The main subject of this paper is a critical evaluation of the meaning behind Lev 19:26-28 and research of historical and cultural context of tattoo practice, to lay foundations for its meaning in a wider context. The ban codified in the Book of Leviticus needs to be recognized in its literary and cultural context, which also includes reading into set of surrounding commandments. In order to begin deciphering the meaning behind the biblical regulation, we will retrace how tattoos functioned in the ancient world, with a special emphasis on countries neighboring Biblical lands and affecting them ideologically or culturally (1). Next we briefly determine four general reasons behind tattooing throughout the ancient world (2). We will then proceed to analyze the unit mentioned above (Lev 19:26-28). Our key goal will be to establish what the Bible actually says about tattooing and what the literary and theological context in which the ban occurs is (3). Next step in our research will be a brief analysis of ancient Biblical translations: LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, and Ethiopic version. Examination of those traditions will be focused on retracing what the main lexical and theological differences between those interpretations are and, thus, how the biblical prohibition was understood in different regions of the ancient world (4). Then, we will present an overview of Rabbinic literature dealing with the subject of tattoos (5). All the previous steps will lead to a final conclusion, which aims to delineate a perspective required to identify the context behind the ban in Lev 19:26-28.

It is expected that further study will be composed to involve theological analysis of a few other biblical texts that possibly mention tattoos to outline approach accepted by authors of different texts throughout the Bible. For that, the following study will be a starting point with both philological and cultural background.
1. ‘LET’S TAKE A STEP BACK…’

Canaan was always influenced by its neighboring civilizations. Among those, the main role was played by Egypt and the empires cradled on the shores of Euphrates and Tigris. In order to understand the meaning of biblical prohibition of tattooing one needs to examine what function tattooing served there and why it was performed in those cultures. The same procedure was adopted in Rome, and because those empires were connected to Israel through administration, one can guess they promoted their culture and customs.

Although tides of history kept sweeping through Canaan various nations and their cultures, conquests of Alexander the Great had significantly changed and influenced Middle Eastern cultures reaching as far as India, Greece is omitted from the following analysis. According to my research tattooing has not been practiced among Greeks, and scarce examples of bodily modifications can be explained as being instances of foreign provenience. Another significant set of literature absent from our study is Ugarit. There, the main challenge is the fact that sources are subject to interpretation, whether they actually depict tattooing, and the only fragment possibly pointing to the practice is mentioned in notes 57 and 58.

1.1. EGYPT

First point of reference in any socio-cultural analysis of Israel’s life is Egypt, since it influenced Canaan politically and culturally for long ages. This strongly affected social and religious ideas of the Hebrews, since many similarities between the two countries have been observed. Although literary data concerning tattoos in ancient Egypt is wide, it is ambiguous. It dates to later periods so there is no written reference to tattoos or markings on bodies in Egypt before the Greco-Roman period, and even then it is often biased by a tendency to mock Egyptians. That is why we will focus mainly on archaeological discoveries.

The origin of Egyptian tattoos is unclear; there was no specific and exclusive word for it in Ancient Egyptian, which may suggest it was not a native custom. Some point to a Nubian influence, since bodies of Nubian women decorated with patterns of dots and dashes have been discovered dated as early as Sixth and as late as Eighteenth Dynasty. But there are also some Predynastic female figures that look as though they have been tattooed. However, there is no proof that

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3 See L. Keimer, Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Egypte Ancienne, Caire 1948, 2, fig. 1–5;
the signs represent tattoos, marking, painting or scarification. In later periods any corporal modification was labeled with a glyph ‘mentenu,’ which means ‘inscribed,’ ‘etched,’ ‘incised,’ or ‘engraved.’ The same glyph was also encountered in reference to inscribing names of gods on people’s arms. But no specific method was mentioned.

Though not exclusively, tattoos were worn mainly by women, as numerous archaeological findings prove. The most famous tattooed mummies date to the Middle Kingdom (Eleventh Dynasty, ca. 2050–2000 B.C.) and were found at Deir el-Bahri. One of the bodies, which bore geometrically arranged dots and dashes on the abdomen, above the thighs and breasts, as well as on legs and arms, belonged to the Priestess of Hathor, the goddess of sky and protector of pharaoh’s wives, whose name was Amunet. The woman and her companion were first recognized as prostitutes or dancers. But the reality proved more complex than it seemed at first. The tattoos were not associated with immorality and low social status, since inscriptions on the tombs labeled one of the women as $hkrt\ nsw\ w't.t$. This title, ‘Sole Lady in Waiting’ was often given to the wives of important officials. Both bodies were buried close to the temple of Mentuhotep Nebhepetre, which is an area that seems to have been a property of royal, or at least noble women.

In 1923, 32 years after the above discovery had been made, two other tattooed bodies were found in the same area. Besides similar patterns, tattoos on their chest, arms, legs, dorsum of their feet and abdomen, corpses exhibited scarification. Unfortunately, no titles were included in the tombs, so the status of the bodies cannot be determined, although the place of burial might suggest an equally high social rank of the women. The same markings were later discovered on ‘paddle dolls,’ sometimes called ‘fertility dolls’ or ‘brides of the dead,’ that were fashioned in the New Kingdom period.


4 R.S. Bianchi, *op. cit.*, 27. “Although the appearance of certain painted dolls found in archaic graves has led certain writers to assume that tattooing was customary in Predynastic times in Egypt, no positive evidence of this any other form of mutilation of the skin has ever been revealed by the direct examination of the bodies of the Proto-Egyptians” – G.E. Smith, *The Ancient Egyptians and their influence upon the Civilization of Europe*, New York 1911, 55–56.

5 This title used to be translated in the past as ‘Sole Royal Ornament’, or ‘King’s Favourite Ornament’. – see G.J. Tassie, *op. cit.*, 90. Later those translations have been proven incorrect.


Figure 1. Detail of the tattoos on Amunet’s friend’s abdomen

Since all the women were either elite court ladies or even priestesses of Hathor, it can be concluded that marking the body was not purposed on amusing men. It is possible that the signs were intended as marks specific for the devotees of Hathor. Positioning of the patterns near genital areas may point to either fertility or protection rituals engaged in the process. This leads us to a later tradition of tattooing.

9 L. Keimer, Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Egypte Ancienne, Caire 1948, 11, fig. 9; D. Fouquet, Le tatouage médical en Égypte dans l’antiquité et à l’époque actuelle, Archives d’Anthropologie Criminelle 13 (1898), 271–278.

10 ‘The priestess Amunet and the figurines in question are all associated with Hathor, the most lascivious of all Egyptian goddesses […]. Nevertheless, the eroticism which is undoubtedly associated with Egyptian tattoo of the Middle Kingdom correlates […] with a prevailing religious attitude that linked physical procreative drives with the loftier aspirations of a resurrection in the Hereafter.’ – R.S. Bianchi, op. cit., 22–23; ‘Tattoos on the abdominal part of the female body would have become particularly notable when the woman became pregnant – the patterns would expand, forming an even more symbolically interesting pattern, like a web or netting design.’ – G.J. Tassie, op. cit., 91. But earlier conclusions were pointing towards therapeutic purpose: ‘The examination of these scars, some white, others blue, leaves in no doubt that they are not, in essence, ornament, but an established treatment for a condition of the pelvis, very probably chronic pelvic peritonitis.’ – see D. Fouquet, op. cit., 271–272.
(or at least, painting) the image of Bes, Egyptian god, on women’s thighs as depicted in paintings and carvings from New Kingdom period\textsuperscript{11}. Bes is believed to play an apotropaic role, watching over households, and especially over women and mothers during childbirth\textsuperscript{12}. However, the practice of tattooing dots and dashes existed side by side with the custom of putting silhouette markings representing Bes.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{bes_tattoo}
\caption{Selected Bes’ depictions, employed as tattoos in New Kingdom period\textsuperscript{13}}
\end{figure}

This theory is supported by evidence from later periods, as cultic tattooing was practiced and often mentioned by Philo and other texts, although no body bearing such signs has been preserved and discovered. In the Greco-Roman period tattooing obtained another meaning – slaves were branded and at the same time tattooing became a form of penalty. Discoveries at Akhmim might prove the assumption, since the recovered bodies bear marks on the chin and sides of the nose, however due to the decomposition and scarcity of findings, it is impossible to determine whether it was a common practice in ancient Egypt\textsuperscript{14}.

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\textsuperscript{11} It is important to remember that high-status women were usually depicted fully clothed, but because of the paucity of archaeological data, it is impossible to determine whether this custom was shared by all women in Egypt – see G.J. Tassie, \textit{op.cit.}, 94–96; C. Graves-Brown, \textit{op.cit.}, 113.

\textsuperscript{12} R.S. Bianchi, \textit{op.cit.}, 24–25.

\textsuperscript{13} L. Keimer, \textit{Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Egypte Ancienne}, Caire 1948, 41, fig. 39.

1.2. MESOPOTAMIA

Any analysis of tattooing practice in Mesopotamia lacks reference to archaeological data and, therefore, only textual allusions can be brought up. It is usually stated that in Mesopotamia slaves were marked, incised or branded in the flesh either on their foreheads or on their hands. This mark, called ḫuṭārtu in Akkadian, was meant to identify the slave’s rightful owner; the Laws of Hammurabi forbid removing or obliterating it. Doing so, and even encouraging a slave to do so was considered a capital crime. But before marks were used on slaves and servants, the first method of visual identification was a special haircut, namely a lock of hair growing from a specifically determined part of the scalp with the rest of the hair shaved. This was a practice continued in later periods with household servants. When a slave was to be freed, the hairdo was removed.

Besides punitive signs imposed on runaway slaves, Babylonians also gave their slaves markings stating the name of the owner. From among numerous texts, we shall only bring up one, from the Late Babylonian period, which mentions markings on slaves’ bodies:

\[
\text{ša ritti imnišu ana šumi ša PN šaṭrata uḫuṭārti šanīti ana šumi ša PN}_2 \text{ šaṭrata}
\]

(a slave girl) whose right hand is inscribed with the name of PN
and (further identified by a second slave mark ḫuṭārtu) inscribed with the name of PN2

Alternative expressions denoting markings on the body included šimtu (sometimes spelled as šindu), šaṭāru and eṣēru. We lack any reference to what method was involved, with the writings often describing them as signs made with dye, similarly to those used for branding cattle in the Old Babylonian period. The second and third terms generally mean ‘to write, draw, or incise,’ and thus offer an insight into the method of marking one’s body. The skin was incised with a sharp object and drops of indelible ink were inserted between the layers of the skin.

Another example of markings made on hands was connected to the practice observed in the Neo-Babylonian period. In this case oblates of Eanna temple were branded with a sign on their hands, signifying that they had become slaves of their god or of the temple.

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16 N.S. Fox, op.cit., 268–269.

17 Other punitive actions involved piercing (palāšu), severe mutilation (ḫapû or nakāsu) of the ears, nose, lips, tongue or jaw. MAL A40 includes a sentence imposed on a slave woman: dressing in clothes not befitting her class and cutting off her ears. Anyone helping her to avoid the penalty and protecting her from the authorities would have his ears pierced and tied to the back – see also laws A4, A5, A24, A44, A59, LH205 and LH 205 – see N.S. Fox, op.cit., 271–272.

18 Original text and translation – CAD VI, 264.

19 Original text and translation – CAD XVII/1, 307.
kakkabti rittašu taltemit u šaṭāri ina muḫḫi rittīšu ana Nanā taltaṭar

(the slave girl herself) marked her hand with the star and wrote an inscription on her hand, ‘to (the god) Nanā’

The text shows that a name written on girl’s hand was a sign that she had become property of her god. In other words, her statement makes her a servant (širku, literally ‘the given one’) to her god. In other texts, the verb šamātu is often employed to describe marks on persons devoted to a god, as a parallel to animals branded with the name of their owner.

Some researchers suggested that marking one’s arm with a name can be interpreted as a sign of gratitude. However, meaning of the phrase employed, šalmam naqārum, is unclear and, thus, disputed.

1.3. ROMAN EMPIRE

In ancient Rome, leaving marks on the body played a different role. Since literacy was much more widespread, short pieces of information or warnings were put on the skin. This process was mainly connected to two social groups: slaves and soldiers.

The former group, slaves (servi), were usually marked as a form penalty for severe crimes. Ancient Roman texts are mainly focused on one specific crime committed by slaves – escaping, with no other violation of the law by slaves reported this widely in Latin sources. Troublesome slaves were given marks on their faces and/or heads describing their crimes and faults. It was commonly performed on slaves who attempted to escape their masters’ households. Runaway slaves were marked with the capital letter F (or FUG), standing for Latin ‘fugitivus’. But it was only the first part of the penalty; in addition, fugitives were either sent to become gladiators or to perform most exhausting tasks, for example working in dangerous environment of mines with heads shaved, forever bound in iron collars around their necks and iron chains around ankles. Yet another dimension of the same penalty was that usually they were not allowed to leave the property of their master, or even the building where their work was performed. One of the collars preserved at Rome bears

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21 pānīki ina amārī šalāmki ina aḫīni in niqqur (‘when we see you, we should incise your image on our arms’) – F.R. Kraus, Briefe aus dem British Museum, Altbabylonische Briefe 2, Leiden 1966, text 46:19-21; šumma balṭākū-ma An-Martu bānīka igdamlanni šašmīka ina aḫīya luqqur (‘If I am alive, and An-Martu, your begetter spares me, I should incise your images on my arms’) – R. Frankena, Briefe aus der Leidener Sammlung, Altbabylonische Briefe 3, Leiden 1968, text 22:7-9; see also J. Huehnergard, H. Liebowitz, op.cit., 72.

the inscription ‘I have run away. Catch me. If you take me back to my master Zoni-nus, you will be rewarded’.

Besides F(UG) marks, different sets of signs were also put on the skin of offenders. Two other marks are “FUR” (from Latin “fur”) for thieves and “KAL” (from grecized word “kalumnia”) for false accusers. However, it is disputable whether the signs put on the slaves were actually tattoos, as it is more likely they were branding, especially if punitive purpose was the dominating motive. Since tattooing is a longer process, which requires at least some sort of consent stated by its receiver, branding, which is a painful imprinting of small texts or figures with hot iron, is a more probable method of punishing wrongdoers.

Marks on the body have been retraced also in case of soldiers. Putting a mark on them was a necessity, since many of them were mercenaries; when facing harsh climate conditions of or challenging foes, they were likely to run away from the camps or positions assigned to them. If marked with a special set of signs, they were easy to distinguish from the crowd, and could be quickly returned to their superiors and places of assignment or affiliation. They did not play the same role as modern epaulettes or sleeve marks determining their rank, but they served as signs indicating that people wearing them were soldiers on the run. As compared with the same procedure as with the slaves, their signs were meant to discourage them from leaving their positions, rather than penalize them for doing so.

2. ANCIENT REASONS FOR TATTOOING

Although authors agree almost unanimously that tattoos in history were usually treated as a sign of slavery, one different point needs to be stressed: so far no decisive proof has been presented that tattoos in antiquity had an aesthetic value. The earliest documented information about aesthetic tattoos come from 247 BCE, and originates in Japan, as recounted by Chinese historians. However, tattoos fell out of use


when the markings started being imposed on criminals\textsuperscript{27}. Based on archaeological and written data retrieved from different cultures, even those from outside the Fertile Crescent, reasons for tattooing can be broken down into four groups: social, punitive, cultic or therapeutic.

When dealing with a social purpose, tattoos are based on a supposition that a visible sign worn on the skin is an expression of initiation or fulfilling conditions which make a person suitable for a new role within and for the community\textsuperscript{28}. The punitive dimension aims to distinguish a criminal from the rest of society; the tattoo works then as a ‘caution’ sign put on the skin. As for the case of cultic tattoos, they are considered as a part of rituals that connect the marked person with the deity\textsuperscript{29}.

Therapeutic tattoos were relatively rare in antiquity, but one such case discovered was that of ‘Ötzi,’ the 5,000-year-old body found in a glacier in Tyrolean Alps (see fig. 3), who had tattooed carbon lines on lumbar spine, a cruciform mark behind the right knee and different signs around ankles. Medical examination of the places underneath the marks revealed ‘age-conditioned or strain-induced degeneration’ of the bones\textsuperscript{30}, as well as osteochondrosis (\textit{necrosis aseptica ossium}) and an early stage of spondylosis in the lumbar spine. His knee and ankle joints betrayed painful degeneration, which was probably why the places were marked with tattoos, as it is shown below\textsuperscript{31}. The marks were believed to have the power to cure, although it is difficult to decipher the meaning of the practice\textsuperscript{32}. More importantly, this procedure shows some similarities with Chinese acupuncture, although predates it chronologically by about 2000 years\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{29} For example, in Ancient Pazyryk culture, dwelling in the territory of modern Iran – see S.A. Yatsenko, \textit{The Tattoo System in the Ancient Iranian World}, in: \textit{Tattoos and Body Modifications in Antiquity}, ed. P. Della Casa, C. Witt, Zurich Studies in Archaeology 9; Zurich 2013, 98; see also R. Satinover Fagen, \textit{Phylacteries}, ABD 5, 369; Ch. Rainier, \textit{Ancient Marks. The Sacred Origins of Tattoos and Body Marking}, San Rafael, CA 2006.
\textsuperscript{31} ‘Ötzi’ has also been diagnosed with Lyme disease (or Lyme borreliosis) and among its numerous symptoms there are joint pains, which could be another reason for marking those spots.
Figure 3. Tattoo-marks found on 'Ötzi'\textsuperscript{34}

\section*{3. Lev 19:26-28 AND ITS BAN ON TATTOOING}

The biblical ban on tattooing is expressed in a set of units comprising Lev 19. This chapter forms a unity, since it is clearly remarked with an oft-employed formula of division ‘Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying (waydabbēr yhwh ‘el mōšeh llēˇmōr)’\textsuperscript{35}. Chapter 20 starts with the same words, thus, marking the beginning of another unit. Further division within the chapter is based on the phrase ‘I am the Lord! (\‘ānî yhwh)’\textsuperscript{36}, which is sometimes extended to a form ‘I am the Lord, your God! (\‘ānî yhwh \‘ēlōhêkem)’\textsuperscript{37}. Those phrases are all short forms of historically-


\textsuperscript{37} Lev 19:3.4.10.25.31.34.
based profession of faith, as mentioned at the end of the chapter: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt’ (Lev 19:36).

It is easy to notice that laws concerning different subjects are preserved (religious, ethical, ritual and others), as well as diverse forms are employed (apodictic and casuistic), while the range of those who are subject of the law varies (individuals and society), there are few ways to recognize the internal structure of the passage. It is possible to divide the entire chapter in three parts, since close lexical parallels may be found at the beginning and at the end of the unit.\(^{38}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>v. 3</th>
<th>ʼet-šabbōtāy tīsmōrû</th>
<th>v. 30</th>
<th>ʼet-šabbōtāy tīsmōrû</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>v. 4</td>
<td>ʼal-tipnû ʼel-haʼēlīlim</td>
<td>v. 31</td>
<td>ʼal-tipnû ʼel-hāʼōbōt</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. 14</td>
<td>ṭwāyārēʼā mēʼēlōhēkā</td>
<td>v. 32</td>
<td>ṭwāyārēʼā mēʼēlōhēkā</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. 15</td>
<td>lō-taʼāšû ʼāwel hammišpāt</td>
<td>v. 34</td>
<td>wāʼāhabtā lō kāmōkā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 18</td>
<td>wāʼāhabtā lōrēʼākā kāmōkā</td>
<td>v. 35</td>
<td>lō-taʼāšû ʼāwel hammišpāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. 19</td>
<td>ʼet-ḥuqqōtāy tīsmōrû</td>
<td>v. 37</td>
<td>ūšomartem ʼet-kol-ḥuqqōtay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on this observation it may be concluded that Lev 19 is structured chiastically with central parts enclosing vv. 19–29. However, given the repeated phrase ‘I am the Lord!’ (ʼănî yhwh) and the frequent shifts among first and second singular and second plural, one can divide the chapter into a scheme containing 18 passages of commandments flanked by opening and closing phrases:\(^{39}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Opening (vv. 1–2)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Unit 1 (v. 3)</td>
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<td>3. Unit 2 (v. 4)</td>
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<td>4. Unit 3 (vv. 5–8)</td>
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<td>5. Unit 4 (vv. 9–10)</td>
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<td>6. Unit 5 (vv. 11–12)</td>
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<td>7. Unit 6 (vv. 13–14)</td>
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<td>8. Unit 7 (vv. 15–16)</td>
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<td>9. Unit 8 (vv. 17–18)</td>
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<td>10. Unit 9 (v. 19)</td>
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<td>11. Unit 10 (vv. 20–22)</td>
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<td>12. Unit 11 (vv. 23–25)</td>
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<td>13. Unit 12 (vv. 26–28)</td>
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<td>14. Unit 13 (v. 29)</td>
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<td>15. Unit 14 (v. 30)</td>
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<td>16. Unit 15 (v. 31)</td>
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<td>17. Unit 16 (v. 32)</td>
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<td>18. Unit 17 (vv. 33–34)</td>
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<td>19. Unit 18 (vv. 35–36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Closing (v. 37)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The opening serves also as an introduction of the main subject, which all following regulations lead to and find their fulfillments in – qədōšîm tihyû (‘be [pl.] saint!’).

Scholars who trace the history of development behind the present text of Lev 19 emphasize that it is a sign of a theological revolution that has taken place in Israel when holiness stopped being viewed as a domain of sacred sphere (sanctuaries) and those who serve it (priests and Levites), and started being seeing as a virtue, a challenge and a requirement for every Israelite. Participation in holiness was accessible to anyone, who followed the rules mentioned in this chapter.

Most of the interpreters and exegetes base their analysis on a presumption that the ban on tattooing is a synonymous parallel to another prohibition expressed in the first part of the verse: ‘You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead’ (NAS). Therefore it is implied that tattoos are connected somehow with the mourning rites and rituals. However, it can be observed that the entire unit is not based on twofold stanzas, but rather it is a collection of commandments concerning pagan, or polytheistic rituals, loosely connected to each other.

The first prohibition sanctions, literally, ‘eating over the blood (lōʾ tōʾḵəlû ʾal-haddām).’ The same phrase occurs in the HB also in 1 Sam 14:33-34 and Ez 33:25. Besides a supposition of a scribal error, incorrectly replacing dalet with resh, there are three other interpretations of this phrase:

1. preposition ʾal simply means ‘with,’ as it is suggested in Ex 12:8. This leads to conclusion that the prohibition means to strengthen the ban of eating blood (see Gen 9:4; Lev 7:27; 17:10-14; Deut 12:16,23-25);
2. the preposition has a spatial (‘over,’ ‘in front of’) or chronological (‘before’) aspect, meaning ‘before offering the blood to God on an altar,’ in other words – while the blood is still in the sprinkling bowl. This view is based on the story in 1 Sam 14:33-34.

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41 ‘Thus instead of searching (in vain) for a mourning rite to explain the juxtaposition of tattooing to laceration, tattooing should be regarded as an independent prohibition aimed, perhaps among other objectives, at the abolition of slavery in Israel’ – J. Milgrom, op. cit., 1695. Although we find no reason to pin the tattooing ban with an idea of rising Hebrew society of slaves, Milgrom’s opinion concerning a very lose relation between parts of the verse is a valid observation. It is not uncommon to find commandments that are almost unrelated and focus on different subjects in one verse (for example, Ex 23:18-19; Lev 19:3.16.30).
42 This is suggested by other passages suggesting cultic feasting at the hills or mountains (Ez 18:6.11.15; 22:9). However, determining a scribal error demands a textual proof that states otherwise. So far no Hebrew textual witness bears any other reading than the one that has been suggested by MT.
43 A. Dillman, V. Ryssel, Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, KEH 12, Leipzig 1897; B. Baentsch, Exodus – Leviticus – Numeri, Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 1/2, Göttingen 1903; K. Elliger, Leviticus, Handbuch zum Alten Testament. Erste Reihe 4; Tübingen 1966. One thing needs to be pointed out, after C.M. Carmichael (A Strange Sequence of Rules: Leviticus 19.20-26, in: Reading Leviticus, ed. J.F.A. Sawyer, Sheffield 1996, 195–196), that it is unlikely for the author to mention eating without listing what is eaten makes no sense, and therefore traditionally accepted meaning ‘eating with’ should be rejected. Anyway, his final conclusion concerning the meaning of this prohibition (‘You shall not celebrate killing, however justified, as in war, by festive eating’) in our opinion is very unlikely and strays too far from the context of entire passage.
44 See b. Sanh. 63; Tg. Ps.-Jonathan. Modern views are presented by: H.Ch. Brichto, On Slaugh-
3. 'al holds its regular meaning, but it is a reflection of rite, practiced as a form of divination\(^{45}\).

The core of a second regulation, lō tōnāhāšû (‘you will not practice divination’) a verb in Piel, occurs in the Hebrew Bible eight more times\(^{46}\). Its etiology is debatable and probably it is entrenched in biradical Semitic root ḥš, which means ‘sound softly, whisper’\(^{47}\), of which Hebrew verbs, nḥš and lḥš are cognates. Whatever etymology is assigned to it, the meaning of the verb is closely connected to augury, which was practiced in many branches both in Israel and in its neighboring lands\(^{48}\). This must be carefully distinguished from sorcery, that describes attempts to alter the future, as opposed to a simple recognition of what will happen. Although the former has been practiced and accepted for a long time in ancient Israel, the latter has always been condemned (Deut 18:10; Ex 22:17)\(^{49}\). However, everyday practice seemed to stray from official regulations (2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chr 33:6; Jer 27:9; Ez 13:18-19; Mic 5:11; Mal 3:5)\(^{50}\).

Etyymology of the following verb at the center of another prohibition, wəlō’ tōnōnēnu (‘nor [you will practice] soothsaying’) is nebulous, as is of the previous one. Various etiologies have been proposed so far, but the two verbs, 'nn and nḥš, are often coupled up by Biblical authors (see Deut 18:10; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6). Moreover, they often share the stage with qsm (Num 23:23; 2 Kings 17:17) and ḥzh (Ez 13:6.9.23; 22:28; Jer 14:14; Mic 3:6-7). All of them appear to be virtually inter...
changeable and their meaning is based solely on the context, when no further comments are added; the significance of the verbs is rather mercurial, and varies from general to specific\textsuperscript{51}.

Although the meaning of verbs in the following verse (19:27) is rather clear, the motivation of the actions described in it is obscure. The verb \textit{nqp} is at the core of the commandment. In Qal it denotes going round (Is 29:1), but more often it is employed in Hiphil, in which it means ‘to circle,’ or ‘to surround’ (see Josh 6:3; Job 19:6; Is 15:8)\textsuperscript{52}. The most plausible subject of this prohibition is forming a haircut in form of a perfect circle, that is ‘the sides in back of the ear equalized with the forehead’ (\textit{Sipra Qedoshim} 6:3; b. Mak 20b; see also Josephus, \textit{C. App} 1:173).

Similar bans appear in three other parts of the Old Testament (Lev 21:5; Deut 14:1 and Ez 44:20). Even though the first of the mentioned texts (Lev 21:5) prohibits head shaving, it needs to be pointed out that the text is addressed to priests, while Lev 19:27 affects all Israelites. The reason behind the ban can be related to the contents of some ancient tombs, which included locks of hair, so the prohibition aims to stop all Hebrew believers from imitating pagan rituals. However, suggestions that hair is a symbol of life force, and therefore cutting them is a sign of rejecting it, lacks any profound and decisive textual proof\textsuperscript{53}.

The reason behind prohibiting of shaving one’s beard is also undetermined. Scholars point to either mourning rituals as mentioned in Ugaritic texts, other biblical passages or customs encountered among nomadic tribes\textsuperscript{54}, or tend to view facial hair as a sign of manhood. Even though the latter explanation seems more satisfactory, proof of such a symbolical rendering of beards in the Bible are missing. It is more constructive to recall Biblical accounts, in which shaving a man’s beard was a sign of humiliation which, to a certain degree, excluded him from social life (see 2 Sam 10:5).

The noun which opens v. 28, \textit{śereṭ}, does not appear anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Etymologically, this term is entrenched in root \textit{srt}, also encountered in Akkadian (\textit{saraṭu}), Arabic (\textit{saraṭa}) and Aramaic (\textit{sāraṭ})\textsuperscript{55}, where it means ‘to tear to pieces,’ or ‘to slit.’ This is also corroborated by other passages where the root is employed; it appears in the Hebrew Bible also in Lev 21:5 – the fragment mentioned above – where restrictions concerning priests are mentioned; the regulations double those listed in Lev 19:27. Another place is Zech 12:3, where it symbolically describes bruising hands of anyone, who attempts to lift a heavy boulder, to which

\textsuperscript{51} J. Milgrom, \textit{op. cit.}, 1689; see C.M. Carmichael, \textit{op. cit.}, 200–201.


\textsuperscript{53} Cf. W. Engelkemper, \textit{op. cit.}, 124.

\textsuperscript{54} See W. Engelkemper, \textit{op. cit.}, 123–125.

\textsuperscript{55} Also attested in Ethiopic languages, but always with metathesis – in Classical Ethiopic (Ge’ez) as \textit{ṣaṣṣara}, Tigre – \textit{sāfra}, Tigrinya – \textit{sāṭāra}, Harari – \textit{sēṭāra} and Gurage – \textit{šāṭāra}. 

\textsuperscript{56} J. Milgrom, \textit{op. cit.}, 1689; see C.M. Carmichael, \textit{op. cit.}, 200–201.

Jerusalem is compared. Based on parallelism with a Hithpolel verb $gdd$\(^\text{56}\) in Deut 14:1 and 1 Kings 18:28, the word may also bear the meaning of cutting and gashing. Although connection between the gesture of gashing one’s skin and rituals undertaken after the demise of a relative or somebody close is clear, it is uncertain why the author opts for an ambiguous noun $nepeš$. In the Hebrew Bible it often occurs as an equivalent of the indefinite pronoun (‘someone’, or ‘anyone’), but when authors intend to point to a dead person, they employ phrase $nepeš mēt$ (see Lev 21:11; Num 6:6). Therefore, it can be implied that the author bans cutting skin as a religious act, undertaken with a specific intention. Cutting one’s skin, as mentioned in a picturesque passage of a ‘duel’ between Elisha and false prophets (1 Kings 18:20-40), was a part of rites within Baal’s cult. But since it is listed among other actions in the funereal context, we cannot dismiss this dimension. In Ugaritic texts, it is mentioned as a part of the mourning ritual after Baal’s death (CTA 5 VI:10-23\(^\text{57}\)).

Another noun, $kətōbet$, occurs once in the Hebrew Bible. Its connection with a common root $ktb$ is beyond discussion, but since it is juxtaposed with another biblical hapax legomenon, $qa’āqa$, the meaning behind the root should be studied carefully. While the former verb undoubtedly describes an act by which one leaves words on a solid material for reading, modern idea of writing is assigned to the root secondarily.

Chronologically, the first meaning behind the root $ktb$ was ‘to chisel (letters in stone),’ or ‘to scratch (writing on a wax tablet)’\(^\text{59}\), which can be observed in numerous biblical accounts. That is especially important for the meaning and importance of stone tables, on which the Ten Commandments are written (see Ex 24:12; 31:18; 32:15; 34:1.28).

The meaning is further detailed in the account of the golden calf. When Moses descends from Mount Sinai, he is said to have held the stone tables on which God’s writing ($miktāḇ$) has been engraved ($ḥārūt$). The verb occurs only once in the Bible, probably as a scribal error, for which the more common verb $ḥrš$ seems more suitable. The noun $miktāḇ$ plays a special role in this analysis, because it is connected to the same root and appears in a similar syntactical function. It is stated that the sacrificial formula is engraved on the idol (see $ktb$ in Ex 39:30b); reading as $miktāḇ$ $pittūḥē ḥôtām$ (‘inscription, as on the engravings of a seal’). Usually, the noun $miktāḇ$ occurs in the Bible in absolute form with its usual meaning ‘document,’ ‘decree’ or

\(^{56}\) Attested in Akkadian, Old South Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac and Mandeans; also in Arabic as $gdd$.

\(^{57}\) The text contains mourning gestures and rites common for entire Near East and parallel to those mentioned in the Bible as for the mourning customs – see Ex 4:25; Josh 5:2-3; Is 47:1; Jer 48:27; Jon 3:6; Ez 26:16; 27:30.

\(^{58}\) See W. Engelkemper, op.cit., 123–126.

‘edict,’ (see 2 Chr 21:12; 35:4; 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Is 38:9)60 and Ex 39:30 is the only example of the construct state, which points to the nouns as determining its precise meaning. Last noun (ḥôtām) denotes a seal or a sign that proves right to a title or ownership.

The second term (pittûāḥ), related to a root pth, common in biblical texts, which besides its primary meaning ‘to open’ in Pi’el has a more nuanced meaning of ‘to engrave’. This is mainly attested in Exodus, Books of Kings and Chronicles. Its Pu’al participle counterpart is also recorded in etymological figures as a method of fashioning metal, stone and wood objects, which involves making holes, furrows and engravings. This form is probably a loanword, since in Assyrian verb patâḥu means ‘to bore’ or ‘to. Among different points of reference, one can find material perforation aimed at items in a specific manner61. The entire figure (miktab pittûḥê ḥôtām), therefore, denotes a method of crafting metal that seems to involve engraving, leaving a place for another material or simply punching letter-shaped holes.

Etymology of the latter term, qa’āqa, remains vague. Usually, authors suggest roots qw’ or q’62, neither of which is attested in Biblical Hebrew. It is more likely, that it is entrenched in the root yq’, which often describes breaking bones, bruising or inflicting corporal mutilation. This meaning is further confirmed in Semitic cognates, for example, Arabic (D stem) verb qaqa’a63, or Ethiopic waq’a64. All of those roots can also bear a meaning of striking, flaying, skinning, stripping off and crushing, making it safe to assume that semantic fields of these two separate verbs merged at some point, as is often suggested by twofold definitions contained in dictionaries.

Recognition of a I-w/y duplicated root is corroborated by an analogy with a noun še’ēšāʾ, derived from a root ysʾ. Even though semantically the two terms are similar, qa’āqa is most probably a noun which denotes a method employed for writing that involves making painful bruising of the skin65.

4. HOW OTHERS SAW IT?

Modern approach to different textual traditions attempts to stray away from a strict comparison of the contents in order to decide how far they confirm Hebrew text, treated as an original version, or differ from it in order to explain, why such deviations occur. Besides attempting to make biblical message comprehensible for those who were its recipients, they also play a role of witnesses of how difficult

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61 CAD XII, 269–270.
62 BDB 891; E. Klein, op cit., 586.
63 This root can also signify branding a horse.
passages were solved in different parts of ancient world. In the following chapter we will analyze Lev 19:26-28 in different textual traditions (Greek, Latin, Syriac and Ethiopic), in order to discover, how authors perceived the subject of tattoos.

4.1. LXX

The Greek Old Testament reveals a problematic phrase reading ‘eating over the blood’ by ‘eating on the mountains.’ This version could imply scribe’s error, mistaking Hebrew resh for dalet. Although no Hebrew textual witness confirm such reading, it may be suggested to have followed a ritual mentioned and criticized by Ezekiel (18:6.11.15; 22:9). The following prohibition is described with a verb οἶωνεζάμαι, which occurs nine times in the Greek Bible, and even though etymologically it is connected with a noun οἶωνος, referred to a large bird, it can be assumed that it was employed for describing soothsayers, and the verb could simply mean divining from omens or signs. The verb closing up the verse (ὁρνιτσόκοποςομαί), however, has a straightforward meaning of watching birds for omens, and occurs only once in the Greek Bible. In comparison to the previous verb, this one refers to common, smaller birds, as described by noun ὄρνις.

The meaning of a following prohibition is dubious since the noun employed, οἰσω, is used exclusively in this place in LXX, and no parallels in Greek literature can be traced whatsoever. It is assumed that it means ‘a curl of hair’. Since it is followed by a partitive preposition ευκ it can be assumed that the author means to prohibit putting hair into a specific hairdo. The growth of facial hair, however, is not restricted, as the second part of the verse states. Verb employed (φθείρω) means primarily ‘to destroy,’ but in reference to the shape, or appearance of one’s beard (ὄψις τοῦ πωγώνος) it may also bear a nuance of shaving or cutting.

66 Samaritan Pentateuch is left out, since its reading copies literally Masoretic version. Old Latin fragments – as far as I have observed – agree with Vulgate, and Coptic version follows radically LXX and therefore they bring nothing new to understanding the biblical ban. Although Qumran community was very interested in the book, no fragment preserved among texts discovered in the Judean Desert contains pericope Lev 19:26-28.

67 The Hebrew Bible is not consistent in describing the rite either with ‘al or ‘el. Thus, one should either assume those prepositions were used interchangeably, or scribes did commit a mistake while copying the text.


69 Usually it was used to describe birds of prey, vulture or eagle – see Philo, Spec. leg. 3:115; Josephus, Ant. 1:185; 2:71; Bell. 3:123. But it often appeared in a sense of an omen or a presage – see Philo, Deus 181; Mos. 2:623.282.284.287; Josephus, Ant. 2:234; 19:87. The later term, reserved especially for divination was οἰωνισίς – Josephus, Ant. 18:212, and those who observed birds were called οἰωνοσκόται – see Philo, Spec. leg. 1:60; 4:48.

70 In Philo’s and Josephus’ writings those terms are usually connected to the story of Balaam, which suggests that the term was used in a wider sense, that is ‘diviner,’ or ‘soothsayer.’ M.A. Zipor (Notes sur les chapitres XIX à XXII du Lévitique dans la Bible d’Alexandrie, Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 67 (1991) 4, 332–333) treats this view as an actualization of the message behind the Hebrew text.

71 See also synonymous verb, ὄρνιθεω – Josephus, C. App. 1:202.

72 Hesychius notes that this word has originated in ancient town of Phaselis, in Asia Minor, on the coast of Lycia.
Verse 28 opens with a ban of making cuttings (ἐντομίς) for the deceased (ἐπὶ ψυχῇ). A similar phrase also appears in Jer 16:6, and the entire compound occurs about ten times in the Greek Bible, with all of the uses fitting the funerary context. As it has been pointed out earlier, regulations contained in Lev 19:26-27 are reflected also in 21:5. Even though the noun ἐντομίς occurs in both instances, in Lev 21 it is an object of a different verb – κατατέμνω. This observation is important as the verb is connected in the Greek Bible to worship of foreign gods (see 1 Kings 18:28; Hos 7:14). Having used the noun γράμμα, the author closely retains a sense of Hebrew ḱōbet, since the noun derives from a verb γράφω, which means ‘to write,’ the same way as its Hebrew counterpart does. This noun is rare in LXX and, except for geographical names, it is only employed 15 times, usually to describe royal edicts, and only once with a reference to an engraved writing (Ex 39:30). As in the Hebrew version, the noun is followed by an adjective that describes a method by which the writing is made; stikta, is entrenched in the verb στίζω, meaning ‘to brand (with a mark of disgrace or other sign), puncture,’ and hence the adjective bears a connotation ‘punctured, spotted, dappled’. Two other nouns derive from the same verb, στίγμα and στιγματιὰς, which in Greek literature refer to a mark on a skin and the person bearing it, respectively. Although it can be disputed whether the mark is branded or tattooed, the second option seems more conceivable.

4.2. VULGATE

In the Latin version of the Bible the unclear meaning of the Hebrew prohibition of ‘eating over the blood (lōʾ tōʾḵeluʾ al-haddām)’ is understood as a repetition of a ban on consuming blood, since similar phrase was employed in those commandments. Another verb, auguror, is quite common in the Latin Bible, and even though it is etymologically connected to observing birds (from avis ‘bird’ and garrire ‘to chirp, chatter’) in search for omens, it has become a general verb for describing divining practices (Gen 44:5.15). In the text, practitioners of divination are called augures (Deut 18:14; Is 2:6; 47:13; Jer 27:9; see also Is 57:3 for feminine form), while the practice itself is referred to as augurium (Num 23:23; 24:1; Deut 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6; Sir 34:5). The same excerpts also mention ‘observing dreams’ (Deut 18:10; 2 Chr 33:6), as an equivalent of the Hebrew verb ḥām.

The Latin version simplifies commandments from v. 27: the first is generally consistent with restrictions for levitical priests preserved in the Book of Ezekiel (44:20), where the ban refers to shaving or cutting hair; the only discrepancy between the texts is that Leviticus prohibits shaving in a unique pattern – in rotundum. The adjective refers to round shapes, and in other parts of Vulgate refers to the way the Jerusalem Temple was built (1 Kings 7:12.23.31.35; 10:19; Ez 4:2; see also 2 Chr 4:2 which describes the molten ‘sea’). In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, Latin version

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puts no specific restriction on shaving beard (barba) to its sides or edges, but bans it completely, like LXX does.

The way ‘cutting one’s skin’ is rendered in Latin Bible resembles closely the Hebrew version. However, the second part of the verse is treated in a different manner. The compound katōbet qa‘āqa is treated as consisting of two nouns, the former signifying ‘shapes (figuras)’ and the latter – ‘signs (stigmata)’. The second term is usually restricted in Latin literature to signs of infamy or punitive marks given to runaway slaves or criminals. The reason behind such a rendering lies in the theological environment where the Vulgate arose. Its author, Jerome, was a Christian theologian, and in his times, social status of slaves had already undergone some changes, relative to the times, when Lev 19:28 was codified. Therefore it can be assumed that Jerome wanted to give a foundation for Christian teaching on tattooing and branding, which in the case of slaves was based on a sense of community and equality among all people (see Ga 3:28; Col 3:11; Phil 1-25).

4.3. PESHITTA

As noted earlier other translations make an attempt to render all varieties of meanings of the phrase of ‘eating over the blood’, Peshitta leaves it out completely and starts v. 26 with a prohibition of ‘divining with birds’, followed by a ban of any divination or foretelling (qṣm).

The first part of a following verse (27) can be hardly explained in relation to the Hebrew, Greek (LXX) or Latin versions. Although it is ambiguous, neither meaning conforms to the previous versions. The verb tǝrabbûn is a Pael form of the root rby, and in reference to the hair it means either ‘to let grow’ or ‘to extend.’ In the case of the first meaning, the prohibition sanctions wearing long hair (presumably, by men). Given the fact that Peshitta is usually viewed as a Christian translation, this regulation may reflect a later disapproval of long hair worn by men (see 1 Cor 11:14). Second meaning, probably referring to women, can be treated as parallel to that observed in the writings of Muslim theologians, who condemned artificial or lengthened hair75. It is also possible that the author intended to leave the phrase ambiguous with both meanings representing a valid interpretation. The second part of the verse is a word-to-word translation of the Hebrew reading, since similar terms are employed (namely, pʾiʾ ddqnykwn).

The same exact rendering is found in the first part of the v. 28. In Syriac version, the ‘incisions (ḥwrṭʾ)’ made for the dead are connected to the root hṛṭ, which bears a similarity to its Hebrew cognate, šrṭ. The author of the Syriac translation renders the Hebrew phrase katōbet qaʿāqa as ktbʾ dnwqdtʾ. Meaning of the first noun is clear

75 Muḥammad ibn Ismāʾīl Al-Bukhārī, Sahīḥ Al-Bukhārī. Arabic-English trans. Muḥammad ibn Ismāʾīl Al-Bukhārī, Al-Medina 1974, 7:537: ‘I heard the Prophet saying, “Allah has cursed the lady who practices tattooing and that who gets it done for herself, and also the lady who lengthens hair artificially and that who gets her hair lengthened artificially.”’ Although Qurʾan makes no mention of tattooing, attitude of Muslim theologians is unanimous in finding it unsuitable, and criticizing the practice (al-wašima). It seems that practice was very common among Arab women before the Islam era – for further examples see J. Huelnergard, H. Liebowitz, op.cit., 61, n. 5.
and remains in accordance with its Hebrew counterpart, but the second, which means ‘a dot’, derives from the root *nqz* and it is used to describe pricking or hitting. It is assumed that it refers to the tattooing process, which involves puncturing one’s skin in order to leave an indelible continuous line of ink dots in the form of letters.

### 4.4. GE’EZ BIBLE

The Ethiopic version of Lev 19:26-28 simplifies ambiguous phrases seen in the Hebrew Bible. In v. 26 author follows mainly LXX replacing ‘eating over the blood’ with ‘eating on the mountains (bawǝsta ’adbār)’, and ‘soothsaying’ with ‘divining by observing of birds (waʾittǝyǝru baʿaf)’77. The rendering of the next verse (27) suggests that the reasons behind the biblical ban and the meaning of the prohibited actions remained enigmatic. For this reason the author interprets the bans in a manner similar to that preserved in LXX: ‘you shall not make yourselves lock(s) of hair (qwǝnzǝʾt), nor shall you shave the beard on your face (ṣǝḥma gaṣṣǝkǝmu).’ One aspect remains vague in the reference to the first part of the verse, namely the verb employed. As the verb *gabra* is a general description of doing or making something. It is unclear whether ‘making lock(s) of hair’ refers to a special hairdo or to cutting hair in a specific manner.

The final verse mentions a ban against bodily mutilation, first performed as a part of mourning rituals: ‘you shall not touch your skin with a razor (malaṣē).’ Although the noun is rendered here as ‘razor,’ it can also signify ‘lancet,’ or ‘needle’ which brings the reader closer to another issue – tattooing. The verse is concluded with an etymological figure, based on the verb *fatara* (waʾittfeṭru lakemu fatarā), which means making gashes or incisions on the flesh, but more often it signifies inscribing or carving magic letters. The noun is often employed to designate magical figures. This suggests a practice of tattooing protective spells or protective figures, connected to specific deities.

### 5. ‘OUR RABBIS HAVE TOLD US…’

The subject of tattooing does not recur too frequently in the rabbinic literature. It is brought up in Mishnah and Tosefta, in reference to specific methods employed in the process that make one culpable or intention that causes the same effect. They are important opinions since they place the discussion of whether tattoos are acceptable in entirely different context, than that suggested by numbers of scholars.

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76 As mentioned above, tattoos found on the bodies of Amunet and her companion are dots covering the chest, the abdomen and the genital area, which is consistent with the description of the practice in Peshitta.

77 The phrase is constructed pleonastically, since the verb *ṭayyara* by itself means ‘to divine or predict future by observing the flight of birds.’ This is derived from the etymological connection of the root to Arabic verb *ṭāra*, which is also attested in Aramaic and Syriac. The former also preserved the nuance of divining by observing of birds in Pael verb *ṭayyer*. 
The ban on tattooing is repeated in Mak 3:6, however, it is not placed in context of mourning rituals, and this observation supports our suggestion, that tattooing is not connected in any way with mourning practices. To be found culpable, writing has to be based on a dye injected hypodermically. The Mishnah does not specify, what has to be written in order to transgress the commandment, but later interpretations (for example, R. Shimon) suggest that it is meant to forbid tattooing God’s name. Nevertheless, the Jewish theologians were not unanimous sharing the same view – others stated that the guilt implied having a pagan deity’s name tattooed. The important thing to stress out is that in Mishnah in no way connects the subject and intention of tattooing with mourning practices.

Tosefta (Makkot 4:15), however, views this subject in a different manner. Both, the tattooing and tattooed ones are guilty of transgressing the commandment, as long as the tattoo marks are connected to the idolatry. The same passage deals with the subject of tattooing slaves stating, that if the marks are meant for keeping the servants from running away, tattooing brings no guilt on their owner.

Although some scholars argue that the rabbinic literature serves as a witness of a shift that has occurred with understanding of tattooing between biblical period and later Jewish literature, it seems more likely, that the later literature preserved the meaning which had already been used in reference to the biblical ban since the time it had been codified. Even though the practice was connected to marking a slave, it has more to do with the Roman customs prevailing in ancient world due to the Roman administration over different regions, than with a supposed view of tattoos as marks of slavery.

6. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

The above analysis brought up one very important aspect of the tattooing ban mentioned in the Bible. Both the Hebrew Bible and its ancient translations place the prohibition within the spectrum of forbidden magic practices, treating it equally with divination rites aimed at connecting with foreign gods. As a result, tattooing was practiced among polytheistic societies as a sign of a devotion to god(s), and was not to be imitated by Hebrews, since they were already a special property of the Lord (Ex 19:5), and were not supposed to follow customs of other nations.

The ban thus could be viewed as a sign of devotion to idols were criticized in the Pentateuch. However, we lack any proof that the prohibition was observed. As a matter of fact, some texts – as it will be noted below – may even suggest that the regulation only existed as a theoretical or hypothetical decree.

In order to bring our analysis to an end, three other Biblical books that mention skin markings need to be brought up and briefly analyzed. What is important, the practice is not criticized by the Biblical authors and that is to be a subject of further studies, relating both to theological message of the cited pericopes and to their syntactical and lexical shapes.

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78 See J. Huehnergard, H. Liebowitz, op.cit., 76.
The first fragment is from the Book of Genesis (4:15), when Cain is given a sign ('ôt) on his forehead. Its purpose is to protect its bearer against unrestricted vendetta. The sign, placed by God is a metaphor of God’s will to prevent the violence from escalating endlessly.

Other fragment (Is 44:5) is especially important, since it bears a striking resemblance to a practice encountered in Mesopotamia among oblates. When describing future renewal of Israel using a metaphor of streams flowing through dry grounds, Isaiah describes reaction of the Jews confirming their faith. Besides a verbal confirmation, believer verifies his commitment by writing Lord’s name on his hand (wǝzeh yiktōb yādô layhwh). Although the phrase is cryptic in terms of syntax, with especially the exact meaning and function of the noun yādō under much debate, one things deserves a special attention – marking one’s hand with Lord’s name is not a subject of criticism. Rather, it is employed as an ultimate sign of a deep devotion. Similar meaning can be found in the Book of Revelation (14:1; 17:5), where a sign on the forehead is a mark of allegiance. One other text from the same book deserves a moment of attention. In Rev 19:16 it is stated that the white rider bears a writing ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’ It could be assumed that the Bible suggests that Jesus had a mark of some sort on his thigh, but the structure of the verse suggests that the markings were placed on his vestments.

The verse from Leviticus analyzed above sometimes is often brought up in relation to moral evaluation of modern tattoos, but simple quoting cannot dismiss profound biblical research of the cultural context and thorough exegesis. Bible does criticize tattooing as a sign of devotion to pagan gods. The criticism is focused on tattoos as elements of polytheistic (or pagan) rituals meant for establishing special bond with the idols.

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The main subject of the paper is a critical evaluation of meaning behind ban on tattoos in Lev 19:26-28 and analysis of historic and cultural contexts of the practice in antiquity. An exempt of Leviticus is deeply entrenched in its context of commandments which forbid imitating religious customs of surrounding cultures and their magical practices, so the research into all of contexts allows reaching main motivation behind the ban and main meaning behind the practice in Israel and in antiquity in general. First step is analysis of motivation for getting tattoos in Israel’s neighboring countries to determine main reasons which led ancient people to tattooing and being tattooed. Then, we undergo a thorough philological and exegetical analysis of bans in vv. 26–28, which allows us to understand perspectives which followed authors of ancient biblical translations. Next, after an overview of rabbinic literature we form main conclusions concerning tattoos practice in Leviticus.

Key words: tattoo, tattoos in antiquity, tattooing prohibition, polytheistic rituals, theological context of Lev 19:26-28

Summary

The main subject of the paper is a critical evaluation of meaning behind ban on tattoos in Lev 19:26-28 and analysis of historic and cultural contexts of the practice in antiquity. An exempt of Leviticus is deeply entrenched in its context of commandments which forbid imitating religious customs of surrounding cultures and their magical practices, so the research into all of contexts allows reaching main motivation behind the ban and main meaning behind the practice in Israel and in antiquity in general. First step is analysis of motivation for getting tattoos in Israel’s neighboring countries to determine main reasons which led ancient people to tattooing and being tattooed. Then, we undergo a thorough philological and exegetical analysis of bans in vv. 26–28, which allows us to understand perspectives which followed authors of ancient biblical translations. Next, after an overview of rabbinic literature we form main conclusions concerning tattoos practice in Leviticus.

Key words: tattoo, tattoos in antiquity, tattooing prohibition, polytheistic rituals, theological context of Lev 19:26-28

Streszczenie

Głównym tematem artykułu jest krytyczna analiza znaczenia zakazu tatuażu zawartego w Kpł 19, 26–28 oraz badanie historycznych oraz kulturowych kontekstów praktyki tatuowania w starożytności. Zapis Księgi Kapłańskiej jest osadzony w kontekście zbioru zakazów praktyk magicznych, imitujących religijne zwyczaje narodów ościennych, w związku z czym analiza kontekstu pozwala dotrzeć do głównej motywacji, która towarzyszyła prawodawcy. Pierwszym krokiem jest analiza motywacji tatuażu w krajach ościennych Izraela, by dalej ustalić główne powody, dla których w starożytności wykonywano tatuowanie ciała. Następnie szczegółowej analizie filologicznej oraz egzegeetycznej poddane zostaną zakazy z ww. 26–28, by na tej podstawie prześledzić w kolejnym kroku, jak starożytni tłumacze rozumieli te zakazy. Dalej, po zarysowaniu zagadnień w literaturze rabinicznej, sformułowane zostały główne wnioski dotyczące praktyki tatuowania w Księdze Kapłańskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: tatuaz, tatuaże w starożytności, zakaz tatuażu, teologiczny kontekst Kpł 19, 26–28, politeistyczne rytuały
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