

Michael Avioz

Death, Burial, and Mourning Customs in the Writings of Josephus

This article explores customs related to death, burial, and mourning as they appear in the writings of Josephus. The objective of this study is to examine the extent of Greek and Roman cultural influence upon Josephus' formulation of these customs. Some such customs are described in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, his rewriting of the Hebrew Bible, where certain death, burial, and mourning customs feature. Other descriptions appear in the rest of his writings. The article explores sources from the Hebrew Bible, the ancient Near East, the New Testament, the Apocrypha, rabbinic literature, and works of Greek and Roman authors. Our conclusion is that we must not be too quick to assume Greek or Roman influence upon Josephus' writings – rather, each case must be examined individually. Some descriptions in Josephus' rewriting of the Hebrew Bible indeed seem to be under direct influence of Greco-Roman culture. In other instances, however, Josephus' familiarity with these Greco-Roman customs led him to present the Jewish religion as distinctly different from other religions. Additionally, in some cases, Josephus was familiar with inner-Israelite traditions and presented these in his writings, so that there is no need to assume any Greek or Roman influence.

Yoram Tsafrir

The 'Ten Cities' or Decapolis: A Reconsideration

The Decapolis or 'Ten Cities' is mentioned mostly in the sources of the first century – the New Testament, Josephus, and especially Pliny. All ten cities belonged to the province of Syria, spread from Damascus in the north to Philadelphia (Amman) in the south. One city – Scythopolis (Bet Shean) – was located west of the Jordan River. Many scholars conceive the term 'Decapolis' as mostly geographical. Others, the author among them, understand the term to be the name of a group of cities (Hellenistic by origin) which declared their commitment to Greek culture and religion. Such a definition was necessary as within the cities and around them there were citizens (such as Jews, Samaritans, Itureans, and Nabataeans) who opposed the Greek religion and culture or maintained rather superficial syncretism.

The article claims that the commitment of each individual city and its elite class to the classical-Greek culture encouraged inter-urban activity. It is likely that the cities maintained regional religious and cultural events such as festivals, public sacrifices, games, and personal honorifications. The cities had to appoint officers who were responsible for managing this activity. Indeed, there are no literary sources revealing such activity in that period, but the phenomenon is known from other periods and places. The best parallel is the *'koinon'* of the *'Panhellenion'*, the members of which were cities and individuals, mostly from Greece and Asia Minor. Its center was in Athens and the temple of Eleusis. The members of the Panhellenion strictly examined the Greek authenticity of its members (by origin and mostly by education). It was established by Hadrian and was active throughout the second century CE. The article suggests that as in the case of the Panhellenion, the cities of the Decapolis, too, maintained institutions and managing bodies that took care of the inter-urban activity.

Orit Ramon

Kristof Harant's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (1598) and His Account of the Christian Denominations in Ottoman Jerusalem

Kristof Harant, who published his travelogue in Czech in 1608, described in detail his tour of Jerusalem and especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As part of his detailed description of the church he elaborated on the various Christian denominations he encountered there. He was impressed with the way Christian worship was conducted under Muslim rule as well as with Ottoman supervision of the holy places and pilgrimage, and assigned the maintenance of order and proper relations between the Christian communities to this supervision, although in all other cases he criticized Ottoman rule and the Ottomans as corrupt, greedy, and merciless. The explanation offered in this article for the discrepancy between Harant's attitude towards Ottoman rule in general and Ottoman policy towards the Christian communities in Jerusalem in particular, lies in sixteenth-century Czech inter-confessional relations and Harant's quest for religious harmony.

Lavi Shay

The First 'Family Album' in Jerusalem: Examination of the Valero Family's *carte de visite*, 1860–1900

The development of family albums in Israel and the world in general is related to social and cultural processes of modern society in the last hundred and fifty years, and to technological innovations of the photographic medium. A small local market and conservative norms delayed and postponed the development of the family album in the Land of Israel to the turn of the nineteenth– twentieth century. The present study focuses on a collection of fifty photographic portraits from the second half of the nineteenth century, discovered in possession of the Valero family – owners of the first private bank in the Land of Israel. The author analyzes different aspects that characterize the collection: geography, society, culture and identity, gender, photography, and more.

Collection analysis revealed a narrow segment of the high society in nineteenth-century Jerusalem and illuminated important aspects of the history of photography in Jerusalem in its early stages, such as practices of photographers, Western influence upon them, and their adaptation to diverse audiences, both local and Western. The research indicates that this collection is a relic of a unique 'family album' – one of the first to be created by Jews in Jerusalem. Much of it was actually photographed in the first studio established in the city. The album's business-oriented and professional nature (and not familial, in its modern definition) was common in the nineteenth century in the West, but is not known in the history of photography in the Middle East. The album reflected the system of economic, political, and social connections maintained by this family of bankers and the fact that it served as a cultural agent that assisted the penetration of Western culture, in general, and the photographic medium, in particular, into Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

Yechiam Weitz

Nathan Alterman in the Knesset: The Two Faces of the Poet

During Israel's first decade the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) dealt with two poems written by the prominent poet Nathan Alterman. The first debate took place in 1949 and dealt with the decision of the Military Censor to forbid publishing a poem by Alterman about the dismantling of divisions of the Palmach (Strike Forces). Members of Knesset from the Zionist left-wing Mapam Party, who were in the opposition, criticized the Censor's decision while Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion strongly defended it, despite his close relations with Alterman. The second time that a poem by Alterman was debated in the Knesset was in 1956. At a plenary session of the Knesset, Ben-Gurion read out Alterman's poem about the unloading of weapons received by the IDF from France on the eve of the Sinai Campaign, an act that was carried out in great secrecy. Ben-Gurion's recitation of the poem was considered a most festive and rare event. The way the Knesset deal with the two poems of Alterman reflects the two faces of the poet: one who at times was identified with the opposition and at others closely connected to the establishment.

Nava Vasserman

'The Abstinent Society' – An Alternative Model to 'The Learner's Society'

In characterizing Israeli Haredi (i.e., ultra-Orthodox) society, Menachem Friedman, who laid the foundations for its scholarly study, coined the term 'society of learners', and used it to describe all the various groups of Haredim. By including the Hasidim in this category he obscured their social distinctiveness and limited their uniqueness to issues of dress, music, and leadership by an '*Admor*' (acronym of *Adoneinu Moreinu Verabeinu*, the title of Hasidic spiritual leaders).

This study, focusing on the Gur Hasidic community, shows that there is no single model of Ashkenazi Haredism and that Gur Hasidism represents an alternative to the aforementioned 'the learners society' model that is based on an independent world of content and differences in both lifestyle and religious practice. While the society of

learners defines the identity of Lithuanian-Mitnagdic Haredim as a function of their long-standing Torah study in *yeshivot* and *kollelim*, Gur Hasidism is organized around an ethic of sexual abstinence which is termed '*kedushah*' – holiness – in the sense of being both sanctified and set apart from the habitual practice.

This *kedushah* requires distancing oneself from anything that might arouse sexual desire, much beyond the letter of the law according to its Haredi interpretation. The ethos of *kedushah* leaves its imprint on both the private and public spheres and is accompanied by distinctive patterns of behavior of the *hasid* with himself, his family, his surroundings, and first and foremost his wife.

Yoram Cohen

Reading, Writing, and Literacy in the Ancient Near East

Discussions about the historical, social, and cultural contexts that led to the writing of the Hebrew Bible often inquire into the degree of literacy in Ancient Israel and its neighboring cultures. The publication of Aaron Demsky's book, *Literacy in Ancient Israel*, provides us with an opportunity to treat this issue in a critical way. This broad survey examines the degree of literacy in ancient Near Eastern societies, in particular in Ancient Israel in comparison with its neighboring cultures.