

The נָזַם and Navigating Power Structures

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Abstract

Important facets of identity can be communicated through dress. Descriptions of dress and body adornment within the text of the Hebrew Bible can therefore be used as a narrative device to convey subtextual information about the wearer. By utilising archaeological research on the role that jewellery plays in age and gender differentiation alongside textual evidence, this article argues that נָזַם rings are worn by women and children of both genders to convey messages about their valuation, commodification and ownership in relation to a male patriarch. This has important implications for understanding the nuances within the biblical texts themselves and offers new perspectives and interpretative possibilities.

Keywords

Hebrew Bible – body adornment – nose ring – נָזַם – jewellery – dress

Introduction

Dress and adornment are a concern of every human society of which we have knowledge. The concern with decorating, covering, uncovering or otherwise altering the human form is an almost universal feature of the human experience. The culture which gave rise to the Hebrew Bible is no exception and the topic of dress and body adornment in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East more widely is an increasingly popular area of study.¹

¹ Most recently see volumes Berner et al. (2019); Finitis (2019); Quick (2021).

In the following, I will explore the role of jewellery and specifically the **זָנָה** in the Hebrew Bible as an item of body adornment used to construct and reproduce power dynamics and social hierarchies. I will demonstrate the way **זָנָה** are used to circumscribe a particular social group within ancient Israelite and Judean societies. I will show that the **זָנָה** rings are associated in the Hebrew Bible with women and children of both genders and, in particular, that the **זָנָה** ring signifies the status of the wearer as a dependent. By wearing the **זָנָה** ring, concepts of obligation, objectification, commoditisation and ownership are physically represented and constructed on the bodies of dependents, including women and children.

Throughout, I will assert that the inclusion of descriptions of body adornment are likely a conscious decision by the authors of the Hebrew Bible. As such, I will argue that descriptions of **זָנָה** and body adornment more generally are used as a narrative device to communicate facts about the identity of the wearer. A consideration of the role of body adornment descriptions in these texts is essential to understanding the nuances and undercurrents running within the texts themselves.

The recognition of the importance of the role of dress and body adornment for social interaction and the construction of identity has led to an increased interest in the use of clothing and cosmetics by biblical authors as a narrative or plot device.² By reading through the lens of dress, we can uncover meanings in the texts 'that previously may have gone under the radar, for presumably the authors included every reference to dress for a reason' (Batten 2019: x). The significance of descriptions of items of adornment in biblical texts can be drawn out through an analogy to the use of costume in modern cinema. Costume is an essential element of the overall design of a film and can be used to convey information about a character's ethnicity, social status or gender. Costumes in films are an important tool which directors use to shape and further the narrative sometimes in ways more immediate and impactful than verbal dialogue.

² For clothing as a literary device in the Joseph narrative see Matthews (1995); for the role of garments in the Tamar story as markers of status and authority as well as the means by which identities are revealed or concealed see Huddlestun (2002); for the application and removal of cosmetics allowing Esther, Ruth, Judith and Susanna to adopt and discard persona such as 'Strange Woman' see Quick (2019a; 2019b).

Method

Items of personal adornment are highly charged with meaning and offer immense potential for exploring identity as experienced, projected or imposed. The importance of the body as a site of communication of complex social and cultural messages has been repeatedly highlighted by anthropologists and cultural theorists.³ Moreover, there is a growing recognition that items of dress are not merely a system of signs which communicate features of the independently existing identity of the wearer, but rather contribute to actively constructing that identity (Fisher and Loren 2003; Joyce 2005; Sørensen 2007). This scholarship has demonstrated the complex interplay between individual agency and social structures which mean that the power structures of a society are reproduced by the body. Thus in most patriarchal societies, for groups such as women, body adornment is a way ‘not only of masking the body but of continually calling it to order’ (Bourdieu 2001:28).⁴

Alongside this emphasis on the constructive nature of dress, there is a burgeoning body of scholarship which criticises the earlier tendency to privilege the visual semiotics of dress over the haptic experience (Entwistle 2000; Fisher and Loren 2003: 227; Joyce 2006; Cifarelli 2017). This work engages with embodiment theory which emphasizes the importance of the body as a site of lived experience and its insights have been used effectively as a lens through which to explore personal adornment in the ancient Near East.

For instance, Megan Cifarelli argues that the large, sharp and impractical dress pins uncovered in Hasanlu dating to the IVb period (1050–800 BCE) would almost certainly have inhibited day-to-day life of their elite, female wearers (Cifarelli 2017: 110–114). Cifarelli argues that these pins were worn, despite the discomfort they may have caused to the wearer, as a means of communicating an intimidating message that these women’s bodies were defended (Cifarelli 2017: 115). Indeed, osteological analysis at the site shows that skeletal trauma consistent with abuse occurs at a much lower rate amongst the adult women whose dress included these long, potentially lethal pins (Cifarelli 2017: 114).

Similarly, John Green demonstrates that anklets were used to construct and express gender and age identities based on the evidence from the early Iron Age

3 See particularly, Douglas (1966); Foucault (1972); Bourdieu (1990); Turner (1984); Butler (1993); Shilling (2005). Stavrakopoulou (2013: 523) contrasts this approach with the ‘older post-Cartesian, Western intellectual traditions’ which views the body as ‘merely the fleshy vessel in which the ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ was housed’.

4 For a discussion of how Bourdieu’s analysis of dress interacts in complementary ways with embodiment theory see, (Csordas 1990).

cemetery in Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. Green shows that anklets were worn in pairs primarily by women, infants and children and that no identifiably male individuals wore anklets in pairs, although single anklets were worn by some high-status males (Green 2007). Drawing on Bourdieu's observation that the opposition between maleness and femaleness is performed through bodily experiences and this performance can symbolise aspects of domination (Bourdieu 1990:72, 78), Green argues that 'the greater the level of patriarchy and control of women in reproduction, marriage, and domesticity by men, the greater the contrast in "restriction" between male and female adornment' (Green 2007:296). For Green, physical attributes of the anklets worn by women and children, such as their weight and their physically restrictive properties, reflect how 'concepts of ownership, obligation, objectification, and commoditisation may all be intertwined with physically and symbolically restrictive ornamentation' (Green 2007:296).

Both Cifarelli and Green's studies highlight the interplay of the physical object of adornment and the social reality it constructs as well as the way in which it allows the wearer to navigate social interactions. Items of adornment are not merely for beautification or signalling wealth and status, they can also situate the wearer in relation to power structures which, in turn, the items of adornment themselves actively construct. By re-focusing on the embodied, haptic experience of the wearer we can begin to explore the social valence of the $\square$ ring and its role in constructing the body as a site at which notions of socially-expected domination and subjugation are constructed, performed and navigated.

The basic methodology of this article is to investigate all attestations of the term $\square$ and how they are contextualized, revealing the patterns of meaning which emerge with reference to extant archaeological evidence. Constituent symbols of dress can be understood differently depending upon the identity of the wearer, the occasion, the place, the company, and even something as vague and transient as the wearer's and the viewers' moods. Fred Davis terms this variability as 'undercoding' in his study of dress as communication (Davis 1985:17). Dress is, after all, not only heavily historically and socially context-dependent but can have different valences based on the individual wearing it. These nuances in turn should shape how we read the texts in order to uncover the narrative significance communicated to us through dress. Consequently, this article is structured according to the groups with which the $\square$ is associated in the Hebrew Bible: women (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15) and groups of mixed gender, including children (Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3; 35:22; Judg. 8:24–6; Job 42:11).⁵

5 The $\square$ ring is also associated with livestock (Proverbs 11:22) which will be discussed further below.

This approach is not without its limitations; it is undeniably difficult to map lexical studies of culturally specific terminology onto material culture, particularly when the texts which contain the lexical term, themselves have complex compositional and redactional histories. This is further problematised by the fact that 'material culture meanings are often practical and subconscious' and the non-discursive and non-linear nature of material culture results in 'polyvalence, polysemy and ambiguity of symbols' and '...the complexity of the message has a much greater potential for ambiguity than in language' (Hodder 1991:72–3). The spoken word is far less durable than the material object and the meaning may shift over time.

There are 17 occurrences of the lexeme נָזַם in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3; 35:22; Judg. 8:24–6; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15; Job 42:11; Prov. 11:22; 25:12) and, where a material is mentioned, it is always made of gold. The term נָזַם is frequently listed alongside other items of jewellery.⁶ It is variously translated as ring, nose-ring or earring (HALOT 11:684; BDB:633; DCH v:650). Indeed, it is not entirely clear from the textual evidence in the Hebrew Bible how and where this type of ring was worn on the body. נָזַם is modified by both 'nose' (Gen. 24:47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12 and 'snout' Prov. 11:22) and 'ears' (Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3 and, indirectly, in Prov. 25:12).⁷ This may suggest that the characteristic(s) which identified a ring as a נָזַם was not the location on which it was worn on the body. As such, I have used the term 'ring' throughout this article as it encompasses both nose- and earrings.

Several translations, particularly the KJV and ASV, have a tendency to translate נָזַם as 'earring' when it is not modified by a body part (Gen. 24:22, 30; 35:22; Judg. 8:24–6; Hos. 2:15; Job 42:11). Indeed, the KJV even translates נָזַם when modified by 'nose' in Gen. 24:47 as 'earring' and when modified by 'nose' in Ezek. 16:12 as 'a jewel on thy forehead'. This displays what Arie van der Kooij terms 'acculturation'; the adaption of a translation to the culture of the time (van der Kooij 2006: 49). This is a phenomenon which Elizabeth Platt has also noted in particular in relation to the discussion of the Daughters of Zion's dress in Isaiah 3 with the use of anachronistic terms such as 'smocks', 'linen vests' and 'apron' to translate the items of adornment (Platt 1979b). This Western bias against nose-rings is perhaps a reason why this term of adornment has previously been overlooked for an in-depth study.

6 כִּוְמוֹ (Exod. 35:22; Isa. 3:21); עֲגִיל (Ezek. 16:12); צִמִּיד (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47); חָח (Exod. 35:22); כִּוְמוֹ (Exod. 35:22); עֲטָרָה (Ezek. 16:12); חֲלִיָּה (Hos. 2:15); נְטִיפָה (Judg. 8:26); שֶׁהָרִין (Judg. 8:26).

7 The term also frequently occurs without explicit reference to any particular body part: Gen. 24:22, 30; Hos. 2:15; Judg. 8:24–6; Job. 42:11 and Exod. 35:22.

Nose-rings, earrings and finger rings are often indistinguishable in the archaeological. The only way of differentiating between earrings, nose-rings and finger rings with any certainty is when they are found in situ with skeletal remains. It has been suggested that nose-rings would necessarily need to be smaller than some earrings due to the proximity of the mouth (Limmer 2007: 278). However, this too is a convention which relies on western cultural preconceptions and cannot necessarily be treated as a cross-cultural phenomenon. For instance, the Shawnee and many other tribes of the Pacific Northwest Coast wear septum piercings strung with beads which are specifically designed to hang over the mouth (DeMello 2007: 205). Although far outside the confines of ancient Israel, this highlights the importance of avoiding assumptions of cross-cultural continuity. Indeed, DeMello's excellent encyclopaedia entry on nose-piercing details many different cross-cultural and cross-temporal examples of nose piercings which demonstrates a great variety both in style, form and cultural meaning and significance with which they are imbued (2007:204–6). This highlights the need to consider rings found in situ in relation to the body of their wearer in order to avoid importing unwarranted assumptions.

A further challenge to drawing on the archaeological evidence for the use of rings for age and gender differentiation is that it is only remarkably recently that archaeologists of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean have begun to age and sex skeletons using bone and dental analysis. In the excavations of the early 20th century, it was often treated as a foregone conclusion that jewellery items denoted a female owner whilst weapons necessarily meant the occupant of the grave was male (Goring 1996:27).⁸ Even when human remains are aged and sexed, the analysis is not infallible. Skeletal sex exists on a continuum and, whilst pelvic shape and certain features of the skull can act as indicators of sex, they form a spectrum rather than a binary. This complicates the sexing of skeletal remains. For instance, there is a notable paucity of older women in skeletal assemblages, this is often attributed to the high mortality rate in childbirth. However, women past menopause often develop more robust features of the skull which are commonly associated with male features. Thus, it is possible that this low number is in fact a product of the miss-sexing of

8 Even when individuals are reliably sex-typed, there is often a tendency to creatively re-interpret the "gendered" grave goods which do not align with the sex of the grave's occupant. For instance, McCaffrey summarizes, somewhat humorously, the interpretative gymnastics scholars engage in to resolve the perceived inconsistency amongst the royal tombs at Ur: 'male headdresses and other inappropriately gendered objects tend occasionally to fly and land on or under something else' whilst 'high-status females are buried with gold versions of their vegetable choppers to memorialize their kitchen duties for eternity' (McCaffrey 2008: 208).

older females (Clegg 2018:1–2).⁹ Indeed, there is a demonstrable systematic bias in skeletal sexing in favour of males by 12% across populations (Weiss 1972). Sexing children is also notoriously difficult and often unreliable as the characteristic markers are not present in children until after puberty (Clegg 2018:2). This can pose a problem for the identification of items of adornment with particular social groups. Although, grave goods can give us some insight into the construction and performance of gender (Sofaer and Sørensen 2013), it is also worth highlighting that mortuary goods reflect the living projecting their idealised conception of the dead (Fowler 2013). Consequently, death and the rituals surrounding it cannot automatically be taken as representative of the lived reality.

Notwithstanding these challenges, using the evidence of ring wearing drawn from in situ burials to interrogate the biblical texts, offers insights into the messages which are encoded by the descriptions of personal adornment in the Hebrew Bible. The proposed approach can explicate the significance of wearing the נָזַן and, in turn, provide fresh insight into the biblical texts themselves.

Archaeological Evidence

Although jewellery is not uncommon in the archaeological record of ancient Israel and Judah, in situ evidence is surprisingly limited (Golani 2013: 70). This is, in part, due to the fact that primary burials were frequently disturbed by the introduction of secondary burials; the bones and grave goods of earlier occupants would be moved to the periphery or possibly re-deposited into a pit in the tomb floor (Bloch-Smith 2018: 367). As a result, particularly in family tombs such as the cave or bench tombs, in Iron Age Israel and Judah it is often difficult to associate specific objects with specific individuals by age or gender (Bloch-Smith 2018: 365–70).¹⁰ This is a particular problem for small

9 The skeletal collection at the crypt of Christ Church Spitalfields, London where the age and sex is known, has been used to blind test sexing techniques, the research shows that older women are consistently misidentified as male (Clegg 2018:2).

10 The challenge of associating grave goods with a specific individual is by no means confined to Israel and Judah; similar challenges are discussed by Jill Baker in her study of the Middle and Late Bronze Age tomb complex at Ashkelon. Baker notes that individuals were often laid out in a tomb with grave goods placed around them, however after subsequent deaths, the tomb was reopened and 'in many cases, the skeletal remains and associated grave goods were removed from their original place and swept to the edges of the chamber, seemingly without concern for the welfare of the individual who was previously laid to rest in such a careful manner, and the new interment with its mortuary paraphernalia replaced the earlier burial' (Baker 2010: 11).

finds such as rings, which were likely to be disturbed from their original in situ positions unlike larger items such as anklets, armlets and bracelets which are more likely to remain in their original position because they were worn around limbs (Golani 2013: 128).

The only possible nose-ring which has been found in situ was discovered in a child's burial in Megiddo (Loud 1948:Pl. 225:9, T.2121). This grave is located in stratum IX which is usually dated between 1550-1479 BCE.¹¹ The nose-ring found belongs to a type usually identified as a mulberry earring; a hoop which may be circular or lunate with a small cluster of granules attached to its base in a conical shape. This granulation appears to have been 'cast in the shape of clusters of fruit' (Barkay 1986:26), hence the nomenclature mulberry earring. Although attested in the Middle Bronze Age, the type remains popular into the Iron Age (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971:224-6, 268-9). The mulberry earring located in situ in the nose raises the possibility that this type of hoop could be worn both in the nose and ears, as Elizabeth Platt suggests (Platt 1979a:77). However, there is also a very real possibility that this simply represents an instance of displacement of an earring as soft tissue has decayed.

Moreover, even if we do accept the interpretation of the mulberry ring as a nose-ring, evidence from a singular burial alone does not provide sufficient data from which to draw any substantiated conclusions. As, Abigail Limmer points out, it is plausible that after losing one earring, the remaining half of the pair may have been re-purposed by an individual as a nose-ring (Limmer 2007:71). Indeed, rings are found in a far wider number of contexts than other items of jewellery, including living contexts.¹² This is perhaps because small rings, such as earrings and nose-rings, are more easily lost in daily activities than larger items of jewellery such as bangles or anklets.

A further, illuminative example is the Persian period graves at Kamid el-Loz (Poppa 1978). The graves at Kamid el-Loz are single inhumations making it easier to associate the grave deposits with the interned individual. Rudolf Poppa's meticulous publication lists not only the gender identification and approximate age of each skeleton but also the exact location of items of adornment on or near the skeletons (Poppa 1978:pls. 26-41). It is interesting to note that earrings and/or nose-rings were found in twenty-five graves and pendant

11 This is long before the oft quoted date for the emergence of Israel, 1200 BCE (Sparks 2007). Although this traditional understanding of the emergence of Israel both in its understanding of the emergence of a state and the dating of this development has been problematised and disputed particularly in the work of Thomas Thompson (2000) and Emanuel Pfoh (2009).

12 See for example, the number of rings found at Lachish in the context of domestic courtyards and floors (Sass 2004:2040).

earrings in seven graves (Poppa 1978:39). Of these total thirty-two graves, only one (grave 46) belonged to an adult male.¹³ However, grave 46 is in the middle of three superimposed graves and lies directly above grave 47. Poppa suggests that it is probable that the grave goods associated with grave 46 may have originally belonged to the disturbed grave 47 and its female inhabitant (Poppa 1978:106). In graves 20, 40 and 63 rings were found in the area of the nose or resting against the upper teeth, although it is difficult to know if these were in situ as nose-rings or have simply come to rest here after the decay of the soft tissue of the ears (Poppa 1978:92, 103, 113). It is also worth noting that eleven of the seventeen graves of children have earrings, an even greater proportion when you consider only thirteen of the graves were provisioned with goods (Poppa 1978:47). The evidence at Kamid el-Loz suggests that earrings and/or nose-rings were strongly associated with women and children of both genders. Although outside the confines of ancient Israel, this highlights the possibility that נָזְנָה may have had a similar role in constructing and performing aged and gendered identities.

Textual Evidence: נָזְנָה Worn by Women in the Hebrew Bible

The term נָזְנָה in the Hebrew Bible is frequently associated with women (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15) and a significant number of the descriptions of women wearing and owning נָזְנָה rings are found in the sexual and marital metaphors in the prophetic texts.¹⁴ They are worn by the Daughters of Zion in Isa. 3:21; the foundling bride in Ezek. 16:12 and the wayward mother in Hos. 2:15. Several commentators have noted that YHWH's gift of the נָזְנָה to his foundling bride in Ezek. 16:12 seems to have been given as part of the bridal dowry or ceremony (Blenkinsopp 1990:78; Eichrodt 1970:206; Joyce 2009:131).¹⁵ Platt claims that the נָזְנָה forms part of the 'queen-bride's jewelry'

13 A further four of these thirty-two graves (graves 4, 8, 63, 69) were unable to be gendered due to the age or general poor preservation of the skeleton. Of these ungendered graves, three (graves 4, 63 and 69) belong to juveniles aged 13–18 who may still have been considered children (Poppa 1978: 136–9).

14 For a compelling critique of the use of the term 'marriage metaphor' to subsume all of the sexual and marital metaphorical language in prophetic texts see Moughtin-Mumby (2008:23–5).

15 Meir Malul, Julie Galambush and Shawn Flynn have all argued that Ezekiel 16:1–7 reflects an adoption (Malul 1990; Galambush 1992: 92; Flynn 2018: 185). This alternative interpretation, however, need not undermine the argument that נָזְנָה are associated and used to delineate the boundaries of the identity of women and children.

(Platt 1979a:77). This has been taken as evidence that the זָנוּ worn by women was used to communicate their marital status. Francis Andersen and David Freedman explicitly argue in their commentary on Hos. 2:15 that the זָנוּ is one of the wayward mother's 'sacred bridal gifts' which is 'defiled' when she uses it to pursue lovers (Andersen and Freedman 1980:259–60).

Implicit within this interpretation is the notion that the זָנוּ communicates a woman's marital status or sexual unavailability. Indeed, cross-cultural studies of both male and female adornment suggest that women in patriarchal societies tend to use ornamentation to indicate their sexual unavailability and/or status as married women whereas men tend to use ornaments to convey messages about their rank and puberty, but rarely about their marital status (Low 1979:469, 486).¹⁶ According to this interpretation, the reference to the זָנוּ in the sexual and marital metaphors in these prophetic texts reflects a perverse subversion of a symbol of sexual unavailability being used to attract lovers.

This interpretation may also find some support in the story of Rebekah's betrothal to Isaac (Gen. 24:14–61). The servant who is sent to find an appropriate bride for Isaac, reaches the well and prays that the woman who offers to draw water for him will be the one יְהוָה has appointed to marry Isaac (Gen. 24:12–14). When Rebekah arrives and offers both the servant and the camels a drink (Gen. 24:18–19), the servant gifts her a זָנוּ and bracelets (Gen. 24:22).¹⁷ Rebekah's brother Laban understands the message encoded in these items of jewellery (Gen. 24:30) and, when the events are subsequently retold to Rebekah's family, the servant seems to imply that the gifts of jewellery were

¹⁶ The idea that jewellery may communicate sexual availability has also been raised by Platt and her survey of the triangular jewellery plaques which she suggests were worn over the genital area. On the basis of this archaeological evidence, Platt suggests that the reference to נֶחֱשֶׁתֶּךָ (Ezek. 16:36) should be translated as 'your triangular piece'. She argues that the diatribe in Ezek. 16:36 is against women who remove these plaques, which are frequently decorated with a female goddess figure and so 'idols', in order to have sex with their lovers whilst they are menstruating (Platt 1976).

¹⁷ Several commentators, both ancient and modern, find the servant's gift of the jewellery before asking Rebekah whose daughter she is problematic (Gen 24:22–3). Rashi suggests that this an expression of the servant's faith that יְהוָה has responded to his prayer (Gen 24:12–4). However most early Jewish exegetes including Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak, Yehudah He-Hasid, Abravanel, Hizkuni, Tosafot to Hül. 95b. prefer to reverse the order of events in vv.22–3, citing v.47 as proof. For an overview of early Jewish interpretation of this passage see, (Sarna 1989:165). Westermann understands the gift of the jewellery as simply an act of 'extravagant generosity' in response to Rebekah's hospitality, separate from the betrothal itself (Westermann 2004: 172). However, given the context of Gen. 24:47 and the servants trip as explicitly designated to find Isaac a wife, and the use of the זָנוּ elsewhere within the context of marriage (Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15) it seems likely that the זָנוּ and other items of jewellery are part of the betrothal.

made because he knew her identity as the intended future bride of Isaac (Gen. 24:47).

Indeed, Tova Forti argues that the נִזְנִי is an ornament exclusively worn by women (Forti 2008:51). Forti is particularly concerned with Prov. 11:22: 'A gold ring in the nose of a pig is like a beautiful woman without discretion'.¹⁸ Although there is archaeological evidence of nose-rings being used to control domesticated animals (Littauer and Crouwel 1979:30–1) as well as pictorial evidence, for instance in the Royal Standard of Ur (Woolley 1934:Pls. 90–3), Forti argues that נִזְנִי does not refer to this kind of nose-ring. Rather, she contends that Prov. 11:22 is intended to be 'absurd' because of the contrast it constructs 'between a woman's fine jewelry and the ungainly garbage-eater, with its bristles and snout' which in turn 'produces ridicule and astonishment' (Forti 2008:51). Forti understands the proverb to mean that beauty in a woman who lacks the qualities of discernment and intelligence is as ridiculous as a valuable item of jewellery in a pig's nose (Forti 2008:52). This coheres with one of the most prominent themes of the book of Proverbs: how to find a suitable wife (Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10–31). Moreover, the well-documented aversion to pigs and repeated prohibition against their consumption (Deut. 14:8; Lev. 11:7; Isa. 65:4; 66:3, 17) lends credence to Forti's conclusion that the נִזְנִי wearing pig is intended to be an ironic, humorous image rather than a historically accurate comment on animal husbandry.

However, Forti overlooks the use of נִזְנִי rings elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible by groups of mixed gender and children (Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3; 35:22; Job 42:11). This greatly undermines the interpretation that it is the נִזְנִי itself which functions as an item of jewellery which communicates a woman's marital status or sexual availability. Rather, as Laura Quick argues, it seems likely that it was the location at which the נִזְנִי ring was worn and the act of nose piercing which 'functioned as a visible sign of marriage' (Quick 2021: 135). Quick points to the practice of piercing a slave's ear with an awl as part of the manumission of slaves (Exod. 21:2–6; Deut. 15:12–7) to argue that body piercing, as a form of permanent body modification, marks a permanent change of status through the body (Quick 2021: 135–8).¹⁹ Quick expands the logic of these texts to apply

¹⁸ For an overview of the treatment of Prov. 11:22 in commentaries see (Heim 2008: 16–20).

¹⁹ The notion that piercing or other forms of body alterations might mark the body as property is by no means a novel observation. The way in which physical disfigurement can act as a sign of ownership and membership of a particular social class is explored in the work of Jacobs (2014), on whose work Quick draws. Jacobs also considers circumcision and the legal formulation of *lex talionis* in addition to the piercing of the slave's ear. See also Hurowitz (1992) for Akkadian parallels to Exod. 21:5–6 and property transactions.

to Rebekah's betrothal and the gift of her nose-ring (Gen 24:22, 27) to argue that nose piercing marked a woman's permanent change of status to wife.

It is indeed significant that all of the instances where נִזְמִיּ are described as worn in the nose occur with reference to women (Gen. 24:47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Prov 11:22). Quick is likely right to conclude that the act of piercing the nose signals a permanent change of status, however what Quick does not explore is the embodied experience of wearing a ring in the nose. The well-documented use of nose-rings to control livestock as well as its association with domesticated animals in Prov. 11:22, suggests that the נִזְ should be read as a symbol of the desire to exercise control over and overtly display ownership of a wife's body. Indeed, livestock are listed as part of the household alongside wives and male and female slaves in the covenantal code (Exod. 20:17).²⁰ The נִזְ ring worn in the nose does not merely convey a change of marital status and sexual availability, it communicates complex messages about the ownership, control and commodification exercised over the wearer.

This conclusion is arguably bolstered by the use of nose rings in the ancient Near East. In Akkadian the word, *ṣerretu*, is used to mean both a nose-ring as an item of jewellery as well as a lead-rope or leash which is attached to a ring which has been passed through the captive's mouth or nose (CAD 16:134–6). Tiglath-pileser I claims to have attached nose ropes to captive kings (RIMA 2 A.0.87.2: 26–27). Ashurbanipal pierces the defeated king of Qedar's jaw and holds a lead-rope placed through his gums (RINAP Ashurbanipal 11:ix 107). The practice of using a *ṣerretu* to subjugate prisoners is also documented in one of Esarhaddon's epithets: he is the one who 'flattened [his foes and] fastened lead-ropes on the kings of the [four] quarters' (RINAP Esarhaddon 2003:ii 5'; 2004:10'-11'). There are also several iconographic depictions of captives being led by leashes which are attached to rings in their mouths or noses. The Zinjirli Stela of Esarhaddon depicts Esarhaddon holding a club and leashes which are attached to rings in the lips of two captives (Image reproduced in Parpola and Watanabe 1988:20; discussed in Porter and Bunnens 2000). Similarly, the rock relief of Anubanini depicts the king of the Lulubi leading two captives by

20 An interesting anthropological parallel is presented by the similarities between the dress and adornment of Rashaayda Bedouin women and the tools used to domesticate camels. Rashiidy women wear tightly fitting belts and straps to bind their hair and face like the tight saddle girths used to break camels. These women also tattoo themselves, often with brands shaped like camels, much as the camels are branded once they have been domesticated. There is also considerable overlap between the terminology used to describe the material culture surrounding camels and Rashiidy women's dress. Particularly relevant, here, a woman's nose ring, *zimaam*, is also used to refer to the iron nose-ring used to break a camel in to its saddle (Young 1994: 68).

leashes attached to rings passed through their noses (Potts 1999:318–9; Hrouda and Trümpelmann 1976).²¹ The practice of passing a *şerretu* through the nose of a captive may also go some way to explaining the *laban appi* gesture (lit. to touch the nose) which was a ceremonial act to demonstrate ‘humility and intensified begging for mercy in the presence of divinity’ (Cifarelli 1998: 216).

This practice of leading captives using rings also seems to be attested elsewhere in the Bible (2 Chr. 33:11; Job 40:25–26; 2 Kgs. 19:28; Isa. 37:29; Ezek. 38:4), although the term used to describe the rings used to lead captives seems to be חָהּ or possibly חוּהּ. Although the nose ring used to lead captives clearly serves a different function to the נֶזֶם, it is notable that the term חָהּ stands in parallel to נֶזֶם in the list of items used to make the Golden Calf (Exod 35:22). This suggests that, although distinct items in material culture, the נֶזֶם as an item of dress may have carried similar connotations. Indeed, this connection between nose-rings and defeat and humiliation perhaps explains why nose-rings were not popular items of adornment in the Babylonian world (Stol 2016:37–9). Moreover, Amos 4:1–2 seems to allude to the practice when it states that overly-assertive and morally corrupt wives will be led away with fishhooks (סִירֹת דּוּגָה) or rings (צִנּוֹת).²² Here, we also find the association of wives with livestock (Amos 4:1). It is against this rich cultural backdrop in which metal rings were used to communicate ownership, objectification as well as to subdue and control both animal and human livestock, that the wearing of the נֶזֶם as a nose ring should be read.

נֶזֶם Worn by Groups of Mixed Genders

Where נֶזֶמִים are described as being worn by groups of mixed genders (Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2, 3; 35:22; Judg. 8:24–6; Job 42:11), the wearers seem to be members of a family unit who are dependents of a male head of household, often women or children of either gender.²³ Indeed, the נֶזֶם arguably serves as a

21 For an overview of the Mesopotamian iconography of captives being led by ropes attached to rings and its development over time see Ornan (2007).

22 For a detailed discussion of this tricky passage, see (Kleven 1996).

23 In recent years, significant inroads in the study of children and childhood in the Hebrew Bible and biblical world have been made, see in particular Bunge, Fretheim and Gaventa (2008); Parker (2013) and (Garroway 2014). In his survey of this research, Aasgaard highlights that a hallmark of this scholarship is the rejection of the traditional tendency to pair children with other marginalized groups such as women, slaves and the elderly and treat them as an undifferentiated group. Aasgaard convincingly draws on intersectionality to point out that despite significant overlap of common interests, children's interests and perspectives would likely differ significantly from adult females and, whilst features of the lived experience

marker of the wearers' identity as a dependant. This interpretation is bolstered by the reference to נזמים which occurs in Exod. 32:2. Aaron commands the people to remove the נזמים which are worn 'in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters', which are then subsequently melted down first to make the golden calf and then to furnish the Tabernacle (Exod. 32:3–4; 35:22). This explicitly identifies the נזם as an item which is worn by women and children of both genders.

Similarly, in Genesis 35, Jacob commands his household to put away foreign gods, purify themselves and to change their garments (Gen. 35:2). His family subsequently give up the gods and 'the rings (נזמים) that were in their ears' (Gen. 35:4) and these are buried. There have been numerous different suggestions as to who is wearing the נזמים and what the exact connection is between the נזמים and the foreign gods they are buried with. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan implies that the earrings are connected to idol worship by adding the phrase 'on which the likeness of his idol was designed'.²⁴ The idea that the earrings may have been adorned with images connected to the foreign gods has been taken up by numerous, later commentators who have suggested the נזמים were decorated with 'pagan symbols' (Sarna 1989:240) or were used as 'amulets' (Westermann 2004:244), or 'talismans' (Sarna 1989:240) for the 'adoration or service of foreign gods' (Arnold 2009:301), or were believed to be imbued with 'a magical deterrent power' (von Rad 1972:336). However, the vast majority of rings in the Iron Age archaeological record are plain, decorated with beaded

of children and women may intersect, to conflate them wholesale is to tacitly accept and reiterate that the human norm is the adult male. (Aasgaard 2019: 37). Nevertheless, it is hardly a novel observation that the ancient world did not meet our own standards of gender equality. Women and children are treated here together as a family unit of dependents because they are both explicitly identified as wearing נזמים and the archaeological evidence strongly suggests that earrings and/or nose-rings were strongly associated with women and children of both genders. Whilst I do not wish to deny the insights of intersectionality or the very real differences between women and children, the wearing of a נזם is a point of intersection. Moreover, numerous semantic studies on how dependents are identified and conceptualised in the Hebrew Bible seem to suggest that women and children were understood under the rubric of 'dependent' within the household unit. See for example the work on the semantic valence of the term נָזֵם: Locher ("נָזֵם" TDOT 5:348); O'Connor (1999); O'Connor and Lee (2007); Eng (2011:89–94).

- 24 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is clearly also uncomfortable with the notion that these idolatrous items of jewellery and foreign gods had come into the possession of Jacob and his family and so they are distanced from them by suggesting that the נזמים along with the idols were taken from the inhabitants of Shechem.

granulation or iron bands but are not, as a general rule, decorated with what might be described as ‘idol’ imagery.²⁵

Victor Hurowitz has proposed an innovative and unique solution to the somewhat enigmatic passage in Gen. 35:4 and suggests that the third plural pronominal suffix (בָּאָזְנֵיהֶם) refers not to the family’s ears but to the ears of the idols (Hurowitz 2000). Hurowitz highlights Ora Negbi’s catalogue of figurines with pierced hoop earrings as evidence of the practice of placing earrings on figurines (Hurowitz 2000:31; Negbi 1976). Whilst this explanation is grammatically plausible and undeniably appealing for its ingenuity, Jacob’s command to his family to change their garments and purify themselves in Gen. 35:2 perhaps suggests that the referent of the suffix is not the foreign gods but rather Jacob’s family, particularly in light of the identification of the נָזֶם with women and children in Exod. 32:2. Tentatively, therefore, the implication of Gen. 35:2 may be that the נָזֶם are worn by Jacob’s household; his wives and his children.

Moreover, both of these passages emphasise that the נָזֶם ring can be worn on the ears. This brings to mind the practise of piercing the ear of a slave who wishes to remain with his master with an awl (Exod. 21:5–6). Here too, it seems likely that the site of the body, the body modification and act of piercing as well as the נָזֶם themselves convey a complex message about the relationship of dependents and their social status and role within the kinship unit.

At first sight, the mixed group in Job 42:11 does not ostensibly conform to this pattern of associating נָזֶם with women and children. Job’s, presumably, adult brothers and sisters comfort him and each gift him a golden נָזֶם and a piece of money. Commentators tend to view the נָזֶם here as a transportable and easily transferable form of wealth. Indeed, Golani notes that one of the functions of jewellery in the Iron Age II period is wealth storage (Golani 2013:72). In societies that do not use monetary systems as we recognise them, items of jewellery which can be recast, exchanged or gifted represent a potentially significant form of wealth transfer and the distinction between ornament and currency becomes blurred. For example, Clines states that: ‘we may presume that he is not planning to wear all the jewellery, but that the rings are a substitute for money’ (Clines 2011:236). Hartley argues that the purpose of this gift is to ‘overcome his losses’ and to contribute towards the cost of rebuilding his estate (Hartley 1988:541). More broadly the gift exchange has variously been

25 Golani has constructed an incredibly helpful typology of Iron Age II Jewellery in the Southern Levant. See in particular his work on earrings and small rings (Golani 2013: 96–144). One possible exception is the pair of earrings discovered as part of the Tel Miqne-Ekron hoards which are ‘a simple hoop to which is soldered a hollow sheet-silver lotus flower with an Egyptian-style human face at the base of the petals’ (Golani and Sass 1998: 66–7 fig. 11:4).

interpreted as ‘a token of good will and restored relationships’ (Habel 1985:585) and ‘tokens of his reintegration in society’ (Gray and Clines 2010:504).

These interpretations largely rest on the underlying assumption that the gift of the נזם has the same function as the second gift: the ‘piece of money’ (קישטה אחת). The נזם is thus understood as a financial gift, designed to help Job rebuild his estate or possibly as a means of communicating his wealthy status through dress.²⁶ However, this assumption is not necessarily warranted. The hermeneutical key to understanding the gift of the נזם lies not in the gift of money but rather the preceding verse: ‘YHWH restored the fortunes of Job while he was praying for his friends, and gave him twice as much as he had before’ (Job 2:10). The restoration of Job has thus happened before his family has come to visit, the gifts from his brothers and sisters are not intended as a consolation but rather are a celebration of his restoration. Included amongst the wealth which is restored to Job, are his seven sons and three daughters (Job 42:13). The gift of the נזמים from his brothers and sisters symbolizes the restoration of not only his material wealth but also the restoration of a thriving household after the death of his children (Job 1:18–19). The gold rings are not merely ornaments that have a secondary, monetary purpose and function as a form of wealth storage and display. The נזמים in Job 42:11 are deeply connected to and symbolic of the restoration of the children who would be dependent upon him as the male head of the household and therefore perhaps would have worn a נזם as a signifier of this relationship and their social status.

Like Job 42:11, the discussion of נזמים rings in Judg. 8:24–6 ostensibly does not address women or children at all.²⁷ Indeed, more broadly Judges 8 almost exclusively focuses on the actions of male agents.²⁸ Judges 8 describes a conflict with the Midianites who are ultimately defeated by Gideon. As part of his plunder, Gideon asks the Israelites to give him the נזמים from their spoils of war. Judg 8:24 states that Midianites had worn golden rings, because of their identity as Ishmaelites. This confusion between Midianites and Ishmaelites has led some commentators to suggest that the term “Ishmaelite” is a gloss for the

26 Clines notes that, based on the account of the Ishmaelite men wearing gold earrings in Judg.8:24–6, ‘an Uzite like Job may well have demonstrated his wealthy by adorning himself with some at least of his jewellery’ (Clines 2011: 1236). However, for reasons I discuss below, I do not find this interpretation convincing.

27 Despite the fact that this is almost universally translated as ‘earrings’ (ESV, NIV, KJV, ASV and NRSV), probably on the basis of Gen. 35:4 and Exod. 32:2–3, נזם is never modified by אָזִן in this chapter. I therefore refer to the נזמים worn by the Midianites as “rings”.

28 Tellingly, Stephen Wilson focuses on this passage in his study on the performance of masculinity in the Hebrew Bible, in particular Wilson focuses on Jether’s inability to kill the captive Midianite kings in relation to male maturation (Wilson 2015: 129–132).

style of dress affected by the Midianites.²⁹ The description of the golden נְזָמִים rings is frequently understood by commentators as an allusion to the wealth of the Midianites/Ishmaelites which is seen as part of an elaborate portrayal of an ‘exotic “other”, dripping in jewels’ (Niditch 2008: 105).³⁰ The נְזָמִים are usually seen as a unique, ethnically-coded item of dress. Indeed, Alter argues that ‘these semi-nomadic folk were evidently known for wearing golden ornaments’ (Alter 2013). However, it is notable that נָזֶם rings are not listed amongst the items of jewellery taken from the Midianites in Num 31:50, suggesting that the נָזֶם is not inseparably connected with Midianite identity whilst the other passages discussed above (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15; Job 42:11) suggest that the נְזָמִים were not uniquely associated with Midianite or Ishmaelite identity.

Several commentators have noted the similarities and parallels between the plundered נְזָמִים used by Gideon to cast the idolatrous ephod and the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 (Niditch 2008:105; Assis 2005:104–5). However, they have overlooked the fact that the נְזָמִים used to cast the golden calf are explicitly described as being taken from the ears of the wives, sons, and daughters of the Israelites (Exod. 32:2). Given the association of the נָזֶם with women and children elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and the discussion of the attacks of the cities of Succoth and Penuel earlier in Judges 8, it seems likely that these נְזָמִים were acquired by the Israelites indirectly as a result of taking captive Midianite/Ishmaelite women and children. The practice of taking captives is well-attested in the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 20:12–4; 21:10–4; Num. 31:14–8; Gen. 34:29).³¹ Indeed, Deut. 20:14 explicitly defines spoil (שָׁלַל) as women, children, livestock and everything which is in the city. There is, therefore, a significant overlap between that which Deut. 20:14 classifies as spoil and those described as wearing the נָזֶם elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, by removing the נָזֶם rings worn by the captive Midianites/Ishmaelites women and children, the Israelites destroy the last vestiges of the Midianites/Ishmaelites’ former kinship units and thus abrogate their loyalty to their former male household leaders. There is arguably mirrored in Deut. 21:11–4 when a captive bride must have

29 The confusion between Ishmaelites and Midianites also occurs in the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37:25–8). For an overview of the solutions proposed for Judges 8:24 see (Zimmermann 1952: 113–4). More recently, Webb has attempted to resolve the tension by suggesting it is the rings which are Ishmaelite in origin rather than the Midianites (Webb 2012).

30 See also, Webb’s argument that the reason for singling out the golden earrings for special attention is to draw attention to the Midianites’ wealth (Webb 2012).

31 For a detailed discussion of the treatment of women and children as captives and plunder see (Niditch 1995; Rey 2016; Southwood 2017; Lemos 2018).

of all of her clothes, as well as her hair and nails removed before she can be assimilated into an Israelite household.³²

Conclusions

I have considered the function and role of the נזמים as a narrative device which is used to communicate subtle nuances within the text through dress. These texts, combined with the archaeological evidence, suggests that the נזם communicated and actively constructed the relationship of women and children to the household which belonged to the male patriarch. This understanding enriches our understanding of the texts in which a נזם is described as part of the dress of the wearer (Gen. 24:22, 30, 47; 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3; 35:22; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12; Hos. 2:15; Job 42:11; Prov. 11:22; 25:12). Despite the tendency to associate נזמים exclusively with women possibly as a betrothal or bridal gift, I have demonstrated that the נזם is an item of jewellery which was worn by both women and children of both genders. I have utilized archaeological evidence to suggest that this is a historically plausible reconstruction. As such, נזמים inscribe on the body and actively construct complex concepts surrounding the valuation, commodification and ownership of the wearer in relation to the male patriarch of the household. Moreover, the location of the נזם on the wearers' body is used to communicate principles of control and ownership. In the prophetic sexual metaphors, the use of the נזם to attract lovers is not morally repugnant to the author(s) because it is a perversion of an item of bridal jewellery, but rather because it rejects the male authority and ownership which the נזם represents; a subtle but nevertheless important nuance. Similarly, the gift of נזמים in Job 42:11 is not merely a step towards the restoration Job's material wealth but rather is symbolic of the restoration of his family and the birth of his children who will ultimately wear the נזמים as his dependents. The reference to נזמים in Judg. 8:24–6 is not intended as an allusion to the Midianite/Ishmaelites wealth, but rather hints at the very human nature of the spoil captured by the Israelites and the consequent destruction of the Midianite/Ishmaelite's kinship units. It is only when these diverse passages are considered together that the subtle nuances and undercurrents conveyed through dress can be fully understood. The values and power structures of a society are inscribed on both the wearer's body and the bodies of text themselves.

32 There is significant debate amongst biblical scholars as to the status a foreign, female captive might expect to hold in an Israelite household. For more detailed discussion see, (Olyan 2000: 97–8; Rey 2016).

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