**Babylonians**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** The Ur III texts take into account that a woman could not work during six days per month; undoubtedly due to her menstrual period  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1995

**Focal Year:** 3000 – 539 BC

**Citation:** Stol, M. (1995). Women in Mesopotamia. Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. 38(2), 123–144. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mh07-010

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Bedouin**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** Also, if a woman's “periods” fall during the fast month, she must fast for an equal number of days as the periods lasted (and she was unclean) after the fast month is over. Particularly harmful is the close approach of a man who has had sexual intercourse and has not as yet had time to wash himself. Similarly, a menstruous woman is a danger. Both are unclean, najis, and so are harmful. It is not lawful for a woman during her menstrual period to do the Haj. She is then considered unclean, and no amount of purification ceremonial will make her otherwise. During her monthly periods a woman is forbidden to have intercourse with her husband for full seven days. When the menstrual period is over, a woman is unclean until she washes all over; this is called “washing her hair”. If a woman has her period when she enters the sacred precinct of Mecca to perform the Haj, then her pilgrimage is null and void, as she is considered unclean.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1951

**Focal Year:** 1880 – 1936

**Citation:** Dickson, H. R. P. (Harold R. P. (1951). The Arab of the desert : a glimpse into Badawin life in Kuwait and Sau’di Arabia. George Allen & Unwin Ltd. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mj04-001

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Iran**

**Aka Iranians**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** If a woman who is menstruating touches flowers, they will wither (H.). Women are impure (nedjes) during menstruation, and the same is true during childbirth (nefas). This is also true in case of any irregular secretion. She must not fast then, nor enter any sacred place or cemetery, and she owes a compensatory fast. While nursing her child she is exempt from fasting.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1954

**Focal Year:** 1617 – 1936

**Citation:** Massé, H., & Messner, C. A. (1954). Persian beliefs and customs. In Behavior Science translations (p. 527). Human Relations Area Files. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=ma01-007

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Israelis**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** Since menstruating women are considered to be polluting, men are enjoined not to touch them for fear that they themselves will inadvertently become affected.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1990

**Focal Year:** 1957 – 1980s

**Citation:** Weingrod, A. (1990). The Saint of Beersheba. In SUNY series in Israeli studies (pp. viii, 148). State University of New York Press. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf01-015

**Description:** We must cry out against Jewish women studying philosophy or kabala, especially when they are in their period of impurity and flow, and especially when young men teach them; this is the truth of the Torah and all the winds of the world will not move the truth from its place. Jewish couples are forbidden to have sexual relations during, and for a week after, the wife's menstrual period. Women are required to immerse themselves in a mikveh before resuming sexual relations.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1994

**Focal Year:** 1900 – 1990s

**Citation:** El-Or, T., & Watzman, H. (1994). Educated and ignorant: ultraorthodox Jewish women and their world. Lynne Rienner Publishers. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf01-004

**Description:** A woman in niddah is considered to be ritually unclean for purposes of conception, and she may not conceive a child until she stops bleeding, observes seven “clean” days when she refrains from sexual contact, and immerses in a ritual bath. Grazi explains the differences between a niddah and a zavah; the former is defined as “a woman who experiences vaginal bleeding from the uterus during her expected menstrual period, and a zavah is a woman who experiences bleeding at times other than her expected period”. Both statuses render a woman ritually “unclean,” though the period of uncleanliness differs. Grazi makes clear that bleeding produced “from a wound” incurred during diagnostic procedures in gynecological exams and fertility tests falls under a different Halakhic category: makkah. There is considerable rabbinic disagreement as to what constitutes a wound and how you can determine whether the source of bleeding is a wound or menstruation.

**Date of Ethnography:** 2000

**Focal Year:** 1990s

**Citation:** Kahn, S. M. (2000). Reproducing Jews: a cultural account of assisted conception in Israel. In Body, commodity, text (pp. viii, 227). Duke University Press. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf01-007

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced potentially updated to accommodate fertility treatments as seen in the last ethnography is the only apparent change but this didn’t directly change the taboo more just outlined when fertility treatments could occur given the menstrual taboo

**Israelites**

**Aka Hebrews**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** It is also of interest to note that the menstrual taboo is attached to these restrictions on sexual relations (Lev. 18:19). Whatever its original rationale, the sequestration of the woman during her menses and after childbearing (forty days for a male child and eighty for a female child, Lev. 12:1–8) served to perpetuate her essentially private status and justify her exclusion from public office, including the cult.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1997

**Focal Year:** 1000 – 586 BC

**Citation:** Blenkinsopp, J. (1997). The family in First Temple Israel. In Families in ancient Israel, Leo G. Perdue ... [et al (pp. 48–103). Westminster John Knox Press. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf07-014

**Description:** Women probably washed more often than men, most likely as part of flirting (Song 5:3; Ruth 3:3) and purifying after menstruation. When people were afflicted with a skin disease, part of the recovery process demanded the washing of their clothes (Lev 13:6, 34; 14:8–9). A similar treatment is prescribed for a man who suffered from “a discharge from his member,” had “an emission of semen,” or touched a menstruating woman (Lev 15).

**Date of Ethnography:** 2003

**Focal Year:** 1200 – 586 BC

**Citation:** Borowski, O. (2003). Daily life in biblical times. In Archaeology and biblical studies (Issue 5, pp. ix, 148). Brill. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf07-007

**Description:** In the Book of Leviticus, following a long and detailed list of incest prohibitions, and after warnings against intercourse with women during their menstruation, there comes the threat: if you commit these abominations, the land will become “defiled” and “vomit you out” (Lev. 18, 20:10–22). The Levitical law of menstrual impurity is one of the most severe ones: “And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be in her impurity seven days; and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her impurity shall be unclean; every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sitteth upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if he be on the bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her and her impurity be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean” (Lev. 15:19–24). It is interesting to note that the prohibition of intercourse with a menstruating woman had a moral connotation. This emerges from the words of Ezekiel, who lists among the observances of a “just man” that he does not “come near to a woman in her impurity” (Ezek. 18:6). They are unclean for the duration of the issue and for seven days following its cessation, and similarly defile everybody and everything they touch (Lev. 15:2–15, 25–30). In contrast to the above-mentioned law which merely pronounces a man who lies with a menstruating woman unclean for seven days thereafter (Lev. 15:24; cf. Lev. 18:19), a subsequent Levitical law imposes capital punishment on both the man and the woman who commit this sin: “If a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness—he hath made naked her fountain and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood—both of them shall be cut off from among their people” (Lev. 20:18). While no such severity characterizes the Koranic law, it, too, prohibits intercourse with menstruating women: “They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness” (Koran 2:222). The same rule remained a part of the later Muslim tradition. In actual practice, the Arab woman is forbidden to have intercourse with her husband for a full seven days during the monthly periods, after which she still remains unclean until she washes all over. This ritual washing is called “the washing of the head.” Among the Rwala a man must not touch his wife for three to five days during her monthly period.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1959

**Focal Year:** 2000 BC – 1950 AD

**Citation:** Patai, R. (1959). Sex and family in the Bible and the Middle East. Doubleday. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf07-003

**Description:** The Hebrew Bible says little about the facts of menstruation; the biblical writers were not so interested in the everyday hygienic habits of women, and were mainly concerned with the state of impurity that arose during this time. Although the Hebrew Bible does not provide many details about the reality of menstruation, Leviticus 15 relates that regular and abnormal female genital discharge was considered unclean and that menstruating women were restricted from participating in public religious activity during that time (Lev. 15.18–33); these purity regulations were written much later than the Iron Age I period, however. 1 1 Much of Leviticus is assigned to the Priestly tradition, which many scholars believe to be exilic (written down after 586 BCE). Thus, the purity regulations in Leviticus may not be applicable to highland village life in the early Iron Age. Specifically, menstruation resulted in a seven-day period of impurity when a woman could not enter the sanctuary. The menstruating woman and the objects under her could transfer impurity, and anyone who touched her or these objects would experience a one-day period of impurity and would be compelled to wash themselves and their clothes. If a man engaged in intercourse with a menstruating woman he was either impure for seven days (Lev. 15.24) or cut off from his people, along with the woman (Lev. 20.18). No passages indicate that women were isolated, and there was no specific need for sacrifice or ablutions at the end of the seven-day period; only the passage of time ended a woman's impure state. This story, which is believed to pre-date the purity legislation in Leviticus 15, may demonstrate an earlier train of thought in Israelite experience either concerning the impurity of menstruation (van der Toorn 1994, 52–53) or the connection between menstruation and fertility (Philip 2005, 19–25). Parallels with sources from Mesopotamia seem to confirm the aversion to menstrual blood and its impurity in a cultic context, but this may be more closely related to a widespread folk belief than to any intentional action on behalf of the priestly class to keep women out of cultic roles in ancient Israel. “Religiously, menstruation had an ambivalent character … it was a sign of fertility and hence a blessing. But at the same time people regarded it as a source of impurity and this latter aspect is particularly emphasized in the ancient texts” (van derToorn 1994, 49). In our story, the menstruating women sleep separately from the men; when it is bearable, they sleep in the west room on the main floor, and when it is too hot they take their bedding to the courtyard and sleep there while the rest of the family sleeps on the roof or in the vineyard. But they are not completely secluded or cut off from the men in the family, and they still go about most of their daily activities as usual. During this time, we might imagine that children and older adults take on more responsibilities in the household; this is seen in our story when everyone but the women clean up after the evening meal and take charge of the children at bedtime. Although the Hebrew Bible does not stipulate ritual cleansing after menstruation, later rituals, such as immersing oneself in a mikveh as a means of purification, may have their origins in earlier practices. Although only the passage of time was required for women to reenter normal life after menstruation, ritual bathing may have been practiced as for similar states of impurity, like seminal emissions (Lev. 15.16–18) or irregular/excessive vaginal bleeding (Lev. 15.28) (Burnette-Bletsch 2000, 205). Women could not serve as priests in ancient Israel, and they were restricted in other ways from participating in the official cult, in part because purity laws may have prevented them from participating in religious activities during menstruation, after childbirth and at other impure times.

**Date of Ethnography:** 2010

**Focal Year:** 1200 – 1000 BC

**Citation:** Ebeling, J. R. (2010). Women’s lives in biblical times. T & T Clark. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mf07-008

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced other than the change from ancient Hebrew law to modern Israelis Jewish law.

**Kurds**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** During menstruation a woman is ritually unclean. She must not enter a holy place. Only the big ablution of the whole body can make the woman ritually pure at the end of the menstruation period.   
**Date of Ethnography:** 1961

**Focal Year:** 1957

**Citation:** Hansen, Henny Harald. 1961. “The Kurdish Woman’s Life: Field Research in a Muslim Society, Iraq.” In Copenhagen Ethnographic Museum Record, ix, 213 , 99 plates. Kobenhavn: Nationalmuseet. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=ma11-004.

**Description:** For menstruation clean pieces of rag are used as towels, and sexual intercourse is prohibited during the period. The cloths are commonly washed and reused. Tattooing is denied by most men to be done by women of the town, but it is possible to observe daily female residents of the lower classes with blue dots or marks inscribed on their faces.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1953

**Focal Year:** 1951

**Citation:** Masters, W. M. (1953). Rowanduz: a Kurdish administrative and mercantile center. [s.n.]. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=ma11-002

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Lur**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** The monthly flowing-out of dirty, dark blood renders a woman ritually unclean: she is not to pray until she has performed the prescribed ablutions and washed her blood-soiled skirt. Menstruation is referred to as binamaz, without prayer.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1997

**Focal Year:** 1965 – 1994

**Citation:** Friedl, E. (1997). Children of Deh Koh: young life in an Iranian village. Syracuse University Press. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=ma12-007

**Description:** We are what we are through the will of God, whether we like it or not. A menstruating woman can't pray and can't go to the mosque. Her blood is dirty and can make others sick. It is said that in the beginning, after God had made Adam and Eve, men had to put up with this nuisance. They complained about it to God: “We don't want this bother,” they said. “It makes us dirty and weak, it is defiling. Take it away from us.” They kept imploring God and in the end He took it away from them and gave it to the women. That's why women menstruate and men don't.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1989

**Focal Year:** 1965 – 1985

**Citation:** Friedl, E. (1989). Women of Deh Koh: lives in an Iranian village. Smithsonian Institution Press. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=ma12-006

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Palestinians**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** A woman is considered najisa (unclean) when she is having her menstrual period. Women feel obliged to break the fast during Rama□ān if they are having their menstrual period. Under these circumstances they abstain from entering mosques, religious shrines, or cemeteries. During this time, they refrain also from touching the Qur'ān. Once the menstrual period is past, the women are expected to make up all the obligatory religious activities ( farā'i□ ) that they had missed.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1966

**Focal Year:** 1960

**Citation:** Lutfiyya, A. M. (1966). Baytīn a Jordanian village: a study of social institutions and social change in a folk community. In Studies in social anthropology: Vol. v. 1 (p. 202). Mouton. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=m013-038

**Description:** Such springs should never be approached irreverently. Therefore no pious woman would ever come near or touch such a spring while “impure” through her menstrual blood. If she is careless, the holy man who dwells in that water will afflict her with some bodily ailment, or by stopping the flow of the source punish all her village.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1922

**Focal Year:** 1914 – 1922

**Citation:** Kanʻān, T. (1922). Haunted springs and water demons in Palestine. Studies in Palestinian Customs and Folklore, 153–170. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=m013-011

**Description:** “Unclean — far from you — is a woman during her menstruation ( il-□u□r, il-□ē□, or, il-□āde — the ‘customary’). The man has one [cause of] uncleanness and the woman has two: the uncleanness from her husband and the uncleanness from menstruation. If he sleeps with his wife this makes him unclean. If he is unclean he dare not pray [without washing]. If he is clean he gets up and prays. If in a village where there are no springs a man does not come for the morning prayer [people know by this], they say: ‘The man is unclean.’ All men must wash and say two raka□āt, or forms of prayer, for the ablution before all praying. The man fills his jug [with water] and uncovers his head and says: ‘I wish for the throwing off of uncleanness and I will say: ‘There is no God without God’ etc. After that he is pure. This is what is prescribed concerning washing ( sinnet il-□usl ). It must be before all praying. Besides this he has his regular ablutions.”. An unclean woman may not visit sick people or a woman in childbed, because people think she will harm them. “If anyone has bad eyes, and an unclean woman looks steadily at this person, it is not good.”. If an unclean woman, even if she is a near relative, comes near a dead person after the latter has been washed, she defiles her or him. Nor may she sew the grave clothes ( il-kafan ) or touch them without harming the dead person. An unclean woman may not fast during the Rama□ān, she may not pray. An unclean woman may not go into a holy place; if she does, she will be punished. An unclean woman may not take part in the procession of the Nebi Mūsa festival. “No unclean woman ever approaches or enters a shrine, touches a holy tree, draws water out of a sacred well or comes near a consecrated spring.”. No women of the Greek Orthodox church will enter the church while she is in the state of impurity. Even after childbirth she must wait forty days and must take a bath before she goes to the house of God.”. “A man can only be unclean through a woman, cohabitation is uncleanness”, she certainly expressed a common opinion. On the other hand, a woman is unclean from three causes. Like the man she is unclean after cohabitation, but also every time she menstruates and finally every time she gives birth to a child. It would be interesting to discover what effect this — a woman's purely physical peculiarity — has had upon the conception of her value. The rules in this connection are given in Leviticus xv. 25 sqq., xviii. 19, xx. 18 and xii. there she cannot move from one part of the room which is reserved for the women during their period of uncleanness. “During the monthly period the woman cooks and eats with the others as usual.” but in any case she is cut off from many things during her best time and it is certain that a fuller social life is more possible for her after the period when she has “cut off menstruation and birth”. Then she can be a midwife or a sick nurse; she can fast and pray to God, and freely visit holy places, thanks to the fact that she is free and clean from blood.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1935

**Focal Year:** 1925 – 1931

**Citation:** Granqvist, H. N. (1935). Marriage conditions in a Palestinian village: [volume 2]. In Commentationes humanarum litterarum: Vol. Vol. VI (Issue 8, pp. iv, 366). Akademische Buchhandlung. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=m013-010

**Description:** Man forbidden to have sexual intercourse with menstruating woman. — See also Leviticus XVIII. 19; XX. 18; Ezekiel XVIII. 6. Cf. Leviticus XV. 16 sq., 18, 19 sqq. And in this town I heard that if an impure woman is present at birth it will be a long time before the mother is pregnant again, or it makes birth more difficult. “The impure woman may be present during her menstruation but not the woman who is impure from sexual connection. That is a great sin. That is before she washes herself; but after she has washed herself she can be present, she is no longer impure.” 9 9 Cf. Leviticus XV. 18 sqq. Man forbidden to have sexual intercourse with menstruating woman. — See also Leviticus XVIII. 19; XX. 18; Ezekiel XVIII. 6. Cf. Leviticus XV. 16 sq., 18, 19 sqq.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1947

**Focal Year:** 1925 – 1931

**Citation:** Granqvist, H. N. (1947). Birth and childhood among the Arabs: studies in a Muhammadan village in Palestine. Söderström and Co. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=m013-016

**Description:** It used to be believed by the Arabs that when Eve plucked the fruit of the tree, it bled. As a punishment for her disobedience the female race must bleed every month ( Dâiratu l-Ma□ârif, vol. I, p. 48). ever approaches or enters a shrine, touches a holy tree, draws water out of a sacred well or comes near a consecrated spring. There is nothing which will irritate a man of God as much as such an imprudent act. Once a woman of the village approached the spring during menstruation. This careless act provoked the anger of the djinnîyeh and the spring was dried up. A priest had to go to the place and burn incense, thus reconciling the djinnîyeh.

**Date of Ethnography:** 1927

**Focal Year:** 1927

**Citation:** Kanʻān, T. (1927). Mohammedan saints and sanctuaries in Palestine. In Luzac’s oriental religion series: Vol. V (pp. viii, 331). Luzac and Co. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=m013-018

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Rwala Bedouin**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** During her monthly period, □alejha-l-□ej□, the man must not touch the woman for from three to five days, and not for forty days after the birth of a child. During the monthly period the woman cooks and eats with the others as usual. If a man wants to beget a boy, he must have intercourse with a woman on the night of Thursday to Friday, ˇgâma□aha lejlt al-ˇgum□a, as the name of Friday, ˇgum□a, recalls sexual intercourse, ˇgemâ□.  
**Date of Ethnography:** 1928

**Focal Year:** 1900 – 1928

**Citation:** Musil, A. (1928). The manners and customs of the Rwala Bedouins. In Oriental explorations and studies (Issue 6, pp. xiv, 712). The American Geographical Society. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=md04-002

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced

**Turks**

**Continent:** Middle East

**Description:** Nothing is eaten after that, except by menstruating women or people who are ill, until after nightfall.   
**Date of Ethnography:** 1964

**Focal Year:** 1955 – 1961

**Citation:** Pierce, J. E. (1964). Life in a Turkish village. In Case studies in cultural anthropology (pp. xii, 102). Holt, Rinehart and Winston. https://ehrafworldcultures-yale-edu.uleth.idm.oclc.org/document?id=mb01-003

**Change in Menstrual Taboos:** None Referenced