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# Ritual Purity in Daily Life after 70 CE: The Chalk Vessel Assemblage from Shu‘afat as a Test Case

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## Abstract

Chalk vessels became common at Jewish sites throughout the Southern Levant beginning in the late first century BCE, apparently because Jews considered stone to be impervious to ritual impurity. It is commonly thought that a drastic decline in the phenomenon occurred after 70 CE as a direct result of the temple's destruction—on the assumption that the central motivation for Jews' observance of the purity regulations was the temple cult. These notions are reconsidered here in light of an impressive assemblage of chalk vessels recently unearthed at Shu‘afat, occupied during the brief 70-132 CE interwar period. The character of this assemblage, presented here preliminarily, suggests that both use and production of chalk vessels continued unabated for decades after 70 CE, contradicting the notion that the chalk vessel industry was reliant on a functioning temple and that observance of the purity laws was inexorably linked with the Jerusalem cult.

## Keywords

ritual purity – chalk vessels – 70 CE – Shu‘afat – Temple – Roman period

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

A wide variety of tableware and storage vessels made from soft chalk began to be produced in Roman Judea starting sometime toward the end of the first

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Rachel Bar-Nathan for graciously inviting me to publish the final report on the chalk vessel assemblage from Shu‘afat as well as for her kind permission to

century BCE, with production and widespread use continuing into the first century CE. The most prevalent forms are various types of bowls and mugs, but also small pitchers, goblets, large basins, large krater-shaped jars, stoppers and lids.<sup>2</sup> Remains belonging to this unique family of vessels have been found almost exclusively in geographic areas known to have been settled by Jews during this period of history: in Judea, Eastern Galilee, the Golan and Perea in the Transjordan.<sup>3</sup> Chalk vessels are almost completely absent from settlement sites and geographical areas known to have been settled predominantly by non-Jews, such as most of the coastal cities, Western Galilee, Samaria, and the cities of the Decapolis.<sup>4</sup> The distinctive character of this distribution pattern is conventionally explained by the hypothesis that Jews at this time considered vessels made of stone to be unsusceptible to the ritual impurities described in the Pentateuch, especially in Lev 11-15.<sup>5</sup> The idea that stone vessels were thought to possess a unique status with regard to the purity regulations is implied in John 2:6 and is explicit in numerous early rabbinic sources (e.g., m. 'Ohal. 5:5). Whereas the Pentateuch mandated that ceramic vessels which come into contact with an impure person or thing are to be broken (Lev 11:33; 15:12), it came to be understood that stone vessels may be reused without fear of ritual contamination. This unique ritual quality would have been particularly significant at a time when the biblical purity laws were regularly observed by large segments of Jewish society.

It has become commonly accepted among scholars that the destruction of the temple in 70 CE brought about a drastic decline in the chalk vessel industry, and that during the interwar period (70-132 CE), use of these vessels was far less common than it was when the temple still stood. The decline of the phenomenon, and its eventual complete demise, are conventionally explained by the assertion that the widespread observance of the ritual purity laws during the late Second Temple period was intimately tied to the temple and its cult. With the destruction of the temple, the central *raison d'être* for the observance of the purity regulations disappeared, and with it chalk vessels vanished as well.

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present these finds preliminarily here. My appreciation is extended also to all the other directors of excavations at Shu'afat—Deborah Sklar-Parnes, Yehudah Rapuano, and Peter Gendelman—as well as to the Israel Antiquities Authority for providing me full access to these finds.

2 See, e.g., Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 18-115.

3 Magen, 148-73; Adler, *Archaeology of Purity*, 182-88, 367-73.

4 Magen, 159-62; Adler, 182-88.

5 Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße*, 166-246; Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 138-47; Adler, *Archaeology of Purity*, 178-82; Adler, "New Insights," 13-17.

The axiom that the chalk vessel phenomenon declined after 70 CE—along with the attendant interpretation for why this happened specifically at this time—needs to be seriously reconsidered in light of new evidence from recent excavations at Shu'afat, a site which was occupied during only a brief period of time in between the two revolts, and at which an impressive assemblage of chalk vessels was unearthed. This article presents this assemblage in a preliminary fashion, along with an analysis of the ramifications these finds have toward our understanding of the scope of the production and use of chalk vessels after 70 CE. Anticipating the conclusions of this analysis, we have found no reason to believe that use of chalk vessels or their production declined in any way after 70 CE. To the contrary, the finds from Shu'afat suggest that the phenomenon continued unabatedly and even developed over the course of the decades which followed the end of the Great Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem. This recognition forces us to reconsider the understanding that the chalk vessel industry was somehow reliant on the existence of a functioning temple, and accordingly it forces us to reconsider the axiomatic link between observance of the purity laws and the cult of the Jerusalem temple.

## 1 Chalk Vessels after 70 CE: The State of Scholarship

In his groundbreaking study on the chalk vessel industry published over thirty years ago, Yitzhak Magen suggested a clear and direct link between the disappearance of these vessels and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple:

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, along with the severe blow to the city's inhabitants, led to the decline of stone workmanship, to the point of its final disappearance after the Bar Kokhba revolt ... During the Second Temple period there was a strict compliance with the purity rules within the context of the temple. With the destruction of the temple, regulations were canceled and the purity laws were changed, including those relating to glass vessels. It was because of this that the stone vessel industry died out. Only those who bore the memory of the temple's destruction and the hope for its rebuilding continued to use stone vessels. Following the Bar Kokhba revolt, however, their use ended completely.<sup>6</sup>

Magen noted that only small numbers of stone vessels were found in the Bar Kokhba period refugee caves, and that unlike those of the late Second Temple

<sup>6</sup> Magen, *Stone Vessel Production*, 109.

period, these were exclusively hand-made (as opposed to lathe-turned) and of low quality.<sup>7</sup> In his view, the practice at this stage was no more than a relic from bygone days: “The people who used these vessels bore in their consciousness the purity of the temple and the memory of its destruction.”<sup>8</sup>

Magen’s assessment of a dramatic decline in the use of chalk vessels after 70 CE has become widely accepted among scholars.<sup>9</sup> As chalk vessels were known from archaeological contexts associated with the Bar Kokhba revolt, scholars followed Magen in explaining that these are anomalous finds which are not to be seen as representative of a widespread phenomenon during the 70-135 CE interwar period. Jane Cahill, for example, claimed that chalk vessels were used only sporadically during the first half of the second century CE, and that the sole remains of vessels from this time come from refugee caves in the Judean Desert and subterranean hiding complexes in the Judean Shephelah.<sup>10</sup> Like Magen, Shimon Gibson noted that almost all of the vessels that could be dated to the Bar Kokhba period were hand-made, and suggested that the production of lathe-made vessels ended completely after 70 CE.<sup>11</sup> The few lathe-made vessels that have been found from the interwar period he discounted as heirlooms dating to pre-70 CE times. Rachel Bar-Nathan and Judit Gärtner, who recently published an assemblage of chalk vessels from Jericho which includes a number of fragments which date to the period between 70-112 CE, concluded that while both hand-carved and lathe-turned chalk vessels continued to be manufactured into the second century CE, the chalk vessel industry experienced a certain decline after 70 CE.<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars followed Magen in linking the decline in the chalk vessel phenomenon after 70 CE to the cessation of the temple cult.<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Zangenberg, on the other hand, has proffered a social explanation for the decline of the phenomenon following the destruction of Jerusalem—the deaths of many of the stone vessel consumers along with many of the vessels’ artisans, and the exile or displacement of entire populations.<sup>14</sup> Stuart Miller has suggested that the original appearance of these vessels had been tied to the large-scale

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7 Magen, 107.

8 Magen, 107.

9 See, e.g., Cahill, “Chalk Vessel Assemblages,” 232; Reed, “Stone Vessels and Gospel,” 386-87; Reich, “Stone Vessels,” 263.

10 Cahill, “Chalk Vessel Assemblages,” 232.

11 Gibson, “Stone Vessels,” 302.

12 Bar-Nathan and Gärtner, “Stone Artifacts,” 208.

13 See, e.g., Deines, “Jüdische Steingefäße,” 137.

14 Zangenberg, “Pure Stone,” 546-47.

building projects in Herodian Jerusalem, and that their disappearance (or dramatic decline) after 70 CE was tied to the end of these construction projects.<sup>15</sup>

Recently, Magen has revised his earlier assessment that chalk vessels found at sites putatively dated to the Bar Kokhba period indicate that these vessels continued to be used, even sporadically, after 70 CE:

[A] re-examination of the finds revealed that in addition to stone vessels, coins from the second year of the revolt (68 CE) were found at the same Bar Kokhba sites and caves ... Possibly, therefore, the stone vessels found at sites dated to the Bar Kokhba revolt were brought by people fleeing areas under Roman occupation during the first revolt. The discovery of a single vessel, apparently in secondary use in a period later than the Destruction, does not indicate continued production. These vessels disappeared after the Destruction of the Second Temple, and were no longer used.<sup>16</sup>

To date, all of the assessments regarding the chalk vessel industry during the 70-132 CE interwar period have relied on the limited number of remains which could be securely dated to the period subsequent to 70 CE. The new finds from Shu'afat, which include a large assemblage of chalk vessels dating to the interwar period, compel us to reevaluate the entire matter.

## 2 The Excavations at Shu'afat

Shu'afat is located ca. four kilometers north of Jerusalem, at the southwestern foot of Tell el-Ful. Five seasons of excavations were carried out at the site prior to the laying of tracks for the city of Jerusalem's light-rail train.<sup>17</sup> To date, reports on the results of these excavations have appeared only in preliminary

15 Miller, *At the Intersection*, 172.

16 Magen, "Stone Vessels," 359.

17 All excavations were carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and funded by Moriah Jerusalem Development Corporation. The first two seasons were directed by Deborah Sklar-Parnes in 2003 (IAA License A-3955) and 2005 (IAA License A-4402). Two additional seasons were directed by Rachel Bar-Nathan in 2006 (IAA License A-4965) and in 2007 (IAA License A-5755). A final short season was directed by Peter Gendelman in 2008 (IAA License A-5467).

publications.<sup>18</sup> The description which follows is based primarily on these published reports.

Several levels of occupation were discerned at the site, the earliest of which is represented by a single structure dating to the end of the Second Temple period. The main occupation level is a settlement established during the period between the two Jewish revolts against the Romans. After this settlement was abandoned, the site was never settled again, aside from transient occupations during later periods: the late Roman, Byzantine, Mamluk and Ottoman periods, as well as the twentieth-century periods of the British Mandate and Jordanian authority over the area.

Because the excavations were restricted to the narrow path of the planned light-rail line, only a small portion of the primary phase of settlement at the site was uncovered, measuring 506 m long and only 8 m wide (Fig. 1). As the area that could be excavated was limited, the eastern and western boundaries of the settlement could not be determined, and no architectural units were exposed in their entirety. Despite these limitations, excavators estimated that the settlement was likely long and narrow in plan, since the site is built on a rock terrace which declines sharply from east to west, while from south to north the downslope is quite moderate.<sup>19</sup>

The settlement was built according to a well-planned design, and it is divided into blocks (*insulas*) separated from one another by streets and alleyways which intersect the settlement from east to west. In the southern sector of the site, ten *insulas* were uncovered which include residential units together with units exploited for crafts and small-scale manufacturing, and perhaps also shops and storage rooms. Five additional *insulas* of a more public character were uncovered in the northern sector of the site, among which were two Roman bathhouses, a large public latrine, and the remains of a large ashlar-built public building. Water cisterns and stepped immersion pools (i.e., *miqwa'ot*) were uncovered among the various *insulas*.

Salient among the small finds were coin hoards, local and imported pottery, lamps ("Herodian," discus and mold-made lamps), glassware, ceramic inkwells, iron and bronze implements, loom weights and spinning whorls, basalt

18 Sklar-Parnes, Rapuano, and Bar-Nathan, "Excavations in Northeast Jerusalem"; Sklar-Parnes, "Shu'fat"; "Shu'fat—Final Report"; Bar-Nathan and Sklar-Parnes, "Jewish Settlement"; Bijovsky, "Coin Finds"; Bouchnick and Bar-Nathan, "Bones as Evidence." Currently in preparation is a final excavation report that will cover all seasons of excavations between the years 2003-2008, written by Rachel Bar-Nathan together with collaborators. This final report includes a chapter prepared by the present author on the chalk vessel assemblage unearthed at the site.

19 Bar-Nathan and Sklar-Parnes, "Jewish Settlement," 58.

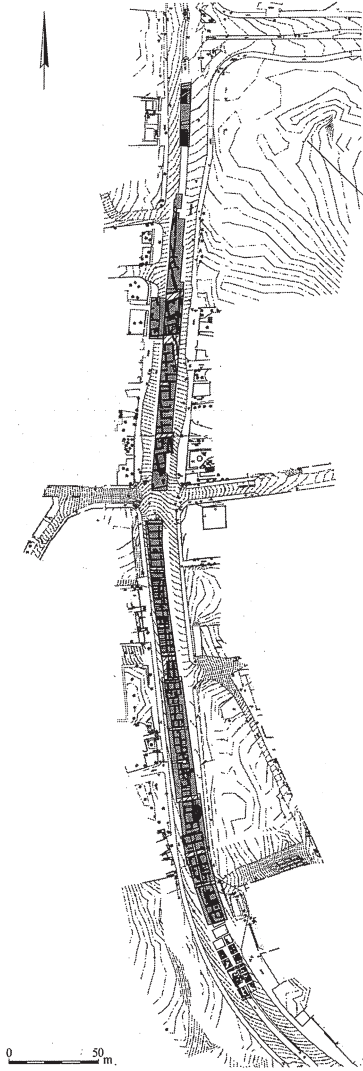


FIGURE 1  
 Plan of the site  
 BAR-NATHAN AND SKLAR-PARNES, "A JEWISH  
 SETTLEMENT," COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL  
 ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

grinding stones, and a large assemblage of chalk vessels—which is the subject of the present article. An analysis of the faunal remains has shown that the number of bones belonging to species forbidden in the Pentateuch (saliently, pig) is quite low, a faunal profile characteristic of Jewish sites throughout the Early Roman period.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bouchnick and Bar-Nathan, "Bones as Evidence." The authors of this study wrote (p. 220) that the low incidence of pig and donkey remains in the faunal assemblage indicates that

The chronology of the site has been established mainly on the basis of the rich numismatic evidence which was uncovered at the site (326 coins have been identified). A *terminus post quem* for the date of the establishment of the settlement was concluded on the basis of the latest coins found in the foundations of the structures and on the surfaces of the bedrock—lepta dating to the second and third years of the Great Revolt (67-69 CE). On top of the floors of the buildings were found city coins dating to the first and early second centuries CE. The latest coins in the hoards date to 126/7 CE, and as such the excavators reached the conclusion that the site was abandoned on the eve of the Bar Kokhba revolt—without having taken part in the revolt itself. As for how the site's occupation ended, the excavators note that the data is somewhat unclear; on the one hand there are indications of organized abandonment (such as coin hoards, openings that were sealed shut and entire rooms found empty of any contents), while on the other hand there are signs of partial destruction and swift abandonment, for example layers of ash and rooms with intact vessels left on the floors.

The excavators proposed that the site was occupied by a well-off Jewish population, and even went so far as to suggest that refugees from Jerusalem's aristocracy were settled at Shu'afat by the Roman authorities either during the Great Revolt or immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The basis for this hypothesis is a story told by Flavius Josephus about Jerusalemite aristocrats who gave themselves up to the Romans and were settled in Gophna by Titus (*J.W.* 6.115-116), along with the precise town-planning reminiscent of Roman urban design. The economy of the settlement relied on the provision of food to the Roman soldiers and road services to passersby on the main road of the central Judean highlands that passed just to the west of the site.

According to the excavators, residents of the settlement abandoned the site for reasons unknown immediately prior to the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt and did not participate in the revolt itself. The chronological conclusions derived from the results of the primary excavations at the site are supported by the results of limited salvage excavations conducted at the edge of the site and in a nearby burial cave.<sup>21</sup>

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while this was not a Roman site—i.e., one associated with the legions—the settlement likely hosted a mixed Jewish/non-Jewish population. I am not at all convinced that a small number of bones (24 NISP of pig and 9 NISP of donkey) is enough data to allow us to decide that a permanent non-Jewish population resided at the site. A careful analysis of this issue, however, is beyond the scope of the present article.

21 Adawi, "Burial Cave"; Rapuano, "Ceramic Finds"; Yeger, "Jerusalem, Shu'fat"; "Jerusalem, Shu'fat (A)."



### 3 The Assemblage of Chalk Vessels from Shu'afat

The assemblage of chalk vessels from Shu'afat includes 757 fragments, of which 656 are typologically identifiable. These vessels were uncovered throughout the entire site, with several fragments unearthed in most rooms of each insula and even in alleyways between some of the town blocks. Stratigraphically, chalk vessel fragments were found not only in fills, but also directly on floor surfaces, in the makeup of floors and also beneath floors. Chalk vessel finds on floor surfaces, in many instances almost completely restorable, indicate that these vessels were being used up until the abandonment of the site circa 130 CE. The extensive spatial distribution of chalk vessel fragments throughout the site suggests that use of these vessels was extremely widespread among the site's residents and was not relegated to particular families or groups.

All of the most common forms of chalk vessels known from Second Temple period assemblages are represented in the Shu'afat corpus, but present at Shu'afat were also some new types unknown from pre-70 CE assemblages. Considering both the large quantity as well as the variegated quality of the present assemblage, the excavations at Shu'afat have provided an exceptional opportunity to study typological developments in chalk vessels produced during the 70-132 CE interwar period.



FIGURE 2 Representative group of hand-carved vessels from the Shu'afat assemblage  
PHOTO CREDIT: CLARA AMIT; COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES  
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FIGURE 3 Representative group of hand-carved basins from the Shu'afat assemblage  
 PHOTO CREDIT: CLARA AMIT; COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES  
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### 3.1 *Hand-carved Vessels*

The largest group of vessels within the corpus (64%) is hand-carved, without the aid of a lathe. The clear majority of these (38% of the total assemblage) are identified as mugs, pitchers or bowls—all of which are types well-known from pre-70 CE assemblages (Fig. 2). The mugs are approximately cylindrical in form and display a distinctive, pierced “mug-handle”—an upright rectangular projection with a round hole drilled through the center. Mugs have either a single such handle or two opposing handles. It should be noted that all the mugs unearthed at Shu'afat were fashioned completely by hand, unlike the technique commonly used in Galilee where the inside of the mug was removed as a single core with the aid of a lathe.<sup>22</sup> Pitchers resemble mugs, except that they tend to be smaller and present an open spout placed at an approximately 90° angle clockwise from a single pierced “mug-handle.”<sup>23</sup> Bowls resemble mugs and pitchers except that they are without a pierced “mug-handle” or spout, and instead have either no handles at all or small lug-handles at or near the rim. Another hand-carved form found in significant numbers at Shu'afat (17% of the total assemblage) is the basin—a large, rectangular- or oval-shaped tub with a flat base, straight or sloping sides, rounded corners and a pair of lug handles at the rims on both of the short sides (Fig. 3). Other hand-carved vessels

22 Gal, “Stone-Vessel Manufacturing Site”; Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 118; Amit, “Manufacture of Stone Vessels,” 56-58; Adler, “New Insights,” 10-12.

23 One pitcher in the assemblage is exceptionally large; see Fig. 2 (top row, second from right).



FIGURE 4 Lathe-turned “Shu’afat-type” bowls from the Shu’afat assemblage  
 PHOTO CREDIT: CLARA AMIT; COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES  
 AUTHORITY

include lids with pierced “mug-handles,” large trays, round table-tops, and fragments from a rare type of liquid-collecting vessel known from only a small number of other sites.<sup>24</sup> Another rare vessel is a volume-measuring device, also known from a limited number of parallels at other sites.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.2 *Small Lathe-turned Vessels*

The second largest group (26%) are vessels turned on a small lathe, mostly bowls of various types (23% of the total assemblage). While some of the bowl-types are well-known from pre-70 CE assemblages, the dominant type of lathe-turned bowl in the Shu’afat corpus (6% of the total assemblage) is almost completely new, and we might therefore dub it the “Shu’afat-type bowl”—a simple form with a flat base and sloping sides, with or without an inward curve or carination toward the rim (Fig. 4).<sup>26</sup> Other lathe-turned objects include lids and a small number of cores removed during production of bowls, manufacturing waste which was likely reused at the site as stoppers. It should be noted here that cone-shaped stoppers with wide heads, known from late Second Temple period sites, are conspicuously missing from our assemblage.

24 For parallels and discussion, see Adler and Farhi, “Unique and Enigmatic Type.”

25 For a preliminary report on this vessel and its parallels from other sites, see Reich, Amit, and Bar-Nathan, “Volume-Measuring Devices.” This vessel will be published separately from the chalk vessel assemblage in the final report on the excavations at Shu’afat.

26 The closest known parallel to this type of bowl is found at Hizma, among bowls that had broken during production (Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 23, Fig. 2.6:1-3). As will be discussed below, production activity at Hizma appears to have continued after 70 CE, and it is quite possible that fragments of our “Shu’afat-type bowl” found at Hizma date to the interwar period. The form is similar to one found at Sepphoris, a site which was continuously occupied both before and after 70 CE (Reed, “Stone-Vessel Assemblage,” 759, no. 10; the excavators of Sepphoris did not report a date for the locus [85.1212] in which this fragment was found).



FIGURE 5 Large krater-shaped jar from the Shu'afat assemblage

PHOTO CREDIT: CLARA AMIT; COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

### 3.3 *Krater-shaped Jars*

Large krater-shaped jars, turned on a large-lathe, make up the third largest group of identified fragments (11%).<sup>27</sup> One of these jars was unearthed complete (Fig. 5). While these are quite similar in form to those found in Jerusalem and other pre-70 CE assemblages, the form of the rims is noteworthy; all of the rim fragments in the present assemblage belong to a single type, featuring a flat top from which protrudes a single rounded or squared ledge, beneath which a triangular-profiled projection overhangs the shoulder and body of the krater. At other sites, another type of krater-rim featuring a triple-ridge profile is quite common. This second type of rim appeared as early as the first century

<sup>27</sup> Archaeological reports and scholarly works often call this type of vessel a *kallal* (or *qallal*), but this is based on a mistaken understanding of the term in rabbinic literature; see Adler, *Archaeology of Purity*, 210-12.

BCE,<sup>28</sup> and dominates the first century CE assemblages from Jewish Quarter Areas A and W (7 out of 10)<sup>29</sup> and from the Jerusalem Garbage dump (13 rims out of 17).<sup>30</sup> Reich noted that a higher frequency of triple-ridge rims was also found in the much larger sample he had excavated together with Eli Shukron in “fills dumped on the eastern slope of the City of David,” apparently a reference to portions of the city dump encountered in their excavations begun in the late 1990s in the area of the Gihon Spring and elsewhere in the Lower City.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, excavators at the nearby Giv’ati Parking Lot excavations found triangular-profiled rims (like those at Shu’afat) to be the dominant type among krater-rim types in this assemblage.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere I have suggested that the discrepancies between rim-type frequencies in various excavated areas of Jerusalem may represent an as-yet unrecognized chronological development in typological forms, with the finds from the city dump and perhaps those from the Jewish Quarter as well representing one chronological period, and those from the Giv’ati Parking Lot another.<sup>33</sup> The finds from Shu’afat support this possibility, as they suggest that the triangular-profiled rim may have been the only krater rim-type in use by the early second century CE, by which time this type had completely replaced the earlier, triple-ridge profile type.

#### 3.4 *Summary of Shu’afat Assemblage*

The plethora of chalk vessel finds at Shu’afat provides clear and indisputable evidence that chalk vessels were indeed used for decades after 70 CE. The fact that numerous restorable vessels were found throughout the site on floors of structures abandoned around the beginning of the fourth decade of the second century CE indicates that these vessels continued to be used right up until the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

It seems quite likely that chalk vessels were not only in continuous *use* throughout the interwar period, but also that these vessels—both hand-made and lathe-turned—continued to be *produced* during this period as well. The following reasons may be adduced to support this assessment:

1. It seems unlikely that all of the Shu’afat vessels evidently in use ca. 130 CE were simply heirlooms, produced at least sixty years prior.

28 Geva, “Stone Artifacts,” 222-23, Fig. 9.2:1-6.

29 Reich, “Stone Vessels,” 266.

30 Gadot and Adler, “Quantitative Analysis,” 214.

31 Reich, “Stone Vessels,” 266. For the “fills dumped on the eastern slope of the City of David” encountered by Reich and Shukron, see Reich, *Excavating City of David*, 148.

32 Zilberstein and Nissim Ben Efraim, “Stone Vessels,” 220.

33 Gadot and Adler, “Quantitative Analysis,” 214.

2. The dominant type of lathe-turned bowl in the Shu'afat assemblage (the "Shu'afat-type bowl") belongs to a new type of vessel almost completely unattested in assemblages predating 70 CE.
3. As we shall see below, certain finds unearthed in the chalk vessel workshop at Hizma date specifically to the interwar period, suggesting that production at this site continued for some time after 70 CE.

In sum, the rich chalk vessel assemblage unearthed at Shu'afat suggests that there was no decline in either usage or production of chalk vessels at any point during the 70-132 CE interwar period.

#### 4 Interwar Period Chalk Vessels at Other Sites

Was the chalk vessel assemblage from Shu'afat anomalous, or does it perhaps represent a far wider phenomenon of continued production and use of chalk vessels after 70 CE at other sites as well? I will argue here that Shu'afat is likely exemplary of post-70 CE Judea as a whole, and that previous assessments regarding the low amount of chalk vessels which date to the period between 70 and 132 CE misrepresent the actual number of finds which date to the interwar period. As will be described presently, the underestimation owes itself primarily to the difficulty in archaeologically differentiating between the late Second Temple period and the period immediately following it.

The failure of the Great Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem did not result in the demise of late Second Temple period pottery-making traditions, as most of the pottery types characteristic of the mid-first century CE continued virtually unchanged into the beginning of the second century.<sup>34</sup> More precise chronological determinations are possible only with regard to a limited number of material finds which can be dated with a high degree of certainty to the interwar period and the Bar Kokhba revolt—e.g., coins, discus lamps and "Darom"-type lamps, candlestick-shaped glass bottles, and a small number of unique ceramic forms. Because the material culture characteristic of the period before 70 CE is so similar to that of the period immediately following it, archaeological reports tend to lump the entire period beginning with Herod the Great and continuing until the Bar Kokhba revolt into one extended archaeological period.<sup>35</sup> While this archaeological period should best be referred to by

34 Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt, "Ceramic Corpus"; Rapuano, "Pottery of Judea"; Terem, *Jerusalem and Judaea*.

35 Rapuano, "Pottery of Judea," 60.

a neutral term such as the “Early Roman period,” it is quite common for it to be called—somewhat inaccurately—the “late Second Temple period” or even the “Herodian period.” This archaeological convention has been the source of a certain amount of confusion when “late Second Temple period” phenomena are assumed to have disappeared precisely in midsummer of 70 CE.

Chalk vessel fragments have been uncovered at dozens of sites in the Judean countryside whereat archaeological remains dated to the interwar and the Bar Kokhba periods were also uncovered. In most of these cases, it is possible to assign only a broad date to the chalk vessel fragments themselves in accordance with the period of time during which the site was occupied. As such, in most cases it is simply impossible to know if the chalk vessels predate or postdate 70 CE. The following is a partial list of sites which have produced evidence of occupation during the interwar and/or Bar Kokhba periods, and at which chalk vessel fragments were also uncovered:<sup>36</sup> Tel Shiloh, Kh. Burnat (North), Shoham Bypass, Ben Shemen Interchange, Ḥ. Ḥermeshit, Ḥ. Gardi (Kh. Gharbawi abu Subha), Qiryat Sefer, Ḥorbat Tittora, Kh. Nisya, Kh. Umm el-‘Umdan, Gezer, Gibeon (Tell el-Jib), Yad Benyamin Site, Jerusalem International Convention Center, Bethany (el-‘Azariya), Ramat Raḥel, Giv‘at Ha-Maṭos, Naḥal Yarmut, Kh. Hilal, Ḥ. Midras, Ḥ. ‘Etri, Ḥ. Lavnin, Ḥ. Tannim, ‘Ein ‘Arub, Kh. Tabaq, Kh. Jamrura, Aḥuzat Ḥazan, Rujum el-Ḥamiri, H. Ṣalit, Naḥal Yattir, and Aro‘er. At each of these sites, it is possible—if not likely—that at least some of the chalk vessel remains are from the period between 70-135 CE.

The royal palaces site at Jericho is another site at which a level well-dated to the interwar period has been excavated—the so-called “Roman Estate,” dated ca. 70-112 CE.<sup>37</sup> As noted above, within this layer were uncovered chalk vessel remains belonging to a variety of types of lathe-made bowls, hand-carved bowls, mugs and large basins.<sup>38</sup>

At the chalk vessel workshop at Ḥizma as well, a number of the published ceramic remains are datable to the interwar period, suggesting that production at the site continued after 70 CE.<sup>39</sup> These include certain types of cooking wares and storage jars as well as a fragment of a mold-made discus lamp unknown from Jerusalem and other Jewish sites destroyed during the Great

36 As per Zissu, “Rural Settlement,” vii-xv.

37 Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt, “Ceramic Corpus,” 5.

38 Bar-Nathan and Gärtner, “Stone Artifacts.”

39 Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 52-61. The dating of some of this published pottery specifically to the interwar period was explained to me in personal communication with Rachel Bar-Nathan and Shulamit Terem (01.01.2019). My thanks to Rachel and Shulamit for their kind assistance on this matter.



Revolt.<sup>40</sup> These finds contradict Magen's assessment that "the entire pottery assemblage" from the Hizma workshop is to be dated to the first century CE per se, and suggest rather that activity at the site continued during the interwar period—quite possibly well into the second century CE.<sup>41</sup> If production at Hizma did in fact continue during the interwar period, it is not at all unlikely that this workshop may have provided products to Shu'afat, located only five kilometers away.

Clear evidence of continued use of chalk vessels during the interwar period in Galilee as well was uncovered at Khirbet Wadi Ḥamam, where chalk vessels were found among a rich assemblage of artefacts found in a massive destruction layer that has been dated on the basis of strong numismatic evidence to the reign of Hadrian, ca. 125-135 CE.<sup>42</sup> This is the first instance that a destruction layer dating to the second century CE has been discovered in the Galilee, and the presence of chalk vessels within this destruction layer provides the first solid evidence that in the Galilee, as in Judea, chalk vessels continued to be used as late as the third or fourth decades of that century. A careful analysis of excavation reports on chalk vessels from Sepphoris, Capernaum, and Nabratein reveals that at these Galilean sites as well, no evidence has been found which might suggest that chalk vessel usage declined in any way at any point in time prior to the middle of the second century CE.<sup>43</sup>

## 5 Discussion—Purity without the Temple

The finds from Shu'afat help to fill in the picture—which until now had been vague—of the extent to which chalk vessels continued to be produced and used during the period intervening between the Great Revolt and the Bar Kokhba revolt. At this stage we may summarize that there is no data today which points to a decline of any sort in scope or intensity of the phenomenon following 70 CE. To the contrary, the finds from Shu'afat suggest that the

40 A drawing of the discus lamp fragment appears in Magen, *Stone Vessel Industry*, 60, Fig. 2.61. For a discussion on when the discus lamp was first introduced into Judea, see Rosenthal-Heginbottom, "Imported Pottery," 382.

41 Throughout the pottery report, Magen concedes that many of the pottery forms uncovered at Hizma remained in use through the Bar Kokhba period (*Stone Vessel Industry*, 53, 55, 57-58, 61). It should be noted that this report predates important typological clarifications recently made known regarding changes in pottery types during the interwar period; see especially Terem, *Jerusalem and Judaea*.

42 Leibner, "Stone Artifacts."

43 Adler, "Decline," 273-77.



chalk vessel industry continued, and even developed, for some time into the second century CE.

I have argued elsewhere that even during the period when the temple stood, the primary motivation for widespread observance of the purity laws among Jews throughout the country had nothing at all to do with the temple or its cult.<sup>44</sup> Following John Poirier, I argued that a straightforward reading of the passages in the Torah which delineate the purity regulations would likely have led most Jews to the understanding that impurity is a negative state of being which should be avoided to the extent that this is possible—at all times, in all places, and for all “Israelites.”<sup>45</sup> The Pentateuch dedicates five entire chapters in Leviticus (11-15), and an additional chapter in Numbers (19) to explicate in great detail the various causes of impurity, how these impurities are transferred from one person or object to another, and finally how these impurities are to be removed from humans, clothing and utensils. In almost all cases absolutely no explanation is given as to *why* it should matter if a person, article of clothing, utensil or foodstuff became impure, or *to what end* must the impurity be removed if and when it can be. It seems quite likely that these passages were understood not merely as theoretical descriptions of the metaphysical mechanics of impurity in the cosmos—how impurity is contracted and how it is removed—but rather as practical *directives* addressed to every individual Israelite on how to act with regard to various situations of impurity. Of course, it would have been impossible to completely avoid impurity, as women naturally experience menstruation and childbirth, men experience seminal ejaculations, and every mortal human eventually dies and requires burial. Accordingly, the common understanding would likely have been that when impurity occurs, those affected should remove the impurity as soon as this becomes feasible in order to rectify the situation and return things to their proper state of being. There is no reason to think that any of this might have been understood as relating to the temple, its cult or the priests. The Pentateuch itself in these six excruciatingly detailed chapters certainly never suggests this in any explicit way.

True enough, in a number of cases the Pentateuch’s purity rules do explicitly refer to the sacred sphere: impure persons are forbidden to consume sacrificial meat (Lev 7:21; 22:3-7; Num 9:6-13), if such meat becomes impure it may not be eaten and must be burnt (Lev 7:19-20), certain impure persons are barred from entering the sanctum (Lev 12:4; cf. Lev 15:31; Num 19:13, 20), a postpartum woman is admonished not to touch “any hallowed thing” (Lev 12:4), and priests

44 Adler, “Between Priestly Cult.”

45 Poirier, “Purity beyond the Temple,” esp. 253.

are expressly prohibited from incurring corpse impurity (Lev 21:1-4, 11; Nazirites too: Num 6:6-11).<sup>46</sup> Those who failed to keep the purity rules when it came to the sanctum and the sacrificial cult were threatened with excision (Lev 7:20-21; 22:3; Num 19:13, 20) and even death (Lev 15:31; 22:9). It seems highly unlikely, however, that any of these prescriptions and exhortations were viewed as circumscribing all of the Pentateuchal purity regulations in such a way that the entirety of Lev 11-15 and Num 19 was somehow understood as applying only to the temple or to the priesthood. To the contrary, it appears to be quite difficult to interpret a number of references as anything other than normative prescriptions applying at all times, in all places, to all Israelites and in all situations. For example, it is forbidden to touch carrion (Lev 11:8; Deut 13:8), and one who refrains from bathing and washing his clothes after eating carrion or a “torn animal” carcass is considered a sinner (Lev 17:15-16). There is no reason to think that any of this might refer specifically to priests or that it has anything at all to do with the temple cult. Similarly, earthen vessels as well as ovens and stoves which have come into contact with certain impurities must be smashed (Lev 11:33, 35; 15:12), and again there are no obvious grounds to assume that this should have been understood as relating specifically to cultic vessels and installations.

It seems that the most straightforward way to understand all of this—and this is how I imagine most Early Roman period Jews actually did—is that the purity regulations were to be kept at all times and in all places, but failure to do so would have resulted in the most severe of *consequences* specifically when it came to the sanctum and the cult. This may be likened to perjury: while one should never tell a lie anywhere, uttering falsehoods in a courtroom is a particularly grievous offence that carries actual penalties.

Modern scholars often describe the Second Temple period observance of purity in everyday life as somehow “extending” the bounds of purity from the temple cultus to the mundane sphere,<sup>47</sup> as imitating the priestly way of life,<sup>48</sup> or as “greatly exceeding the scope of biblical commands” in some kind of competition with the priests.<sup>49</sup> All of these approaches, I suspect, are heavily influenced by later rabbinic viewpoints which sought to limit the biblical

46 Certain impure persons are excluded from “the camp” (Lev 13:46; 14:8; Num 5:2-4; 12:14-15; 31:19, 24; Deut 23:11-12), and some late Second Temple period Jews certainly did interpret these verses as referring to the temple or even to all of Jerusalem; see: Birenboim, *Observance*, 159-222. Outside of the Pentateuch, we find that Israelites are said to bring offerings to the temple in “a pure vessel” (Isa 66:20).

47 Alon, “Bounds.”

48 Neusner, *From Politics to Piety*, 83; cf. Harrington, “Did the Pharisees,” 53-54.

49 Regev, “Pure Individualism,” 190, 192-99.

foundations of purity in everyday life.<sup>50</sup> Vered Noam has showed how time and again the Tannaitic Midrashim sought out various bold exegetical strategies in order to negate the plain sense of biblical passages whose simple understanding seems to legislate mandatory ritual purity rules in daily life.<sup>51</sup> None of these late Tannaitic modes of thinking are in evidence prior to the Bar Kokhba revolt, however, and as such it is a grave mistake to assume that first- and early second-century Jewish society as a whole thought like the later rabbis on this matter.

It should be stressed that Jews would have been able to maintain the Pentateuchal purity laws more or less in the same manner after 70 CE as before. In almost all cases, the Pentateuch does not require any sort of temple-related activity—such as sacrifice—in order to effect purification. Purification is almost always accomplished through bathing, waiting a specified amount of time, and/or laundering clothing (Lev 11:24-25, 27-28, 31, 39-40; 13:6, 33, 58; 15:5-11, 13, 16, 18-19, 21-24, 27-28; Num 19:21-22; 31:24; Deut 23:12). Primary corpse impurity requires, in addition, sprinkling with red-heifer ashes (Num 19:17-19). Purification from scale-disease requires, in addition to washing and laundering, a ritual involving two birds, and hair shaving (Lev 14:1-9). Utensils require immersion or rinsing in water (Lev 11:32; 15:12, 17; Num 31:22-23) and in some cases passing through fire (Num 31:22-23). None of these ritual actions involve the temple in any way. Only in four instances are sacrifices required, following purification by the usual waiting and/or washing and laundering: (1) the postpartum woman (Lev 12:6-8); (2) the scale-diseased person (Lev 14:10-32); (3) the male with a pathological genital flow (Lev 15:13-15); and (4) the female with a pathological genital flow (Lev 15:28-30). But even in these cases (especially with regard to the latter two), the sacrificial requirement is most easily understood as a sacrificial obligation which obtains *after* the person had already been purified—and not as a prerequisite to the purification itself. In other words, purification was rarely (if at all) contingent on the offering of a sacrifice in the temple.

If, as I am arguing here, Jewish observance of the purity laws during the late Second Temple period had nothing to do with the temple, it follows that

50 See Adler, "Decline"; cf. the suggestion of Poirier ("Purity beyond the Temple," 259-65), who ascribes the prevalent modern approach to Maimonides' polemical anti-Karaite stance on the matter.

51 Noam, "Dual Strategy." While Noam speculates that this approach reaches back as far as the first or even second centuries BCE, elsewhere I have suggested that the rabbinic approach on this matter reflects attitudes contemporaneous with the time when practical purity observance was in decline, beginning around the middle of the second century CE. See Adler, "Decline," 277-81.

the destruction of the temple would have had little effect on how these regulations would have continued to be observed following the temple's ruin. It is likely that anyone who observed the purity laws in day-to-day life prior to 70 CE would have continued to do so afterwards as well. As such, it is in no way surprising to discover that the chalk vessel industry—fundamentally reliant as it was on the needs of those concerned about the purity of their vessels and food—continued to exist and even develop over the course of the decades which followed the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

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