'Atiqot 113, 2023

Archaeology, Purity and Society: Some Methodological Reflections

Eyal Regev[1]

This article examines the assumptions and methodology underlying the correlation between stepped pools and stone vessels and purity laws and practices. It focuses on the way these are interpreted in light of Second Temple period and early rabbinic texts. The article further introduces more complex understandings of the emergence of ritual baths in the Hasmonean period as an expression of Jewish ethnic identity, and the flourishing of ritual baths and stone vessels in the first century CE, as an indication of social individualism.

Keywords: Purity, ritual baths, stone vessels, social archaeology, ethnicity, individualism

Introduction[2]

In 1964, Yigael Yadin excavated a number of small stepped pools on the southern side of Masada. One of them had a perforation that connected it to an adjacent smaller pool without steps. Yadin immediately suggested "that what we had discovered was a ritual immersion bath – *Mikve* in Hebrew," and that "no *mikve* has so far been discovered belonging to this very period, the period when much of the relevant traditional law governing the *mikve* was written and enacted" (Yadin 1966:165–166). Following his announcement of the new discovery, Yadin was visited by ultra-Orthodox Rabbi D. Muntzberg, a specialist in the modern rabbinic laws of *miqwa'ot*, who examined and measured the stepped pool and announced that it matched the minimal size of 40 *se'a* required by rabbinic Halakhah. Yadin was impressed, albeit somewhat cynical. He noted that "spiritually, these people (Rabbi Muntzberg and his associates who climbed with him to Masada) had been deeply stirred by what apparently was a very humble structure." Yadin did, however, acknowledge the significance of this discovery, remarking that "according to Jewish religious law, such

[1] Prof. Eyal Regev, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan.

[2] I would like to thank the editors for the invitation to write this article, and to the reviewers for their comments. Since the second part of the article relies on chapters 1 and 2 of my book (Regev 2023:10-50), the discussion of the archaeological and textual evidence and the references to relevant scholarship are reduced to a minimum.

a bath, without which no Orthodox Jew could live, particularly in those days…" (Yadin 1966:166).

Yadin interpreted the stepped pools at Masada through an anachronistic correlation to modern ritual baths and (modern) rabbinic Halakhah. He further stressed the historical significance of this finding: "the defenders of Masada were devout Jews… even here, on dry Masada, they had gone to the arduous lengths of building these ritual baths in scrupulous conformity with the injunctions of traditional Jewish law" (Yadin 1966: 167).

Despite the anachronism, Yadin's association of Masada's stepped pools with rabbinic law became a consensus in archaeological scholarship: we think of Second Temple stepped pools as an ancient example of current *miqwa'ot* according to rabbinic Halakhah. From a methodological perspective, cultural correlations between different civilizations and different periods (e.g., Bar-Yosef and Ayalon 2001), or diachronic cross-cultural comparisons (Peregrine 2004), are legitimate methods in archaeological research. Nonetheless, Yadin and other scholars, who identified stepped pools as ritual baths following rabbinic Halakhah, do not seem to have been aware of such methodological concerns. They simply identified more or less the same installation despite a gap of virtually 2000 years.[3] This is only but one example of the methodological and conceptual complexity of the archaeology of purity.

Purity and impurity were of great concern in ancient Judaism. Since the 1980s, there has been a great deal of interest in this field, including from scholars of the Hebrew Bible, the Second Temple period and rabbinic Halakhah (see the survey in Rogan 2018). One reason for the growing interest was the publication of many documents from Qumran pertaining to purity regulations, including the Temple Scroll and 4QMiqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah (e.g., Regev 2003; Werrett 2007). This interest also aligns with the many dozens of ritual baths unearthed in recent years, including in salvage excavations, which required explanation.

In this article, I introduce some methodological considerations on how archaeological evidence of ritual baths and stone vessels from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods may be understood, and present my own approach to the challenge relating to ritual baths and stone vessels in the late Second Temple period. I will present a chain of assumptions and questions leading from the excavated artifacts to the historical and social conclusions that may be drawn from them. Simply put, these methodological concerns are as follows: What was the function of the installations and the artifacts in relation to purity/impurity? How do we correlate these findings to (mainly early rabbinic) texts? How do we correlate these findings with other findings? How do we correlate artifacts and texts with social phenomena?

My main argument is that the correlation between the archaeological artifacts and the topic of purity and impurity—whether related to specific practices, laws or to a more complex system of religious and social phenomena—is based upon a chain of interpretations. Nothing is obvious, and almost nothing is certain. This makes the entire field more interesting, with potential for new research.

[3] On Yadin's use of modern Halakhah to interpret ritual baths, see Miller 2019:17–18.

Stepped Pools and Stone Vessels in Relation to Purity Practices

Often, when an excavator finds a hewn, stepped water installation that measures 2 sq m with several steps, the field archaeologist immediately identifies it as a ritual bath, as this is the acceptable practice in archaeological scholarship. But on what grounds? If the same installation dated to the Iron Age or earlier, other assumptions would have been considered. As we have seen above, it seems that the main reason for this intuitive interpretation is the similarity between the ancient, stepped water installations to modern-day *miqwa'ot*, which are built according to rabbinic and modern Jewish Halakhah. However, should one not assume that the function of stepped pools has changed over 2000 years?

Until the 1980s, stepped pools were usually identified as water cisterns and the like (Reich 2013:49). Reich (2013:46–49) identified most of the stepped pools from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods as ritual baths, considering that it is hard to believe that the steps had any function other than facilitating immersion in the water. Although winepresses also had (usually narrower) steps, they comprised several other architectural components, and unlike ritual baths, they were always located outdoors. Reich also argued that since there are so many such installations in Judean sites, it is hard to think of uses other than ritual immersion for purity purposes. Reich's study was ultimately based on the similarity between the stepped pool and the installation reflected in the laws of *miqwa'ot* in Rabbinic literature (Reich 2013:46–47, 50–52). Adler (2022a:406–408; 2022b:62–65) added that the shape of the steps from the rim of the pool down to its floor attests to immersion, and also noted that such stepped pools are distinctive to Judea and hence characteristic to Jews, and only Jews.

Another key argument for identifying the stepped pools as ritual baths is that, according to historical and *halakhic* sources, purity observance was very common in Judean society from the late Hellenistic/Hasmonean period (e.g., Adler 2022a:408). This is well-attested in contemporary texts. Although this argument was usually not explicitly mentioned by archaeologists, it seems to be implied in Avigad's (1980:139) explanation for the discovery of many ritual baths in the Herodian Quarter in Jerusalem, in several cases more than one such installation in each domestic unit. Avigad claimed that the large number of installations precludes their use as water reservoirs and therefore, he explained them as purity facilities, especially considering their proximity to the Temple.

However, apart from rabbinic Halakhah, which postdates most of the eary stepped pools, although some regulations are attributed to first-century CE sages—none of the written sources dating to the Second Temple period (Josephus, Philo, Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament) refer explicitly to stepped-pool installations, and the act of ritual bathing is rarely mentioned (Wright 1997:191, 205–211). In fact, there is no definition or description of a *miqweh* in rabbinic literature (Miller 2019:32). When the rabbis do mention a *miqweh*, they are not necessarily referring to a manmade installation (Miller 2019:32–44). There is no direct correlation between stepped pools, Second Temple period written sources and

rabbinic laws, and therefore, the identification of the stepped pools as ritual baths is based on interpretation.

The question nonetheless remains: did *every* stepped pool from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods function as a ritual bath as argued by Reich (2013:52)? Some scholars think not, e.g., concerning the site of Horbat Qumran (Hidiroglou 2000; Magen and Peleg 2018:116–119). Wright (1997:204) raised doubts, which seem to contradict the basic principle of archaeological methodology: "I do not accept that similarity of form requires us to interpret an identity of function." He suggested that some of the stepped pools could have been used for immersion for purposes other than purification.[4] Theoretically, this is a valid argument; however, since the 1990s, many more stepped pools have been discovered in late Hellenistic and Roman-period Judea and Galilee, and it is difficult to furnish any explanation for so many small stepped pools other than as a means of purification.

With regard to stone vessels dated to the first and second centuries CE, one might wonder why they are considered a unique phenomenon. After all, vessels made of stone are typical of all ancient civilizations. Avigad's excavations in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter initially associated such vessels with purity concerns. Avigad noted the large numbers and variants of stone vessels, which were more expensive than pottery and explained their presence as an adherence to Jewish purity laws (Avigad 1980:127). Subsequently, Magen (1988:94; 2002:138) maintained that the daily observance of purity among many Jews affected the material culture as Jews wanted to purchase vessels that were not susceptible to impurity.

Once again, archeologists based their observations on (somewhat later) rabbinic Halakhah, according to which stone vessels are impervious to impurity,[5] although stone vessels are not often mentioned in this connection in rabbinic literature. The only non-rabbinic text which refers to this phenomenon is the Gospel of John 2:6.[6] Miller (2019:95–98) raised some doubts regarding this explanation, as stone vessels can become impure according to non-rabbinic sources, such as the Qumranic Temple Scroll and the Damascus Covenant scroll. He concluded that it would be an exaggeration to regard every such stone vessel from the late Second Temple and Mishnaic period as being used to facilitate the observance of ritual purity, since some vessels also had other uses (Miller 2019:173–175).

Again, notwithstanding the methodological difficulty of identifying stone vessels as a popular means for eating and storing food in a state of ritual purity, the extraordinarily large number of such vessels in many sites in Judea as well as in Galilee proves that this is a unique phenomenon. Moreover, it is a fact that in this period, stone vessels are found in

---

[4] Gordon (2020) suggested that the baths became popular for their health benefits, namely, that bodily immersion in water was considered vital for physical well-being.

[5] M. *Ohalot* 5:5; Sifre *Ḥukat* 126, ed. Horowitz 162–163; cf. t. *Machshirin* 2:1. Adler (2022a: 412–413) inferred that Jews deduced from the Pentateuch's purity laws that stone does not defile and thus they began to use stone vessels to avoid breaking defiled pottery vessels. In fact, such exegesis is found in Sifre ad. Numbers 31:22 (ed. Horowitz 212), which might suggest that was a quite later interpretation.

[6] Deines 1993:24–38. Note that John is dated to 100 BCE and possibly written in Ephesus.

very large numbers in Jewish sites (Adler 2022a:411–412). Purity concerns therefore seem to be the best explanation for such extensive use of a new type of vessel.

Common to the problems of relating stepped pools and stone vessels to purity practices is the partial correlation between the vast amount of archaeological finds (the number of installations/artifacts and the number of sites) and their rather limited (explicit) representation in contemporaneous Second Temple period texts, or even in later rabbinic Halakhah. The methodological problem derives from the juxtaposition of archaeology and texts. It seems that we expect that our finds in the excavations should match what we know from the historical records, and what we know from the texts should be validated by what we find. But I suggest that this is, at times, an unrealistic expectation. For example, Josephus mentioned a theater, an amphitheater and a hippodrome in Jerusalem (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.268, 341). Despite extensive excavations and the size of such buildings, none have been found (Kloner 2000).

I suggest that archaeologists acknowledge the differences between text and artifact evidence. Some aspects of daily life may be overemphasized in the material record compared to the textual/historical evidence because they can be easily traced in an excavation. Some significant findings may have no parallel in the written sources simply because historical sources are by nature selective and cannot be expected to refer to all existing social practices. Consequently, the correlation between text and artifact is complex, and interpreting the finds solely according to written sources may be misleading.

For this reason, I believe that one should not merely regard the large number of stone vessels and ritual baths as a representation of what we already know from historical or *halakhic* (mainly Qumranic and early rabbinic) evidence. While these written sources can establish a preliminary identification of these finds in relation to purity observance, I suggest that they cannot establish a conclusive understanding of these finds. I would not simply (or only) establish a direct link between specific artifacts or the location of a ritual bath and a specific text or law. Rather, we should study them as phenomena of material culture, with the textual evidence in the background but not in the foreground. In what follows, I briefly present two examples of such interpretations, based on my own studies (Regev 2000; 2021; 2023:10–50). But first, a short methodological background relating to one aspect of the anthropological study of archaeology is required.

Anthropological Theory: The Archaeology of Ritual

In designating stepped pools as *miqwa'ot*/ritual baths, we assume that they facilitate a ritual, specifically the transforming from a state of impurity to a state of purity. In daily use, stone vessels may not be related directly to ritual, but when they are used in a meal, they facilitate its ritual status in a special state of purity. When studying the social meaning of these installations and artifacts, it is appropriate to consider how archaeologists identify and interpret ritual in archaeology.

One consequence of the use of social or cultural anthropology by the so-called post-processual archaeologists is that they apply the concept of ritual to the study of archaeological remains (Insoll 2011). Ritual is the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. Ritual is a specific, observable mode of behaviour. Ritual entails focusing attention (Turner 1967), which implicates distinctive frames of practice, thought, performance and emotion (Tambiah 1981; Swenson 2015). Ritual is not confined to religious or cultic spheres; there are mundane rituals as well (Kyriakidis 2007a:294; 2007b:16–17).

From an archaeological perspective, namely that of material culture, ritual is a form of human action that leaves material traces (Fogelin 2007:56). It is a matter of action and behavior (Swenson 2015:61–62). Identifying ritual in archaeological contexts is a complicated task. Religious and secular rituals are neither distinct nor clearly identifiable (Bradley 2005). Rituals are identifiable when they form patterns in the archaeological record (Kyriakidis 2007b:20). We are looking for the process whereby a seemingly ordinary action becomes ritualized. Rather than seeing rituals as either religious or secular, archaeologists view the gray area between the two as worthy of study (Fogelin 2007:59–61). Ritual is usually linked to a rite of passage from one state to another (such as from impurity to purity). Several types of rites of passage are assumed to be detected in archaeology. For our present purpose, the rites, boundaries, portals, thresholds and transformations (Garwood 2011:271–275) are particularly relevant. Since ritual is a social phenomenon, material culture associated with ritual cannot be isolated from certain social phenomena and contexts, which lead to its emergence or influence its development.

If ritual baths and stone vessels are related to rituals, what kind of rituals are they? What is their meaning and why did they become so common? It may not be sufficient to simply state that Judeans wanted to purify themselves and maintain their purity status. If we take the archaeological record seriously and consider the implications of the archaeology of ritual beyond a material representation of Tractate *Miqwa'ot* in the Mishnah/Tosefta or the general concerns of purity in Second Temple period texts, it is appropriate to ask: Why did ritual baths emerge in the Hasmonean period and flourish in the first century CE? Why did stone vessels become so popular in the first century CE? What social processes were related to or reflected by the growing concern for specific purity practices? We probably will not be able to provide clear answers beyond reasonable doubt, but we may suggest interpretations which connect data and theory.

Ritual Baths, Purity and Ethnic Identity in the Hasmonean Period

The laws of ritual cleansing from natural sources of impurity (e.g., a corpse, leprosy, menstruation) are detailed in the Pentateuch, especially in the Priestly Code (Adler 2022a:50–53), but there is no detailed prescription for the actual practice of purification and no reference to installations, apart from the phrase "wash in water." While Jews most probably previously maintained bodily purity, stepped plastered pools for immersion appear in the archaeological record in c. 100 BCE. Most pools were found in Jerusalem

and throughout Judea, but some discovered in Galilee and Transjordan are associated with the Judean population. At least 45 such baths can be dated to the Hasmonean period, before Herod's reign (Regev 2021:400–404; 2023:11–13).

Why did Judeans begin to build ritual baths for immersion during the Hasmonean period, and not earlier or later? To answer this question beyond the banal (yet true) answer that purity concerns (and more meticulous commitment to the Torah) increased in that period, which hardly teaches us anything new, I suggest relating it to two contemporaneous phenomena.

The first phenomenon is an abstention from using gentile pottery, as reflected in the relative lack of archaeological finds. During the Hasmonean period, we find a negligible amount of imported pottery in Jerusalem and Judea (Ariel 1990; Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2014). Fine wares, such as Eastern Sigillata A (ESA), Rhodian amphoras and Hellenistic lamps are rare in Judean towns, but prevalent in non-Judean cities. The clearest case is the Hasmonean palaces at Jericho (Bar-Nathan 2002:119, 122), where the rejection of imported fine wares was probably due to the fact that they were manufactured by gentiles or because the local Judean population associated them with non-Judeans (cf. Berlin 2013). This abstention changed in the Herodian period and throughout the first century CE, when ESA, amphoras and Roman discus-shaped oil lamps became common in the Herodian palaces in Jericho, Jerusalem's Upper City/Jewish Quarter, and even in Masada during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (Bar-Nathan 2002:119–144; 2006:307–365; Geva and Hershkovitz 2006:94–143).

It is possible to understand the rejection of foreign pottery as the result of purity concerns (Ariel and Strikovsky 1990; Adler 2011:271–273), but more than anything else, it manifests a rejection of gentile (and not only Hellenistic) material culture. The reason(s) for this rejection is a matter of interpretation. This leads us to another textually-based phenomenon: 'gentile impurity.'

Attributing ritual impurity to gentiles or their artifacts is attested to in Numbers 31:20–24, but it remained relatively inconsequential until the Hasmonean period. The Books Maccabees (dated to c. 120–100 BCE), and several other Hasmonean-period texts, including Jubilees, the Psalms of Solomon, 4Q Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah, and 4QDamascus Document, refer to it time and again in different contexts. Some texts discuss the general classification of gentiles as unclean or impure, sometimes adding the prohibition against coming in contact with them. Others state that the gentiles or their acts are actually defiling, that is, they refer to the consequences of their impurity for the Judeans. In several cases, there are explicit references to rites of purification from this impurity, although neither immersion nor the ritual bath are mentioned (1 Maccabees 13:47–50; 2 Maccabees 12:38; cf. 1QM 14:2).

The increase in evidence related to gentile impurity in the Hasmonean period may explain the abstinence from gentile pottery, but it may also explain, at least partly, the emergence of ritual baths in the same period. Why did some Judeans, including the Hasmoneans, wish to facilitate purification by hewing immersion baths in c. 100 BCE? A new factor led to a new cultural or social phenomenon which is reflected in the material culture. The fact

that awareness of gentile impurity became much more common in that period, as reflected in Hasmonean propaganda, supplies a reasonable connection. The new ritual baths were used to get rid of this impurity, or as a rite which enhanced ritual purity in response to the 'threat' of gentile impurity even when one was not in direct contact with it (see below).

Gentile impurity and the abstention from gentile pottery reflect how Judeans treated non-Judeans. These are not merely matters of purity and impurity, or observance of the Jewish Halakhah, but they also establish Judean communal identity in relation to others. In social and cultural terms, these phenomena are related to ethnicity. Here the archaeology of ethnicity may be relevant for interpreting the meaning of the historical and archaeological evidence and further correlating the ritual baths to this general ethnic trend.

Ethnicity is a consciousness of difference which entails the reproduction and transformation of basic classificatory distinctions between groups of people who perceive themselves to be in some respect culturally distinct (Eriksen 1992:3). Ethnicity is represented by social boundaries: groups define themselves in relation and contrast to other groups (Barth 1969; Wimmer 2013). The boundaries result from contact and interaction between groups (McGuire 1982:163). The dominant group uses these boundaries to single out the weaker group, unite the rest of the group against them (McGuire 1982:172), and define them by the idiosyncratic use of specific material and behavioral symbols compared to other groups (Barth 1969:14–15; McGuire 1982:160; Emberling 1997:299). The boundaries are chosen for their symbolism and represent an identity distinct from other groups. They may be behavioral or material in form (McGuire 1982:160, 163), and may be detected in the archaeological record (Hodder 1982; Emberling 1997:311, and see references therein), when certain artifacts carry symbolic meaning (McGuire 1982:163; Hodder 1982; cf. Faust 2006:49–64).

Following the intensity of gentile impurity and the lack of foreign pottery in the Hasmonean period, I suggest that the emergence of the ritual baths in the Hasmonean period reflects such ethnic identity through a ritual dismissal of gentile impurity. Biblical and *halakhic* concepts of purity were linked to the contemporaneous socio-political context. Indeed, purity and impurity are based on inclusion in and exclusion from ritualized environments, creating social hierarchies, and establishing and reinforcing differences between social groups (Olyan 2000:38, 54–62). The act of purification, I suggest, was not merely a legal/*halakhic* requirement. It may have been used as a boundary related to the reluctance to come into contact with gentiles and use their pottery. Immersion in a ritual bath may have been intended to draw a distinction between Judeans and non-Judeans.

The historical context supports this ethnic interpretation. From the time of Antiochus IV to Alexander Jannaeus the Hasmonean period is characterized by intensive conflicts between the Judeans and the neighboring gentiles, led by the Hasmonean high priests and rulers. The Hasmoneans conquered the Hellenistic cities, including Joppa (Yafo), Ashdod, Gaza and Qedesh (*Antiquities* 13.255–257, 275–251, 356–364, 174, 393–397) and even converted some Idumeans and Ituraeans to Judaism (Regev 2013:274–278). Regarding gentiles as inherently impure, practicing ritual purification as an indirect result of this impurity, and

abstaining from the use of pottery produced by gentiles, were boundaries which separated Judeans from non-Judeans, following this ongoing ethnic conflict.

The methodology of this interpretation of the ritual baths involved two steps: (1) relating the ritual baths to other contemporaneous historical and archaeological phenomena taking place in Judea; (2) drawing on the concept of ethnic identity, following the historical context of ethnic conflict and the relationship between purity and boundaries. The ethnic model connected the historical and archaeological data and explained why ritual baths were specifically necessary in this period. Neither of these steps has been proven, and no single ritual bath can be clearly related to gentile impurity or to the manifestation of Judean ethnic identity. Yet, the more evidence we can connect, the stronger the explanatory value of the whole.

Ritual Baths, Stone Vessels and Individualism from Herod to 70 CE

Ritual baths became much more popular in the last decades of the first century BCE and the first century CE until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Many of them were found in Jerusalem, but their number increased substantially around the city, throughout Judea, and in Galilee. Reich (2013:71–206) surveyed 450 ritual baths throughout Judea in the period from the late second century BCE to 70 CE. Adler counted 850 from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE, including 170 in Second Temple period Jerusalem, and 600 in the Judean hills, in many rural settlements and in domestic units, from the Hasmonean period to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Most were built in the period between the reign of Herod and 70 CE (Adler 2011:41–42, 62, 321–334; note that only some 50 baths can be safely dated earlier than the Herodian period). In many cases, several baths were found in close proximity, even within one architectural unit.

Stone vessels, usually made of chalk, include several types manufactured by three main production techniques: hand-carved mugs ('measuring cups') and pitchers; bowls and goblets turned on a simple small lathe; and large kraters (*kallal*) turned on a sophisticated large lathe. Their distribution is extremely widespread, in almost every Jewish settlement in Judea: at least in 140 settlements in Judea—including many sites in Jerusalem—and in 60 settlements in Galilee, totaling 250 sites (Adler 2011:182–188; cf. the 69 sites in Deines 1993:39–165, Map 1). Stone vessels appeared during the Herodian period (Magen 1988:107; Gibson 2003), and they became extremely common in the first century CE in Judea, Galilee and the Judean Desert, south and west Samaria, the Golan Heights and Transjordan (Cahill 1992:231–232).

A relatively large number of stone vessels have been published from several excavations. For example, in Gamla, 487 fragments are documented (Gibson 2003:304–305) with a ratio of 1/20 in relation to pottery fragments (cf. Berlin 2006:4, Table 1.1; 130–131, Tables 4.20, 4.21, 4.22). Over 1000 fragments were found in Jerusalem's City of David with a ratio of 1/100 in relation to pottery fragments (Gadot and Adler 2016). Most of the vessels were tableware for personal use, such as bowls and cups (80% of the vessels in Gamla; see

Gibson 2016), and handmade mugs were the most common. They were heavy and crudely shaped. In Masada, over 100 intact mugs were found (Reich 2007).

Why were ritual baths and stone vessels so popular, both in their geographic distribution and in the number of installations or artifacts in each site? It would be true but superficial to conclude that this merely reflects the general observance of purity. We already know this is the case since it is seen in Second Temple texts and early rabbinic literature (Regev 2000). It seems that purity concerned the common Judeans even more than the historical evidence shows. The question is, what can the archaeological evidence teach us that we could not understand without it? Can we suggest an interpretation of the findings that relates to the specific archaeological record? Can we relate the findings to the various historical sources in a more nuanced and accurate manner? To do so we should first acknowledge that just as not all rituals are alike, there are also different aspects and meanings to purity concerns.

It is interesting to examine whether the ethnic explanation that was suggested for the emergence of ritual baths in the Hasmonean period can be applied to the later period. Did the number of baths substantially increase, and stone vessels emerge and flourish during the reign of Herod and in the first century CE because the Judeans were increasingly concerned with emphasizing their ethnic identity in relation to the gentiles? Was it useful to confirm this identity through more frequent and accessible ritual immersion? Could facilitating purity during a meal by using stone vessels establish such a collective identity? I think not. More and more baths in the same site or household would hardly increase the ethnic boundaries. Gentile impurity became less important in the Herodian period until the eve of the First Jewish Revolt, and imported Hellenistic pottery became more prevalent (see above). Conflict with the gentiles was rare until 66 CE and Judean domination decreased following the policy of Herod and the Roman governors.

Instead, I would like to suggest the following explanation for why the Judeans chose to have so many ritual baths in their proximity and why it was useful to eat from stone vessels to ensure that the vessel was not defiled during the meal, and why purity concerns had such a pervasive effect on daily life. Ritual baths had become readily availabl and their distribution points to the accessibility of the baths. People wanted to have their own private or family bath, instead of sharing it with many others in the village or neighborhood, or even in the same household. The most common stone vessels were personal items, especially mugs. The users' main concern was the individual observance of purity, and contact with others, who may not observe it, during the meal. The evidence therefore suggests that the focus of the purity practice was the individual, who wished to establish his/her purity status in relation to other Judeans.

Contemporaneous textual evidence attests to an emphasis on the purification of the body and the maintenance of a state of purity in daily life. This purity is not related to the Temple, the sacrificial cult, or priests eating heave offerings in a state of purity. The rabbis designate it *ḥulin* purity, and it is possible to designate it "non-priestly purity." For example, Philo and Josephus mention the need to purify oneself immediately after sexual intercourse (Spec. Leg. 3.63, explicitly mentioning immersion; *Jewish Antiquities* 6.235; cf. *Against Apion*

2.203). The Pharisees and early rabbis required that members of the fellowship (*ḥavurah*) eat ordinary *ḥulin*, literally: non-sacred) food in a state of purity, which also required separation from less observant Jews, the *ʻAm-ha'aretz* (literally: "the people of the land," Tosefta *Demai* 2:2; Mishnah *Hagiga* 2:7). Early rabbinic Halakha (predating the Houses of Hillel and Shamai, i.e., the Herodian period) prescribed handwashing before a meal to avoid defiling food and drink with impure hands (Mishnah *Yadayim* 2:4; Mishnah *Hagaiga* 2:5). According to New Tetstament sources, the Pharisees considered handwashing before meals to be a "tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:2–4), and they also immersed in a ritual bath before meals upon their return from the marketplace, where they might have encountered less scrupulous people (Luke 11:17–18 based on Q), and they paid special attention to the purity status of their vessels (Matthew 23:25).

Qumranic sectarian scrolls that deal with purity laws require that defiled persons, including those who have touched other impure persons (most probably, within the group), cleanse themselves from their "primary impurity" (*tumʻato ha-rishona*) before eating. They are prohibited from eating before beginning the purification process (4Q514 1, 1; 4Q274 *Tohorot A* 1–3). All these texts and many others point to the role of the body of the individual in that period, and not only among the Pharisees. In this sense, they correspond to the baths and stone vessels which were available to a substantial section of the Judean population, not only in Jerusalem and its environs.

Individualism pertains to a particular historic-cultural conceptualization of the person or self (Rappot 1996:450). Individuality means personal uniqueness, as opposed to being a unitary, totalized and indivisible person; the boundedness of the person (Fowler 2004:4, 12). Rüpke (2013:13, 20–21) limits phenomena related to individualism to "practical individuality"—when people act on their own instead of simply following tradition, sometimes resulting in a temporary rupture of social bonds. He refers to examples such as the religious experience in Greco-Roman religions. The pursuit of the individual in archaeology is usually limited to social archaeology (Deetz 1996:84–86; White 2009). In archaeology, the concept of individualism is somewhat related to that of agency (see the survey in Regev 2023:5), namely, the role of the individual or self in material culture, since one's personhood may be distributed outside the human body (Gell 1998:96–154) and is negotiated through material culture (Fowler 2004:370).

Experiencing oneself as a living individual is part of human nature. Some argue that archaeologists should reconsider the individual's social, spatial and ideological importance, as well as the existence of individual embodied lives (Knapp and Dommelen 2008). It is possible to examine the materialization of an embodied individual and to approach the concept of individuals as a negotiation between differing social and personal concerns (Knapp and Dommelen 2008:20–22).

In many cases, purification in a ritual bath was not a public ceremony but an individual one. The immediate purpose of this observance of purity was the individual's concern: achieving personal ritual purity in relation to other Judeans (such as the *Am-ha'aretz)* and a minimal level of sanctity (see also Balberg 2014). Most of the stone vessels also belonged to

the individual—cups or mugs. The increase in individual ritual purity observance therefore may attest to a general tendency toward individualism in Judean society in the Herodian period and the first century CE (and also among early rabbinic circles in the first and second centuries CE).

The individual nature of purity observance, such as immersion in water and handwashing, is closely related to the concept of the body (e.g., Mauss 1979), which also pertains to the individual (Regev 2023:44–47). The increase in immersion, purification, and maintaining a state of purity through the use of stone vessels (mostly the individual's own vessels such as mugs) signifies a growing awareness of the body as a vehicle for achieving obedience to the Torah and religious practice or a closer encounter with the Divine. Care for the body and its ritual status is actually care for the self, the individual person as a subject. The new legal/religious and bodily practices show that the person is consciously perceived as an agent for this practice, whose behavior can attain discipline and closeness to God. Thus, the practices of non-priestly purity and the goal of maintaining some degree of holiness in daily life reflect unprecedented individualization. The body has become a project which requires effort as part of an individual's self-identity.

All this points to the many individuals from different religious or social circles, and probably many of the common people, who used ritual baths and stone vessels to treat their body in a new manner, as an agent for achieving religious expression and piety. If this conclusion is correct, it indicates the rising importance of the self in the Judean socio-religious system, namely the elevation of the individual.[7] This, however, did not come at the expense of the social influence of the priestly public rituals at the Temple, which I believe remained highly influential until after the destruction of the Temple.

CONCLUSIONS: ARTIFACT, TEXT, CONTEXT, MODEL AND INTERPRETATION

In this paper I have argued that relating the archaeological findings to purity is an interpretive task. Unlike cooking pots made for boiling food or the like, the function or use of a stepped pool or stone vessel is not self-evident. It cannot naturally and undoubtedly be linked to purity. Only additional data, usually textual, makes such a link possible. It is the nature of science that what was previously an innovation or speculation becomes common knowledge on which other scholars can base their conclusions without hesitation. It is therefore reasonable to develop new and more complex explanations for the various types of ritual baths, their emergence, proliferation and development.

We mainly identify ritual baths and chalk stone vessels from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods based on early rabbinic Halakhah, despite the fact that there is no clear description of them in these texts. The more baths and stone vessels we find, the more valid this identification becomes. For this identification we rely on the general observance

[7] Burial in family caves and in ossuaries may point to similar social trends (Regev 2023:51–122).

of ritual purity in Second Temple sources, although the archaeological evidence seems to show that purity concerns and practices were even stronger and more widespread than these texts indicate.

The archaeological record may attest not only to the basic function of these baths and vessels, but also to the people who used them. New material phenomena indicate new social phenomena. In order to proceed with such a social analysis, we should not simply base our arguments on direct connections between artifact and text. I suggest that we need a model or theory which explains the connection between the artifact and social behavior. The archaeology of ritual is one example of such a connection. Once we understand that purity practice is not merely an activity or concept which relates baths or stone vessels to texts or laws, but a ritual, a social phenomenon which may take diverse forms and have various aims, it is possible to suggest more complex and specific explanations for purity concerns as reflected in the archaeological findings.

The interpretations presented in the second part of this article concerning purity and ethnicity, and purity and individualism, address general archaeological phenomena, a number of findings in a given period. They rely on several pieces of evidence, archaeological and historical, as well as models or social theories which bind them together. But all this may not be helpful for archaeologists who discover a single ritual bath. In many cases, we have no way of knowing whether the people who immersed in this specific bath were concerned with purity as a marker of Judean ethnic identity, or wanted to emphasize the purity of their individual status, or had some other reason. Purification may be motivated by several different reasons, and different types of purification probably took place in the same ritual bath.[8] Assuming for the sake of argument that most ritual baths were similar, their material form or shape does not indicate the intentions of those who used them, and certainly not the social meaning of the baths. In fact, we have no proof that a specific stepped pool was used for ritual immersion for bodily purification. Once again, I would like to stress that all the explanations suggested here in relation to stepped pools and stone vessels are based on interpretation, relying on their number, distribution, date and connection to textual evidence. We may call this science.

[8] This is demonstrated in Mishnah *Hagiga* 2.6 (once again a correlation between archaeological findings and a later rabbinic text): "If a man immersed himself to render himself fit to eat of unconsecrated produce (*hulin*), and his intention was confined to unconsecrated produce, he may not touch [Second] Tithe. If he immersed himself to render himself fit to eat of [Second] Tithe, and his intention was confined to [Second] Tithe, he may not touch Heave-offering (*terumah*). If he immersed himself to render himself fit to eat of Heave-offering, and his intention was confined to Heave-offering, he may not touch Hallowed Things (*qodesh*). If he immersed himself to render himself fit to eat of Hallowed Things, and his intention was confined to Hallowed Things, he may not touch Sin-offering water (*hattath*). If he immersed himself for the sake of what has a higher degree of sanctity, he is permitted to touch what is of lower degree. If he immersed himself but without special intention, it is as though he had not immersed himself at all" (translation Danby).

REFERENCES

Adler Y. 2011. *The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in Ereẕ-Israel from the Hasmonean Period until the End of the Talmudic Era (164 BCE–400 CE).* Ph.D diss. Bar Ilan University. Ramat Gan (Hebrew; English summary, pp. i–iii).

Adler, Y. 2022a. Along Ethnic Lines: The Case for Stepped Pools and Chalk Vessels as Markers of Jewish Purity Observance. In K. Hedner Zetterholm, A. Runesson, C. Wassén and M. Zetterholm eds. *Negotiating Identities: Conflict, Conversion, and Consolidation in Early Judaism and Christianity (200 BCE–400 CE)* (Coniectanea Biblica Series). Lanham, Md. Pp. 401–421.

Adler Y. 2022b. *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal.* New Haven–London.

Ariel D.T. 1990. Imported Stamped Amphora Handles. In D.T. Ariel. *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985, Directed by Yigal Shiloh* II: *Imported Stamped Amphora Handles, Coins, Worked Bone and Ivory, and Glass* (Qedem 30). Jerusalem. Pp. 13–98.

Ariel D.T. and Strikovsky A. 1990. Imported Stamped Amphora Handles: Appendix. In D.T. Ariel. *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985: Directed by Yigal Shiloh* II: *Imported Stamped Amphora Handles, Coins, Worked Bone and Ivory, and Glass* (Qedem 30). Jerusalem. Pp. 25–28.

Avigad N. 1980. *The Upper City of Jerusalem*. Jerusalem (Hebrew).

Balberg M. 2014. *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*, Berkely.

Bar-Nathan R. 2002. *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho. Final Reports of the 1973–1987 Excavations* III: *The Pottery*. Jerusalem.

Bar-Nathan R. 2006. *Masada* VII: *The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965; Final Reports: The Pottery of Masada.* Jerusalem.

Bar-Yosef O. and Ayalon E. 2001. Chalcolithic Ossuaries—What do They Imitate and Why? *Qadmoniot* 121:34–43 (Hebrew).

Barth F. 1969. Introduction. In F. Barth ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* Boston. Pp. 9–38.

Berlin A.M. 2006. *Gamla* I: *The Pottery of the Second Temple Period; The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976–1989* (IAA Reports 29). Jerusalem.

Berlin A.M. 2013. Manifest Identity: From *Ioudaios* to Jew. Household Judaism as Anti-Hellenization in the Late Hasmonean Era. In R. Albertz and J. Wöhrle eds. *Between Cooperation and Hostility: Multiple Identities in Ancient Judaism and the Interaction with Foreign Powers* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Suppl. 11). Göttingen. Pp. 151–175.

Bradley R. 2005. *Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric Europe*. London.

Cahill J. 1992. Chalk Vessel Assemblages of the Persian/Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods. In A. De Groot and D.T. Ariel eds. *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985 Directed by Yigal Shiloh* III: *Stratigraphical, Environmental, and Other Reports* (Qedem 33). Jerusalem, Pp. 190–274.

Deetz J. 1996. *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (rev ed.), New York.

Deines R. 1993. *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit: Ein archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Joh 2, 6 und der jüdischen Reinheitshalacha zur Zeit Jesu* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/52). Tübingen.

DeMarrais E. Castillo L.J. and Earle T. 1996. Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies. *Current Anthropology* 37:15–31, 47−86.

Emberling G. 1997. Ethnicity in Complex Societies: Archaeological Perspectives. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5:295–344.

Eriksen T.H. 1992. *Us and Them in Modern Societies: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius Trinidad and Beyond*. London.

Faust A. 2006. *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance*. London.

Fogelin L. 2007. The Archaeology of Religious Ritual. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36:55–71.

Fowler C. 2004. *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach.* London–New York.

Gadot Y. and Adler Y. 2016. A Quantitative Analysis of Jewish Chalk Vessel Frequencies in Early Roman Jerusalem: A View from the City's Garbage Dump. *IEJ* 66:202–219.

Garwood P. 2011. Rites of Passage. In T. Insoll ed. *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion.* Oxford. Pp. 261–284.

Gell A. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford.

Geva H. and Hershkovitz M. 2006. Local Pottery of the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods. In H. Geva. *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem, Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969–1982* III: *Area E and Other Studies. Final Report*. Jerusalem. Pp. 94–143.

Gibson S. 2003. Stone Vessels of the Early Roman Period from Jerusalem and Palestine: A Reassessment. In G.C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and L.D. Chrupcala eds. *One Land—Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM* (SBF Collectio Maior 41). Jerusalem. Pp. 287–308.

Gibson S. 2016. Soft Limestone Vessels.I In D. Syon. *Gamla* III, 2: *The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976–1989. Finds and Studies* (IAA Reports 59). Jerusalem. Pp. 49–81.

Gordon B.D. 2020. Health and the Origins of the *Miqveh*. *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 11:418–459.

Hidiroglou P. 2000. L'eau et les bains à Qoumrân. *Revue des études juives* 159:19–47.

Hodder I. 1982. *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture*. Cambridge.

Insoll T. ed. 2011. *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion.* Oxford.

Kloner A. 2000. Hippodrome/Amphitheater in Jerusalem. In A. Faust and E. Baruch eds. *New Studies on Jerusalem* 6 *(Proceedings of the Sixth Conference, December 7th 2000, Bar-Ilan University).* Ramat Gan. Pp. 75–86 (Hebrew; English summary, p. 9*).

Knapp A.B. and Dommelen P. van. 2008. Past Practices: Rethinking Individuals and Agents in Archaeology. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 18:15–34.

Kyriakidis E. 2007a. Archaeologies of Ritual. In E. Kyriakidis ed. *The Archaeology of Ritual* (Cotsen Advanced Seminars 3). Los Angeles. Pp. 289–308.

Kyriakidis E. 2007b. Finding Ritual: Calibrating the Evidence. In E. Kyriakidis ed. *The Archaeology of Ritual* (Cotsen Advanced Seminars 3). Los Angeles. Pp. 9–22.

Magen Y. 1988. *The Stone Vessel Industry in Jerusalem during the Second Temple Period*. Tel Aviv (Hebrew).

Magen Y. 2002. *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Ḥizma and the Jerusalem Temple Mount* (JSP 1). Jerusalem.

Magen Y. and Peleg Y. 2018. *Back to Qumran: Final Report (1993–2004)* (JPS 18). Jerusalem.

Mauss M. 1979. The Notion of Body Techniques, Sociology and Psychology. In M. Mauss. *Sociology and Psychology: Essays by Marcel Mauss* (B. Brewster trans.). London–Boston–Henley. Pp. 97–105.

McGuire R.H. 1982. The Study of Ethnicity in Historical Archaeology. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1:159–178.

Miller S. 2019. *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee* (2nd rev. ed.). Göttingen.

Olyan S.M. 2000. *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult*. Princeton, N.J.

Peregrine P.N. 2004. Cross-Cultural Approaches in Archaeology: Comparative Ethnology, Comparative Archaeology, and Archaeoethnology. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 12:281–309.

Rappot N. 1996. Individualism. In A. Barnard and J. Spencer eds. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London–New York. Pp. 298–301.

Regev E. 2000. Pure Individualism: The Idea of Non-Priestly Purity in Ancient Judaism. *JSJ* 31:176–202.

Regev E. 2003. Abominated Temple and A Holy Community: The Formation of the Concepts of Purity and Impurity in Qumran. *DSD* 10/2:243–278.

Regev E. 2013. *The Hasmoneans: Ideology, Archaeology, Identity* (*Journal Ancient Judaism* Suppl. 10). Göttingen.

Regev E. 2021. Purity, Pottery, and Judaean Ethnicity in the Hasmonean Period. *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 12:391–432.

Regev E. 2023. *The Social Archaeology of Late Second Temple Judaea: From Purity, Burial, and Art, to Qumran, Herod, and Masada*. London–New York.

Reich R. 2007. Stone Mugs from Masada. In *Masada* VIII: *The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965 Final Reports*. Jerusalem. Pp. 195–206.

Reich R. 2013. *Miqwa'ot (Jewish Ritual Baths) in the Second Temple, Mishnaic, and Talmudic Periods*. Jerusalem (Hebrew).

Robb J.E. 1998. The Archaeology of Symbols. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27:329–46.

Rogan W. 2018. Purity in Early Judaism: Current Issues and Questions. *Currents in Biblical Research* 16:309–339.

Rosenthal-Heginbottom R. 2014. Imported Hellenistic and Early Roman Pottery—An Overview of the Finds from the Jewish Quarter Excavations. In H. Geva. *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem, Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969–1982* VI: *Areas J, N, Z and Other Studies; Final Report*. Jerusalem. Pp. 377–413.

Rüpke J. 2013. Individualization and Individuation as Concepts for Historical Research. In J. Rüpk ed. *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean Attribution*. Oxford. Pp. 3–38.

Swenson E. 2015. The Archaeology of Ritual. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44:329–345.

Tambiah S.J. 1981. *A Performative Approach to Ritual*. London.

Turner V. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, N.Y.

Werrett I.C. 2007. *Ritual Purity in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Leiden.

White C.L. ed. 2009. *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives.* New York.

Wimmer A. 2013. *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks*. New York.

Wright B.G. III 1997. Jewish Ritual Baths—Interpreting the Digs and the Texts: Some Issues in the Social History of Second Temple Judaism. In N.A. Silberman and D. Small eds. The *Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*. Sheffield. Pp. 190–214.

Yadin Y. 1966. *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand.* London.