Sacred Shields

The Material, Religious, and Cultural Significance of Persian Ashkelon’s Egyptianizing Amulets

by

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INTRODUCTION

Israel’s coastal city of Ashkelon has long been a fascinating and important place for the study of Near Eastern archaeology. Thanks to extensive occupation from the Early Bronze Age through the Crusader period nearly three thousand years later, this Mediterranean port city boasts diverse settlements that populated the site and its tels. This thesis aims to take advantage of that long and storied history in its examination of an assemblage of amulets from Ashkelon’s domestic quarters during a period of Persian occupation. These amulets depict Egyptian deities and symbols far from the Nile and represent a unique cultural exchange. Ashkelon’s unique economic and political relationship with the larger Near East and Mediterranean makes cross-cultural interaction commonplace in this city, and must mean that the assemblage of Egyptianizing amulets, or amulets in an Egyptian style, is more than just an anomaly. They are one part of a pattern of complex relations between the citizens of Ashkelon and their counterparts in Egypt, Persia, Phoenicia, and across the Levant.

Ashkelon came under the control of the Persian Empire during this period in the fifth and forth centuries BCE. However, the city was locally governed by the Phoenicians, meaning that the Persians lacked daily control of Ashkelon. As a result, the site cannot be simply defined as a Persian city. Its citizens likely had traits and traditions stemming from multiple origins and influences, not least of all from Persia and Phoenicia. As a port city, it saw a great deal of economic movement coming and going through its borders. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a rich assemblage
of amulets with Egyptian origins of style and form became entrenched in Ashkelon’s domestic life.

Everyday lives are shaped by innumerable factors: family life, economic status, social class, travel, food, religious practice, and many more; accordingly, attempts to archaeologically reconstruct these ancient lives are equally complex. Since attempting to examine all of these factors would be too broad for a project of this scope, this thesis will examine one such factor, religious practice, and the manners in which it might intersect with residential and family life. A study of Egyptianizing amulets provides a good way to explore such questions for several reasons. Because their multicultural natures begs exploration of how Egyptian religious ideas traveled to Ashkelon, they provide a unique perspective about the intersection of Ashkelon’s private religious practice with Egyptian beliefs. Amulets are often an indication of religion or belief expressed privately, given their frequent appearances in residential and funerary contexts. As a result, the way that people’s religion interacts with their private lives can be studied outside of larger official state religious situations. That intersection of personal use and larger cultural interaction is a valuable place to study, and these amulets provide insight on how those categories inform each other.

In this part of the world, amulets are not only used in specific religious practices. There is substantial evidence, largely stemming from Egypt, which suggests that amulets played large roles in the practice of magic and the desire for protection from evil forces. The deities they represented often had apotropaic qualities, believed to guard mortals from pain and death. At the core of the question of their use and significance in Ashkelon is understanding the personal beliefs ascribed
onto them. As a result of having such an apparent wide range of potential contexts and meanings, amulets are a valuable artifacts in particular when studying the nature of private belief and practice.

This thesis will approach these amulets from Ashkelon from a variety of ways in order to more accurately determine their significance. First, it will situate the assemblage historically by compiling a history of Ashkelon during the Persian period, as well as phased overviews of the grids from which the amulets come. It is especially important, in any archaeological analysis, to maintain a well-established physical context for material culture. If we can better understand the history that characterizes this period, we can better understand the world in which these amulets are being used.

Next, this thesis will move onto a theoretical analysis concerning religious imagery and its relationship to these amulets. Many religious images, especially in the Egyptian tradition, are immanent in their depiction of gods; those divine beings are believed to literally inhabit the image. As one can imagine, the nature of interaction between such an object and a mortal worshiper would be very powerful. There is a spectrum of religious iconography, and the degree to which immanence is present in these amulets is central to this questions of use.

Additionally, the majority of these amulets are found in domestic contexts in this city, which necessitate an examination of the nature of private and household religious practice. Cult and temple centers are common throughout Egypt and the Near East, and many cities hosted state-sponsored religious centers where priests facilitated public cult practice. If these amulets are not part of this tradition, we need
to examine the nature of private worship in these areas, as well as the theoretical background for household religion in general. The purpose of this direction will be to determine what kind of religious practice these amulets might have been used in.

A key piece of evidence in this thesis comes in the form of the catalogue. One by one, each amulet will be outlined and examined; this will include information about the excavation and physical characteristics of the piece. Data like size, material, texture, and color are very important in identifying both what precisely the piece depicts and what it was used for. Descriptions and images of the amulets will also aid in this respect. Especially after several sections focusing on history and theory, the physicality of the pieces themselves cannot be lost. Those tangible qualities must be examined carefully if they are to be at all applied and compared.

These previous sections are meant to establish a theoretical and historical context upon which these pieces can be thoroughly introduced and examined in a catalogue. Once the amulets have an established background, the thesis will move on to examine parallel sites in order to look for discernible patterns in use, deposition, context, and depiction that shed light on their meaning in Ashkelon. In order to do this, the assemblage will be compared to sites in four different locations. The first of these locations is Egypt itself, where the amulet forms originated. What has changed between their original nature in Egypt and these versions in Ashkelon? The only way to answer that question is to go back to Egypt itself. Three primary sites from Egypt will be considered: the first two are Amarna and Deir el-Medina, two workmen’s villages from the New Kingdom with the best preserved domestic archaeology in all of Egypt. Despite the wide chronological difference between this
era and the period of Persian occupation in Ashkelon, there is value in looking back in time. If sites in Egypt have a long-established tradition of amulet use, examining older archaeological evidence will help reveal that pattern. The next Egyptian site is Tell el-Muqdam in the Nile Delta, whose occupation dates to Egypt’s Late Period. Having a site from this time period is very important, because it is the era in Egyptian history which most closely parallels Ashkelon’s Persian period. In this way, a more direct comparison can be made across time between these two Mediterranean sites.

Three sites from the Levant will be tackled next; once a native usage of similar amulets has emerged, it will be helpful to know whether or not foreign use seems to be universal or if Ashkelon presents a more unique case. We turn first to Tel Dor, a site presently located on Israel’s northern coastline. Like Ashkelon, Dor was a city conquered by the Persian Empire, but given to govern to the Phoenicians. Like Ashkelon, Dor was a city which developed a major port because of its access to the Mediterranean Sea. And, like Ashkelon, Dor was a multicultural city because of these economic and political influences, especially during the Persian period. The similarities between the two sites are clear, and they make Dor a natural archaeological parallel. It is the perfect place to question the use of Egyptianizing amulets outside of Egypt, because the circumstances of the two sites are so similar.

The Levant is not entirely comprised of sites with a history identical to Ashkelon’s, however; on the contrary, the region is characterized by sites of vastly different histories, and the last two sites are notable in these differences. The first site is Beirut, the present day capitol of Lebanon. Like Ashkelon, Beirut lies on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Unlike Ashkelon, the port of ancient Beirut was a
Phoenician site which did not lie under the authority of the Persian Empire. This difference is key, especially given the number of similarities that did exist between the sites during this time period. Egypt and Persia had a complicated history of mutual influence and control; when Persia’s influence is taken out of the equation, how does it impact the presence of these amulets? That question can only be answered by examining a city in the Phoenician heartland.

Finally, we look to Maresha, a landlocked site in the south of modern Israel. As it is not on the coastline, the city was never explicitly under Phoenician control. It was, however, under the authority of the Persian Empire. Similar to the value that isolating one of Ashkelon’s major influences has in Beirut, Maresha removes one such power in order to examine the significance of the other; in this case, the site represents a Persian city without Phoenician control. Additionally, Maresha is not a port city; the inland Levant was a world apart from neighbors on the coast, and the regions reveal vast cultural differences. By including a site of this nature in this study, we can determine the extent of these Egyptianizing amulets and question how pervasive their use across Palestine might or might not have been.

Ultimately, these amulets are a window into the private lives of Ashkelon’s ancient inhabitants. In a sea of stratigraphy and architecture, amulets stand out in Ashkelon’s archaeological evidence as highly personal links to the individuals who worked and lived in these neighborhoods. All of these lines of investigation are intended to reach conclusions about the use of these pieces. To what kind of religious and cultural tradition did they belong? The interconnected nature of Egypt, the Near
East, and the Mediterranean Sea in general facilitates these connections, and this thesis aims to find the amulets’ place within them.
CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORY OF PERSIAN ASHKELON

The Foundation and Early History of the Persian Empire

The city of Ashkelon has been almost continuously occupied for more than four thousand years. During that time, the city has undergone significant changes in imperial leadership, cultural makeup, material culture, and architectural layout; each of these leaves archaeological traces and allows scholars to reconstruct pictures of life in ancient Ashkelon. This particular assemblage of Egyptianizing amulets comes from the Persian period, during which time the city was imperially controlled by the Persian Empire. Establishing an overview of the history of this period can help contextualize the assemblage.

The Leon Levy Expedition in Ashkelon conducted excavations all over the site of ancient Ashkelon for almost thirty years. That research has been essential to the recovery of the city’s ancient history. These years of field work have dated the site’s Persian period of occupation to between 525 and 330 BCE (Stager et al 2008: 216). These dates were determined in part through typical archaeological processes, but they also situated the time period between two major destructions of the city. These violent events chronologically bookend the beginning and the end of the period. Across the site, a pattern appears outlining the trends of this period of Persian

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1 These processes include dating pottery forms, the use of excavated coins, and stratigraphy,
occupation. It began in the middle to late sixth century BCE, and established a stability that lasted until the early or middle of the fourth century, when wider imperial unrest destabilized the region and resulted in a tightening of Persian control. Normalcy settled back over the city later in the fourth century, and lasted until Alexander the Great’s expanding empire dominated Persian imperial territory, and Ashkelon experienced the beginning of a Hellenistic period.

The Persian Empire occupied huge tracts of land, from modern day Iraq to Egypt, and even extending at times into western India. It was founded in 550 BCE by Cyrus the Great, and it ended between 334 and 323 BCE after a series of military defeats courtesy of Alexander the Great, the conqueror from Greece (Kuhrt 1997: 647). The history of this empire is derived from a variety of sources, not least of all being the Greek historian Herodotus, who aimed to celebrate Greek victories against the Empire in his account of their interactions. A lack of reliable and translated sources restricts the use of Persian source material, but archaeological evidence can supplement some of these gaps in the literary record (Kuhrt 1997: 651).

In 559 BCE, Cyrus inherited and ascended to a local throne in Persia, and slowly began to expand his territory, beginning with invasions in Susa and Der (Kuhrt 1997: 657). As this territorial expansion increased, and after the eventual conquering of the Medes and Lydians further south, Cyrus saw an open Anatolia and became a tangible threat to the Babylonian Empire with increasing military pressure. He eventually conquered the Empire in 539 BCE (Kuhrt 1997:659). Although the exact date and nature of a Persian occupation of the Levant is unknown, it is possibly
around this time that the area was fortified into Persian occupied territories, with the coastal region providing highly valued naval ports. These sites retained a certain degree of independence; as he accumulated more and more territory, Cyrus began appointing local officials in newly conquered provinces, a custom which became common and allowed for an increasingly autonomous rule of Persian territories (Kuhrt 1997:659). After his son Cambyses I took the Persian throne, the Empire marched south on Egypt, invading and conquering the region during the years 526-525 BCE (Kuhrt 1997: 662). Egypt’s absorption launched a period of unease within the Persian Empire; revolts here and along the Palestinian coast in 522-521 BCE were decisively suppressed by the next emperor, Darius, and rising tensions with Greek states came to a head during the reign of his son Xerxes in the following decades (Kuhrt 1997:670). After attempts to force Greek city-states to acknowledge Persian authority failed, the Persian Wars with Greece began with a series of initially successful campaigns lead by Xerxes on the Greek mainland. Two battles in 480 BCE, Marathon on land and Salamis at sea, turned the tide of the war against Persia with surprising and crushing Greek victories, and a final defeat at Plataea in 479 BCE eliminated the remainder of Xerxes’ army in Greece (Kuhrt 1997: 670).

The period in Persia following its unsuccessful war with Greece was relatively stable, save for a 401 BCE rebellion in Egypt which briefly expelled imperial Persian rule from the region. The Empire devoted the next years to reestablishing control in the region, which it eventually did in 343 BCE in part by tightening its grip on the

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2 Both Athens and Sparta famously rejected those demands (Kuhrt 1997: 670).
Syria-Palestine region (Kuhrt 1997:673). Phoenicia, the coastal Levantine region including Ashkelon and its neighboring cities, revolted following Egypt’s reconquering, before an unsteady Persian rule was reestablished until Darius III was defeated by the military of Alexander the Great and his empire by 323 BCE (Kuhrt 1997: 673).

The Early History of Ashkelon

Prior to Persian occupation, Ashkelon was one of the five major Philistine cities, a culture which characterized the city’s second Iron Age. This period, which lasted from approximately 1000-604 BCE (Stager et al 2008: 21), came to an abrupt and violent end when, in that final year, King Nebuchadnezzar II of the Babylonian Empire destroyed the city on his march down the coast of the Levant en route to an intended invasion of Egypt (Stager et al 2008: 8). Following this destruction, which is archaeologically marked by such evidence as ash layers, smashed pottery, burned organic material, and human remains, the last Philistine king of Ashkelon, Aga, was sent into exile in Babylon, and the city saw a period of abandonment (Stager et al 2008: 8). Gaps in occupational debris and layers of naturally accumulated sediment in old Philistine domestic and urban areas are indicative of a substantial period of time between human settlements.

Ashkelon’s Persian occupation was not, however, an isolated instance. The Empire had great influence over the larger Levant, as well as with Egypt to the south;
examining Ashkelon’s Persian Period benefits from considering these wider contexts. Before the arrival of Cyrus and his empire, Egypt had long held influence and interest in the Phoenician coast, particularly because of the strategic maritime position and resources it commanded (Kuhrt 1997: 643). Indeed, Egypt even ruled briefly over the entire region during the last third of the seventh century BCE, and concentrated their economic interests in these coastal regions (Lipschitz 2006: 21). This Iron Age connection with Egypt was reinvigorated after Egypt’s conquering by the Persians in the sixth century; while Ashkelon was populated by a different people, their economic proximity to Egypt could be reminiscent of earlier contact.

_Ashkelon: A Persian and Phoenician City?_

Near to the end of the sixth century BCE, Ashkelon was resettled under the Persian Empire (Stager et al 2008: 9). The city became a part of the Empire’s western territories, but it never appears to have been strictly controlled by an imperial Persian presence. According to a late fourth century BCE account of Mediterranean sea ports and powers written by Pseudo-Skylax, Ashkelon functioned during this time as the “headquarters of a Tyrian governor” (Stager et al 2008: 9), and a reference in this same text identifies the city as a _basileia_, a royal Persian citadel, which may indicate that it also served as the seat of the current Persian governor (Stager et al 2008: 373). The inscription also hints at the nature of Phoenician occupation of the region; while it does not define Phoenicia’s political or geographic boundaries, the text does indicate
that it was divided into city-states, some of which were administrative subjects of the Phoenicians (Martin 2007: 51). Incidentally, they were a people of maritime traders whose cultural influence in Ashkelon and the Palestinian coast during its Persian occupation is undeniable.

The confusing chronology of Ashkelon and Phoenicia’s absorption into Persia can be illuminated a little with an inscription from Eshmunazar II’s sarcophagus; the man was a king of Sidon, a Phoenician city, whose literary remains help scholars date Phoenician interaction with Persia. The inscription itself is 22 lines long, and describes his dynasty, temples buildings programs, Sidonian domination of the Levant, and lays a foundation for a time frame of his reign (Martin 2007: 287). While placing that time frame is a controversial issue, the most plausible option is a reign spanning 539-525 BCE, a theory argued by Josette and Alain Elayi which coincides with Persia’s conquering of Babylon and Egypt. Unfortunately, these dates present a conflict with archaeology of coastal Phoenician cities, which generally do not begin accumulating Persian material culture until 500 BCE (Martin 2007: 287). However, historical and archaeological evidence from Sidon appears to strongly support these dates. Phoenician naval service to the Persian Empire did begin with Cambyses’ Egyptian campaign in 525 BCE, so perhaps the absorption is a process difficult to read in the archaeological record. Additionally, three Attic vessels excavated in Ashkelon and dated before 500 BCE may indicate earlier Persian reoccupation. It bears mention, however, that reoccupation need not be directly associated with empire; the presence of Attic ware does not prove Persian rule, though it is frequently used as a dating mechanism for the period (Martin 2007: 78).
What does appear to be clear is the city was administered by a client-state relationship with the Phoenicians. According to excavation director Lawrence Stager, “beginning in the late sixth century, Persian imperial rules had allowed or [even] encouraged Phoenicians to inhabit the city. They and their material culture dominated Ashkelon throughout the Persian period” (Stager 2008: 565). This is not to say, however, that Persian occupation went unmarked in Ashkelon. Persian presence does bring a particularly significant change to the urban organization of Ashkelon and, similar to other Phoenician cities, in the form of an orthogonal city plan. Such a design is typically referred to as Hippodamian, for the Greek urban designer and theorist said to have originated the idea (Martin 2007:105). This layout was, however, far more common in the near East than in Greece, and is highly characteristic of Persian occupied territory in this region. Occupation gaps between phases where these orthogonal plans were implemented indicate that the imposition of urban planning was deliberately made, and was not an organic or gradual development. A great degree of organization characterized this change (Martin 2007:113). Large warehouses and public buildings are frequently excavated in Ashkelon’s central areas, indicating a closeness of commercial and domestic life encouraged by urban planning (Martin 2007: 62).

**Persia’s Economies**

Phoenician influence in the Mediterranean grew in strength because of its excellence in maritime trade; Ashkelon and other coastal cities were optimally located
to function as a “waystation” that connected Syria and Persia in the north with Egypt in the south (Stager et al 2008: 37). Ashkelon had ties with the Egyptian Empire far before this period, including early Egyptian references to Ashkelon in Middle Kingdom Egyptian Execration texts, a connection which seems to have declined after the Hyksos regime was defeated prior to the New Kingdom dynasties (Stager et al 2008: 7). A plethora of Egyptianizing material culture, my assemblage aside, also support a connection with Egypt during this period. A hoard of Egyptianizing bronze statuettes and figurines, depicting gods like Osiris, Isis, Anubis, and Bastet, was discovered in the early twentieth century (Stager et al 2008: 161). A life sized statue found on the Ashkelon’s shoreline has been characterized as “an Egyptianizing statue from the Levant [featuring] variations on the three part kilt typical of the Nile Valley (Stager et al 2008: 617). Clearly, Persian Ashkelon’s cultural diversity included influence from Egypt.

In antiquity, Ashkelon was a large urban center compared to other nearby cities in the Levant, and its coastal location gave it a natural seaport (Stager et al 2008: 4) and an opportunity to create a successful harbor. Excavation reports from the Leon Levy Expedition characterize the Persian city in this manner:

Throughout its history, Ashkelon’s role in overland and maritime trade attracted an international business community. Textual and artefactual evidence point to an ethnically diverse population in this period, with Phoenicians, Persians, Philistines, Egyptians, Greeks, and native residents contributing to a vibrant economy (Stager et al 2008: 563).
This bustling, international economy is visible in the period’s archaeological record. As noted earlier, a dominant presence of Phoenician material culture supports an administration of the seaport by “Phoenicians from Tyre” (Stager et al 2008: 537). These peoples were a powerful naval presence in the Mediterranean, with “far-flung maritime trade” reaching many coastal areas. Ashkelon and other coastal ports enjoyed numerous economic benefits from their ability to connect to and participate in international markets (Stager et al 2008: 9). Strengthening the notion of Ashkelon as a port power is a collection of Persian storage amphorae and other broken pottery sherds whose locations indicate that “maritime activity was not confined to the present limits of the site…but [instead] extended much farther to the north and south” (Stager et al 2008: 94). The presence of these amphorae in neighborhoods on the site’s southern tell is indicative of the blended domestic and commercial nature of daily life in this city. Furthermore, underwater archaeological surveys conducted in the 1960’s uncovered multiple anchors from this period, cementing an understanding of the city’s importance as a busy port city (Stager et al 2008: 67).

A significant amount of inscriptions, mostly in the form of ostraca, have been found in Persian contexts as well. Though the vast majority of these are written in a Phoenician script, some of them are also written in Aramaic and Greek. That breadth of language indicates a larger relationship with other economic powers in the Mediterranean (Stager et al 2008: 337). Additionally, a defining form of pottery from the Persian period is Attic black-glazed ware from Athens, which is mostly found in cups, plates, and other domestic tablewares. These forms were imported from Greece into Ashkelon’s port, and appear to then be distributed east to inland cities (Stager et
al 2008: 358). Evidently, Persian Ashkelon had heavy Greek economic influences, as well as played a role in redistributing their products to other nearby settlements. Large numbers of Athenian-style coins excavated in these phases also indicate that Greek cultural influence was strong; some of the coins are identified by excavators as a “Philistine-Athenian” style, indicating a far reaching relationship (Stager et al 2008: 374).

*Instability, Conflict, and Collapse in the Persian Empire*

Relationships with Greek affairs in the west were not isolated to economic trade, however; the larger Levant area became embroiled with Mediterranean conflicts after the meeting of the Delian League in Greece and a successful Egyptian revolt soon after. Jerusalem was fortified after these events, perhaps in a Persian attempt to ensure that the region did not follow Egypt to revolt (Lipschitz 2006: 36). Other coastal sites like Tel Michal and Tell el-Hesi are commonly interpreted as administrative and military sites, primarily given their domination by a single public structure. Militarization of the coast seems to be a response to tightening control following this growing unrest (Martin 2007: 88). Additionally, there the Phoenician coast had unrest of its own; Tel Dor, a coastal city far to Ashkelon’s north, appears on an Athenian tribute list following the Delian League’s formation (Lipschitz 2006: 36). Many Phoenician cities joined a rebellion lead by Sidon following Egypt’s reconquering in the fourth century BCE, an effort which was suppressed by the Empire before its eventual defeat by Greek imperial force.
This system of Persian rule, with imperial political control allowing for more localized Phoenician administration, came to an end around 323 BCE, when Alexander the Great conquered Persia on his quest to build the world’s largest empire. Some thirty years after, a second destruction in 290 BCE appears site wide in Ashkelon. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar’s 604 BCE destruction of this city, this event is less known, although a period of abandonment does characterize this one as well. One possible explanation for this destruction holds that the layer coincides with Ptolemaic assertion of control over the region, though no concrete historical evidence exists to corroborate any specific cataclysmic scenario. In any event, the transition from late Persian to early Hellenistic occupation is archaeologically visible in many Persian phases throughout Ashkelon.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALITY

A Spectrum of Religious Iconography

Most major religions, cultures, and belief systems across the world have their own unique iconographic tradition that reflects their governing divine or spiritual forces. Apart from the loss of some of these records to time, ancient religions appear to be no different. Without surviving language, religious images and materials are often the only remaining evidence of such a belief system. A lack of text from Ashkelon forces this material culture to be the primary source for understanding religious life during the Persian period; the assemblage of amulets in question incorporates Egyptian imagery in representing divinities and symbols of Egyptian religion. In order to understand how these amulets were used in Ashkelon, it is necessary to examine their religious significance and to question the nature of their imagery.

Such religious imagery spans a spectrum of intended purpose; not every piece of religious art is intended to convey the same message, or is used in the same manner. Here I present a spectrum that ranges from immanent to apotropaic images with the intention of placing the amulets of Ashkelon at some point along that continuum. The first extreme end of this spectrum comprises of an immanent image, which is also called a divine image. The terminology of “divine image” is important here, because it will form a comparative benchmark for these amulets and other religious images.
On its most basic level, this term refers to a visual representation of a divine being or power; however, more complex questions must be applied to it before it can be so simply defined. Ioannis Mylonopoulos examines such images in the ancient Greek world by emphasizing the “importance of the materiality of the divine figure” (Mylonopoulos 2010: 3). These divine images are defined as physical objects, but ones that are fundamentally connected to their divine qualities. Divine images do not simply visually depict a god or goddess; divinity is inseparable from materiality in such a manner that gods are believed to actually embody these images. This belief is also called immanence, when god is present in image.

Cult statues are a clear example of such a divine image in Egypt. These statues, which depicted gods and goddesses worshipped in cult practice, were housed in public temples and cult centers, and were worshiped and cared for as divine entities. In addition to physically depicting a deity, these statues were also believed to be literal embodiments of that divine presence. That divinity was invited into the statue through a ritual process known as the Opening of the Mouth. In this ritual, a “sequence of speeches and actions” were performed by priests to welcome the god into the statue and prepare it to perpetually receive offerings and nourishment (Roth 1992: 113). This ritual marked a turning point for the statue’s meaning, because before it took place, cult statues were ordered and created “as one would an ordinary, utilitarian object” (Meskell 2004: 103).
The Opening of the Mouth ritual is also well documented in primary sources, particularly in the New Kingdom. The Pyramid Texts on the northern wall of Unas’ burial chamber, seen in Figure 2.1, outline the ritual in detail (Rother 1992: 118).

The ritual life of cult statues did not end after the Opening of the Mouth, however; daily cult rituals tended to the statues and to the divine presence it housed. As one, the god and statue were “awakened, washed, fed, dressed, and anointed” in rituals of care and reverence (Lorton 1999: 150). As scholar Lynn Meskell argues, the Egyptian pantheon did not have a physical earthly body, so by creating these divine images in the form of cult statues, the Egyptian people provided what they believed to be “the only possible earthly incarnation” of these gods (Meskell 2004: 88). Indeed, these statues were not thought to be an artistic representation of the god’s body; they were “the body itself” (Meskell 2004: 90). By providing their deities a
physical form on earth, the Egyptians created a usable version of that divine being. Interaction with the gods was direct though their divine images, because they were a physical form for a god on earth.

When approaching the challenge of defining this term on theoretical terms, it can be useful to turn to ethnographic parallels as a source. Unfortunately for Egyptian religious practice, no modern spiritual group embodies a living tradition of the worship of the Egyptian pantheon. There are, however, traditions with comparable notions about the materiality of religious images and, more significantly, the worship of statues as divine images and earthly embodiments of divine power. In the Hindu religion, statues erected in temples or shrines are believed to “become infused with the presence of the deity” (Meskell 2004: 107). Like cult statues for the Egyptians, this idea was taken literally; rituals surrounding the statue transform it into an immanent object that was venerated as the divine presence itself. The care given to these images, like the clothing draped over them, or the flower petals sprinkled upon them, or the jewelry adorning them, demonstrates the compatibility of materiality and divinity in a religion with these divine images so incorporated into religious practice (Meskell 2004: 107). Furthermore, Hindu belief encapsulates the notion that the divine is “present in the image” (Eck 1981: 3).

If this inherent connection exists in the belief system between the divine and the image, any visual contact with the image is a religiously charged event. The prominence of eyes in anthropomorphic divine images of later Hindu tradition has also been linked to this connection; they strengthen the association of visual symbolism to the divine quality of the deity (Eck 1981: 7). According to Meskell’s
comparative analysis, another major defining factor of these statues’ status as divine images is what they represent for the relationship between worshipers and divinities. Meskell describes this interaction as follows:

The image does not stand between the devotee and the god: because the image is a form of the supreme lord, it is precisely the image that facilitates and enhances the close relationship of the worshipper and deity (Meskell 2004: 107).

The divine image is not a conduit; it is not a means of access; it is not a substitute. A divine image is an embodiment of divinity, one that is irrevocably infused with the immanent presence of the power itself. These Hindu ethnographic parallels are reminiscent of Egyptian practice, and paralleled considerations are especially important because defining a divine image is essential to studying them. With so much scholarly thought favoring immanence as an essential component of what comprises a divine image, let them be defined by this consideration. A divine image, then, cannot only be a visual representation of a divine or spiritual power. It must be embedded with divine presence.

The other end of this spectrum is populated with apotropaic images, a term which refers to protective or evil-warding properties. In Egypt, apotropaic symbols were ones which offered protection from the most feared dangers of the day. In many cases, the causes of such perils were demons. In Egypt, the spiritual category of demons was not so strictly defined as is the modern concept, but there was a belief
that malevolent spirits actively sought to bring harm to the world of the living. That harm came in the form of plagues, sickness, wild animals, poisonous snakes and scorpions, bleeding, miscarriages, and more, all of which were thought to be caused by demonic forces (Szpakowska 2009: 800).

In many cases, this apotropaic end of the spectrum in Egypt was populated by amulets. References to such protective qualities in funerary amulets are present in several Egyptian coffin texts, which particularly link images of eyes and solar disks to protective purposes. The London BM 1224 1.7 stele, proclaims- “may you set your iris and pupil as my protection,” and implores divine intervention in keeping the speaker and wearer safe from demons and danger in the afterlife (Darnell 1997:40). In funerary tradition, amulets were frequently included in graves; these items typically represented “deities, symbols [and] body parts” and were often lain in the linen layers shrouding the corpse (Meskell 2004: 127). The Egyptian underworld was thought to be full of dangers and tricks that had to be navigated before a deceased soul could reach its final destination, so protective and instructional goods such as these were common, especially in elite graves; this idea also took the form of texts like the Book of the Dead to give souls the guidance they needed to reach a peaceful afterlife.

The Book of the Dead contains reference to amulets within its spells, including descriptions of the Eye of Horus “[binding]…protecting amulets” to the deceased

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3 These malevolent spirits included of enemies and dead souls who had failed tests in the underworld or had been denied proper funerary rites (Szpakowska 2009: 800).
In another spell, the subject speaks of the future path of his soul in the afterlife:

I am the child of yesterday, and the Akeru gods of the earth have made me strong for my moment (of coming forth). I hide with the god Aha-aaiu who will walk beside me, and my members will germinate, and my khu shall be as an amulet for my body and as one who watcheth (to protect) my soul and to defend it and to converse therewith; and the company of gods shall harken unto my words (Budge 1901: 216-217).

There are several illuminating aspects of this passage: first and foremost, funerary amulets are specifically referred to as exemplars of protective objects. By comparing the khu with an amulet, the spell implies that this soul takes on qualities that amulets typically bestow upon the wearer. Additionally, the gods mentioned appear to play active roles in this process, roles which appear to interact with the physical amulet itself. The passage implies that gods and amulet function together to protect the deceased spirit. By not equating god with amulet, it appears clear that amulets are not characterized by permanent immanence, not in the way that cult statues are.

These two examples define two extreme ends of a spectrum of religious imagery: the immanence of cult statues and apotropaism of funerary amulets. However, those ends to not define the total corpus of such iconography. Mylonopolous argues for an acknowledgment of the fluidity of status that religious or cultish objects can have (Mylonopolous 2010: 8). It’s here that one finds the intermediate, mutable space of the spectrum of religious imagery, where a strict dichotomy of immanence versus apotropaism is no longer appropriate. In Greece,
statues and images could have temporary or emergency cult status applied onto them, regardless of the original intentions of the artist; that significance cannot be seen in the materiality of the image. (Mylonopolous 2010: 17). Meskell’s arguments that utilize comparative Hindu ethnography are useful in exploring this fluidity as well. Like the Egyptian statues, Hindi images do not merely represent the god on earth; it presents the god on earth. Significantly, a key difference between these two examples is that while Hindi statues could be “de-sacrilized” and “recycled” for reuse of the material itself, Egyptian statues retained their immanence once imbued with it (Meskell 2004: 108). Clearly, there was a permanence to the meanings ascribed onto these images to the Egyptians that Hindi statues lacked. Once the Opening of the Mouth ceremony took place, which invited the god into the statue, the physical object became its home forever, but in Hindi practice that cult status was much more flexible. Clearly, a dichotomy of immanent versus apotropaic images misrepresents the potential complexity of religious iconography.

Egyptian religious images have the potential to fall at either end of this spectrum. The amulets at Ashkelon, however, are neither cult statues nor funerary amulets and initially fit obviously into neither end. Where, then, do they lie? On a surface level, the Egyptianizing amulets in Persian Ashkelon appear to meet the primary qualification for a divine images insofar as they depict Egyptian deities which received cult worship. But in order to determine whether or not these amulets are indeed “divine images,” one must determine if they are immanent. Since the forms of these amulets are Egyptianizing, one must look to Egypt to anchor the possibilities for their purpose.
Consider the rituals surrounding cult statues, which lie solidly on the immanent end of this spectrum of religious iconography. That immanence is attached through the Opening of the Mouth ritual, and the regular cult practice which attends to the statue’s physical needs also cements the image’s identity as an embodiment of divinity. These rituals are essential to the immanence of the cult statue, and pictorial and textual evidence exists which connects ritual to the image; however, there appear to be no references to such a ritual being associated with amulets. Given the extensive documentation of the rituals surrounding cult statues in Pyramid and Coffin Texts, the lack of texts about similar rituals suggests that there was no equivalent to the Opening of the Mouth for amulets. 

Instead, the evidence for the religious use of amulets comes from spells. These magical texts were often aimed at curing sickness, driving away demons, easing childbirth, promoting fertility, and warding away deadly animals; amulets aided in this process by helping the caster access divine power. Written spells would also be directly worn, as amulets in their own right (Pinch 1994: 117). There is a clear difference in the ritualized activity associated with cult statues and amulets. The highly specific and important nature of the Opening of the Mouth ritual allowed immanence to characterize cult statues, and it is unlikely that amulets could obtain the same status without such a ritual.

Before immanent power was ritually bestowed, cult statues were not believed to house the gods that they depict. The creation of a divine image was an extremely important process, and a powerful ritual was necessary to transform the statue into an immanent image. Amulets, on the other hand, “acquired [their] full efficacy as
soon as [they were] made…[and] no special consecration was necessary” (Germond 2005: 22). The power of these objects, then, is not ritually bestowed, suggesting that amulets derive their significance from a different kind of power, and are not appropriately characterized as divine images on our spectrum.

A possibility for these amulets that warrants addressing is their purpose as apotropaic personal objects, like those frequently appearing in funerary contexts. The use of magic in belief and ritual has long been associated with Egyptian practice (Teeter 2011: 161), and textual references have linked Bes, Bastet, and other deities as well as Eyes of Horus with protective qualities. In fact, many gods and goddesses depicted on amulets had apotropaic associations. Bastet, for example, is referenced as “[one’s] protection until dawn” in a Coffin Text (Darnell 1997: 41). “Demonic entities who threatened the living were the same as the ones who were considered…enemies of the gods,” which meant that amulets depicting various deities were meant to invoke the protection of that god against a common enemy (Szpakowska 2009: 801).

Since these symbols appear in Ashkelon’s amulet assemblage more than once, the connection is worth exploring. Many examples of Egyptian belief in magic was associated with defense and protection from evils like demons, disease, and wild animals (Teeter 2011: 167), and wearable amulets may carry the appeal of taking these qualities with the wearer, providing her “with magical protection in life” just as they did in death (David 2002: 175). The protection of the image’s symbolic power extends outside of ritual or cult centers much as funerary amulets and their properties were believed to follow the deceased into the afterlife (Germond 2005: 17). As in Ashkelon, many Egyptian amulets were wearable objects with a similar purpose. String
piercings and loops present on many such excavated objects prove their “wearable and personal” nature (Germond 2005: 17). It appears that amulets had such a pervasive protective power that they were worn both in life and in death.

The etymologies of the Egyptian words for amulet are also indicative of a protective association, as opposed to an immanent one. Various terms were used from the Old Kingdom and onward, but by the New Kingdom many dynasties later, “the terms had become virtually interchangeable” (Germond 2005: 20). Originally, the Old Kingdom word for amulet was *meket*. Scholars believe it to be derivative of the verb *m(e)ki*, which means “to protect.” Commonly, the term is written in the phrase *meket ha*, meaning “protection of the body” (Germond 2005: 20). This word implies a physical and literal ability of the object to protect the wearer or the body from harm and evil. *Meket* continues to appear into the New Kingdom, but in this time another word, *nehet*, also emerges. This term also derives from a verb signifying protection, *nehj*, and is associated with notions of “protection” and “shelter” (Germond 2005: 20). Clearly, to the Egyptians, amulets were meant for this protective purpose suggested by the very language used to describe them; they were not considered portable cult statues or immanent objects which housed their gods.

This is not to say that amulets utterly lacked the intimate connection to divinities enjoyed by cult statues with traditional immanence, but that they were conductors of that divine association and not a physical embodiment of it. In Egypt’s Amarna period, the pharaoh Akhenaten mandated a systematic religious shift to a monotheistic worship of the sun god Aten. Archaeological evidence of amulets still depicting the old pantheon indicates that the ancient Egyptians “felt the need for
comfort” provided by the previous tradition, and “kept amulets of these deities to provide magical protection for their family members” (David 2002: 245). Therefore, while amulets did not function as immanent divine images, they did provide means for bearers to access the protective qualities of the represented image. In this way, they are synecdochic; they may not be actual gods, but they represent aspects of their protective realms, and those parts were believed to help the wearer access divine powers. Amulets which depicted deities did not visually represent “the god’s complete appearance;” not every amulet showed every attribute or characteristic. Rather, they “allude to different aspects of his nature and functions” (David 2002: 53). These aspective depictions allow for the belief of amulets as a way for images of parts to access the power of the whole.

Essential to understanding this complexity is an account of such an image’s tendency to be given metonymic and representational meaning, as well as an understanding of what these aspective depictions mean. These amulet forms are coming from Egypt, where images carried a great degree of power (Germond 2005: 14). Most of this power appears to be representative, as many of the images were meant to “substitute for the characteristics of the original” thing being depicted (Germond 2005: 15). By representing an object or a being, images can draw upon that being’s power; this quality can be demonstrated by the lack of realism in depictions of the human form. Jan Assmann recounts a scholarly theory originally written by Emma Brunner-Traut, one that holds that Egyptian forms were aspective. Bodies were artistically created by piecing together different recognizable parts; a hand might be drawn as facing the viewer, the reverse of a realistic perspective, but it
allows the viewer to immediately recognize the body part for what it is intended to represent (Assmann 2005: 26). These bodies, rather than being seamless wholes, were comprised of multiple parts representing the most recognizable versions of each segment. This theory would indicate that the Egyptians prioritized the representative power of images over realism, a notion which lends itself to the use of such images in magical or religious contexts. Recall the importance of the eye in Coffin Texts; parts of a god, while never implying an immanent whole, could be used to invoke a more specific presence or aspect of a god’s power. This and other such references do not equate the symbol of the eye with the deity itself; rather, they indicate a metonymic relationship in which the eye assumes the apotropaic part of the god’s whole potential power. In cases where amulets were used in spells to implore a deity to grant protection and favors or shield the wearer from evil, the god is not in the amulet used to implore him. Instead, the physical symbol was used as a conduit for that communication. These amulets are examples of secondary symbolic association, where “significant forms are represented indirectly” (Wilkenson 1994: 31). In this case, that indirect representation takes the form of an amulet emulating their image.

*The Materiality of Faience*

In addition to the theoretical notion of the image itself, the materials of an amulet are also a large factor in its derivation of meaning. The materials and colors
of amulets “had their own magical properties” (David 2002: 176). The technology of faience, a material commonly used to mold and fashion amulets, can aid in illuminating their purposes. Used to fashion amulets and other decorations, faience is actually fashioned from relatively low-value raw materials, such as quartz and sand; the firing of these components gives it its composite texture (Friedman 1999: 15). While faience was most often produced in Egypt, the commonality of its components means that it is relatively easy to produce anywhere. Distinguishing between faience produced in Egypt or abroad is not always possible, but studies of Bronze Age faience amulets in Beth Shan indicate that during this time, Syro-Palestinian faience was higher-fired than its New Kingdom Egyptian equivalent (McGovern et al 1993: 6). This difference indicates that both faience and its production were being exported out of Egypt, for the purpose of amulet production.

There were several practical reasons why faience became a popular material for the production of these religious pieces. First, while precious stones like lapis lazuli and marbles had to be hand carved, faience was produced by mixing its ingredients into a paste before firing; this malleable material was easier to work with and could even be put into molds. Additionally, by folding a colorant into the paste before firing, producers got a finished product that was tinted and glazed immediately after this process and without any further steps (Friedman 1999: 15). Faience has this advantage over clay, which is easily molded but lacks the ease and glaze of the former technique. These practicalities do not, however, indicate that faience was merely a cheaper “substitute” for more obviously precious materials. Faience is frequently discovered as a decorative material alongside precious stones and metals; it is unlikely
that it was viewed negatively in comparison to them (Bianchi 1998: 24). On the contrary, its transformation from “mundane” sands and stones into a newly born smooth and beautiful product associated it with rebirth, fertility, and light (Friedman 1999: 15). The tradition of transforming ordinary things into a beautiful medium enhanced its “symbolic properties” of regeneration, which is a common motif in Egyptian mythologies (Bianchi 1999: 27). The Egyptian word for faience, tjehet, is even etymologically related to words that mean “luminosity” and “scintillation,” which further associates the material with a bright and transformative power (Bianchi 1999: 24). These transformative connections with faience appear to carry over into the forms that the material takes after being molded and carved. Many of the faience amulets in this assemblage from Ashkelon take the form of an Eye of Horus, which is often referred to as a wadjet eye. According to one myth about this form, all of the “vegetal and mineral wealth of Egypt” were combined together into the wadjet, symbolizing a triumph over death (Bianchi 1999: 27). It might come as no surprise, then, that many of these amulets are fashioned of faience, when the material itself was also associated with regenerative and transformative properties.

Faience’s physical properties, its glaze, its color, and its texture, also enhanced the meanings of the artifacts they comprised. For example, faience comprises almost ever “bride of the dead” figurine found; these objects were female figures found in a wide breadth of contexts, from funerary to domestic spaces, that are often naked and wear long wigs. Their provocative clothing and exaggerated lower bodies have indicated to scholars that they are highly sexualized objects (Bianchi 1998: 25). The silky and smooth finish that faience obtains after firing gives these bodies a
smoothness that possibly enhances their eroticism. In addition to these figurines, and to the kind of amulets found at Ashkelon, faience is used in a variety of different ways, including use in both decorative and ritual contexts. For example, faience was often used to make “inlay...tiles” because of its strong color and shine, and faience paste was often added to other materials to replicate those qualities in tiles (Nicholson 2004: 56). This same beauty, which made faience so appropriate for decoration, also made it a popular choice for ritual objects. In fact, the largest faience object ever discovered is a seven foot long scepter from Naqada (Nicholson 2004: 61). Overall, the physical beauty of faience combined with its ease of production made it an extremely versatile material. However, those qualities also enhanced the spiritual elements of faience objects, like the amulets in this assemblage.

The raw materials themselves, the sand and quartz used in firing, could only be quarried from their sources after a ceremony of “obligatory opening prayers” (Bianchi 1999: 23), and cult statues and items required the opening of the mouth ceremony to complete their transformation into embodiments of the divine. These traditions make the process of crafting faience ritual items a “religiously sanctioned” process from its initial stages to its final ones (Bianchi 1999: 23).

Faience workshops definitely existed by the First Dynasty in Egypt, but beyond that knowledge there is little archaeological evidence for the material’s actual creation; who made it and where these workshops existed remains largely unknown (Friedman 1999: 17). These workshops could have existed in temple and ritual centers, or even at the quarry locations for the raw materials themselves. There is, however, evidence suggesting that the process of firing and creating faience was
considered a technically difficult and important one, especially given the material’s commonality in religious artifacts. It was not the craftsmen who were rewarded for this production, however, but those who commissioned the piece themselves (Bianchi 1999: 22). After all, cult statues were not imbued with their divine significance until after the opening of the mouth ceremony had taken place; materials such as faience did not necessarily derive their quality from the production process, but rather the meaning attached to them later.

The breadth of ingredients needed to mold faience may also be a symbolic reflection of Egypt’s widespread influence across the Near East. For example, the material is commonly found in regions in Nubia, which passed in and out of Egyptian domination through the dynasties and especially in the Middle and New Kingdoms. A number of faience artifacts, such as amulets, bowls, “beads, figurines, and shabtis” have been found in “frontier garrisons” in Nubia and its borders (Lacovara 1999: 46). During these periods of occupation, the material was “imported” from Egypt, even though it might be used to make localized items. Nubian necklaces, for example, were still strung with “faience beads…from Egypt” (Lacovara 1999: 46). In the Eighteenth Dynasty, when Egyptian control over the region was strengthened after a period of weakness, the Egyptian tradition of “faience manufacture” was resurrected (Lacovara 1999: 49). However, in the intervening periods, when invading preoccupations take Egypt away from Nubia, “local production of faience blossom[ed]” (Lacovara 1999: 49). That resurgence indicates that there was a pattern of Egyptian material traditions abroad, even when direct imperial control did not exist.
After the fall of the Hyksos regime and the beginning of the New Kingdom in 1550 BCE, Egypt rekindled its ties and influence in the Levant (McGovern et al 1993: 2). During this period Egypt reestablished the city of Beth Shan as a military garrison for Egypt in the north, whose setting was prized for its ideal location on a major river and at the intersection of a major west-trade route, and rewarded for such a service with defense of advancements from nearby cities like Pella and Hamath (McGovern et all 1993: 2). This combination of local and imperial presence makes Beth Shan an ideal place to study the interaction of local and Egyptian craft techniques, and examining evidence of faience in this region can help shed light on its presence in Ashkelon centuries later. A large number of the faience artifacts excavated in Beth Shan came from a temple complex, whose architectural layout is highly reminiscent of temples in Amarna but whose material culture points to a “combined Egyptian/Canaanite cult” (McGovern et al 1993: 4). In addition to an assemblage of localized bowls and vessels made from faience, the material was commonly found in the form of “pendants” of Egyptian deities, like Bes (McGovern et al 1993: 4). The presence of such amulets in Beth Shan, especially at a date earlier than Ashkelon’s Persian period, indicates that the assemblage belongs to part of a wider phenomenon of traveling Egyptian faience and amulet forms. Excavation reports from Beth Shan argue that this faience was locally produced, as a result of chemical analysis indicating a higher firing than was common in Egypt. In order for this local production to take place, Beth Shan would have needed a pre-existing “glass industry,” as well as Egyptian craftsmen overseeing the process of forming the material into Egyptian
symbols (McGovern et al 1993: 10). Here again we can see the widespread nature of this Egyptian material tradition.

This same issue of production permeates Ashkelon’s amulets as well, and a question remains as to whether they were manufactured locally, as appears to be the case in Beth Shan, or were exported from Egyptian workshops. G. Hermann, a scholar who has cataloged and studied Egyptianizing amulets in many Palestinian coastal sites, takes a strong stance on the issue and maintains that local production in the region was highly unlikely, despite the “large numbers of amulets” found there (Hermann 2010: 225). No large grouping of molds, or concrete evidence of a workshop, has ever been found in the area. Additionally, he argues that faience technology is very complicated, and Egyptian artisans were much more likely to have the necessary expertise to produce amulets in these kind of numbers (Hermann 2010: 225). That evidence, however, does not have enough substantiation in Ashkelon to definitely answer this issue of production. It is true that there is no archaeological evidence of molds or workshops, but neither has any chemical analysis been performed on individual amulets and faience artifacts to determine the origin of the material. In lacking hard evidence either for or against this claim, it seems unlikely that we can at this time definitively decide whether these amulets were made locally or abroad.
A Place in Household Religion?

A final notion to consider as we establish a methodology for examining these amulets is their place within local religious tradition. In order to understand the nature of that role, it is important to establish theoretical frameworks and specific terminologies for various religious realms concerning the natures of household, family, and public religion. A literature review focusing on exploring those religious will establish a concrete terminology. Religious scholar Stanley K. Stowers considers a comprehension of “the conjunction” of these “categories, family, household, and religion” to be of paramount importance to studying their relation to the archaeology and history of these ancient cultures (Stowers 2008: 5).

In order to understand the role that these Egyptianizing amulets played in the religion of Persian Ashkelon, we must first establish the realm of that religion. There is as of yet no archaeological evidence for a cult center or temple in Ashkelon, so this literature review will primarily focus on the realms of private and household religion. Unlike temples or cult centers, many households do not have spatially distinct religious spaces in these cases; religious spaces were integrated into domestic ones as religious activities were intertwined with the economic and social functions of the household. Susan Ackerman examines the ways in which these concepts interact with private Israelite religion; she argues that household religion cannot be the same as family religion, because households are not the same as families. She offers the following definitions for the two concepts: household religions are “those religious activities that the family members who co-habituate a domestic space undertake
jointly within that locale,” and family religion as “that which the biologically and
martially related individuals who constitute a family unit do together to give
expression to their collective religious convictions whatever the location” (Ackerman
2008: 128). In these definitions, Ackerman specifically emphasizes space and location
as defining aspects of the differentiation. Household religions take place in a
household, but family religions need not. Archaeologically, these definitions may be
hard to substantiate. Ackerman herself notes that only “wealthy families” may have
had designated religious spaces in their households, so identifying these religions
within the space of neighborhoods in Persian Ashkelon may be a difficult task.

While Ackerman maintains that family religion must be considered distinct
from household religion lest families become conflated with households (Ackerman
2008: 128), Stowers argues in his theoretical exploration of this issue that family
cannot be “abstracted from the household” (Stowers 2008: 6). Some sociologists and
cultural anthropologists have argued that these family units in antiquity, lacking the
modern and western notion of a “nuclear family,” had such varied “patterns of social
relations” that attaching a universal definition to the idea would be impossible
(Stowers 2008: 6). It follows logically that the religions practiced by such a diverse
social structure would be equally varied. According to Stowers, household religion is
the ultimate religion of “place;” domestic places are the centers of “intergenerational
continuity,” and the significance of these practices can be focalized in a space of
functioning life cycles (Stowers 2008: 11-13).

In his examination of family religions in Bronze Age Ugarit, Theodore J.
Lewis defines these concepts in relation to each other in order to situate family
religion within a spatial context. For him, family religion comprises the “religious…activities in which…common families engaged” (Lewis 2008: 65). Without access to elite cult spaces, the average family is assumed to have practiced these activities in their households. For Lewis, these two religions seem to be one and the same, with households merely providing the opportunity and locale for family religious practice. It does appear that the majority of family religion took place in the “dwelling” of that family (Albertz 2008: 97).

As a “phenomenon of anthropomorphizing,” it is perhaps unsurprising that amulet use is a common marker of private worship in household religions (Stowers 2008: 9). As a result, many private religious practices incorporate amulets. In a way, these amulets depict divine forces and identities in tangible and relatable ways, and may enable the wearer to personally access the power or meaning of their depictions without the formality of an official religious space. Archaeologically, these religious spaces in households can be difficult to identify, partially because such practices do not require spatial delineation. Unlike public worship in a temple or a cult center, household religion is integrated into the daily functioning of a house, and practices do not necessitate strict routine. In a temple, libations may be poured from a sacred vessel made for such a purpose, but in a home the same act might be done with an “ordinary cup” (Stowers 2008: 11). As a result, theoretical models can be a useful tool in filling in these gaps.

In a synthesis of various theoretical and archaeological examinations of family religion in the Levant, Saul M. Olyan offers a different take on this relationship by defining family religion as “the religious activity of the household” (Olyan 2008: 114).
This definition represents a completely different take on the distinction between families and households, and one that Olyan supports with an assertion that “family” and “household” are equal terms (Olyan 2008: 114). He separates these religions from any sense of place in these definitions, and the emphasis shifts from domestic location to the social organization of family units when examining these private religions. However, Olyan appears to consider this definition the most appropriate because of his analysis of local cult centers as focal points for family religion.

It is this synthesis of definitions that appears the most appropriate. If public religion is beliefs and practices that are expressed through shared communal belief and procedure, then private religion is those beliefs and practices which take shape outside of communal or official activity. Household religion encompasses those religious activities which take place within the space of the physical household, and family religion relates to those activities performed by the familial unit, but not necessarily confined to the space of their home. While the distinction between families and households must carry over into their religions, to consider the two to be completely separate entities would be inaccurate. The relationship between families and their households is close, and must be considered in relation to their religions, but it is also important to recognize Ackerman’s larger point about the importance of location. Family religious practice has the potential to extend beyond the confines of a domestic space, and therefore seems to be the larger category which also encompasses activity within a household. After all, amulets can be worn anywhere.
CHAPTER THREE

CATALOGUE AND DIVINITIES

Catalogue

1. Bull


Measurements: 1.38 cm height, 5.25 mm height of interior of hole, 1.05 cm height from top to bottom, 4.8 mm depth at bottom.

One piece, incomplete.

This artifact is an amulet in the shape of a bull. It is made of faience, with a turquoise color interrupted by sections of a dark blue toned gray along the base, stringing hole, and back legs. A combination of raised curves and incised lines make up the shape of the animal. Visible on the head are eyes, horns, ears, snout, and mouth. There are small incised lines marking folds in the bull’s neck, as well as its upward curve. Four thin lines in the bull’s midsection delineate its ribcage, and there is a stringing hold above these ribs. The bull is standing on a rectangular base, and the space between base and body is filled with the same faience that comprises the animal. This apparent maleness of the animal means that this figure represents the Apis Bull, a sacred Egyptian animal. It is worth noting, however, that the goddess Hathor was
often represented as a cow, and both Apis and Hathor are identified in the excavators’ identification; however, the rarity with which Hathor was represented as a complete cow, as opposed to an anthropomorphic figure with just the animal’s head, indicates that this amulet depicts Apis and the goddess. The amulet was excavated from a destruction layer on Floor 456, from the latest Persian period of grid 38. The floor had uneven occupation levels and many inclusions, including cuts by a cobble and fieldstone drain. Also found on this floor in the same context were bones, iron nails, worked shells, seeds, and a faience 19th Dynasty scarab.

2. **Isis**

MC 26510 Grid 38, square 63, unit 556. Persian.

Measurements: 1.92 cm height, 7.2 mm width, 5.15 mm depth

One piece, nearly complete.

This anthropomorphic amulet depicts a standing goddess Isis. The figure’s features are not clearly incised, and details appear to be faded. However, the outlines of a face, long hair, two arms, and two legs are visible. The only detail left on her face are two faint incised eyes. Draped clothing is evident as well, though like the body, the details of this cloth are indistinct. It is possible that she is holding something in her hand, but again, this detail is faded. Raised marks on each shoulder indicate the presence of hair or a headdress draped over on each side of the figure’s neck, indicating
once again that this amulet depicts Isis; this goddess is frequently depicted with this hairstyle, particularly in later Persian and Hellenistic periods. The very top of the amulet is chipped away, though a groove through this portion remains, indicating the presence of a perforation for stringing. The amulet is a dark purple-gray color, with some spots of a paler tan and shiny green; this may be the remains of a glaze or paint. These details, in addition to the smooth and sandy texture, indicate that the material is, like so many of these amulets, faience. The amulet was excavated from a beaten earth floor in the western part of the building in square 64.

3. **Taweret**

MC 26082, grid 38 square 63, Layer 556, Feature 456. Phase 10

Measurements: 30 mm height

Once piece, almost complete.

This piece is an amulet of the goddess Taweret, who often depicted with hippopotamus attributes. The amulet is a pale turquoise blue faience, and contains nearly all of the figure. While it was identified by excavators as a baboon figure, the amulet actually depicts an anthropomorphic hippopotamus with visible breasts and a head still detailed with incised decorations. The square nose and long face are characteristic of the animal, and those attributes identify it as Taweret. The figure has two long arms by her side, with hair on either shoulder, and stands straight against a rectangular slab on the back side of the amulet. There is a stringing hole
running laterally through the back, just below the shoulders on the other side. This amulet was found in the same context as both the Apis and Isis amulets in this catalogue; layer 556 is a destruction layer on floor 456, located in the corner of Room 456 near the wall. Also found in this context were bone and amber beads, slag, a lead weight, copper alloy pieces, a faience seal, bones, olive pits, and amphora sherds.

4. Sekhmet


Measurements: 2.32 height, 6.2 mm width at head, 6.35 mm depth at head

One piece, nearly complete.

This amulet depicts the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet; the figurine has the head and face of a lion, a commonly depicted attribute of the goddess (Andrews 1994: 34). While the artifact is it almost entirely complete, there is a chip missing from the bottom of the figure. The figurine depicted is female, with long hair over both shoulders and a left leg stepping forward. That posture creates a fold in fabric between the legs, indicating a depiction of long fabric or clothing. One of her arms is bent at the elbow across her torso, and the other lies flat against her body. The back of the figure lies against a long rectangular base which extends nearly to the top of
her head. Although the incised decorations are very faded, her face still retains clear eyes, and her hair is easily distinguished from her shoulders and body. Her breast are also slightly raised and visible. There is a horizontal groove along the top of her head, which is likely the remnants of a perforation for stringing. This figurine is a pale blue color in almost its entirety, with spots of a clear green glaze on the body as well, and this in combination of a smooth texture indicates that the material is faience. The entire square from which this amulet was excavated is primarily comprised of interior architecture, and the unit in which it was found is a north-south oriented mudbrick wall. Other material culture excavated from the same unit include a copper allow earring.

5. **Eye of Horus**


Measurements: 1.79 cm height, 2.05 cm width, 5.6 mm depth at top.

One piece, incomplete.

This amulet depicts another Eye of Horus, easily identified as such by the eye in the center of the piece. The single piece that remains constitutes approximately three quarters of what was the complete amulet. The eye, which is detailed with very deeply and clearly defined incised lines, is surrounded by a rectangular border on the remaining portions. There is a perforation for stringing through the piece, about two thirds from the base of the amulet. A dark grayish purple color covers most of the
amulet, but there is a light yellow color on the pupil of the eye and on some of the lower decorative lines, possibly indicating the presence of a paint or glaze. Both sides do have an eye image, though they are not identical and mirror each other. The smooth exterior texture and rough interior breaks are a light brown color. While the majority of such amulets in this assemblage are made of frit or faience, this one is ceramic. It is heavier than most of the other amulets, and the texture is rougher as well. This amulet’s archaeological context is occupational debris over floor 227, and it was excavated in association with bronze, bone, iron, and shell pieces.

6. Eye of Horus


Measurements: Largest fragment- 3.84 cm height from top, 7.42 cm width from tip of eye, 9.5 mm depth. Smallest fragment- 1.1 cm height, 3.62 cm width.

3 pieces, complete.

This faience amulet depicts an Eye of Horus. It is in 3 pieces, but is practically entirely complete, save for several small chips. It is large and flat, with a slightly course and picked outer texture. Deeply incised lines with curves decorate its surface and outline the Eye itself, which lies on the far right of the amulet. Above the eye lies a series of short and possibly hand drawn diagonal lines, which detail the entire top portion. This area also features a long perforated hole, presumably for stringing; its
length indicates that the amulet would have lain entirely flat and horizontal against whatever string it was on. The surface is characterized by a pale blue-green color, which is intensified in the incised lines. The interior, visible on broken surfaces, has a yellow tint and is very rough. The layer from which this was excavated was the second layer of fill to the east of wall 119 inside this building. This wall fall was deliberate, and it was primarily comprised of mudbrick destruction debris over the floor in this area.

7. **Taweret**


Measurements:
One piece, incomplete.

This amulet is a partial representation of the goddess Taweret, so identified by the rectangular hippopotamus head that the figure has. Deep incised lines carve decoration into the amulet, which is made of faience. It is a pale blue-green color, like so many in this assemblage. A laterally pierced stringing hold runs through the back of the amulet, behind and below the goddess’ head. It is incomplete; there is a worn broken edge below the figure’s breasts, which presumably would have depicted a lower body. It was excavated from Layer 135 in grid 50, which is a deliberate fill layer in an alley. Pottery also from the layer is dated to both Persian and Hellenistic
periods, putting the phase at likely 4, which covered the transition between the two periods. Bone, shell, and bits of metal also accompanied this amulet in its context.

8. **Partial Bes Headdress**


Measurements: Approximately 1cm height.

One piece, incomplete.

This artifact is an incomplete amulet. It depicts the partial head and headdress of the Egyptian dwarf god Bes, so identified by the headdress worn by the figure, which has curved plumes that are common in the feathered head piece worn by the god. It is made of faience, and was likely mold made. The color is a pale turquoise with partial glaze on the exterior, with a chalky and white interior on the broken edge. The top of the artifact features three curved vertical protrusions, which resemble the aforementioned feathers. The sides feature three curves down each edge. It was found in a layer of occupational debris from square 59, along with Persian dated pottery.
9. **Bes headdress**


No measurements

This amulet depicts a Bes headdress, and is made of faience. Unfortunately, there is no image available for this amulet, but Bes’ headdresses were typically comprised of four large feathers. It was excavated from exterior courtyard debris in the eastern corner of the square. The debris was sandy silt, and also contained bone, copper, glass slag, beads, and Persian pottery.

10. **Eye of Horus**


Measurements: 20 mm in height

One piece, complete

This amulet clearly depicts another Eye of Horus, but the fine relief is sharper than in other pieces in this assemblage. These raised lines clearly form an Eye, with small details in the eyebrow, pupil, and more. It is made of faience, and in a white color. There are small traces of a pale blue glaze on the surface of the amulet, and a lateral stringing hole pierces the piece through its upper third. It was excavated from a western, interior surface from square 48, along with lead, stone, and copper weights, bone, iron nails, and pottery.
11. **Bes**


No measurements.

Two pieces, incomplete

This amulet depicts the dwarf god Bes, and is double sided. The two remaining pieces depict parts of the deity’s head and body. It is made of faience, white in color, with traces of remaining pale blue glaze. The layer from which this piece was excavated was comprised of occupational debris in an exterior alley in the east-western part of the square. Unfortunately, this amulet does not have a recorded image in excavation records, so none can be reproduced here. Along with this amulet, Persian pottery, charcoal, coper, worked stone blades, and iron slag were found in this unit.

12. **Nefertem**


Measurements: Approximately 5 cm height.

One piece, complete.

This artifact is a faience amulet depicting the god Nefertem, so identified by his short and rectangular beard. There is also a faint line visible in the profile view of
the amulet that slopes down across the figure’s legs above the knee; this could
represent a kilt, another common attribute of Nefertem. The figure is standing on a
rectangular base with a long support on the back. There is little fine detail remaining
on the amulet, but the beard, headdress, hands, and legs are still visible. There is a
lateral stringing hold running through the back of the amulet, behind the figure’s
head. This piece was excavated from a layer of accumulated fill in a courtyard, along
with various animal bones, bits of metal, plaster, and red ocher pigment.

13. **Eye of Horus**


No measurements.

One piece, incomplete.

This artifact is a partial Eye of Horus, a pupil section of a large amulets. It is
white with partial bits of blue glazed decoration, with a lateral stringing hole
running through. It was found in a layer of natural fill in this grid, along with
Persian and Iron Age II pottery, and pieces of bone and metal. Like the proceeding
piece, there is no photograph or image available.
14. Ptah

MC 12866. Grid 50, square 59, layer 50, Persian/Hellenistic.

Measurements: Approximately 2 cm height

One piece, incomplete.

This artifact is the bottom half of a faience amulet. It features two legs standing on a rectangular base, which belong to the god. It is made of blue-green faience, with lightly incised lines marking details in the piece; these details include a bend separating the foot from the ankle. In between the two legs lies a vertical and rectangular staff, a scepter which is a common attribute of Ptah. There are also three curved and incised lines draping down the upper part of each leg, as well as one more set of incisions closer to the figure’s ankles. While much of this detail has been faded, they might depict wrappings around the legs; Ptah was often depicted with a wrapped or mummified body, and was symbolically connected to the colors blue and green. There is a rectangular support, or plinth, on the back of the legs. This particular amulet was excavated from an occupational debris layer with pottery from the Persian and Hellenistic periods.
15. **Headdress**

MC 62789. Grid 51, square 73, unit 247. Phase 6

Measurements: 1.66 cm height, from top of perforation, 6.8 mm width at top, range of 2.5-1.5 mm depth as amulet goes down.

One piece, incomplete.

This artifact, though broken, appears to depict a headdress once worn by a missing deity. It has a perforation on the top right edge that clearly made it capable of being strung, but its incomplete nature makes its original form difficult to definitely determine. The fragment is rectangular, with a series of five incised vertical lines going down to the broken edge of the piece. These lines are not deeply incised and are rough and faded in areas, and only appear on one side of the amulet. They likely represent reeds or feathers; significantly, both Bes and Nefertem were commonly depicted as wearing plumed headdresses. The texture of the piece is smooth and matte, while the inside edge revealed by the fragmented portion is much rougher. The outside has a pale blue-gray color, while the inside is much browner. This texture, as well as the color, indicate that it was a frit amulet. There are remnants of this blue color in a more concentrated form in the incised lines, and these areas also retain a shine; this is most likely the remainder of the original glaze. The thickness of the piece narrows as it gets farther away from the perforation. It was excavated from a mudbrick floor in the southwest room of square 73. This floor runs all the way up to the eastern floor 137, and slopes up to meet the walls in the southwest. Along with
this fragment, the floor also yielded a coin, a spherical bead, and various faunal remains.

16. Bastet


Measurements: 1.35 cm height, from tip of ear to bottom of base, 8.7 mm width at outer ends of base, 3.65 mm depth of base.

One piece, complete.

This amulet clearly depicts a seated cat, with a perforation lying within a rounded shape on the cat’s upper back; this curved shape was possibly intended to be the curve of a tail. It sits on a small, rectangular base, and its precise detail in the face. These details include two pointed ears and raised eye and nose features. It is made of faience, and has a sandy tan color throughout the piece. It does, however, retain a small amount of shiny glaze between its front legs, whose original color is difficult to determine. The detail in the cat’s face also extends to this lower portion; the front paws are separate and distinct. Given the cat’s strong symbolic and visual association with Bastet, this goddess is the intended representation of this cat. A seated cat with a “loop on the spine,” intended for stringing, is a very common form of Bastet amulet, an image reflected in this piece (Andrews 1994: 33). This amulet was excavated from a floor on the east side of Building 1, around other material culture like a blank scarab bead and a glass eye bead.
17. **Male legs**

MC 63140, Unit 51, square 74, unit 221. Phase 7.

Measurements: 2.17 height from base to broken edge, 1.07 cm width at bottom of base, 6 mm depth in base.

One piece, incomplete.

This fragment depicts two standing legs, one of which is straight and the other lies behind the first but is stepped forward. It is broken just below the torso, and any perforation for a string would have been attached to the head or upper torso, both of which are missing from this fragment. The legs appear to be draped in clothing of some sort, but this fabric has little detail and its edges remain faded. There are no feet, and one arm is visible; it is bent at a right angle at the elbow on one side of the amulet. The surface is a pale blue color, with a light green glaze lying in incised lines that outline the leg shapes. These incisions are deep and clear, but are obviously faded. The interior, visible at the broken edge at the top of the piece, is white and has a chalky texture, indicative of a frit material. The legs are standing on a rectangular base, and has a vertical framing that lies against the straight leg, which appears to connect with the base. It is unclear whether the fine gridded material in which this amulet was found came from the mortar inside of the wall U215 or the fill of U221 against it.
18. **Eye of Horus**


Measurements: Largest piece-1.6 cm height, 1.5 cm width, 4.4 mm depth. Smallest piece-5.6 mm height, 3 mm width.

Two pieces, complete.

This is an Eye of Horus amulet found on a floor surface. It is broken into two pieces, but these form the complete artifact. The color is very uniformly a light blue, although it does intensify into a green glaze on the highest points on the back side of the piece. There is a long perforation along the top, inside a section covered with a curved dome with two incisions. The surface is decorated with very shallowly incised lines that curve to form an eye with minimal detail. Four lines in total comprise the eye and its pupil and extent. It is very light, and appears to be made of faience, like many of these amulets. This Eye of Horus was found in a unit comprised of occupational debris on a floor in Room 13 of square 74. The floor covers the southern section of the room, and runs over a shell surface.
19. **Eye of Horus**


Measurements: Largest piece- 1.72 cm height, 1.72 cm width, 4.4 mm depth. Smallest piece- 1.68 cm height, 1.34 cm width at top.

Two pieces, nearly complete

This amulet depicts an Eye of Horus, which is broken into two pieces but remains almost entirely complete save for a small chip off of the top of the piece. The surface is decorated with deeply incised lines that curve and form the shape of the eye, and these lines lend the amulet a high level of detail. Small and thin lines slope diagonally across the top of the amulet, above the eye itself. It is a very pale blue color, but the pupil of the eye has a large inlaid black dome, possibly from a paint, which interrupts the otherwise smooth and flat surface. The top of the piece has one long perforation which extends flatly through this section, presumably for stringing, and the material is faience. This amulet was excavated from a late phase 7 layer of occupational debris over a beaten earth floor 552. The surface of the floor was ashy, with a patchy shell lining. The floor was bound by a northern baulk, eastern wall 448, and western wall 533.
20. Shu


Measurements: 1.285 cm height, 1.1 cm width at the groove, 5.4 mm depth.

One piece, incomplete.

This amulets depicts a figure with both arms outstretched over its head, surrounding a circular focus. Only the top half of the amulet is preserved. The outstretched arms, raised disc above the head, and filled in spaces between the arms and disc are attributes that strongly indicate that it depicts Shu (Andrews 1994: 19). Its color is pale blue, with some yellow faded sections, and the texture is smooth and matte. These factors indicate that the artifact is made of faience. The grooves which make up the decoration in the piece have an intensified color in them, likely a stronger glaze than what has faded away on the remainder. The spaces between the body and arms remain deeply etched, but rest of the incisions are fainter, and there are no smaller details on the face or arms beyond their fundamental outlines. The back of the piece has a rectangular base. Unit 169 is a western sidewalk alongside street 116. The sidewalk featured shell inclusions and lots of pottery, as well as more material culture in the form of a pin.
21. **Eye of Horus**


Measurements: Largest piece- 1.47 cm height from top, 1.59 cm width at the top, 4 mm depth. Medium piece- 6 mm height, 3.5 mm width. Smallest piece- 5.5 mm height, 1 mm width.

Three pieces, nearly complete.

This amulet is another Eye of Horus from this Egyptianizing assemblage. The amulet exists in three pieces, the largest of which measures approximately 1.5 centimeters both in width and height; with the two smaller sections, this amulet is almost, though not entirely, complete. It is made of faience and has a smooth exterior. The interior of the material, noticeable due to the amulet’s multiple fractures, has a slightly rough and almost chalky texture. The artifact is a pale and icy blue, a color which is intensified both in hue and in shininess in the incised decorative lines of the eye itself. This diminished color suggests that this amulet was Egyptian blue, a chemically manufactured aqua pigment that characterizes many Egyptian decorations. Those incised lines, incidentally, remain deep and clearly defined. They form the outline of an eye, which has a long almond shape, a circular iris, and other decorative lines extending in arcs from the base of the eye. There is also delicate detail in the brow, with short diagonal lines extending through the top portion of the amulet. Finally, there is a long and circular piercing through that some portion of the amulet, with a vertical incision through this circle, which would have been used for its stringing; this amulet would have laid flat and horizontally across its string. This
Eye of Horus was excavated from a mudbrick floor, with unit 165 as a layer of occupational debris having accumulated on top. Both of the north and south closing walls of this room were robbed out.

**Gods and Goddesses**

The amulets in this assemblage depict popular gods, goddesses, and symbols of ancient Egypt. The following section will highlight each featured deity and image, offering explanations on their mythological identities, physical representations, and symbolic associations in order to further contextualize the amulets.

**Eye of Horus**

The Eye of Horus was one of the most popular and pervasive symbols in Egyptian religious art, and one of the most common amuletic forms (Quirke 1992: 144). Generally, eyes were very potent motifs in Egypt, having the power to “see” and “illuminate” evil forces (Quirke 1992: 26). They had a strong connection to solar divinity; a duality of Eyes of Horus with “goddess[es] of solar eyes” (Darnell 1997: 36) like Hathor and Bastet emphasizes the widespread nature of this eye motif in religious symbolism. Indeed, examples of amulets with a physical duality that “[flip] from one side to the other so the goddess of the eye and the Eye of Horus are one” (Darnell 1997: 36), further cements this connection between eye amulets and the power of solar divinity (Darnell 1997: 37).
The symbol itself depicted a “made-up” human eye (Germond 2005: 41), with an eyebrow above and markings below (Andrews 1994: 43). The materials and stylization of these amulets varied greatly; they could be made of faience, terracotta, and many precious stones, and the nature of detailed decoration in elements of the eye, like in the brow and pupil, had the potential to be very diverse (Andrews 1994: 44). Despite that physical variation, the symbolism of the Eye of Horus remained consistent.

In early iterations, the god Horus was a creator god with two very important eyes: the right represented the sun, and the left represented the moon (Andrews 1994: 43). He was a champion of order, and consequently somewhat of an antithesis to his evil and chaotic brother, Seth (Quirke 1992: 64). In an act of extreme violence, Seth gouged out Horus’ left eye and left him wounded. The eye was later healed by Thoth and returned to its owner, before being eventually offered to Osiris in the underworld “as a symbol of physical integrity completely regained” (Germond 2005: 41). As a result, the Eye of Horus symbolized health and resurrection, and its associations with the moon and lunar cycles emphasized a perpetual process of “mutilation and mythical healing” (Germond 2005: 41). The restoration of this Horus’ was the ultimate symbol of healing and physical wholeness, and the eye itself took on those meanings. Eyes of Horus were called wadjet eyes in Egyptian, a word which means “he who is in perfect health” (Germond 2005: 41); the name itself its strong connection to holistic health and healing. The Eye of Horus was also an apotropaic image; many diseases were thought to be brought by demons and evil forces, and the Eye warded away those forces in order to ensure the wearer’s health; its watchful nature was thought to
prevent those forces from getting close. These amulets are also representative of “the eastern end of the netherworld, and the place of the $dflyw$,” a word relating to the pupil (Darnell 1997: 40). Commonly used as funerary amulets as well as personal ones, Eyes of Horus also have this connection to the underworld through their mythological origin as an eventual gift to Osiris. In addition to protecting mortals in life, they appear with them in death to act as protection against the dangers of the underworld and help the dead remain whole.

**Bes**

Bes, a god depicted as a dwarf, was one of the most popular Egyptian gods in private cult particularly in the Late Period. Scholars believe that he arrived in Egypt from the Sudan during Egypt’s 12th Dynasty, and remained in Egypt before spreading in popularity into further territories (Stern 1995: 448). Physically, his attributes render him easily recognizable. He is a dwarf, often with long arms and short legs. Sometimes, he even has a tail (Stern 1995: 448). His face is squat, with a snubbed nose, shaggy beard, and large eyebrows. Often, he is depicted with his tongue sticking out, with prominent ears, and even sometimes with horns on his forehead (Stern 1995: 448). Sometimes, he wears a headdress made of feathers. These physical qualities render him a rather ugly god which, in combination with his frequently “oversized genitals added to his effectiveness as an apotropaic deity” meant that he repulsed danger away from worshipers (Pinch 2002: 119). Bes is largely
absent from any mythological record; in all likelihood his outlandish looks landed him in many stories told in households, but these record do not survive.

The “main significance of Bes in the Syro-Phoenician world lies in his apotropaic function,” a quality not limited to amulets of this particular god (Stern 1995: 448). It would appear that, in Ashkelon’s part of the world, Bes was an amuletic choice because of his popular ability to protect the wearer from harm. In particular, Bes was associated with being a great protector of women, especially during pregnancy and childbirth. Wall decoration in elite Egyptian homes during the Late Period even depict him as being present during birth (Stern 1995: 448). Men too could benefit from Bes’ protection; he was also thought to protect hunters and households against the dangers of “noxious desert animals” (Stern 1995: 451). His extreme popularity, especially in household cults, might be attributed to these protective associations, especially in the case of women. In the late second-early first millennium in Egypt, Bes was sometimes identified with other deities in a similarly protective capacity; the first main instance of this duality was his combination with the sky god Shu, and the “joint deity” of Horus-Bes was a “divine healer and protector” (Pinch 2002: 118). His close association with childbirth also gave him a symbolic connection to rebirth, and is therefore a relatively common presence in funerary contexts (Pinch 2002: 118).
Taweret is a mother goddess in the Egyptian tradition, depicted with the head and body of a hippopotamus. She also often has prominent breasts, lion’s paws, and a crocodile’s tail (Pinch 2002: 209). In accordance with her identity of a mother, Taweret can also be pregnant in her representations (Stern 1995: 448). She was an apotropaic goddess, like Bes, who protected women in childbirth and early motherhood (Pinch 2002: 209). Perhaps this association came from the animal often used as her most identifiable physical attribute; Egyptian hippopotamus goddesses in general were given great respect for their fierce defense of their young, like the animal itself. Additionally, they were sometimes associated with water as a force of life (Pinch 2002: 141). There were many names given to these female hippopotamus’ deities, like Ipet and Reret, but scholars suggest that these were merely different aspects of the same goddess (Pinch 2002: 141).

Taweret could be seen as a fierce defender of women and mothers, and the combination of dangerous animals in her oft-depicted physical form enhanced that strength. Like Bes, her strange and powerful appearance only added to her power as a goddess of protection. She, alongside Bes, was often artistically represented on chairs, beds, and mirrors in Egyptian households (Koen 2008: 74), and in particular appeared with the dwarf god in birth chambers during the 18th Dynasty (Stern 1995: 448). Such depictions indicate that belief may have placed her as present during childbirth, or at least was invoked to offer protection and safety for women during a highly dangerous time. Her mythological role is not as clearly defined as more traditionally pantheonic deities, but it is clear that her identity was one of a defender.
The “Hippopotamus constellation” in “Egyptian sky maps” depict Taweret and other “ferocious deities” as eternal guards of Seth as an evil bull. Indeed, Plutarch even wrote that Taweret was Seth’s former concubine, who left him behind to fight for his rival Horus (Pinch 2002: 143).

**Isis**

A very powerful goddess, Isis eventually grew to become the most “widely worshiped” deity in Egypt. She was known as the “throne goddess” and the mother of every single king of Egypt (Pinch 2002: 149). According to Pyramid Texts, Isis was the wife and sister of Osiris when the god was killed by his evil brother Seth. She reassembled the strewn parts of his body to resurrect his spirit, and he became the lord of the underworld (Pinch 2002: 150). Because of this act, Isis is strongly associated with resurrection and protection; in a New Kingdom hymn, she uses “spoken magic” to protect her husband’s body from Seth (Pinch 2002: 150). While early Coffin Texts identify her son Horus as the equal match for Seth and his evil, later sources from the first millennium make Isis herself Seth’s true enemy; in these versions, she transforms her form to “hunt down” and “destroy” him and his followers (Pinch 2002: 151). Isis shared an ability to “produce life without an active partner” with Atum, the creator god (Pinch 2002: 150). That mythical fertility ties her to associations with mothers, childbirth, and life. As the inventor of agriculture, Isis was also a mother of floral fertility as well, and was often invoked to take advantage of that association.
As a healer, she was also sometimes viewed as an antidote to venoms (Pinch 1994: 100); the dangers of deadly snakes and other desert creatures made this aspect of Isis a popular invocation. In general, Isis was a major goddess in magical practice, both in terms of the belief associated with her strong magical power and in her frequent appearance in magical texts. These appearances in particular indicate that her magical abilities made her “sympathetic to the humblest members of society” (Pinch 1994: 29). The longest magical healing text against the poison of scorpion bites begins with an invocation of Isis, who was often the “archetype of medical help” due to her “magical and maternal” powers (Assmann 2001: 133-134). More than most other Egyptian deities, Isis is lauded as a “divine magician” (Assmann 2001: 134), and therefore as one of the most popular figures in magical practice. That identity as a healer made her a popular choice for amuletic representation, especially when combined with her strong power over demonic forces which brought all sorts of dangers to the common people of Egypt (Darnell 1997: 45). Isis’ amulets protected the wearer against such forces, as well as allowed them a stronger connection to magical power.

Physically, Isis is depicted in a variety of ways. When she appears with her infant son Horus, she is often seated and suckling him at her breast (Andrews 1994: 48). She sometimes has a solar disk as a headdress, indicating her association with the solar barque of Ra (Pinch 2002: 151). Later, and especially in the Hellenistic period, she has a long, tight dress and two long, curled locks of hair on either shoulder (Casagrande-Kim 2015: 79). Her presence spread throughout the Mediterranean as
Egypt’s cultural influence grew, appearing in Hellenistic Palestine’s art as a part of a typical Egyptian pantheon (Erlich 2009: 30).

Beginning in the Late Period, but especially in later Hellenistic and Roman times, Isis’ role transformed to accommodate foreign occupation and belief. Later foreign pharaohs in the Ptolemaic line began to integrate Isis and other popular Egyptian deities with Greek cults in order to establish their rule as legitimate. Throughout the Greco-Roman world, Isis and Serapis, a New Greek rendering of the Apis bull, became a duality of natural fertility forces (Quirke 1992: 178). Greek harvest feasts celebrated Isis, and she became accepted in Greece itself as a patron of seafaring and a protector of sea travelers (Quirke 1992: 178).

Ptah

Ptah was a creator god from Memphis, said to have “made the world with his heart and tongue” (Pinch 2002: 181). He was also the chief deity of this Egyptian capital, and along with his consort Sekhmet and son Nefertem was a member of the Memphis triad. Triads were a significant part of Egyptian religion, and they often appear in the form of three members of a family (Kakosy 1980: 48). The “creator god-wife-son” combination was a common pattern in triads, and the Memphis version is no exception (Kakosy 1980: 48). Ptah and this triad represent a different kind of mythological tradition and theology than the more popular Isis and son Horus narrative. According to Middle Kingdom Pyramid Texts, he was a skilled craftsman, and could make a dead person an entirely new body (Pinch 2002: 181). His handy skills made him a popular patron god of artisans, metal workers, and industrial
producers (Assmann 2001: 81). In later tradition, he combined with gods Sokar and Osiris to form a divine “triple entity” that symbolized the total cycle of resurrection (Pinch 2002: 182). He was an “earth god;” his physical skills and associations often eclipsed his cosmic power (Assmann 2001: 81)

Physically, he was typically depicted with a beard and an artisan’s skill cap, as well as a cloak wrapped around his shoulders. When painted, his skin was blue or green, and he almost always carried a scepter which combined symbolism for stability and life (Pinch 2002: 181) (Wilkenson 1884: 112). Sometimes, especially in older representations, his legs or entire body were wrapped, making him a mummy. Even in this form, he typically still carries his scepter (Fletcher 2004: 53). As an amulet, Ptah’s roles as solar deity and “earthly craftsman” were often emphasized, allowing the wearer to access his power in relation to production and creativity (Quirke 1992: 45).

Sekhmet

Sekhmet was an aggressive, destructive, and powerful goddess who was an “instrument as divine retribution” (Pinch 2002: 187). She had the body of a human woman and the head of a lioness, which was sometimes surrounded by a solar disk. Both she and the goddess Hathor were sometimes known as the “Eye of Ra,” acting as agents of divine authority and power (Roberts 1997: 89). According to popular mythology, she brought death into the mortal world when this Eye was “set down” to “punish rebellious humanity” (Pinch 2002: 187). This goddess was often associated with both Hathor and Bastet; in both instances, she acted as the violent and
destructive manifestation of those goddesses’ powers. Where Hathor was the beneficent, Sekhmet balanced with deduction and vengeance (Roberts 1997: 16). Both Sekhmet and Bastet were depicted with feline characteristics, though later iconography clarifies a separation between the two by associating Sekhmet with the lion and Bastet with a domesticated cat. One scholarly theory holds that as cats grew in popularity as household pets, Bastet assumed more artistic depictions as a cat and, in effect, a more benevolent role. Sekhmet, on the other hand, kept the visual associations with lions and assumed the more violent and dangerous role from the other goddess (Mace 2015: 34). The violence she often brought with her did not preclude her identity as a mother, however. She was a protective mother figure to Egypt’s kings, much like Isis, and in the Memphis triad she was Nefertem’s mother; the family pattern of this triad defined her by that maternal role (Pinch 2002: 188).

Sekhmet was also a powerful archer, considered the most skilled and dangerous of the type. Her arrows were “personified” as seven bringers of sickness and inescapable plague (Pinch 2002: 188). Even as she brought epidemics to earth, she was also believed to destroy that sickness when properly worshiped. By properly including her in cult sites, mortals could “placate her and persuade her to remove those terrors” (David 2002: 287). Additionally, her priests were renowned as “great healers” throughout Egypt, and as experts in magical healing techniques and spells (Roberts 2002: 80). Sickness and infection were major dangers in ancient Egypt; her popularity in cult worship often accounted for a desire for protection against those risks.
Demonic entities which brought plague and sickness to the people of Egypt were considered messengers of Sekhmet meaning that the goddess was also the controller of those demons. In the Late Period, that relationship became formally endorsed in literary sources (Szpakowska 2009: 804). Sekhmet’s amulets were meant to invoke her protection against those demons, which made her a popular choice in the warding off disease.

\textit{Nefertem}

Nefertem was the third and final member of the Memphis triad, alongside his father Ptah and mother Sekhmet. His divine emblem was the lotus, a flower that grows under still water, only to rise to the surface and bloom in the face of sunlight (Pinch 2002: 158), and that floral association extended into his identity as the “lord of perfumes” (Wilkenson 1994: 109). In mythological tradition, the lotus bloomed to support the sun-god, only to take the name Nefertem and absorb the role of “vivifying the emerging” god (Quirke 1992: 27). This solar connection was so strong that in Heliopolis, he was “regarded as the young sun” itself (Watterson 1996: 168). That power that came from a strong solar association also afforded the god “militaristic and punitive aspects” (Heinz 2011: 217).

Physically, Nefertem was sometimes represented as a young child on a lotus, but more often than not he was a grown man who might wear a lotus shaped headdress, or have a headdress made of feathers. Like his mother Sekhmet, he sometimes was depicted with the head of a lion (Pinch 2002: 158). He might have a
short, squared off beard. Often, he wore a kilt wrapped around his waist that reached
down to his knees (Fletcher 2004: 53).

In the Late Period, Nefertem’s identity developed beyond merely these solar
associations. He became associated with “good luck” (Heinz 2011: 217), a facet which
vastly increased his popularity as an amuletic deity. In fact, most Nefertem figurines
from this period feature loops and stringing holes, even if the figure was “large” or
“bulky.” While certainly not the only deity who appears more frequently in amulets,
Nefertem attained a role as protector of, and a bearer of, “good fortune,” which may
“signify [that he possessed] a special amuletic quality” with wearers hoping to attract
that luck (Heinz 2011: 217).

Shu

Shu was a son of the creator and sun god, and one of the oldest cosmic deities
in Egypt. He was often associated with his sister and wife Tefnut. As the first
identified “divine couple,” they commanded respect as a pair (Pinch 2002: 2002). Their
first sexual union was the first sexual union between a male and a female, according
to mythology and it granted the two deities an inescapable association with fertility
(Pinch 2002: 197). As an individual, Shu physically separated the earth from the sky,
artistically depicted with two outstretched, right angled arms with palms to the
heavens (Pinch 2002: 196). In this role, he was associated with dryness, light, and
air, as well as the “live-giving” qualities that those brought (Pinch 2002: 195). The
separation between these two realms also allowed “the process of creation to begin”
(Pinch 2002: 197), making Shu a creator god. As an embodiment of dry air, the god
was also a force of preservation, which linked him both to life and to “the concept of time as a series of... eternal cycles” (Quirke 1992: 26). His very name could also mean Life, irrevocably linking him with the eternal cycles of life and death (Assmann 2001: 177-178). He was an “ideal mediator between... divine and human” realms (Assmann 2001: 17), which may have been part of what made him a popular depiction in amulets; just as amulets were meant to access aspects of divine power, Shu himself fulfilled this role on his own. Additionally, his was a frequent presence in funerary tradition and amulets. He is the subject of Spell 80 in Coffin Texts, which declares that the god was meant to “supply the deceased with air” and protection. Additionally, spells meant to protect the caster against wild animals like crocodiles often referenced Shu. In one such spell, the reciter takes over the role of his son in order to “intimidate the animal” away from causing harm (Quirke 1992: 122). Amulets depicting Shu may also have accessed this aspect of the god, allowing the wearer to ward off dangerous creatures.

Physically, Shu is often depicted in the act of separating the earth and sky; with upturned and outstretched arms. Alongside Tefnut, he was symbolically represented as one of two dual lions, which were featured on beds and homes; the lions were believed to guard the sun as it fell and rose again (Watterson 1996: 31). His primary qualities, air and light, were difficult to represent visibly, so he sometimes was depicted as a man wearing a feathered headdress with a hieroglyph for a name (Watterson 1996: 31). Amulets depicting Shu or the scene of his separation of the sky and ground often feature a Shu wearing a short kilt. He sometimes kneels, and his upraised arms surround a solar disk which lies directly atop his head (Andrews 1994: 19).
Bastet

The goddess Bastet was a feline figure, and a frequently regarded mother of Egyptian kings (Pinch 2002: 115). While her earlier iterations depicted her as having the head of a lioness, and thus conflated with the destructive Sekhmet, she eventually settled into portrayals which gave her the head of a cat, or simply depicted her as the animal entirely (Pinch 2002: 15). This transformation was complete by the end of the second millennium BCE. Bastet’s role as a goddess was dual, for she was both a “nurturing mother” and a “terrifying avenger” (Pinch 2002: 115). Like her fellow goddesses Sekhmet and Hathor, she was associated with the solar eye, a symbol which had the potential for both protection and destruction. Various Coffin Texts refer to her as a bringer of plague, but they also declare that she will be “your protection until dawn” (Darnell 1997: 41). That duality was not contradictory to the Egyptians. In the same funerary context, she is referred to as a torch, illuminating “the underworld for the dead” (Darnell 1997: 41). Amulets in graves were perhaps meant to invoke this identity, and she functioned as a guide for these souls.

As Egyptian mythology develops, Bastet has a tendency to take on the protective aspects of her duality with Sekhmet, leaving the destruction and violence to the latter. A 12th Dynasty text comparing a king to the lioness-headed goddess in rage likens the same man to Bastet when he “protects his loyal subjects” (Pinch 2002: 116). She is juxtaposed with that violent goddess, becoming a more “benevolent counterpart” to her ferocity (Watterson 1996: 201), a fact which is emphasized by her frequent depiction as a cat. She left her more violent qualities behind when her lioness depictions shifted to dominate Sekhmet’s attributes (Mace 2015: 34). According to
Herodotus’ historical writings, Egyptian women were freed from sexual restraints during a festival dedicated to her worship, implying that she also had a connection to women’s sexuality (Pinch 2002: 115). Bastet was an extremely popular goddess, featured in many cemeteries dedicated to beloved pet cats (Watterson 1996: 202).

Like Sekhmet, many demonic forces which brought plague (sometimes called “murderers”) were considered to be Bastet’s messengers; this meant that she could also cast them away (Szpakowska 2009: 802). Additionally, Bastet was a popularly represented figure in aegis amulets, which represented the head of a deity with a broad collar (Mace 2015: 32). This particular kind of amulets were associated with protection and safety from evil forces, and in Bastet’s case, that protection especially extended to the warding of disease and insurance of healthy fertility (Mace 2015: 35). As a representative of young mothers, Bastet became a common choice in amulets which intended to protect those women from such dangers.

*Apis Bull*

The Apis Bull was an animal kept in Memphis, which was by far Egypt’s most significant sacred animal. His association with Egyptian cultic practice was so strong that by the Late Period, he was in essence a “national mascot” (Pinch 2002: 105). By late antiquity, the Apis cult flourished so intensely that it became a major tourist attraction to the area (Campbell 2014: 445). By the Hellenistic period, the bull began to morph with Osiris into Serapis, a Greek version of Apis-Osiris. Serapis spread throughout the Greek world, becoming the principle deity of Greco-Roman Alexandria and a god of fertile earth and agriculture. Serapis’ cult spread to Greece
itself, with a large center on Delos (Quirke 1992: 177-178). The strong continued tradition of worship of this bull, as well as the staying power of its iconography is notable in these later periods particularly because it existed despite foreign control of Egypt. One scholarly theory suggests that these religious traditions remained important to non-Egyptian leaders as a way of preserving local tradition in the face of so much political change (Jay 2007: 99).

The Apis bull was a real creature, kept and cared for until his death whereupon all of Egypt would mourn while a replacement bull was chosen based on a series of set sacred qualifications (Pinch 2002: 105). The animal was housed in a temple in Memphis (Jones 1990: 143), and subterranean galleries and chambers were later built to contain the bull’s sacred burials (Jay 2007: 98). In life, the bull was considered the physical manifestation of Ptah; after death, he was Osiris. In both cases, the bull was practically worshiped as those gods (Pinch 2002: 105). Accordingly, the bull was heavily associated with resurrection and the cycle of life. In his strong association with Ptah, the bull was a conduit for the creator god’s “creative forces” that flowed into the world (Quirke 1992: 177).

These bulls were “not divine in themselves as animals,” but, much like the metonymic function of amulets, they “fulfilled the function of making a deity tangible on earth,” as an indirect service of principle deities like Ptah (Quirke 1992: 176). Amulets depicting the Apis bull would therefore perform a similar function, to allow the wearer to access Ptah and his protection. When Greek cultural presence arrived, such amulets would also be associated with the cult of Serapis, and with agricultural fertility.
CHAPTER FOUR

AMULETS IN ASHKELON AND ABROAD

The Archaeological Contexts of Ashkelon’s Amulets

As the information from the catalogue of this assemblage has hopefully made clear, many of these amulets were excavated from similar archaeological contexts; they are not randomly distributed throughout the site. These contexts are important, because they reveal the kinds of places in which amulets were deposited during this period in Ashkelon. In order to further flesh out those locations, this section will more concretely situate these artifacts within the archaeology of Ashkelon’s grids. By understanding where they come from, we may be able to further understand how they might have been used. For further clarification on the comparative chronological phasing of the Persian occupations of our three grids, see Figure 4.1 below.

![Figure 4.1](image.png)
Grid 38

Nearly half of the amulets of this assemblage were excavated from Grid 38, located on Ashkelon’s south tell and the longest running open excavation areas on the site. Because it has seen so many digging seasons, Grid 38 benefits from a well-established chronology in relation to its occupation, which stretched from Bronze and Iron Age settlement through to the Crusader Period (Stager et al 2006: 297). Of interest to us are the four major phases of Persian occupation, 13-10, which approximately span the years 525 BCE-290 BCE. The last of these phases, 10, also includes the era of transition between the Persian city and the later Hellenistic period; it ends, therefore, under the rule of Alexander the Great. It is also within this final phase that the amulets of this assemblage were uncovered.

Grid 38 appears to be largely domestic in nature, and Persian arrival is clearly marked by a new material culture atop the 604 BCE destruction layer. Phase 13, rebuilt after the abandonment of 604 BCE, primarily featured a large, villa-like building with a central courtyard and smaller surrounding interior spaces. Many floors and fill layers in this phase contain Attic pottery imports, connecting this time in Persian occupation with economic interaction with the West trickling into domestic settings. This phase ended with a series of dog burials in the courtyard and street and subsequent re-abandonment; phase 12 reused many of 13’s architecture when it was rebuilt. The domestic pottery and oven debris that characterized 13’s small rooms decrease in phase 12 and are replaced with a material culture featuring far fewer displays of wealth, like fine wares and jewelry. Phase 12, too, falls out of use, and is followed by the thick fill accumulation and garbage pits of phase 11. This
phase is a thick fill layer with garbage pits, and the few remains recovered are poorly preserved. These areas, which tend to be confused archaeologically, coincide with Egyptian rebellions in the early to mid-fourth centuries, which caused rippling turmoil throughout other Persian territories (Birney 3). When the area is rebuilt in phase 10, it is rebuilt with new architecture following a Hippodomain plan and featuring new insular structures with clear streets and interior spaces that reuse of various walls, ashlar blocks, and wine stores (Stager et al 2008: 283). (Stager et al 2006: 299-303).

The last Persian phase of this grid is phase 10, which also contains the transition between late Persian and early Hellenistic occupation. This phase is characterized by different architecture and rich small finds including our faience amulets, as well as artifacts like scale weights, worked bone, and weaving tools. Such an assemblage of material culture is indicative of a bustling domestic and productive area (Stager et al 2008: 287). This combination of domestic and industrial spaces is indicative of an ancient cottage industry in this neighborhood, a system wherein economic production takes place in the home. Overall, the wealth displayed by recovered material culture in Grid 38 points to a wealthier neighborhood than ones further south and seaward. The end of this phase is marked by a destruction layer in the form of burned floors and smashed pottery and vessels. Since Hellenistic presence is evident in the grid before this destruction, which dates to approximately 290 BCE, it is possible that this destruction is associated not with the end of Persian occupation, but with an assertion of Ptolemaic control over the area after the death of Alexander the Great when the empire was divided between his primary generals. The presence
of fill layers immediately above these destructive signs, which are present site wide, may indicate a brief period of abandonment before this calamitous event (Birney 1).

Phase 10 is notable for an increase in the wealth of material culture. The diversity of type increased, bringing more jewelry, worked bone, metal weights, amulets, pottery, and more. The Egyptianizing amulets of this collection may be a part of this increased material wealth that flowed into the neighborhood. Three amulets were excavated from the southwest corner of room 546 in square 63, which is a separate interior space from the grid’s main insula. A Taweret (MC 26082), an Isis (MC 26510) and an Apis bull (MC 26081) were found very close together from Layer 556, a destruction layer atop Floor 456. This unit was riddled with uneven surfacing and inclusions, and contained a wide range of other material culture, including amber and bone beads, a faience seal, bones, olive pits, a lead weight, amphorae sherds, pieces of copper alloy, and ceramic slag. This assemblage, especially the faience seal and lead weight, indicate that this area was used for industrial activities, as well as possible domestic ones, at the time of the phase 10 destruction. A drain, unit 548, ran north-south through this space, a building which opened onto the street separating the grid’s two primary structures. An entrance to the room was not concretely located by excavators, but the large and open nature of the space indicates that these amulets were not farther than one or two doorways away from the main entrance. The close proximity of the amulets to each other might indicate their use by the same owner, or even possibly stringing on the same necklace.

The other amulets of phase 10 were excavated from the insular building to the south of the street. Significantly, the remaining three pieces were found in areas far
away from the street, indicating that their locations may have been more private. Given their distance from public spaces, the public likely had limited access to these rooms. The material culture surrounding these supports this idea; there are no weights, seals, or storage vessels to indicate prevalent industrial activity. An Eye of Horus amulet (MC 25845) was excavated from the southernmost end of the long, rectangular Courtyard 254 in square 83 from the occupational debris layer 223. Bits of bronze and bone, as well as iron and shells, also came from this unit. It was located near to the doorway connecting the courtyard to the southernmost rooms in this building, which were characterized by tabuns, our faience amulets, and evidence of weaving activities in the form of loom weights. Faience artifacts, amulets and otherwise, were found in two of these spaces: a worn and broken head (MC 32203) was excavated near a tabun in Room 225, separated from the courtyard by two doorways, and an Eye of Horus (MC 26500) in Room 229, which was one degree of separation farther from the courtyard. Additionally, a Sekhmet amulet (MC 32756) came from Room 346, the easternmost room in the insula’s central row of spaces. The room was also riddled with various occupational artifacts, like a coin, bits of copper and other metals, shell inclusions, bone, and copper jewelry. It was far from entrances from both the street and the courtyard; inhabitants would have passed through four doorways in either direction in order to access that room.
Grid 50

Grid 50 lies close to Ashkelon’s shoreline and encompasses a series of insular and warehouse structures, as well as a uniquely staggering number of dog burials. It appears to occupy a less residential part of Ashkelon than Grid 38 during its Persian occupation, which spans four archaeological phases. After the 604 BCE destruction, and subsequent Persian reoccupation, several warehouses are built in this area. The grid itself is generally categorized by two warehouse phases, with a strange and unique interval in between the two (Stager et al 2008: 299). The first Persian phase
of this grid is phase 6. This phase lies above the 60+ BCE destruction layer and subsequent abandonment (which are both present in essentially every part of the site); phase 6 covers approximately the first half of the fifth century BCE. The new structures are built without substantial wall foundations, but in a very orderly, north-south orientation. The floors of these areas in phase 6 are rich in material: store jars, camel scapulae possible used as a raw material of some kind, remains of a basket with red ochre, and bone artifacts were excavated from these unites (Stager et al 2008: 314), all of which indicate a bustling and diverse set of economic transactions coming through these warehouse spaces. The exterior spaces in phase 6 are revealing as well; evidence of ash, bronze wasters, slag, worked bone and bone working debris, Attic pottery, and amphorae (Stager et al 2008: 314) all characterize the street or courtyard here as an active industrial area.

Following is phase 5, which spans the middle to the late fifth century, and is followed by phase 4, the first half of the fourth century. In the next phases, these warehouses appear to go out of use, seeing a dramatic decrease in industrial debris. Instead, grid 50 sees a large amount of dog burials taking place in this space (Stager et al 2008: 315). These burials come to measure in the thousands, span a wide range of ages, and have no grave goods or surface markers to indicate the presence of a burial (Stager et al 2008: 315). The motivation behind this phenomenon, which also appears in varying forms in contemporary phases in other grids, remains largely unknown, though a possible ritual element can never be fully discarded. These burials last through phases 5 and 4, where new buildings begin to be constructed out of mudbrick. These floors appear to be domestic, however (Stager et al 2008: 316). The
final phase of Persian occupation is phase 3, which spans the transition from late Persian to early Hellenistic control. It is not until phase 3, which also marks the transition into the early Hellenistic periods, that an extensive architectural complex returns to grid 50. Evidence of wine or olive oil production in the north building and bread ovens in the west indicate a larger scale production in these spaces than was previously present (Stager et al 2008: 318). These spaces mark the final phase in this grid; the large number of intact vessels from the end of the phase may also indicate an abandonment of the area. This transitionary phase lasts from the second half of the fourth century into 290 BCE, when a second destruction ends the early Hellenistic period here.

Unfortunately, there are no accurate phase plans detailing the architecture of this grid, meaning that the amulets from this grid cannot be placed within the architecture with complete certainty. In total, eight amulets from this assemblage came from this grid which depict the following figures: Bes, Taweret, Ptah, Nefertem, and the Eye of Horus. Because of the unclear architectural records for the grid, the phases of these amulets are not clear in excavation records. However, phase 5 left the grid largely abandoned, allowing natural fill to accumulate while the area was transformed into a dog cemetery; these amulets can be situated before and after this event. The Nefertem amulet (MC 30654) was excavated from Layer 286 in square 49, on the northeastern corner of the grid. This unit is layer of natural fill accumulation in the western side of a courtyard. The natural fill is indicative of a period of abandonment, which corresponds to the end of phase 6 and the beginning of phase 5, when the dog burials began after the warehouse complex was abandoned. The amulet
was excavated along with a wide array of material culture, including bits of plaster, iron, ash, gypsum, and a fragment of an Astarte figurine (MC 30251). Similarly, the fragment of Ptah (MC 12866) was excavated from Layer 50 in square 59, which is on the eastern end of the grid; it is a layer of natural fill and occupational debris, with a mix of late Iron Age II and Persian period pottery, which probably indicates that the layer came before the beginning of the dog burials, like the amulet of Nefertem. Similarly, an Eye of Horus (MC 30006) was excavated from natural fill Layer 210. The Bes amulet (MC 12341) also came from a layer of natural fill, Layer 46 in square 59. The pottery from this unit was, like the previous amulet, predominantly Persian with some Iron Age II pieces; these amulets likely from the abandonment before the dog burials. There are two other Bes amulets (MC 43046 and MC 30154) which also come from similar early Persian levels. The last Eye of Horus amulet was excavated from an interior floor surface, Floor 221, with a mixed Persian industrial and domestic assemblage; artifacts like metal weights, nails, and Persian pottery characterize it in this way. The final amulet from this grid is a partial representation of Taweret (MC 19289) from layer 135 in square 48 in the northern part of the grid. This layer was deliberate fill layer in an alley, and pottery from the unit date to both the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The context also yielded pieces of shell, metal, and bone. Because of this, and the deliberate nature of the fill, the amulet most likely came from phase 4, after the period of dog burials.

Unfortunately, not much more can be inferred about the contexts of these amulets due to the lack of accurate phase plans and architecture. What does seem to be apparent is the presence of amulets spanning all phases of Persian occupation, but
with a higher concentration during earlier phases around the time of the grid’s abandonment and use as a dog cemetery.

**Grid 51**

This assemblage’s remaining amulets come from Grid 51, which is also located on Ashkelon’s south tel and near to both Grids 38 and 50. Throughout its Persian phases, the grid was comprised of insular architecture and streets, with a mixed residential and industrial material culture. Like 50, Grid 51 has Persian phases built on top of the destruction layer left in the wake of Nebuchadnezzar’s violence. Excavators have dated three major Persian phases in this grid: the first, phase 7, is the Early Persian period and lasts from 500-400 BCE. Next, the Middle Persian period of phase 6 spans 400-350 BCE. The Persian period ends with phase 5, which spans into early Hellenistic material and lasts from 350-290 or 280 BCE (Birney 2014: 45). Phase 7 is built on top of destruction debris from phase 8, the last layers of Philistine occupation and evidence of its annihilation. These layers consist of collapsed and melted mud brick, smashed pottery, natural fill, general debris, and even human remains. There is evidence of raking in these layers, indicating that before the Persians rebuilt the neighborhood, they smoothed over and cleaned out the destruction rubble (Birney 2014: 49). In the first Persian phase, grid 51 gets a brand new orientation; phase 8 architecture ran northeast-southwest, but the Persian grid was strictly north-south. Interior rooms are lined up running along this orientation, with a street to their east and a courtyard to the south. This gridded pattern remains consistent in Persian architecture through the end of their occupation of the grid.
Egyptianizing amulets from this assemblage only appear in the first two of these Persian phases, with a majority falling in both early and late parts of phase 7.

All three periods of Persian occupation are characterized in Grid 51 by a mix of industrial and residential material. A southern courtyard remained in use through this time, and in phase 7 it appears to have an especially active industrial function. It is divided by a short wall, with a small amount of paving and pottery covering its surface. Crushed glycimen shells and a drain on the east end may indicate use for dye production, and later additions of a tabun and a “chaotic accumulation of materials” prove its longevity as a productive space. Sunken storage jars and fish bones in one area may even mean that garum was produced here (Birney 2014: 50-51). There are small hearths in rooms 3 and 12 further back from the courtyard, possibly indicating private kitchens (Birney 2014: 50); if cooking was not taking place communally in this exterior space, it was likely used for more commercial purposes. In the rooms further north, and further away from the courtyard, the architecture is comprised of mud brick walls and shell surfaces, and contains less material culture of a productive nature (Birney 2014: 61). In general, the diversity of material culture excavated from this phase, including imported Greek pottery, metals, worked bone, and more characterize the phase as “the founding and floruit of Ashkelon as a Phoenician marketplace” (Birney 2014: 51).

Late phase 7 has rich material culture, particularly in metal artifacts like bronze weights and slag in the northern rooms of building 1 (Birney 2013: 52). As the grid transitions into phase 6, however, there appears to be a decrease in this kind
of evidence. The floors and architecture were made of mud brick, and there is little accumulation of the industrial material wealth of the grid’s earlier phase. The southern courtyard in particular sees a decrease in industrial use (Birney 2013: 55). The occupational debris from this phase does include Attic red-figure ware, indicative of continued interaction with the west (Birney 2013: 58). Like so many others, the final Persian phase transitions into early Hellenistic occupation, and ends with layers of destruction.

Phase 7

The first phase of Persian occupation in grid 51 began with the raking of destruction and abandonment debris left over from the city’s decimation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 BCE. The architecture is rebuilt on a different grid system featuring a more organized north-south orientation. There is one primary building in the space, bordered to the east with exterior space, which is built into a street in the later part of phase 7. The majority of the building was comprised of small interior rooms, with the exception of the exterior courtyard of southern rooms 16 and 17. Installations in the latter half of the phase, like tabuns, which increased the amount of industrial material culture and, presumably, activity in the exterior space. Two amulets were found close to the eastern edge of the grid; the first is a partial depiction of Shu (MC 70093), excavated from U169 in square 75. This unit is an exterior sidewalk on the western edge of the large north-south running street to the east of Building 1. This area would have been close to the entrance to the building. The second amulet found in the east is an Eye of Horus (MC 67273), from U474 in
square 74. U474 is a layer of occupational debris which covers a shell floor U498 in the southern portion in Room 13, on the southeastern end of the square. This room is one of the eastern rooms in Building 1 which lie directly next to the street, with the quickest access from the outside; it is unclear whether or not the space was accessible from the courtyard in square 84. It is clear, however, that it was immediately entered through a doorway directly to the street. Along with this amulet, U474 also contained pieces of metal, clay, ceramic, bone, and slag. These two amulets are, in summary, located in the most accessible parts of this building.

The other amulets from this phase of Grid 51 were excavated from rooms farther inside the building. The first of these is a large Eye of Horus (MC 69125) from U531 in square 74. This unit is a layer of occupational debris on top of floor U552 in Room 3, a small room located in the northwest corner of its square. This layer accumulated on top of a beaten earth surface with a patchy, uneven shell lining and ash inclusions. The room is far from the street, featuring three degrees of separation in the form of three rooms and their respective entrances. The amulet was excavated from the western corner, the opposite end from the room’s door. The next amulet from this phase is the seated cat representation of Bastet (MC 63252), located in square 74’s U283 in Room 8. This unit was a floor, and the amulet was excavated near to the doorway to Room 7 to its west. Within this same context were a great deal of small finds, like a scarab, lead weights, and a glass eye bead. It was not an industrial assemblage of material culture. This particular space was also relatively far removed from the front rooms and entrance, lying at least two doorways away from the outside. The final amulet in phase 7 is the partial representation of a pair of
unidentifiable male legs (MC 63140), found in U221 in square 74. This unit was a layer of fill material against wall U215, and the amulet either came from the mortar inside the wall or the fill sloping against it; either way, the unit is located in Room 11, in the western end of Building 1 and three rooms away from the street. Like the Eye of Horus in Room 13, it is unclear whether or not this room was accessible to the courtyard to the south. If it was not, no less than four doorways separated this room from the entrance of the building, which places this amulet far away from public eyes and access.

Phase 6

The next phase of Persian occupation contained the same basic architectural layout as its earlier iteration, with some small differences. The eastern rooms (4, 9,
13, and 17) along the north-south street were rebuilt; Room 9 especially was given larger eastern and western walls. The sidewalk on the western side of the same street, on the other side of these rooms, was also rebuilt. During the latter half of this phase, Building 1 became dominated by mudbrick floors, and room 15 was also given an eastern closing wall in the courtyard. Other than these changes, the architecture of the insula remained largely intact.

Two amulets in this assemblage were excavated from this phase. The first of these was an Eye of Horus (MC 67139) dug from Unit U168, a mudbrick floor under occupational debris layer U165 in Room 16 of square 84. This room is part of the southern courtyard, and had its northern, western, and southern closing walls robbed out by later Islamic trenches. Finally, the last amulet from this grid is a broken headdress (MC 62789) from unit 247 in square 73. The unit in question is a mudbrick floor, typical of late phase 6 construction in this building, in Room 10 on the far western end of the grid. It also featured several charcoal inclusions, and slopes down from the southwest into the northeast part of the room. Room 10 is far from the street, separated from that exterior space by four rooms and four doorways; the space would have been very isolated from the public, who must have had to navigate a significant amount of residential area in order to access the space. In addition to this amulet, the floor contained a coin, a spherical bead, and many bones.
Amulets in the Levant

Tel Dor

Tel Dor is an archaeological site located on the northern coast of modern Israel. Excavations of the site begin in the early twentieth century, eventually revealing occupation dating back to the Middle Bronze IIA period (Stern 1995: 1). Like Ashkelon, Dor has seen near continuous occupation through to the Roman era and spanning nearly every major period in between. This similar occupation pattern makes Dor a natural parallel for Ashkelon during the days of the Persian Empire.
As early as the 12th century BCE, Tel Dor was a major maritime power in northern Palestine, and much of its early history reflects that strength. Persian rule was established in 538 BCE, and brought about a period of renewed prosperity for the people Dor (Stern 1995: 2). Much as is done in Ashkelon and in other coastal cities further south, the Persians decided to give control of the city and its harbor to Phoenician control, and the cities of Sidon and Tyre largely took over administrative control of Dor (Stern 1995: 2).

As a port city, Dor is located directly on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It lies on a naturally square section of land, one that is surrounded by natural bays to the north and south (Stern 1995: 9). In total, seven areas of excavation have been opened and studied; two of these, areas A and C, were the subjects of more extensive publication in two volumes detailing the stratigraphy, architecture, pottery, and small finds of the domestic occupational areas of Tel Dor. The insular architectural nature of these residential neighborhoods, as well as the existence of Egyptianizing amulets and other materials in these areas, bear a resemblance to the assemblage at Ashkelon; comparison will help illuminate the nature of the presence and use of such material culture in Phoenician domestic contexts.

In these two areas, A and C, Persian occupation spanned two stratigraphical strata; these are Stratum VI, which began around the time of initial Persian presence in the city and ended circa 400/375 BCE, and Stratum V, spanning the end of Stratum VI to the early Hellenistic Period in 275/250 BCE. There are three primary phases across both Areas A and C which characterize Persian occupation of Tel Dor (Stern 1995: 275). The first, spanning Stratum VI, lasts from the imposition of Persian
imperial control until approximately 400/375 BCE (Stern 1995:275). A destruction layer clear in the archaeology of these areas is indicative of a violent event that ended this first major phase. The second major phase spans the earliest part of Stratum V, VB, lasted in the interim years of rebuild, from 400 to 350 BCE (Stern 1995: 275), when the second, Phoenician led rebellion shook the region. Finally, the third and last phase of Persian presence spanned the remaining VA Stratum and the remaining years of Persian occupation, from 350 BCE to the arrival of Alexander the Great around 275 BCE (Stern 1995: 275).

The earliest Persian city, which lies in early Stratum VI, was laid out on a typical Hippodomain orthogonal urban plan, and was likely built when Persian occupation began. Fortifications arrived later, in the form of large and thick walls with an offset-inlet undulating pattern (Stern 1995: 29). Some of these fortifications, as well as the orthogonal city layout, were destroyed at the end of this stratum during the war between Egypt and Persia (Stern 1995: 32). The next major stratigraphical stratum, V, is initially comprised of levels of rebuilding following this destruction. This period of time likely spanned some fifty years, and the second section of Stratum V lasts into the early Hellenistic period. The end of this stratum did not come as a result of war, but more likely after a series of extensive rebuilding activities carried out by King Ptolemy II, part of a line of Alexandrian generals (Stern 1995: 30).

Building in this Persian period was characterized by a distinctive form of wall; this type was comprised of ashlar masonry filled with fieldstone rubble. This type of wall is notably Phoenician in style, appearing in building programs in practically every Phoenician city during this time (Stern 1995: 32). The prevalence of this
technique throughout both Areas A and C throughout Dor suggests that Phoenician city planning and building technique was dominant in the city (Stern 1995: 32). Like in Ashkelon, Phoenician material culture greatly outnumbers that of the Persians; Dor was more culturally Phoenician than Persian.

Area A

Apart from differences in the “location and partition of the floors,” the architecture in Areas A and C were very similar (Stern 1995: 37). They both featured insulae, long building units oriented east-west which faced streets and were divided into residential units (Stern 1995: 34). Two and a half units were placed into area AI on the boundary between one of these insulae and the street it faced in order to establish stratigraphy for both the building and the street (Sharon 1995: 57). Although areas of the building’s facade had been largely robbed out by later trenches, these units did reveal that there were two major Persian construction phases, 5 and 6, in the insula (Sharon 1995: 58). Many of the Persian walls in this area featuring the characteristically Phoenician ashlar and fieldstone construction abut older walls, and there are many floors and installations associated with these Persian walls as well (Sharon 1995: 69). These details might indicate an extended occupation of the area, both before and well into the Persian period; clearly the space featured substantial use and reuse.

Area A was also home to two noteworthy examples of material culture: terracotta fertility figurines and faience Egyptianizing amulets. These fertility
figurines, also found in Area C, were mold made pieces featuring a common local motif. They depict a female figure “holding her breasts in her hands;” this woman has been identified as Astarte, a local goddess associated with love, sex, and fertility (Stern 1995: 438). In A, these figurines are widespread and appear in both eastern and western ends of the excavation area. The contexts of these figurines, largely close to outer fortification walls and not inside domestic structures, indicate that they may not have been a part of a domestic or household cults. That being said, many figurines were excavated in favissae, subterranean depositions of votive objects that were often ritually broken or else intentionally deposited (Stern 1995: 436). If the fertility figurines excavated were deposited in these pits after their use in a cult space, they might indeed have played a role in private worship.

The insula spaces of Area A were also home to a variety of faience objects, including beads and amulets. With little evidence of an official temple or state cult presence, excavators have concluded that these items were featured in use in popular and private cult worship, not state worship. Accordingly, the deities present in these assemblages of Egyptianizing faience were those that were genuinely popular among local populations. These deities include Osiris, Isis, Horus, Taweret, Sekhmet, and, in particular, Bes (Stern 1995: 447). Bes, in addition to being the most commonly depicted Egyptian deity on an amulet, also has a telling feature concerning the origin of such pieces. One such faience amulet is carved on both sides, a decidedly Phoenician practice, and one that reveals this particular Bes to have likely been manufactured locally, or at least in Phoenicia, and not in Egypt (Stern 1995: 448). Not all of these amulets feature Phoenician two-sided carving, however, and excavators determined
that they are a mix of both Egyptian imports and of locally made pieces (Stern 1995: 448). Dor’s contact with Egypt, then, was both economic and cultural. The location of these amulets within these insulae is also significant. Not every amulet is specifically located within the publication’s excavation reports; one such piece which is depicts a partial pair of male faience legs, which is very similar to MC 64130 from Ashkelon’s Grid 51. It was excavated from I 41 square in area AI, in a small room near the back of the structure. AI lay back from a north-south running street, with a long facade wall defining the exterior of the building. The first room accessible the entrance was filled with ovens and other installations, and subsequently led back to two smaller rooms to the west; the faience legs were found in one of these spaces, which means that it was separated from the building’s exterior by two doorways, and might therefore have been a more private part of the house.

**Area C**

The second of Tel Dor’s residential grids is Area C, and it also contains long east-west oriented insulae with long rooms and residential spaces. And, like Area A, the residents of Area C would have benefited from substantial fortifications that protected the neighborhood (Stern 1995: 37). The first excavated section is area C0, which encapsulates an insula wedged between two streets west of the town wall (Sharon 1995: 90). The eastern facade of this building revealed three building phases in excavation, as well as stratigraphy confirming that the insula was already in use when Persian streets I and II were added to the neighborhood (Sharon 1995: 90). The area had eight total units, all of them likely domestic spaces, which remained in use through the Persian period (Sharon 1995: 91).
The western part of Area C, CI, featured another residential insula near to a street running along a north-south orientation. In addition, this area featured other structures adjacent to eastern fortifications (Sharon 1995: 142). Significantly, this area also revealed an intermediate Persian/Hellenistic transition phase without fortifications. Most of the walls of these homes were cut by later foundations for Hellenistic period fortification walls, ending the Persian phases of this area (Sharon 1995: 143). Finally for Area C, a final street and residential insula were discovered in C2. In this building, extensive robbing of the ashlar and fieldstone walls has left some confused stratigraphy, but it is clear that the typical Phoenician pier and stone rubble-filled walls dominated this residential section as well (Sharon 1995: 213).

The excavated grids in Area C also yielded significant assemblages of fertility figurines, amulets, and beads made of terracotta and faience. Indeed, another favissa excavated near the fortification wall contained many terracotta figurines of Astarte (Stern 1995: 436). Additionally, some of the votives found in this favissa were Greek in style, exemplifying the multi-cultural nature of this Phoenician port city. Excavators also found clay masks in this area depicting naturalistic heads, presumably of a local god or goddess. This style of mask are “common finds in the late Canaanite-Phoenician-Punic world,” where they played important roles in local popular cults (Stern 1995: 447). Clearly, a strong connection to local deities and cult practice was present in Dor. A wide array of faience material was also excavated from Area C, including amulets similar to those from Area A, and an assortment of smaller beads that clearly came from the same necklaces (Stern 1995: 447). These come from a variety of contexts; while many are from the residential insulae, amulets also came
from burials and *favissae*, the Egyptianizing nature of these pieces extended into funerary and cult spheres (Stern 1995: 447). Other amulets excavated from Area C include several Thoths, a god associated with the baboon, a complete Bes with a feathered crown, and a Taweret (Hermann 2010: 226). She is a protective goddess depicted as a hippopotamus; this example is heavily pregnant with prominent breasts and a crocodile tail (Hermann 2010: 226). In these areas as well, the location of the excavated amulets were in rooms farther from main entrances. In Co’s phase 5, an Eye of Horus amulet was excavated from a small room in the back of the building, at least three rooms back from the north-south street where the building was accessed; the same amount of doorways stood between the street and this amulet, meaning that this space was more likely used only by the private residents of the insula, and was not often accessed by the public. Nearby, area C2 was a smaller insular structure where several amulets were found. In phase 6, a Bes and a Taweret amulet were excavated from two different rooms. The Bes was found in a southern room accessed through two doorways leading to the street on which it lay. The Taweret was excavated from a room on the western side of the building, and it too was two rooms back from the main entrance. In essence both of these amulets were found in rooms which were not the first spaces a visitor would have encountered in the house. In phase 5, a Bes faience amulet was found with two terracotta fertility figurines in an eastern room facing the street. They were excavated near to a doorway, but the room itself could not be accessed from the outside; rather, it lay behind that access point.

There is a commonality between the terracotta figurines and Egyptianizing amulets found in these grids; in both cases, the objects represent powers related to
fertility, childbirth, or women’s health. The terracotta figurines, with their feminine forms and bare breasts, are immediately evocative of those associations, and the Egyptian deities commonly represented by amulets here were often popularized for their roles in childbirth and as protectors of women. For example, the dwarf god Bes is the most commonly depicted deity on Dor’s amulets.

Beirut

Located on the northern Palestinian coast, the modern-day capitol of Lebanon was once a Phoenician city during the Iron Age. As a modern urban center, the city has a unique relationship with archaeology; the majority of excavations are completed as salvage projects to study ancient architecture before it is replaced with new construction. This urbanization has left scholars with a “relatively poor understanding of the topography of ancient Beirut,” but it remains clear that the city enjoyed occupation from the early Bronze Age through Roman and Islamic periods (Cumberpatch 1995: 160). The city serves as an appropriate comparison for Ashkelon’s amulets in the Persian period because both cities were controlled by the Phoenicians and prospered economically because of their location on natural harbors. Unlike Ashkelon, however, Beirut was located in the Phoenician heartland. Its first major destruction and conquering came during the Hellenistic period, not Persian; its cultural influence, therefore, was not impacted by the Persian Empire in the same manner as Ashkelon.
A series of excavations carried out by the American University of Beirut in the 1990’s targeted different areas in order to situate a chronology for the various phases of occupation in the ancient city. One of the objectives of these digs was to determine whether or not ancient Beirut still existed during the Phoenician period; after all, the city was never mentioned in historical texts alongside the more well-known cities of Tyre and Sidon (Badre 1997: 1). A grid in BEY 003 was opened for this purpose, but an extensive series of Bronze Age architecture was uncovered instead. Significantly, a fair number of faience amulets and other artifacts were excavated from the area which warrant mention. Ancient Beirut’s first fortification wall was built in the middle Bronze Age, and a silo near to the wall which dates to a late portion of that period. The silo also featured an attached rectangular room cut into the bedrock, but the material culture and pottery in these floor layers were identified by excavators as “(un)characteristic content of a silo;” rather, the assemblage more closely resembled residential use (Badre 1997: 28). A cache of items, likely deposited by workers on the fortification wall’s repairs, was found in this floor. It included several faience vessels and goblets, a faience Taweret amulet (see Figure 4.4), and two faience amulets depicting clusters of grapes (Badre 1997: 31). The manufacture origin of these pieces is unknown, so it is impossible to tell whether they were imported or made locally. These amulets were used in Beirut many centuries before those of Ashkelon’s Persian
period, but they might indicate a long tradition of Egyptianizing amulets in the coastal harbors of Palestine.

BEY 003 featured continued excavations around the fortification wall to identify its rebuilding phases, and the discovery of a “huge amount” of Iron Age II pottery outside of the fifth wall’s rampart suggests that the wall’s final phase corresponded to the period of Persian occupation in Ashkelon. There are sites within Beirut that chronologically match Ashkelon’s Persian period. At the end of the sixth century BCE, a new quarter was built on the western side of the Phoenician harbor, a quarter which featured insular architecture (Elayi 2010: 157). The area consisted of houses, warehouses, and combinations of the two in spaces which shared residential and industrial purposes. In effect, the “Phoenician city of Beirut” was confirmed without a doubt to have existed (Badre 1997: 83).

Unfortunately, some of these areas have been lost to urban development; southern souks in the city had Phoenician areas, but their removal by developers left

FIGURE 4.5

archaeologists without well-preserved contexts. Luckily, BEY 002 is not one of these cases; its first occupation begin in the sixth century, with thick stone walls and deep foundations forming insular architecture (Aubert 1996: 63). There were no amulets of Egyptian style excavated from this area, but there were anthropomorphic terracotta figurines with outstretched arms recovered from a cache which may have been fertility objects. Their collective deposition differentiates them from Ashkelon’s religious objects, which were deposited much more independently (Aubert 1996: 64-65). BEY 010 also had occupation dating to this period with late Iron Age architecture. In this grid’s Area D, there are identified six rectangular complexes with an east-west orientation. The interior function was not determined during excavations, but the rooms are rectangular in shape and have different sizes. No amulets were recovered from this area, but nearby Area A did yield an assemblage of 40 terracotta figurines with Egyptian artistic influences (Aubert 1996: 244).

Other grids in Beirut display a similar story: clear presence during this period, but no Egyptianizing amulets. BEY 020 had typical Phoenician pottery and new fortifications, as well as insular architecture. It also had a series of terracotta figurines from this period, and one of these was a woman with Egyptian-style hairdressing (Finkbeiner and Sader 1997: 149). It would appear, then, that Egyptian artistic influence was indeed present in this Phoenician city, but amulets were not.
Unlike the other two Palestinian sites being compared to Ashkelon in this study, the city of Maresha was not located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It lies 35 kilometers east of Ashkelon and 40 kilometers south of Jerusalem in Shephelah, a region of lowlands in mountainous Judea (Kloner 2003: 2). Accordingly, Maresha was never a Phoenician city; a people who excelled at sea trade had no use for occupying a city so far inland. It was, however, absorbed into the Persian Empire at the same time as Ashkelon. The Judean Kingdom fell to the Persians in 586 BCE, and by the second half of the fourth century BCE Sidonians and Greeks had also settled in the city and introduced a period of Greek influence in Maresha’s language and culture (Kloner 2003: 5). Generally speaking, coastal and inland Israel during these periods surrounding the Iron Age were completely different worlds, which enjoyed different cultural influences and economic interactions. During the third century BCE, Maresha was annexed into Ptolemaic control in the Hellenistic period, where it became the seat of the region’s government and a trade center between both the coast and Egypt (Kloner 2003: 5).

The history of archaeology in Maresha is rather simple; the first series of excavations took place at the turn of the 20th century by Frederick Bliss and R.A. Stewart Macalister, western archaeologists hoping to find evidence of an ancient Jewish city in the region (Kloner 2003: 5). To this end, they completely excavated through the Persian occupation phases after finding the Hellenistic city, and its presence went unrecognized until a new project beginning in the late 1980’s identified clear occupation in late Iron Age and Persian periods (Kloner 2003: 5).
This excavation identified two primary areas of occupation in the city: on the Upper Mound and in subterranean levels. The Upper Mound was a large area, covering a diameter of 160 meters, and had a clear Hippodomain city plan by the Hellenistic period in the third century BCE (Kloner 2003: 9). The city’s fortification wall was rebuilt in the Persian period, indicating a strong presence of occupation at that time. There were three types of buildings which dominated the architecture of the period: large buildings with small rooms enclosing a central courtyard, small structures with “haphazardly” arranged rooms, and smaller duplexes consisting of shops and servant’s quarters (Kloner 2003: 11). While these Persian levels yielded plenty of pottery, including Aramaic ostraca, no Egyptianizing amulets were found anywhere on the Upper Mound. A cache from the Hellenistic period filled with 16 lead figurines did indicate a presence of a magical tradition, at least as late as the third century; the figures were anthropomorphic and their hands and feet were symbolically bound with copper wire, a strong indication of curse work (Kloner 2003: 16). Still, no such evidence exists in the Persian period, and there is no way to prove that this magical practice existed before the Hellenistic period.

The subterranean levels in ancient Maresha consisted of cave-like complexes in the lower city. These areas were at least 15 to 30 meters lower than the highest level of the Upper Mound (Kloner 2003: 18). Comprised of interconnected, rounded rooms, the complexes had a mix of residential and industrial activity indicated by material culture, and open central spaces were interpreted by excavators as public buildings as well (Kloner 2003: 20). The primary collection of these areas in the lower city was Subterranean Complex 70, comprised of over 30 chambers, halls, rooms, and
cisterns divided into four separate systems. The first of these, System A, was a collection of ten rooms (see Figure 4.6). Four of these, rooms 1, 2, 5, and 6 were used in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods and were connected by a large passageway, and a cistern in room 9 served these areas (Kloner 2003: 32).

![Figure 4.6](image)


The only faience material excavated from Complex 70 came from room 8 in Hellenistic levels, not Persian; this artifact was a bowl dated to the third century BCE, with a pale green color and leaf motifs decorating its exterior (Kloner 2003: 124). This lack of faience also means that the site has no faience Egyptianizing amulets. In fact, no such amulets of any material were excavated from the Persian period at all. All evidence recovered from these complexes of cultic activity was also
dated to the Hellenistic period; Complex 21 revealed a niche cut into the wall of a
* columbarium* with votive dedications, and an oil press in Complex 45 had a similar
feature (Kloner 2003: 45, 57). Bliss and Macalister’s destructive archaeology in 1900
might have erased all evidence of Persian occupation from some of these spaces,
making it impossible for future archaeologists to find any evidence of Persian religion.
It is also possible, however, that the connections made between Egypt and Maresha
after the latter’s absorption into Ptolemaic control in the third century brought
Egyptian cult practice to the region for the first time after Persian occupation had
ended.

*Amulets in Egypt*

*Deir el-Medina and Amarna*

During Ashkelon’s period of Persian occupation, the Egyptian Empire was in
the midst of the chronological era known as the Late Period, which lasted from
approximately 664 to 332, with two brief periods of Persian occupation spanning
sections of this time frame (Kitchen 1991: 206). This period lies between the end of
the Third Intermediate Period and the beginning of Hellenistic Egypt, which arrived
with the conquering army of Alexander the Great and lasted until the Roman era. In
seeking a framework for the nature of amulet presence and use in domestic contexts
of Egypt, the Late Period is an obvious parallel to Ashkelon’s Persian period, for its
chronological proximity, strong Persian presence and influence, and for the fact that the Persian Empire had intermittent control over Egypt.

Unfortunately for domestic archaeology of the Late Period, a combination of various destruction layers left by Persian and Greek invaders with an overall lack of good preservation means that this era is not strongly represented in the archaeological record. By far the best domestic contexts in Egypt comes from the Late Bronze Age New Kingdom villages at Amarna and Deir el-Medina, the latter of which is mostly comprised of the village of workers building tombs in the Valley of the Kings (Stevens 2009: 3). As a result, understandings about the ‘daily life’ of ancient Egyptians are generally derived from this time period and those Upper Egyptian locations, and not from the Late Period. That being said, some architectural traditions do linger on into those later periods, and these New Kingdom sites are a good basis for the types of residences and domestic quarters that were typical in Egypt.

Amarna alone has yielded more than 100 separate houses in excavations, which have given archaeologists a large sample size (Spence 2013:84). The typical home had two stories and many room divisions, including an open floor plan upstairs (Harrington 2013: 65) and a tripartite arrangement on the main floor. In this model, the inner rooms farther away from entrances were typically smaller and more compact, which restricted common access and could have been used to control who was allowed to use those particular spaces (Spence 2013: 86).

Significantly, many scholars agree that the majority of these rooms were highly multi-functional and did not have strictly defined spatial activities. Harrington
argues in her overview of ancestor cults that, apart from cult spaces marked by votive presence in niched areas, the small sizes of many rooms were indicative of a need for a diverse use of the space (Harrington 2013: 69). Spence’s analysis of interior artifact distribution agrees with this conclusion; other than weaving activities, which were concentrated in outer rooms with more natural sunlight, domestic activities did not appear to have a strict spatial pattern within the houses’ layouts (Spence 2013: 88). Some houses in Amarna did have kitchens, but the majority of food production appears to have taken place wherever outdoor space was available. That space took for the form of courtyards or alleyways between structures, or in other open spaces outside of the home (Spence 2013: 90). Such spaces are archaeologically marked by the presence of botanical remains and burning.

House P47.28 from the eastern end of a large enclosed residential area is a prime example of standard residential architecture in these sites (See Figure 4.7). Note the small subsidiary house in the back, as well as the multiple outdoor spaces being used for food production, such as the large ovens in the east, and the separate activity areas to the west (Spence 2013: 90).
Evidence supporting the existence of domestic cults is fairly common in Egypt, both in the New Kingdom villages in Amarna and Deir el-Medina and in Late Period settlements. In the New Kingdom, unlike the multi-functional domestic activity areas, religious activity tended to have specified space. In these sites, many houses contained wall niches that “appear to have some cultic associations,” and the deposition of votives and figurines near these spaces is indicative of these indentations as cultic areas (Harrington 2013: 77).
Figure 4.8 illustrates one such example of a niche, from a 19th Dynasty house in Deir el-Medina. As the caption describes, it would have held a “bust, statuette, or stela” (Harrington 2013: 78). Many New Kingdom cult spaces in domestic contexts also had large stone surfaces called lustration slabs, where offerings could be made to ancestors of domestic deities (Harrington 2013: 79). Other houses in Amarna and in Deir el-Medina had stepped pedestals in front rooms that had similar assemblages (Stevens 2009: 4). Particularly in these houses, dedications had a heavy focus on female fertility and protection (Harrington 2013: 81). Stevens identifies Bes, Taweret, and Hathor as some of the most popular deities worshiped in private cult practice based on two primary criteria. First, the associations of these divinities, like fertility,
protection of women, and the defeat of dangerous animals, are oriented towards the everyday fears and concerns of private individuals. Second, these deities often appear artistically depicted in amulets and wall decoration in practically every social class in Egypt, from workmen’s villages to pharaoh’s palaces. Their spread across “houses of varying sizes across el-Amarna” is indicative of a widespread presence, regardless of the socio-economic status of the individual household (Stevens 2009: 10). Gods like Meretseger, Ptah, Amun, and Anubis more frequently appear in the context of large regional temples. They rarely appear with the same domestic consistency of Bes, Taweret, and Hathor, indicating their recognition in official and state cults instead of private ones (Stevens 2009: 11).

**Tell el-Muqdam**

Despite the archaeological bias towards the New Kingdom as the best era to study domestic life, there are sites in the Late Period which reveal the nature of domestic life during this time. One such example is Tell el-Muqdam, located in the eastern Nile Delta. Excavated by the University of California at Berkeley beginning in 1992, the site was comprised of two occupational areas, the Camel and Qasr Stations. The first of these, Camel Station, had four major occupational phases; Phase 4 (seventh-early sixth centuries), Phase 3 (early sixth-mid-fifth centuries), Phase 2 (fifth-fourth centuries), and Phase 1 (third century) (Redmount and Friedman 1997). For the purposes of this ultimate comparison, Phase 2 is the closest parallels to Ashkelon’s Persian period.
Phase 4 is a destruction layer from the Persian period, dated with pottery and characterized by large areas of burning and collapse (Redmount and Friedman 1997:70). Phase 3 was dated to the mid fifth to early sixth centuries BCE, based primarily on the Persian pottery found there, but the architecture remains the same. Several unspecified amulets survived this phase, like multiple Eyes of Horus and a disk Bes amulet (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 70). Overall, these two phases lack the archaeological complexity that characterizes the later phases.

Phase 1 contained Ptolemaic occupation, so the final phase occupying the Late Period is phase 2. This phase architecturally consisted of a large mudbrick wall on the south part of the tel, with a series rooms and courtyards running along it (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 61). Pottery from these rooms, most notably in the southernmost of this series where was found amphorae and other wares related to food preparation and storage, date this residence to the fourth to fifth centuries BCE (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63). Persian period pottery was also found in an adjacent alleyway, along with a bronze Osiris figurine (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63). The courtyard yielded more pottery used in food preparation and evidence of cooking, indicating that it served as a kitchen. To the north of this outdoor space was another series of small rooms, in which was found a Bes-shaped pot, as well as wares imported from the Levant (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 64). The biggest assemblage of amulets from this phase was excavated from a small room in the southwest corner of the house, where beads and amulets depicting Harpocrates (Horus as a child), Nefertem, Mihos, and Eyes of Horus were discovered in a sunken jar. The discovery of many identical beads in the same context led excavators to
conclude that these amulets might have been grouped together on the same necklace (Redmount and Friedman 1997:65).

In general, the most common figurine type found in this house were erotic and fertility figures; however, no identifying attributes indicate an intended representation of a specific goddess. The figurines may not have featured many unique characteristics, but an interesting example of such an artifact, however, came from a unique context. Near the interior base of a wall in the southern kitchen, between the foundation and the first course of mudbrick, a niched crevice was cut where figurines were deposited (Redmount and Friedman 1997:63). Among these artifacts was Figure 4.9, a terracotta figurine of a woman giving birth, one of the common fertility symbols deposited here (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63).
This wall deposit may have been a version of the cult wall niche common in New Kingdom villages. Unidentified amulets and figurines do appear to be concentrated in specific areas, like this wall niche or the sunken jars, rather than randomly spread throughout the spaces. This pattern of concentration indicates that cult activity was tied to space in the house, and would not have been practiced just anywhere.

The second occupational area in Tell el-Muqdam is Qasr Station, another domestic neighborhood with seven uncovered structures. The area is bounded by streets, and the homes themselves consist of small rooms of varying shapes and one large open space; typically, they were bordered by an alley to the east and a courtyard to the west. Many of these structures also had an exterior terrace (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 72). Like Camel Station, Late Period occupation did not end until phase 2, which is dated on the basis of pottery (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 77). Inside these structures in phase 2 was a lot of brick debris, particularly in the smaller spaces, and less pottery and material culture than the Camel Station counterparts. An alleyway between structures was excavated to reveal deposits of pottery and faience vessels, as well as unidentified amulets and fertility figurines (Redmount and Friedman 1997:76). It is important to note here that fertility figurines were discovered in outdoor, discarded space in Qasr, while in Camel they appear inside the house.

Overall, the deposition of cult or other cultural material was exclusively in outdoor space and not inside the homes themselves. Sebakh excavation, a common practice in the early twentieth century which removed fertile soil from archaeological
tells, revealed more fertility terracotta figurines and amulets. The nature of their
discovery, however, means that the identifications are not specified by the excavators,
and their original contexts are impossible to determine (Redmount and Friedman
1997: 76). Clearly, there is an obvious difference between the wealth of material
culture found in Camel Station and nearby Qasr; the former appears to have been a
richer neighborhood. Significant also is the excavator’s note that “the wealth of the
rinds recovered from what is clearly a Persian period domestic structure is notable”
(Redmount and Friedman 1997: 83).
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Ashkelon’s Amulets

The last two chapters have independently dealt with these amulets in depth, by examining the deities and meanings that they represent and their archaeological distribution and context within the grids of Ashkelon. By synthesizing these two categories, we can come to conclusions concerning the manner in which the amulet’s identity interacted with its context and deepen our understanding of their ultimate purpose.

The Gods from Egypt

The catalogue of amulets encompasses an array of Egyptian deities and symbols: Bes, Taweret, Isis, Bastet, Sekhmet, Shu, Ptah, Nefertem, a bull, and the Eye of Horus. Within this list, the three most common images are Bes, Taweret, and the Eye of Horus; out of a group of 20, there are six Eyes of Horus, two Tawerets, and two Beses.

This distribution of divinities is indicative of several points. First, most common images are all strongly associated with personal protection. The Eye of Horus was an extremely common symbol in Egypt and remained one of the most
popularly exported images in many different forms wherever Egyptian amulets were found, excavated in sites all over the eastern Mediterranean. It was a widely recognized symbol of protection, regarded by many as “universally potent” for its link to the resurrection of Osiris and to rebirth in general (David 2002: 175). In Ashkelon, the Eyes are mostly either a pale blue or blue-green color, two hues symbolically associated with life, rebirth, and healing (Wilkenson 1994: 107-108).

Taweret and Bes also carry similarly apotropaic associations, but, significantly, both deities are more specifically connected with the protection of women. Recall these deities’ associations, which were outlined in Chapter Three. Bes was commonly depicted as present at home births, and was a “great protector of women” from common dangers (Stern 1995: 451). Similarly, Taweret was a goddess who guided mothers in childbirth, described by Rosalie David as a “female protector” with popularity as a local deity all over Egypt (David 2002: 275). She and Bes were together known as popular deities of the household, and of children (Koen 2008: 74). Both Taweret and Isis were likewise known as “mother goddesses,” and frequently depicted as such. In the Late Period, Isis was often shown with an infant son Horus, and Taweret as pregnant or with prominent breasts (Stern 1995: 451). Indeed, wall paintings of birth scenes featuring both goddesses may have even indicated separate birth rooms in Egypt, emphasizing the prominent and present role that these deities were believed to play in motherhood and childbirth (Koen 2008: 140). While she lacked the aforementioned connections to childbirth, Sekhmet, a goddess of “disease and epidemics,” was often worshiped to “remove” those same “terrors” (David 2002:
Health, in childbirth and otherwise, was clearly a large motivating factor in amuletic protection.

A pattern emerges in these associations, one of strong connections to protection from the dangers of daily life. Childbirth and disease were two common parts of ancient life, and many of the amulets from Ashkelon appear to relate directly to them. Additionally, a focus on the health and daily lives of women is prevalent; many of these deities, particularly Bes and Taweret, were popular in Egypt specifically because of their connection to the prosperity of mothers and the households that they ran. It is no accident, then, that they are found in households in Ashkelon.

Also of note is the presence of all three members of the Memphis triad within this assemblage: Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefertem. Similar groupings of three deities was a prominent part aspect of Egyptian Late Period religion, and often depicted trios of family members. This particular triad features a common pattern: a creator god, a goddess, and their son (Kakosy 1980: 48). The Memphis triad traced its origins back to the New Kingdom, and represented a different theology and creation myth than the more traditional pantheon lead by Amun (Kakosy 1980: 53). These three deities were considered the “divine family of the Memphite area,” near modern day Cairo, where Ptah functioned as the creator god and local protector (Fletcher 2004: 55).

Now, it is important to note that the three examples of these amulets from the Persian period were not found together; only two of them were excavated from the same grid. That being said, this trio of divine figures appears to have enjoyed pockets of regional popularity outside of Egypt (Fletcher 2004: 52). For example, there are over 200 examples of amulets depicting these deities from peninsular Italy, but less than ten in
Similarly, eastern Greek sites have yielded 200 Memphis triad amulets but northern Africa has only yielded six (Fletcher 2004:52-53). Richard Fletcher favors an economic explanation for this uneven distribution, arguing that “differing configurations and arrangements of traders and/or consumers” created both high and low geographic concentrations of these deities (Fletcher 2004: 56). The connection between those locations and Egyptian material cannot have been purely aesthetic; Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefertem were hardly the most exotic Egyptian amulets that could be imported. The most likely explanation, according to Fletcher, is that buyers and traders had a relationship with Memphis itself (Fletcher 2004: 59). He even presents the idea that there might have been a religious connection between the triad and Phoenician cities importing them, but admits that such a link would be extremely difficult to prove, given our lack of understanding of the nature of local Phoenician religions (Fletcher 2004: 61). This is an important note to consider, because it indicates that these deities might reflect a prioritization of the gods of the Memphite region. Not every amulet represents a deity who offered protection; some of these amulets might be indicative of an economic connection with Egypt itself.

*Distribution and Use*

What beliefs are actually attached to these artifacts? Do they have religious significance, or do they merely represent a fascination with Egyptian culture expressed through wearing these amulets as a kind of trinket? The location of these amulets within the grids of Ashkelon is essential to an understanding of their possible
purpose to those citizens who used them, and there are several patterns which emerge from their examination. Because of the muddled architectural understanding of the Persian phases, the specific locations of those amulets in Grid 50 are hard to determine, so this analysis will primarily focus on the amulets of Grids 38 and 51. The first pattern of note concerns the proximity of these amulets to areas of public access; the majority of pieces from 38 and 51 come from interior spaces which are far from their building’s entrance. Subsequently, the rooms from which they came were more likely to have been spaces reserved for the private members of that household; guests or members of the public were more likely to have access to those rooms with easy access from the street. Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 from Chapter Four display the specific locations of the amulets in Grids 38 and 51, and they clearly demonstrate the degrees of separation between the amulets and entrances. Here, it is useful to recall those detailed contexts; in Grid 38, two Eyes of Horus and a Sekhmet were deposited at least two, and usually more, doorways away from the main entrance, and a grouping of Apsis, Taweret, and Isis appear cornered together. In Grid 51, the only amulets which appear near the direct access point to the main entrance (or in exterior space) are and Eye of Horus and a Shu. It would appear that the majority of these pieces were separated from public use by multiple doorways.

Additionally, those deities represented by amulets in those private areas are the ones most heavily associated with household and female protection; take Sekhmet (MC 32756) in grid 38’s room 346, or Taweret (MC 26082) from 38’s Room 546. Those amulets which were associated with women and their household cults were, more likely than not, excavated from areas of the house which were spatially hidden
from public use. Though the absence of a fixed altar or similar cult marker makes identifying these spaces as cultic difficult, especially since the material culture surrounding these amulets tends to be a mix of industrial and residential material, the private nature of the space where they were deposited is indicative of specifically private use. The mixed archaeological context does indicate that the spaces where cult activity might have taken place within the household was not fixed to a strict space within that structure; clearly, more than one kind of activity was happening in these rooms.

Those amulets which were excavated from areas of these two grids closer to entrances, like the Shu (MC 70093) from 51’s phase 7 street, lack the strong associations with the protection of women and families that figures like Taweret definitely have. This amulet, along with the Eye of Horus (MC 67273) from 51’s front Room 13, might be more associated with a more general, even possibly male, protection, and without the necessity of private, possibly female, space. These amulets are more likely to be deposited in space which saw more foot traffic from the outside, which is a key point here. The amulets protecting women and households are tucked deeper into those household spaces, while amulets offering less gendered and more general protection lie in more public areas. Recall also that Ptah could be considered a god of artisan and industrial production in Egypt. This particular amulet was excavated from a layer of occupational debris containing large amounts of Persian pottery and a mix of material culture that could indicate the presence of industrial activity or production, including bits of copper alloys and talc stone, as well as stone blades and two basalt mortars. Other areas from this grid have revealed plaster,
pigments, metal weights, nails, and other material culture indicative of similar activity. An amulet of an industrial Ptah from an area which may well have been filled with industrial activity might be indicative of a link between Egypt’s and Ashkelon’s use of Ptah.

Other evidence from Ashkelon indicates several important points. First, they did not come from large cult centers or communal areas, so they were most likely not used in public religious practice. Instead, they come from largely domestic contexts, mixed with other residential and industrial debris. Many of them, particularly the five amulets from Grid 38 phase 10, were discovered in rooms and corners far from the street; these spaces, farther from public access, were more likely to be privately used by members of the household. One would expect a trinket with no significant religious value to be deposited in all areas of the house, not just the ones which were reserved for private activity. The concentration of amulets within these homes suggests a tie between their use and the household’s residents.

As distribution patterns indicate, the amulets of this assemblage fall both in and outside of domestic structures. While the majority were deposited in interior rooms with multiple degrees of separation from public entrances, some of them were found near doorways or even outside the insulae. The rooms from which the amulets come also lack strong indicators of household cultic practice; there are no altars or niches or basins which architecturally situate religious activities within the house. The lack of apparent sacred space within these domestic structures indicates that they were not part of a tradition of household religion. As established in the literature review of household religion, such practice necessitated a confinement to domestic
space. This is not to say, however, that an absence of altars or cultic niches proves that religious rituals tied to the household cannot have taken place. It merely suggests that the meaning attached to these amulets did not permanently situate them within one sacred area of the home. It is more likely, therefore, that they were a part of a different kind of sacred tradition, one of private, family religious activity. These amulets are not confined to these domestic spaces. They predominantly occur in residential areas, but their ability to travel with wearers both within and outside of the home suggests that they are more likely a part of private or family religion, and not a household cult. As portable items, amulets allow these beliefs and practices to travel with the wearer outside of any one specific space.

There is another possibility for the significance of these amulets that merits exploration; by incorporating Egyptian deities in into local religious practice, Ashkelon’s citizens might have been projecting their own local gods and goddesses onto foreign amulets. Polytheistic deities did not exist in isolation, particularly during a time when both Egypt and Ashkelon were controlled by the same Persian Empire. A combination of that historical reality with the long reaches of Phoenician sea trade created a strengthened period of cultural connection between Egypt and the Near East, ensuring that religious beliefs from both areas would come into contact with each other. As an example of this type of interaction between religious iconography, let us examine one final archaeological site.

Sarepta was a Phoenician city, located between Sidon and Tyre on the coast of the Mediterranean. On the outskirts the its main tel, overlooking the harbor on its south, was a small Phoenician temple dedicated to local goddess Tanit-Astarte, dated
to the Iron Age Period, up to the seventy century BCE (Pritchard 1978: 131). It was entered from a street that sloped back down to the east, and consisted of a rectangular room with benches along all four walls, and a raised table against the western wall (Pritchard 1978: 135). In front of this table, there was a large cache of votive objects, interpreted as a deposition as part of the ritual activities of the shrine. This cache contained the following faience amulets: Bes, Bastet, Ptah, a seated cat, a seated sow, and fourteen Eyes of Horus (Pritchard 1978: 135). However, this and other deposits around the same space also contained terracotta figurines in the style of local fertility figures. This temple had a mix of both local and Egyptian cultic material, indicating that both were used in the religious activities in this site of public religion. Pritchard argues that, at the very least in iconography, the “local cult was synchretistic” with Egyptian religious practice (Pritchard 1978: 142). Evidence from other sources indicates that this connection was not limited to iconography. Depictions of a divine infant share a common visual representation in Egypt and the Near East, but each has its own name and mythology; in Egypt, this figure is known as Harpocrates, the infant Horus, while in the Near East he goes by many other names: Mot, Tammuz, Adonis, and more, depending on the region (Holbl 1986: 1999). Isis, too, had a mutable identity when it came to foreign worship; she had “countless names…because she could be equated with every local…and foreign goddess” (Casagrande-Kim 2015: 81). As Holbl argues, the religious iconography of Egypt could be “adopted and applied to

* The term “syncretism” refers to the ability of a deity to “adopt aspects and names” of other gods without unseating them, and without losing its original identity or permanently changing (Casagrande-Kim 2015: 79).
Phoenician concepts, but still in accordance with their Egyptian significance” (Holbl 1986: 199). As Egypt’s influence spread throughout the Near East, its deities could “adopt aspects and names” or local gods and goddesses without “supplanting” them or permanently altering their identities (Casagrande-Kim 2015: 79). That crossover was not unique to Egyptian influence on the Near East, however; there is evidence from as early as the 18th Dynasty that places priests of Baal and Astarte in Egypt (Casson 2001: 89). This blending of Egyptian and local religious imagery also blended the religious belief behind them, allowing both Egyptian and Phoenician belief to be present in the same image. Increased economic and political exchanged increase between Ashkelon and Egypt during their shared Persian occupation allowed more Egyptianizing material to flow in the city, and these amulets were no exception. While their original Egyptian significance in relation to the protection of women’s health and fertility remained intact and associated with these amulets, they may also have absorbed locally specific meaning as well, such that Ashkelon’s citizens celebrated both local and foreign tradition as they used them in private religious practice. Unfortunately, without archaeological evidence of local cult practice in Ashkelon, such a theory is impossible to undeniably substantiate. We do not have a local temple like Sarepta’s with which to examine any blending of local and Egyptian iconography. Until such a thing is discovered it can only remain a possibility.
Amulets Elsewhere

Since no cultural components can exist in isolation, comparing the contexts and use patterns of Ashkelon’s amulets to examples in other archaeological sites is an essential step in examining the nature of that use. Recall the rationale for the selection of these sites; by comparing Ashkelon’s assemblage to sites in Egypt, from time periods both contemporary to and earlier than the Persian period, we can compare the characteristics of these artifacts from their point of origin to their versions in Palestine. By bringing in comparable sites nearer to Ashkelon, the same approach to looking at the amulets’ contexts and depictions can aid in establishing larger geographical patterns for their actual use.

Egypt

The identifications and contexts of amulets in Egypt can be compared to Ashkelon’s in order to determine if any practices traveled to Ashkelon with the amuletic forms. Significantly, many of the deities represented in domestic sites in Egypt are the same as which appear in our assemblage. In Deir el-Medina and Amarna, the most commonly found amulets in the context of homes were those which depicted Bes, Taweret, Hathor, and the Eye of Horus. Other deities, like Meretseger, Ptah, Amun, and Anubis popped up in local cult centers (Stevens 2009: 10). Once again, the most common household amulets depicted deities which offered protection to women, and to their children and families. The most common amulets in these
villages match Ashkelon’s nearly exactly; both sites display preferences for the same symbols. In these New Kingdom villages, the amulets even appear to have been made in the homes themselves, judging from the archaeological evidence of molds within the houses (Stevens 2009: 9) (in Ashkelon, there is no such evidence). Now, these sites in Egypt and in Ashkelon were not a part of the same chronological era; Egypt’s New Kingdom lasted from the 16th to the 11th centuries BCE, while Ashkelon’s Persian Period did not begin until many centuries after. The closest chronological parallel to a time contemporary with most of these amulets in Egypt comes in that empire’s Late Period, dated to 664–332 BCE (Kitchen 1991: 206).

Luckily, there are sites in Egypt from this era which have preserved domestic contexts, and one such example is Tell el-Muqdam. As Chapter Four illustrated, the site contains two major domestic complexes, Camel and Qasr stations, and three phases of Late Period occupation. Within those phases, many faience amulets were found; they depicted Bes, Taweret, Mihos, the Eye of Horus, Harpocrates, and Nefertem (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 59). Again, many similarities to Ashkelon’s assemblage can be found here: Bes and Taweret seem to be present in nearly every domestic site encountered thus far, and this site also has an example of a Nefertem amulet like Ashkelon’s. None of these three assemblages is identical, however; some deities found here in Tell el-Muqdam, like Harpocrates and Mihos, are nowhere to be found in Ashkelon, and nor are Isis and Bastet present in Tell Muqdam. Even so, the amulets which were most popular in Ashkelon were also the most popular in these Egyptian sites, even though they were separated by great distance and many
centuries. Those popular amulets always carried the strongest associations with the protection of women and families.

Deir el-Medina, Amarna, and Tell el-Muqdam revealed three apparent primary contexts in which amulets are present: in homes, in exterior deposits, and in cult centers. Of the deities found in the latter two circumstances (Osiris, Ptah, Amun, Meretseger, and Anubis), only one is found in Ashkelon. The distributions of deities found inside domestic spaces in all of the sites in Egypt and in Ashkelon are very similar, but the nature of the domestic space in Egypt is somewhat different. Houses in Amarna and Deir el-Medina had fixed cult spaces: wall niches, raised altars, and stepped pedestals define cultic areas within residential structures (Stevens 2009: 4) which strongly suggest the presence of household religious practice. In Tell el-Muqdam’s Camel Station, many amulets were found in a sunken jar deposited in a southwest corner of a small room (Redmount and Friedman 1997). The amulets of Ashkelon do not come from the same kind of space, and do not appear to have been intentionally deposited in the same manner. While these Egyptian sites do appear to have established both household religious and cultic practices related to amulet use, Ashkelon does not; its amulets are more likely connected to private religious practice.

Dor

As another coastal Persian city in Palestine with Phoenician control, Dor is a natural parallel for Ashkelon and its amulets are a natural point of comparison. Like Ashkelon, Dor has many insular structures which comprise its residential quarters. Excavations from Persian period insulae in Areas A and C have yielded amulets
depicting Bes, Taweret, Sekhmet, Isis, Thoth, Osiris, the Eye of Horus, and Horus himself (Stern 1995: 447). This assemblage is similar to Ashkelon’s, and to the distributions of Egypt as well. Like the sites before, the most common amulets depicted Bes, Taweret, and the Eye of Horus. The presence of Sekhmet and Isis in Dor recalls Ashkelon, and strengthens the number of goddesses with associations with women’s protection that are present in both sites. While these two groups are certainly not identical, the similarities are numerous enough that they indicate a shared phenomenon. Dor, too, did not have the altars, wall niches, or platforms present in Egyptian houses which denote sacred household space. Like in Ashkelon, some of Dor’s amulets came from domestic areas with mixed residential and industrial material culture. Most of the amulets excavated from the insulae in areas A and C came from rooms that were two or more doorways away from the building’s entrances, which likely indicate more privately used spaces. The amulets from these small rooms depicted Eyes of Horus, Bes, and Taweret; those amulets in Ashkelon were also found in rooms which lay further from the entrance.

However, some amulets from this site were excavated from favissa, intentional subterranean deposition of ritually broken or otherwise discarded amulets and figurines. Dor’s favissa primarily contained terracotta figurines interpreted as fertility figures, but faience amulets were also excavated here in Area C. Favissae are not middens, or random deposits of trash; they were filled with items which were deliberately and ritually put out of use. The presence of faience amulets among these artifacts indicates that they were used in similar cult practice to the fertility figurines which dominate the context. A meaningless trinket from Egypt would not be
deposited in a favissa. At least in Dor, Egyptian-style amulets appear to have carried
cultish significance, and had a place in local practice.

Tel Dor has long been a natural parallel to Ashkelon, but the differences
between the two are important. Ashkelon’s amulets are primarily characterized by
their domestic contexts, but Dor’s come from both favissa deposits and burials in
addition to residential locations. The combination of more public and private contexts
for these finds might be indicative that, either, Dor had a larger public cult presence
than Ashkelon, or possible that Ashkelon’s cult area is simply yet unknown. However,
the identities of the deities represented in the assemblages are similar, meaning that
the purpose and origin of the amulets may be similar as well. Ashkelon’s and Dor’s
residents appear to have used their amulets to promote fertility and women’s
protection, and Dor’s mix of local and imported pieces could hold true for amulets in
Ashkelon and other Phoenician coastal sites.

Beirut

The second parallel site in the Levant is Beirut, a coastal city in the Phoenician
heartland. Like Ashkelon, it has a harbor. Its long period of occupation, from the
Bronze Age through to the modern era, contains two important phases for the
purposes of our comparison. The first was in the Middle/Late Bronze Age, which
was more or less contemporary to the Egyptian New Kingdom of Deir el-Medina and
Amarna. Chapter Four outlined the excavations of BEY 003 in this period of Beirut’s
history, including the discovery of several faience vessels, including goblets and vases,
two amulets in the shape of a grape cluster, and a Taweret amulet on a Late Bronze Age floor (Badre 1997: 30-31). While this small collection of faience amulets does not mirror those found in contemporary Deir-el Medina or Amarna, the enduring popularity of Taweret as a domestic figure is made even clearer by its appearance in Bronze Age Beirut. Recall the importance and popularity of Taweret in Egyptian households and private cult practice, especially in relation to women’s health and fertility; those meanings were apparent in the houses of contemporary Deir el-Medina and Amarna. The appearance of such an amulet in a Middle/Late Bronze Age residential area in Beirut might be indicative of an extension of the original Egyptian tradition in Palestine.

Ashkelon’s Persian period aligned with Beirut’s late Iron Age, a period of occupation which continued its use of fortification structures and was characterized by its use of rectangular insula complexes in residential architecture. Interestingly, the faience Egyptianizing forms present in Bronze Age amulets appear to have completely disappeared even by the time of the late Iron Age. The only artifact of Egyptian style found in these phases is a terracotta head of a female with an Egyptian hairstyle (Finkbeiner and Sader 1997: 149), a form which is absent from Ashkelon’s assemblage. Beirut does not appear to have any Egyptian-style amulets. There can be little doubt that Beirut was indeed a Phoenician city; after excavations of BEY 003, excavators confidently declared Phoenician presence to be a “confirmed reality” in the city’s history based on late Iron Age pottery, fortification rebuilding phases, and local terracotta ritual figurines (Badre 1997: 83). It would appear, therefore, that
Egyptianizing amulets are not a defining factor of Phoenician presence during the fifth and fourth centuries.

Maresha

Maresha is an important site to consider in these comparisons, because, unlike Ashkelon, it is neither a coastal nor a Phoenician city. It is, however, under Persian control throughout this same period, and it is important to consider what the religion of a Persian city might have looked like without Phoenician influence. As has been noted earlier in Chapter 4, excavations of Persian occupation periods in Maresha have been complicated by the activities of Bliss and Macalister in a 1900 expedition. That project blew through those phases on its way to finding a first millennium Jewish city (Kloner 2003: 7). While later excavations in the late 1990’s have confirmed without a doubt the presence of Persian occupation, it cannot be documented with the same level of detail as can the phases above and below it. The site’s subterranean caves represent a very different style of residential architecture as can be seen in the coastal cities of Dor and Ashkelon. Excavations concluded that these cave structures, featuring a mix of industrial and residential spaces with cisterns, did not contain any Egyptianizing amulets from the Persian period.

The only evidence of religious or magical practice in these Maresha excavations came in the form of 16 small lead figurines, depicting human beings with bound feet and hands (Kloner 2003: 16). They were excavated from small rooms surrounding a large and open public courtyard in Block 1 on the Upper Mound; this
space was not domestic, and later because the barracks of the Seleukid period (Kloner 2003: 16). The bindings are evidence of spelled or cursed figurines, and indicate that magical belief and practice was a part of life in Persian and Hellenistic Maresha. Evidently, Maresha had ritual practice but not Egyptianizing amulets; while such evidence might have been lost when the early 20th century excavations failed to recognize Persian occupation, it might also be indicative of a lack of their presence in this site.

**Final Conclusions**

Ultimately, the comparison and analysis of Ashkelon’s amulets both within and outside of the site are done in the interest in answering fundamental questions about these artifacts. What is, after all, the significance of these Egyptian style amulets? In answering, we must consider the represented deities and images, as well as the associations those figures and materials have. Additionally, their archaeological contexts and comparisons to amulets both here and in other Egyptian and Palestinian sites are essential to understanding that meaning.

These amulets do not have the same meaning in Ashkelon as similar forms did in Egypt, but this is not to say that they lacked meaning. The contexts in which they are found in Egypt and in Ashkelon are, simply, different; Ashkelon’s houses did not have altars, or stepped platforms, or wall niches, or any other kind of distinct cult space that indicates the presence of an established set of household religious practices. The amulets from Deir el-Medina, Amarna, and Tell el-Muqdam appear to have come
from a tradition of household use, where cult space was architecturally marked, and, unless Ashkelon’s household religion manifested very differently, it did not share this tradition. While the lack of centralized cult indicates a lack of immanence, it does not necessitate a lack of religious use; the amulets functioned as personal objects used to connect the wearer to protective divine forces without obliging them to use them within a structured Egyptian household practice. Since many of these amulets were deposited in interior spaces far from entrances and streets, it is also possible that they were used in religious rituals located in the house’s private parts; if those rituals did not have any architecturally marked cult space, they would be difficult to prove in the archaeological record, and might therefore represent a different kind of procedure and tradition than what was typical of Egypt. Significantly, it is also possible that these amulets did not necessitate specific or regimented ritual— they may simply have been worn and lost in rooms frequented by the wearer.

In Egypt, childbirth was a very dangerous time for women, and those dangers extended into a child’s early life as well. Delivery was an unsettling event; it forced the entire family to come into contact with creation, and the medical dangers it often brought were sometimes outside of human influence. The pelvis was considered an area of danger in Egypt and girdles strung with amulets were popularly worn here to guard against fertility dangers (Koen 2008: 153). Women were involved in religious activities, and were the ones who maintained household ancestor cults and shines to deities (Koen 2008: 18-19). It is unsurprising, then, that the most popular deities in household religious contexts were those which held the promise of protecting women and their families, like Bes and Taweret. Since healthy fertility was essential to
maintaining the longevity and success of family lines (Koen 2008: 74), the popularity of these gods in household religion rarely wavered, as indicated by amulets from both the New Kingdom and Late Period. Those same figures appear to be featured in Ashkelon for the same reason, to protect the domestic spaces of women and their families.

Egyptianizing artistic influence was also certainly a feature of Phoenician culture. In both the Greek and Phoenician worlds, Egyptian motifs in art and religion were a “striking cultural element” beginning in the early first millennium BCE (Holbl 1986: 197). Markoe identifies three primary phases of Egyptian influence in Phoenician art, the last of which marks the beginning of the Persian period across the Levant in the fifth century; after all, this was the time when both the Phoenician coast of Palestine and Egypt came under the control of the same empire, and “regular commercial and diplomatic exchanges” between the two regions were resurrected (Markoe 1990: 23). On a purely artistic level, this cultural exchange took the form of common Egyptian motifs like anthropomorphic representation and lotus symbols, appearing in various forms in the Phoenician world, like relief carvings, sarcophagi, statues, and decorative elements in architecture (Markoe 1990: 16). Egyptian influence did not only impact decorative traditions in Phoenician cities, however. As Ashkelon’s assemblage proves, amulets in the form of Egyptian divinities and popular symbols were also present in these cities. Despite what we have seen in Beirut, there are cities in the Phoenician heartland with examples of Egyptianizing amulets; they appeared in elite neighborhoods in Sidon, before popping up in local temple deposits in Byblos, Sarepta, and Kition. Those temple deposits were located in shrines
dedicated to local deities like Astarte, and were always excavated with mixed local cultic material (Holbl 1986: 198). These Egyptianizing amulets also began appearing in residential spaces, like in Ashkelon, and in Phoenician cemeteries as well. Examples of such graves in Atlit and Sardinia revealed that these amulets, primarily depicting the deities Bes and Taweret, appeared almost exclusively in the graves of women and children (Holbl 1986: 200). These contexts reiterate the idea that the connection between these types of amulets and women is high throughout both their Phoenician and Egyptian contexts. In fact, Holbl argues that the “Egyptian popular beliefs concerning the protective power of [amulets] for fertility and health…was adopted unadulterated” in the Phoenician world (Holbl 1986: 198). These amulets might have been a facet of Phoenician culture, but they were no mere cultural trinkets; they represent a tradition of religious beliefs concerning fertility and protection that exist in both Egypt and Phoenicia, even though their application in Phoenician religious practice was not identical to their use in Egypt. However, it is important to remember that the presence of these amulets was not universal throughout Phoenicia, as Beirut’s lack of amulets proves.

So while these types of amulets were certainly widespread throughout the Phoenician world, they do not seem to have been universally equated with it. Consider Beirut, a city with undeniable Phoenician presence which also appears to lack any Egyptianizing amulets during the period of their occupation. It is not, therefore, a guarantee that a Phoenician city would have Egyptianizing amulets; this fact further opposes the idea that their presence lacked religious or cultic meaning.
Their selective presence indicates that amulets might have only appeared in cities where Egyptian beliefs about cultic protection of women and their families spread. In addition to their religious meaning, these amulets are indicative of an undeniable economic connection between Egypt and Ashkelon, particularly if they were not manufactured locally. They are also evidence of Ashkelon’s culture of private religion- these amulets indicate that such practices existed in domestic spaces but remained unbound to those specific locations. Comparisons to assemblages in Tel Dor, Beirut, and Maresha prove that the impetus for and application of amulets use was universal in neither Persian not Phoenician cities. Rather, this selective appearance implies that these amulets represented a religious belief that traveled from Egypt with the amulet’s form. And finally, they prove the enduring influence of women in the private religions of average settlements, from Egypt to Persia. The domination of apotropaic deities aimed at protecting women in childbirth and family life is strong evidence for female power in determining the nature of family cults and religious practice in ancient Ashkelon.
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