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Young Girls and Their Dolls in Judaism

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Abstract

Dolls were popular toys, especially of young girls, from ancient until modern times and it is hard to see why Jewish girls would not have had them or played with them. Yet, and as opposed to other types of toys, they are not mentioned in Talmudic sources and not found in Jewish archaeological settings. As Talmudic sources tend to mention toys with halakhic problems, it is possible that the rabbis of the Talmud did not see any problems with doll play and the missing archaeological setting may reflect the non-lasting material from which the dolls were made. It is hard to imagine, though, that the rabbis and the general population were not aware of the dual nature of dolls in Graeco-Roman society, as playthings and as votive objects, and the dangers implicit in their votive nature. The dual nature of dolls in non-Jewish society continued to exist in the Middle Ages and almost up until modern times. In Jewish sources, dolls are mentioned for the first time in the Middle Ages and as aspects of dolls and their ritual use were even more blatant than before, this must have been common knowledge in Jewish society. While Jewish society would have known of the problems which were associated with idolatry and the sources that deal with them indeed mention idolatry, Jewish society never considered this a serious issue. Doll play thrived and by modern times doll production and sales had turned into a thriving business.

Keywords: dolls, play, toys, votive objects, idolatry, halakhah

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Young Girls and Their Dolls in Jewish Society and Law

Introduction

Dolls were and are perhaps the most popular toys of young girls throughout the ages.¹ Playing with dolls is well-documented in source material, and dolls have been found from past to present in archaeological contexts from prehistoric times and afterwards and in other venues of material culture and they have been discussed in scholarship far more than other toys. Primitive dolls were made from materials like wood, bone, or natural objects and were later crafted from wood, paper, wax, papier-mâché, cloth, rubber and much more, with the choice of material dependent on cultural context and technology.² Research has shown that the popularity of dolls was often the result of a combination of psychological benefits, their function as tools for social and emotional development, and their association with feminine roles and caregiving. Playing with dolls teaches children empathy and social skills, allows for emotional expression for their own feelings without guilt, or the projection of those feelings on to the doll even if these are fantasy. They provide a tool for the separation of the child's internal world from the realities of the real world but also give the child an opportunity to vent on that world through the doll. In that sense, the dolls create a new world in which a player can duplicate their life. They provide comfort, teach those who play with them nurturing and responsibility, language, communication and even fine motor skills, dressing them and playing with their accessories, even if the doll was old and falling apart. Some have claimed that playing with dolls was linked to social expectations for female children as future wives and mothers. As such, dolls gave these girls a chance to mimic adult roles

¹ This article continues my studies on play, games, and toys in Jewish society. Many of these studies are collected in Joshua Schwartz, *Jews and Christians in Roman-Byzantine Palestine, History, Daily Life and Material Culture, Vol. II, History, Society and the Land of the Jews* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 337-521. See also Joshua Schwartz, "Encounters in the Playground: Jewish and Christian Children at Play in Roman-Byzantine Palestine," in *Sanctifying Texts, Transforming Rituals: Encounters in Liturgical Studies*, ed. Paul van Gest, Marcel Poorthuis and Els Rose, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 349-365, Joshua Schwartz, "The Play's the Thing: Toys in Ancient Jewish Society—Visualizing through the Words of the Rabbis," *Images* 12 (1) (2019), 7-19 (https://brill.com/view/journals/ima/12/1/article-p7_2.xml), Joshua Schwartz, "God and Wisdom at Play: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Proverbs 8:30-31," *Revue des études juives* 184 (1-2) (2025), 157-176 and "Jews and Christians Playing at Religion from Ancient to Modern Times," to appear in the Peter J. Tomson Festschrift volume.

² See, in general, the classic Antonia Fraser, *Dolls* (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1973). See also the podcast series, "Her Half of History: From Venus to Barbie (a history of dolls)" (<https://herhalfhistory.com/2023/10/12/11-4-from-venus-to-barbie-a-history-of-dolls/>).

in learning how to dress, groom, manage a household and raise children.³ Most dolls until modern times were rather basic, makeshift or even primitive. These types of dolls could be beneficial, allowing the child to express creativity by completing the doll image. They were models for the adult world, yet unlike the adult world, playing with them rarely had rules and engendered free and unencumbered play. Completing the doll image allowed young girls to express their views on fashion, social values and class status, modeling various cultural phenomena. They can also be works of art at home, in religion and the theatre.⁴

Unfortunately, at least for young Jewish girls, and despite all the possible benefits of doll play just listed, they could also become problematic in terms of Jewish law or halakhah, as dolls throughout time also had a possible votive or cultic nature, as I shall shortly show. Was this enough to stymie their acceptance in Judaism or could this be ignored? Was there perhaps accommodation that might be available vis-à-vis potential problems? I shall first describe the nature of dolls in the non-Jewish world and then show how this impacted upon Jewish life. It should be remembered, though, that in terms of both Jewish life and law, this play, as all play, was not center stage in Jewish history and that the source material at times can be sketchy. It should also be remembered that halakhah is not monolithic and different types of Jewish law exist and sometimes the source material can be of different types, but most of the halakhic material appears in the standard or normative works of rabbinic halakhah or works derived from these. The basic question is to what extent were young Jewish girls and most likely their parents willing to look the other way when their daughters played with dolls and either ignore or find solutions to halakhic problems?

The Idolatrous Doll

³ See the literature cited in Mary Harlow, "Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 329-330.

⁴ See in detail Mattia Thibault, "Lotman and Play: For a Theory of Playfulness Based on the Semiotics of Culture," *Sign System Studies* 44, no.3 (December 2016), 295-325, and esp. 303-305. The general literature on dolls from a variety of perspectives is voluminous. See, e.g., Miriam Forman-Brunell, "Interrogating the Meanings of Dolls," *Girlhood Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012): 3-13, <https://doi.org/10.3167/GHS.2012.050102>; Miriam Forman-Brunell and Jennifer Sawn Whitney, eds., *Doll Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015) and Miriam Forman-Brunell, ed., *Deconstructing Dolls: Girlhood and Meanings of Play* (Oxford/New York: Berghan Books, 2021). See also Anna Chernaya, "Girls' Play with Dolls and Doll-Houses in Various Cultures," in Leon T. B. Jackson, et. al., eds., *Toward Sustainable Development Through Nurturing Diversity: Proceedings from the 21st International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.4087/HDOV09045>.

While dolls existed in the ancient Near East and in biblical Israel, I shall begin my discussion with dolls from the Graeco-Roman world as these dolls, and those that followed, would influence developments in Jewish society and not the earlier dolls, even though these early dolls often had the same dual functions of play and cult or religion, as the later ones did.⁵ Dolls are among the oldest artefacts of Graeco-Roman play culture and have been discovered in numerous ancient archaeological contexts which often show that they also served utilitarian purposes in rituals, rites, and celebrations. It is hard to differentiate between a toy and votive object and hard to know whether a doll may have been a ritual object, toy or both and if one aspect followed and in what order. Sometimes the non-utilitarian toy role came before the utilitarian votive role and sometimes there was a duality of function with the utilitarian-ritualist existing alongside the non-utilitarian. Even if some of the votive, ritual or worship aspects dissipated, they probably remained somewhere in the religious and cultural background of the player. This being the case, the innocent play with a doll might indeed have been innocent but was still steeped in possible ritualistic origins. Some have even claimed that a doll for a young girl was the equivalent of an icon for an adult.

Thus, dolls in the Graeco-Roman world could be toys and could be cultic objects and could be both separately or together and the play of the young girl with dolls, as with other toys, might have even acted out rituals.⁶ The sacred and ritualistic purposes of the doll were part of a teleological transition process from young girl to woman and toy dolls were offered to Demeter when that physical transition took place. The girl gave up her dolls, most cherished childhood possessions. In the Roman world the young girl was expected to dedicate her dolls to Artemis or to Aphrodite/Venus, reflecting a willingness to part with something cherished and offer it to the goddess as she approached a new chapter in life.⁷ Dolls found in a child's grave in the Graeco-Roman world represented what the girls could have and should have become. The parents had

⁵ On dolls in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel see Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts* (Atlanta; SBL Press; Archaeology and Biblical Studies 23, 2018), 210-211 and Rona S. Avissar Lewis, *Children in Antiquity: Archaeological Perspectives on Children and Childhood in the Land of Israel* (Rishon LeZion: University of Haifa Press-Miskal-Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2019), 126-129, 132, 146-149 (Hebrew).

⁶ See Schwartz, *Jews and Christians*, Vol. II, 375-394 (= Joshua Schwartz, "Ishmael at Play; On Exegesis and Jewish Society," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 66 [1995], 203-221). The rabbis describe Ishamel playing at sacrifice, offering up locusts on a "toy" altar. The rabbis were horrified by this type of play.

⁷ Kate McK Elderkin, "Jointed Dolls in Antiquity" *American Journal of Archaeology* 34 no. 4 (1930), 455-479. The Roman poet Persius (42-62 CE) mocks this custom, saying that the dolls are useless to Venus (*Saturae* 2:68-70).

given up their most cherished possession instead of the young girl giving up her doll. Ritualistically, the doll remained with the young girl forever.⁸

One of the most striking aspects of children's dolls, in Graeco-Roman world, was that they did not subscribe to anatomical modesty. Many dolls from these times were explicitly female anatomically gendered, with ornate hairstyles, molded breasts and genitalia. They were often highly adorned, with accessories made by the girl herself or bought, and the dolls often resembled upper class or even imperial figures, especially in hairstyles and many were developed enough to allow for movement of limbs. The dolls were meant to pass on to Greek or Roman girls Graeco-Roman ideas of femininity and socialization, especially of the upper classes of these societies, and some might even have been fertility charms or protection, in addition to being toys.⁹ The Graeco-Roman period sources do not express any problems with the lack of modesty or with nudity of the dolls whether as toys or as cultic or votive objects.

Most dolls of the Graeco-Roman period were made of cloth or wood. There were, however, also terracotta dolls, some jointed and some not.¹⁰ The duality of interpretation exists in these types, including the jointed ones. While the jointed limbs make it appropriate for a toy, the major archaeological context of graves or temples, make them appropriate votive or ritual items. Dolls found in a household context, however, could also possess a duality of function, as toys and as votive items.¹¹

⁸ Maria Sommer and Dion Sommer, "Archaeology and Developmental Psychology: A Brief Survey of Ancient Athenian Toys," *American Journal of Play* 9 no. 3 (2017), 341-355. See also Hautala, "Ancient Romans".

⁹ Fanny Dolansky, "Playing with Gender: Girls, Dolls, and Adult Ideals in the Roman World," *Classical Antiquity*, 31 no. 2 (2012), 256-292. See also Genevieve Warwick, "Playing with Dolls- Art Effigy, Agency," in *Art History Now: Objects, Concepts, Approaches*, ed., Geraldine Johnson, (London: Routledge 2026), 417-433 and Mary Harlow, "Toys, Dolls, and the Material Culture of Childhood," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed., Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 322-340 and esp. 329-337. From time to time there were trends to try and avoid nudity in dolls, whether by adding britches in some Christian dolls, which would prevent looking under dresses or having them already clothed. This though prevented the personal touch as well as the making of or buying doll clothes or accessories. See Svetlana Hautala, "Why Did the Ancient Romans Put Toys in their Children's Graves? Interpretations from the Era of Antiquarianism to 20th Century Anthropology," in *Agents and Objects, Children in Pre-Modern Europe*, ed. Katariina Mustakallio and Jussi Hanska, *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 42, (2015), 179-199.

¹⁰ See Elderkin, "Jointed Dolls," and Frauke Gutschke, "Greek Terracotta Dolls: Between the Domestic and Religious Sphere," in *Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas*, ed. Giorgos Papantoniou, Demetrios Michaelides and Maria Dikomitou-Eliadou (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 215-222.

¹¹ See also Lizz Hayes, "Moulding the Maiden in Ancient Greece," (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/warwickclassicsnetwork/publicengagement/studentengagement/storiesof>

Christianity did not prevent young girls from playing with dolls. The only real change was the gradual dressing of the doll, reflecting a Christian desire or demand to cover up the explicitly nude elements of the earlier dolls. The ritualistic, votive and worship aspects of doll play did not disappear from Christian doll play and continued during Byzantine times and afterwards. Doll play among young girls in Christian society continued to maintain associations with religious ritual and magic, sometimes in the background and sometimes not.¹² The Christian doll was not that different from the pagan one. The doll assumed agency in the hands of the girls at play. It remained a projected, idealized portrait of the girl who owned her as before, a type of idol. Like the Roman doll, the Christian doll prepared the young girl for marriage, and if she died before and was removed from circulation, as it were, so was the doll and buried with her and could then accompany her on the journey to the last abode, some even believing that it served as ticket of sorts to paradise, a message translated into an acceptable Christian form and spiritual message.¹³

Medieval girls also played with dolls made or manufactured from cloth, wood, clay, wax, or even metal which might be home-made or even manufactured. They could be in the shape of babies or adults. These dolls would have probably had clothes of some type, the nature and quality reflecting the status of the girl's family.¹⁴ Ritual elements in the medieval Christian doll and the Renaissance included Christ Doll processions and Baby Jesus manger and nativity scenes. This was clearly not a play doll and not a doll of a little girl. The use of these dolls bordered on idolatry. Still and young girls might have also had figures of the infant Jesus or of saints in doll form as both religious objects and toys. It is not surprising that during the Protestant Reformation and afterwards, some of these Christian dolls were used as playthings explicitly to deprecate them.¹⁵

[objects/blog/maiden/](#)), and E-J Graham, "Wax Infant Votives in Cyprus: Ancient and Modern Parallels," *The Votives Project: Offerings to the Gods from Antiquity to the Present*, September 13, 2018 (<https://thevotivesproject.org/2018/09/13/wax->).

¹² See in general Brigitte Pitarakis, (2021). "Toys, Childhood, and Material Culture in Byzantium," in *Ludics*, ed. Vassiliki Rapti and Eric Gordon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 251-255 on dolls, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7435-1_12.

¹³ Hautala, "Ancient Romans".

¹⁴ "Medieval Dolls: Aelflaed of the Weald (India Ollerenshaw), 2002 (<https://wotnot.squanderlings.com/doco/dolls.html>).

¹⁵ See Joe Moshenska, "Dolls and Idols in the English Reformation," in *Memory and the English Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Walsham, Bronwyn Wallace, Ceri Law and Brian Cummings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 153-167.

As we shall see, doll play to deprecate them would become an important aspect of Jewish doll play.

Medieval and Renaissance Christian girls of course did not dedicate their dolls when they grew up and married, kept them as adults as an effigy of sorts which could be passed down to daughter or granddaughter which could then take on aspects of religious and ancestral worship.¹⁶

As time went on, the play aspect of the doll became dominant, although it was hard to differentiate this from other secondary aspects such as fashion dolls, portrait dolls, mascot dolls and novelty figure dolls; the line between sacred image and toy was often blurred.¹⁷ Dolls continued to have votive aspects, especially funerary votive aspects. Children in the Christian world continued to die young, and dolls continued to play roles in the process of mourning for short and long periods in tandem with or separate from play and this lasted all the way almost to modern times. This sometimes bordered on the idolatrous. I cite one example from the 19th century which still exists today. During Victorian times in England life-sized effigies were at times prepared, wigged with the deceased child's hair and clothes. These are called "mourning dolls" and still exist today known as "reborn dolls".¹⁸ The devotion to these dolls bordered on worship. Those playing with dolls in any form were not always consciously aware of the votive or cultic aspects. This underlying current, though, will prove of great importance in understanding the Jewish attitude.

While I will expand somewhat upon the views of Islam in my discussion of the "Barbie" doll in Jewish society, and the Islamic reaction to that, I should like to briefly mention here the general position of Islam on dolls. Doll play was also common among your girls in Islamic society. Gender and modesty issues relating to dolls were of more concern in this society than in the others just mentioned, but if there was anything upsetting at times, it was the pagan underlying roots of

¹⁶ Warwick, "Playing with Dolls." See also *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images: From the Middle Ages to the End of the 18th Century*, ed. Kamil Kopania (Bialystok: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, 2017).

¹⁷ Fraser, *Dolls*.

¹⁸ On these types of dolls see <https://heritagemuseumoc.org/from-manicured-to-macabre-a-brief-history-of-dolls/>.

the doll and its rituals. This, however, did not prevent playing with dolls. As we shall see, this would change and Islam would have increasing difficulties with modesty problems of the doll.¹⁹

Jewish Dolls and Potential Idolatry

As mentioned above, dolls were among the most popular toys of young girls throughout the ages from ancient to modern times. One might expect that this would also be the case in Jewish society. Why would Jewish girls be different and not play with dolls? Talmudic literature, however, mentions numerous types of toys and games and children playing with them or engaging in them,²⁰ but nothing in relation to dolls whether of young girls or anyone else. Moreover, no dolls have been discovered in Jewish grave sites. Would this suggest that Jewish girls were different? As far the Talmudic sources are concerned, the lack of mention probably reflects the fact that not everything could and would be mentioned in Talmudic literature, especially when it came to toys and games, and these are usually mentioned only when there is a serious problem and the rabbis after all may not have been all that up-to-date on doll developments and may not have seen any problems.²¹ Their absence from grave sites may simply indicate that most of the Jewish dolls were of cloth or other materials that would not last. I am going to assume, though, that since dolls were very popular in the ancient world, it is likely that Jewish girls were no

¹⁹ See Sabina Abdullayev, "Islamic Doll: To Grow Up in Good Hands," (<https://www.regthink.org/%D7%91%D7%95%D7%91%D7%94-%D7%90%D7%A1%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%93%D7%95%D7%9C-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%93%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%98%D7%95%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA/>) (Hebrew).

²⁰ See the articles cited in n.1. In other instances of what they perceived as problematical toys or games they did voice serious concern. The rabbis had no problem with ball play, an extremely popular pastime in the Graeco-Roman world, but when Jewish children and adolescents adopted such games during times of war against Rome or persecution by the Romans, they did object and then forbade such play. See Joshua Schwartz, *Jews and Christians in Roman-Byzantine Palestine: History, Daily Life and Material Culture, Volume II, History, Society and the Land of the Jews* (Bern, Peter Lang, 2018), 423-453 (= Joshua Schwartz, "Ball Playing in Ancient Jewish Society: The Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods," *Ludica, annali di storia e civiltà del gioco*, 3 [1997]: 139-161). See also the detailed discussion in Anna Chernaya, "Girls' Play with Dolls and Doll-Houses in Various Cultures," in *Toward Sustainable Development through Nurturing Diversity: Proceedings from the 21st International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, ed. Leon T. B. Jackson *et al.* ed., (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4087/HDO9045> and Hautala, "Ancient Romans."

²¹ See "Jews and Christians Playing at Religion from Ancient to Modern Times" (n. 1 above). One would assume that a nude doll might have aroused some halakhic opposition or discussion in the Talmud, which, as just stated, was silent about dolls. See also "The Play's the Thing: Toys in Ancient Jewish Society," (n. 1 above). I suggested there that it was exactly gender and modesty issues which might have upset the rabbis. If these issues upset them, they do not state so. This would be a good time to retract what I wrote about dolls there. I shall elaborate further later in this study.

exception and had them and played with them but were probably not buried with them, although this is not impossible.²²

Over the course of time, however, there developed problems in Jewish society and law regarding dolls. As most of the Jewish sources date from the early modern period and afterwards into contemporary times, I shall limit my discussion of the halakhic issues to a summary of relevant issues as they developed.

The basis for the problems that would develop was the second of the Ten Commandments, which was interpreted as forbidding idolatry (Exodus 20:3-5; Deuteronomy 5: 7-9; cf. also Deuteronomy 4:15-19). While the connection between idolatry and dolls might be clear here, we saw above that this was a prominent motif in general regarding dolls as votive or cultic objects or toys.

Subsequent sources began to redefine and sometimes limit idolatry and mold it in various forms which would eventually lead to dolls, at first limiting idolatry in relation to the depiction of forms, human or animal, to problematical ornamental images on the vessels or implements of a non-Jew when found by a Jew.²³ The next step permitted the use of signet rings with human faces on them, if the image on the ring was not recessed.²⁴ The Babylonian Talmud defined idolatrous images as a representation of something connected to the biblical Tabernacle or Temple, never a real concern in Jewish law, or to the “four (animal) faces” of Ezekiel 1:10.²⁵ Thus, depictions of heavenly beings were not permitted. This would hardly be a source of concern as there would

²² I have been able to find no society that bans doll play. There are societies though that allow or produce dolls without facial features or with blurred ones such as some modern Mennonite and Amish dolls. See, e.g., “Camping, dolls a perfect pair,” *TimesReporter*, June 26, 2015 (<https://www.timesreporter.com/story/lifestyle/2015/06/26/camping-dolls-perfect-pair/34070379007/>) and Jean-Pierre Rossie, *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures. Children's dolls and doll play*, 2005 (https://www.academia.edu/6485515/Saharan_and_North_African_Toy_and_Play_Cultures_Childrens_dolls_and_doll_play). These restrictions are usually related to gender issues and not idolatry.

²³ Mishnah Avodah Zarah 5:3. See Nehorai Meizal, “The Prohibition against the Making of Forms,” *Tehumin*, 29 (2008): 173-185 (Hebrew) and Moshe Cohen, “Dolls for Play and Pictures of Landscapes which Have Depictions of Heavenly Bodies,” *Tehumin*, 33 (2012), 464-472 (Hebrew).

²⁴ Tosefta Avodah Zarah 5:3. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Avodah Zarah* 3:10-11 for a lenient view. Not everyone agreed with Maimonides. Shulhan Aruch Yoreh Deah 141:4 agreed with Maimonides, and this too met with some opposition. See Meizal, “Prohibition,” 174.

²⁵ Avodah Zarah 43a-b (=Rosh ha-Shannah 24b)

(almost) never be such dolls.²⁶ The Babylonian Talmud also opened the door to permitted general depictions of animals and thus, opening the door for play with an animal doll, but, as we shall see, animal dolls were not the most popular doll for girls throughout the ages as “human” forms were preferred, and that is what I shall discuss.²⁷ The medieval tosafists came to a decision that would be both beneficial and problematic for Jewish doll play, restricting the prohibition against depicting human forms to the depiction of the human form if it was complete, if the entire human form was shown in a clear manner and the body parts of the form were normative. If a limb or body part was not depicted or was not clear or was somewhat distorted or disfigured, then it was not a real depiction of the human form.²⁸

The first clear halakhic rabbinic reference to doll play is found in the responsa of Rabbi Joseph di Trani (Greece, 1568-1639). It is clear that he was responding to previous views on doll play showing that such play existed in Jewish society and was forbidden according to some. In his view, no one really considered dolls to be human figures worthy of worship. Playing with doll figures should be considered a temporary act and not a worshipful act and thus playing with a doll was not worship. He was clearly though responding to those halakhic views which did consider

²⁶ The one exception I could find was the trio of Kabbalah dolls based on the depiction of three angels on an amulet which “make the perfect gift for those who like a little history, mystery and fun in their designer toys”. They are part of the Biblical Beasts toy series developed by Ken Goldman in 2006 and were meant, figuratively speaking, to bring protective angels into the homes of newborn babies, <https://kengoldmanart.com/albums/kabbalah-dolls/>. They were sold exclusively at F.A.O. Schwartz and, perhaps unsurprisingly, do not seem to have been a hit. They have nothing to do with children’s play and will not be examined further.

²⁷ Thus, I do not include in the discussion the Labubu doll, the zoomorphic elves and Labubu the monster doll with sharp teeth. See Julia Kim, “‘Labubu’ Is a Plush Toy that is Causing a Frenzy. Here’s its Story,” *NPR*, June 18 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/06/18/g-s1-72939/what-is-labubu-pop-mart-explained>. There has been one attempt, as far as I know, to market a LabuJew Collection, “where Jewish pride meets collectible cuteness”, but this is not significant for the discussion here, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DMSrPAUxhIQ/>. I remain within the framework of standard, “normative” dolls. Thus, I also refrain from discussing the “Magical World of the Cabbage Patch Kids”. In any case, these were originally “The Little People”. The inventor Xavier Roberts refrained from calling them dolls and insisted that they be referred to as “babies” and had to be “adopted”. The “cabbage patch baby” image was that of babies found in a cabbage patch, <https://cabbagepatchkids.com/?srltid=AfmBOorG3TFzTggD5-awPuKOrmHBKQfuO6mXGxrA-QwmwM-UyhlycY7w>.

²⁸ See, e.g., Mishnah Avodah Zarah 4:5, “How does one annul it? If one cut off the top of its ear, the tip of its nose, the tip of its finger, or defaced it even without reducing it, one has annulled it.” See also the long discussion in the Tosafot on Cherubim in Babylonian Talmud Yoma 54 a-b. The comments of the tosafist related at first to the depiction of human images in illuminated manuscripts and similar works. Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel [Rosh] (1250 [1259]- 1327) in his commentary on Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 83:65 expanding upon the issue of completeness stated that a head without a body was not complete and therefore permitted. Not everyone accepted lenient views, but they were accepted in Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 141:7, although there was some opposition also to this. See Cohen, “Dolls for Play”, 467; Meizal, Prohibition, 175-177.

this play to be halakhically worship and thus forbidden, although these views were not spelled out. He also added that the play was not always respectful. All of this shows that by his time, although we cannot know exactly when, dolls and doll play had been connected to idolatry and his responsa sought to sever this connection to it.²⁹ His responsa though did not give total carte blanche to playing with dolls. He had allowed playing but did not allow doll production. From this point on, and despite the lenient view of di Trani, the fear of idolatry was always in the background, at least in the normative halakhic discussion in Jewish society. It is important to remember that whatever it was that bothered halakhic authorities about doll play, it related only to idolatry and not to issues of modesty or propriety.

The Modern Halakhic Doll

Di Trani's view on dolls and idolatry was the springboard for most of the further discussion on dolls, whether it was explicitly mentioned or not.³⁰ As playing with dolls, despite the association with idolatry, as well as with toys and games in general, were not considered halakhic issues of great significance, the discussion often did not take place in standard halakhic works. This, however, did not limit the scope and extent of the discussion since as play with dolls became more popular, the halakhic discussions often took place on internet platforms reaching far greater audiences than those of standard literary halakhic works. However, that the queries took place in these fora also says something as to the level (and age) of the questioners. Thus, my discussion of the modern period will, for the most part, revolve around internet responsa which vary in terms of the halakhic detail provided, reflecting the audience somewhat and the policies of the popular religious fora in which the questions and answers appeared which tend to stress brevity to fit the attention spans of their readers. I provide a sample of the discussions. Many, but not all, of these internet discussions are from Israel. Some are Orthodox or Ultra-Orthodox from the United States. The discussion surrounding Barbie dolls will mostly reflect the United States.

Hidabrut is an organization devoted to popular religious outreach, especially to a less knowledgeable clientele, but one that often seeks to become more religiously observant.³¹ Its

²⁹ The Responsa of Joseph di Trani, Part 2, Yoreh Deah 35. See in detail on this Cohen, "Dolls for Play," 468 and Meizal, "Prohibition," 183.

³⁰ See the compendium of sources brought in detail by Rabbi Assaf Dehan, "Dolls and Figurines," (<https://ph.yhb.org.il/plus/20-15-07/>) (Hebrew).

³¹ <https://www.hidabroot.org/>.

halakhic discourse is not too technical but would be within the framework of modern (Israeli) Orthodox normative halakhah. Thus, Rabbi Hillel Myers, a Modern Orthodox Ashkenazi rabbi was asked whether it was permissible to have a doll at home in terms of the Second Commandment. The questioner is aware of this problem of the Second Commandment and focuses the question on this. The question does not specify who would have had the doll, who would play with it, how the doll got there and what kind of doll that it was.³²

Rabbi Myers answers briefly, referring to two sources from the published multi-volume responsa collection of the former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Ovadiah Yosef (tenure: 1973-1983) who was often recognized as an accepted halakhic authority by many segments of the (Israeli religious) population. One cannot assume that the original questioner to Rabbi Yosef was an Ultra-Orthodox Sephardi as he was. While Rabbi Myers makes brief reference to this, I elaborate somewhat. In *Yabia Omer* (Part 3, *Yoreh Deah* 5) Rabbi Yosef states that those who buy dolls for their young children to play with have a halakhic basis on which they might depend, but it is preferable to be strict and not to buy dolls for their young children if those dolls are of a complete human body. Rather, it is better to buy those which are only of the upper part of the body or those which are constructed in profile, that one sees only part of the doll's face. As we have seen above, this is not a modesty issue, but an idolatry issue and the advice is to buy those dolls which are clearly not halakhic idols. While Rabbi Yosef is willing to be lenient according to the letter of the law, he counsels halakhic (and probably educational) strictness as preferable. In *Yechavaeh Da'at* (64) published later, he permitted toy dolls even if they were of the entire human body. This was fortunate because today one can even buy a Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef doll.³³ What explains his greater leniency in the later ruling? It is hard to imagine that he had learned more about dolls, but he might have realized that the connection to idolatry was rather flimsy. There was also an awareness of and acceptance of the view of Joseph Di Trani that playing with dolls was not always respectful,

³² <https://www.hidabroot.org/question/31519>.

³³ <https://forum.moreshet-maran.com/threads/%D7%91%D7%95%D7%91%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%93%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%A8%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%91%D7%93%D7%99%D7%94-%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%A3-%D7%96%D7%A6-%D7%9C.12154/>. If they are sold, someone is buying them. Playing with them? Hard to imagine so, but this is not impossible.

vitiating the idolatry matter.³⁴ There was no concern with how the doll looked in terms of body, gender, or form. It was either an idol or not and Ovadiah Yosef said it was not.

His successor in the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate of Israel was not as lenient. Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (tenure: 1983-1993) when asked in a radio interview stated that a child who had a toy doll in the house had to remove a limb or disfigure it. His son, Rabbi Shemuel Eliyahu, chief rabbi of Safed reiterated the prohibition and tied it directly to matters of idolatry, connecting the issue to small votive figurines from the Far East.³⁵ While there were numerous other parallels from history, cultures and religion that might have been more relevant, Rabbi Eliyahu's comparison with votive figurines showed an understanding of the background problematics of the doll as they impacted on halakhah.

The disfigurement requirement set by Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, is found not only among Ultra-Orthodox Sephardi rabbis but also required by certain Ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi rabbis. Thus, for instance, the modern-day Rabbi Mordechai Halevi Schwartzbord of Upper Modiin requires this for dolls, citing the opinion of Rabbi Nissim Kareliz (1926-2019), the head of the Beis Din Tzedek of Bnai Berak.³⁶ The Ultra-Orthodox zeroed in on the idolatry problem. While it might have been expected that they would be stringent also on the nature of the (usually female) body of the doll, this does not seem to have been the case. What concerns them is idolatry, but the solution seemed rather simple. Parents might carefully remove a tiny piece from inside the nose of the doll, so that the child will not even notice. This type of disfigurement was enough to cancel the idolatry problem, although this minor action, possibly not even visible, would seem to defeat the purpose of negating any element of idolatry.³⁷

³⁴Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef had six daughters (and five sons) and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. It is possible that he really did acquire more awareness as time went on. See also the view of The Chabad rabbi, Yosef Simchah Ginzburg, "Play Dolls" in the Chabad weekly, *Sihat ha-Shavua* 1677 (22/2/2019), <https://www.chabad.org.il/Magazines/Articles.asp?CategoryID=2366>, who permits the play with dolls based on the view of Joseph di Trani as cited in the writings of R. Ovadia Yosef cited above.

³⁵ <https://www.makorishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART1/065/063.html>. Mordechai Eliyahu even forbade animal dolls, unless they too were disfigured.

³⁶ <https://www.dirshu.co.il/%D7%94%D7%90%D7%9D-%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%A8-%D7%9C%D7%94%D7%97%D7%96%D7%99%D7%A7-%D7%91%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%95%D7%91%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%93%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%90%D7%93%D7%9D-%D7%91/?srsltid=AfmBOoppGOB5rXwuDLjt8yyIIP0eRGoBCqLURH26NWhaXTGBy15JzdiY>.

³⁷ See the responsa of the Chabad rabbi Chaim Hillel Raskin, *The Weekly Farbrengen*, December 8, 2022, <https://anash.org/play-dolls-in-halacha/>.

Dolls came in numerous forms and sizes. Rabbi Yaakov Ariel, the former chief rabbi of Ramat-Gan (1990-2017), was asked if it was permissible to buy a life-size doll of cartoon characters and he answered that this was permissible for children because they do not always play respectfully and this lack of respect would invalidate any idolatrous (latent) respect. This of course is dependent on the view of Joseph di Trani mentioned above, even if not cited. Despite this, he found life-size potentially problematical and suggested that play with such dolls be avoided. There are no sources cited, but the background is clearly idolatry and the view of Di Trani was apparently not enough to solve that problem.³⁸ As dolls go, though, the life-sized cartoon dolls were not that popular in any case.

While many questions pertain to actual play, others cite other issues. Rabbi Binyamin Hoteh, an Ultra-Orthodox Sephardi rabbi from Upper Beitar in his internet site (in Hebrew) entitled (in translation), “Sixty Seconds of Halakhah”, discusses whether one is one allowed to pray in a room in which there are dolls, a question which obviously pertains to adults, although it might be assumed that the dolls belong to a child. He forbids this since it might appear that one is praying to the doll, although it is hard to imagine how anybody would think that today.³⁹ The fear of idolatry goes far beyond the logic of reality.

Up until now I have mostly related to doll play of young girls. Amazingly among the Modern Orthodox of various persuasions and *Hardali* (*Haredi Leumi* [fundamentalist nationalist]), one finds even young boys with dolls, arousing the occasional halakhic quandary. Rabbi Shelomo Aviner (born 1943 in France, living in Bet El) was asked in an SMS responsa column about the play of a seven-year-old boy talking to his doll while in bed and if this was considered idolatry. He answered that it certainly was not and that this was permitted and beneficial play. The question, because of the SMS format was telegraphic in nature and provided few details about the doll. Once again, the halakhic concerns of the parent and rabbi were idolatry, not gender issues of the boy with a doll and in any case, there are no details as to what type of doll it was. Rabbi Aviner’s answer was six words long (in Hebrew) with no explanation.⁴⁰ Rabbi Aviner was relating to a question in Israel.

³⁸ <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/ask/109661>.

³⁹ <https://www.babli.co.il/beit-hamidrash-halacha/sxks68>.

⁴⁰ Olam Katan 988 (7 be-Adar 5785) (Hebrew). As of the writing of this article, the responsa had not been posted on the internet.

The halakhic discussions up until this point related to dolls in general. There were specific dolls which became so popular that they generated their own independent halakhic discussions and as mentioned above mostly relate to modern Israeli society. Babrbie brings the discussion to the United States with some reference to Israel.

Barbie: *Tefillin*, Accessories and *Burqa*

One of the most popular dolls among young girls is of course “Barbie”. The recent Barbie movie even aroused some halakhic interest, at least among those halakhists who were aware of it.⁴¹ It is hard to relate to Barbie, though, without reference to her figure and Gil Student, writing in the Brooklyn-based “The Jewish Echo” in 2024 finally mentioned the issue of body and modesty and particularly Barbie’s unrealistic body and unnatural dimensions and their impact on the thinking of young girls and boys.⁴² This, though, of course, was in addition to the idolatry issue, which is still the central issue of his discussion. Student wavers between lenient and stringent views and suggests asking one’s own rabbi. Only at the very end of his discussion does he return to Barbie herself and state that even if they are permissible, they are still “not advisable”, usually Orthodox-speak code for (grudgingly) permitted, but only technically and should be avoided. Similarly (relatively) modern Orthodox Rabbi Jack Abromowitz of the Orthodox Union (OU)⁴³ in his discussion of “Barbie Girl”, returns to the idolatry issue, stating that the impossible anatomical form of the Barbie would actually make the doll acceptable, as this would be similar to marring it (!), but there are those who would still insist that the Barbie had to be clearly disfigured to make it acceptable.⁴⁴ The popularity of Barbie and Barbie-clones elicited a relatively large amount of halakhic interest. Jewish educator Margalit Bracha Ingall, writing in the “Ask the Rabbi” page of Ohr Sameah, an Israeli yeshiva mostly for those seeking to learn more about Judaism from an Orthodox religious viewpoint, while mentioning the usual issues, negates all aspects of idolatry today and allows for the purchase and playing with Barbie and any other full-feature doll in Jewish homes.⁴⁵ A similar issue came up in the US and was discussed in the progressive Jewish

⁴¹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1517268/>.

⁴² Gil Student, “Barbie Dolls in Halachah: Are Children Allowed to Play with Life-like Dolls or Do Those Dolls Constitute Idols?”, *The Jewish Echo*, January 29, 2024, <https://jewishecho.com/halacha/barbie-dolls-in-halachah/>.

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox_Union.

⁴⁴ Jack Abramowitz, “Barbie Girl: The Prohibition against Making Human Forms,” <https://outorah.org/p/6084/>. I have not found any follow-up to the somewhat radical view that the Barbie dimensions themselves are halakhically disfigurement. This is quite surprising coming out of a rather conservative rabbinical body.

⁴⁵ <https://ohr.edu/ask/ask058.htm>.

newspaper, The Forward, which devoted an article to a six-year-old Modern Orthodox boy who played with Barbie dolls. The doll was female. He was playing with Barbie, not Ken. The author of the article, Roz Warren, was not observant and it does not occur to her that there might have been idolatry problems. She was interested in the fact that the young boy, being Orthodox, made sure to dress his Barbies modestly and he pointed this out to the author who was his babysitter at the time. No idolatry here and no problem with a boy playing with a doll, but the doll had to abide by Orthodox Jewish dress codes.⁴⁶

Ruth Handler, the creator of Barbie in 1959 was Jewish, and naturally there were questions as to how Jewish Barbie was.⁴⁷ Essentially, there was nothing Jewish about her, her outfits, accessories, friends and boyfriends, although some aspects were modelled on Handler's family. In 2006, though, Jen Taylor Friedman outfitted Barbie in a tallit and tefillin and this became the "Tefillin Barbie". Eventually she could also hold a volume of the Talmud and read from the Torah and even be dressed "Jewish".

The Muslim world did not need Tefillin Barbie to consider Barbie as being Jewish and as part of a Jewish (and Western) plot to destroy the values of Islam. In 2003 Saudi Arabia outlawed the sale of Barbie dolls as the "Jewish Barbie" was symbol of the decadence of the perverted West.⁴⁸ In 2009, the "Burqa Barbie" appeared, created by the Italian designer Eliana Loreno and with support from Mattel, the parent company of Barbie, founded by the Jewish Handlers. Business was business. There were other acceptable Muslim dolls such as the Jamila doll with Jamil, the Muslim Ken, as it were, and the Fulla doll.⁴⁹ Over the years many new Muslim dolls have

⁴⁶ Roz Warren, "A-Six-Year-Old Orthodox Boy and His Barbie Dolls," The Forward, June 17, 2014, <https://forward.com/news/200201/a-six-year-old-orthodox-boy-and-his-barbie-dolls/>.

⁴⁷ Orly Lobel, "How Jewish is Barbie?," *The Jewish Chronicle*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/life/how-jewish-is-barbie-yiuv8eis>. See in general now Michael Kimmel, *Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America* (New York: Norton, 2026).

⁴⁸ See Rima Dunn and Adam George Dunn, "Bad Dolls/ Reappropriating Badness," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 12 no. 2, (2016): 275-283.

⁴⁹ Dunn and Dunn, "Bad Dolls". On the Fulla doll see "Fulla Doll: Authentic Hijab and Abiya Dolls," <https://www.thefulla.com/>. These include "authentic Arabic Hijab and Abaya Dolls" with appropriate Muslim Dress. See also Matthew Campbell, "Barbie hasn't a prayer against Devout Islam Doll," *The Times*, Sunday January 22 2006, <https://www.thetimes.com/travel/destinations/europe-travel/france/paris/barbie-hasnt-a-prayer-against-devout-islam-doll-jsdv79jz67g>.

appeared, some even disfigured or without facial characteristics.⁵⁰ It has been pointed out that Tefillin Barbie and Burqa Barbie, as well as the other Muslim dolls, represent opposite trends, the former of empowerment and the latter of conservatism.⁵¹

In some Jewish quarters, though, Tefillin Barbie was not seen as empowerment but as exaggerated feminism. This resulted in attempts to produce a more appropriate Jewish doll. Aliza Stein developed the Gali Girl doll in 2004, and which lasted until 2013 when production ceased.⁵² These dolls, in different skin tones and representing various Jewish communities were dressed “appropriately” in terms of modern Jewish modesty requirements. Another example of an appropriate Jewish doll was the Rebecca Rubin doll, theoretically growing in New York City in 1914. She came with a Shabbat set of accessories as well as with other Jewish accessories.⁵³

Today there are entire lines of dolls in all forms, fashions and materials which cater to the religious of all kinds, in Israel and abroad. They are dressed in appropriate clothing and have appropriate accessories for the type of Judaism associated with those who buy or play with the dolls. They are big business and whatever halakhic problems existed, or still exist, are secondary to the business of making and selling these dolls. While there was a time when there was a fear of idolatry, even tangential, today these fears are minimal and hardly seem to affect sales.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See Masha Zur-Glozman, “The Muslim Doll without a Face that Angers even Muslims”, Ha-Aretz, 21 December 2014, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/kids/2014-12-21/ty-article/0000017f-db2c-d856-a37f-ffec5c60000> (Hebrew). See also, “Muslim Dolls: The Ultimate Guide to Modest Dolls for Children (2025), <https://muslimmarketing.io/muslim-dolls-the-ultimate-guide-to-modest-dolls-for-children-2025/>. Ultimately, though, different Muslim countries developed different attitudes in keeping with local Islam. On Pakistan, e.g., see Javaria Farooqui, “From a Toy to a Tool: The Reception of Barbie and Cultural Ambiguity in Contemporary Pakistan,” *Feminist Theory*, 25 no.4 (2024): 521-534, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001241291394>.

⁵¹ See Alma Heckman, “Tefillin Barbie and Burqa Barbie: What Does it Mean to Dress Dolls?”, August 25, 2010: <https://jwa.org/blog/tefillin-barbie-and-burqa-barbie>.

⁵² <https://adollsdays.wordpress.com/2013/11/07/final-farewell-from-gali-girls/>.

⁵³ From the blog of Rabbi Jason Miller, “Jewish Dolls for Jewish Girls,” December 18, 2011, <https://blog.rabbijason.com/2011/12/jewish-dolls-for-jewish-girls.html>.

⁵⁴ Just to cite some examples, in the United States there is the “my Jewish Doll-Chani” audio series which helps to teach children blessings (<https://www.eichlers.com/my-jewish-doll-chani-hebrew-english-gm-mjdg02.html?srsId=AfmBOorvWxZUtwVbl5c5wxFWmlOY278eYh986Ebvo7KKjH2GcqVOaBVR>) and her male counterpart Yossi (<https://judaicaplaza.com/products/att-gm-mjdb03?srsId=AfmBOorSS8nL7RfUyv6HkOZFkjee8C1Io02JGreJDbxRA-8jC9sfCbl4>). There are family sets of dolls such as the Mitzvah Kinder Family set (https://mitzvahkinder.com/products/mitzvah-kinder-family?srsId=AfmBOoryD_nWkFk12blgFOl1_LutZDiDPrAQ9hCUGFjNmG-CUSGzajw6). These are available in different levels of family religiosity. In Israel for example there are JD Toys which sell a wide array of religious dolls (https://jdtoys.co.il/?s=%D7%91%D7%95%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA&post_type=product&dwgt_wcas=1).

Not every aspect of doll play faced halakhic challenges. I conclude with a brief discussion of these two types. For the most part, these dolls can be seen today only in museums, and their play aspect was not the major factor in their history.

Shoah

Obviously, Concentration Camps and similar Holocaust-period venues were not particularly associated with children's dolls, Jewish or otherwise. There were though several doll phenomena associated with the Shoah.

The State Museum of Majdanek has a photo exhibit of sixteen dolls found on the grounds at Majdanek in 1944. It is presumed that these dolls had belonged to Jewish girls imprisoned at KL Lublin/Majdanek.⁵⁵ Jewish women and children liberated from camps in 1945 were given scraps of cloth by the Red Cross, apparently part of their rehabilitation process, and made dolls, some of which were given back to the Red Cross as presents.⁵⁶

Some Jewish dolls survived the Holocaust. Éva Modval took her doll Gerta with her when she and her parents were deported from their home in Transylvania. Éva and the doll survived the war and Éva later donated her doll to Yad Vashem as a symbol of her lost childhood.⁵⁷ Two dolls donated to the Holocaust Museum in Paris in 2016 belonged to two French girls taken away from them by a French gendarme. The girls were deported to Auschwitz and apparently died there. A French family looked after the dolls for three generations before they donated them to the Holocaust museum.⁵⁸

The most macabre of all is the doll from the Turkish toy museum with hair from a Jewish girl killed in the Holocaust, apparently in 1941. The dolls were made for German girls. This doll has been on exhibit since 2017, and Jewish groups have taken some for genetic testing. The use of such hair was apparently not used on any significant scale.⁵⁹

National Costume Dolls

⁵⁵ https://www.majdanek.eu/en/exhibitions/dolls_of_majdanek_photo_exhibition/17.

⁵⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-61894683>.

⁵⁷ <https://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/doll-gerta.html>.

⁵⁸ <https://www.motl.org/dolls-snatched-from-jewish-sisters-during-holocaust-preserved-by-three-generations-of-french-family/>.

⁵⁹ <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hair-of-holocaust-victim-on-baby-doll-143082>.

There were dolls that were used as a tool for building national identity and for strengthening coherence. This type of doll was the national costume doll, which were mostly “souvenir dolls” or mementos and not often play dolls for use by little children, although they might have also been toys at times for young Jewish girls whether in Israel or the Diaspora.⁶⁰ The Jewish national costume doll was popular in the pre-1948 Yishuv (Eretz Israel) and in Israel after 1948 and through the 1980s and were meant to foster national identity.⁶¹

Originally, these dolls gave expression to a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic viewpoint. During time the diversity diminished, and the dolls became more ideologically Israeli. Among the types of dolls produced were dolls of farmers, socialist youth members dancing, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox praying, Arabs, soldiers, Yemenite women at work.⁶² A variety of crafts materials were used from fabric to string and wire, wood, sawdust and much more. Israelis displayed them, tourists, Jewish and non-Jewish, bought them, and among Israelis and Diaspora girls there were probably some who either displayed them or played with them. By the end of the 1980s they became less popular as their message was expressed by other means. I know of no halakhic discussions regarding national costume dolls, and it was obvious that this was not idolatry or worship, unless nationalism was considered as idolatry or worship as some might think today.

Summary

Dolls were popular toys, especially for young girls, from ancient until modern times and there was no *prima facie* reason why Jewish girls should have been an exception. They are, however, not

⁶⁰ On this phenomenon see in general Shelly Shenhav-Keller, “A Land and its Dolls: Israeli Souvenirs and National Identity,” <https://www.eretzmuseum.org.il/en/exhibitions/a-land-and-its-dolls/>; Shelly Shenhav-Keller, “ ‘A Land and its Dolls’: ICME/ICOM – International Conference of Museums 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, https://icme.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/01/ICME_2013_Shenhav_paper.pdf. Cf. M. B. Katz, “A Land and Its Dolls: Israeli Souvenirs and National Identity”, *Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, May–September 2011; Catalog*, ed. Shelly Shenhav-Keller and Haim Grossman, Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2011 and Maya Balkirsky Katz, *IMAGES*, 5 no. 1, 118-122 (<https://doi.org/10.1163/187180011X604490>).

⁶¹ See “The Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art and Material Culture,” The Center for Jewish Art, s.v. dolls, https://cja.huji.ac.il/search.php?free_text=doll&name=&object%5B%5D=&subject%5B%5D=&origin%5B%5D=&maker_name%5B%5D=&community%5B%5D=&location%5B%5D=&collection%5B%5D=&school%5B%5D=&inscription_language%5B%5D=&date%5B%5D=&submitted=submited&extantOnly=all&order_by=relevance.

⁶² For vivid depictions of the different “national” and ethnic types see, Haim Grossman, “National Dolls,” <https://www.nostal.co.il/Site.asp?table=Terms&option=single&serial=1467&subject=%E3%E1%E8%E9%ED%20%E9%E0%E1%E4%E5&portal=%E0%E5%E1%E4%E9%ED%20%E5%FA%E7%E1%E9%E1%E9%ED> (Hebrew).

mentioned in Talmudic sources, but those sources usually only mentioned toys which had religious problems. They are not found in a Jewish archaeological setting, but that likely reflected the non-lasting nature of cloth dolls. Ancient dolls, though, had a potential problem for Jewish girls as they often doubled as both toys and votive or cultic objects and this was the case from ancient and basically until modern times. “Jewish dolls” appear in Jewish sources only from the Middle Ages when the double possible use was even more blatant and well-known. In spite of this and in spite of the potential severe problems of anything associated with idolatry, and in spite of the fact that was apparently known to Jewish society, these potential problems were downgraded or ignored in Jewish life, basically allowing the Jewish girl unrestricted for the most part doll play. Jewish doll play thrived and by modern times doll production and sales had turned into a booming business. The play trumped the idolatry problems; the willingness to allow normal play to young girls led to accommodation with any problematic issues that were attached to doll play.

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