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Chapter One

**Jewish Purity Practices
in Roman Judea:
The Evidence of
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Jewish Purity Practices in Roman Judea: The Evidence of Archaeology

By: Yonatan Adler

One of the outstanding characteristics of Jewish religious practice during the late Second Temple period (first century BCE until 70 CE) was a marked preoccupation with the ritual purity laws found in the Torah. Concentrated in the Priestly Code (mostly in Lev 11–15 and Num 19), these laws relate to numerous sources of ritual impurity, such as male and female genital discharges, various skin diseases, as well as human and certain animal corpses. In the literature penned during this period, including the Biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and the works of Philo and Flavius Josephus, we find frequent references to these laws and the ways they were implemented practically by various Jewish groups.



Above Left: Mikveh near the Temple Mount, Jerusalem. All figures courtesy of Yonatan Adler except where otherwise noted. Above Right: Mikveh at Qumran

Continued interest in ritual purity law, to one extent or another, is evidenced throughout the rabbinic literature of the Roman and Byzantine periods. Conflicting interpretations of the details of these laws played a major role in the sectarian schisms that characterized the period, with groups such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, the Qumran sect, the nascent Jesus movement, the rabbis and commoners all staking out positions on the specifics of how these laws were to be practically observed.

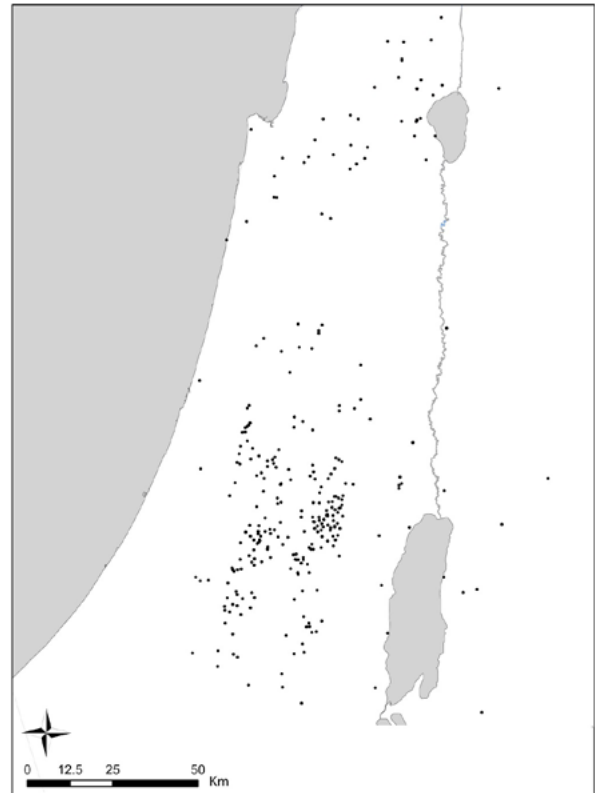


Above: Mikveh at Magdala

Until recently, the literary sources were our only window onto ancient Jewish purity practices. Today, the texts have been supplemented by a plethora of archaeological finds which provide evidence for the centrality of ritual purity observance in the daily lives of Jews throughout Judea during the Roman period. Chief amongst these finds are stepped water installations which served as ritual baths (Hebrew: *mikva'ot*; singular: *mikveh*) for the purification of ritually impure people, clothing and vessels. The earliest *mikva'ot* date to the Hasmonean period, from around the beginning of the first century BCE. Baths definitively dating to this early stage have been found in Jerusalem, Jericho and Qumran. The Early Roman period (63 BCE–135 CE) witnessed a surge in the number of ritual baths throughout the country, with the vast majority discovered to date (over seven hundred) deriving from the period spanning from the first century BCE until the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–135 CE.

Ritual baths from this period have been discovered at dozens of sites throughout Israel, from the Upper Galilee and the Golan in the north, to the Beersheba valley in the south, as well as at a number of sites in Jordan. Not surprisingly, the largest concentration of ritual baths dating to the Early Roman period has been found at

Jerusalem, where approximately 170 baths have been uncovered to date. The phenomenon is hardly one unique to Jerusalem, however, as hundreds of ritual baths dating to the Early Roman period have been uncovered at dozens of rural settlement sites in the Judean countryside. Often numerous baths have been found at a single site, even in relatively small villages or farmsteads, a phenomenon which highlights the important role that ritual immersion played in the daily lives of Jews during this period.



Above Left: Mikveh at Qumran. Above Right: Distribution of sites with finds of ancient ritual baths.

The heyday of *mikva'ot* continued far beyond the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 CE, with continued construction and large-scale usage of these installations at least until the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132 CE. Ritual baths postdating the Bar Kokhba rebellion have been found at numerous sites throughout Israel, although in far fewer numbers than those from the Early Roman period.

Most ritual baths were located in residential contexts, in the basement or ground floor of houses as well as in shared domestic courtyards. The phenomenon of ritual baths installed in private homes was prevalent across the entire socioeconomic gamut, from

simple dwellings in rural villages to lavish mansions such as those found in the Upper City of Jerusalem and the royal palaces of the Hasmoneans and of Herod the Great. Numerous ritual baths have been found near entrances to the Temple Mount, in close proximity to the Huldah Gates in the southern wall and Robinson's Arch and Wilson's Arch in the western wall. These were apparently public ritual baths, intended for the use of the multitude of pilgrims who visited the Temple on the festivals and throughout the year and required purificatory immersion prior to entering the sacred realms of the Temple.



Above Left: Chalkstone vessels on display at the Old Jaffa Museum of Antiquities. Above Right: Large chalkstone jars, Jerusalem (Photo © Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Avraham Hay)

A number of ritual baths have been found adjacent to winepresses and oil-presses, and were apparently used by agricultural laborers in order to insure the ritual purity of the wine and oil that were produced at these installations. Several ritual baths have been found located adjacent to burial caves, and were apparently used after the burial ceremony for the purification of funerary participants who had contracted corpse-impurity.

Another important archaeological phenomenon that points to the observance of ritual purity regulations is the widespread use of chalkstone vessels. The practice is based on the conception that stone is a material impervious to ritual impurity. According to the Priestly Code, vessels may be rendered impure upon contact with certain sources of ritual impurity, however in some instances a distinction is drawn between vessels made of different materials: wood, cloth, leather and sackcloth are to be purified through

immersion in water (Lev 11:32), while earthen vessels are to be broken (Lev 11:33, 15:12). Other materials singled out for purification through ablutions are: gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin and lead (Num 31:22–23).



Above Left: Chalkstone mug (Photo © The Israel Museum, by Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon, Canadian Museum of Civilization). Above Right: 2016 Excavations at ‘Einot Amitai, a chalkstone vessel workshop in Galilee.

The status of vessels made of stone (such as grinding implements usually made of basalt or other hard rock) is nowhere apparent from these sources. Throughout the rabbinic literature, on the other hand, we find that the rabbis assumed that stone vessels cannot contract ritual impurity and, as such, never have any need for purification. This understanding appears to lie behind the explanation found in the Gospel of John (2:6) that the stone water jars featuring in the wedding at Cana narrative were associated with “Jewish rites of purification.”



During the Early Roman period, various types of vessels made of chalkstone, serving as both domestic tableware and storage containers for food and liquids, were in widespread use at Jewish sites throughout Judea, supplementing the usual repertoire of ceramic vessels. These include hand-carved bowls, mugs basins and platters, as well as lathe-turned bowls, trays, goblets, stoppers, spice bowls and inkwells. Less common are are kraters, tall barrel-shaped jars standing on a single leg and generally measuring 65 to 80 cm in height and 40 to 50 cm in diameter. Kraters were produced on a large lathe and were probably used as storage containers for food and liquids.

Chalkstone vessels first appear in the archaeological record during the second half of the first century BCE, and continued to enjoy widespread popularity until the quelling of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE, after which the phenomenon almost completely disappears from the archaeological record. Chalkstone vessels have been found at over 250 sites throughout Israel and Jordan. The phenomenon is a uniquely Jewish one, however, as remains of these utensils are conspicuously absent from non-Jewish sites.

Chalkstone quarries and workshops for the production of these vessels have been excavated at Jebel Mukabbir to the south of Jerusalem, at Hizma, Mt. Scopus and Tell el-Ful to the north of the city, and at Bethlehem of Galilee in the North of the country. Currently, I am directing excavations at two additional chalkstone vessel production sites located near Nazareth in Galilee—‘Einot Amitai and Reina.

Along with *mikva’ot*, the chalkstone quarries and workshops reflect the surprising extent to which the economy and landscape were dedicated to the concept of purity.

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Chapter Two

Shulgi, King of Cleveland: Ask a Near Eastern Professional

Shulgi, King of Cleveland: Ask a Near Eastern Professional

By: Alex Joffe



Image of Shulgi. Courtesy
of William F. Romain.

William F. Romain writes:

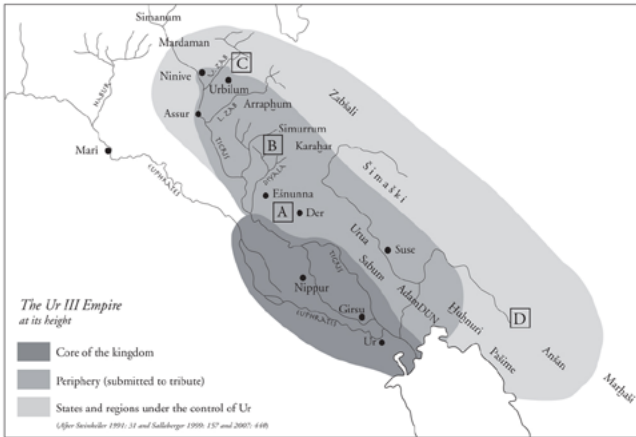
While at the Cleveland Museum of Art I came across this sculpture purporting to be Shulgi, king of Ur. On loan by anonymous donor. No information as to where it was found or by who is on file at the museum. No Near East curator - position is currently vacant.

What do you think? Seen it before? Real deal?

Introducing, Shulgi

Shulgi, the second king of the Third Dynasty of Ur, reigned for an extraordinary 48 years, from around 2029 -1982 BCE. This is not quite the 82 years of [Sobhuze II of Swaziland](#) (who ascended the throne when he was four months old) but still respectable for someone born in an era when total life expectancy was only 40 or 50 years to begin with.

Shulgi's father, Ur-Nammu, created a territorial state that controlled most of southern Mesopotamia. The dynasty is best known for its ambitious construction projects, including the famous ziggurat at Ur, constant warfare, and a seemingly fanatical devotion to centralization and bureaucracy. The region's city-states were reorganized into territories under governors to extract taxes in grain, livestock, and other products to finance state projects, such as irrigations works and, of course, wars.



Above Left: Map of Ur III – Photo Credit: Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative.



Above Right: Ur-Nammu's ziggurat at Ur – Photo Credit: Hardnfast via Wiki Commons

Goods had to be moved continually through collection and distribution centers; an army of scribes kept track. Over 100,000 published cuneiform tablets document just about everything down to the number of shovels signed out to work gangs. Dates were carefully recorded using names of years derived from important political events, such as “[Year in which Amar-Suen destroyed Urbilum](#),” facts that meant something to scribes, as well as to residents of Urbilum.



Above Left: Ur III tablet Ashmolean 1911-197.



Above Right: Tablet recording the receipt of goats – Photo Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The crazy level of detail is wonderful for scholars since individuals and transactions can often be traced in amazing detail. The crazy levels of taxation and bureaucratic control the dynasty exerted over people's lives probably wasn't so great. Still, it is [fascinating to learn](#), for example, that starting in Shulgi's 43rd year, the prince Ur-Sin

had two bear cubs delivered from mountains in the north to an entertainer in the south in the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and first months of every year.



Stele of Ur-Nammu. Photo credit: theancientneareast.com

Given this level of royal domination of seemingly everything, including bears, it figures that Ur-Nammu is credited with Mesopotamia's first 'law code,' a forerunner of Hammurabi's a few hundred years later. This is basically royal propaganda that declared how great Ur-Nammu was, how the gods gave him kingship, and oh, they've also put me in charge of justice, so don't murder, steal or rape.

Speaking of royal propaganda, Ur-Nammu declared himself "king of Ur," then "king of Sumer and Akkad." Shulgi topped this with "king of the four quarters," (aka the world), and then half way through his reign essentially has himself declared a god. Whether this is a sign of strength or weakness is a matter of debate. Since he may have been murdered, along with several queens and sons, including bear aficionado Ur-Sin, this is more than an academic question. At least it was for him.

The whole dynasty lasted about a hundred years; weakened by wars with mountain tribes, an attack by the Elamites knocked them out for good. But one advantage of such a long life span was that flunky-scribes wrote [excellent poems about Shulgi](#):

When I sprang up, muscular as a young lion, galloping like a spirited ass at full gallop, the favour of An brought me joy; to my delight Enlil spoke favourably about me, and they gave me the sceptre because of my righteousness. I place my foot on the neck of the foreign lands; the fame of my weapons is established as far as the south, and my victory is established in the highlands.

Shyness was not one of Shulgi's problems. As he put it, "Let me boast of what I have done. The fame of my power is spread far and wide. My wisdom is full of subtlety. Do not my achievements surpass all qualifications?"

Little did he realize that in the 21st century CE he would become the King of Cleveland.

When I first saw Shulgi...

This should be the title of a song, and if the poem praising him is any indication, he probably had a couple of songs written about him as well. But what about his head?

There happens to be a fair amount of representative art from the Ur III period; a few copper foundation pegs of Ur-Nammu and Shulgi, buried during the construction of temples, lots of [cylinder seals](#), and of course, Ur-Nammu's famous stele. A head of Shulgi would be an especially interesting and prized item.



Above Left: Foundation figure of Ur-Namma holding a basket, ca. 2112–2095 B.C.

Neo-Sumerian, Ur III Copper alloy; H. 27.3 cm (10 3/4 in.) Photo Credit:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Above Right: Seated statue of Gudea – Photo Credit: Wiki Commons

Late third millennium Mesopotamian sculpture had many conventions. Eyes are usually almond shaped with thick upper and lower lids. Sculpted heads of Gudea, a ruler of Lagash about a century before Shulgi, for example, have eyebrows that converge above the nose, often with 'feathering' to represent hair. Badly in need of threading by today's standards, eyebrows look like palm branches. Without painted in eyes, expressions are impassive, almost awestruck (apparently they're in the presence of the deity). Beards are rare among Sumerians but common for Akkadians, who fancied the [lumbersexual](#) look. Sumerians dug hipster style woven caps or equally hip shaven heads (whether there really were 'Sumerians' we'll leave for another time).



Above Left: Head of Sargon or Naram-Sin – Photo Credit: Ancient History Encyclopedia.

Above Right: Head of Gudea – Photo Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Frankly, Shulgi didn't look quite right to me. The eyes are strange, with multiple eyebrow lines and faded 'feathering' on his outer left eyebrow only. The nose is large, and ears are both large and badly rendered. The bulbous shape of the skull reminded me of Old Kingdom Egyptian heads. And the stone is quartz. Good quality stone for sculpture was rare in ancient Mesopotamia; hard to carve crystalline quartz, rather than

easily polished diorite or schist (for that shiny shaven head look) seemed odd. Overall, his expression is rather [gormless](#), like someone who has confidently gotten off at the wrong bus stop and suddenly has no idea where he is.

To me, the Shulgi of Cleveland looks like the product of someone working from old black and white pictures. So I turned to retired Metropolitan Museum curator and ancient Near Eastern art expert, Oscar Muscarella.

It didn't take long for him to get back to me, with a reference to an "Early Dynastic Sumerian" head, published in his book [The Lie Became Great](#) (page 164, No 33, photo on page 477): "It is not difficult to recognize as modern a large head once in the Chrysler Art Museum, Virginia, but subsequently passed back into the bazaar, where it is now circulating." When I described my misgivings, he agreed with me.

Why identify this uninscribed object as Shulgi, rather than Gudea? I sent the photo to Mesopotamian art expert (and scholar of fakes and forgeries) Claudia Suter, who noted "The overall shape looks modern to me, the upper part is too high and too naturalistic; the chin, if Gudea, is not pronounced enough; the lips too round; and the eyebrows definitely unlike the excavated heads of Gudea's time. Heads are, of course, sought after objects for collectors and there is a history of fakes around the Gudea sculptures."

A third expert was similarly suspicious, but a fourth and fifth were more cautious. Of course, none of this conclusively proved the head is a forgery, but it raised some doubts. That the piece came from the antiquities market makes it more suspicious still. Alas, the Chrysler Museum couldn't provide more information; their files only go back to 1990.

When Walter Met Shulgi

Like many collectors [Walter Chrysler, Jr.](#) (son of the car manufacturer) was more eager than discerning. One early misjudgment was when, as a fourteen year old at boarding school, he bought and displayed a nude by Renoir, which was promptly confiscated and destroyed by the administration.



Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.
Photo Credit: chrysler.org

A sometime film and theatrical producer, friend of Nelson Rockefeller and neighbor of Louis Tiffany, [Chrysler seemed destined to collect and display art](#). In 1958 he bought a disused church in Provincetown, Massachusetts and created a museum, but in 1962, [close to 100 of his paintings](#) were accused of being fakes. By the time he opened his museum again in Norfolk in 1971, the fakes were gone.

There didn't appear to be any information available about where Chrysler bought Shulgi, nor any published images of whoever he was back then. But at some point it appears that after being suspected as a forgery, Shulgi was quietly removed from view and sold off. Unlike boarding

school administrators, [museums are loath to destroy any art – good, bad, or fake - and law enforcement officials don't have the resources](#). Pieces also have a way of reappearing years later on the market with new stories for new buyers.

An entry in the Federal Register gave a hint: on August 10, 2015, the Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the Office of the Legal Adviser of the Department of State recognized Shulgi as being of “[cultural significance](#)” and permitted him into the country, to be exhibited until March 2017. It is unclear what sort of background check Shulgi underwent before his visit was deemed as being “in the national interest.” Nor did it say where he was visiting from.

The Name is Shulgi. King Shulgi.

The Cleveland museum curator did not respond to my query, but one Friday night, the ‘art advisor’ to the current owner did. Without indicating who the owner is he simply said “I can refer you to the review of the sculpture by the distinguished scientific panel who included the same in their exhibition: “ANTES DEL DILUVIO/ BEFORE THE FLOOD”: MESOPOTAMIA 3500-2100, Poligrafia 2012. FUNDACION “LA CAIXA”, BARCELONA. King Shulgi is illustrated in the catalog.”

“Review” implied that ‘King Shulgi,’ who was lent to the Madrid show by the ‘Colecciones Burzaco,’ had been examined or even authenticated. The problem is the scholars [listed in the show’s press release](#) as the “distinguished scientific panel” were simply distinguished museum curators who lent objects for this 2012-2013 show. Three of them informed me that they did not “review” or offer any opinion about Shulgi. More emails were sent. The ‘art advisor’ stood by his statement and had nothing further to add.



Shulgi on display in Madrid – Photo Credit:
Pedro Azara via hoyesarte.com

But even later *the next night* I got an email from the curator of the Madrid exhibition, Pedro Azara. And at this point in what has become a soft-boiled detective story, I have to express special thanks, for it was he, writing from Iran, who began to clear up the story.

According to Azara, Shulgi entered the US early in the 20th century but hadn’t been exhibited since 1956. By 2011, however, he was owned by a Mexican banker, M. Burzaco Malo, with residences in Spain and London, and was being exhibited at the Palace Hotel in Madrid and had been viewed, but not purchased, by the wife of the ruler of Qatar.

Azara included the piece in his exhibition “because it would disappeared from the public eye and we considered that it should be studied by historians due to its so strange appearance... to my surprise, there were not many reactions. It did not attract any interest, or at least no one told me anything. I did not know whether the head was genuine or not. I was surprised by it. I thought it could be a fake but I was not sure. I was expecting so the opinion of specialists. I am happy that after four almost five years there might be a solution to the problem caused by the head.”

In other words, the head was exhibited precisely because it was suspicious. Indeed, in the exhibition catalog, Oscar Muscarella’s book, and doubts, are cited! But who was he, really, this ‘King Shulgi’? Azara notes, as did the catalog, that the head had

previously been identified as Gudea but that the late Iraq archaeologist Donny George had revised this to Shulgi. But since George died in 2011, we are unlikely to know his reasoning.

As Paul Simon once put it, “[misinformation followed us like a plague](#),” something inherent with objects from the marketplace. And mysteries indeed remain, like the full story of Gudea/Shulgi’s sojourn in the US, and a ‘positive analysis’ of his patina by the University of Georgia’s Geology Department. This was mentioned in a short, scathing review of *The Lie Became Great* (kindly brought to my attention by another member of the “distinguished scientific panel”) in which an eminent and deceased Assyriologist – who was also noted for his work authenticating antiquities for the marketplace - essentially vouches for the object.

More could be done. Microscopic examination might determine whether or not Shulgi was carved with Bronze Age tools. His quartz might be chemically analyzed to determine its source, and three-dimensional scans could compare him mathematically with excavated sculpture (let’s call it ‘high resolution digital forensic phrenology’ or HRDFP for short). If established as a fake, a molecular tag could track him, like a con’s ankle monitor. Most likely he’ll just skip the country.

The lesson? Due diligence is always required. Before you buy the steak, be suspicious of the sizzle.

Alex Joffe is the editor of the Ancient Near East Today. Have a question you would like a Near East professional to answer? Send your question to Alex Joffe at theancientneareasttoday@gmail.com.



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Chapter Three

‘Invaders of Obscure Race?’ Understanding the Hyksos

‘Invaders of Obscure Race?’

Understanding the Hyksos

By: Anna-Latifa Mourad

From the time of the first pharaoh, ancient Egyptian civilization saw over a thousand years of unbroken development, with dynasty after dynasty of divine kings building pyramids and overseeing the growth of a rich culture. But after this ‘classical age’ of the Old Kingdom, toward the end of the third millennium BCE, Egypt faltered and splintered into separate realms. Then, in the early second millennium, it experienced something unprecedented: foreign rule by the ‘Hyksos.’ Their origins and impact on Egypt are deeply controversial issues, clouded by the bitterness of Egypt’s own memories.

Manetho

The term ‘Hyksos’ has its origins in the works of third century BCE Egyptian priest, Manetho, quoted by later writers like Josephus. Despite their late date, these Greek works formed the basis of inquiry into the Hyksos for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries CE. Thus, we learn that

... unexpectedly, from the regions of the East, invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they easily seized it without striking a blow... Their race as a whole was called Hyksos, that is ‘king-shepherds’...

Manetho, *Aegyptiaca*, frag. 42, 1.75-83

The Hyksos apparently destroyed cities and temples, massacred locals, and placed one of their own as king and founder of the Fifteenth Dynasty. Tribute was levied from the Egyptians, and the citadel of Avaris, fortified with both men and high walls, was built in the Delta. The Hyksos became associated with ruthless invaders who forced control over Egypt.



Figure 1. 'Aam' men in a procession of Asiatics. The first on the right is labelled 'heqa khaset', 'ruler of a foreign land'. The tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan, Dynasty 12. Image courtesy of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (photograph by Effy Alexakis).



Figure 2. 'Aam' people in a procession of Asiatics. The tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan, Dynasty 12. Image courtesy of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (photograph by Effy Alexakis).



Figure 3. A 'Aamet' woman with the Egyptian name Senebheqa. Stela of the Egyptian 'overseer of the treasury', Senebsuma, Dynasty 13. After H. de Meulenaere, 'Les monuments d'un haut dignitaire de la 13e dynastie', CdE 40 (1985), fig. 1 (drawn by Anna-Latifa Mourad).

Egyptian Records

Agreeing with Manetho's perception are texts from the Seventeenth Dynasty (contemporary with the Fifteenth, dating ca. 1650-1550 BCE), and from the subsequent Eighteenth Dynasty. A leader from the southern city of Thebes, Kamose, evidently mounted a campaign to expel the foreigners from Egypt. He designates the Hyksos king and his people as an 'Aam' group who had desecrated the land. Their king was titled '*heqa ny Retjenu*', 'ruler of Retjenu', and his city, Avaris, was described with high walls and harbours docked with 300 cedar ships filled with a plethora of goods including gold, silver and 'all the fine products of Retjenu'. Around a century later, Queen Hatshepsut is quoted as having restored what was destroyed during the Hyksos period when the Nile Delta was occupied by the abominable 'Aam' people.

Such texts link the Hyksos with (1) the 'Aam', (2) Retjenu, and (3) a fortified city, known as Avaris, in the Delta. But who were these Aam? Where was Retjenu? And is there truly a city by the name of Avaris?

The term 'Aam' is a well-attested ethnonym that labels individuals from the Levant, the area that currently incorporates Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Translated by Egyptologists as 'Asiatic', the term first appears in the late Old Kingdom, becoming more frequent from the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty (ca. 1900 BCE) in texts naming newly migrated northeasterners as well as those of mixed Egyptian-Levantine origin (see Figures 1-3).

Figure 5. Map of Tell el-Dab'a. After M. Bietak, 'The Impact of Minoan Art on Egypt and the Levant: A Glimpse of Palatial Art from the Naval Base of Peru-nefer at Avaris', in J. Aruz et al. (eds), *Cultures in Contact. From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.* (New York, 2013), fig. 1 (drawn by Anna-Latifa Mourad).

to Third Intermediate Period. Spanning an area of approximately 1200 hectares, the site features administrative districts, palatial complexes, cemeteries, temples and residential sectors that were occupied during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. These occupations included widespread cultural remains that are not wholly Egyptian. Due to the magnitude of this settlement as well as its remains, the city is now identified with Avaris, capital of the Hyksos.

The identification of Avaris has helped illuminate the nature and rule of the elusive Hyksos. Contrary to Manetho, the evidence from Tell el-Dab'a does not point to a sudden invading foreign force. Instead, it suggests that Egyptians founded the site but that foreigners were present from the very beginning of the Middle Kingdom. By

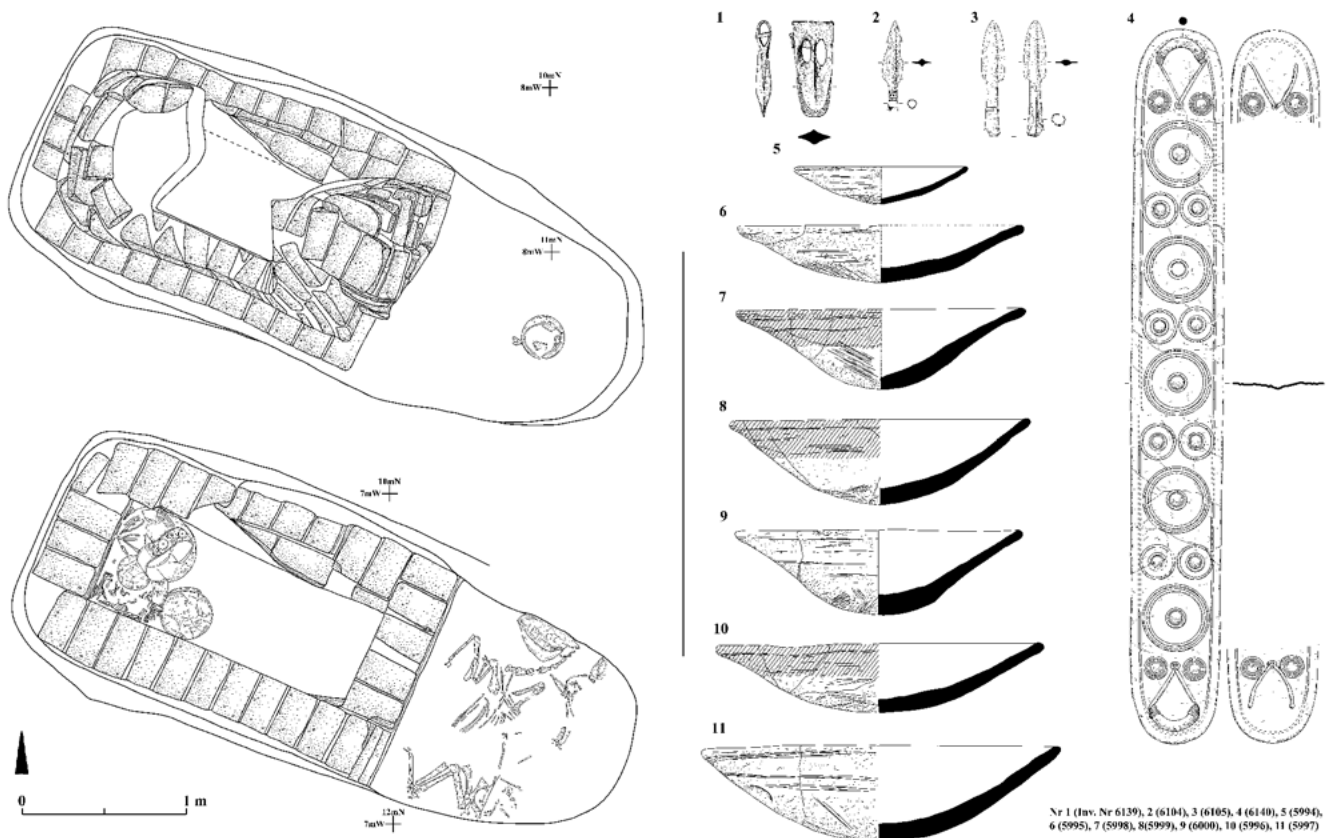


Figure 6. Plan of a tomb and its associated grave goods (not to scale). The burial of a donkey at its entrance is a non-Egyptian funerary custom, while weapons found within follow Levantine styles. Tell el-Dab'a, late Dynasty 12. After R. Schiestl, 'Some Links Between a Late Middle Kingdom Cemetery at Tell el-Dab'a and Syria-Palestine: The Necropolis of F/I, Strata d/2 and d/1 (= H and G/4)', in M Bietak (ed.), *The Middle Bronze Age in the Levant. Proceedings of an International Conference on MBIIA Ceramic Material in Vienna, 24th-26th of January 2001*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie 26 (Vienna, 2002), figs 2-3 (drawn by Anna-Latifa Mourad).

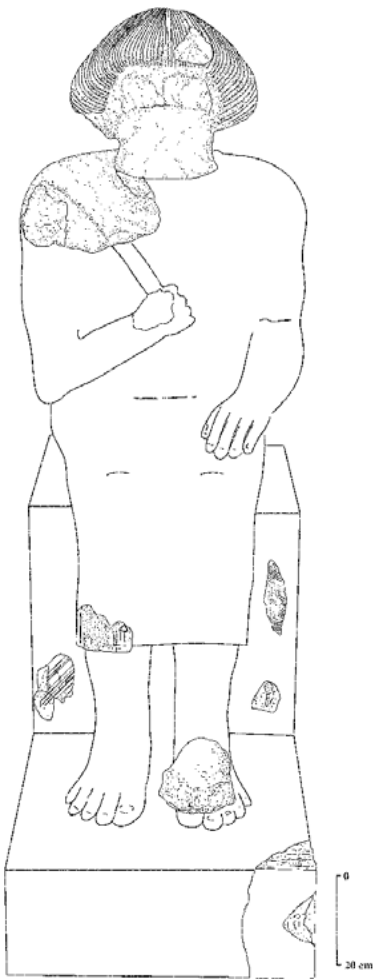


Figure 7. Reconstruction of a statue bearing both Egyptian and Levantine features. Tell el-Dab'a, Dynasty 13. After R. Schiestl, *The Statue of an Asiatic Man from Tell el-Dab'a, Egypt*, *Ä&L* 16 (2006), fig. 2 (drawn by Anna-Latifa Mourad).

the late Twelfth Dynasty, the variety and number of foreign elements increased. Vessels imported from the Levant are found in Egyptian temples and tombs, burials began to include non-Egyptian, Levantine traditions (see Figure 6), and houses were designed with Levantine features. The inhabitants practiced both Egyptian and Levantine customs, signifying that they were (a) a largely Egyptian populace heavily influenced by the Levant; (b) partly of Levantine origin but influenced by the Egyptian culture ('Egyptianised'); or (c) a mixture of both. This 'heterogenous' character evolved into the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Dynasties. The population grew, displaying both hybrid elements that merged Egyptian and Levantine features (see Figure 7), as well as completely new and innovative creations. Pottery of Levantine style was locally made. Temples following Levantine architecture were built and utilised for non-Egyptian rituals. Trade flourished with the Levant, Cyprus and Nubia. By the Fifteenth Dynasty, Tell el-Dab'a was a thriving commercial hub that was controlled by an elite with close ties to the Levant, if not of Levantine origins. Inhabited by a multicultural populace, the metropolis progressed from a harbour town under Egyptian rule to an independent centre and capital of the Hyksos.

Understanding the Hyksos Period

Recent excavations and studies agree with the picture painted by the remains at Avaris. The Twelfth Dynasty itself was likely established and secured with the help of Levantine warriors (see Figure 8). Trade and diplomacy ensued as Egypt imported

a variety of goods from its northeastern neighbours, while Levantine sites, such as Byblos, Sidon, Ashkelon and Tell Ifshar, also received Egyptian commodities. The Levantine elite was even involved with the Egyptians in an expeditionary venture in Sinai that spanned over 20 years (see Figure 9). Such demand for and persistence of Egyptian-Levantine relations led to the growth of Tell el-Dab'a's commercial significance, its lords steadily gaining power and wealth.



Figure 8. A group of Asiatic warriors. The tomb of Amenemhat, Beni Hassan, Dynasty 12. Image courtesy of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (photograph by Effy Alexakis).



Figure 9. An elite Levantine donkey-rider and his entourage, most likely on an expedition to the Sinai. Inscription Nr 405, Serabit el-Khadim, Dynasty 12. After A. H.

These developments not only affected the elite. Finds throughout Egypt point to an increasing number of Asiatics and individuals of Asiatic origin working and residing across the land (see Figure 3). By the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty, many had already been in Egypt for over 100 years, occupying various positions within Egyptian institutions, industries, and households. Migrations into major sites as Tell el-Dab'a also continued as Levantines sought opportunities in the land of Egypt.

As such, the rise of the Hyksos can no longer be seen as an invasion by an 'obscure race.' There was no invasion; rather, people gradually and peacefully entered Egypt throughout the Middle Kingdom. By the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty, native Egyptian administration had weakened, control over the Delta was lost and Egypt became fragmented. In turn, this allowed Tell el-Dab'a's increasingly rich and powerful lords to become independent, establishing the Fifteenth Dynasty. As they provided prosperity and security, the population of their capital increased, the settlement expanded, and additional sites in the Delta were developed, their inhabitants also bearing mixed Egyptian-Levantine traits. The Hyksos became a formidable force in the Mediterranean, managing both local and regional trade across land and sea.

It is, therefore, no surprise that such a force would come into conflict with other emerging powers in the fragmented land of Egypt, particularly one in the south at Thebes. Ultimately the Thebans were victorious, their succeeding rulers misrepresenting the defeated enemy. The Levantine-influenced Hyksos as well as their 'Asiatic' people became the scorn of Egypt: the first 'foreigners' in Egyptian memory



to rule their land, and the first to evidently do so with the support of both locals and foreigners. Despite attempts to cloud their reign, archaeological and historical inquiry will continue to illuminate the true nature of the Fifteenth Dynasty and its cross-cultural attributes, enhancing our knowledge of Egyptian-Levantine affairs, and strengthening our understanding of the Hyksos.

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Chapter Four

Masculinities and Third Gender: Gendered Otherness in the Ancient Near East

Masculinities and Third Gender: Gendered Otherness in the Ancient Near East

By: Ilan Peled

There is a distinct human phenomenon in ancient Near Eastern history: persons who were born males, but under various social and historical circumstances their masculine identity was considered to be ambiguous. These persons can be classified as belonging to a third gender.

How did ancient Near Eastern societies treat cases of deviation from the normative social order, in which people were arranged in two distinct gender categories: masculine and feminine? What was the social status of those who belonged to a different class of gender? What attitude did their surrounding community show them?

Third gender persons comprised distinct groups in society with clearly defined titles. What was the significance of this fact? What were the differences between the various sub-categories of third gender figures? What did they all have in common, beyond their basic relation to the third gender? No less important are historical changes in social attitudes towards this class of people.



Victory stele of Naram-Sin

My book, [Masculinities and Third Gender: the Origins and Nature of an Institutionalized Gender Otherness in the Ancient Near East](#), uses as its framework the theory of hegemonic masculinity, developed by R.W. Connell, which sees ruling social elites consisting of hegemonic men who aspire to suppress women and non-hegemonic men. In light of this theory, the book analyzes the third gender group of persons as belonging to a non-hegemonic group of men. In Mesopotamia, the terms that describe these persons were grouped in numerous lexical lists, which supply us with the frame and boundaries of the research. To a lesser extent, the grouping of these persons is apparent in narrative and literary

compositions. Two aspects of the research are discussed in the book: masculinity, and third gender. Though the two are naturally related, they are by no means identical.

The most notable of these titles were *gala/kalû*, *assinnu*, *kurgarrû* and *lú-sag / ša rēši*. Other similar titles that were documented less frequently were *kulu'u*, *girseqû*, *tīru*, SAG-UR-SAG, *pilpilû*, *nāš pilaqqi*, *sinnišānu* and *parû*. Their sexual and gender ambiguity was realized in numerous and diverse manners. Occasionally, it bore a clear physiological form, in the shape of castration. But mostly, their lack of procreativity constituted another form of gender ambiguity, as it contradicted one of the most important gender functions in the ancient Near East, the siring of offspring.



Ur III / Old Babylonian terracotta plaque of a beardless cult attendant.



Old Babylonian terracotta plaque from Ur of a sexually-ambiguous beardless figure.

The common denominator of all these figures appears to have been a concept of flawed manliness. But effeminacy was not necessarily the key factor, as some of these figures seem to have been rather masculine indeed. For example, two of the goddess Ištar's male most prominent cult attendants were the *assinnu* (written phonetically or in logograms (*lú*) *ur-munus*, literally "man-woman") and the warrior-like *kurgarrû*. Presumably, each was the mirror opposite of the other and represented one of Ištar's

attributes, erotic love and sexuality, and aggressiveness and war. In contrast, *girseqû* and *tîru* were childless males who worked in palace administration. But third gender individuals were not necessarily of low social status. For example, from the third millennium through the first, the *gala/ kalû* was a performer of lamentation songs in the Emesal dialect of Sumerian.



Cuneiform tablet of Old Babylonian Sumerian proverbs mentioning the *gala*.



A Neo-Babylonian kudurru from Uruk. According to the inscription, the beardless person is Ibni-Ištar, *kalû* of Ištar-of-Uruk.

It was sufficient that these persons deviated enough from the customary model of ancient Near Eastern masculinity, in order to be considered as part of this third gender class. The standard model of masculinity in the ancient Near East was exemplified the idealized sexually active party in heterosexual relations; having the ability and intention to sire descendants.

These third gender men were by and large anonymous, known by title and not as private persons. The book does not, therefore, investigate the psychological characteristics of individuals, but rather the sociological phenomenon of title-holders within Mesopotamian society. Arguably, this third gender was a social construct, meant for delineating the social norms typical of the ruling men.

To my understanding, hegemonic masculine men in society used the concepts of “different,” “other”, and “strange” in order to demonstrate and highlight their own characteristics of conformity. These concepts of otherness are essential for demarcating social borders, which, in turn, define patterns of normative conduct.

Identity is defined by its limitations: where it begins and ends, and what exists beyond it. The strange, the extreme and the bizarre signify what common, hegemonic, people are *not*, and therefore mark who common, hegemonic, people actually *are*. These boundaries are constructed by using social mechanisms of norms and prohibitions. In this sense, the third gender figures served social needs of defining norms of conformity. Not only did they form an integral stratum within the structure of their society, in many respects their stratum was highly critical and contributed a great deal to social stability.

The very instability involved with these figures was the chief reason for their existence, and their most important contribution to maintaining order within the society in which they lived. We have to remember, of course, that these forced order and conformity were meant to serve first and foremost the androcentric interests of specific parts of society, the hegemonic masculine ones.

As such, the third gender class – and its formal articulation in Mesopotamian literature and religion - should be viewed as a social mechanism for the enforcement of control and the perpetuation of gender division and male superiority. This is an important lesson for any person living in the 21st century who ponders about social structure and conformity. One wonders how different ancient Mesopotamia actually was in this respect from present-day societies. The similarities, it seems, are at times quite striking.

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