ʿAtiqot

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The Archaeology of Purity

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'Atiqot

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Cover Illustration
Front: Nineteenth-Century Reconstruction of the Area Surrounding the Silwan Pool and Birkat el-Ḥamra (Illustration: J.H. Byram; see Barclay 1857:525)
Back: Stone Vessels from the Chalk-Vessel Production Cave on Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, Second Temple Period (Photography: Clara Amit)

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Abbreviations

'Atiqot (HS)	*Hebrew Series*
'Atiqot (ES)	*English Series*
BAIAS	*Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society (Strata BAIAS from 2010)*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BAR Int. S.	British Archaeological Reports (International Series)
BIES	*Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* (Hebrew)
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BJPES	*Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* (Hebrew)
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
ESI	*Excavations and Surveys in Israel*
HA	*Hadashot Arkheologiyot* (Hebrew)
HA–ESI	*Hadashot Arkheologiyot–Excavations and Surveys in Israel* (from 1999)
IAA Reports	Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IJES	*Israel Journal of Earth Sciences*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
INJ	*Israel Numismatic Journal*
JAS	*Journal of Archaeological Science*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSP	*Judea & Samaria Publications*
NEAEHL	E. Stern and A. Lewinson-Gilboa eds. *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land 1–4.* Jerusalem 1993
NEAEHL Suppl. 5	E. Stern ed. *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* 5: *Supplementary Volume.* Jerusalem 2008
PJ	*Palästinajahrbuch des deutschen evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes zu Jerusalem*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
SBF	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Editorial

Ritual purity is a fundamental concept in many religions, cultures and societies, each pertaining to a different set of beliefs and practices and influencing various aspects of daily life. Once a concept of purity was introduced, its complementary concept—impurity—was established, creating a binary system: purity, which is associated with divinity, morality and spiritual superiority, and impurity, which is considered earthly, polluted and defiling. In many languages, the terms 'pure' and 'impure' are associated with general binaries, such as good and bad, right and wrong. Purity, as opposed to cleanness, was not merely a technical state achieved by washing or bathing, but rather a religious status connected to spiritual beliefs that demanded the performance of specific actions.

Ancient societies established a complex, multifaceted system of principles, in which ritual purity served yet another category for determining one's social identification and status. Elite groups were traditionally associated with higher levels of purity and therefore, the level of purity maintenance created an inner hierarchy that governed social behavior. Pure-status holders would thus avoid or limit interaction with ritually impure groups or individuals.

The observance of ritual purity is manifested in numerous aspects of daily life, which can be traced through the archaeological study of the material remains. The most obvious are water installations that were built specifically for ritual immersion (as opposed to hygiene bathing), attesting to a practice of purification. Also, food remains may point to an observance of dietary laws, which deemed certain foods pure or impure based on religious or cultural beliefs. Dietary restrictions were often symbolic and may have been linked to ideas of spiritual or moral virtue. Thus, certain foods were to be avoided, while those which were permitted were to be prepared or consumed according to specific rules to ensure their pure status. Vessels used for food storage or preparation were also required to comply with certain standards of purity to protect their contents, and users, from transmitting or acquiring ritual impurity.

Ritual purity was also connected to specific locations: while temples and sanctuaries were considered inherently pure, other locations, such as graveyards, were naturally impure. Pure places required those approaching them to undergo a process of purification, and those who visited impure places were considered to have contracted impurity and therefore, were required to undergo a similar process of purification. Pure and impure spaces were located both in the private domain and in the public sphere. They were divided by physical limitations or conceptual boundaries that manipulated movement patterns. Archaeological remains may reflect patterns connected to the observance of ritual purity, their interpretation and understanding being crucial not only in reconstructing the material culture of societies but mainly, their social order and organization.

The articles comprising this issue are concerned with the roots of Jewish ritual purity, which is first encountered in biblical times, reached a peak in the 'purity culture' of the Late Second Temple period until the Bar Kokhba Revolt, extended into later periods, and

continues today. The Jewish complex system of purification was significantly developed by the Sages, who interpreted the biblical requirements and prescribed directives and regulations for contracting impurity and restoring purity. Various literary sources, including historical sources such as Philo and Josephus, as well as the New Testament and rabbinic literature, imply that during the Late Second Temple period ritual purity was strictly observed and practiced by the Jewish society in Judaea and Galilee. The archaeological remains dating from the Second Temple period confirm the textual evidence, with the finding of many ritual baths (*miqwa'ot*; singular: *miqweh*) that served for full-body immersion, a paucity of imported pottery vessels and a vast amount of chalk stone vessels. Various aspects of purity are addressed, offering a broad theoretical perspective based on the vast literary evidence and archaeological data, drawing general conclusions, challenging previous assumptions, and suggesting a methodological framework for future studies.

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