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C O L U M N S

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Letter From the President

Dear *Columns* readers,

As the year draws to a close, it is apt to reflect on one's accomplishments, shortfalls, and hopes for the new year. For *Columns*, this year has been a time of tremendous growth and growing uncertainty. This semester, the College of Arts and Sciences has agreed to support the printing of our journal. Through this, we have gained another champion for undergraduate research: Dr. Keith Mellinger. This support secures the future of the club and cements the club in the present as an honored contribution to the wider University of Mary Washington. Further, *Columns* will now be published in *Eagle Scholar*, a project to which we are entirely in the debt of Mr. Peter Catlin, our first champion and a "God amongst librarians."

For all of our accomplishments, we face uncertainty in our future. Next semester, the vast majority of our operational board and a portion of our editorial board will be graduating. Yet, I have full confidence in our club members as well as UMW students. This semester, we received a record number of submissions for Fall, so we will have a sufficient supply of student research. Additionally, the club members' dedication to our mission and their enthusiasm give me full confidence that *Columns* will continue.

This current issue features research that tie into the problems of the modern day: education and naturalization, sectarian violence, and even national identity. As you read our current volume, I encourage you to reflect on how ideas expressed in this paper touch on aspects of your own life and the world we are living in today. As I know too well, history oft repeats itself, and if it does not, it certainly rhymes.

I would like to take a moment to thank the editorial board, the operational board, and our club members for their hard work. Please take time to read their bios and get to know these incredible people. It has been a great privilege to work with, learn from, and be friends with them, for this I am eternally grateful to *Columns*. Additionally, thanks must be given to the professors who advised these papers, inspiring students to perform impassioned research that they, and we, are proud of. This semester we also thank those who contributed via *Eagle Funding* to help *Columns* to grow its presence and support our mission. Finally, we would like to thank you, the reader. We look forward to seeing you next semester as a returning reader, an author, or even a club member.

With gratitude, appreciation, and warm regards,



Laura E. Connors
President of *Columns*

Tonia Attie

Reincarnating Conflicts: Sectarian Conflicts Before the 1860 Civil War and the Establishment of *Mutaşarrifiyyat Jabal Lubnān*

University of Mary Washington

Advised by Dr. Nabil Al-Tikriti

For HIST 339: Modern Middle East History

Abstract

Lebanon's political system is organized in terms of religious sects, a tradition that dates back to the emirate of Mount Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire. The 1860 Druze-Maronite Conflict was one of the significant events that led to the evolution of Lebanon's current system. However, there is a disagreement about what exactly led to the 1860 Druze-Maronite Conflict. While some scholars cite that a misinterpretation of the Tanzimat caused the violence between the Druze and Maronite communities, others argue that there is a history of violence and uprisings that existed long before the conflict. This paper seeks to analyze differing arguments and retrace the numerous events that preceded the 1860 Civil War, finding that it is misleading to argue that one singular factor led to the outbreak of violence in Mount Lebanon, which has implications in Lebanon today.

Keywords: Lebanon, Ottoman, Sectarianism, Druze-Maronite Conflict, Jumblatt, Bilad al-Sham, Intercommunal Conflicts

Sectarianism is by no means a new or foreign concept to Lebanon. The political structure seen in modern Lebanon, with most political parties and government institutions being dictated by religious sects, can be traced back to the *Emirate* of Mount Lebanon under the Ottoman Empire. While Lebanon did not become an independent state until 1943, its modern history started in 1860 with the Druze-Maronite Conflict, more specifically, the events leading up to 1860. However, it is debated as to what exactly caused the Druze-Maronite Conflict. Whereas some, such as Ussama Makdisi, argue that it was a misinterpretation of the 1839 and 1856 *Tanzimat* reforms that played a significant role in the breakout of a sectarian conflict in Mount Lebanon, I posit that sectarian political violence is found in the *Emirate* far before the establishment of the *Tanzimat* reforms and European intervention.

Prior to evaluating the key actors of Mount Lebanon in the mid-nineteenth century, one must first look to the structure, both political and cultural, of the Ottoman Empire. Though the Ottoman Empire consisted of a predominantly Muslim population and Islamic principles were utilized politically, legally, and culturally, the empire itself was both ethnically and religiously diverse. Religious minorities were granted certain freedoms through the *millet* system, with three main groups each being headed by a religious leader in Istanbul. The Grand Rabbi for the Jews, the Greek Patriarch for the Orthodox Christians, and the Armenian Patriarch for the

Armenian Christians. Each *millet* was granted the authority to govern itself in accordance with its own religious and cultural beliefs, with little interference from the Ottoman ruling class, except in cases of unrest or lack of adherence to major Ottoman legislation, such as taxation. Despite the religious freedoms granted to religious minorities, Muslims were ultimately granted more power and given a higher status within Ottoman society, which also transmitted into the provinces.¹

Among these provinces, known as *Eyalets*, was the Damascus Eyalet, which encompassed the majority of *Bilad al-Sham*. Within the Damascus Eyalet was *Jabal Lubnān*, Mount Lebanon, a semi-autonomous region that was governed by an *emir* directly appointed by the Sultan, separate from the *Pasha* of Damascus.² Mount Lebanon was unique due to the vast religious diversity found within a small area.³ The majority of the population of the Ottoman Empire was Muslim, Maronite Catholics accounted for the majority in Mount Lebanon, followed by Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Druze, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Jews.⁴ Although the Ottoman Empire was predominantly Muslim, Mount Lebanon was unique, given the vast number of ethno-religious groups within a single region.

To accommodate the religious and cultural needs of each sect in Mount Lebanon, the *emirate* was ruled through a feudal system of power known as the *imarah*. Overseeing the entire system was the *Grand Emir*, with the highest power in

¹ William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 6th ed. (Westview Press, 2017), 44.

² Özavcı, Hilmi Ozan, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2021), 230.

³ The religious and ethnic diversity of Mount Lebanon is still seen today and is a key factor in

many of modern Lebanon's conflicts, including the 1975 Lebanese Civil War. One difference is that almost all of the Jewish-Lebanese population fled around the time of the 1975 Civil War.

⁴ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, Abram S Hewitt, Sultan Of The Turks Abdülhamid II, and Abdülhamid II Collection, *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Matbaa-yı Amire, 1874), <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018672548/>.

Mount Lebanon, followed by *emirs* of lesser power and *Great Sheikhs*, with those being ruled made up the peasantry, farmers, and commoners.⁵ Each of the *emirs* and *sheikhs* was granted a *muqatta'ah*, an area of land that operated as a feudal fief. Additionally, each of the *muqatta'at* was ruled by a different *emir* or *sheikh*, with the majority of them being Druze.⁶ The religion of an *emir* or *sheikh* did not necessarily constitute the religion of the *muqatta'ah*, as Maronites were the majority and many areas were deemed as mixed. Power dynamics among different religious groups, or more importantly, who ordinary people recognized as having power in each village, began to impact the legitimacy of the *muqatta'at* in the early nineteenth century.

One of the most dominant families within Mount Lebanon was the Jumblatt family, who are from modern-day Syria and ethnically Kurdish and Druze.⁷ It was not until the eighteenth century that the Jumblatt family became involved in politics, when a nephew of Jumblatt, ibn Said, inherited the wealth of his deceased father-in-law, who happened to be a *sheikh* with no male heir.⁸ Through this newfound wealth, the Jumblatt family became one of the richest and most powerful families in the *emirate*, and in turn rivaled other powerful families, most of whom were also Druze, including the 'Imad family.⁹ It was through these rivalries that these families began vying to retain power and establish political alliances, specifically with the Grand *Emir*.

From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, Mount Lebanon was

ruled by Grand Emir Bashir Shihab II. Prior to the Shihab family taking over, the Mani family had held the seat of the grand *Emir* until the last Mani ruler died with no heir, leading their relatives of the Shihab family to gain power.¹⁰ In the late eighteenth century, when a new ruler was to be chosen among the Shihab family, the Jumblatts competed with other families and used their political connections to put Bashir Shihab II in power.⁸ While members of the Shihab family were originally Sunni Muslims, Bashir Shihab II was one of the many individuals in his family who converted to Maronite Catholicism, meaning his rise to power was very much supported by the Maronite majority in Mount Lebanon.¹¹

One of the most notable aspects of Bashir Shihab II's reign was his brutality and desire to suppress political opponents. In what became known as the *Muqatadjis Massacres*, Bashir Shihab II began to eliminate many of the members of his family who threatened his power, as well as rival families of the Jumblatts, in the name of his alliance with Sheikh Bashir Jumblatt. Rulers of the *muqatta'at* had their property, wealth, and authority diminished, with many of them being killed by Bashir Shihab II, which caused a disturbance of the *imarah* system.¹² While this may be viewed as common political violence, as Bashir Shihab II did not target Druze due to their religion, and oftentimes provided refuge to religious minorities looking to enter Mount Lebanon, the religions of the individuals involved in his political oppression had implications that led to later sectarian tension.¹³ The majority

⁵ Eugene Rogan, *The Damascus Events: The 1860 Massacre and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Basic Books, 2024), 101.

⁶ Kamal S. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 1988), 109–11. *Muqatta'at* is the plural version of *muqatta'ah*.

⁷ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 232.

⁸ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 234.

⁹ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 233.

¹⁰ Antoine J. Abraham, *Lebanon at Mid-Century: Maronite-Druze Relations in Lebanon, 1840-1860: A Prelude to Arab Nationalism* (University Press of America, 1981), 41–43.

¹¹ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 103.

¹² Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 235.

¹³ Abraham, *Lebanon at Mid-Century*, 51.

of the *muqatadjis* were Druze and persecuted by a Maronite Catholic *Emir* who did not have the authority or right to do so, as the *Emir* is still under the authority of the Ottoman Empire. Bashir Shihab II's attacks on the Druze leaders were one of the driving forces in future conflicts, creating a barrier of distrust between modern Druze and Maronite groups.

Around the same time, the religious influence of both Maronite Catholics and Greek Catholics in Mount Lebanon increased because of the interest of both the French and European Churches. Europeans, especially the French, took it upon themselves to act as the protectors of Christians within Mount Lebanon and to elevate their status. For example, the French were investing in the education of Christians through Catholic schools that, in turn, would allow Maronites and other Christians to go from being among the commoners to holding political positions, with some even working for the Jumblatt family.¹²

Through members of the French clergy, the churches of Mount Lebanon and their followers deviated from the *muqatadjis* in order to gain more power and not be under the influence of an *emir*. In addition, these acts were protected by Bashir Shihab II, who through his power as grand *emir*, protected the churches and their interests, as he too was a Maronite. The protection granted to Christians and the church triggered the loss of authority and respectability of the *muqatadjis*, with many Christians beginning to favor the European structure of government over the Ottoman. As Ozan Özavcı states, "in Mount Lebanon, class and sectarian consciousness formed virtually simultaneously in the early nineteenth century."¹⁴

Babshir Shihab II was forced to increase taxes after his forces accumulated a military debt when they came to the aid of Damascus during a Salafi invasion.¹⁵ These taxes led to the Kirsawan Rebellion, or the First Peasants' Rebellion, lasting between 1819 and 1820. The first peasants' rebellion was carried out by northern Maronite Catholics, stating that it was unwarranted for the Druze, as well as Maronites living under Jumblatt rule, not to have to pay as much in taxes. Both the Maronites and the Druze communities established communal and religious differences, with the clergy aiding the Maronites and the Jumblatts leading the Druze.¹⁶

After Bashir Jumblatt assisted Bashir Shihab II with quelling the first peasants' rebellion in the name of restoring peace, Jumblatt and Shihab began a rivalry that would drastically alter the politics of Mount Lebanon. Jumblatt found Bashir Shihab II's accumulation of power to be concerning as well as a threat to the *imarah*, the source of Jumblatt's power, and a diminishing of Druze influence. In 1822, Jumblatt and Shihab found themselves on opposite sides of an argument between Ottoman *pashas*, causing Shihab to find refuge in Egypt after Sultan Mahmud II sided with Jumblatt and the Pasha of Saïda.¹⁶

While in Egypt, Shihab found himself in the good graces of Mohammad Ali Pasha, who went on to be supportive of Bashir Shihab II's rule in Mount Lebanon. On one hand, Shihab was hoping to gain help from outside of Mount Lebanon to keep him and the Maronites in power, while Mohammad Ali was hoping to gain a closer connection to Lebanon with the goal of expanding the province of Masr. However, while Shihab was in Egypt, Jumblatt was

¹⁴ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 236.

¹⁵ The reference to the salafis is likely a reference to the Ottoman-Wahabi War, when Mohammad Ali Pasha looked to not only expand the influence of the

Masr province, but also combat against a rising salafi influence.

¹⁶ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 236–37.

raising an army of his own to counter Shihab, gaining the support of Druze, members of the Shihab family who had not converted to Maronite Catholicism, Orthodox Christians, as well as Maronite elites in the village of Kisrawan.¹⁷ Jumblatt's army was not simply a mobilization under a united idea, to overthrow Shihab, but a use of religious identity in order to encourage political action, with Shihab doing the same to gain the support of Maronites.¹⁸

Despite Jumblatt's efforts, his army fell to Shihab and Mohammad Ali's forces, leading to the death of Bashir and the imprisonment of Druze leaders working under him. The murder of Jumblatt created a catalyst that the Druze would not forget. As Kamal Salibi states, "Weakened and leaderless, they [Druzes] henceforth ceased to cooperate wholeheartedly in the affairs of the *Emirate* and awaited the opportunity for revenge."¹⁹

An opportunity for revenge did come through the 1831 Syrian Campaign, brought by Mohammad Ali when he invaded the Syrian provinces, including Mount Lebanon. After Mohammad Ali assisted Shihab with removing Jumblatt from the picture, Shihab became a pawn for Egypt, forced into loyalty for the remainder of his reign as Grand *Emir*. With the Egyptians defying Istanbul's orders, the Druze leaders in exile, including members of the Jumblatt family, hoped that aligning with the Ottomans would prove fruitful. Istanbul officials granted Bashir Jumblatt's son, Numan Jumblatt, the title of "*Sheikh* of the *Sheikhs* in the Mountain," as a sign of opposing the actions of Shihab.²⁰

In 1833, the Syrian provinces, and subsequently Mount Lebanon, fell to Egypt under the rule of Mohammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha. Ibrahim Pasha was looking to gain support by promising to uplift the status of non-Muslims; granting non-Muslims roles as officials in the legislative and judicial sectors of both Syria and Mount Lebanon. The French clergy members sculpted a narrative that the Ottoman Empire oppresses non-Muslims, and Egypt's control of the region would grant Maronites and other Christians the equality they had been wanting. During the occupation, Mount Lebanon was more open to the West in politics and business, with consulates of Western countries established in Beirut.²¹

Following an increase in prices, the suppression of locally owned production, and a rise in taxes, the Syrians and Lebanese began to distrust the Egyptian *pashas*, with discontent being especially strong among the Druze, who had been disarmed to prevent any potential revolts. This led to the 1837 to 1838 uprising of Druze forces against the Egyptians and Bashir Shihab II, who had used religious slogans to encourage Maronites to join his cause, and banned Druze from being inside his palace.²² In addition, letters were sent to Maronites to encourage them to protect themselves against "the heretical Druzes, who deny the prophets."²³ Shihab's army went on to kill roughly one thousand Druze soldiers.²³ While attacks against Druze were solely due to political reasons before, the generalization of Druzes in Mount Lebanon was another example of a rise in sectarianism, criminalizing religion, and equating religion with political alignment.

¹⁷ Kisrawan, a village in northern Mount Lebanon, was one of the villages that saw an increase in taxes due to Bashir Shihab.

¹⁸ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 238.

¹⁹ Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (Greenwood Press, 1976), 27.

²⁰ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 240.

²¹ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 241–42.

²² Bashir Shihab II likely banned the Druze from his palace as an anti-assassination measure.

²³ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 243.

One year after the incidents of June 1838, the Ottoman Empire issued the first part of the *Tanzimat* Reforms, specifically the *Gülhane* Edict of 1839. “The 1839 decree stipulated the equality of Muslims and non-Muslim subjects before the law and insisted that this equality was fully compatible with the empire's glorious Islamic past.”²⁴ An issue with the reforms arose in Mount Lebanon, as leaders and foreign actors were unable to come to a consensus on what the reforms signified.²⁴ Due to the confusion and many elites disagreeing with the Ottoman Empire entirely, the *Gülhane* Edict of 1839 was never truly implemented in Mount Lebanon. However, the *Tanzimat* did seemingly inspire an uprising against the Egyptian occupation.

Ibrahim Pasha's authoritarian rule, disarmament of locals, and mandatory conscription led to an unlikely alliance on June 8, 1840, in the *Antilyas* Church. In the church, Druzes, Maronites, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims established a pact to protect one another from foreign aggressors, regardless of religion, in what would become known as *al-qiyam al-jumhuri*.²⁵ Around the same time, many foreign actors saw the *Tanzimat* as an opportunity to attempt to overthrow Egyptian forces in what is known as the 1840 intervention. Between August and November 1840, locals of Mount Lebanon united for the Second Peasants' Rebellion, going against Egyptian forces in Deir al-Qamar, with the support of foreign actors like England and leaders from Damascus. After local forces failed, European actors directly intervened to

protect the greater Ottoman Empire. As a result of European intervention, Shihab II was deposed, leading to the appointment of Bashir Shihab III as Grand *Emir* by Sultan Abdulmecid I.²⁶ When Bashir Shihab III came to power, the sons of Bashir Jumblatt, Numan, and Said, returned to Mount Lebanon from exile, with the new Grand *Emir* refusing to return land that had belonged to Druzes back to its original owners, now being in the hands of the Maronites.²⁷

However, despite the direct Ottoman governance of Mount Lebanon, tensions were still high amongst locals, with Druzes looking to cultivate alliances with foreign actors, such as the British, and the Maronites being afraid due to Bashir Shihab III's lack of influence. On September 13th, 1841, a civil war broke out in Deir al-Qamar, the same village where Druzes and Maronites had previously come together against Egyptian forces. The Civil War of 1841 started due to an initial fight between Druze and Maronite hunters that quickly spread across Deir al-Qamar and to neighboring villages. Even though Numan Jumblatt and other prominent families of both Druze and Maronite descent attempted to halt the fighting, civilians and lower-level officials were still furious over the dissolution of the *imarah* system, with Druzes threatening to kill Numan if he did not join the fighting as well.²⁸ Ottoman officials only intervened when Druze forces stormed the Deir al-Qamar palace and tortured Bashir Jumblatt III, sending in Mustafa Pasha to mediate.²⁹ While the fighting ended by December, with over one thousand killed and thousands of

²⁴ Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (University of California Press, 2000), 57.

²⁵ Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 58. *Al-qiyam al-jumhuri* most closely translates to the values of the republic, signifying a group that transcends sectarian ties.

²⁶ Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (University of California Press, 1994), 26–27.

²⁷ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 45–46.

²⁸ Özavcı, *Dangerous Gifts*, 257–58.

²⁹ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 51–52.

homes destroyed, little was resolved between the groups.²⁷

Serving as an attempt to appease the Druze, who did not want to be ruled by a member of the Shihab family, and the Maronites, who were unhappy with Bashir Shihab III's lack of influence, Istanbul had Bashir Shihab III step down from his position. Supposedly, as Bashir Shihab III was preparing to board his ship to Istanbul, "a party of Druzes attacked his escort and stripped them of their arms, then proceeded to manhandle the *Emir*."²⁹ Omar Pasha, a colleague of Mustafa Pasha and an ethnic Croatian, went on to replace Bashir Shihab III as an interim governor.³⁰

Omar Pasha was then tasked with gaining the trust of both the Druze and Maronite communities to remain in power. To accomplish this, a series of petitions was presented to the leaders of foreign consulates in Lebanon, who took it upon themselves to advocate for the needs of specific groups, such as the French supporting the Maronites or the British favoring the Druzes. In order to win the support of the Druze factions, Omar Pasha had granted them all of the land that was lost during battles in previous years, while Maronites were either lied to, blackmailed, or financially threatened into signing petitions to show their support.³¹ Though Omar Pasha initially had the support of the Druze, things took a turn after he arrested several prominent Druze figures in an attempt to dissuade any potential uprisings. In addition to this, Omar Pasha was sending Islamic scholars to Druze-majority regions to convince Druze locals to become Muslim and even forced Druzes to pay a high fee to Maronites after their loss in the 1841 conflict.³² As a result, Druze forces led by Shibli al-Ayran started a revolt by

surrounding Beit al-Dine, where the palace was located, and cutting off the water supply. To repel the Druze rioters, the Ottoman representative Asaad Pasha, also the governor of the Beirut *eyalet*, sent both Ottoman and Albanian troops, as well as soldiers with Omar Pasha, to fight against the Druzes. Once the Druze forces retreated, Omar Pasha was replaced by Muhammad Pasha by the end of 1842. The Ottomans, British, French, Austrians, and Russians devised a plan that went on to divide Mount Lebanon into two.³³

A system of a double *kaymakamate* was installed, leaving northern Mount Lebanon to be ruled by a Maronite and southern Mount Lebanon to be ruled by a Druze. The issue that arose was that Maronites made up the majority in Mount Lebanon as a whole, meaning that while the Druze controlled the south, there was still a higher population of Maronites compared to Druzes in the region. On a similar note, while Druzes did not make up the majority in the north, there were still Druze residents residing in the north. In addition to this, other minorities, such as Armenians, were grouped amongst the Druze, while Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics were grouped with the Maronites by the Ottoman Empire, causing strain between these groups that had different beliefs being treated as monoliths.³⁴ According to Kamal Salibi, "The establishment of the double *kaymakamate* in Lebanon was in itself a source of difficulty...it was the formal organization of a civil war in the country."³⁵

What was to come is best described in a statement from Husayn Abu al-Hassan in 1842, "The old days of the *muqatadjis*, the peaceful coexistence of the Maronites and the Druze in their manors, had now passed. A new era was coming like racing

³⁰ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 53.

³¹ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 54–55.

³² Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 260.

³³ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 61–63.

³⁴ Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 79–80.

³⁵ Salibi, *History of Lebanon*, 64.

clouds.”³⁶ After much deliberation, Ottoman, foreign, and local officials came to an agreement that the north and south would be divided on sectarian lines, with mixed villages having two *vekils*, one for Maronites and one for Druzes, who would serve as a disposer of affairs, along with the governor of Saida. The village of Deir al-Qamar, infamous for previous instances of unrest, and also a mixed village, had members of the Ottoman army stationed to promote stability.

Despite having a designated plan to appease both the Druze and the Maronites, the Maronite peasantry began to call for a return of the Shihab family as head of the *Emirate*. Some members of the French clergy not only supported the possibility but also encouraged more locals to take on a positive opinion of the Shihab family.³⁷

Meanwhile, in Istanbul, the former Emir Bashir Shihab II was working with the French and Austrians, mainly clergy members, to send aid to the Maronites in Mount Lebanon. The aid was meant to rally troops to try to reinstate the Shihabs into power, as well as attack Deir al-Qamar and the property owned by the Jumblatt family. At the same time, Said Jumblatt, leading the Druze, began to ready themselves for war by rallying soldiers and making amends with any previous Druze rivals in order to defend themselves against the Maronites.³⁸

In the spring of 1845, Maronite forces, holding French flags, attacked Deir al-Qamar and areas controlled by the Jumblatt family, destroying thirteen villages in the initial attack. Roughly eighteen villages were involved in the fighting, resulting in thousands of houses destroyed and thousands of people killed. It is estimated that anywhere between one

thousand five hundred and three thousand individuals were killed, with the Druze community suffering immensely. It was after the events of 1845 that the Ottoman Empire began to take a more direct approach to dealing with Mount Lebanon.³⁹

After 1845, it was decided that the Ottoman Empire would have an increased presence within Mount Lebanon, with Mustafa Reshid Pasha, one of the creators of the *Tanzimat*, serving as Ottoman Grand *Vizier*, and Mustafa Sekib Efendi serving as the Foreign Minister. Their main goals were to limit foreign influence over Mount Lebanon, to cease sectarian and political violence, and to enforce the *Tanzimat fully*. The entirety of Mount Lebanon was disarmed and divided along geographical lines, with adjustments made in both the north and south to create more equal representation among the ethno-religious groups. As for the village of Deir al-Qamar, an Ottoman military officer was placed in charge, and it was designated as not a mixed village, but a neutral one.⁴⁰

Much of the Ottoman reforms were an attempt at bringing Lebanon into a new era and putting the past behind them. Alas, peace did not last long. In 1856, Sultan Abdulmecid I released the second part of the *Tanzimat* Reforms, the Reform Edict, which “repeated the principle of 1839 and made explicit the guarantee of equality of all subjects.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, many *sheikhs* and *emirs* had refused to relinquish their power and denied certain rights to their citizens, such as equality to all individuals regardless of religion, and abused the tax system.

Serving as a rebellion against the nobility, the Greek Catholics in Zahle declared themselves as an independent region, denouncing Mount Lebanon and the

³⁶ Isa Iskandar al-Ma'luf, *Tarikh Madinat Zahlah* (Matba'at Zahlah al Fatat, 1911), 203; Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 265.

³⁷ Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 267–70.

³⁸ Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 271.

³⁹ Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 271–73.

⁴⁰ Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts*, 273–74.

⁴¹ Cleveland and Bunton, *Modern Middle East*, 78.

kaymakamate system. A town council was established, and a leader with the title of “*sheikh shabab*” was elected.⁴² The actions of the Greek Catholics inspired civilians to rebel against the old laws of the *emirate*, but instead wanted to embrace what the Ottoman Empire was offering through the *Tanzimat*, equality, and civilian protection.⁴³

What transpired was an uprising in Kisrawan, which was under the Maronite rule of the elite noble family of the Khazins, infamous for ignoring orders from the ruler of the *kaymakamate* and the Ottoman authorities. After the Khazin family dismissed the grievances and requests of civilians, the locals followed suit after Zahle had elected their own leader in 1858. Tanyus Shahin, known as Tanyus Bey, was not only seen as the leader of Kisrawan, but of all the Christians in Mount Lebanon, a hope to revolt against the nobility. The Third Peasants’ Rebellion in 1859, when Tanyus Shahin and a group of Christians began to attack the Khazin family, their property, as well as political elites who supported them. Over five hundred Khazins were forced out of Kisrawan. Unlike previous uprisings, “the Ottoman government chose not to intervene because the uprising against the Maronite *sheikhs* was in accord with the inclination of the government.”⁴⁴ Tanyus Shahin went on to create a council, with members elected by locals, consisting of one hundred individuals, alongside an army of roughly one thousand men, in what was known as the “People’s Republic of Kisrawan.”⁴⁵

The success of the Christians in Kisrawan posed a threat to the Druze, especially the Jumblatts, as there was a possibility of both an internal rebellion

against the Druze nobility and an attack from the Christians. However, the Druze elites reminded the locals how much damage the Maronites had done to their community, and that dividing amongst themselves would put them at an extreme disadvantage, threatening their security.⁴⁵

In 1860, both the Christians and Druzes started to mobilize in different regions. Christians in Druze-controlled areas, such as Jumblatt’s Shuf, wrote letters to Tanyus Shahin looking for support, and the Druzes reached out to the Druzes near the Bekaa Valley and Damascus. Eventually, Shahin had gathered roughly fifty thousand soldiers, while the Druze only had twelve thousand. To make up for the lack of soldiers, the Druze conducted secret attacks against Christian villages, including Zahle, and villages in the Druze-controlled south that had Christian majorities. The actions of the Druze marked the beginning of the 1860 Civil War, sending Lebanon into a new era.⁴⁶

Druzes went on to attack Deir al-Qamar, burning roughly one hundred thirty buildings until Ottoman forces intervened, as well as the villages of Jazzin, Rashayya, Hasbaya, and the Syrian Wadi al-Taym. What makes the cases of Hasbaya and Rashayya particularly interesting is that they were ruled by Sunni Muslim members of the Shihab family. Said Bey Jumblatt disregarded the fact that these villages were not ruled by Christians, and instead wanted revenge against the Jumblatts’ notorious rival. Druzes had ransacked villages and attacked the palaces of every town they traveled to, killing anyone in their way.⁴⁷ In the town of Zahle, which had claimed

⁴² *Sheikh shabab* is a title meaning the leader of the youth.

⁴³ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 109; Fawaz, *An Occasion for War*, 36–37.

⁴⁴ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 112; Letter from French Consul Bentivoglio in Beirut to Foreign

Minister Walewski, 7 January 1860, in Ismail, *Documents Diplomatiques*, vol. 10, 163.

⁴⁵ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 113–14.

⁴⁶ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 114–15.

⁴⁷ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 116–17.

independence, the Muslims had joined forces with the Druze to attack the Christians, who abused Muslims living in Zahle, which fell to the joint Druze and Muslim forces.⁴⁸

The 1860 Civil War or Druze-Maronite Conflict went on to define modern Lebanon. Roughly fifteen thousand people died, the vast majority of whom were Christian, with most of the violence carried out in the Damascus province. Leaders of Druze forces were either imprisoned by the Ottoman Empire or went into hiding to protect themselves from Ottoman punishment. In the aftermath, the Ottomans combined north and south Mount Lebanon into one region. In May 1861, the Ottoman Empire, France, Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia met to discuss the future of Mount Lebanon, coming to the conclusion that Mount Lebanon would be established as a “special Ottoman governorate, or *mutaşarrıfıyyat*,” which would be run by a Christian.⁴⁹

In conclusion, the impacts of the events between 1819 and 1861 are still apparent in today’s Lebanon. For example, in modern Lebanon, it is mandatory for the president to be a Maronite Christian, a legacy going back to the 1860 conflict. Furthermore, the Jumblatt family is still the most prominent political figures for the Druze population in Lebanon. Additionally, in 1981 the former Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel declared that the 1975 Civil War shared a direct link with the events of 1860 stating, “The immediate cause of this war was the threat addressed to the Maronite community by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt, a threat that could not but awake in our Christian subconscious the memory of the 1845 and 1860 massacres.”⁵⁰ Regarding

the causes of the 1860 Civil War, the belief that the *Tanzimat* or even European interference caused the attacks is an oversimplification of a nuanced and complex series of events that dates as far back as 1819.

that the *Tanzimat* or even European interference caused the attacks is an oversimplification of a nuanced and complex series of events that dates as far back as 1819. There are multiple skirmishes, rebellions, and a rise in tensions that occur before the *Tanzimat* Reforms were even introduced to the mountain, caused by familial and religious alliances, power structures, and the use of religious identities as a political weapon. Additionally, it can be argued that the *Tanzimat* Reforms were never properly integrated into Lebanese society, with members of the nobility refusing to follow suit with no consequences. Lebanon’s 1860 Druze-Maronite Conflict was by no means the first instance of sectarian violence in Lebanon, and as history shows, it was most certainly not the last, creating a cycle of reincarnating conflicts.

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⁴⁸ Rogan, *The Damascus Events*, 122–23.

⁴⁹ Akarli, Engin Deniz, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920*, (University of California Press, 1993), 30–31.

⁵⁰ Kanaan, Claude Boueiz, *Lebanon 1860-1960: A Century of Myth and Politics*, (Saqi, 2005), 74.

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Packaging Patriotism: The Role of Childcraft Encyclopedias in Marketing American Identity in the Mid-20th Century

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For HISP 320: Material Culture

Abstract

The public education system in America in the early to mid-20th century was historically used to further pro-American narratives amidst the global conflicts of the period. During that time, numerous educational materials were marketed and sold to teachers and parents alike, which helped perpetuate narratives of American exceptionalism, such as the Childcraft Encyclopedia library initially published by W. F. Quarrie & Company. The Childcraft sets from this period are the lasting legacy of Americanization—a process undergone by many children who were identified as a cultural “other” in America’s public school system. The United States’ government marketed the ideologies of American identity as a core benefit of public education, presenting the education system to immigrant parents as a convenient opportunity to deconstruct their being perceived as a cultural “other” in the United States. Drawing on post-war new-parent manuals, early English as a Second Language (ESL) educational methodology, first-hand accounts of Childcraft’s in-home usage, and the broader socio-political agenda of Americanization, this research seeks to understand how the public school system attempted to assimilate immigrant children in this period by packaging American exceptionalism as Americanization to reshape cultural identities among immigrant children.

Keywords: Americanization, Identity Politics, Material Culture, Immigrant Education, Gratitude Paradigm, 20th-Century, Immigration, & English as a Second Language

The Childcraft Encyclopedias

Books from the 1942 *Childcraft Encyclopedia* library are distinguished by their orange cloth-bound hardcovers, which feature black and gold text on the spine and similarly colored, embossed illustrations relating to their topic on the front cover. While the original set of 7 total books in the edition came with similar-colored and composed dust jackets, the two being studied are without them. The cloth cover is a linen-canvas blend fabric with the texture of a wax-sealed coating for durability. Due to wear and tear, there is visible fabric texture from fraying at the edges. The two books in question are the *Poetry & Famous Literary Works* (Fig. 1) and the *Famous Individuals* (Fig. 2), which comprise two of the three books written for children in this set. The other four books were produced for parents and teachers on the topics of child education and raising children.¹ Although originally owned by W. F. Quarrie and Company, the parent company of the *Childcraft* libraries is the *World Book*

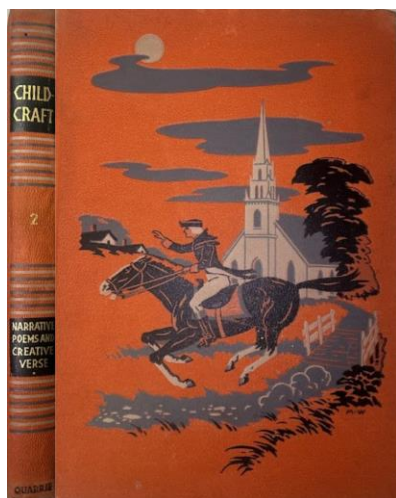


Figure 1, spine and cover of the *Childcraft Encyclopedia*. Author's photo.

Encyclopedia, which is still in the business of writing and selling encyclopedia libraries.² The *Childcraft* series was for sale in full print well into the 1990s.³

The *Childcraft* library was first published in 1934 and consisted of relatively basic information, not significantly different from the two books addressed in this study.⁴ Of the seven books, only three were content for children while the bulk of the 1942 series addressed the adults who would have purchased them on how they could best teach and raise children, regardless of whether they were a parent, educator, or both.⁵ Such parenting and teaching guides would have been standard in the period, especially as encyclopedias transitioned into the post-war and Cold War landscape well into the 1980s. One could easily argue that parenting books still exist in a popular form today. Such claims are inadmissible to this research due to differences in format, messaging, and intended uses of the content provided in parenting manuals of this period

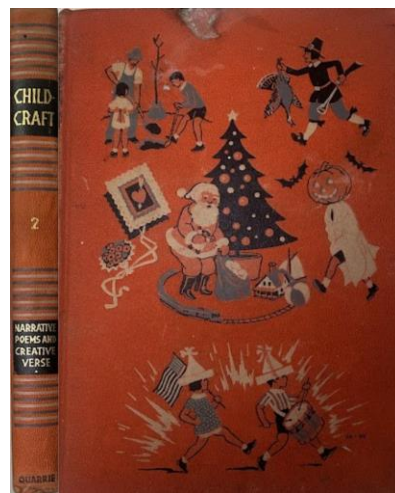


Figure 2, spine and cover of the *Childcraft Encyclopedia*. Author's photo.

¹ "Childcraft | World Book," World Book, accessed April 2, 2025, at https://www.worldbook.com/childcraft-titles?srsltid=AfmBOoo7imWN-_jQT5V4fohT2FWs9StwALCjvOMYhvfV4rvGyD3EH4hx.

² Mary Ellen Quinn, "Childcraft: The How and Why Library," *Booklist* 98, no. 2 (2001); "Childcraft | World Book," World Book.

³ "Childcraft | World Book," World Book.

⁴ Quinn, "Childcraft: The How and Why Library," 252.

⁵ Quinn, "Childcraft: The How and Why Library"; "Childcraft | World Book," World Book.

versus modern parenting manuals. It is notable, however, that there are references to the *Childcraft* library in modern parenting novels as an essential for a mother's education of her children in the household.⁶

What makes *Childcraft* so unique that American families and schools spent seven decades collecting its various editions? The *Childcraft: How and Why Library* has always been a tool used to simplify the tenets of American identity in digestible ways, including the two mentioned here, alongside science, famous places, and fairytales. The encyclopedia's first editions arrived at the end of the legislative period for the Americanization movement, which occurred in the 1920s and 30s, which filled schools by enrolling more young immigrants in the public school system than ever before due to the newly generated child labor and compulsory schooling laws.⁷ They were then employed to implement the ideals of a "true" or "good" American Citizen as defined by the Americanization movement. These encyclopedias were recognized for their use in bilingual education in the early 1960s and early 1970s—not only for the linguistic simplicity of their content, but also for the quality of the pro-American content that immigrants and non-native English speakers could absorb from their pages.⁸ The *Childcraft* library was suggested as a good starting point for parents who wanted to educate their children to be 'real'

Americans, regardless of whether they were natives or non-natives to the United States. The encyclopedias were costly, but the quality of the materials and the content within them made them a worthy investment for many immigrant and native-born citizens. For those who struggled with the cost, cheaper, discounted, and older editions of the encyclopedia were suggested, though their content and factual basis were less up-to-date.⁹ Many of the earlier editions—those published starting in 1934 through the 1950s—were sold to the public at frequently discounted rates to make them more affordable in value to their audience, as they were available exclusively as an entire set.¹⁰

The Americanization Movement

The Americanization movement, created in the 1910s, was a national push for a clear American identity and generated pro-American legislation well into the 1920s.¹¹ The actual definitions, motivations, and policies that can be included in or directly attributed to this movement are all highly debated in academia, especially the logic behind the movement's nationwide popularity. The bulk of the movement's implementation was largely grassroots, even if it was subscribed to on the federal level, as most of the affected legislation that spawned from Americanization occurred on the state level.¹² Dr. Michael Olneck defines Americanization as something that "may be interpreted as 'symbolic behavior,' which is

⁶ Leonore Andres et al., *The Mother's Book: Practical Ideas for Parenting* (Kindred Press, 1988).

⁷ Adriana Lleras-Muney and Allison Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed? An Evaluation of the Effect of English-Only and Compulsory Schooling Laws on Immigrants," *American Economic Journal. Economic Policy* 7, no. 3 (2015): 258–90, <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20120219>.

⁸ Phil Gore and Ernest Maestas, *Migrant Education Guide* (Colorado Department of Education, Migrant Education Programs, 1971), 15,

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=txu.059173025411510&seq=1>.

⁹ Andres et al., *The Mother's Book*.

¹⁰ Times Daily, "42. Articles for Sale-Belue's," *Times Daily*, October 10, 1964, 9; The Tuscaloosa News, "40. For Sale-Miscellaneous," *The Tuscaloosa News*, May 20, 1962, 16.

¹¹ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?"

¹² Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?"

'ritualistic and ceremonial' in that the goal is reached in the behavior itself rather than in any state which it brings about." This interpretation of Americanization as a political movement is central to Olneck's argument that the alteration of American civic identity was the driving force behind Americanization, not the desire for assimilation. Olneck's piece discusses English-only laws, compulsory schooling, and patriotism as a principle in public education, which were spawned by the government's desire to centralize power in the United States' multinational culture by imposing a cultural hegemony on the population.¹³

Olneck makes a complex argument on the ideologies that supported total Americanization, but Lauret argues that there were two intensities to Americanization when it was applied and subscribed to.¹⁴ The second intensity of Americanization is that of the Liberal Americanizer, who believed in the modest application of the theory through the defining of Americanization as a standardization of distinctly American "skills, behaviors, and values" in households nationwide that still allowed for immigrants to continue the practice and ownership of their cultural traditions.¹⁵ Lauret argues that Liberal Americanizers saw the maintenance of culture by immigrants as the melting-pot function within America's cultural landscape.¹⁶ They impose that American culture is refined and grown by the melting pot nature of the country, thus retaining a need for immigrants to partially assimilate.

Through the standardization of language—meaning to become fluent in English—and aligning their civic behaviors and personal values consistently with the principles of the US' free-market capitalist society and those outlined in foundational documents—the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, etc—can Americanize themselves while retaining elements of their cultures of origin such as folklore, food, and preferred religious practices.¹⁷ However, further into Lauret's argument, she states that while Liberal Americanizers may have expressed their desire for remnants of an immigrant's origins to remain in practice, the application of this is faulty due to the Theodore Roosevelt-esque Americanizers, who insisted Americanization was an all-or-nothing process.¹⁸

The term *ethnic shame* is what Lleras-Muney and Shertzer argue bars second-generation immigrants from being willing to maintain their cultural connections.¹⁹ They define the term through a series of examples of the second-generation immigrant experience, such as embarrassment from having an accent—or one's parents having an accent—noticeably foreign names, and most especially: regular public consumption of cultural foods, like those found in a school cafeteria. Essentially, Lauret argued that if Americanization ideals were going to target the majority of elements within a cultural identity as being negative signs of "otherness," then other aspects of cultural identity would also be discarded out of the condition that to have ethnic practices is to

¹³ Michael R. Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants, 1900-1925: An Analysis of Symbolic Action," *American Journal of Education* 97, no. 4 (1989): 399, <https://doi.org/10.1086/44393>.

¹⁴ Maria Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then: The 'Nation of Immigrants' in the Early Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 2 (2016): 419–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816000487>;

Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants."

¹⁵ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 21.

¹⁶ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then."

¹⁷ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 21.

¹⁸ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then."

¹⁹ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?"

be un-American and to be un-American is to be undeserving of being in the US.²⁰ From the 1940s to the 1970s, a cultural fear arose of the sinister reasons behind un-American behavior among immigrants, due in large part to World War II and the Red Scare being at their peaks. Lauret argued that the total rejection of origins and culture is a part of second-generation immigrants' caution towards the threats that "conditioned the lives of American-born descendants of immigrants growing up during the Depression, World War II and the Cold War."²¹

While Americanization may have been a social movement promoted at the federal level by individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt, Lleras-Muney and Shertzer emphasize that the bulk of the movement's implementation occurred through state-level legislation.²² The three types of legislation that can be attributed to benefiting the Americanization movement are English-only laws, child labor laws, and compulsory schooling laws—alongside a significantly smaller number of significant pieces of national legislation—that were enacted by states across the country.²³ To emphasize the scope of these policies and their popularity: by 1939, 48 US states had enacted compulsory schooling laws.²⁴ This piece of legislation was encouraged by child labor laws that set a higher minimum age for children to acquire a work permit within their state, which resulted in more children being at home with nothing to do, leaving a perfect gap for the public school system to

fill.²⁵ Even those children who were permit recipients were required by most states to attend school part-time.²⁶ These two pieces of legislation, paired with English-only laws, lead to higher literacy rates among immigrants, thereby achieving the first and most crucial goal of Americanization: the linguistic hegemony of English.²⁷ To teach non-native speaking students, programs such as English as a Second Language were formulated in professional educational circles, which relied on readily accessible materials, including *Childcraft* encyclopedias.²⁸

Ultimately, the best way to define Americanization is through what reads as a mere throwaway line in Olneck, where it is asserted that Americanization was designed to alter the behavior, values, and skills of all who resided within its borders, natural-born citizens or otherwise.²⁹ Olneck identifies Americanization as a shift in the civic identity of the nation, resulting from external pressures the US faced, which led to new needs from the citizenry to provide safety, stability, and community.³⁰ The argument of "civic culture reconfigured" as a justification for the sudden need for Americanization is just as analogous to the time it exists within as a piece that discusses similar theses of a vertically-structured identity schema and civic duty through the use of paradigms and social orders written by Lyon-Jenness on the period immediately before Americanization's inception: the 1850s to 1880s. At this time, Lyon-Jenness highlights that the shift in civic identity was

²⁰ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then."

²¹ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 34.

²² Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?"

²³ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 260.

²⁴ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 265.

²⁵ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 260.

²⁶ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 265.

²⁷ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 271.

²⁸ Gore and Maestas, *Migrant Education Guide*, 15.

²⁹ Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants."

³⁰ Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants," 410, 416.

primarily from a passive to an active role, a movement that Americanization will take a step further. However, Lyon-Jenness' civic identity revolves more around the beautification of community spaces and the identification of beautiful spaces as spaces of "true" or "good" Americans, and the effect that those mentalities had during the Westward expansion of the US, which happened during this period.³¹ Westward expansion would directly result in the influx of immigrants to the US on both the East and West coasts, would then begin to degrade both the distinct boundaries of American culture and the beauty of the space due to the sheer capacity—or lack thereof—of Western and rural towns.

Americanization and the Immigrant Experience

How do the effects of Americanization remain in the sociopolitical bloodstream through an era defined by the Second World War, the Red Scare, and the start of the Cold War, if it is a movement most often defined as being from the beginning of the 20th century until 1930? The answer is the gratitude paradigm, which assumes a way of "thinking and feeling about U.S. citizenship that profoundly shapes American patriotism, exceptionalism and, with it, the 'nation of immigrants' idea as an ideological formation."³² What it means is that Americanization is, by the country's capitalist nature, a transaction. In return for the US being willing to take in immigrants seeking a better life, immigrants were expected to be eternally grateful and display that gratefulness visibly through actions such as willingly flying the

American flag, signing up for military service, reciting the national anthem or Pledge of Allegiance, and of course, donating funds to support the federal government—beyond federal taxes.³³ A war bonds poster (Fig. 3) from the First World War provides an example of the mainstream propagation of the gratitude paradigm, showing how immigrants were employed to purchase war bonds not to protect their freedom, but to express their gratitude for the freedom—or liberty in this case—that the United States gave them in what is essentially a pay-to-play manner. The poster portrays a familiar scene to many already settled first-generation and newer immigrants: the first sight of the Statue of Liberty from atop a ship's deck as it heads into Ellis Island.³⁴ While this poster has a transparent and overtly pro-American bias, it remains a critical examination of what the government assumed to be the core of the American identity, as shaped by the ideals of Americanization. American liberty is a consistent theme in the marketing rhetoric, from the federal government to those

contributing to the immigrant influx, as a value ascribed as mandatory to acquire through

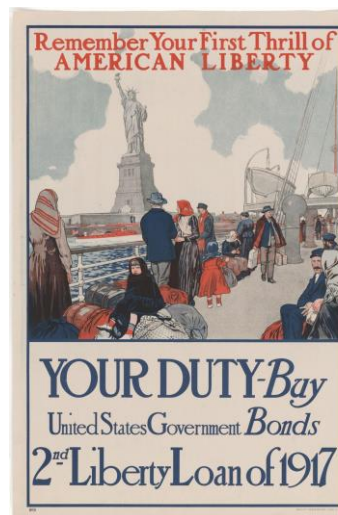


Figure 31, "Remember Your First Thrill of American Liberty. Your Duty- Buy United States Government Bonds. 2nd Liberty Loan of 1917," ca. 1917–ca. 1919, NAID 512676, Records of the U.S. Food Administration, National Archives, Washington

³¹ Cheryl Lyon-Jenness, "Bergamot Balm and Verbenas: The Public and Private Meaning of Ornamental Plants in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Midwest," *Agricultural History Society* 73, no. 2 (1999): 201–21.

³² Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 29.

³³ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 31.

³⁴ "Remember Your First Thrill of American Liberty. Your Duty- Buy United States Government Bonds. 2nd Liberty Loan of 1917," ca. 1917–ca. 1919, NAID 512676, Records of the U.S. Food Administration, National Archives, Washington DC.

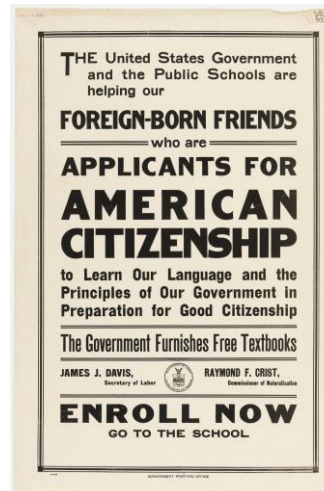
Americanization. This poster's request for war bond investments is just one example of how the gratitude paradigm has been imposed on immigrant populations, as this paradigm is one of the longest-lasting social demands placed on immigrants in the US.

The gratitude paradigm was not seriously investigated until second- and third-generation immigrants entered academia and the middle class in the late 1960s and early 1970s, inspired by the revelations of the Civil Rights movement.³⁵ One of the largest of these gaps is that very few second-generation immigrants or those beyond spoke or learned the language of their culture. Not only were English-only laws some of the most heavily favored for "easy" Americanization, but speaking foreign languages in public, especially during the era of the World Wars and the Red Scare, drew considerable attention and, likewise, a lot of judgment. Americanization promised immigrant parents that if they encouraged their children to speak, read, and think in English exclusively, they would be closer to being true Americans and to meeting the threshold for achieving the American dream.³⁶ There were a significant amount of programs offered nationwide, either by the public school system, community centers, or even employers like the Henry Ford factory, that would teach adult immigrants not only to use English in public spaces, but also to teach their children, helping reinforce their in-school English lessons outside of the classroom.³⁷ English language programs evolved in their focus, and the foreign languages they targeted were based on those languages that were considered the most un-American

and/or threatening to the American way of life at any given time. Early programs, such as the ones displayed on this leaflet produced by the Department of Education and Department of Labor (Fig. 4), targeted Eastern European languages in hopes of encouraging all those from highly turbulent, "threatening" areas—areas characterized by the people's revolutions occurring in these regions—to prove they were well-intentioned by conforming to one of the most easily identifiable tenants of American identity.³⁸ This leaflet, dated 1922, also exists in a Polish version, targeting the displaced refugee and immigrant influx resulting from the Russian Revolution and those fleeing Bolshevik persecution.³⁹ Programs like this would be revived during the Cold War, as those who spoke with distinctly Eastern European accents were considered to not only be un-American but malicious actors spying on or sabotaging the US in some way. There was also the fear of Eastern Europeans being so unfamiliar with democratic forms of government that they would attempt to revert to the modes of

government they were familiar with out of habit, if that habit was not broken through the multistep process of naturalization using the

Figure 42, "Foreign-Born Friends who are Applicants for American Citizenship," 1922, NAID 7452511, Publications of the U.S. Government, National Archives, Washington DC.



³⁵ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 35.

³⁶ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then."

³⁷ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then"; Lauret, "Foreign-Born Friends who are Applicants for American Citizenship," 1922, NAID 7452511, Publications of the U.S. Government, National Archives, Washington DC.

³⁸ "Foreign-Born Friends Who Are Applicants for American Citizenship."

³⁹ Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants"; National Archives, "Foreign-Born Friends Who Are Applicants for American Citizenship."

techniques found in Americanization resources, such as the classes shown on the leaflet and the more subtle cultural material covered in mediums such as *Childcraft* encyclopedias.⁴⁰

Multi-generation immigrants were closer to American culture than that of their country of origin, and in reflecting on the cause of this cultural gap, they cited the ethnic shame their parents' and grandparents' were made to feel regarding cultural practices such as naming practices, cuisine, and culturally-significant clothing habits.⁴¹ These very criticisms are the source material for the rhetoric around the US being a "nation of immigrants," and the reason it's been accepted in a culture so reliant on Americanization is that, at its core, Americanization was never intended to be a divisive and targeted ideology. Americanization was designed to unite Americans under a common language, sense of identity, and sociocultural norms, which were intended to apply equally to native citizens and immigrants, despite its disproportionate impact on immigrant communities.⁴² What the "nation of immigrants" rhetoric does is cite that nearly every natural-born American is descended from someone who immigrated to America one way or another—with or without that descendant's consent—and that the identity of an American as being an immigrant is uniting all subsets of identity in America under one common moniker.⁴³

Conclusion

American culture was founded with literacy as its core cultural principle.⁴⁴ The

era of the print word in the United States began with the founding fathers and remained the dominant form of intelligence until the 1920s with the invention—and widespread popularity—of the radio, which allowed Americans to learn remotely without having to read anything.⁴⁵ The colonial period of America is defined by relatively little development, except for one universal consistency: schools.⁴⁶ Postman's argument, while separate from concepts of Americanization, revolves around something called the Lyceum Movement, which generated an oral tradition to the written word that followed print structure and resulted in multihour lectures nationwide in formal lecture halls and everything in between. The Lyceum movement furthered both print and oral traditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, generating the concept of education existing through print media, such as *Childcraft*.⁴⁷ The purpose of this encyclopedia is to teach children about new topics they may not have explored before, and the focus of the early editions of the *Childcraft* Library on literary and poetic works clearly agrees with Postman's assertion that print media lends itself to an inherently unifying purpose.⁴⁸

The modern American should be concerned with conversations around Americanization for a couple of reasons. Most importantly, many of the laws that people take for granted are rooted in this heavily problematic ideology. The most relevant reference to Americanization as a method of naturalization—specifically, as the only acceptable method of naturalization that is wholly encompassing—in the modern political landscape is the targeting by the

⁴⁰ Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?" 259.

⁴¹ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then."

⁴² Lleras-Muney and Shertzer, "Did the Americanization Movement Succeed?"

⁴³ Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then," 36.

⁴⁴ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 20th anniversary ed. (Penguin Books, 2006), 32.

⁴⁵ Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

⁴⁶ Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 33.

⁴⁷ Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 40.

⁴⁸ Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

executive branch of the multilingual and usually immigrant background of America's truck drivers. In an executive order in April of 2025, President Donald Trump declared that all commercial truck drivers in the United States must be proficient in English to retain their jobs.⁴⁹ This executive order states, "they [commercial truck drivers] should be able to read and understand traffic signs, communicate with traffic safety, border patrol, agricultural checkpoints, and cargo weight-limit station officers."⁵⁰ The administration's choice in wording—particularly, their choice in placing the importance of reading English above all other functions—reinforces the idea that to read a language is to have a connection with the culture needed to fully understand the way they use that language.⁵¹ However, while this research focuses primarily on the less harmful and often well-intentioned elements of Americanization, such as education policy, it is important not to understate the serious racial and ethnic biases that have always fanned the flames of Americanization since its inception.

Americanization as a philosophy has always been idealist at its core, desiring a universal language for common collaboration, but in practice as an ideology, Americanization is the practice of deeming one culture, language, or set of norms "superior" to another and thus dictating that the practice of all language, culture, and norms must fall within the "superior" frame. Regardless of its connotations of cultural erasure in modern consciousness, Americanization had one goal: unity. The written word, regardless of the format it takes, requires that "everyone could speak

the same language" and comprehend the meaning of that language and its references.⁵² What made the written word so American that the Americanization movement focused so heavily on providing educational courses designed to teach English that almost exclusively relied on print media like *Childcraft*, if not that to read is to understand, and to understand the reader must learn cognitive skills like investigation, doubt, and critical thought?⁵³ What do citizens who think critically about their communities produce if not "a busy, mobile, and public society," perfectly designed for the democratic participation Americanization was meant to inspire?⁵⁴

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⁵⁰ Irwin, "Trump Executive Order Requires Truck Drivers to Speak English."

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⁵² Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 34.

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Beyond the Barricades: Third Wave Feminism in *Les Misérables*

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For HIST299: Introduction to the Study of History

Abstract

This essay examines the feminist dimensions of *Les Misérables*, focusing on the representation of its female characters – Fantine, Cosette, and Éponine – and their alignment with Third Wave feminist principles. Although often perceived as a male-centric narrative, *Les Misérables* reveals, through its portrayal of these women, that they occupy critical, complex roles that challenge traditional gender expectations. Analyzed within the socio-political context of the 1980s, the Broadway musical adaptation of *Les Misérables* demonstrates a re-signification of the original novel, engaging with contemporary feminist discourses through its libretto and through insights drawn from scholarly studies. Through musical expression, Fantine, Cosette, and Éponine assert their agency by embodying themes of independence, personal sacrifice, and emotional resilience which reflects Third Wave Feminism's emphasis on individual choice, autonomy, and the rejection of societal constraints.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender Roles, Re-Signification, Musical Theater

Many scholars believe *Les Misérables* (*Les Mis*) to be an overly male-dominated musical, which, when examining the placement of women compared to men in the plot, is not entirely untrue.¹ However, through a closer examination of each woman's individual storyline, the opposite proves to be more accurate. A deeper analysis reveals that the female characters, although fewer in number, play crucial and multifaceted roles. Beginning with Fantine's heart-wrenching struggle for her daughter's future, to Éponine's unrequited love and ultimate sacrifice, their narratives add profound depth and emotional complexity to the story. Even Cosette, often perceived as a secondary character, represents hope and redemption. Around the time *Les Mis* hit the Broadway stage, a new era of feminism was beginning to be ushered in: Third Wave Feminism. This period was far more inclusive in terms of gender, sexuality, and race. Within this movement came the re-emergence of "Marxist feminism" (rather than Marxist-Leninism) which emphasized that a capitalist system caused many of the problems that women faced in a patriarchal society. From this perspective, capitalism is a restraint on a woman's ability to succeed and make her own choices.² Still prevalent today, the Third Wave is extremely individualist, pushing the idea that a woman should be able to choose what life she wants to live—whether that be a more traditional role or a more unconventional one. This movement ushered in Third Wave Feminist musicals such as *The Color Purple* and *In the Heights* where women of color and their

intersectional struggles took center stage. By failing to conform to societal expectations and building their complexity as characters and claiming their individual autonomy, Fantine, Cosette, and Éponine embody various Third Wave Feminist concepts that would normally be punished under a patriarchal structure.

Les Mis began as a novel published in 1862 written by Victor Hugo. Drawing from both contemporary and historical genres, Hugo's story became a worldwide sensation.³ The story follows Jean Valjean, an ex-convict, through 19th century Paris during the time of a student uprising which would later be called The June Rebellion of 1832.⁴ There are three major female characters at play in this story: Fantine, Cosette, and Éponine. Fantine is a factory worker who is an unmarried, single mother working to pay off a pair of innkeepers, the Thénardiens, who are currently looking after her daughter, Cosette. Before she dies, Fantine asks Jean Valjean to rescue Cosette from the Thénardiens because they have been exploiting her for child labor, so he does, and continues to raise her. Éponine Thénardier is later introduced as someone who grew up alongside Cosette but was treated far better as a child. Now forced into street life, Éponine's circumstances sharply contrast with Cosette's sheltered upbringing under Jean Valjean, reversing the power dynamic of their youth. Éponine befriends and falls in love with Marius, a young revolutionary whom Cosette later falls in love with as well. But tragically, Éponine ultimately sacrifices herself during a small

¹ Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 129, 143.

² Frigga Haug, "Gender Relations," in *Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Shahrzad Mojab (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2015), 59–61.

³ Kathryn M. Grossman and Bradley Stephens, "Les Misérables: From Epic Novel to Epic Musical," in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Musical*, eds.

Robert Gordon and Olaf Jubin (Oxford University Press, 2016), 383–84.

⁴ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven & Cie., 1862); Eric Martone, "Not Just the Uprising from *Les Misérables*: The Legacy of the June Revolution of 1832 in Paris," in *Royalists, Radicals and les Misérables: France in 1832*, ed. Eric Martone (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 123.

battle in the uprising.⁵ The musical covers the same story points but gives the female characters more autonomy and independence, unlike the original novel that is more conservative in its female representation.

The story was originally adapted by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil and debuted as a musical in 1980 in French in the city of Paris, France. Its popularity led to its English adaptation, and with the help of Cameron Mackintosh, debuted in London on the West End in 1985.⁶ The English version concentrated more on each character's arc and added about an hour to the show's runtime by varying some storylines and songs like "I Dreamed a Dream." The show quickly became a worldwide sensation just as the book had.⁷ Eventually, *Les Mis* made its way to the United States and debuted on Broadway in 1987, this production being the first introduction of contemporary feminist themes that fall under Third Wave Feminism. The year 1987 marked a transitional period between Second and Third Wave Feminism, which helps explain why the musical cannot be considered entirely feminist. Its status as an adaptation of Victor Hugo's nineteenth-century novel, a work shaped by patriarchal and non-feminist values, further limits its capacity to fully align with feminist ideals. Although many of the feminist themes in the musical are portrayed through the female characters, one of the *most* feminist parts of this work is the re-signification of the story itself. Feminist historians Maud Anne Bracke, Penelope Morris, and Emily Ryder state in a *Gender*

& History article, "Through re-signification, a social actor invests a text with new and subjective meaning, responding to perceived needs and tensions in her own environment" and is "proposed as specifically feminist."⁸ *Les Mis* as a musical is, in itself, a re-signification of the novel, acting out one major principle of the Third Wave, which is its focus on globalization in response to the Second Wave's neglect of global connectedness. The notion that "sisterhood is global" was a significant concept that feminists began to push during the transition between waves, especially as a new age of technology was ushered in.⁹ As a widely known work performed and celebrated around the world, *Les Mis* not only underscores the shared struggles and solidarity among women but also amplifies these themes on a global scale. By touching audiences from various cultures and societies, it highlights the universal themes of resistance, resilience, and the fight for equality among women across the world, proving that its messages transcend borders.

Although the 1987 musical was a smashing success and earned lots of raving reviews, there was criticism about some of the initial performances, especially in comparison to the original London cast. Notable theater critic John Simon stated in *New York Magazine* that Frances Ruffelle's take on Éponine had "too cute" of a voice to be playing her character and left him feeling "cold." Similarly, Simon states that Randy Graff, the actress for Fantine, gave a "remote, inexpressive performance."¹⁰ If Simon's account is to be believed, performances of this nature not only

⁵ Hugo, *Les Misérables*; Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, *Les Misérables: Libretto* (Music Theater International, 2011) (hereafter cited as LML).

⁶ Sarah Whitfield, *Boublil and Schönberg's Les Misérables* (Routledge, 2018), 3–4.

⁷ Andrew Lamb, *150 Years of Popular Musical Theatre* (Yale University Press, 2000), 341–42.

⁸ Maud Anne Bracke et al., "Translating Feminism: Transfer, Transgression, Transformation (1950s–1980s)," *Gender & History* 30, no. 1 (2018): 219.

⁹ Bracke et al., "Translating Feminism," 222.

¹⁰ John Simon, "Victor Victorious," *New York Magazine*, March 23, 1987, 88.

misalign with the emotional intent of the scene but also compromise the integrity of the musical's central themes. However, despite Simon's critiques, the original Broadway cast won eight Tony's, including Frances Ruffelle for best featured actress in a musical.¹¹

The success the musical had, and continues to have today, underscores the strength of the production. One key element contributing to its impact is how the female characters in *Les Misérables* exemplify Third Wave Feminism—primarily through their individuality. In fact, characters like Fantine and Éponine are punished when they *do* conform to dependency.¹² Previously, Fantine had been significantly dependent on her lover, both financially and emotionally, but eventually he left her alone with a child and no money. This is implied when Fantine sings “He slept a summer by my side/He filled my days with endless wonder/He took my childhood in his stride/But he was gone with autumn came” in her solo “I Dreamed a Dream.”¹³ Despite the fact that dependency was customary during this period, Fantine is 'punished' for her reliance on a man.¹⁴ Despite the fact that dependency was customary during this period, Fantine is 'punished' for her reliance on a man and must be entirely financially responsible for her daughter. This transgresses family unit expectations but presents Fantine as an autonomous individual who is capable of taking care of her family on her own.¹⁵ Although Fantine does embrace her individuality, her life eventually ends in tragedy when she dies from disease, which could be seen as a conservative punishment for being independent.¹⁶ This unfortunate

ending for Fantine is not because the musical is anti-feminist, however. This is a result of *the story* which is about “les misérables” (or “the miserables” in English).

Éponine also demonstrates individualism by flipping the stereotypical ‘male savior’ narrative and sacrificing herself for a cause that she cared about to save the man she loved. Éponine’s ‘punishment’ for her dependency on her father, who exploits her to sustain his greed, is a life of isolation and unfulfilled longing. Unlike Cosette, who is rescued from the Thénardiens’ corruption, Éponine remains trapped within the consequences of her parents’ immorality.¹⁷ When she realizes the state of her loneliness, Éponine decides to commit herself to the revolutionary cause by disguising herself as a boy to fight in a small battle. There, Éponine is shot and dies in the arms of Marius as she sings “A Little Drop of Rain.”¹⁸ Although it is Éponine’s choice to fight for the revolutionary cause, she still had to change her gender just to do so. *Les Mis* may be exemplifying feminist values by allowing Éponine to die on her own terms, but the world she lives in is still a patriarchal one. Her ability to engage in the revolution and gain some agency is framed within the context of masculine heroism, suggesting that women must adopt traditionally masculine roles to be recognized or to have an impact. This reflects the broader societal expectation that women’s power is often only validated when it aligns with male-dominated spaces, even in narratives that challenge patriarchal structures. For both Fantine and Éponine, their independent actions are the result of unfortunate situations that they were placed in as

¹¹ *The Deseret News*, “‘Les Misérables’ Captures 8 Tonys; ‘Fences’ Wins 4,” June 8, 1987, 2.

¹² Chutian Weng, “Feminism is Love: Structural, Romantic, and Marxist-Feminist Themes in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Les Misérables*,” *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2019): 1814.

¹³ LML, 13.

¹⁴ Weng, “Feminism is Love,” 1814.

¹⁵ LML, 11.

¹⁶ LML, 27.

¹⁷ Weng, “Feminism is Love,” 1814.

¹⁸ LML, 57, 72–73.

‘punishment’ for their stereotypical dependency on others.

Another way in which the female characters in *Les Mis* illustrate Third Wave Feminist values is through the act of choice, particularly in the ways that Cosette and Éponine choose who they love or want to spend their lives with. In a journal article entitled “A Prostitutes’ Jamboree,” Meg Weeks discusses the power and importance of choice and explains how, in the past, the idea of truly voluntary choice for women was a rarity.¹⁹ The article specifically discusses this idea in relation to sex and sex work, areas in which a woman’s agency is traditionally toiled with. But here, Cosette and Éponine take back their autonomy by putting themselves in situations where they have the right to choose. Although Cosette does not engage in sex work as Fantine does, the ideals are still applicable to the idea of love. Both women set their minds, and hearts, on someone that they want to spend their lives with, expressing autonomy in their romantic lives. Cosette and Éponine are especially interesting when exploring this concept because they both fell in love with the same man, Marius. For Cosette, her story is one of success. Both Marius and Cosette spot each other in the street and immediately develop feelings for one another, which is played out in their duet “A Heart Full of Love.” Both Marius and Cosette are repeating each other’s melodies and shared feelings in response to one another. Marius begins the duet by singing, “A heart full of love/A heart full of song” which Cosette then mimics when she comes in and sings, “A heart full of love/No fear, no regret” and the song continues in this manner until it ends.²⁰ In fact, their dynamic is somewhat revolutionary in terms of

modern feminist ideas because they are both equally in love rather than a one-sided relationship, which was the more stereotypical relationship for the time period.²¹ On the other hand, Éponine, who does not ‘get the man,’ so to speak, still has freedom in choosing who she wants to spend her life with. She acknowledges both her love and the fact that it is not reciprocated in her solo “On My Own” when she sings, “I love him, but only on my own.”²² Rather than succumbing entirely to helplessness, Éponine asserts her emotional truth, and in the face of rejection, chooses to express her love on her own terms. This moment of agency is significant because it shows her ability to claim her emotions in a world that does not give her the opportunity to act on them. Her internal strength lies in her acceptance and articulation of her love, which, though unreciprocated, remains uniquely hers. She may be powerless in changing her circumstances, but she has control over her own emotional narrative.

As a wider concept, *Les Mis* represents the generational changes and advancements that have been made over generations. As mother and daughter, Fantine and Cosette are comparable and contrastive to each other in a lot of ways, especially when it comes to ideas such as independence or freedom. Fantine represents the older generation of women who did not have as much freedom of choice, especially when it came to marrying for love or pursuing independent careers. Her sacrifices and struggles are a poignant reflection of the limitations and hardships faced by women of her time. In contrast, Cosette symbolizes the newer generation that sees the dawn of change. She grows up with the hope and opportunity that Fantine's sacrifices

¹⁹ Meg Weeks, “A Prostitutes’ Jamboree: The World Whores’ Congresses of the 1980s and the Rise of a New Feminism,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 31, no. 3 (2022): 288.

²⁰ LML, 55–56.

²¹ Weng, “Feminism is Love,” 1814.

²² LML, 68.

provided, embodying the potential for a future where women have greater autonomy and the ability to forge their own paths. Additionally, the juxtaposition of Fantine's tragic fate and Cosette's more hopeful future underscores the impact of societal evolution on individual lives. By illustrating how the collective efforts of past generations paved the way for the next, the characters emphasize the importance of continuing the fight for women's rights and equality. *Les Mis*, therefore, not only tells a story of personal triumphs and tribulations but also reflects the broader societal shifts that have shaped the lives of women across time.

Music can be used as a tool that connects to, invokes, and expresses emotion. Musicals, especially in the case of *Les Mis*, are no exception. One of the most powerful ways that *Les Mis* demonstrates feminist concepts and breaks away from typical female stereotypes is through song. Many times in stories, women are portrayed as feeble and hysterical, especially when there is a threat of violence. But, through song, *Les Mis* gives women a platform to express their emotions and amplify their voices without portraying them as 'emotional' or 'distraught.' This is especially powerful in scenes with fighting and violence—where a more stereotypical woman would be panicked, the women of *Les Mis* stand their ground. One major example of this is Éponine as she is dying on the battlefield. Éponine chooses to embrace death, just as she had embraced the fight that led to it, as she sings, "The rain can't hurt me now/This rain will wash away what's passed."²³ Additionally, the music of *Les Mis* gives the act of expressing emotion power for both men and women. When Fantine is fired from the factory she sings a beautiful, yet raw account of her life about how she longed for it to improve. She vocalizes,

I dreamed a dream in time gone by
When hope was high and life worth living
I dreamed that love would never die
I dreamed that God would be forgiving

She then builds up to the climax of the song, where her voice is bearing raw emotion as she belts out, "I had a dream my life would be/So different from this hell I'm living."²⁴ Fantine expresses so much emotion here, but it is not hysterical, it is strong. Fantine is channeling her deep pain into a controlled and resonant belt. Her voice is not cracking nor does it sound desperate like it had previously in the song; here it resonates with a force.

The powerful musical expression of emotion and strength in *Les Mis* not only resonated with audiences at the time but has continued to evolve over the years with critics and viewers alike reflecting on its lasting impact. About a decade after the show's premiere on Broadway, theater critic John Simon wrote a follow up article evaluating the new production of *Les Mis*. His view was much more positive, both in terms of the acting and writing. Simon states that "it has now been spiffed up by the producer, Cameron Mackintosh, and the co-directors, Tevor Nunn and John Caird."²⁵ His observation highlights how, since its debut, the musical adaptation has finally done Hugo's original story justice—compared to the first performance he reviewed—while at the same time revitalizing it to appeal to the Third Wave Feminist demands of a modern audience. As the show continues to be performed, the female characters in it have become even more iconic for their incredible depth, resilience, and emotional complexity. Their stories resonate with audiences, highlighting the struggles and strengths of women, making them enduring symbols of

²³ LML, 73.

²⁴ LML, 12–13.

²⁵ John Simon, "Hit and Miz," *New York Magazine*, March 31, 1997, 85.

empowerment and perseverance. The show was even adapted into a movie in 2012 where Anne Hathaway further captivated audiences with her performance as Fantine. The musical adaptation of *Les Misérables* further strengthens these feminist elements by re-signifying the original narrative, breathing new life into its themes and characters. While the novel was ahead of its time in depicting female suffering and sacrifice, the musical emphasizes the individuality and autonomy of the female characters at its core, offering a more nuanced exploration of their emotional and personal development. *Les Misérables* functions not just as a retelling of history, but as a space where feminist interpretations of the past can be explored and reimaged.

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Exodus from Babylon:

The Flight of Iraqi Jewry Following the Murder of Shafiq Adas

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For Hist 339: Modern Middle East

Abstract

On September 23, 1948, Iraqi-Jewish business tycoon Shafiq Adas was executed. His public hanging, which had drawn a crowd of 15,000, was especially celebrated across the whole of Iraq. Vendors in his home city of Basra even displayed purchasable images of his corpse in their shops, hoping to profit off of the festive atmosphere created by his execution. Despite what the average Iraqi citizen may have believed, Iraq had not killed a traitor—they had simply murdered a Jew. Shafiq Adas was falsely accused of providing arms to the state of Israel, a crime punishable by death. A three day trial where Adas could not call witnesses or present evidence, the Iraqi court sentenced him to death. The claims that inspired his conviction were unfounded. After Shafiq's death, Jews began to leave Iraq in droves for the first time since their arrival 2,000 years earlier. By 1952 nearly all of them had left. This paper strives to explain the social and political circumstances that led to Shafiq Adas's death. It also intends to prove that Adas's death, along with the traumatic Farhud pogrom of 1942, inspired the Jewish exodus from Babylon.

Keywords: Iraq, Iraqi Jews, Farhud, Shafiq Adas, Zionism, Antisemitism

By the dawn of September 23, 1948, the city of Basra, Iraq, was alive. Iraqis, young and old, bustled anxiously through the city's ancient streets, shoving each other forward in frenzied waves of motion. The excitement of the crowd was palpable. Some of them had traveled hours overnight, often on cramped buses, simply to watch the events of the morning unfold. Throughout the city, the sounds of laughter and celebratory music could be heard ricocheting off of every street corner. The city was celebrating. In the early dawn heat, just steps from the giddy assembly of onlookers, a man emerged onto the streets of Basra for the last time. As the crowd watched, a battalion of armed guards led the man towards a great mansion. He was wearing the clothes of a prisoner, and no doubt looked small against the grandiose backdrop that loomed behind him. 15,000 of his nation's civilians stood before him, some jeering at him, some chanting, some quiet. They were waiting for his end to begin. This man's name was Shafiq Adas, and he was about to die. Victim to a tale as old as time, Shafiq, a prominent businessman, found himself standing before the gallows as nothing more than a Jew. After enduring a three-day trial seeped in antisemitism and entirely void of evidence, Adas was sentenced to hang until dead for one of the worst crimes an Iraqi could be accused of: Zionism. In the days afterwards, some of the most influential people in Iraq called for his pardoning, including the ambassador for the United States. Adas's wife offered the court a payment of roughly 261 million US dollars in exchange for his release.¹ Farhud pogrom were factors many Iraqi Jews considered when deciding to flee their homeland, the

event that inspired the Great Exodus was the trial and murder of Shafiq Adas. Due to his status and connections, many Iraqi Jews believed Shafiq Adas to be the last Jew that would ever reach the gallows. When he was falsely accused and murdered before their eyes, they realized in a single moment that they could never live safely in their homeland.

The story of Iraqi Jewry begins in the Bible. When the empire of Babylon invaded Judea in 586 BCE, the Jews of Jerusalem were taken as slaves and scattered across the Babylonian frontier. They spent forty-seven years as spoils of the Babylonian conquest, living and working primarily between Nebuchadnezzar's two rivers.² When Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE, he allowed the Jews to permanently return to their home in Jerusalem. Although many immediately set out for Israel, a notable subsection of the Jewish population chose to remain in Babylon. It is from this group that Iraqi Jews trace their beginnings. Over the next 2,500 years, the Jews of Iraq both suffered and flourished in their adopted homeland. Although they never achieved equal rights under any leadership, the community had periods of growth and cultural development that have shaped the Jewish world to this day. One of the most important books in Jewish religious literature, the Babylonian Talmud, was written in Iraq around 500 CE, roughly 1,000 years after the end of Jewish captivity in Babylon. These advancements often traveled in lock-step with strife for the Jews of Mesopotamia, who found themselves on the receiving end of unfairly levied taxes, restrictive, humiliating laws,

¹ Adi Schwartz, "Dryyfwš h'yr'qy: mšpt Hr'wvh štl' t' yhdwt 'yr'q b '48," *Yšr' l Hywm*, November 11th, 2022, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/magazine/hashavua/article/13352471>.

² Lyn Julius, *Uprooted: How 3000 Years of Jewish Civilization in the Arab World Vanished Overnight* (Vallentine-Mitchell Publishers, 2018), 6.

and occasional violence no matter the century.

The tides turned for the Jews of Iraq in the year 1856. Having been subjects of the Ottoman Empire for at least 25 years,³ the Jews of old Babylon had spent most of their lives before 1856 as “dhimmis”. To be a dhimmi in the Ottoman Empire was to be a “protected” minority within the Ottoman system; a second-class, non-Muslim citizen who guaranteed their own safety by paying a lofty tax. The status of dhimmi awarded physical and religious protections to whom it applied,⁴ and granted communities the autonomy to run their own schools and court systems. Unsurprisingly, though, the label also came with numerous restrictions. Those classed as “dhimmis” in the Ottoman empire were forbidden from riding horses with saddles, building new houses of worship, repairing existing houses of worship in Muslim areas of residence, carrying weapons, and more.⁵ They were also made to pay an extra land tax, an extra personal tax known as *jizya*, and, for Jews specifically, a tax for the appointing of a Rabbi called the *rav akçesi*.⁶ These taxes were incredibly financially burdensome, and often trapped generations of dhimmis in an endless loop of poverty. In 1856, Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid II published the second round of his groundbreaking Tanzimat reforms as part of his broader effort to

modernize and “westernize” his empire. These reforms abolished the dhimmi status and all of its restrictions, allowing Jews to function as entirely equal members of society for the first time in generations.

The Jewish community of old Babylon wasted no time in taking advantage of their freedom. In 1864, the community welcomed the opening of the “Alliance Israelite Universite”, a popular French-language school dedicated to “improving the welfare of the Jews”⁷ by educating children⁸ in a western, Jewish environment. In Judaism it is considered a “mitzvah”, otherwise known as a holy commandment, to provide children with an in-depth religious and general education. Many Mesopotamian Jewish parents took this commandment to heart, prioritizing education for their children regardless of the family’s economic status. By 1880, an estimated 12,000 Iraqi-Jewish children were in school.⁹ By the time they had reached adulthood most Jews of both genders had been educated in some capacity, a sentiment many of their gentile neighbors could not share. In the rapidly industrializing population centers of Baghdad and Basra, ambitious Jews were able to obtain high-level jobs and work their way up the social ladder, establishing a Jewish stronghold

³ Before 1831, most of modern Iraq was under the governance of the “Mamluks,” a class of military slaves who paid tribute to the Ottoman Empire in exchange for territorial domain.

⁴ Although dhimmi status protected Jews under the *law*, it did not prevent them from day-to-day antisemitism.

⁵ Anver M. Emon, “The Legal Regulation of Minorities in Pre-Modern Islamic Law,” in *Religious Minorities in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Law (5th–15th Centuries)*, eds. John Victor Tolan, Capucine Nemo-Pekelman, Nora Berend, Youna Masset. (Brepols Publishers, 2017) 58–59.

⁶ Yaron Ben-Naeh, “Jews in the Court of the Kadi,” paper presented at EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP, *Jewish History Resources*, vol. 5 (2012): 158.

⁷ *New International Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905), “Alliance Israelite Universite.”

⁸ The AIU operated solely as a boys’ school until 1893, when a girl’s branch of the school was opened in Iraq.

⁹ Hagit Goral Halperin, “The Jews of Iraq in Modern Times - and My Family’s Story,” *Center for Jewish Studies at Fordham* (blog), January 10, 2021, <https://jewishstudies.ace.fordham.edu/2021/01/10/the-jews-of-iraq-in-modern-times-and-my-family-story/>.

within the Iraqi upper-middle class.¹⁰ Many of the upper-class Jews worked in international trade¹¹ or finance, fields the Jewish community had strong monopolies over.¹² By the turn of the 20th century Jews made up nearly 40% of Baghdad's population, a higher ratio of Jews-to-gentiles than New York City could boast in the same era.¹³ Although the Jewish community in Baghdad was largely self-sufficient (Baghdadi Jews had their own neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, etc.), they were so integral to commerce in greater Baghdad that the city market closed on Saturday, the Jewish day of rest.¹⁴ In Iraq's major port city of Basra, Jews rarely self-segregated, often living in Muslim-majority neighborhoods without conflict.¹⁵ Despite differences in custom and occasionally social class, Jews across Mesopotamia generally lived comfortably alongside their Muslim neighbors. Even Jews living in insular, Jewish-only communities often laid their loyalties with "Mesopotamia," believing themselves to be a cog within their nation's culturally diverse wheel.

The end of the first World War in 1918 ushered a new era, and a new empire, into Mesopotamia. After aligning itself with Germany in the first year of the Great War, the Ottoman Empire weakened by the day. In 1917 the Empire, whose domain had once stretched continents, collapsed upon itself. As the Ottoman dust settled, two European empirical forces laid unexpected claims upon its ruins, eager to cement themselves in a region they hadn't touched in centuries. England and France, the most powerful nations in Europe at the time, split the bounty of the Middle East quicker than its

bewildered inhabitants could utter "independence". Originally, England had reached an agreement with Hussein ibn Ali, the overseer and caretaker of Mecca and Medina, in which it promised to aid in the establishment of a unified pan-Arab state if Hussein used his influence to engineer revolts against the Ottomans.¹⁶ Although a revolt did take place, with Hussein as its orchestrator, the English did not honor their word. In the shadows, England had been negotiating with their closest ally, France, on the ways they intended to split the Middle East between themselves after the Ottoman Empire, then called the "Sick Man of Europe", took its last breath. Through the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, Britain and France put their secretive plan into motion by way of the "mandate" system. A mandate was a form of post-war occupation, sanctioned by the newly established League of Nations, that allowed foreign powers to take control of land previously under the governance of Germany or the Ottoman Empire. "Concerned" that the peoples of the Middle East would be unable to establish functional democracies without foreign assistance, England and France wasted no time carving the region into their personal playground. Some of Eastern Mesopotamia was given to France, but the majority of it fell under the jurisdiction of the English.

The Iraqi public was deeply angered by their newfound position under the heel of the Union Jack. Their anger reached a boiling point just months after the Mandate was established, culminating in a revolution so powerful it entirely restructured the British Mandate system in Iraq. Although it was eventually suppressed, the Revolution

¹⁰ Halperin, "The Jews of Iraq."

¹¹ Iraqi Jews established expat communities across the world, most notably in India, China, and England. These community-controlled strongholds overseas gave the Iraqi Jews a boost in trade relations.

¹² Moshe Gat, "Iraq and its Jewish Minority: From the Establishment of the State to the Great Jewish

Immigration 1921-1951," *Israel Affairs* 30, no. 2, (2024): 202.

¹³ Lyn Julius, *Uprooted*, 6.

¹⁴ Lyn Julius, *Uprooted*, 6.

¹⁵ Halperin, "The Jews of Iraq."

¹⁶ This agreement is called the "Hussein-McMahon Correspondence," and it occurred in 1915 and 1916.

of 1920 was so deadly, and more importantly, costly, to the British Empire that in 1921 they facilitated the appointment of King Faisal I of Iraq, who, ironically, was the son of the aforementioned Hussein ibn Ali.¹⁷ The appointment of a king gave Iraq self-governance, but by no means freed them from occupation. The British, whose eyes were trained on Iraq's bountiful oil supply, refused to cede ultimate power to the newly-established monarchy, and would not do so until Iraq's independence in 1932. Despite the power struggle, the British partnered closely with the newly crowned Faisal, whom they hand-selected for the position largely thanks to his pro-British sentiments. Although Iraq was able to secure its independence in 1932, a year before King Faisal I would die of a heart attack,¹⁸ the British didn't truly remove themselves from their beloved "Mesopotamia" until after the second World War. Their presence in the region was a thorn in the side of nearly all of its residents, who longed for a day when their homeland would be free from the meddling of bad-faith foreigners. That being said, the arrival and consistent presence of the British brought with it upsides, especially for some in the Jewish community. The British were known to put their highest level of trust in the minorities of their mandated territories, making no exception in Iraq.¹⁹ Jews, along with other minority groups like Assyrians, were valued by the British in ways they rarely were by their countrymen. Although the British did not "favor" Jews, the attention they paid to the Jewish community undoubtedly improved its situation, if only slightly. The British also brought numerous employment opportunities with them, a major upside for those in the Jewish community with advanced, Western educational

backgrounds. Some of these well-educated Jews enjoyed employment within the Iraqi-British bureaucratic system.²⁰ To outsiders looking in, the connection between some Iraqi Jews and the British government was enough to warrant a black mark upon the entire community, even if most Jews shared the same frustrations and nationalistic aspirations as their gentile neighbors. The black mark only darkened after Iraq gained independence.

By the mid-1930s, Muslim and Christian Iraqis were leaving school with a level of education similar to that of their Jewish counterparts. Itching to join the high profile workforce, many fixed their hopeful eyes on their country's government. The Iraqi bureaucracy, made up mostly of Jewish employees who had transferred from the Iraqi-British civil service, was a highly coveted place of employment with very few open spots.²¹ Upon realizing that most of the desirable positions within the government were occupied by Jews, the educated Iraqi youth began to resent the Jewish community, viewing Jews as hoarders of success who had "stolen" their opportunities. At the same time, Islamic Arab Nationalism was becoming wildly popular amongst the Muslim population in Iraq. Previously, Iraqi Arab nationalism had centered around the shared Arab culture of its inhabitants, excluding Kurds, but notably including Jews. Many Iraqi Jews strongly identified with the original Arab nationalist ideology, as they understood themselves to be entirely culturally and historically Arab. When Islam was added to the identity Jews and Christians immediately lost their qualifications as "Arabs" in the truest sense, and began to be seen more as outsiders and dampeners of the culture. Adding fuel to the fire, one of the major pan-Arab

¹⁷ Ali Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq*.

¹⁹ Halperin, "The Jews of Iraq."

²⁰ Moshe Gat, "Iraq and its Jewish Minority," 204.

²¹ Moshe Gat, "Iraq and its Jewish Minority," 206.

organizations in Iraq, which was headed by the Palestinian Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, began openly decrying both Jews and Zionism, usually without differentiating between the two.²² The Nazi German consulate in Baghdad worked equally hard to disgrace the Iraqi Jewish character by publishing *Mein Kampf* in newspapers, and ensuring that Radio Berlin was clearly broadcast throughout the country. Nazi efforts were especially effective amongst younger Iraqis, whose experience with the job market left them easily susceptible to conspiracies related to Jewish control of the economy. The blending of these various forms of propaganda and prejudice shifted the status of Iraqi Jewry greatly. Where they were once welcomed, Jews were now scorned, judged, and mocked. Although there were occasional instances of intense, physical antisemitism as a result of the changing political climate, the Jewish community lived mostly without fear of violence until the shocking events of June 1, 1941.

In April 1941, a group of Iraqi military officers monikered “the Golden Square” staged a coup in Baghdad. Frustrated with the consistent British presence in the region, their goal was to break their government from Britain’s ranks by force. The coup was successful, and the regent of Iraq,²³ Abd al-Ilah, fled to Jordan. In his wake, the Golden Square officers appointed their leader, politician Rashid Ali al-Gailani, as Prime Minister. al-Gailani was devoutly pro-Nazi, and hoped that Germany could come to his aid in banishing the British from the Middle East. In a blow to Golden Square aspirations, Nazi Germany

was preoccupied with fighting in Europe and no assistance came. The British, on the other hand, wasted no time in returning to their Mesopotamia of old. By May, troops brandishing the Union Jack had surrounded Baghdad, leaving al-Gailani’s fledgling government with no choice but surrender. By June 1, the Golden Square had collapsed.²⁴ During the two days it took for Abd al-Ilah to be reinstated as regent, all hell broke loose in Baghdad’s Jewish quarter. Angry at the coup’s failure and the return of the British, defeated Golden Square soldiers and members of Nazi-adjacent political groups joined together to carry out a “retaliatory” attack against the Jews of Baghdad.²⁵ This ordeal, now known as the “Farhud”, was 30 hours long, and resulted in the deaths of 180 Baghdadi Jews. Those who survived remembered the day as one of the most terrifying in their lives. Many Baghdadi Jews sheltered in their homes, some even paying policemen to protect them.²⁶ Those who were unlucky enough to be found by the attackers were often tortured, raped, and sometimes mutilated before their deaths. Telling his story as an older man, Farhud survivor Steven Acre recounted how he, at age nine, had witnessed unimaginable horrors committed by the Golden Square soldiers and Nazis. Hiding in a palm tree by his house, Steven watched a group of men enter the home of his mother’s best friend, whose name was Sabicha. He heard screams for some time, then witnessed the men emerging from Sabicha’s doorway, which they promptly set on fire. They were all laughing, and one of them appeared to be holding a piece of meat in his hands.

²² Moshe Gat, “Iraq and its Jewish Minority,” 206.

²³ The king was not of age at this time, so all decisions were made by his regent.

²⁴ Moshe Gat, “Iraq and its Jewish Minority,” 207.

²⁵ It is important to note that a pogrom was also carried out in Basra in May of 1941, resulting in no

casualties. The motives for the Basra pogrom were the same as the more infamous one in Baghdad.

²⁶ The price for police protection during the Farhud was half a dinar per shot.

According to Steven, he was later informed that the man had been holding one of Sabicha's breasts.²⁷

The Farhud was inarguably the beginning of the end for Babylon's Jewish community. Having never before fallen victim to such intense, organized violence in their 2,000 years of history, the Jewish community of Iraq fell into shambles. A sizable minority of Jews elected to leave immediately, usually heading for India, where there was a large community of Iraqi Jewish expats, or Palestine.²⁸ The rest of Iraq's Jews refused to relocate despite the trauma, a sentiment that would all but disappear after the murder of Shafiq Adas. Even after the horrors of the Farhud many Jews felt safe in Iraq, largely because of the support they received from their government and non-Jewish neighbors. The Iraqi state was accepting of its Jewish citizens, and genuinely attempted to protect them during the politically tense years leading up to the Golden Square coup. In the early 1940s there was no indication that state-sanctioned antisemitic violence would occur under the dominion of Abd al-Ilah or any other representative of the Hashemite kingdom. Iraqi Jews were also comforted by the fact that many of their gentile neighbors took active steps to protect them during the Farhud, sometimes risking their own lives to do so. Feeling as though they were once again safe amongst their countrymen, many Iraqi Jews got to work rebuilding their lives, usually enlisting the support of their gentile neighbors to do so. Life returned to a state of semi-normality by 1942, and most Jews began to regard the Farhud as nothing more

than an ugly scar on their community's back. By the mid-1940s the community had regained its pre-coup status and was prospering. Some of the refugees of the Farhud even chose to return to Iraq just a year or two after they had fled, coming to the conclusion that tensions had decreased enough for their homeland to be safe again.²⁹ Although the Farhud was a future-altering moment for the Jews of Iraq, it did not have a long-lasting effect on the way that the community functioned, unlike the murder of Shafiq Adas, which changed Iraqi Jewry completely. More than anything, the Farhud was a warning sign of what was to come.

Until the atrocities of the Farhud, Zionist sentiment was all but absent from the Iraqi Jewish consciousness. During the early 20th century most propagators of Zionism were European Jews, whose unfamiliarity with and disrespect towards Arab culture made it nearly impossible for Iraqi Jews to resonate with them. "Ambassadors" from Palestine, sent to Iraq to spread the Zionist message, were often treated with indifference by the local Jewry, who had no intention of leaving their homeland.³⁰ In the late 1930s, as tensions between Jews and Arabs were reaching a fever pitch in Palestine, Iraqi Jews fell victim to random, unprovoked acts of violence more than they ever had before.³¹ In response, the Iraqi Jewish elite, including the country's Chief Rabbi, loudly and proudly displayed their support for their "Arab brethren" in Palestine, and openly

²⁷ Sarah Ehrlich, "Farhud Memories: Baghdad's 1941 Slaughter of the Jews," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, June 1, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13610702>.

²⁸ Alisa Douer, *Jews of Iraq*, (Logos Verlag Berlin, 2017), 72.

²⁹ Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford Press, 2012), 125.

³⁰ Esther Meir Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country: Jews in Iraq in the 1940s* (Routledge Press, 2004), 213.

³¹ According to a British report from 1939 an estimated 3-5 Jews were attacked a day, likely in "retaliation" for the violence in Palestine.

decried Zionism.³² Even after the Farhud, many older Iraqi Jews openly disliked Zionism, or at least considered it to be a useless ideology. The few that did resonate with Zionism were usually religious and motivated by the idea of dwelling in proximity to holy places like the Western Wall. Shafiq Adas's own mother-in-law, a deeply religious Jew, had moved herself to Jerusalem sometime before 1948.³³ In contrast to their parents, Iraqi Jewish youth of the 1940s were often drawn to Zionism. Horrified by the Farhud, which was the defining event of their youth, young Iraqi Jews sought to protect and uplift their community in any way possible.³⁴ The Zionist movement provided an outlet for them to safely enjoy their culture, and served as a way for them to organize against the antisemitic threats that continued to plague their community.³⁵ Even within the Zionist movement, though, most members focused far less on the idea of a mass immigration to Palestine, and instead chose to dedicate their efforts to bettering the conditions for Jews in their homeland. Most Iraqi Zionists did not leave the country until after Shafiq Adas had taken his last breath.

While most of the Iraqi Jewish community suffered and succeeded as a collective, Shafiq Adas largely kept to himself. Considered to be one of the richest men in Iraq, Adas was fairly elusive to those not in the upper echelons of society. Born in 1900 to a rich Syrian-Jewish family, Shafiq first set foot in his future home of Basra shortly after the end of the first World War. He and his older brother, Avraham, had arrived in Iraq to take advantage of the business opportunities presented by the

nation's newfound British occupation. Adas likely started his career in Basra as a car mechanic, gradually climbing the ladder of success in the world of automobiles. It was rumored that he personally met Henry Ford,³⁶ who gave him the exclusive license to sell Ford Automobiles in Iraq.³⁷ The Ford car was the most desirable in the world at the time, and Iraqi elites from across the nation flocked to Adas to purchase it. By the 1940s Shafiq, and the Muslim man he had taken as a business partner, had expanded their business to include the reselling of British scrap metal, a decision that proved to be very lucrative. By the time of his conviction, Shafiq was one of the richest men in the entirety of the country. He lived in Basra with his wife Aliza, the daughter of a well-off Iraqi Jewish merchant, and their six children. He consistently mingled with the Iraqi elite, including the regent Abd al-Ilah and Prime Minister Nuri Said, and was considered an incredibly influential figure in Iraqi society. To most, Shafiq Adas was untouchable, until he wasn't.

Shafiq Adas's conviction came during the tensest period of Iraqi Jewish history since the Farhud. Since early 1948, Iraqi Jews had been paying the price of a Zionist movement very few of them participated in. Angry at the approaching establishment of the State of Israel, the Iraqi government began to abuse its Jewish community as a form of retribution, marking the first time Iraqi Jews experienced state-sanctioned antisemitism since the days of the Ottoman Empire.

Iraqi police officers began extorting wealthy Jewish businessmen, often threatening to arrest them or publicly accuse them of being

³² Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 104.

³³ Schwartz, "Dryyfws h'yr'qy: mšpṭ Hr'wwh šṭlṭl 't yhdwt 'yr'q b '48."

³⁴ Many young Iraqi Jews were also drawn to Communism, because they believed it to be a

Communist society would keep the Jewish community safe.

³⁵ Halperin, "The Jews of Iraq."

³⁶ Ironically, a renowned antisemite.

³⁷ Schwartz, "Dryyfws h'yr'qy: mšpṭ Hr'wwh šṭlṭl 't yhdwt 'yr'q b '48."

Zionists if they did not pay an allotted amount of money.³⁸ Jews of all backgrounds were being arrested daily, put on trial, and incarcerated or fined for their “Zionist” activities, often without proof. The Jews “lucky” enough not to have been incarcerated could no longer have traditional Jewish prayer shawls in their homes. Even possessing a letter written in Hebrew could be enough to warrant an accusation of Zionism. The situation had gotten so intense that many high-profile Jews had resorted to begging their Muslim friends for protection against the government crackdown. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared itself a state. On that same day, Iraq, along with nearly every other Arab nation, had confidently declared war on the fledgling country, certain they would crush it in days. By mid-July, the news returning to Iraq from the frontlines was growing grimmer by the hour. Within a week the war had ended, and the Iraqi army returned defeated. The entire country was shocked. Iraqi lives had been lost fighting a two-month war many thought would last days, and their deaths had been in vain. The government was especially embarrassed and immediately declared Zionism a capital offense. Although he didn’t know it at the time, the last weeks of July 1948 had sealed Shafiq’s fate, and the fate of his people.

In late July 1948, Shafiq Adas had received a knock on the door of his office. His visitor was not a familiar face, but Adas welcomed him regardless, offering him coffee and a cigarette. Shafiq didn’t know it, but he was staring his death in the face. His mysterious visitor was the editor of “*A-Nas*,” Basra’s nationalistic newspaper known for its strong anti-Jewish sentiments, and he wanted a thousand dinars. As mentioned previously, the act of

blackmailing high profile Jews was not new in Iraq, and it was almost a miracle that Adas had made it to July without proving his loyalty through cash. Though the situation was “normal”, Adas was not. He knew what the editor wanted from him, and he was not going to give it. Adas was confident that no harm would come from refusing this man’s request, after all, he was one of the most powerful men in the country, with the most high-profile connections possible. He was also openly anti-Zionist and hadn’t been spotted in a synagogue more than a handful of times during his three decades in Basra. In his mind, *anyone* would be able to see through whatever accusations *A-Nas* could publish about him, so he needn’t give the situation a second thought. He could not have been more wrong. Two days later, *A-Nas* accused Adas of “spying for Zionism and selling weapons ‘to the Zionist gang fighting the Arab people.’”³⁹ The public was outraged, and many newspapers called for his arrest. His friends, including the brother of the Basra police chief, warned him that he needed to leave Iraq, but he did not believe them. On August 5, he voluntarily arrived at the Basra police station, hoping to clarify his situation with Law Enforcement. Instead, he was immediately arrested. He spent a month in Basra’s central prison, which was notorious for its poor conditions, before his trial began on September 11th. The judge presiding over the case was Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Naasni, a known Nazi sympathizer. Adas attempted to hire three top-tier defense lawyers, but they all resigned after learning that they would not be allowed to call witnesses to testify. The court accused Shafiq Adas of selling British scrap metal and weapons to Israel and then facilitating the smuggling of the weapons

³⁸ Schwartz, “Dryyfws h’yr’qy: mšpt Hr’wwh štltl ’t yhdwt ’yr’q b ’48.”

³⁹ Schwartz, “Dryyfws h’yr’qy: mšpt Hr’wwh štltl ’t yhdwt ’yr’q b ’48.”

and metal through Italy and Cyprus. Adas had, in fact, sold scrap metal to *Italy*, but there was virtually no indication that any of it even grazed an Israeli shore. The only evidence the court had against Adas was a payment of 50 dinars that he sent to Jerusalem every month. According to Adas and supported by the location and amount of money sent, this payment was an allowance for his mother-in-law. Despite the complete lack of evidence, Adas was sentenced to pay an 8 million dinar fine and hang by the neck until dead. A few days after his sentencing, his wife Aliza prostrated herself in front of the regent Abd al-Ilah, a friend of Shafiq's and begged him to spare her husband's life. Although he was tortured by the decision, Abd al-Ilah was told that the public would riot if Adas was acquitted, so he did not commute his sentence. On September 23, 1948, after a tearful goodbye to his children and some prayers with Basra's chief Rabbi, Shafiq Adas was hung in front of his own mansion.⁴⁰ The city had the atmosphere of a festival for the rest of the day. Pictures of his body were sold in the shopping district, and processions of Basran civilians paraded through the streets, some throwing stones at Jewish houses.⁴¹

The Jewish community of Iraq was beyond shocked at the events of September 23. Shafiq Adas was entirely inactive in the Jewish community. He did not attend synagogue, his children did not attend Jewish schools, he had very few Jewish friends, and, most importantly, he was firmly anti-Zionist and a proud Iraqi patriot. If someone so rich, connected, and so obviously removed from Jewish life had just met his end at the gallows, what kind of fates awaited them? Soon after his death,

many Jews began packing their bags. Iraqi-Jewish writer Yitzhak Bar-Moshe wrote after the hanging that "From now on there is only one way left. No one will ask why Jews are talking about mass immigration. From that day there is no Jew who thinks otherwise."⁴² Another Iraqi Jewish writer Shalom Darwish, who was a known anti-Zionist, said that Shafiq's lynching "shocked him severely to the core and undermined his faith in the possibility of life in his homeland."⁴³ Iraq had declared martial law in 1948, meaning that it was impossible for Jews to leave. When martial law was lifted in mid-1949, Jews began fleeing Iraq en-masse, for the first time in 2,500 years. Iraqi Jews with money generally elected to immigrate to Iran or the West, while middle and lower class Jews usually immigrated to Israel.⁴⁴ Between mid-1949 and early 1950, 5,743 Jews left Iraq. By 1952, 130,000 more had left. Although there were multiple factors that inspired the major exodus of Iraqi Jews from their homeland, most Jews likely would not have left had it not been for the murder of Shafiq Adas. His death, and the celebrations that followed it, opened the eyes of Iraqi Jews, and forced them to confront the fact that they would never be safe in their homeland again.

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⁴⁰ He was hung there because the court alleged that he had promised Israel the building as their future embassy in Iraq. There is no proof of this.

⁴¹ Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 190.

⁴² Schwartz, "Dryyfwš h 'yr' qy: mšpṭ Hr' wwh šṭlṭl 't yhdwt 'yr' q b '48."

⁴³ Schwartz, "Dryyfwš h 'yr' qy: mšpṭ Hr' wwh šṭlṭl 't yhdwt 'yr' q b '48."

⁴⁴ Most of them were airlifted to Israel.

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“Our English Jamaican Hero:” Henry Morgan as a Representative of English Perceptions of Piracy

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For HIST 299: Intro to the Study of History

Abstract

Seventeenth-century Jamaica served as a hub for government-sponsored pirates. As a result, many views of these so-called buccaneers would develop both locally and in Europe as the actions of these sea marauders got more brazen. These views were varied and complex. On the island itself, two camps formed: the planter elite, who wished to transition the colony into a plantation-style economic system from a plunder-style piratical economic system, and the pirates who wished to use the island as a base for raids on the Spanish empire. In England, public perception was mostly positive, with many buccaneers being referred to as heroes. One man would come to represent or express all of these views in his life and career. Henry Morgan, one of the most famous pirates of the seventeenth century. He would lead some of the most successful raids against the Spanish main, be arrested, be knighted, and retire to Jamaica as a wealthy planter, all in ten years.

Keywords: Piracy, Henry Morgan, English Jamaica

On September 8, 1655, the English officially conquered the Spanish colony of Jamaica. Though Jamaica was not their primary target, the conquest was still significant. It was the first time in English history that a colony belonging to another nation was taken over by military conquest.¹ The island would prove valuable as a launching point for further harassment of Spanish holdings in the Caribbean, as well as a colony to establish a foothold in the area. To assist in this harrying, the English government began sponsoring private ships to attack Spanish shipping and colonies. Such sponsorship would eventually turn Jamaica and its principal city, Port Royal, into a pirate haven. As such, many varied views began to arise in regard to the privateers.² These opinions were expressed by everyone from colonial officials to English lawmakers and even the public. This multifaceted seventeenth-century view of piracy is reflected in the life, career, and legacy of one of the most famous pirates, Henry Morgan. Morgan climbed the ranks of the buccaneers, became a hero to the English through his raids on Spanish settlements, and eventually lived the remainder of his life as a plantation owner. In his life, he either reflected or personally expressed the many views and opinions of piracy. Throughout this astounding career Morgan largely used the island of Jamaica as a base of operations.

Jamaica was by no means the first target of the Cromwellian expeditionary force that was sent to establish a foothold in the Caribbean. Oliver Cromwell, the ruler of

England after the civil war, had his eyes set on the island of Hispaniola, but the island was well defended and the invasion attempt was a disaster. However, instead of returning to England empty-handed, the expeditionary force turned to the smaller, less defended, and less desirable island of Jamaica. The conquest was part of a lofty plan developed by the English revolutionary government in the 1650s. It believed that the Spanish empire was far-flung and thus susceptible to attack. As a result, it made plans to attack and capture as many colonies as it could in the West Indies to dislodge the Spanish hold on the area. This plan would come to be known as the “Western Design.”³

After their repulsion from Hispaniola, William Penn, the leader of the expedition, decided that the force was too weak to expand the conquest any further and so decided to settle on Jamaica. For five years after that, the English were able to rely on the Royal Navy to defend the island from Spanish counterattacks. But in 1660 the British naval squadron that usually defended Jamaica returned to England, and its replacement was a much smaller force. This reduced naval force is most likely one of the reasons Jamaica developed as a pirate hub in the 1660s.⁴ Though there was a mass proliferation of pirates on the island at this time, not all of the inhabitants supported such a development.

In the seventeenth century, the English colony of Jamaica was torn between two camps: the pirates or privateers who wished to maintain the island as a base for

¹ Carla Pestana, *English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 117.

² There were three main terms used to refer to the sea marauders of the seventeenth century: privateers, buccaneers, and pirates. The terms privateer and buccaneer were essentially used to soften the actions of the English sea marauders which were sometimes illegal. For more information on the use of the word

buccaneer, see pages 90–91 of Lane's *Pillaging the Empire*. For more information on the term privateer see page 107 of Hanna's *Pirate Nests*.

³ Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica*, 117, 15–16.

⁴ Carla Pestana, “Early English Jamaica without Pirates,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2014): 327–28, 332.

plunder, and the planters, who wished to fully transition the colony into a plantation system. Such a duality had been present in English colonies well before the conquest of Jamaica however. For example, in Captain John Smith's⁵ book *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith*, which was written in 1630, there is a call for pirates to “regaine therefore [their] wonton reputations, and endeavour rather to adventure to those faire plantations of our English Nation.”⁶ This statement highlights the English upper-class view of piracy. Smith expresses a clear disdain for pirates, and by making this call he shows that he believes that the English colonies in the West Indies should begin shifting from plunder to a plantation-based economic system. This English elite view of piracy would remain through the conquest of Jamaica and would have a dramatic resurgence with the rise of privateering in the Jamaica.

Though the news of peace between England and Spain reached Jamaica by 1667, the governor at the time, Thomas Modyford, was reluctant to recognize this peace and continued to allow the numerous privateers of the island to harass Spanish shipping. As a result Captain Henry Morgan was able to lead a raid against the Spanish town of Porto Bello. Morgan was the nephew of a distinguished colonel in the British army. At a young age, made his way to the Caribbean where he joined a band of buccaneers in Jamaica. He was able to swiftly rise through the ranks of the buccaneers and became a captain of a ship. After taking part in numerous expeditions

and raids, and after the other foremost buccaneers died or disappeared, Morgan became the leading privateer in Jamaica by the 1660s. This put him in the position to lead his raids on Porto Bello and Panama.⁷

The attacks were justified by Modyford as he heard rumors that the Spanish were planning an attack on his island. Fueled by these rumors, Modyford sent Morgan to capture Spanish prisoners from their colonies for interrogation. Instead, Morgan went to Cuba and raided the town of Puerto Principe. During this raid, the Spanish governor was killed and the raiders carried off as much loot as they could. Such an action was significant, because it was a blatant disregard of orders from Modyford to just capture Spanish prisoners. After this raid, Morgan sailed to the larger town of Porto Bello.⁸ In a similar manner to Puerto Principe, Morgan's buccaneers defeated the Spanish forces, tortured the prisoners into revealing treasure, and looted everything they could. The buccaneers then departed with all the loot they could carry and sailed to Cuba to divide the plunder. After the division, they sailed back to Jamaica to regroup.⁹

The raid on Porto Bello represents the independence that buccaneers had from the colonial governors who commissioned them. The commission that Modyford gave Morgan explicitly forbade him from any land actions against Spain. According to Hanna, the only exception to this embargo on land attacks was if there was explicit evidence that an invasion of Jamaica was imminent. Morgan tried to use this excuse for his brazen raid, but as evidenced by his

⁵ The John Smith referred to here was the famous English colonist of the early seventeenth century who helped establish the colony of Virginia.

⁶ John Smith, *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith, in Europe, Asia, Affrica, and America, from anno Domini 1593 to 1629*, John Haviland (1630), 60.

⁷ Clarence Haring, *The Buccaneers in the West Indies in the XVII Century* (E. P. Dunton and Company, 1910), 142–44.

⁸ Haring, *The Buccaneers*, 145.

⁹ Alexandre Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America* (1684), 142–46, 149. Exquemelin provides an extensive first-hand account of the sack of Porto Bello.

former crewmate, Alexandre Exquemelin's account, no such invasion was expected. The raids on Porto Bello and Puerto Principe were just the beginning of a series of raids conducted by Morgan from 1667 to 1671. The last of these raids was the sacking and burning of Panama in 1671.¹⁰ Though the sacking of Panama was a notorious feat that was applauded in Jamaica, the tenuous peace between Spain and England had been finalized in 1670, one year before the sacking of Panama, officially making Morgan's actions illegal acts of piracy.

The raids conducted by Morgan, particularly in Panama, had such significant consequences in Europe that King Charles II tried to pardon all privateers who willingly surrendered, granting them land in Jamaica with which the English government hoped they would peacefully retire. The message used by the crown was markedly similar to that used by John Smith forty years earlier: a call for pirates to turn away from their violent way of life and instead embrace what the English elite saw as a more honorable career, that being planting. Messaging such as this showed the continuation of the divide between plantation owners and privateers that gripped Jamaica for the remainder of the century. To support the transition from a plunder to a planter colony, the English brought back the anti-buccaneer Governor Sir Thomas Lynch to govern the colony.¹¹

While this change in governance was underway in Jamaica, the English government directly responded to the acts of Henry Morgan. It first aimed to punish Modyford for initiating the attacks, although the root of this punishment was mostly just to appease Spanish aggravation in Europe

rather than to actually bring him to justice. As such, secret orders were sent out for his arrest upon the arrival of Lynch in 1671. After his arrest, Modyford was sent to England and imprisoned in the Tower of London, albeit very comfortably, and was released after two years with no trial. After he was released, he was allowed to return to Jamaica and even appointed chief justice.¹²

A similar punishment was expected for Henry Morgan as the actual perpetrator of the actions, but his arrest was delayed for months. Finally, on April 7, 1672, orders were officially sent out for Morgan's arrest. Fortunately for Morgan, he had many influential friends in England who were able to defend his honor. When he arrived in England, he was hardly treated as a prisoner, with no record of him even being imprisoned in the Tower of London.¹³ While there is not much information on Morgan's time in England, it can be inferred from private correspondence and letters that he was well received by the gentry. After his short time in England, he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica and simultaneously knighted.¹⁴ Such a positive reception in England was unsurprising given the impressiveness of his actions, but it was certainly not the punishment that the Spanish government expected. Instead, it seems that Morgan's trip was more of a victory lap than retribution. However, Morgan's arrest and "deportation" to England mark an important turning point in his life. He had officially gone from pirate to politician in the span of less than a year.

While English planters were genuinely fearful of Spanish retaliatory attacks on Jamaica, another inherently

¹⁰ Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 113.

¹¹ Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 116.

¹² Arthur Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir Henry Morgan: With an Account of the English Settlement of the Island of Jamaica (1655-1688)* (Macmillan Company of Canada, 1935), 202–3, 217.

¹³ Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir Henry Morgan*, 218–20.

¹⁴ Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir Henry Morgan*, 223–25.

classist fear of theirs was the social mobility of piracy. This is evident in a letter from Thomas Lynch from 1671 saying that privateering “does but enrich the worst sort of people.”¹⁵ While such class movement that the Jamaican elite fretted over was not widespread, the privateering of the seventeenth century did allow for more mobility than many other careers at the time. Evidence of such mobility can be found in Exquemelin’s account of how pirates divided their plunder: “The Captain, or chief Commander, is allotted five or six portions to what the ordinary seaman have; the Master’s Mate only two; and other Officers proportionate to their employment. After whom they draw equal parts from the highest even to the lowest mariner, the boys not being omitted.”¹⁶ Such a statement suggests that the social mobility the planters feared was theoretically possible but realistically unlikely.

Such a social climb from Henry Morgan was possible not only because he was captain but also because he cheated his crew out of much of the loot from his famous raids. Accusations were leveled both by Exquemelin and the surgeon of the expedition, Richard Browne, who Hanna claims “believed plunder amounted to £70,000, but sailors only received a £10 share.”¹⁷ This exploitation earned Morgan money to allow him to climb to the top of the social ladder. Morgan’s rise was even more frightening to planters because information came out suggesting that he began his career as a poor man. Though Exquemelin claims that his father was “a rich yeoman,” he also alleges that Morgan was sold into indentured servitude when he

arrived in the Caribbean.¹⁸ Morgan denied such allegations, but this was most likely to defend the public image he was trying to control at that time. However, if the origins described by Exquemelin are to be believed, Morgan actuated one of the primary fears that planters imagined: a lower-class individual climbing the social ladder through violent and dishonorable means. But despite representing one of the planter’s biggest problems with piracy, Morgan soon joined them, both in occupation and viewpoint.

From 1680 to 1683, Morgan bought around two thousand acres of land, establishing himself in the planter class and separating himself from his buccaneer past.¹⁹ As well as buying land, Morgan also began to assume the role of a planter through his rhetoric. Although he still retained some sympathies for pirates upon his return from England, by 1680 he had adopted the views of the planters. For example, in a letter sent from Morgan to the secretary of state, Lord Sunderland, he declares that one of the main problems with Jamaica was “the privateers, which dr[ew] off white servants and all men of unfortunate or desperate condition.”²⁰ Morgan would go from representing and acting on behalf of one major viewpoint of pirates of the era, by being a pirate himself, to representing the opposite viewpoint by becoming a planter and adopting their politics.

Around this time, Exquemelin had his book *The Buccaneers of America* published in English for the first time. The first English edition was very charitable to Morgan and his actions, calling him “Our

¹⁵ Lynch to [Privy Council?], [December?] 1671, in *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*, Mark Hanna (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 117.

¹⁶ Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 60.

¹⁷ Hanna, *Pirates Nests*, 115.

¹⁸ Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 120.

¹⁹ Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir Henry Morgan*, 347–48.

²⁰ Morgan to Lord Sunderland, July 5, 1680. in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 10, 1677-1680*. Eds. by W Noel Sainsbury and John Fortescue (1896), 414.

English Jamaican Hero” on the title page. However, there was one glaring issue that Morgan found with the publication: it claimed that “he resolved to go in the service of one, who . . . sold him as soon as he came on shore.”²¹ Though Hanna, in his book *Pirates Nests*, argues that this anger stemmed from Morgan’s desire to distinguish between pirates and privateers, it is equally, if not more likely, that it was because the accusation disrupted the integration into his new class. Furthermore, in the letter to Sunderland, Morgan clearly states that he had a distinct disdain for “privateers.” By using this term, Morgan showed that he was not necessarily trying to distinguish between pirates and privateers, but rather he was trying to immerse himself in his new occupation and political views.²²

Such a view was one of many that both Morgan as well as the English and Jamaican populations had in the seventeenth century. Many people had many different opinions, but of all these views, two main camps stood out: the buccaneers, who wished to use Jamaica as a base for plunder against the Spanish empire, and the planters who saw the buccaneer's business as reckless and dangerous to the colony, as they feared it may have sparked a Spanish retaliatory attack against Jamaica. These two camps were represented by very different people, but one man came to represent both Henry Morgan, one of the most successful pirates of the seventeenth century, would use his plundered wealth to become a planter and openly express a disdain for his former occupation. Throughout his career, he also represented the public views of piracy. In the 1670s, when he was taken to England, he was treated as a hero and knighted, representing another viewpoint outside of the dichotomy of the plunder/planter rivalry in Jamaica. All of the many views expressed by Henry Morgan

can ultimately serve as a good representation of perceptions of seventeenth-century Jamaican piracy.

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²¹ Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 120.

²² Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 139.

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Between Civilization and Wildness: The Shifting Images of the Mountain Man in the Making of the American West

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Independent Research

Abstract

This essay examines three images of the mountain men: the frontier hero, the immoral savage, and the man of the Jacksonian era. Each representation is analyzed through the identification and discussion of its defining features. The primary materials of this essay include historiographical works and original sources, such as the autobiographies of mountain men and travelers' accounts. The study concludes that these three images are not mutually exclusive, as they appear in various combinations across different sources and reflect the inherent ambiguity of the mountain men's biographical trajectories.

Keywords: Mountain men, American frontier, cultural representation, historiography, Jacksonian era

Introduction

"There is, perhaps, no class of men on the face of the earth...who lead a life of more continued exertion, peril, and excitement, and who are more enamoured of their occupations, than the free trappers of the West."¹ With these words in *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Washington Irving captured the spirit of the American mountain man - a figure that would come to embody the restless dynamism of the early republic and the mythology of the frontier. More than a century after Irving's account, this image continues to dominate both literary and cultural representations of the mountain men.² However, the subsequent historiography indicates that this idealized conception coexists with alternative constructions. The first portrays the mountain man as a product of the Andrew Jackson era, embodying individualism, mobility, and self-reliance. The second presents him as a "submissive and obedient slave," an object of exploitation by the fur companies.³ The latter image emerged from the travel literature of the 1840s, during a period of economic decline in the fur trade. The former, by contrast, gained popularity in the revisionist historiography of the 1970s and 1980s, which sought to contextualize the frontier within the broader tendencies of American capitalism and expansionism.⁴ Therefore, this study aims to examine these representations comparatively, highlighting

the ideological and material conditions that produced them.

The image of the mountain man was shaped through a range of texts, including various ego documents - personal writings such as diaries and autobiographies as well as the narratives of travelers, scholars, and literary authors. The latter offered the most vivid portrayals of frontier life in the Rocky Mountains, and their influence extended even to the trappers themselves, some of whom explicitly referenced these writers in their memoirs.⁵ Nevertheless, the image of the mountain man as an autonomous and charismatic hero arose primarily from self-narratives, in which he often mythologized his own experiences and portrayed himself as a conqueror of the frontier's "wildness."⁶ Such a metaphor implies both imperial expansion and the "civilizing mission" directed toward Indigenous peoples.⁷ A similar trope was widespread in cultural and ideological discourses of the nineteenth century, but one of the founders of this approach in historiography can be considered Frederick Turner, the historian who wrote a seminal work on the significance of the frontier in American history and who greatly popularized this theme. He defined the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization."⁸ It is noteworthy that in this case the notion of an abstract point is present, yet throughout Turner's work the leitmotif, understood as a recurring thematic

¹ Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, Literary Classics of the United States (Library of America, 2004), 641.

² William H. Goetzmann, "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 402-3.

³ Goetzmann, "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," 404.

⁴ H. L. Carter and M. C. Spencer, "Stereotypes of the Mountain Man," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1975): 18.

⁵ Warren A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains: A Diary of Wanderings on the Sources of the Rivers Missouri, Columbia, and Colorado from February, 1830, to November, 1835* (Old West, 1940), 69.

⁶ F. A. Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year of 1839* (Missouri Historical Society, 1912), 17.

⁷ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 531.

⁸ Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Barnes & Noble, 2010), 10.

element, is that of a line of contact which is not static but constantly moving. This indicates the dynamic nature of the frontier, which is not fixed in any clearly defined position.

In addition, special attention should be paid to the dichotomy between the state and the frontier, which demonstrates the process of constructing Said's "Other" in relation to the frontier and thereby helps the state define its own identity through constant comparison.⁹ In this case, the "Other" means a spatial image that emerged as a result of the state's representation of the frontier territory through various actors. It includes a set of demarcation categories aimed at creating, maintaining, and embedding this image within the state's political discourse, which enables the state to structure space according to the desired narrative. Such an image may take the form of a messianic idea, through which the state colonizes the frontier territory not purely for selfish purposes, but for an allegedly higher, utilitarian good to raise it to a civilized condition. At the same time, the sovereign state may adopt a different perspective that denies the existence of civilization's opposite as something given in advance. Instead, it envisions a kind of "void" or "wildness" that includes both the natural world and its potential Indigenous inhabitants. In this second case, wildness is not perceived as "nothing," but is deliberately homogenized. This approach was characteristic of many colonial powers and, in particular, influenced Turner's way of describing the frontier territory. Accordingly, as actors within the framework of the frontier, the mountain men were no

exception to this conceptualization and were often viewed precisely through such binarism. From this point of view, it is possible to see the mountain men as symbolic agents in the cultural and ideological production of the American West.

In addition to fur trading, mountain men explored new territories, conducted topographical surveys, and accompanied missionaries and settlers.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this aspect of their activity is represented primarily in historiography. For their contemporaries, the prevailing image was that of the frontier hero. A particularly revealing source for analyzing this image is the autobiography of James Beckwourth, which was written down by another person from Beckwourth's dictation, as he was illiterate. According to this account, Beckwourth's adventures included escaping from Indigenous captors over a distance of ninety miles, fighting a bear, becoming a chief of the Crow tribe, and taking part in the conquest of California. Throughout his autobiography, Beckwourth seeks to present himself as the best hunter in any expedition and the strongest warrior among the Indians. At one point, he even compares himself to Alexander the Great.¹¹

This autobiography stands out among other mountain men's narratives, as it simultaneously belongs to the genre of the slave narrative, given that Beckwourth was African American, even though he says little about his origins or the circumstances of his emancipation. In this respect, it should be noted that not all mountain men depicted their experiences in such a manner. Nevertheless, their autobiographies

⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 2003), 54–55.

¹⁰ Scott Wyson, "The Mountain Men, the Cartographers, and the Lakes," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (2018): 129–30; James H. Maguire et al., *A Rendezvous Reader: Tall,*

Tangled, and True Tales of the Mountain Men, 1805–1850 (University of Utah Press, 1997), 267.

¹¹ James P. Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians: Written from His Own Dictation by T. D. Bonner* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 111, 118, 149, 387–88, 420.

generally share a common tendency toward the mythologization of their own actions and personalities.

The Mountain Man as a Frontier Hero

Overall, several features characteristic of the frontier hero can be identified. Among them are freedom from civilization, a liminal position between the “savage” and the “civilized” man, self-sufficiency, and a high degree of adaptation to the natural environment, including resilience to extreme weather and encounters with wild animals. The first trait is closely linked to space, as the idea of remoteness from urban and political centers plays a key role here.¹² Frontier territories often lacked stable institutions or enduring forms of social life, except for the constant intensity of the processes unfolding within them. By this, I mean the unusual pace of social mobility, uncharacteristic of regions under the control of states or other structured authorities. Such a perspective makes it possible to characterize the state of the frontier as fluid. This property is most fully articulated in sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Modernity*, where he observes that “fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy.”¹³ Consequently, applying Bauman’s concept to the frontier allows for an intriguing conclusion about the frontier’s changeable and metamorphic structure, as well as about a distinctive perception of temporality within this phenomenon.

Furthermore, it is possible to suggest

that the frontier exists under conditions of modernity. If it does not surpass other territories, it at least stands at their conceptual vanguard. The philosopher Marshall Berman wrote that modernity represents “a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.” Moreover, it “promises us adventure” while “threatening to destroy everything we have.”¹⁴ From these words it follows that the frontier can indeed be understood through the categories of modern temporality, for it shares the same qualities: circulation of states, fluidity, rhizomatic structure in Deleuze’s sense, and processes that are both intense and constantly changing, creating opportunities while simultaneously annihilating them. To use Berman’s words in relation to space, the frontier manifests “the glory of modern energy and dynamism.”¹⁵ Some frontiersmen and other actors who enter this zone might undergo a condition akin to social death, as their external status-based identities are transformed or even destroyed. However, they acquire new possibilities for realizing their ideas and ambitions that had previously been beyond their reach.

Beyond the conceptualization of the frontier as a space of opportunity, it was also described as a place of refuge. For example, the mountain man R. Sage wrote that a true hunter “gradually learns to hate the restraints of civilization” and therefore “assimilates” into the frontier environment.¹⁶ However, it appears to be unlikely that all mountain men were escapists, since many engaged in the

¹² Sanjib Gohain, “Selective Access: Or, How States Make Remoteness,” *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 27, no. 2 (2019): 217–18.

¹³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Penguin Books, 1988), 15.

¹⁵ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 121.

¹⁶ Rufus B. Sage, *Rocky Mountain Life: Or, Startling Scenes and Perilous Adventures in the Far West* (Edward Canby, 1890), 38.

fur trade primarily to accumulate capital.¹⁷ Moreover, the mountain men themselves drew clear distinctions among different types of hunters, and the image of the “free” man applied only to one of them. There was, for instance, a category of “contract hunters” who signed agreements with fur companies. They were provided with equipment and received regular payments, in exchange for which they were required to procure furs exclusively for a single company.¹⁸ Alongside them existed another type of hunter whose image became dominant, though they were in the minority.¹⁹ These were the “free trappers,” distinguished by the absence of fixed obligations to any company. Such hunters often sought to profit from competition among fur companies, selling their goods to whoever offered the highest price.²⁰ They had their own equipment, could alter routes at will, and interacted most closely with various Indigenous tribes.²¹ According to mountain man W. A. Ferris, they roamed “through this wild and desolate region, free as the mountain air, leading a hazardous and perilous life, governed by no laws but their own wild impulses.”²²

The second feature of the frontier hero is the liminal position. The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep identified three stages in the process of transition: separation, transition, and aggregation.²³ The first, according to van Gennep’s follower Victor Turner, marks the departure of an individual or group from a fixed point within the social structure, such as when a mountain man leaves St. Louis to join a fur-

trapping expedition. This is followed by a period of liminality, characterized by maximal ambiguity and uncertainty, reflected in their time at the mountain rendezvous, where trappers lived between different social and cultural orders. The third stage completes the rite of passage and leads the subject into a new state. In the case of the mountain man, this occurs when he returns to frontier towns like St. Louis, attempting to reintegrate into society but still marked by his life on the frontier.²⁴ Applying this classical theory of liminality, one may conclude that within the frontier space of the Rocky Mountains, the mountain men occupied a distinct social position that was characterized by the binary oppositions of “civilization” and “wildness.” However, the mountain men cannot be understood solely through this dichotomy, for within the frontier there were no clear or homogeneous categories of either “civilization” or “wildness.” Among the mountain men were individuals of diverse social and ethnic origins, including Latin Americans, Franco-Canadians, and Anglo-Americans, among others. The same can be said of the Indigenous tribes, who differed in language, worldview, and cultural practices. Nevertheless, sources indicate that mountain men were sometimes described as “half-civilized and half-savage.”²⁵ This perception emerged from the intensive cross-cultural exchanges between mountain men and Indigenous peoples. They often traveled together, traded, and intermarried, and some mountain men adopted not only Indigenous hunting and communication

¹⁷ William H. Goetzmann, “The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man,” *American Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 414–15.

¹⁸ George F. Ruxton, *Wild Life in the Rocky Mountains* (Outing, 1916), 152.

¹⁹ Ruxton, *Wild Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 152.

²⁰ Robert M. Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous: Mountain Men and the Paths to the Pacific* (Holt Paperbacks, 1998), 123.

²¹ Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous*, 123–24.

²² Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 40–41.

²³ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 21–22.

²⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Cornell University Press, 1977), 94.

²⁵ Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, 645.

practices but also elements of their belief systems.²⁶

The traveler W. H. Gray, who later became a historian, recorded a striking encounter with a young man who was “so deeply attached to Indian ideas and customs that he considered it beneath his dignity to abandon the ancient usages of the Indians for... civilization.”²⁷ Although this case was rather exceptional, it does not mean that other mountain men were immune to cultural influence. On the contrary, the experience of intercultural interaction became one of the defining characteristics of the mountain men as a social group within the frontier environment.

In addition to their liminal position, the image of the mountain men is marked by self-sufficiency and a high degree of adaptability. These traits can be considered together, as they express the mountain men’s ability to survive for long periods under extreme conditions. Their diaries, written during expeditions in the Rocky Mountains, often reflect this endurance. For instance, the memoirs of the mountain man T. James revealed that hunger and harsh weather were among the most formidable challenges he faced.²⁸

A particularly vivid example of the dangers that defined the mountain men’s existence is the story of John Colter. According to T. James, after an encounter with Indigenous people, Colter lost all his equipment and survived alone for several days before reaching a fur company fort..²⁹ This episode became legendary among mountain men, as James recalled: “When we

passed over the place where Colter ran his race, and listened to his story, an unaccountable terror seized us all. We were struck by the nameless and countless dangers that seemed to surround us on every side.”³⁰ Over time, the story of Colter’s escape outlived the mountain men themselves and entered the canon of frontier legendry.³¹ It may thus be concluded that the experience of survival in the wilderness became a constitutive element in the enduring image of the mountain man.

The Mountain Man as an Immoral Savage

The image discussed above remains the prevailing representation in both literature and historiography. However, a number of contemporary works offer an alternative perspective on the mountain men. According to historian William Goetzmann, mountain men were often portrayed as drunkards, unsuccessful traders, and half-savages exploited by fur companies.³² Several scholars trace the origins of this image to the writings of travelers and authors such as George Ruxton, Francis Parkman, and Lewis Garrard.³³ The distinctiveness of these accounts lies in the fact that their authors visited the Rocky Mountain region in the 1840s, when the fur trade was already in steep decline, a context that might have shaped the more critical portrayals that Goetzmann describes.³⁴

It is possible that those who traveled through the Rocky Mountains after the collapse of the fur trade were likely to form a less romanticized view of the mountain

²⁶ Maguire et al., *A Rendezvous Reader*, 113.

²⁷ Maguire et al., and Barclay, *A Rendezvous Reader*, 186.

²⁸ Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans* (Missouri Historical Society, 1916), 42–43.

²⁹ James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, 57–62.

³⁰ James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, 63–64.

³¹ Maguire et al., *A Rendezvous Reader*, 278.

³² Goetzmann, “The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man,” 403–4.

³³ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 18.

³⁴ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 19.

men. However, many of the traits identified by scholars as characteristic of this later image can also be found in earlier sources, including the narratives written by the mountain men themselves. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that the works of the aforementioned writers do contain a markedly negative portrayal, although positive elements are present as well. For instance, Francis Parkman likens the hunter's life in the Rockies to "chivalric annals," while Lewis Garrard describes the mountain men as "full of good humor, often kind and courteous."³⁵

Even so, the dominant motif in these works is not the mountain men's exploitation or economic failure, but rather a critique of their supposed wildness. George Ruxton, for example, called them "White Indians," meaning "precisely what an uncivilized white man might be considered in an animal state."³⁶ A similar description appears in Garrard, who wrote that mountain men could "tear off a bloody scalp with a grim smile of satisfaction."³⁷ It can be argued that such depictions reflected less an objective account of frontier life but rather an ethnic anxiety rooted in the racialized discourse of Jacksonian America. The mountain men's prolonged interactions with Indigenous societies and landscapes might have undermined the dualisms that structured Euro-American thought. For example, these representations were informed by intellectual traditions that revolved around such oppositions as nature versus culture and civilization versus savagery. In this light, it might be conceptually useful to consider the theory of British anthropologist Tim Ingold, called the "dwelling

perspective."³⁸ The mountain men's *modus vivendi* can be understood as a particular mode of being in the world, grounded in practical engagement with the landscape rather than in the detached, abstract, mimetic logic of their contemporaries. Their survival often depended on developing perceptual and material skills through movement, observation, and cooperation with both Indigenous peoples and the environment. However, their knowledge was situated within what Tim Ingold called "sentient ecology," as these skills were not only transmitted as abstract instructions but also developed through dwelling within a living landscape that included both human and nonhuman actors.³⁹ Therefore, what some observers coded as "wildness" was in fact the consequence of adopting this ecological form of existence. The hybrid position of the mountain men as neither fully "civilized" nor "savage" led to controversial and negative evaluations from middle and upper-class Americans who defined the status of "whiteness" and "civility" through the mastery and separation of culture from nature. It is important to note, however, that depictions of the mountain men's "wildness" appear not only in travelers' accounts from the 1840s but also in their own autobiographies and in earlier narratives from the 1820s and 1830s.⁴⁰ In particular, the presence of such accounts might be explained by the fact that many mountain men internalized this discourse. It can also be argued that the personal narratives of the mountain men are not representative, as they come from the relatively prosperous elite of the group, while most mountain men were illiterate and

³⁵ Francis Parkman, *The California and Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2014), 77.

³⁶ Ruxton, *Wild Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 151.

³⁷ Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail*, 63.

³⁸ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Routledge, 2000), 5.

³⁹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 25.

⁴⁰ Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 289; Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard* (The Lakeside Press, 1934), 101.

possessed a subaltern status that prevented them from expressing their own position. The lack of exact data suggests that the image should not be regarded as entirely distinct but rather as the negative counterpart to the earlier, more heroic representation.

The Mountain Man as a Jacksonian Man

It is necessary to address the final image of the mountain man. Namely, the concept of the “Jacksonian Man.” This term serves as a conventional label summarizing the defining qualities of the “average man” during the presidency of Andrew Jackson.⁴¹ According to historian Richard Hofstadter, the Jacksonian man was “a calculating capitalist, a hardworking and ambitious individual for whom work had become a kind of religion.”⁴² When applied to the mountain men, the main argument suggests that they demonstrated high social mobility and embodied this work-centered ethic. Notably, this interpretation partially deconstructs the traditional representation of the mountain man as either a frontier hero or a “savage”. The leading proponent of this view is William Goetzmann, who used a sample of 446 individuals to argue that the activities of the mountain men were not limited to fur trading, since many later pursued alternative careers rather than the “joy of rendezvous and wildlife”.⁴³

Generally, the concept of the “Jacksonian man” can be meaningfully applied to the mountain men, but several objections should be made regarding Goetzmann’s statistical evidence. First, he does not explain why this particular number was chosen for his sample. Moreover, he draws from a wide range of sources, including newspapers, monographs, and

Senate documents, without providing a clear rationale for their selection. Second, it seems that his statistics are insufficiently representative: according to him, these 446 mountain men comprised 45 percent of all those engaged in the fur trade between 1805 and 1845, but other scholars estimate the total number to have reached several thousand, though an exact figure is impossible to determine.⁴⁴ Goetzmann also provides no sources to substantiate his claim regarding the total population. Third, his dataset relies primarily on the biographies of mountain men whose lives are well documented through autobiographies, contemporary accounts, and similar records, although the majority of mountain men were illiterate and therefore left no such writings. Fourth, his conclusions are weakened by chronological inconsistency: while many mountain men did indeed change professions, this typically occurred after the decline of the fur trade in the 1840s. It would thus be more appropriate to consider only those who abandoned the trade before 1840. Consequently, Goetzmann’s data cannot definitively disprove the image of the frontier hero.

Nevertheless, his findings should not be dismissed entirely. It is plausible that the concept of the “Jacksonian man” does not contradict earlier representations but rather complements them, revealing another dimension of the mountain men’s identity. It is worth noting that Goetzmann’s statistical conclusions were later criticized by other historians. For example, H. Carter and M. Spencer employed a different sample of 300 mountain men’s biographies and arrived at opposing results. Their analysis was based on the multivolume collection edited by LeRoy R. Hafen, *Mountain Men and the Fur*

⁴¹ Goetzmann, “The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man,” 402.

⁴² Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 57.

⁴³ Goetzmann, “The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man,” 410.

⁴⁴ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 22.

Trade of the Far West, which offers concise biographical sketches and serves as a guide to primary sources.⁴⁵ The authors developed a set of criteria corresponding to the three images discussed in this study and calculated the percentage of mountain men fitting each category to determine which image was most historically grounded.

When examining the image of the romantic hero, the authors relied on criteria drawn from Homeric literature such as the experience of battle reminiscent of the *Iliad* and long-distance travel akin to the *Odyssey*.⁴⁶ The second image, that of the immoral savage, was defined by behaviors considered “degrading to a man’s character,” including excessive drinking, betrayal of companions, theft, or the abandonment of Indigenous wives and children.⁴⁷ The third image, representing the calculating capitalist, was based on the criterion of financial success following the individual’s departure from the fur trade. Overall, Carter and Spencer concluded that the image of the romantic hero was the most substantiated, while the other two appeared less convincing.⁴⁸

However, this statistical approach relies on ambiguous and subjective criteria. For instance, it is unclear why the romantic hero is defined through abstract and loosely applied notions drawn from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. If combat experience and travel are used as indicators of heroism, these traits could equally apply to nearly any inhabitant of frontier territories. Furthermore, the identification of drunkenness as a marker of immorality appears to be questionable, since this constitutes a moral judgment inappropriate for the historical context. As W. J. Rorabaugh demonstrates in his classic

study *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, alcohol consumption in early nineteenth-century America was widespread across all social classes, prompting the later rise of temperance movements at the national level.⁴⁹ Consequently, drunkenness alone cannot be regarded as a decisive factor in constructing the image of the “immoral savage.” Similarly, other traits emphasized by the authors appear to reflect their own normative assumptions about what constitutes “degrading” behavior. Overall, the statistical studies of this kind cannot fully resolve the question of which image of the mountain men is most historically valid. Any quantitative analysis must contend with a series of methodological limitations, including chronological scope, geographical variation, and the fragmentary nature of available sources. Accordingly, existing statistical studies often contradict one another and lack full representativeness, though they remain valuable for the conceptual insights they offer.

Conclusion

Thus, both historiography and primary sources reveal three principal images of the mountain men. The depiction of them as frontier heroes appears in their own autobiographies and in travelers’ accounts written before the 1840s, and this image continues to dominate both fiction and historiography. The portrayal of the mountain man as an immoral savage should not be regarded as entirely distinct, for it complements the first image through the dynamic processes of cultural exchange between mountain men and Indigenous

⁴⁵ *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Arthur H. Clark, 1965).

⁴⁶ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 22–23.

⁴⁷ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 24.

⁴⁸ Carter and Spencer, “Stereotypes of the Mountain Man,” 24.

⁴⁹ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 219–22.

tribes. Finally, the application of the concept of the “Jacksonian man” to the mountain men appears justified, despite certain methodological limitations.

Overall, these representations are not isolated from one another. Rather, they often intersect and coexist across different types of literature from fictional narratives to scholarly analyses. Moreover, the sources themselves do not convey a single, coherent image but instead construct a composite representation that frequently contains internal contradictions. In this sense, the various depictions reflect not only diverse interpretive frameworks but also the intrinsic complexity of the phenomenon itself. The mountain men were ambiguous historical figures, driven by different motives and aspirations. Yet, they left a lasting imprint on the folklore, imagination, and history of the American West.

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Nihilism: A Humanist Approach to Nietzsche

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For PHIL 303: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche

Abstract

Nietzsche remains a poignant presence in modern philosophy, and he is widely regarded as the first modern philosopher and one of the first existentialists; Nietzsche’s literary and philosophical corpus has taken on a certain kind of often bleak, often barbaric, and yet, only sometimes empowering reputation. In this essay, I seek to advance a deeply humanistic existential interpretation of Nietzsche’s work by building on top of the underdeveloped existential aspects of his corpus, identifying the crisis of nihilism that Nietzsche wanted so intensely to confront, and reexamining the place of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* in a potential modern philosophical response to Nihilism, with particular attention to individualism and its relation to understanding human beings.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Nihilism, Humanism, Existentialism, Individualism, *Übermensch*

We've been reproached by a peculiar crisis in human history, one that has saturated the west and has already begun to broach the rest of the world's cultures as the institutions of value there will also begin to decay in the face of progress; this decay that has so far proved globally inevitable through industrialization. It is all-encompassing, there is nothing so political, so cultural, so individual, and yet so social as nihilism. Nihilism is that force that negates meaning and value in the myriad selves of mankind. Where man feels alienated, cold, valueless, and meaningless, and like nothing matters he is afflicted by the disease of nihilism.

Our institutions of value have all *but* collapsed, specifically the institution of religion is sinking. In its place, there is a void, and this aberration is called nihilism. Now, make no mistake, humanity has no greater philosophical opponent than nihilism. This is self-evident by the fact that today, no statement is more common sense than the acknowledgement that we, as individuals, often feel worthless deep inside. Nihilism has formed a hole inside us, where our institutions of value used to live and fill with value. The institution of religion once existed for the very purpose of being something that filled that hole and answered that need. Now religion has become perverse, near-harmful, and useless. Those still clinging to religion still do find a sort of self-injurious and limited sense of value in the sinking institution of religion, that's undeniable, and worth what it's worth; but, unfortunately, it's also undeniable that religion has lost the ability to perform its original purpose as efficiently as it once did, and now the institution lives on for its own sake, sometimes to the detriment of its subjects. Again, we have returned to one of the problems that Nietzsche aptly pointed

out: "God has become unbelievable."¹ The trajectory of the institution of religion suggests that its shift from an institution of value, to that of a self-motivated institution of control will continue; in essence, however, the transition is already mostly complete.

An updated interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogical method can be best applied through an institutional lens. Institutions are thus understood as essentially genealogical bodies present in human society; they have "genetic" content, to apply one metaphor. One must, however, understand that institutions are also things which grow, spread, shrink, die, change, stagnate, interact with other institutions, and even possibly give rise to new institutions; this is the heart of the genealogical method. Nietzsche recognizes Christianity as one institution (and within that institution of Christianity, are many other institutions, e.g. the Catholic church), and attributes the institution of Christianity as having originated within that institution of Judaism; Nietzsche condemns the whole of the Abrahamic institution as being infested with "slave morality". This condemnation is strange indeed, but it's better read as a description of the methodology of the so-called "slave revolt in morality", rather than as a condemnation in itself of Jews.

Nihilism's genealogy can be traced to the outset of the renaissance, the reformation, and the enlightenment, to the beginning of the subversion of the institution of religion. The role that religion once played in civilization was absolutely integral. Religion was that institution which gave man justification, not just for the systems he found himself in, but also for his suffering when suffering did arise. This justification is loosely what will be referred

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Random House, 1974), 279.

to when the crisis of value is discussed. Religion didn't just provide value, however, religion also provided meaning and that meaning was conveyed by narrative, and carried with it the ability to convey value, and instilled certain values in man, such as self sacrifice to God and others. In this way, religion functioned simultaneously as an institution of meaning and as an institution of value. The endpoint of this institution, however, is nihilism, as the advancement of knowledge and technology tore holes in the institution's ability to provide meaning.

As it relates to nihilism, we do not seem to observe nihilism's existence before this level of societal development. Did the ancient Romans, or the Parthians, or the Carthaginians, or the Egyptians, or the Akkadians struggle to see value in their lives? No, and Nietzsche says as much. These peoples had their value systems and institutions of values, i.e. their religions and their cultures, to affirm as much of the individual. It's not that these societies were individualist, much to the contrary; these ancient civilizations held much stricter views of the individual as a unit of a family, tribe, society or nation than we do today.

Importantly, the historical processes behind the development and subsequent collapse of the institutions of value have granted the modern age with a few gifts; among them: individualism and anthropocentric hierarchy. The Judeo-Christian institution was relatively empowering of humanity compared to the pagan religions that preceded it, these pagan religions often focused on the primacy of nature. The primacy of nature in the pagan religions are transparently evident in the pantheon of gods that they had; gods of the skies, of the ocean, and the animals, but it was Judeo-Christianity that said "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea

and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."² The strange, nearly self-contradictory, anthropocentrism that Judeo-Christianity brought along with its focus on self-sacrifice and inversion of the values of the master morality is one of the surviving values of Judeo-Christianity. This anthropocentrism sometimes lent its credibility to the politics of Europe. As a value, it helped provide theological justification for the egalitarian liberal revolutions that swept France and the liberal reforms that slowly took hold in England.

Individualism also finds its origins in Judeo-Christianity, particularly empowered by the reformation and the emergence of Protestantism's focus on an individual relationship with God. The rebellion against the Catholic church is also what helped fuel the liberal movements of enlightenment Europe, and Protestantism helped provide a theological justification for the liberal revolutions empowering the individual against the state. For the most part, the rising tide of liberalism that found itself empowered by the rising tide of individualism that was first spawned by the Reformation. Yet, as God becomes unbelievable, and religion decays, the values and the morals remain. The relatively individualist and humanist elements of Judeo-Christianity give birth to secular humanism. The rejection of God, but the affirmation of the human.

These triumphant forces mixed together to create an age of intellectual liberation from the Catholic church, and the values that Judeo-Christianity found themselves forming the framework of the new philosophical projects that emerged in the early modern period. These new liberal philosophies helped give us the physical blessings of equality, liberalism, and

² Genesis 1:26-28 (NIV).

democracy. It was a victorious age for the empowerment of the human being, but it faltered in that, for the first time in human history, equality had become an end in itself, an expectation, and an understanding. This was strange to a species that had grown accustomed to hierarchical systems of society, as Nietzsche points out “It is different with us. who are accustomed to the doctrine of human equality, though not to equality itself.”³ On the metaphysical doctrines, however, the new philosophical projects inevitably became nihilism. The science and rapid technological development of the time began to fill in the gaps that God once filled in, and suffocated God to death. Even as the philosophical projects of Leibniz, Berkeley, and Spinoza attempted to resuscitate God in various strange ways, it became clear that nihilism as a societal force was inevitable.

But yet, the poltergeist-skeleton of nihilism has not yet been vanquished from mankind’s closet, instead it’s been pushed deeper and deeper since it arrived. Nihilism has not been dealt with, its force continues to persist in the present day, haunting the west. The present mental health crisis, particularly intensified by capitalism, is nothing short of strong evidence of this. One of the most striking pieces of evidence is that suicide rates have continued to climb in the US.⁴ As further evidence of this crisis of value, movements such as the hikikomori in Japan or NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) in the west have emerged as people who withdraw from society.⁵ The attempts to get a handle on such widespread alienation and disillusionment have been lackluster. The

priests of yesterday may have transformed into the therapists of today, but it is not enough to fully and systemically confront the crisis of nihilism.

So far, for all the other institutions of life, nihilism is still only a deep terror that all of the institutions of art and politics have only so far begun to sleepily gawk at, much to the dismay of German thinker Nietzsche. It’s the terror that Nietzsche panickily tried (and perhaps failed) to confront with the *Übermensch* or “overhuman”. Yet Nietzsche’s panicked attempts to hastefully recover our value and our values through the *Übermensch* so far have only resulted in a shameful, unintentional contribution to fascism, and solemnly no real solution to the issue of nihilism.

Importantly, for our purposes, Nietzsche identifies particularly the so-called “slave morality” of Judeo-Christianity as being the source of nihilism in this particular institution. He highlights in particular the “morality in which selfishness wastes away” as “a bad sign under any circumstances.” This applies to individuals, and it especially applies to peoples.⁶ The criticism of the “slave morality” applies here to the entirety of the nation; a recognition from Nietzsche that the problems that the individual faces are often applicable to the problems that the wider community faces, so Nietzsche is clearly at least partially aware of the social facets of the crisis of nihilism, even if he places it mostly on the shoulders of the individual.

Now that we have an understanding of the history of nihilism up to Nietzsche’s time and beyond, we must now begin the work of understanding Nietzsche’s solution

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Random House, 1974), 91.

⁴ “Suicide,” National Institute of Mental Health, Accessed March 2025, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>.

⁵ Alan R. Teo and Albert C. Gaw, “Hikikomori, a Japanese Culture-Bound Syndrome of Social

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⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, trans. Richard Polt (Hackett Publishing, 1997), 70.

and asking ourselves whether or not it is an effective solution. Nietzsche was certainly a proto existentialist, but I would argue for a slightly finer interpretation of his work. Particularly along the careless semantic fuzz that is the line between *value* and *meaning*. Value and meaning are intrinsically different things; value is about the capacity to justify life, while meaning is about the narrative wherein that justification is contained and is foundational. Essentially, meaning without value is meaningless. Even though Nietzsche was concerned with both value and meaning, I am far more interested in what Nietzsche has to say on the value end of the existentialist equation. When it comes to value, Nietzsche certainly has an interesting take on value that may not be adequately reflected in the existentialists that came after him. Nietzsche seemed to understand value as the chief thing that people should be concerned with, even going as far as to shelf the usual notion of truth as something that shouldn't be intrinsically valuable.

Why else would Nietzsche admire Plato's noble lie? Nietzsche understood actual truth as being meaningless in the world, in fact he argued for a different understanding of truth entirely in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. Rather than truth being that traditional understanding that we all seem to instinctively understand, Nietzsche asks why it is we instinctively understand it at all. Nietzsche's answer seems to be rooted in his analysis of mankind as a herd animal, Nietzsche understands truth not as that which is truly and objectively true, but as that which is the foundation for society's meaning, that bundle of narratives and mythology which justifies society and existence and helps

mankind interpret the world.⁷ In essence, even as Nietzsche ditches that usual understanding of truth, Nietzsche's conception of truth as adjacent to value as I have defined it, goes to show that Nietzsche is dedicated to value like I argue.

Moreover, Nietzsche isn't painting a terribly cynical view of human nature like Hobbes is, nor is Nietzsche even suggesting something out of a terrible pessimism and distaste for humanity. Nietzsche seems to sincerely want the best for humanity, but rather he is asserting that this conception of truth is just how human society functions. Importantly, when Nietzsche admires the noble lie of Plato's *Republic*, he's also saying that the "movable host"⁸ which *is* truth is also a precondition for the flourishing of human life, especially when understood in the context of his earlier comments on equality. Nietzsche understands that what is best for the individual, is not always "real" truth or "real" equality, it's whatever *is* best for the individual, which he understands to be something other than "truth" or "equality."

From this, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* becomes quite questionable as a possible solution to the social issue of nihilism. Nietzsche conceives of the *Übermensch* as an individual that is wholly free to, while not precisely resist, but escape the social values of the moral supercommunity that they are a part of and create their own values independent of the "herd" that Nietzsche so often talks about.⁹ It is an inherently individual solution to a social problem. Now, Nietzsche isn't stupid, which is why the *Übermensch* is often framed as an "evolution" of humankind, and humankind is often referred to as the "bridge" or a "great path" to this upper level of mankind;

⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, n.d.

⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, n.d., 4.

⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Nietzsche understands that what he's suggesting goes beyond human nature, which is why he prescribes something as fundamental as a kind of philosophical evolution as the antidote to nihilism.¹⁰

But this expectation of man to evolve past his nature as a social animal is a complete chronological misstep on Nietzsche's part. It seems absurd to suggest that man could just will himself into a different animal. But the *Übermensch* has, in effect, already been started. Man has already begun to will himself into a different animal than what any anthropogenic law of nature could've ever intended; the second that man could carve into the world his own being unopposed, man, while retaining his animalistic roots in some ways, effectively seceded from the animal kingdom through sheer will alone. In doing so, man has found himself in a unique position in the world, rendering Nietzsche's description of humanity as a "bridge" very apt. Evolution, philosophical and biological, didn't just stop when mankind began to create civilization, it continued. The emergence of nihilism wasn't just some accident, it was an inevitability in the philosophical evolution of man as soon as he realized the truth of the cosmos with his science; man's very position is nihilistic as mankind is caught between his animal origins and some absent non-destination.

The conclusion here is natural: all that is left for man to create, after all the wonders, and the science and the discoveries, is the destination; just as Nietzsche intended for the *Übermensch* to create their own values, it is time for mankind itself to create its own destination.

The individual framing of the *Übermensch* is a flawed framing. Nietzsche's greatest failure was framing the *Übermensch* as so. The *Übermensch*, as it ought to be utilized, is the empowering of all mankind to build a better future; why else would Nietzsche devote his life to this work? Why else would Zarathustra leave solitude to speak to humanity? Ultimately, we are asking the question of where does man go after his institutions of values, that once suited him so well when he was closer to his animal roots, collapse? In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and in our own nature, we find the answer: Closer together, to the realization that no matter how far man moves from his animal origins, he will never be an island.

Mankind's independence is what allows mankind itself to dictate what is important to man and man only. In this way, mankind's approach towards the *Übermensch* begins where mankind separates himself from the animal kingdom. Humanity is now, and has always been, free to decide that humanity is valuable for humanity's sake and owes no justification to the anti-human philosophers and theologians within that demand some metaphysical justification for mankind's value. Since humanity is free to make its own values, why not make love of man one of our core values? Indeed, it's only natural as the data shows that greater social connection is linked to better mental health, a direct reversal of the effects of nihilism.¹¹ Nietzsche would agree, because after all, Zarathustra himself left solitude out of his love for man: "I love mankind" thus Zarathustra spoke plainly.¹² Now, all that remains is for all of *us* to leave our eagles

¹⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Maudemarie Clark (Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 57.

¹¹ Priya J. Wickramaratne et al., "Social Connectedness as a Determinant of Mental Health: A

Scoping Review," preprint, NIH, January 28, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.01.26.22269896>.

¹² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Robert B. Pippin, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

and snakes and go forth in the love for ourselves *and* for our fellow man.

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Charlotte Niblett

The Cult of Gilgameš: Evidence and Analysis of Cultic Activities Around the Post-Mortem Deification of Gilgameš in Ur III and the Early Dynastic Period

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Abstract

This paper examines the archaeological and textual evidence, as well as the analysis, of cultic activities surrounding the post-mortem deification of Gilgameš

in the Ur III and Early Dynastic Periods. The quasi-mythical king of ancient Uruk, Gilgameš, is the subject of the world's first epic poem. Though most famous for his own epic tale, he appears in later works as a reference or a sort of allusion to the afterlife in companionship with other texts' main characters. His appearance in these textual works, as well as in records from the Ur III period, strongly suggests that he was worshipped in a cultic capacity under his name as a god of the underworld. Though other academics in the field have touched on the subject, many fail to expand on it, often focusing on grander schemes of Sumer or Gilgameš as a whole. Through the compilation of sources, both ancient and modern in scholarship, it is evident that the possibility of Gilgameš being worshipped in a deified sense is highly likely and backed with primary evidence.

Keywords: Gilgamesh, Sumerian Religion, Mesopotamia, Ancient Near Eastern, Akkadian

“In those days, in those far-off days, in those nights, in those distant nights...”¹ Those are the first words accredited to an ancient poem about a far more ancient time. They belong to the Sumerian poem *Gilgamesh and the Netherworld*. Though this poem was composed in a later Akkadian and then Babylonian tradition, it reaches back to the time of both the mythical and historical King Gilgameš in approximately 2750 BCE.² From this legendary hero came a cultural zeitgeist revolving around him, his epic, and his accompanying stories. This ‘Epic Cycle of Gilgamesh’ would dominate the historic and literary landscape of Mesopotamia well into the following centuries BCE and onward.³ The themes of this epic played well with the Mesopotamian mindset, as the fear of death, the acceptance of life, and the trials of a hero all felt familiar to them. Perhaps most interestingly, the fame of Gilgameš inspired not only a rich literary tradition, but also a religious cult.⁴ Following his deification after death, the peoples of Mesopotamia worshipped Gilgameš as a god, whose divine image was portrayed as a netherworld deity, used in cultic veneration, and further used to cement political ideals.

It is important to note that little scholarship has been done on this topic in recent years, with the best attempts to compile coherent examples being in Andrew George’s *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Text* published in 2020. This

thesis aims to interpret the evidence and construct a coherent image of The Cult of Gilgameš, exploring how worshippers engaged with Gilgameš as a chthonic deity.

First and foremost, the subject of the Cult of Gilgameš is the semi-historic king Gilgameš himself. The term ‘semi-historic’ refers to the fact that our records of him as a historical king border on where written historical records meet cultural myth. The period in which he lived is so far and distant in the past that it is hard to visualize; in terms of time, a modern person is closer chronologically to Alexander the Great than Alexander was to Gilgameš. He ruled in what is classified as the Early Dynastic period, from about 2900 BCE to 2350 BCE, in Sumer, the lower region of Mesopotamia. In this period Gilgameš was the fifth ruler in the First Dynasty of Uruk, according to the Sumerian King List.⁵

Archaeologically, the evidence for him as a king ranges from building inscriptions to correspondences from other kings referencing actions taken in his more obscure poems. Andrew George, one of the most prominent scholars on the subject, reports, “...building inscriptions preserve a memory of Gilgameš as an early ruler of Uruk and are thus witnesses to an ancient tradition that Gilgameš was a historical figure.”⁶ Regardless of his physical historical presence, his cultural legacy far surpasses his tangible legacy. As political entities developed in the region, several prominent empires came to dominate

¹ Andrew George, trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*. 2nd ed. (Penguin Books, 2020), 134.

² Noting the different spellings of Gilgamesh and Gilgameš, the former is the more colloquially known version and is used in reference to contemporary literature on the subject while the latter is the more scholarly accurate spelling of the name in the Akkadian tradition.

³ For later and 7th century referencing of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* look to Ashurbanipal’s library at Nineveh.

⁴ Note that this is ‘cult’ in the ancient religious sense and not in the modern ‘new religious movement’ sense.

⁵ “The Sumerian King List: Translation,” Oxford, accessed November 21, 2025, <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>.

⁶ Andrew George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš,” In *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 101.

Mesopotamia over time, including the Ur III Dynasty, followed by the Babylonian Empires and later the Assyrians. What these empires had in common was a shared culture, writing system, and religion, all of which carried with them the legacy of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As scholar Christopher Woods puts it, "...an idealized Sumerian heroic age for subsequent eras, and more specially in the person of Gilgamesh, the image of the Mesopotamian hero *par excellence* that would persevere down to the end of cuneiform culture and beyond."⁷ Throughout these subsequent dynasties the idealistic hero that Gilgameš presents would continue as a strong cultural continuous tie.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Poem Itself and Its Themes

The Epic of Gilgamesh follows its central character, Gilgameš, through his journey in search of fame, glory, and immortality. King Gilgameš, two-thirds god and one-third man, ruled the city of Uruk, a large city set between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Born from the union of Lugalbanda, former King of Uruk, and the Bovine Goddess Ninsun, he carried an undeniable heavenly lineage. From this divine heritage arose his immense hubris, a trait that would shape his story. In the epic tale, the grandiose adventures of Gilgameš play out, with his closest companion Enkidu as they slay monsters, clash with fickle goddesses, and claim great riches. The ultimate outcome of these great exploits is the tragic death of Enkidu. In their time together, they had grown incredibly close; the death of Enkidu had devastated Gilgameš like no other. He mourned Enkidu like a wife, or brother, depending on the translation but regardless the bond was deep. This turn of fortune leaves the king grappling with his own mortality, sending

him into an inward spiral about his fate and future. For days into weeks, he roamed the countryside, distraught in grief and dread, clothed in the pelts of slain wild beasts and cursing the heavens.

Eventually, he makes his way to the fringes of the world where the immortal man, Utnapishtim, resides. Gilgameš implores Utnapishtim to tell the secret of his immortality, in hopes of saving himself from the dread of a mortal death. Utnapishtim tells him how he became immortal through the divine deluge that rained down on humanity long ago, and how it could not be replicated for the sorrowful king. He instead offered that Gilgameš might try to conquer sleep before death, prompting him to try and stay awake for seven days. The hubristic king accepted the challenge but quickly fell into a deep slumber. When he awoke, having been informed of his failure, his pitiful dejection earned him one last sympathy from Utnapishtim. The wise old man told him of a magical herb that could restore his youth, a close second to immortality, perhaps.

Excitedly, Gilgameš went in search of the herb and found it with relative ease, but as he approached the last leg of his journey home, he made a fateful mistake. Before he would re-enter his city, he would wash and make himself presentable for his people. As he bathed in the river, he left the herb unattended, and in this moment of folly, a snake happened upon it, ate it, and shed its skin. The irony of the situation and the king's temperament is entertainingly sardonic and is illustrated in Jim Kline's *The Oldest Story, the Oldest Fear, the Oldest Fool*, "The depiction of Gilgamesh, the mighty and all-wise king, as a reckless, fear-obsessed fool is the most brilliantly ironic

⁷ Christopher Woods, "Sons of the Sun: The Mythological Foundations of the First Dynasty of

Uruk," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12, no. 1, (2012): 81.

aspect of the epic.”⁸ This humanistic outlook that the story portrays bridges the extensive gap between Gilgameš’s time and ours in that way.

Truly a cruel twist in his journey, yet Gilgameš took it in stride, realizing that the importance of life was not in living forever but in the legacy he leaves behind—that, in itself, is a form of immortality. This puts into perspective the remarkable character growth of Gilgameš when compared to his rash and prideful actions earlier in the story. The greatest irony lies in the fact that, after his death, following many heroic deeds and years of prosperous rule, he is ultimately granted immortality in the underworld as a chthonic deity.⁹ This ascension to godhood is coupled alongside the inherent everlasting legacy of history and fame; it is truly ironic that while Gilgameš failed to become a god in life he eventually became one in death. This notion is surely not to go unnoticed by the later Mesopotamian readers of his epic tale.¹⁰

The Sumerians, and the subsequent civilizations of the region, held a very pragmatic view of death and the afterlife, emphasizing the pursuit of greatness in life. This attitude is reflected in their mythological literature and interactions with the concept of death. Due to this the themes of mortality and fear of death resonated powerfully with Mesopotamian audiences. The epic’s themes raise questions about the meaning of life and the value of human accomplishment by using Gilgameš as an actor to portray these queries. The widespread acceptance and lasting impact of his mythic accomplishments, securing him immortality through fame and legend,

reflects the values most deeply held by the people of Mesopotamia played out in their popular culture.

“Curiously the earliest attestation of Gilgameš is as a god, and if it could be accepted that his position in the underworld was from the beginning considered a compensation for missing eternal life, then the tradition of his fear of death would almost be proved.”¹¹ This quote from Lambert’s *The Theology of Death* illustrates a sort of roundabout reward that Gilgameš gets for his accomplishments in life. Going hand in hand with the human fear of death, this deification serves as compensation for outstanding mortal achievements in the face of the denial of a human eternal life. This complex thought process and indirect means of immortality examines the larger cultural lens of Gilgameš as a hero and divine figure in later Mesopotamian civilizations, particularly those of Babylonia and the Ur III period. His figure represents a divinity who understands the internal struggles of mortality, and almost foreshadows the Orphic cults of Hellenic Greece.¹²

The Death of Gilgamesh and Assignment in the Underworld

The Sumerian poem *The Death of Gilgamesh* presents a story not tied to the main plot of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The gods of Mesopotamia are in a predicament; Gilgameš, partially divine king of Uruk, lies ill on his deathbed as the emissaries of the Mesopotamian underworld, Kur, claw at him. Now the great question is raised: Should the gods let the underworld claim him, or should he elude death due to his heavenly parentage? After some debate

⁸ Jim Kline, "The Oldest Story, the Oldest Fear, the Oldest Fool: The Religious Dimension of The Epic of Gilgamesh," *Jung Journal* 10, no. 2, (2016): 30.

⁹ Chthonic refers to an individual and in the case deity that resides in, works in, or deals with the underworld in a large capacity.

¹⁰ Kline, "The Oldest Story," 29.

¹¹ W. G. Lambert, "The Theology of Death," in *Death in Mesopotamia* (Akademisk Forlag, 1980): 51.

¹² Kline, "The Oldest Story," 34.

between heavenly entities, the council concludes that Gilgameš cannot become an immortal, as his lot in life was that of a great king. This is explicitly stated in the translated text itself, "...Has destined thy fate, O Gilgameš, for kingship; for eternal life he has not destined it."¹³ The divine loophole to this was that through a mortal death he would rise to the rank of a divine ruler in the netherworld, governing the shades of the dead and of judging those who will pass through the gates of Kur.

To comprehend the place where Gilgameš resides after his mortal death, one must first understand the Sumero-Akkadian underworld.¹⁴ Otherwise known as Kur,¹⁵ or "The Land of No Return,"¹⁶ this place of death is referenced in many of the Sumerian myths, yet its mechanics are somewhat of a mystery to scholars. The general understanding of Kur is that it is the bleak and grey parallel to the land of the living, where its residents drink brackish water and eat bread made of clay. This netherworld has its rewards in recompense, though. For those with many dutiful descendants, offerings of food and drink are left at cult altars to feed their ancestors. Some accomplished kings are granted roles in the underworld, akin to administrators, who supervise the dead and maintain order. In a rather unexpected bit of compassion, the children who died stillborn are said to be placed at a table of gold and silver with honey and ghee, something that ought to be soothing for bereaved would-be

parents.¹⁷ This netherworld is complex and runs both with a natural order and with the meticulous touch of its queen, Ereškigal, as well as the many lesser gods bound to work for her.

His ultimate fate of netherworld godhood is also alluded to earlier in the epic cycle. As the Babylonian translation of the Humbaba saga has been shown to indicate, "Gilgameš's Netherworld connections are explicitly mentioned in the Standard Babylonian epic when Ninsun, commending Gilgameš to the care of Šamaš...he will 'rule the black-headed race with Irkalla and will 'dwell in the Land-of-No-Return with Ningišzida.'"¹⁸ While the Babylonian concept of predestination and fate is not widely explored, it seems that a plan was laid out for Gilgameš during the time of his heroic exploits. This concept is not unheard of in mythic literature as it is seen in far later in works such as the *Aeneid*, where almost conveniently, the heroic king is deified after death.

Gilgameš the God

The deification of kings is not uncommon in Mesopotamia; there is a well-documented tradition of such elevation to the divine after the Early Dynastic Period, occurring during the Third Dynasty of Ur.¹⁹ What is most intriguing is that Gilgameš, and his father before him, were both deified in the Early Dynastic period, as seen in the Fara God list found at Šuruppak. They were possibly deified even earlier, with this

¹³ Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Death of Gilgamesh," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 94, no. 1 (1944): 9.

¹⁴ The two cultures share religious continuity, as did much of Mesopotamia; hence, the term 'Sumero-Akkadian' is applied.

¹⁵ Direct translation means earth but is commonly used to mean the underworld in Sumerian and Akkadian literature. Other names such as 'Irkalla' are used and are from Akkadian version of the myths and can be used interchangeably as well.

¹⁶ Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (University Texas Press, 1992), 180.

¹⁷ Jeremy Black and Zólyomi Gábor, "Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Underworld," in *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 32–39.

¹⁸ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 127.

¹⁹ The term Ur III is interchangeable with the Third Dynasty of Ur with its shortened version being used for convenience purposes.

notion reinforced by the arrival of newly translated or excavated evidence, however, that research is still ongoing.

“Until the Tell Mardikh discoveries, the earliest occurrence of the name Gilgamesh was in a god list at Fara [approx 2500 BCE] where it is written as g i š - b i l - p a b - g a - m e s . . . Gilgamesh may also occur at Ebla in a standard size tablet of twenty columns with the incipit g u a n, ‘The Bull of Heaven.’ In this text, the name is written b i l - g a - m e - e š. Until this text is published, little more can be said about Gilgamesh in the Fara period except that he was already deified, and seems to have figured in a developing literary tradition.”²⁰

Based on this example, it appears that this occurred approximately two hundred and seventy-five years after his death, possibly less, depending on the time estimates for the Fara period during which Gilgamesh was deified. This helps to clear the great haze that falls upon dating in the Early Dynastic Period, by giving us a semi-solid timeline for Gilgamesh and his literary tradition and divine status. A commonly brought up question is which came first, the literature or the god? Though current sources for him as a god predate physical tablet literature for Gilgamesh, one would be hard pressed to say that an oral tradition of the

historical king did not precede the both of them. Regardless, alongside this prominent archaeological find there are corroborating sources, since cult objects to help confirm the dates set, “Mace-heads dedicated as votive objects to Gilgamesh...late third millennium confirm the evidence of the Fara list, that Gilgamesh entered the ranks of the gods early, and shows he was soon the object of religious devotion.”²¹

The evidence, grounded in period-accurate sources, supports the assertion of his divine capacity and validates his cultic existence within the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon. Within the topic of god lists, a hint of his underworld nature as an underworld deity is present even before examining the literary sources. This is due to the layout of specific god lists and their intentional groupings of divinities, as seen here, “In the lists of gods whom gifts are made in that text Gilgamesh falls between Nergal and Ereškigal, another indication that in some circles he enjoyed a very high rank among the chthonic deities.”²² As mentioned earlier, Ereškigal is queen of the underworld, and subsequently Nergal is her husband and co-ruling king. This helps to visualize his rank within the pantheon, as Gilgamesh was in some cases rather powerful within netherworld invocations. To be seated at the right hand of the king and queen, metaphorically speaking, is certainly telling of his chthonic status and rank. This, of course, is all dependent on his popularity in the area the source comes from. Gilgamesh enjoyed veneration from a number of important cult locations around Sumer, such as his home city of Uruk,²³ the home of the

²⁰ J.D. Bing, “Gilgamesh and Lugalbanda in the Fara Period,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 9, no. 1 (1977): 2.

²¹ George, “Traditions about Gilgamesh,” 122.

²² George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgamesh,” 128.

²³ Andrew R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Eisenbrauns, 1993), 88.

‘Sumerian Renaissance’ Ur,²⁴ Lagaš, the religious capital of the region at Nippur’ Umma,²⁵ and even farther out cities like Dēr.²⁶

When it comes to his roles and attributes as a god, there are two main titles given to him: ‘Governor of the Shades of the Dead’ and ‘Judge of the Netherworld.’ As for the first of these titles, he would become an administrative figure in Kur, managing the ghosts of the dead and keeping them in line, so to speak. This phenomenon would also happen with later deified kings, likely following in his image.²⁷ Gilgameš’s connection to the realm of the dead is evident through his associations with ancestor cults at Lagaš and Ur, which attribute numerous netherworld roles to him.²⁸ He is also referenced in this overseer role in *The Death of Ur-Namma*, a royal death lament for the first king of Third Dynasty of Ur, as well as in relation to broader funerary rites reading the deceased king’s descent into the underworld. “Ur-Namma was..., so with Gilgameš, his beloved brother, he will issue the judgements of the Underworld and render the decisions of the Underworld.”²⁹ This excerpt hints to the later tradition of king deification that would lead to a trend of lesser chthonic deities in Kur. The fact that *The Death of Ur-Namma* is an official court lament lends a

degree of legitimacy to Gilgameš’s tutelary claims. He watches over the dead alongside the other minor deities of the underworld, but from a special perch, and this is due to his second title, “Judge of the Netherworld.”

Sons of the Sun by Christopher Woods presents Gilgameš’s chthonic duality with specific look into the divine judge aspect, “In death, Gilgamesh served as judge of human denizens of the Netherworld, and so was conceived as fulfilling a role analogous with the Sun-god, the divine judge...”³⁰ The majority of Gilgameš’s divine attestations come from those proclaiming his judgement and arbitration skills. What may not be a coincidence is that this passing of divine attributes inherently links him directly to his paternal ancestor Šamaš, the Sun God and god of justice. Inferences could be made from specific sources that Gilgameš, upon his deification, was granted this judicial trait by the sun god himself, a gift upon his newly divine descendant.³¹ Several other historical sources back up this claim, including the previously mentioned royal Ur III works, “Gilgameš, supreme king, judge of the Anunnaki, ... Who surveys the regions of the world, bailiff of the underworld, lord of the [peoples] beneath, ... Šamaš has entrusted to you verdicts and decisions.”³² This is also seen in more standard title

²⁴ Jacob Klein, “Shulgi and Gilgamesh: Two Brother Peers (Shulgi Hymn O)” in *Kramer Anniversary Volume*, (Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1976), 286.

²⁵ Charles François Jean, *La religion sumérienne, d’après les documents sumériens antérieurs à la dynastie d’Isin*, (P. Geuthner, 1931), 117.

²⁶ George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš,” 112.

²⁷ For further inquiry, see Jeremy Black, and Zólyomi Gábor, “The Death of Ur-Namma,” in *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁸ George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš,” 127.

²⁹ Black and Gábor, “The Death of Ur-Namma,” 60.

³⁰ Woods, “Sons of the Sun,” 8.

³¹ For further inquiry look to Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, The Sumerian King List, Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave, Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird.

³² Paul Haupt, *Das babylonische Nimrodepos, Keilschrifttext der Bruchstücke der sogenannten Izdubarlegenden mit dem keilschriftlichen Sintfluthberichte*, (nach den Originalen im Britischen Museum, 93-94. Germany: J.C. Hinrichs, 1891), quoted in W. G. Lambert, “Gilgamesh in religious, historical and omen texts and the historicity of Gilgamesh”, in *Gilgamesh et sa légende. Études recueillies par Paul Garelli à l’occasion de la VIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 1958)*, (P. Garelli, Ed. Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), 40.

proclamations and epithets when invoking his divine name or power, "...the judge who dwells in the land."³³ Further archaeological and literary evidence is relevant and available, but will be addressed later.

To envision Gilgamesh as a divinity, one must try to see him through the eyes of an ancient Sumerian or Akkadian. The land around them is prosperous, but still offered a perilous life, where death is a certainty and commonplace in the cultural conscience, and so great reverence and a touch of fear naturally comes with it. Ingrained in their literature is this acknowledgment of fear and mortality notions such as their cultural heroes, folk tales, and religious festivals that encompass it. The great hero, described in tales from childhood and in royal courts, finds a place after death as a god, while understanding the fear, panic, and grief of a mortal end. He is the adjudicator of the dead, who watches over the ghosts of the underworld, passing judgement on those foul, accomplished, and alike. Although a theoretical speculation, one could argue, that his popularity as a god of the afterlife stems from his profound understanding of mortality and grief, having experienced them himself. There is a clear record of this character arc for the average Mesopotamian, as his tale is a cultural phenomenon. The people of Sumer and Akkad praised his greatness and power, perhaps out of fear, but perhaps also out of reverence and adoration. His heroic character was beloved; therefore, as a god, he was likely respected and admired, just as the devoted priests and priestesses of Nanna and Šamaš were for their divine patrons. The gods of Mesopotamia were rarely benevolent and found themselves fickle and more prideful than what best suited their roles, but

regardless, they were the supreme deities of the land. The possibility that the worship of a god such as Gilgameš could offer a deity more accommodating to mortal plights might make it easier for it to find purchase in a place like Sumer. It may be a stretch to say that Gilgameš, the once hubristic king, and now the judge of the underworld, was a gentler option than the other capricious gods, but a duality of strict decree and compassionate fairness could be possible.

Regardless, his popularity among the people was clear. His name was widely known, and his heroic deeds were sung continuously by the poets of Sumer. His popularity has even left a physical legacy in the way of personal names. It is not uncommon to see a Sumerian or Akkadian name honoring a god, and the same can be said for Gilgameš. For example, "The Sumerian personal name Ur-Bilgames, 'creature of Bilgames,' also bears witness to the deified hero's place in the affections of the common people."³⁴ 'Bilgames' is the original Sumerian translation for the name of the epic hero, with 'Gilgameš' becoming more commonly used due to the Akkadian lingua-franca of the time the epic was written. Even if he was not admired for his mortal favoring qualities, he was certainly admired for his heroic past and given reverence for what he could do for the living and deceased population of Mesopotamia.

One further facet of Gilgameš as a god is in his patronage, not just to the souls of the departed, but specifically those of deceased kings. Scholars have noted a connection between the kings of Ur III and Gilgameš as they frequently invoke him to solidify their status as divine rulers. Alongside this, alluded to in *The Death of Ur-Nammu*, was a trend of deifying kings

³³ "A praise poem of Culgi (Culgi O)," t.2.4.2.15, in *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (Oxford, 1998–2006), <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr24215.htm/>.

³⁴ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 122.

after death, starting with Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, Ur-Nammu, and then onward. Kings wishing to attain better status in the afterlife would look towards these precedent chthonic regents, but most specifically Gilgameš, "...kings were not seeking their eternal salvation at the hands of the king of the underworld, but looked onto Gilgameš as a kind of patron saint capable of helping in the affairs of life."³⁵ The afterlife, as previously mentioned, was seen as rather bleak, and though the ordinary person may accept it as their eternal rest and dwelling, the more ambitious among them, such as kings, might want to aid their descent and standing in 'The Land of No Return.' Regardless of status, no one wants to suffer or be eternally uncomfortable, so the search for guidance in funerary rites and netherworld practices fell upon the governor of the shades. This further connects the idea of the Cult of Gilgameš to the aforementioned Orphic Cults of Hellenistic Greece, a haven for those seeking safe and knowledgeable passing to the lands beyond.

The Cult of Gilgameš

The divine Gilgameš, revered as a figure of worship and guidance, naturally aligns with the concept of the Cult of Gilgameš—for what is a deity without a cultic following? With the primary divine epithets of Gilgameš established and a general framework for his worship outlined, the focus can now shift to the evidence and concept for the Cult of Gilgameš itself.

A common feature in Mesopotamian religious centres was a cult statue of the specific deity;³⁶ this is no different for

Gilgameš. Evidence for this comes from the collection of *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, in which they record the register of holy precincts, shrines, and altars. There is specific reference to a cult statue of Gilgameš, that would serve for the proper devotional rites of the god.³⁷ Letters like these are administrative documents, often found in large quantities of inventories and tax logs. Although tedious, some valuable information can still be gleaned from these records. *A praise poem of Sulgi*, a work meant to glorify the second ruler of the Third Ur Dynasty, relays that the king was conversing with the divine Gilgameš in a cult setting, within a temple complex, and to the statue representation of said deity, "...[I]t may be assumed that Šulgi, after performing some cultic preparations, either brings the statue of Gilgameš into the temple complex, or enters a chamber, where his statue was previously installed."³⁸ At least in Ur III it is hard to be any clearer that Gilgameš found physical veneration in a temple setting. These cult statues acted as the vessels of the gods themselves and were regarded with the utmost care and dedication, with priests and priestesses waiting hand and foot on the whims of these sculpture facade gods. Continuing on, regarding Gilgameš's cultic statues, there are both scholarly and historical attestations to the presence of a holy figurine used in ritual practices. These rituals involve not only Gilgameš but also references to the wrath of other gods, whose anger might be appeased through such devotion to the Netherworld's Judge.³⁹

³⁵ W. G. Lambert, "Gilgamesh in Religious, Historical and Omen Texts and the Historicity of Gilgamesh," in *Gilgamesh et sa légende. Études recueillies par Paul Garelli à l'occasion de la VIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (1958)* (P. Garelli, Ed. Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), 47.

³⁶ Ivan Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: A Descriptive Introduction* (Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 67.

³⁷ Robert F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum*, vol. 4, (University of Chicago Press, 1902), 2; W. G. Lambert, "Gilgamesh in religious, historical and omen texts and the historicity of Gilgamesh," 42.

³⁸ Klein, "Shulgi and Gilgamesh," 272.

³⁹ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 116.

Regarding such rituals, the Mesopotamian religious process included offerings, libations, and prayers to the chosen deity. Within temple complexes, deities may occupy specific rooms devoted to their cult statues, which aside from priests and priestesses, people were not allowed to enter.⁴⁰ However, outside their chambers, altars are commonplace for receiving offerings to these gods. Often offerings were goods such as beer, wine, dates, oil, grain, and other staples of the Mesopotamian diet; these are meant both to feed the gods and offer tribute in hopes of divine favour.⁴¹ Temple inscriptions, temple precinct administrative logs, and other accompanying literature show that scribes and priests did the same for the likes of the deified Gilgameš. Jean Charles François in *La Religion Sumérienne* denotes these offerings as seen in temple documents,

“A Lagaš, on lui fait des oblations d’agneaux, d’huile, de dattes, de bière, de poisson. Gilgameš joussait donc d’une grande vénération dès cette époque...” [At Lagaš, offerings of lambs, oil, dates, beer, and fish were made to him. Gilgameš therefore enjoyed great veneration from this time on...].⁴²

Worshippers not only made physical offerings to these gods, but also prayers and votive incantations, often praising the god’s divine power and asking for aid or blessings. This was generally standard across pantheon based and polytheistic religions. Daily life in Sumer was fraught with the challenges of ancient existence, making religion a vital source of solace. The Sumerians turned to their gods for comfort, offering prayers as a means of seeking relief and striving to earn the favour of specific deities. Mesopotamian religion, with its mystical elements and the pervasive use of magic and incantations, often invoked deities—including chthonic figures like Gilgameš—as a natural extension of its spiritual practices. Incantations and rituals to draw upon the might and persuasion of Gilgameš appear in prayer passages, along with physical acts of bowing down and beseeching.⁴³ What a god can do for the individual worshipper is up to them, but given the knowledge of his realm of power, it is common to see him called upon for rites pertaining to the dead. Given this inherent association with the occult, Gilgameš is well-suited not only to incantations and spells, but also to rites of exorcism. Gilgameš presides over the shades or ghosts of the dead, and so it is within his realm of power to control the wailer of their kin. “Be exorcised by giš.bil, the regent of the underworld,”⁴⁴ says the ancient priest to the afflicted person.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 76.

⁴¹ Charles François Jean, *La religion sumérienne, d’après les documents sumériens antérieurs à la dynastie d’Isin* (P. Geuthner, 1931), 117.

⁴² Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 85-86.

⁴³ Erich Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (J. C. Hinrichs’s, 1919), 277.

⁴⁴ *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol. 13 (British Museum Press, 1901), 42-43; W. G. Lambert, “Gilgamesh in Religious, Historical and Omen Texts and the Historicity of Gilgamesh”, in *Gilgamesh et sa*

légende. Études recueillies par Paul Garelli à l’occasion de la VIIe Rencontre

Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 1958) (P. Garelli, Ed. Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), 46. The second source cited is a separate translation of the first source, which is a scan of the primary source tablet transcription.

⁴⁵ There is certainly something to note on witchcraft, possession, and fear of the occult in Mesopotamia and its religious ideals, however, that is a discussion best reserved for another occasion.

With such fervent veneration comes sacred items and relics associated with a god, whether through the item's connection to the god's divine attributes or their myth; ancient Greek mythology offers a good example of this. The god Apollo, for example, and his lyre, a physical item attribute he is often pictured with in almost all representations. This instrument acts as a sacred object frequently associated with him as a patron god of music.⁴⁶ For Gilgameš, these votive objects often stem from his connections to the netherworld and funerary practices. During the procession of funeral rites, one may invoke him for aid in their loved one's passage to the great land below, a facet of his religious cult devotion. Through this, evidence can be seen of a sacred item connected to him and his presence in funerary actions, "The mattock is the tool of burial...and the net is a metaphor for the shades' captivity in the Netherworld, over which Gilgameš presides."⁴⁷ A mattock is a hand tool used for digging, much like a pickaxe, this presumably was meant to dig graves, ergo connection to the dead.

Items made sacred to him also appear in the form of weaponry, possibly in reference to his legacy as a great warrior king. They are inscribed with his name and praise, "Mace-heads dedicated as votive objects to Gilgameš..."⁴⁸ This aspect of weaponry is also seen in lamentation literature, such as the previously mentioned *The Death of Ur-Nammu*, in which he is gifted a trove of weapons from the funerary

proceedings with the hope that this may appease him in the realm of the dead.⁴⁹

Physical sites are also attributed to Gilgameš in his netherworld sense, especially wells.⁵⁰ For Gilgameš, in his capacity as a Netherworld ruler, was associated with the great below. Many depictions of Kur present the afterlife as a dark and cavernous space, presumably underground in the mind's eye of the Sumerians. This leads to something like a well, which draws its water from deep in the earth, to have a connection with a chthonic deity. From this, it is possible to speculate that other sites such as graves and tombs could have a similar connection, though that possibility lacks archaeological evidence.

Lastly, like any good, established god, there is a place and role for the divine in religious festivals and public ceremonies. Numerous festivals took place throughout the year in Mesopotamia. Some, like the New Year's festival of Akitu, are still celebrated today in modern Iraq. The primary attestation for festivals involving Gilgameš is in the fifth month of the Babylonian calendar, referred to as 'The Month of Torches,' a loose translation from the 'Month when the braziers are lit.'⁵¹ This is seen from Andrew George's analysis of Gilgameš's cultic involvement in this festival,

"...we find him honoured at a regular festival in the month of Abu...the fifth month of the Babylonian year, sacred to Gilgameš, adding commentary of a ritual

⁴⁶ Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1947), 93.

⁴⁷ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 107.

⁴⁸ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 122.

⁴⁹ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 127.

⁵⁰ George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 95.

⁵¹ John P. Britton, "Calendars, Intercalations and Year-Lengths in Mesopotamian Astronomy," in *Calendars and Years: Astronomy and Time in the Ancient Near East*, ed. John M. Steele (Oxbow Books, 2007).

nature, ‘The month of Gilgameš: for nine days the young men fought in their doorways in wrestling matches and trials of strength’...they are held to honour Gilgameš’s memory...”⁵²

This seems to parallel *The Epic of Gilgamesh* itself, in which Enkidu and Gilgameš wrestle within the doorways of Uruk, pummeling each other until a friendship is forged. This calling on of Gilgameš’s legacy in Abu is also referenced in translations of the *Death of Gilgamesh*, in which it is said that wrestling matches and trials of strength could be performed by the young men of the city. This is done in veneration of the great heroes during the month of torches and festival of the ghosts.⁵³ The *Death of Gilgamesh*, being a primary source from the Gilgameš cycle of mythology itself, lends an air of legitimacy to the claims of festival activity in his name. Andrew George further references his festival connection to ones held in Lagaš, which is known to have worshipped the deified Gilgameš in the Early Dynastic Period, although the connection to the festivals of Abu is unclear.

“Documents from pre-Sargonic Lagaš record that Gilgameš received offerings during the ‘courtyard festival’ of the goddess Baba and the festival of the god Lugalurubar. These offerings were presented at a cultic

location known as gú-bi-mes-ka, ‘the river-bank of Bilgames’...the Lugalurubar festival was the ritual commemoration of the shades of dead rulers of Lagaš...the ceremony evidently took place in the presence of a presentation of Gilgameš. Such rituals also took place at the river-bank of Gilgameš...part of the ceremonies attached to the ancestor cult. The nature of these festivals in honour of the departed suggests that Gilgameš’s function in them was as ruler of the shades of the dead, not as a local deity of deified ancestor.”⁵⁴

While the role of Gilgameš in the festivals of Lagaš highlights his function in ancestor veneration and funerary functions, the political significance of Gilgameš as a god took on new dimensions during the Ur III period.

Gilgameš and Ur III Politics

The Third Dynasty of Ur, otherwise known as Ur III, came to power after a dark age in Mesopotamian history. After the fall of the Akkadian Empire in 2154 BCE, a period of cultural decline emerged as the Gutian hordes swept down from the mountains into the riverplains.⁵⁵ They brought with them destruction and disorder, a staunch difference from the structured bureaucratic Akkadian rule of the prior centuries. A few decades later a Sumerian king of Uruk, Utu-Hengal, would lead an

⁵² George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš,” 126.

⁵³ Antoine Cavigneaux and Farouk Al-Rawi, *Gilgames et la mort textes de tell Haddad VI* (Styx Publications, 2000), 16.

⁵⁴ George, “Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš,” 124.

⁵⁵ The general thought is that the Gutians were a Proto-Turkic tribe.

uprising, expelling the Gutians from his city; this would lay the foundations for the rise of Ur III.⁵⁶ Originally a general in the upheaval and battles against Gutian control, Ur-Namma would become the first king of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Establishing his capital at Ur, he would call upon the legacy of Utu-Hengal, through a loose blood tie, to assert his right to restore the lost golden age of Sumer.

Under the reign of Ur-Namma, a period commonly referred to as the Sumerian Renaissance emerged, marked by a revival of literature, increased religious veneration, and the stabilization of the endangered Sumerian language. It is under this period that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* would flourish, its tales being more formally written down in cuneiform and becoming a solid part of the cultural conscience. The state itself was a vehement fan of the epic and played a large role in popularizing it, not only for culture's sake but also for their own political gain.⁵⁷

The kings of Ur III sought to cement their reign within the cultural continuity of Sumer and Akkad, and they did so by drawing upon the legacy of the heroic and later deified Gilgameš. Ur-Namma, in the many titles and monikers of a king, would call himself brother of Gilgameš, son of Ninsun and Lugalbanda, heir to the legacy of Uruk and Sumer.⁵⁸ Later on his son, the ruler previously mentioned as Culgi or Šulgi, claimed the divine parents of Gilgameš as his personal patron gods. Ur-Nammu and Šulgi expressed a particular

devotion to Gilgameš, who was recognized as a significant figure within the Mesopotamian pantheon.⁵⁹ The ties to Gilgameš made for great press and public opinion of the regency. By that a sort of state religion formed around the family of the king and by extension to Gilgameš. This demonstrates how royal ideology and religion intertwined under the Ur III kings, where Gilgameš's cult served not merely devotional ends but reinforced political legitimacy: "Their worship appears, then, to have been an instrument of policy...[i]n Mesopotamia the king's divinity was given a political connotation in one period only—during the Third Dynasty of Ur."⁶⁰

This leads into a concept that would only truly come into fruition after Ur-Namma's mortal death, and that is the deification of living kings. Live king deification is a concept not too unfamiliar, as it is seen in the Old Kingdom of Egypt, but not wholly common in Bronze Age history. Šulgi was the first king of Ur III to be deified during his reign, invoking his posthumously deified father and Gilgameš through a loose Uruk heritage to back his claim.⁶¹ In Sumer kings had long acted as both ruler and head of the religious centres, generating the term 'priest-king' today. Yet, this is the first time the god and king would be completely conflated while alive and still ruling. For Šulgi this was a strategic and political move meant to aid in his centralization efforts. Due to this, the cults of deified kings grew and so did the worship of the deified Gilgameš.

⁵⁶ Piotr Michalowski, "The Mortal King of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Religion and Power Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Brisch (Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 35.

⁵⁷ Michalowski, "The Mortal King of Ur," 37–38.

⁵⁸ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (Yale University Press, 1976), 158.

⁵⁹ Andrew George, "Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions about Gilgameš," 121.

⁶⁰ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 301.

⁶¹ Michalowski, "The Mortal King of Ur," 36.

Gilgameš is referenced as a divinity in Šulgi era Ur III literature, such as the previously mentioned *A praise poem of Culgi*, otherwise read as *Culgi O*, "...when the king appeared radiantly to his comrade -- on that day, Gilgamec, lord of Kulaba, conversed with Culgi..."⁶² By the time of Šulgi's⁶³ rule, 2094–2046 BCE, Gilgamesh had been dead for about seven hundred years. Any appearance of him during this period would likely have been viewed as a divine manifestation or vision, reflecting his enduring legacy in myth and religion. In the poem, he is also noted to have been speaking to Šulgi through the reeds, an allusion, possibly, to the manner in which gods are depicted communicating in Mesopotamian literature, as exemplified in the great flood myths and other texts. Gilgameš's legacy in Ur III was thus expanded from that of a heroic character and god to a tool for political use and validation after a period of great turbulence.

Conclusion

In examining the religious, literary, and archaeological evidence, it becomes clear that the posthumous deification of Gilgameš was not a mythological flourish but a historically grounded reality, deeply connected with the religious fabric of Mesopotamian society. His transformation from a semi-historic king to a chthonic deity reflects both the cultural notions of Sumerian society's affection for the hero and Mesopotamian state religion. The political utility of divine kingship, particularly during the Ur III period, lent itself to the propagation of Gilgameš's popularity and worship whilst also allowing him to be used as a tool for the political players of the time. Gilgameš's enduring appeal may also stem from his dual nature; a heroic figure intimately acquainted with the mortal condition and a divine judge who

oversaw the fate of the dead. The development of his cult, complete with dedicated offerings, festivals, temples, and incantations, mirrors broader Mesopotamian religious practices while simultaneously carving out a unique niche for a god who, at one time, straddled the line between mortal and divine. His worship was not merely devotional but also deeply political, serving to legitimize the ruling dynasties who invoked his legacy. Ultimately, the Cult of Gilgameš reveals the ways in which narrative, ritual, and statecraft converged in ancient Mesopotamia, allowing a once-mortal king to transcend death and become an enduring symbol of divine power and human aspiration.

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⁶² "A praise poem of Culgi (Culgi O)."

⁶³ Culgi is oftentimes written as Shulgi or Šulgi.

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Makayla Bowman is a senior Anthropology & Historic Preservation double major and Museum Studies minor in the UMW Honors Program. Makayla works as an Archaeology Lab Aide in the Department of Historic Preservation and as a Student Research Aide in the Simpson Library Special Collections University Archives. When she's not interning at local Fredericksburg museums, Makayla enjoys reading, embroidery, and watching movies. She hopes to travel the world while her legs still work, and her most-used social media app is LinkedIn.

Anna Schwan is a sophomore English major with an interest in women's literature. Usually hiding somewhere on campus, if she's not working on her own writing or creating complicated analyses of various forms of media, she can be found thinking far too deeply about hyenas or obscure fashion movements.

Zoë Müller is a senior International Affairs major pursuing a Middle East Studies minor. On campus, she is a member of the dance company for UMW in addition to serving as a Student Alumni Ambassador and an Honors Student Coordinator. Outside of UMW, she works as a research intern for the Critical Threats Project and a student fellow for Ballotpedia. She looks forward to the future of Columns and the work she gets to help publish!

Asunta Ross is a senior English major with minors in Digital Studies and Linguistics. She is President of the English Club, a mentor for the UMW RISE program, an editor for The Aubade literary magazine, and works with the Department of English and Linguistics to spread an appreciation for language and literature. Currently, she is trying to reach her reading goal before the year ends.

Orion van Rooy is a senior History major and German minor. His growing up in Austria and studies in America instilled him with almost too many interests, ranging from memory culture to military history to geopolitics. His specific interests are the history of Nazi Germany, British imperialism, soldier's experiences in the First World War and 19th century Great Power conflicts. Outside of his studies, he is a member of a Revolutionary War reenactor unit, works as an Encampment Interpreter at Mount Vernon, and is addicted to Paradox Interactive games.

Operational Board (cont.)

Tonia T. Attie is a senior double major in Political Science and Philosophy: Pre-Law with a minor in Practical Ethics. She is currently working on two senior honors theses, one involving sectarianism and electoral systems, and another focusing on Just War Theory. Tonia has the honor of being the 2025-2026 Newman Civic Fellow and a member of Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society. Additionally, she serves as the Fall 2025 Government Affairs Intern with the American Task Force on Lebanon, a Department Representative for the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, Co-President and Founder of UMW's chapter for Day on Democracy, President of Arab Culture Club, and the Co-Founder of Young Muslims Sisters Fredericksburg Chapter.

Editorial Board

Matthew Clark is a Political Science and Geography double major. His academic interests include the usage of propaganda and geographies of voting. After he completes his undergraduate degree, he will be pursuing a Master of Public Policy to attain his goal of working in the local government or a non-profit sector. In his spare time, he likes to play the viola and take road trips.

Abigail Goff is a sophomore double major in Mathematics and English: Creative Writing with a minor in Environmental Sustainability. She loves reading, playing ping pong, and going on long walks. When she's home, she can be found with her dog and cats.

Bailey Holt is an English Literature major and Museum Studies minor, with a particular interest in the culture of storytelling. After UMW, they hope to pursue their masters in Library Science. On any random week, you might find them walking their dog Goomba on campus or doing some creative writing in their journal.

Chloe McCann is a sophomore Communications and Digital Studies major with minors in Journalism and Political Science. Alongside being an editor for *Columns*, Chloe also edits in the *Weekly Ringer*. Outside of editing, Chloe is a member of the NAACP and Film Club. She loves listening to music, hanging out with her friends, and reading.

Anissa Molnar is a senior International Affairs and Religious Studies double major with a minor in History. She had her research on Islamic messianism published in the Fall 2024 issue of *Columns* and has also aided in faculty research on late-antique religious hagiographies. Anissa serves as President of Botany Club and Vice President of Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society and works at Colonial Tavern and Highmark Brewery. Her pastimes include talking too much, playing with her cat, and sending her friends unsolicited games of chess.

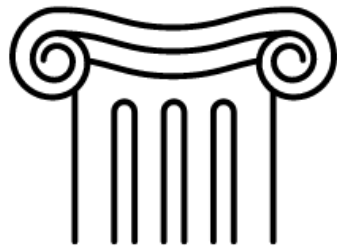
Editorial Board (cont.)

Drew Tolley (class of 2028) is a Classical Archeology and Anthropology double major with an interest in world ancient cultures and religions. She can usually be found cooking for friends, tending her army of pothos, or dressing up to go to the theatre. This editor is sincerely grateful to work with our dedicated Columns team and authors.

Katie Volkmann is a freshman English Literature major. Outside of Columns, Katie is a member of the Camus Christian Community, the English Club, and the Aikido Club. She loves reading, writing, singing, and acting.



*First Row, Left to Right: Anna Schwan, Makayla Bowman, Laura E. Connors, Orion Van Rooy
Second Row, Left to Right, Asunta Ross, Zoë Müller
Third Row, Left to Right: Katherine Hamilton, Drew Tolley, Anissa Molnar
Fourth Row: Katie Volkmann, Abigail Goff, Matthew Clark*



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