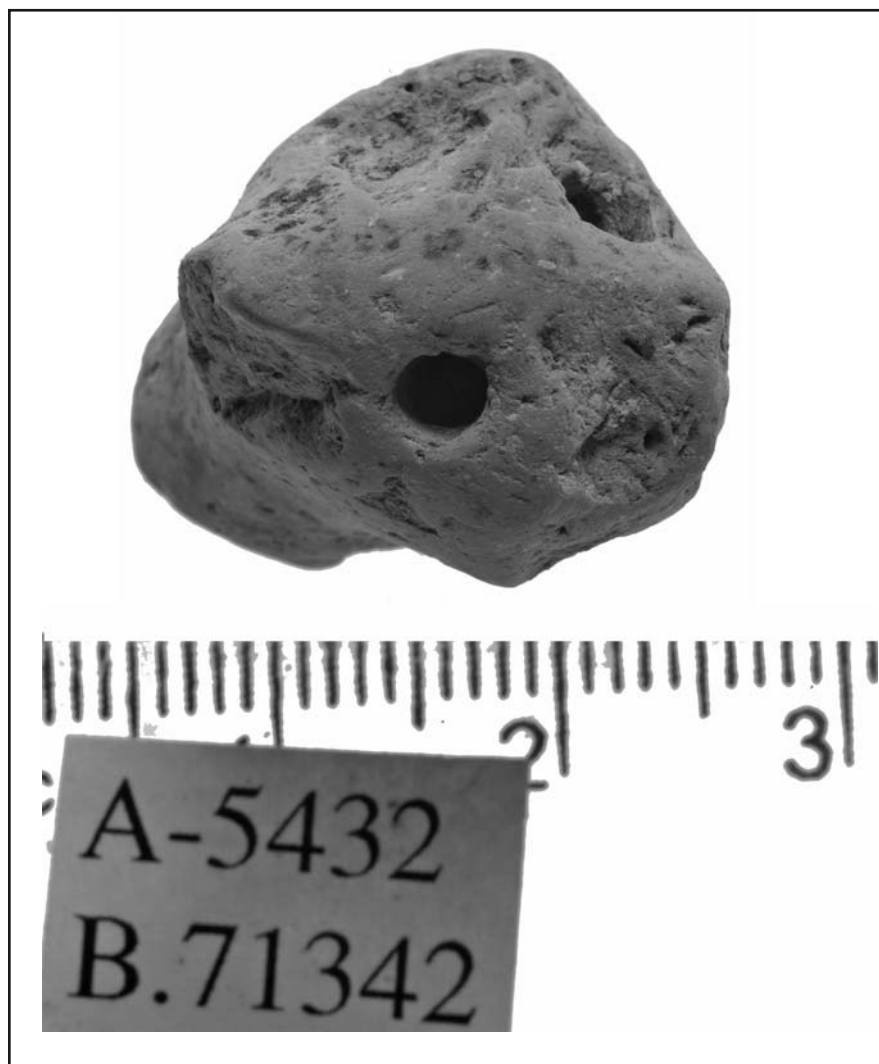
**Fig. 4.** Plan and sections of the Iron Age building (drawing Vadim Essman, Mark Kipnis, Mark Kunin, and Yaakov Shmidov).



**Fig. 5.** Handmade head of Judean Pillar Figurine, Western Wall Plaza B60905; (photo Clara Amit).



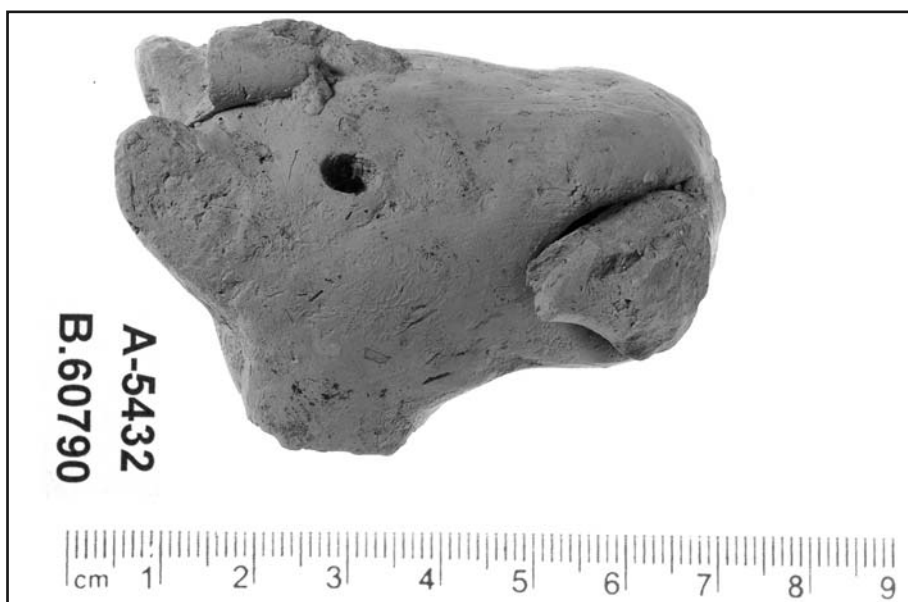
**Fig. 6 (a-b).** Horse Head B60854, Western Wall Plaza (photos Clara Amit).



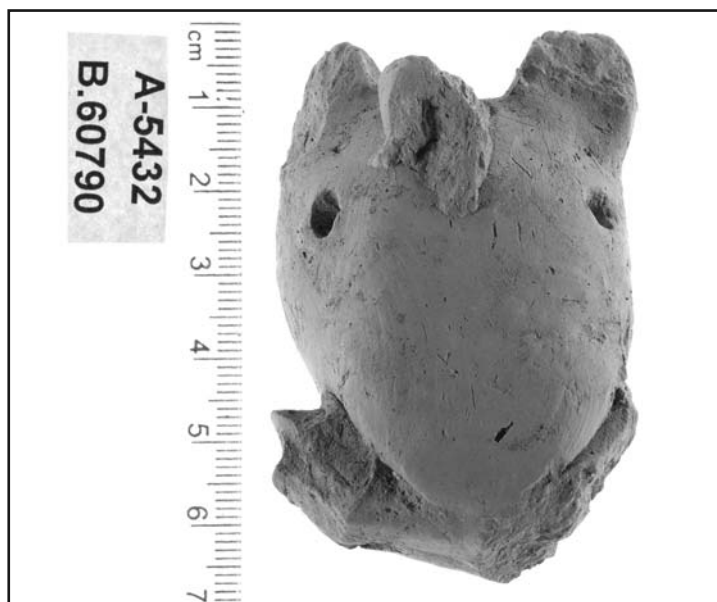
**Fig. 7.** Lion Head B71342 – side (photo Clara Amit).



**Fig. 8.** Lion Head B71342 – front (photo Clara Amit).



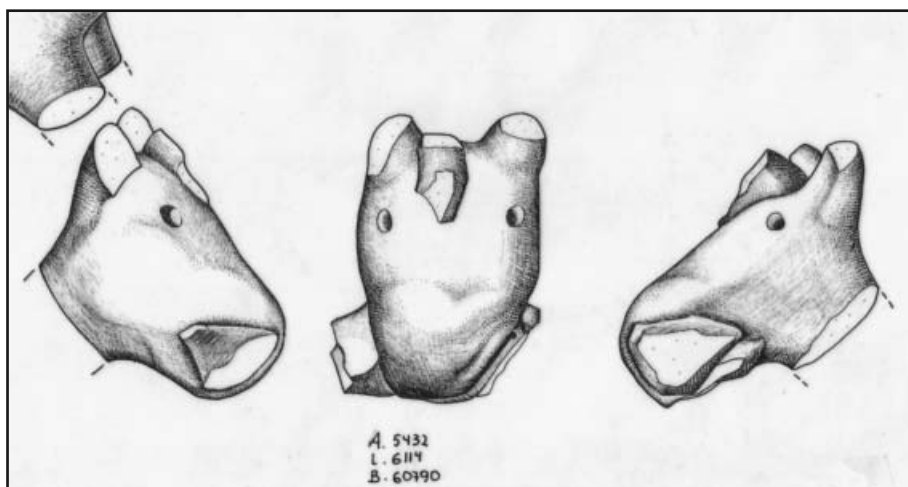
**Fig. 9.** Lion Head B60790 – side (photo Clara Amit).



**Fig. 10.** Lion Head B60790 – front (photo Clara Amit).



**Fig. 11.** Lion Head B60790 – side (photo Clara Amit).



**Fig. 12.** Lion Head B60790 – drawing (by Dalit Weinblat-Krauz).



**Fig. 13.** Lioness, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania (Photo Harvey Barrison, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ngorongoro\\_2012\\_05\\_30\\_2591\\_%287500981960%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ngorongoro_2012_05_30_2591_%287500981960%29.jpg?uselang=en-gb)).



Fig. 14. Lion heads, Chinatown, San Francisco (photo Raz Kletter).