The Refined Roman Society: Analysis of Roman Lamps and a Decorative Lamp Holder

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In the words of John R. Clarke (2003), "the Romans were not at all like us" (p. 159). Illuminating the rift between modern customs and those of ancient Rome are the characteristics of two ancient discoveries, which even today convey the nuances of their respective cultural and historical contexts: a terracotta lamp and a bronze lamp holder accompanied by two bronze lamps. In the former artifact, the inscription of a lurid sex scene shocks the modern voyeur, unsuspecting of such a display on an object appearing to be of primarily utilitarian and domestic purposes. Upon the latter objects, intricate bronze craftsmanship speaks of innovative manufacturing techniques while the symbolic presence of owl, dormice, and frog figurines hint at the rich cultural exchange that occurred during the Roman Period. In this essay, I will analyze the manufacturing process, use, and artistry evinced by the aesthetic of selected Roman lamps and a Roman lamp holder in order to compare and contrast the objects while shedding light on the broader cultural context they attest to. The incorporation of artistic detail into the fabrication of these ostensibly functional appliances illustrates the sophistication of Roman society as well as the socioeconomic and cultural motifs of the Roman Period. While differing in appearance and in motifs of cultural significance, both oil lamps share a common thematic importance in the realms of religion and symbolic insights on life and culture during their time.

The magnitude of the cultural and technological explosion that occurred at the hand of the Romans evokes even among modern scholarly dialogue the question of why they failed to reach the degree of innovation we enjoy in modern society (Eliav, 2014). The Roman Period is divided into three segments: the Early Roman Period, beginning in 63 BCE with the arrival of the Roman general, Pompey Magnus, and ending with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple at the hand of Titus, a general and eventual emperor of the Flavian Dynasty; the Late Roman Period, beginning with the destruction of the Second Temple and ending with Constantine's

edict in 324 CE, which declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire; and the Byzantine Period, beginning with Constantine's edict and ending with the Arab conquest in 640 CE. The objects under examination in this essay are presumably from the Early Roman Period, which marked the beginning of a cultural amalgamation, especially between the Roman traditions and those of the Eastern Mediterranean. A true testament to the Romans' cultural hegemony over its holdings ranging from North Africa to Asia was the peculiar and nearly universal acceptance it received from its conquered societies. Rather than maintain a desperate grip on their indigenous cultures, the denizens of the Roman Empire's conquered territories, provinces, and vassal kingdoms eagerly embraced and assimilated to what is today referred to as Greco-Roman culture. This terminology sheds light on a key irony of this exchange: the Romans achieved their notoriety not by any intrinsic cultural supremacy, but rather by absorbing the finest elements of the civilizations they conquered (Eliav, 2014). Moreover, the social and spiritual status quos were so different than those of today that civil discourse between the ancient Roman and the modern man would be nearly impossible (Clarke, 2003, pp. 14-15). Observing proper religious practices was top priority among numerous cultures. Such obligations were so strict that Jews in the days of the Roman Empire could not tamper with their oil lamps following the commencement of the Sabbath (Westenholz, 2005, pp. 14-15). While this era may sound entirely draconian and oppressive, certain liberties enjoyed in the first years of the Common Era are enough to make the modern man cringe. Before the advent of Christianity in Rome, for instance, overt sexual expression was not condemned by religion or restricted to married couples in the privacy of the domestic sphere, but rather it was viewed as "a much-appreciated gift of the gods" (Clarke, 2003, p. 15). Perhaps unthinkable to the modern inquirer is the idea that artificial light was not at all the abundant utility that it is today. In fact, in the ancient world, "daylight governed the world to a far greater extent than at the present

time" (Bailey, 1972, p. 11). In the absence of electricity, the oil lamp proved to be the key tool to any viable activity after sunset or in dark spaces. Striking in its simplicity, versatility, and ease of use, the oil lamp became a tool no Greco-Roman household could do without.

The terracotta lamp under examination is almost certainly of the Roman variety and was most likely manufactured sometime in the neighborhood of the first century AD (Knell, 2008, para. 3). The heightened eroticism, characteristic of Roman design, depicted in the lamp's discus (also a particularly Roman characteristic), coupled with signs of a "hollow-moulding" manufacturing process evinces its presumable time and place (Bailey, 1972, p. 13; Westenholz, 2005, p. 12). "With the adoption of a large discus, or concave upper surface, as a standard feature of pottery lamps towards the end of the first century BC," and the process of "hollow-moulding" popularizing during and after the 3rd century BCE, we can confidently place the lamp within the realm of the first century AD (Knell, 2008, para. 3-4). It is in truth likely that the lamp was found in the magnificently preserved ancient civilization of Pompeii. "Literally thousands of lamps have been found … made of terracotta or bronze" in Pompeii excavations (Connolly, 1990, p. 44). "The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D." covered the city, leaving its artistic, architectural, and cultural treasures hidden and preserved for future excavators ("Pompeii," 2014, para. 1). This information corresponds beautifully with the aforementioned timeline and cultural context suggested by the lamp's physical characteristics.

Evidence of the artistic process in moulding this lamp reveals the Roman use of pottery manufacturing as a means of conveying cultural refinement and superiority (Eliav, 2014). The Roman lamp's intricate design and the fine seam along its midsection are the results of a process called "hollow-moulding," which, in the Roman times, made use of a plaster or stone "patrix (mould) from which a mould could be taken" (Bailey, 1972, p. 13; Eliav, 2014). From two moulds,

"one for the top, one for the bottom," two constituent pieces of the lamp were created by pressing clay upon each mould (each patrix contained a desired design); then, "the two halves were pressed together, and then the whole thing was placed in a kiln and fired until hard" (Eliav, 2014). "Afterwards, the stone mould would be taken apart, revealing the object inside" (Eliav, 2014). The end result was a beautifully crafted terracotta lamp, refined with an elaborate and intimate copulation scene.

Putting this lamp to use was simple. Two holes, a wick, and oil as a source of fuel were the necessary components of a functioning moulded lamp (Bailey, 1972, 9). With the gradual sophistication of the pottery lamp, Romans transitioned from using a large open vessel as a lamp structure and "pinching the rim" to create a small reservoir for the wick to implementing a "bridged nozzle," which further isolated the wick hole (Bailey, 1972, 9). According to Bailey (1972), "the introduction of the bridged nozzle was a definite advance, as only the end of the wick appears at the wick hole, and the flame can be tamped down until it is virtually smokeless" (p. 9). While an undoubtedly utilitarian addition, the elongated nozzle provided the Romans with more opportunity for fine craftsmanship and artistic design. Thus, we see on the lamp under examination a nozzle taking the form of a flared protrusion (at the bottom of the photo provided) with inscribed lines elegantly embracing its outline. And the remaining hole in the center serves as the "filling hole" into which oil would be poured (Westenholz, 2005, p. 11). The concave surface on which the intricate designs began to appear was called a discus, which is particularly indicative of the Roman school of lamp manufacturing, as it was seen "following the Roman conquest" when "the centre of pottery production moved from Greece to Rome" (Westenholz, 2005, p. 12). In fact, the aesthetic quality of the discus was largely secondary. Its primary purpose, which was to allow one to "funnel the oil into the vessel," reveals the extent of Roman ingenuity and pragmatism (Westenholz, 2005, p. 12).

The oil lamp's centrality to life during the Roman Period exudes insights into the socioeconomic dynamics of the time. Despite the terracotta lamp's impressive design, the likelihood is that "mould-made lamps" of its type were used by "the poorer people," whereas the "elaborate metal examples," were more often employed by the "richer" people of the time (Bailey, 1972, p. 11). In fact, oil lamps came to be such a status symbol that "houses were lit poorly or brightly according to the owner's circumstance." The religious climate of the time made use of the mass production of clay moulded lamps, as their disposability and abundance made them appropriate for widespread ceremonial use (Bailey, 1972, p. 12). "The ordinary clay" lamp was "presented as a votive offering at many temples and shrines," which peppered the span of the Roman Empire to pay homage to a diverse pantheon of national deities. Given the seemingly base, hedonistic design on the moulded lamp of interest in this essay, the idea of such an object in the religious sphere may seem unlikely if not offensive to the modern observer. It is important to note, however, that there was "little connection between the use to which a Roman lamp was put, and the decorative scene appearing on it" and that the values indicative of the Early Roman Period lie in stark contrast to those of contemporary society (Bailey, 1972, p. 13).

Thus, clearly affording further examination is the hollow-moulded lamp's most alluring character, the vivid sex scene depicted on its discus. To the modern observer, the first thought may be that such a lamp must have been used in some sort of brothel or at least owned by some sort of deranged hedonist. In reality, erotic artwork was notably commonplace. In the study of the property owned by an ancient Roman businessman, Clarke (2003) discovered that with regard to "pornographic" paintings, "every home had to have one" (p. 35). Thus, while décor was modeled after members of high society, even the less well off boasted erotic artwork (Clarke, 2003, pp. 33-35). All this by no means indicates some sort of wittingly perverse

society. In the first century A.D., when this lamp was likely put to use, the consensus among Romans was that "to pursue sex was a good thing—not a shameful one" (Clarke, 2003, p. 13). To say that this lamp was extraordinary or must have been owned by a particular stratum of society is therefore fallacious. This idea follows from the fact that lamps were mass-produced, more or less disposable tools during this period (Knell, 2008, para. 3). Erotic art and tradition continued until after "the mid-third century" when Christianity "gave women important roles to play" and "reinstated the ancient Roman rules for every woman's behavior" (Clarke, 2003, p. 162). This, too, attests to the likelihood that the lamp is from the first century CE. In sum, what seems to the present-day viewer to be a bizarre and even laughable pornographic image is in truth just an everyday first century CE tool with an artistic flare.

The last crucial element of the ancient pottery lamp is the wick. The most favored wicks of the time were made of flax, a material "commonly made by the twisting and singeing of old clothing" (Westenholz, 2005, p. 12). Nevertheless, the sole function of the wick was to provide capillary action to "enable the fuel to burn and to feed the fuel to the flame," so various other materials, such as "linen, papyrus, and other fibrous matter" were used (Knell, 2008, para. 2; Bailey, 1972, 9). As stated by Bailey (2006), "olive oil was probably the principal fuel employed in most Mediterranean countries, and was exported to areas where the olive did not grow" (p. 10). That being said, the widespread use of the pottery lamp in and of itself says a great deal about the manufacturing society's degree of prosperity. Specifically, "only societies producing a food surplus could afford to use lamps extensively, and areas which had to import edible oils would be inclined to use them for cooking rather than fuel" (Bailey, 2006, pp. 10-11). While many societies made use of the abundance of olive oil in the Mediterranean region, others had to use whatever fuel was the most available ("sesame oil, nut oil, fish oil, castor oil and other plant oils," to name a few) (Bailey,

2006, p. 10). Intricacy of design, abundance of oil, and the hollow-moulding manufacturing process, which allowed for mass-production ("many [lamps] were clearly regarded as disposable commodities, the 'throw away products of their day'") all point to a staggeringly prosperous society (Knell, 2008, para. 3). This idea, while easily lost in considering the labor intensity required just to keep the human life illuminated, is crucial when examining ancient Rome and its cohort civilizations. Yet again, the ideas of artistic, culture, and now, economic prosperity are brought to the forefront of the discussion. As stressed by Eliav (2014), the ideas of subjugation and national supremacy were firmly entrenched in the ancient world (especially among the Romans) and frequently accomplished through cultural as well as military dominance. The abundance of Roman lamps found throughout the entire land of the Mediterranean, including the land of Israel, transmits this idea of national transcendence through cultural exceptionalism and excellence in art and manufacturing (Eliav, 2014).

Such ideas are perhaps best conveyed in the degree of heightened craftsmanship and symbolism evident in the increasingly ornate bronze variation of the ancient Roman oil lamp. While somewhat similar in shape and form to the moulded clay lamp, the bronze lamps and lamp holder, with their elegant accoutrements and heightened complexity, take the discussion of ancient lighting in a slightly different direction. At first glance, there are unmistakable similarities between the more primitive terracotta lamp and the more luxurious, updated bronze lamps. Some of the most basic aforementioned features that define an ancient oil lamp remain: the nozzle, the filling hole, the mouth (wick hole), and the oil reservoir, to name a few (Westenholz, 2005, p. 11). However, utilitarian and artistic embellishments render the second lamps more sophisticated in terms of both class and functionality. A striking variation of the two bronze lamps is the presence of two mouths. As described in the "halakhic literature," this

modification made the lamps "suitable for use by two people" and would "increase the amount of light supplied" (Westenholz, 2005, p. 11; Knell, 2008, para. 5). "Pierced lugs" on the ornamental palm leaf handles allow for these lamps to be "suspended by chains" from the lampholder, which takes the form of a "leafy tree" (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps,* 2014). This, coupled with the addition of a prominent base, which "allowed the lamp to stand steadily," suited it for practical domestic use (Bailey, 1972, p. 9). Furthermore, in place of the inscribed concave discus perforated with a small filling hole, these lamps contain a much larger filling hole, which warrants the decorative mice plugs to prevent the escape of any excess oil. Perhaps the most noteworthy artistic statement, to be discussed in further detail later in the essay, is made through the preponderant depictions of owls, frogs, and mice, which symbolize certain aspects of Roman life and attest to elements of the underlying cultural climate during the Early Roman Period (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps,* 2014).

The elaboration of design seen in the bronze artifacts is indicative of sophistications in the manufacturing process. A departure from the traditional hollow-moulding technique, "the lost-wax process of casting" produced a bronze template, which could "be re-used in case of casting failure, or applied to the production of multiple copies," which lowered "production costs" (Connolly, 2003, pp. 424-433). The first step of producing a bronze vessel entailed the creation of a "clay or plaster" model "so as to allow for addition and subtraction." From this initial design, "skilled artisans took piece casts…in clay," which would be "lined with a thin layer of wax that could be removed and assembled with others to produce a hollow wax working-model." This easily reproducible component could then be "cast in bronze just as it came from the molds" to produce the uniform, adorned vessels that typify Greco-Roman inventories. An abundance of proof for this manner of metalworking has been found in the

"broken clay moulds, vitrified bricks from furnaces, scraps of waste metal, and slag" accompanying former "metalworking shops." The numerous workshops unearthed in excavations of Olympia, Athens, and Corinth depict the specialization of labor and artisan craftsmanship that went into the manufacture of bronze products (Connolly, 2003, pp. 424-433). However, given the dispersal of these lamps throughout the entire range of the Roman Empire and especially in the Levant, "lamps in the Roman style…seem to have been manufactured at some east-Mediterranean city such as Alexandria in Egypt or Antioch in Syria" since "there were no large factories in ancient Palestine" (Smith, 1966, p. 19).

If such artifacts were truly spread over the massive expanse that excavations attest to, what specifications can be made about their use? According to Smith (1966), "bronze lampstands were familiar household equipment among wealthy Romans, and doubtless some metal stands were used in Palestinian and Herodian times," but it is unlikely that any lampstand of such intricate design would have been found in Palestine during Herodian times preceding the cultural fusion of the Early Roman Period (p. 7). Clearly, then, these bronze lamps and lampholders were common in the dwellings of the more wealthy social strata that had decisively adopted the Greco-Roman fashions of the Early Roman Period. The probable origin of these bronze products can be further narrowed, however, by the lampholder, which takes the form of "a leafy tree." However unique and peculiar its design may seem, it "is a common type found in Pompeii" (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps*, 2014). Extrapolating on its size tells more of the subtleties of its use. Because of the role of lighting as a leading status symbol of the time, the wealthy would boast "elegant lamholders such as lampstands which were so large that they had to be carried in both hands" (Westenholz, 2005, p. 13). Thus, the considerable size and design of the lampholder points to the likelihood that this entire lot was used in a Pompeii household of

high, if not imposing, social stature.

More puzzling and informative than any other detail of the bronze lamp set is the symbolic use of three apparently arbitrary animals: the mouse, the owl, and the frog. A peculiar juxtaposition exists between the elegance and urbanity exuded by the small bronze lamps and their plugs, which would have been inserted in the filling hole to preserve any remaining oil. These plugs take the form of "ordinary house mice of the type that have been found in food storage vessels in Pompeii" (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps,* 2014). While today, the idea of a rodent within any remote proximity to food reserves sends a shiver down the spine, "mice were ever-present in Roman houses." So different was the Roman regard for mice that "one variety, the dormouse, was consider [sic] a culinary delicacy" (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps,* 2014). Given the cultural context, then, the salience of a mouse on an artifact symbolizing the apex of Pompeian society is logical. With this resolved, the owls perched upon the lampstand's branches are no less perplexing. After all, the owl may not today imply any impressive degree of majesty or opulence. However, the decorative use of the owl in Pompeian society reaches beyond temporal perceptions of everyday pests. In reality, the people of Pompeii held this animal to a high degree of sanctity, as "the owl was sacred to their patron deity, the goddess Minerva" (Moeller, 1976, p. 89). Minerva, "the Roman goddess of wisdom and sponsor of arts, trade, and strategy," was commonly depicted artistically through the majestic "owl of Minerva" ("Minerva," 2014, para. 1). While the owl's symbolism can be brought to light with a simple analysis of Roman polytheism, the frogs completing the feet upon which the lampholder stands require an insight into cultural realms beyond that of the quintessential Greco-Roman tradition. As mentioned before, the Roman Empire absorbed from its conquered territories their most appealing cultural components. "Egypt became part of the Roman Empire in the late 1st

Century BC" ("Influence of Greek and Egyptian Cultures," 2014, para. 10-12). With the bronze artifacts of interest being dated to sometime between the first century BCE and the first century CE, any significant consequence of this conquest is likely to manifest itself in high art (*Lamp holder with hanging lamps,* 2014). In fact, studies of Pompeian society have revealed that "the influence of Egypt is mainly within the religious aspects of the society as well as within the art" ("Influence of Greek and Egyptian Cultures," 2014, para. 10-12). "Many statues and figurines show Egyptian pharaohs and Egyptian gods and goddesses" in the well-preserved ruins of Pompeii. In ancient Egyptian tradition, Heqet, "a frog-goddess who represented fertility," was of central importance to basic sustenance, as "the frog was a symbol of life and fertility, since millions of them were born after the annual inundation of the Nile" ("Heqet," 2014, para. 1). The deity's association with the annual flood, which served as the pulse of ancient Egyptian society, earned it an elite stance among the Egyptian pantheon. It is no surprise that an entity of such spiritual weight in the Roman territory of Egypt would show itself in the bronze lampholder that presumably resided in the home of a wealthy Pompeii resident, eager to boast a high level of taste and cultivation.

The two ancient discoveries discussed in this essay have so far accounted for cultural, socioeconomic, technological, and religious dichotomies that characterized the Early Roman Period. Up to this point, distinct differences in the manufacture, use, and appearance of these two findings have been emphasized to comment on the different cultural domains that defined ancient Roman civilization. From this point on, this essay will unify, rather than differentiate, the varying artifacts to expound upon two abstract themes that were universal to the ancient Roman oil lamp in the ancient land of Palestine: religiosity, and the oil lamp's status as a symbol for "life, the family, continuity," and the human soul (Westenholz, 2005, p. 20).

To be sure, the religious and spiritual preoccupation with oil lamps was in no way restricted to traditional Greco-Roman cultic practices. This is unambiguously proven by "the funeral practices of this period, where the customs of pagans, Jews and Christians seem to have been remarkably alike so far as lamps were concerned" (Smith, 1966, p. 11). Upon the death of a loved one, family members would put out any household lamps to acknowledge "that joy had gone out of the home." However, the "popular idea that the dead needed a lamp to light his way as he went down to the underworld" was most commonly held by those of pagan religions (Smith, 1966, p. 11). The widespread belief in some "symbolic or religious purpose" for the furnishing of tombs with lamps has been evidenced by "no sign of blackening around the wick-hole," which suggests that such lamps were not always "merely the property of the dead person" (Bailey, 1972, p. 12). Rather, they "were probably purchased specifically for funerary use" Bailey, 1972, p. 12).

The role of the oil lamp in Jewish practices is substantial enough to justify further discussion. The Sabbath light led the oil lamp to become "one of the foremost symbols of the hallowed day of rest," and therefore, one of the central objects in the practice of Judaism in the ancient world (Westenholz, 2005, pp. 15-20). Because "kindling of a lamp is forbidden on the Sabbath, but illumination is needed for the Sabbath meal, it was necessary to kindle the lamp as close as possible to nightfall." In addition to the practice of caution and careful timing in kindling the lamp, the necessity of adhering to strict religious guidelines during the Sabbath led to technological innovations that improved the oil lamp's function. The goal was "to design an oil-lamp that will burn for a sufficient amount of time without human intervention." The two prevailing solutions included "the addition of a second oil reservoir" and "the use of an egg, or egg-shaped pottery receptacle, as a reserve oil supply for the lamp." Just as with design

alterations sparked by regulations for the Sabbath, the menorah experienced notable changes throughout the evolution of the Jewish practices. The primal, yet magnificent "menorah of the Tabernacle… consisted of a central shaft from which three branches issued on either side," with "flowers" on which individual lamps could rest. In contrast, after much strife and persecution following the destruction of the First Temple and the Second Temple, "a new menorah, initially of iron spits overlaid with wood" had to do for the Hasmoneans following their victories. Through all the struggles faced by the Jewish inhabitants of the land of Palestine, the light emanating from the oil lamp remained with an empowering resilience. This message of perseverance in the face of arduous persecution and struggle might be most familiar to the modern inquirer through a tradition that remains widespread and public to this day: The Hanukkah Holiday. While the commonly agreed upon origin of the Hanukkah celebration may be the Hasmoneans' "commemoration of the rededication of the Temple and the kindling of the menorah following their victory," there are additional roots to the holiday that explain at greater length the symbolic importance of the lamp. Namely, "the Babylonian Talmud attributes the establishment of the Hanukkah holiday to fear of the dark," as Adam feared divine punishment was imminent as the approaching climax of winter shortened the days. The practice of kindling lights for eight nights was, according to this source, to symbolize Adam's "eight-day fast" and to celebrate the eventual lengthening of the days after a period of uncertainty and torment (Westenholz, 2005, pp. 15-20). Thus, the oil lamp served a variety of religious functions, including adorning the deceased soul with a guiding force and through a variety of traditions in Jewish history, designating certain traditions and conveying an empowering message of endurance in times of hardship.

Above all, the oil lamp in the ancient world far outreached its functional purpose of

illumination in times of darkness. As the sole harbinger of artificial light, it became a ubiquitous fixture of life in antiquity. Regardless of distinctions between luxury and inferior varieties, the oil lamp maintained a series of symbolic messages that were applicable and universal to entire societies. Frequently made was the comparison between the lamp and the soul (Westenholz, 2005, pp. 20-22). A particular midrash, alluding to Psalm 20:27, "describes several aspects of the nocturnal activity of the soul, and compares them with the activity of the lamp: the soul warms the body when man is asleep and is regarded as dead; and it draws vitality from above" just as "the lamp generates warmth, and its wick draws oil from the lamp to the flame." Doubtful is there a better testament to the esteem at which man held the lamp in the ancient world. During a time when pure faith extracted from the devout soul was the ultimate guiding force in life, no frivolous comparison would be made between a material object and the transcendent soul. Moreover, the lamp commonly served as the vehicle for metaphors making sense of life and death. In Talmudic sources, "the death of a person in old age is compared to a lamp that goes out by itself, in contrast to the death of a young person, which is like a lamp that is put out by human agency." The human life, then, in both the physical and the metaphysical sense, was continuously associated with the life of a lamp's flame. These comparisons demonstrate a degree of personification of the oil lamp, as if its symbolic meaning took upon a life of its own and rendered itself almost mortal in its capacity to guide man, to provide warmth, and ultimately, to die. To speak of other symbolic roles, Jewish texts establish "the kindling of the Sabbath light… as an expression of the mutual relationship between the home and the Creator." This comparison ultimately reinforced the female confinement to the domestic sphere, as "death during childbirth" was threatened as a consequence of failure to tend to the lamp. Beyond gender roles within the household, "several midrashim" convey "the concept that the

Sabbath light is kindled 'on account of the peace in one's home.'" In this sense, the lamp's status as a symbol for a stable household evidently had the practical function of enforcing generalized societal norms prescribed for the domestic environment. Another symbolic use of the lamp, as introduced earlier in this essay, was specific to "the continuity of Jewish life." "The imagery of the lamp forcefully evokes the struggle for survival of the Jewish people, despite the disasters that it experiences. The phrase "'the lamp of God had not gone out yet,'" used in reference to the "eve of the destruction of the Tabernacle at Shiloh," sums up, in the broadest possible sense, the parallel between the ancient oil lamp and the life of the Jewish faith. An oppressed, yet resilient group, the Jewish people have been historically able to rekindle their religious and cultural flame each time opposition forces are convinced they have extinguished it for good.

This essay has examined two sets of artifacts from the Early Roman Period: a clay moulded Roman lamp and two bronze Roman lamps accompanied by a bronze lampholder. The sophistication of design in each of these objects indicates a high degree of refinement in the Roman culture to the extent that even the most utilitarian objects were tempered with elegant artistry and craftsmanship. However, an analysis of the varying manufacturing processes, uses, and physical characteristics of these artifacts has uncovered a rift in the cultural contexts in which they were put to use. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the Roman oil lamp's uses even in the cultures of Palestine that adopted Roman technology only after the Roman conquest, the themes of religiosity and existential symbolism remain firmly rooted in the most fundamental facets of the ancient Roman oil lamp.

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