

Women's Presence in the Southern Levant During the Hellenistic-  
Roman Period

By Laura Habes Tashman

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Laura Habes Tashman

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## **Preface**

The idea for this research work has originally come from my desire to write about and shed light on women's presence in the Ancient Near East and to prove that women had a major role already in that era. The research on this topic was abstruse and not an easy job as most of the historical sources are male-dominant and were written by men in addition to the “lack” of resources. As an epigraphist, working mainly on Ancient North Arabian Languages, I collected, translated, and extracted the information needed for my research from the ancient scripts and inscriptions and then included the scripts and inscriptions and the translation within the research work, which added a significant importance to it. I believe that this research work will establish a significant reference for researchers and scholars interested in this field.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Nóra Dávid, for the excellent guidance and support during the process. This has maximized the learning opportunities, for which I am grateful.

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Laura Tashman

Szeged, January 15, 2024

## **ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to demonstrate that women had an important role in the Hellenistic-Roman period in the Southern Levant. One of the most important reasons that motivated me to begin my research is that we have yet to conclude and build a clear and strong picture in one research or book with a scientific foundation and evidence to shed light on the exact role of women in social, political, and religious practices during this era. Is it true that all they performed was home duties and followed the norms and restrictions established by their male family members? Did they have an impact on their communities, and more especially, did they engage in their community's religious life? Did they play an important role in their communities? Are there notable female figures whose names are remembered in history?

I had to prove that the role of women was not just a housewife but they had a prominent role in the Southern Levant During the Hellenistic-Roman Period. Therefore, I collected the sources and literature related to my topic as well as the inscriptions and scripts resulting from several excavations that occurred in the Southern Levant. Also, I included the women of Judea, the women of Nabataea, the women of Palmyra, and the women mentioned in the New Testament to prove what I believe of.

I started each chapter by identifying the entities to demonstrate the main features of each entity and then proceeded to reach the point where women were most effective. Also, how they practiced their roles, which I believe that they were fundamental.

I plan to continue my research in the future to add and collect every single inscription and script that mention women and translate them to add to the literature a collective book that makes it easier for all researchers in the field to have easy access to these inscriptions.

**keywords:** The Ancient Southern Levant in the Hellenistic- Roman Era, Women in the Southern Levant, women's roles in households, women's roles in the religious practices, women and communities, women as priestesses, Religion in the Southern Levant in the Hellenistic-Roman Era, Palmyra, Queen Zenobia, Palmyrene religion, Palmyrene Language, the Nabataeans, the Nabataean trading roots, the Aramaic Script, the Nabataean Script, the Nabataean Queens, the Nabataean women in the Society, the Trade of the Nabataeans, the Jewish Religion, the Jewish Women, and Daily life of the Jewish Women.

## List of Abbreviations

Ber.	Berytus
C.	A'fel, Causative verbal conjugation
Déd.	Milik '72 (Dédicaces faites par des dieux
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
Eng.	Bible in Basic English
HNE.	Handbuch der Nordsemitischen Epigraphik
Inv.	Inventaire des Inscriptions de Palmyra
IP.	Inscriptions Palmyréniennes
LOC.	Location, Present location of the text.
Lou.	Dentzer. Feydy and Teixidor 93
MF.	Gawlikowski Monuments funéraires de Palmyra
N.	Noun
N. D.	No Date
NF.	Feminine Noun
NKJV.	New King James Bible
NIV.	New International Version Bible
NRSV.	New Revised Standard Version

NM.	Masculine Noun
Num.	Number
NT.	New Testament.
PAT.	Palmyrene Aramaic Text <sup>1</sup>
Prov	Provenance
PS.	Proto Semitic
RES.	Répertoire d'épigraphie Sémitique
Syr.	Syria, Revue d'Art Oriental et d'Archéologie
T.	Tome
Tad.	Tadmor
Torah	First five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

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<sup>1</sup> Hillers Delbert R., Eleonora Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic texts*", Johns Hopkins University Press, Charles Village, Baltimore, 1996.



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## **Introduction**

In the early history of the Ancient Near East, people lived and disappeared, and only a few of their writings, inscriptions, and archaeological remains were found hidden in the ground or visible. Those people used the available materials in their writings and drawings such as stone, wood, leather, and papyrus. Unfortunately, not all strata of the society were able to read and write (our sources were mostly written by male to male and mainly in the upper level of society), therefore we have to handle them with care. Furthermore, writing was used to codify their laws and customs, and rules of living, not to mention the codification of their legends, epics, and gods that they worshipped and invoked, and thus the types of inscriptions and writings varied, including religious, funeral, poetic, civic, personal ... etc.

Humans entered a new era with the creation of writing, allowing them to express what they felt and thought, which led to the growth of human thinking and the entry into the world of civilization, openness, and progress, and out of the age of darkness. They understood there were supernatural forces at work in the world. As their way of thinking evolved, they began to recognize that there was a greater and stronger thing than they had previously believed, but they couldn't see it with their own eyes. As a result, the concept of supernatural powers that created, moved, and controlled the cosmos emerged. As a result of the discovery of the gods, the concept of religion started to grow, and each culture began to describe their gods and their power, giving them distinct functions and descriptions that were not found in others. Of course, the availability of writing at the time made it simple for scientists to understand what was going on in those people's heads because they wrote everything according to their beliefs. Religions evolved and were passed down from generation to generation, differing or becoming similar from one civilization to the next; each had unique geographical, political, or religious characteristics.

Based on these texts and inscriptions that were left behind, I believe that there is more in-depth to be revealed and so many questions need to be answered, especially when reading about women and religions. There must be evidence to substantiate those women had an effective role in religions. Were they allowed to enter temples, serve the gods, and practice rituals, and under what conditions? Were they equal to men in the matter of offerings and sacrifices? Also, did they practice different prayers than men?

*“Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . And she is simply what man decrees; thus, she is called “the sex.” . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute—she is the Other. . . . But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? . . . How is it that this world has always belonged to men?”<sup>2</sup>*

*Over and over again women heard in voices of tradition . . . that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their femininity. Experts told them how to dress, look, and act more feminine. . . . They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. . . .”<sup>3</sup>*

Women's fortunes generally decreased between the advent of the first hunter-gatherer groups (about 40,000 years ago) and the dominance of urban centers established in Eurasia by 1000 BCE. The first human cultures were distinguished by flexible gender roles, less focus on controlling women's sexual behavior, equal esteem for men's and women's labor, and a strong role for female spirituality.<sup>4</sup> However, by the time cities emerged, the situation had shifted

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Clay, *Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory–1500*, Volume 1, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2009, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Clay, *Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory–1500*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Clay, *Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory–1500*, 6.

dramatically in certain places. Gender roles became fixed, with men often wielding political authority in their own nations. Women's sexual morality frequently became a public matter, with strict rules requiring a single woman's virginity or a wife's fidelity to her husband. Much of the labour considered proper for women faded from public view as their positions became increasingly centered on home responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Any additional job they conducted was generally deemed incidental to their primary responsibilities: food and clothing production, reproduction, and childcare. Finally, many early human civilizations' origin myths show that important female deities were superseded by masculine creatures, and the role of female cult leaders appears to have reduced.<sup>6</sup>

My study will concentrate on women and their existence, duties, responsibilities, and economic and social status in their communities in the Southern Levant, with a particular emphasis on the role of women in religious activities and practices, if any existed in the communities in the Southern Levant throughout the Hellenistic - Roman Era. My goal is to gain insight into the lives of women in communities of the Southern Levant. What they could and could not do in their respective households. What degree of freedom they had inside their communities? How they managed to break out from their shells and restrictions. I will also discuss the social standing of women in the Hellenistic-Roman period in the Southern Levant. Then I'll go through their many roles they played in political, social, and religious areas of life. Another goal of my study is to incorporate ancient inscriptions and scripts that reference women throughout the Hellenistic-Roman period and translate them into English using existing resources and dictionaries.

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<sup>5</sup> Clay, *"Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory-1500"*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Clay, *"Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory-1500"*, 6. I would delete this footnote.

## Research History

I have been studying the secondary literature that discussed this topic in particular for a long time and I came to the conclusion that almost no work has been done in detail as I intend to do. Most of the studies were general or even if they were about women in the ancient Southern Levant, they were not about the role of women in the religious practices and their limitations in the holy temples or what exactly was their role there. Following are examples of these studies:

1. *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, Sharon L. James (editor) and Sheila Dillon (editor), John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2012. In 2012, Literary Criticism received a PROSE Honorable Mention in the Single Volume Reference/Humanities & Social Sciences category. *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* is a multidisciplinary, methodologically based collection of newly commissioned papers by well-known experts on the subject of women in the ancient world. It is the first interdisciplinary, methodological collection of readings on ancient women, the Mother Goddess Theory, Women in Homer, Pre-Roman Italy, and the Near East, Women in the Family, State and Religion, Dress and Adornment, Female Patronage, Hellenistic Queens, Imperial Women, Late Antiquity Women; Early Women Saints; and many more. Thematically arranged to emphasize the importance of historical themes of continuity, development, and innovation. Many of the most notable researchers affiliated with the study of women in antiquity contribute to this book, which rethinks much of the well-known data and preconceived conceptions about women in antiquity.

2. Carol Meyers (Author), *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013. The new book is more than just a correction; it is a substantial theoretical and methodological development. Meyers

successfully argues for the application of archaeology, history, and ethnography in biblical studies in the sections on archaeology, history, and ethnography. Meyers also returns to the issue of patriarchy in *Rediscovering Eve*, a long-standing issue in feminist biblical studies and a major worry in the 1987 *Discovering Eve*, and proposes a new solution, calling for "heterarchy" as a theoretical framework to replace "patriarchy." Meyers deserves credit for her willingness to question, criticize, and reformulate previously published ideas rather than utilizing the new version to regurgitate an old notion. Heterarchy has considerable promise for biblical studies, and both experts and students will benefit from her presentation. Meyers' book is also highly readable and accessible to a large readership, which is to his credit. Meyers defines the novel as an investigation of "Eve and the biblical women she represents." This clever term connects the book's two disparate topics: Eve in the Hebrew Bible, notably in Genesis 2 and 3, and "everywoman Eve," whom she describes as "every woman who lived in ancient Israel, or at least any average woman."

3. Helmut Koester (Author), *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2012. While the original American version of this book was published over a decade ago. The second edition of the book is an Introduction to the New Testament, and its second edition, is no longer reliant on a previously published German work "Einführung in das Neue Testament". The author believes that it will be a valuable introduction to the many complicated elements of the political, cultural, and theological processes that marked the society in which early Christianity formed and affected the New Testament and other early Christian texts for New Testament students.

4. Nicole J. Ruane (Author), *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013. Ruane's study offers several important insights into the relationship between gender and sacrifice. Her alignment of the purity and sacrificial systems in the second half of the book helps illuminate the construction of sexual difference in ancient Israel, and into the concrete ways in which this difference was played out in everyday religious practice. Ruane's theory also allows her to offer persuasive readings of several specific texts, from the purity laws concerning discharges to the prohibition on taking a mother bird from her fledglings in Deut. 22:6–7. Her thoroughness in exploring these textual issues is likewise to be commended, though at times her account of other previous readings distracts from her own take on the text at hand. This is especially (and perhaps necessarily) true in Chapter 4, which is wholly dedicated to the red cow ritual (Numbers 19).

5. Tal Ilan (Author), *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 1996. This book investigates the real "as opposed to the ideal" social, political, and religious situation of women in Hellenistic and Roman Period Palestinian Judaism. This analysis suggests that during the era, extremist religious organizations in Judaism encouraged other groups, classes, and factions to tighten their control over women.

They also promoted an understanding of ideal male-female interactions, as depicted in literature and legal regulations of the time, which demanded increased chastity. Despite this, actual women's lives and interactions with males remained varied and complicated. This book combines Jewish and Early Christian materials with a feminist critique. It is the most complete book of its kind to date, providing a massive store of pertinent material as well as a new interpretation.

- Matthew W. Dickie (Author), *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, Routledge, London, 2003. This is the first research to gather evidence supporting the presence of sorcerers in the ancient world; it also covers the issues of their identification and social roots. The research that follows leads us to the underbelly of Greek and Roman society, into the lives of itinerant holy men and women, conjurors, and wonder-workers, as well as prostitutes, procuress charioteers, and theatrical performers. This interesting recreation of witches' and sorcerers' careers gives us access to hitherto inaccessible aspects of Greco-Roman society. It will be a vital resource for anybody researching ancient magic because of its precision and clarity, as well as the incredibly illuminating range of data used.

7. Leona M. Anderson (Author), Pamela Dickey Young (Author), *Women, and Religious Traditions*, Leona May Anderson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004. *Women and Religious Traditions* investigates women and religion in relation to the world's major religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Aboriginal religions, and new faiths based on the Goddess. Each chapter is organized around the following common themes: women's history and status in each religion; texts and interpretations; symbols and gender; sexuality; social change; women's official and unofficial roles; fundamentalism; and unique features of each religion as they relate to women. Examples were acquired from both Canadian and American contexts. Two case studies are also included in the book, which emphasizes the historical and present realities of religious women in North America.

The opening chapter expose the readers to the present concerns surrounding the study of women and religion, as well as feminist philosophy.

The book is divided into five sections based on five major themes. Women's History and Status: How has each religious tradition interpreted the role of women?



Rituals, Texts, and Interpretations: How each religion's major texts handle women, and how authorities utilize these writings to authorize religious ceremonies. Symbols and Gender: How the primary symbols of each religion influence women's roles. Sexuality: How does each faith influence the sexuality of women? Social Change: How may each faith contribute to women's shifting roles? Each article follows the same fundamental pattern, allowing readers to draw valuable parallels between two extremely disparate religious traditions.

8. Sarah B. Pomeroy(editor), *Women's History and Ancient History*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2014. This essay collection delves into the lives and roles of women in antiquity. The interplay between private and public is a frequent issue, and many of the pieces discover that women's public positions grow as a result of their private lives, notably their familial ties.

Essays on Hellenistic queens, Spartan and Roman women, and political upheaval reveal how women wielded political power—usually, but not always, through their relationships with male leaders—and how political instability provided possibilities for them to exercise powers formerly reserved for males. Essays on Sappho and Noesis' texts focus on the intersection between women's public and private discourses.

The collection also includes a study of Athenian and Roman marriage, the state's involvement in the sexual lives of Greek, Roman, and Jewish women, and an assessment of scientific thought on female physiology<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy, Jane McIntosh Snyder, Marilyn M. Skinner, Cynthia B. Patterson, Ann Ellis Hanson, Lesley Dean-Jones, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Mary Taliaferro Boatwright, and Shaye J.D. Cohen are among those who contributed.

9. Celia E. Schultz (Author), *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2006. Celia E. Schultz extends on the topic of women's religious participation in ancient Rome, indicating that, in addition to observances of marriage, conception, and delivery, Roman women had more—and more important—religious alternatives than is commonly supposed. Schultz's research, which is based on ancient literature, inscriptions, and archaeological remains dating from the fifth to the first centuries BC, demonstrates that women venerated gods unrelated to home affairs, such as Hercules and Jupiter; they participated in economic, military, and political ceremonies; they frequently worshipped alongside males; and they were not restricted to the private realm, the traditional domain of women. The Vestal Virgins were the most famous members of a group of women who held high-profile religious positions: priestesses of Ceres, Liber, and Venus; the flaminica Dialis and the Regina sacrorum; various cult officials; and aristocratic matrons who often played important roles in religious observances despite not being priestesses. Schultz contends that women were key participants—both professional and lay—in Roman Republic religion and that social and marital position, as well as gender, were important variables in determining their prospects for religious engagement in the public realm.

10. Matthew Dillon (editor), Esther Eidinow (editor), Lisa Maurizio (editor), *Women's Ritual Competence in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean*, Taylor & Francis, Milton Park, 2016. Contributions to this book demonstrate how, throughout hundreds of years in the ancient Mediterranean, women's rituals intermingled with the political, economic, cultural, and religious sectors of their society in ways that have only recently received sustained scholarly attention. The collection aims to extract diverse approaches

and contexts, as well as to expand contemporary studies of women in the ancient world and religious and social historical study.

The writers have a notoriously tough task: ancient authors rarely recorded parts of women's lives, such as songs, predictions, and prayers. Many of the artifacts manufactured and used in the ritual by women were perishable and have not survived; some types of ritual goods (for example, humble undecorated pots) are not even described in archaeological records.

However, the diversity of contributions in this volume demonstrates the variety of materials that can be used as evidence - including inscriptions, textiles, ceramics, figurative art, and written sources - as well as the variety of methodologies that can be used, ranging from the textual, image, and material evidence analysis to cognitive and comparative approaches.

### **Research Importance**

The most crucial aspect of this research is its originality, scarcity, and comprehensiveness, all of which I shall attempt to illuminate in this study. After exploring and reading the research and publications on the subject, I discovered that hardly any study covers women and their position in religions in the Hellenistic-Roman period in the Southern Levant. As a result, this research will serve as a resource that includes more than one faith and nation. It will be diverse, including provinces like Judea, Arabia (Nabataea), and Coele Syria.

I will also gather religious inscriptions from the previously mentioned civilizations that are related to women and incorporate them into the study, which will serve as a valuable resource for all academics and scholars interested in this topic. The study will aid scholars by making accessing these translated, interpreted, and amended inscriptions easier. Furthermore, this collection and comparison of inscriptions will be the first of its kind.

The study of inscriptions related to religious subjects, such as tombstones, and the writings that have not been dealt with in research and study will allow me to present them for development, study, analysis, and discussion, which will introduce new material, topics, and discoveries for research.

This study will shed light on the magnificent culture and development, the way of thinking, the beliefs, and the way of living of the people who inhabited this territory. Moreover, I will specify the exact role that women played in the religious practices in the temples or around them, as well as how women were treated and if they were even allowed to do that.

My research will focus on the religious practices of women in the Hellenistic-Roman period in the Southern Levant. Whether it was forbidden for women to do certain religious practices, I will describe the responsibilities and duties that women played in temples and their home religion; I will also highlight other primary functions that women played in their communities.; finally, I will include the inscriptions and scripts that support the results of my research.

### **Research Limits**

This study will collect, scrutinize, analyze, interpret, and translate inscriptions and other written sources from the Hellenistic-Roman civilizations that existed in the Southern Levant during the Hellenistic-Roman period, including the Nabataeans, the Palmyrenes, the Romans, and the Jews, mentioning women whose names were connected to religious practices or liturgy, as well as any information that could demonstrate the women's status in the Southern Levant in the Hellenistic-Roman era and their duties and social place in these communities. From the main goal of my study the limits rise due to the lack of inscriptions that mentioned women's roles in the religious practices, as well as their social duties and family/household duties in general. Another limit that I faced during my research is the limited access to inscriptions from some of the regions discussed.

The last limit that I encountered is that most of the inscriptions that I managed to find from Palmyra were not translated, due to that I had to do the translation by myself to complete my research and add them to my research.

### **Methodology and Sources**

First of all, I will collect the sources books, articles, studies, research-reports, annuals, and websites in the field of the study as well as those that contain inscriptions of the targeted civilization, and study, examine, analyze, interpret, and translate, decipher, revise, and document these inscriptions separately to obtain the required information and deduct the connections between those civilizations in terms of religion. All this study, analysis, interpretation, and comparisons will be conducted to obtain the hoped results from the study.

The study will also include external resources from Greek and Roman historians and writers, for instance, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, etc. For example, I will use The Geography of Strabo in the chapter that deals with the Nabataeans, along with other historical resources and sources, it will be the same in the chapter on Palmyra in addition to the inscriptions that I collected from the books and sources, this will not be all but I will include all the books that I used during my research. As well as the use of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*.

After reviewing all these references, sources, and studies, as well as acquiring vital information needed to finish the study, I will begin the process of gathering, describing, and including material inside the dissertation's contents.

The kingdoms, states, cultures, religions and entities that occupied the Southern Levant throughout the Hellenistic-Roman period, which I have chosen to cover in my dissertation, had political, economic, and social links with one another, as my research will demonstrate. The following chart illustrates the historical period during which all these kingdoms had a common existence in the Southern Levant (so they shared the time and geographical factors at the same time).

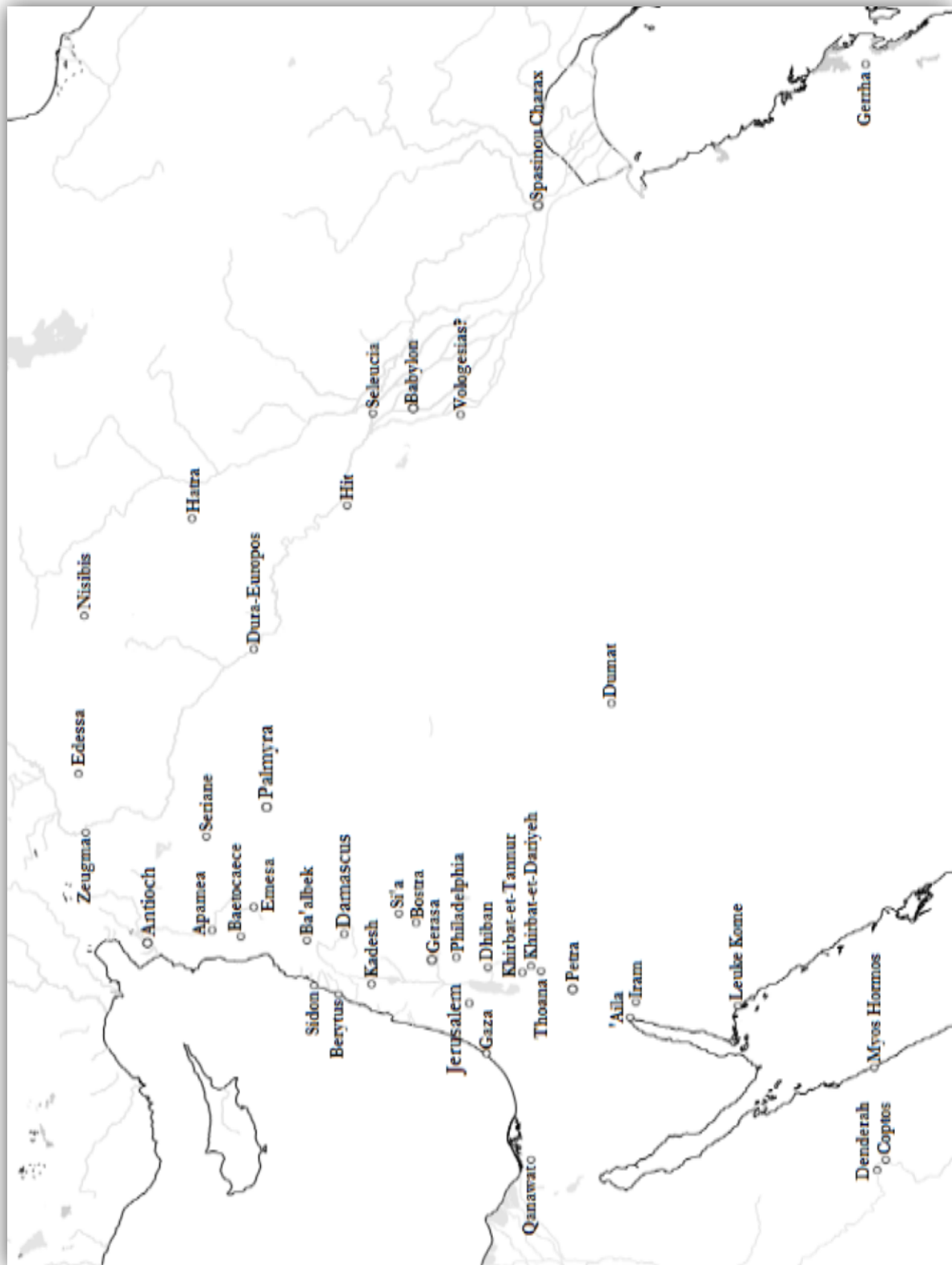


Figure 1: The Most Important Sites in the Greco-Roman world in the Southern Levant, 50 BC – 273 AD.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John Berkeley Grout, *"The Role of Palmyrene Temples in Long-Distance Trade in the Roman Near East"*, University of London, London, 2016, 12.

## **Chapter One**

# **The Role of Women in Religion Practices in Judaism**

*So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27, NIV).*

The history of Jews and Judaism was the start of my research as it was one of the oldest entities inhabited in the Southern Levant, also I chose it to be the introductory chapter due to its involvement in many events that occurred between the second century BC and the Third Century AD as we will see in the following chapters.

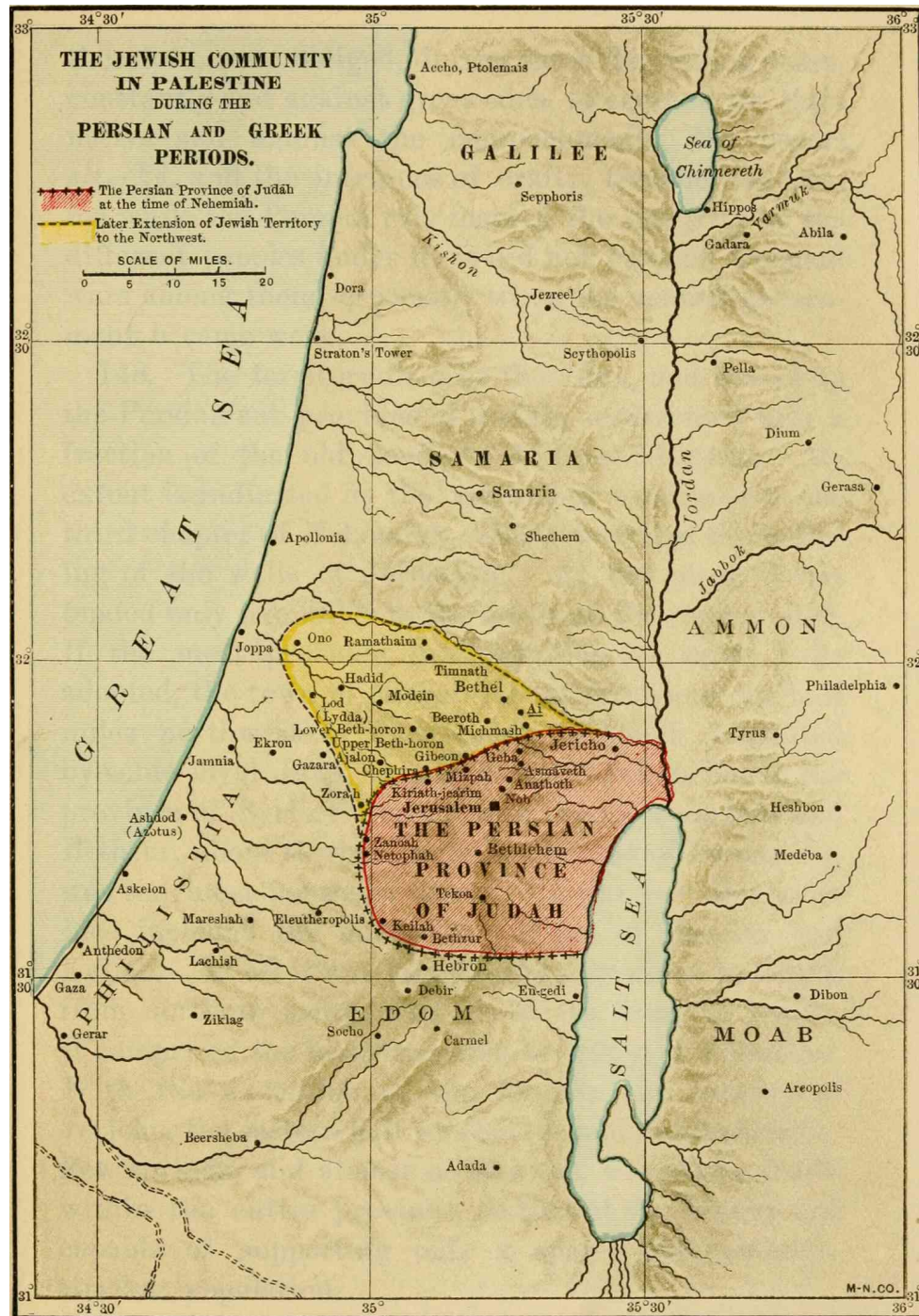


Figure 2: The Jewish community in Palestine in the Persian-Hellenistic Era.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/maps-of-the-levant-119279>, 20. Mar. 2023.



## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the Second Temple Period which started with the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile and the building of their second Temple in Jerusalem (6th cent. BC) and lasted until the end of the first Jewish-Roman war (73 AD)<sup>10</sup>. This era is considered very significant in Jewish history as it is one of the most consequential periods in Jewish history and it is the era when Judaism took on its classical shape as a result of a variety of historical and religious factors, both internal and external.<sup>11</sup>

After the Babylonian exile, when the Jews were able to come back to their homeland under Persian rule, things started to change for them. They tried to rebuild what was left and, in the time of Herod, they were able to rebuild the Temple for the second time, which, unfortunately, was destroyed under the command of Titus 70 AD. During this period, the Jews were under Persian-Greek and then under Roman rule, and, unfortunately, from the very beginning according to Jewish history, they were under the occupation of other nations and not independent, even though they tried to rebel again and again starting from the Maccabean revolt to the tragic revolt of Bar Kochba, which ended by their defeat under the legions of Hadrian between 132 and 135 AD.<sup>12</sup>

This special situation of often subordinated status raised several questions, which I will answer in this chapter, such as e.g., who counted to be a Jew? How was their household and family life? Did they have any rules for the single household? What was the Jewish religion? How did the community treat women? What was the role of women in everyday life and the household in the Jewish community? What rules did women have to follow in the Jewish

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<sup>10</sup> The timeframe of my dissertation exceeds the exact second Temple period, as some of the territories (e.g. Nabatea, Syria) and sources discussed were flourishing beyond this period being so special in Jewish history.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Katz T., *“The Cambridge History of Judaism, The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period”*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Volume IV, 2006, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Katz, *“The Cambridge History of Judaism”*, 29.

culture? Was there any discrimination between men and women in the Jewish community? What were the main practices of the Jewish religion? What are the main sacred texts they had? What were the most important holidays and festivals? The most important question to be answered in this chapter is: what was the role of women in religious practices? Whether it was in preparing certain foods or in the temples or certain prayers. And how were they treated by men when it came to religion?

## **1.2 The Jewish Religion<sup>13</sup>**

The Jews consider themselves to be descended from a Semitic tribe that lived in Canaan at one time. This is typically thought to refer to a large region in the Middle East that includes the majority of contemporary Israel, Jordan, and Syria. They particularly hold that Abraham, the head of a nomadic clan that traveled through the region as a herder and trader, was their oldest ancestor.

The early past of the Jews is preserved in the myths and traditions mentioned in the Scriptures (the Old Testament for example). These contained the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a large nation and that his descendants would number as many as the sand grains on the seashore and the dust of the earth.

It was a great act of faith that Abraham trusted in the promise, given that he was old and had no children at the time. Jews view the Hebrew Scriptures as an account (perhaps legendary, partly historical) of how the promise was fulfilled and how God led the Jews to their destiny.

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<sup>13</sup> For more information see: Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey*, Baker Academic, Michigan, 2007, 43–80, 209–246, 337–346; Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel*, A&C Black, London, 1997, 23–61, 129–246, 177–228; Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan, 2010, 91–119, 187–216, 275–306; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, 35–306.

The Jewish religion is a religion of monotheism,<sup>14</sup> that is, the worship of one and only one God. This has been their religion since the birth of Israel, the worshipping of YHWH. Notwithstanding, many Biblical texts indicate that, at some point, the people of Israel used to worship other deities besides their worship of YHWH. For example, in the book of Judges, we repeatedly notice that the people of Israel were punished for worshipping other deities, but on the other hand, they were rewarded when they returned to the exclusive worship of YHWH.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the Jews presented monotheism to the Romans when they were under the rule of the Roman Empire, which was something new for the Roman religion<sup>16</sup> and they experienced it with Christianity when they concurred the Near East and later. In the time of the Roman Republic Romans were not against Judaism they allowed the Jews to perform their religious practice freely.<sup>17</sup> The situation changed during the spread of the Cult of the Caesars: the Jews could not accept them as Gods, while the emperors could not accept their "unfaithfulness". Also, the activity of Jesus and his disciplines created tension between the Romans and the Jews, and the followers of the new religion.<sup>18</sup>

Historically the worship of YHWH was developed by the contact with other cultures and was influenced by them. Many Biblical narratives suggest that the Israelite's religion is originally from the Canaanite religion and originally, they worshiped the same deities. But, after the Exodus and when YHWH appeared to Moses in the Mountain of Sinai after observing

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<sup>14</sup> For more information see; Daniel C. Snell, *"Religions of the Ancient Near East"*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 103–125; Daniel I. Block, *"The Gods of the Nations: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology"*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2013, 113–148; Tyson L. Putthoff, *"Gods and Humans in the Ancient Near East"*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 118–155.

<sup>15</sup> Spaeth Barbette Stanley, *"The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions"*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Saul M., *"Family Religion in Israel, and the Wider Levant"*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus, Flavius, *"Josephus: The Complete Works"*, Grand Rapids, Eds. J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, Translator: William A. M. Whiston, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Burton St. SE, 1998. Book I, Chapter 1–3, 51–62.

<sup>18</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *"Pauline Churches, and Diaspora Jews"*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan, 2016, 85.

his wonders and powerful miracles that he did to the nation of Israel, they recognized him as the most powerful deity of them all.<sup>19</sup>

In the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 40–66), we read about the Babylonian exile and the period of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus (539 BC). When people started to learn about YHWH the God of Israel, they officially and completely adopted the worship of YHWH as their one and only God and started to observe the Sabbath as the resting day.<sup>20</sup> In the book of Zechariah and the Book of Ezra, many non-Jews in the post-Exilic period who understood and learned the teaching of YHWH came back from Babylon with the Jews (538 BC and later) (Ezra 2:59–60) (Neh. 7:62–62), while other people who were interested in the worship of YHWH went under a whole process of purification from their worship to other Gods in their life, to be pure enough, be qualified and ready to accept the worship of YHWH.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.3 Religious Practices and Beliefs of the Israelites**

The main idea of the Israelite religion was the worship of one and only one God, YHWH, as mentioned in the Biblical texts. But there was an argument by Zevit that says that “if we go through the personal names of Israelites and Judeans in the Hebrew scripts, we notice that there were some other deities’ names, which lead to the belief that there was at least a minority who worshiped other deities beside YHWH. For example, there were names incorporated with the names of Assyro-Babylonian Marduk, Assyro-Babylonian Ishtar, and Egyptian Isis.”<sup>22</sup>

Even if this was true, it was only a minority who worshiped other deities, whether it was instead of YHWH or alongside him. Going back to the Biblical text of Kings, we realize that in the region of King Ahab in Israel (873–852 BC), only 7000 people refused to bow to Baal, who

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<sup>19</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, Flavius, “*Josephus: The Complete Works*”, Book I, Chapter 1–3, 51–62.

<sup>22</sup> Spaeth Barbette Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 78.

was a Canaanite deity associated with rain. Furthermore, we can observe this situation in the time of *King Manasseh* (698–642 BC) of Judah which is described in Kings 21:1–17, and in the last years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC in the diatribes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>23</sup> This was not all but, in some cases, several archaeological discoveries indicated that YHWH might have had a wife or He was with another goddess. Many scholars explained that this kind of inscriptions is only graffiti and establishing any facts based on them is not possible. But, together with another theory, Asherah may indicate an object, especially a stylized pole or tree employed in worship.<sup>24</sup>

Based on this explanation and if YHWH was not paired with a wife and comparing the Jewish religion with the other religions in the Ancient Near East, we see that the Jewish religion placed less value on being a female. In return, this may be associated with the Judean women, substantially in the aspect of religion and the worship of “the Queen of Heaven” as referred to in Jeremiah (44:17–19, 25, NIV).<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the Babylonian Exile, the unnamed prophet, who appeared among the Jews, could put an end to this attraction of Jews worship to other deities, also as if YHWH was a male or female deity by indicating to YHWH as the Father and the mother of all Jews (Isaiah 42:13–14, NIV).

Finding inscriptions or texts mentioning that the Jews worshiped other deities besides or instead of YHWH does not change the fact that the Jewish religion has a central belief that YHWH was their God in the Biblical texts, we observe that they stress the importance of converting to the belief of YHWH, being the one and only God, and if anyone thought of going in another way, there would be consequences for this kind of actions. Also, we notice that the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy taught all about YHWH; how he

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<sup>23</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

<sup>24</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

<sup>25</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

rescued the Israelites from slavery life in Egypt; also, promised them the land, and allowed them to abide there on one condition that they should be loyal to him and worship him. We read that YHWH was a jealous God. He forbade any kind of worshipping to another God except for him; otherwise, as previously mentioned, there would be punishment and He would be angry. For example, in the Babylonian Exile, YHWH sent the king Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Judah, burn the temple, and exile the Jews as a result of worshipping the goddess Inanna, the Egyptian queen “the Queen of Heavens” some Jews after they returned from Egypt (Jeremiah 44, NIV).<sup>26</sup>

The practice of the Jewish religion is provided in many resources like the Legal Corpora, and the Narratives, but most of them are mentioned in the Hebrew Scripture which contains more than nine distinct Legal Corpora, each one of which has its vocabulary. The nine Law Corporas are the following: Exodus 20 (the ten commandments with the alternative version that is mentioned in Deuteronomy), Exodus 21–24 (known as the Covenant Code), Exodus 34 (the small book of the Covenant), Exodus 25–41, Exodus 25–40, Exodus 25–31, Deuteronomy 11–26, and the Book of Numbers.<sup>27</sup>

As for the narratives, the only rule and practice that is mentioned there is the act of circumcision of males, which was practiced first by *Abraham* on his son *Ishmael* (Genesis 17, NIV), after that it was practiced on *Isaac* (Genesis 21:4, NIV), occasionally prayers were mentioned in Genesis never mention temples, and refer to the priesthood only as a non-Israelite office held by *Melchizedek*, the King of Salem (Genesis 14, NIV).<sup>28</sup>

Sacrifice is another practice in the Jewish religion which is essential and it is as old as the Jewish religion itself. We read in the *Book of Genesis* that when Noah built an altar, *Abraham* built three, *Isaac* built one and Jacob built three; those were altars outside the temple and worshipping places. For the sacrifice to be considered sacred, it has to be in certain places.

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<sup>26</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

<sup>28</sup> Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

We notice the clarification on this topic in the Books of Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. All these books made it clear that the only legitimate site for sacrifices was the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, the one that King Solomon built in the tenth century BC.<sup>29</sup>

As for the relation between sacrifices and women, an interesting theme in the Torah is the story of the *Akedah*, the binding of *Isaac*. God instructs Abraham to sacrifice his much-loved and long-awaited son. In the story of Genesis, no words occurred about the mother, *Sara*. She is neither informed nor given the chance to say goodbye to his only son. However, later on, in the synagogue art we can see a good example of how the readers connected her and incorporated her figure -to tell the truth absolutely in a logical way- to the story: depicted *Sara* as a woman with hands bound, being unable to intervene, but at least symbolically being present at the Akkeddah.



Figure 3: The Sacrifice of Isaac, detail, 6th century AD Pavement of the Synagogue, Beth Alpha, Israel.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 82.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.bibleodyyssey.org/tools/image-gallery/a/akedah-beit-alpha>, 04. Nov. 2022

In this matter, Kings 81, Isaiah 36, and Chronicles 32 indicate that if a place is legitimate for sacrificial worship of YHWH is a controversial matter. On the other hand, 2 Kings 23, and 2 Chronicles 34 implied that when a book of divine teaching was found in the temple of Jerusalem in 622 BC, it was taken for granted by more than just the prophetess *Huldah* but also by King *Josiah* and the king officials based on that, that “the place God will choose to cause his name to dwell in Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.”<sup>31</sup> Although other altars of YHWH in other places were destroyed, the Jews in Egypt in the fifth century BC and the Jews at Heliopolis in Egypt in the first century BC maintained their sacrificial worship.<sup>32</sup> Besides the instructions regarding the sacrificial sacred places, which are explained in the *Book of Kings* as well as the *Book of Chronicles*, we can find in the *Book of Amos* and *Ezekiel* that any place other than the land of Israel is unclean, i.e., not pure and based on that, even eating outside the Land of Israel is like eating impure and not clean food, which was at the same level of eating forbidden food.<sup>33</sup>

Another practice in the Jewish religion is the Sabbath which is the resting day in which any physical exertion is forbidden, this can be found in the Pentateuch and it is also stressed in the memories of *Nehemiah*, dated to the fifth century BC.<sup>34</sup>

Another aspect of the Jewish religion is the festivals. They are important factors and the main characteristic features of the religion. We recognize three annual festivals on which it is appropriate to go on pilgrimage to the temple or altars where also could offer sacrifices, and they are the Festival of Unleavened Bread and it was for seven days but at the end of the seventh day there was one more day of celebration for the Passover on which the flesh of a slaughtered lamb was shared by God, priests, and laypersons – including men, women, and children, the Festival of Weeks was only for one day, and the *Festival of Tabernacle* this was also for seven

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<sup>31</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 83.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 82.



days, these were the most elaborated festivals in the addition of the Sabbath,<sup>35</sup> but the festivals does not end here there is many more, we have *The Passover festival* in which there will be a celebration for seven days in which work is forbidden, adding to that *The Festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot)* which starts immediately at the beginning of the Full moon after the spring and fall equinoxes, as well as *The New Year (Rosh Hashanah) festival*, the Day of Atonement, the first of the last days of the Passover, the Festival of the Weeks and last the festival of Conclusion which follows the Tabernacles.<sup>36</sup>

These are not the only festivals that the Jews have and celebrate during the year:

- *Yom Kippur*: 'Day of Atonement, and occurs on the tenth of Tishri. On this day, it is prohibited to drink or eat till the night of the next day, also They are not permitted to wash or bathe, apply lotions or oils, engage in sexual intercourse, or wear leather shoes. On this day, Jews believe that their sins will be forgiven that is why it is considered as “Day of Atonement” and makes it a very special day for them even for the Jews who do not go to the synagogue on the Sabbath they go in this day for sure.<sup>37</sup>
- *Sukkot* — the Feast of Tabernacles: The seven-day festival of Sukkot is a celebration that is held after harvest time. Historically it started as a celebration after the forty years of dwelling in the desert after the Passover which the Jews consider as punishment for not listening to the spies that God sent for them. Sukkot is a Mitzvot from God that appears in Tora, in Deuteronomy 19:13 God instructed the Jews on how to celebrate Sukkot and

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<sup>35</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 82.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 82.

For further readings about the Jewish Festivals see: Bank, Richard D, “*The Everything Judaism Book: a Complete Primer to the Jewish Faith-From Holidays and Rituals to Traditions and Culture*”, F W Media, Inc.; New York City, 2010; Eisen, Arnold M. – Strassfeld, Michael – Teutsch, Betsy Platkin, “*The Jewish holidays: a guide and commentary*”, Harper Collins Harper & Row, New York, 2011; Gross Judith, “*Celebrate A Book of Jewish Holidays*”, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 2005; Miles Liz, “*Celebrating Jewish Festivals*”, 2016, Raintree, United Kingdom;

Schauss Hayyim, “*The Jewish Festivals: A Guide to Their History and Observance*”, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, United States, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Bank, “*The Everything Judaism Book A complete primer to the Jewish*”, 131.

told them to have feasts in Booths for seven days as a sign when the Jews had to stay in tents and Booths during their dwelling in the desert after leaving Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43).<sup>38</sup>

- *Shemini Atzeret*: When the Sukkot festival is over on the eighth day, the festival of Shemini Atzeret is celebrated. It is like the day of completion or perfection of the Sukkot. This day is a spiritual day to celebrate the relationship between God and the Jews. On this day there should be sacrifices as well as special prayers for they practice having rain because as we know the Jews were farmers and the rain was essential for them.<sup>39</sup>

## 1.4 Marriage and Family

It is noticeable in the Biblical legal texts that they have always favored men over women, whether in marriage life or everyday life. For example, as soon as the woman was born, she would be under the will of her father and brother. When she was at an age suitable for marriage, the father would choose her husband, and then she became under the husband's will and if the husband died, she would be under his brother's will.<sup>40</sup>

Taking into consideration that the woman had to be under the will of a male figure, marriage was a must at some point in her life, whether it was for cultural reasons or for giving away the responsibility of her to another man, and, of course, marriages at the Biblical times were much different from the marriages in modern time. For example, the choice of the husband was to the father not to the woman, also she was usually given to marriage at a young age, and she had to serve the husband as he wishes and be a good wife, peaceful, and obedient and not to bring shame to her family. At a certain point in Ancient Israel, they had polygamy marriage,

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<sup>38</sup> Bank, *"The Everything Judaism Book A complete primer to the Jewish faith"*, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Bank, *"The Everything Judaism Book A complete primer to the Jewish faith"*, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Pamela Barmash, *"The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law"*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019, 60.

which means having multiple wives and concubines and they were allowed to go to prostitutes; thus, monogamy was a one-way street in this culture. Moreover, in Biblical law, women were not allowed to divorce their men without their consent. It was only the man who could do such an act.<sup>41</sup> The laws and cultural rules practiced against women indicated how much discrimination was conducted against them. As a common belief, women were for giving birth, doing the house chores, taking care of the folks, serving the husband, and bringing water from the wells if they did not have daughters who were old enough to do so.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.5 Household and Family

When discussing families and households, it is important to highlight the difference between these two terms. A household is composed of one or more people living together in the same house or space, but it is not necessary to have blood or marital relation. Whereas a family consists of two or more people that should have a relationship, whether it is a marriage, blood relation, or adoption, and this family makes up the collective household.<sup>43</sup>

The Bible has a different definition as it stresses the household as it is (בית אב *beit 'āb*) 'house of the father', which occurs in the Bible 83 times. For the family term, it is a mixture between the term (אב *'āb* 'father') and a locational term (בית *beit* 'house'), which is very similar to the household definition. However, the term (*beit 'āb*) cannot be set apart from the much more frequent term (*Beit*), which can determine not only someone's 'house' as a building but also someone's "household" or "family".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, "Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions", ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 2008, 206

<sup>42</sup> John Victor Tolan, et al., "Jews in Early Christian Law: Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th-11th Centuries", Brepols, Turnhout, 2014, 270–271.

<sup>43</sup> Jason Fields and Lynne M Casper., "America's Families and Living Arrangements," Current Population Reports, U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 2001, 20–537. Susan Ackerman, "Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women's Religion in Ancient Israel", Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Hoboken, 2008, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Rainer Albertz & Rüdiger Schmitt, "Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant", Eisenbrauns Inc., Pennsylvania 2012, 24.

Therefore, if we define the family religion, it is the religious practices and activities of the household altogether; everyone in the (בית אב) *beit 'āb* 'house of the father' should follow the same religion and practice the same activities, whether they will do it inside the house or at the local sanctuary. This family religion could be for local deities and/or ancestors, both of these elements are central components of the family religion.<sup>45</sup>

In theory, when describing people gathering as a family or household, the terms family religion and household religion are synonymous. When defining a group of people like a family religion or a household religion, thus the religious practices and activities are undertaken together with certain beliefs applied conjointly by a group of individuals in a certain place, whether a household unit, a house, a tomb, a local sanctuary, or a primary temple in which these activities are conducted.<sup>46</sup>

The family/household religion is a complementary religion of the official religion or the public religion that the male-dominant state or the whole country; also, it is the religion that the king, priests, and prophets follow. Therefore, religion is considered valid for the whole society, but it does not mean that if a person has a family religion, they do not follow the official religion. The family religion is more of personal religion as the Israelite Community is a face-to-face community, which means that they follow the head of the family, as mentioned before the father of the house. So, the whole family members and the households, who lived together under one roof or one household followed the same rules, culture, commands, and religion that the head or the father of the house followed, whether the official religion or the family religion. Mentioning the family religion does not mean that it is a different religion from the official religion, but it takes more of a personal type because it has special offerings and requests that belong to the family; mostly it's requested for protection, survival, and the good life for the

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<sup>45</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *Family Religion in Israel, and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Hoboken, 2008, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Katz, *"The Cambridge History of Judaism"*, 29.

family and on the other side, in the family/household aspect of religion all members of the community could take part, even those (esp. women and kids) who could not in the official cult.<sup>47</sup>

The family's religion is also affected by the level of education and the economic situation of the family. This is obvious in the scripts of the Post-exilic Period as they contain a personal theology and family religion of the wealthy families in the pious wisdom from the theology of people from the less economic situation as in the psalms of the poor.<sup>48</sup>

The family religion and official religion as I previously highlighted have similarities, such as the offering of the first fruits in the process of the yearly sacrifices of the first harvest. The families should offer agricultural products to their local, regional temple or sanctuary as well as the first harvest of barley and wheat that should be offered during the main annual feasts, in a certain period from the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* to the *Feast of Weeks*.<sup>49</sup>

Fest of *Sukkah* was one of the festivals where families celebrated the harvest of fruits and grapes, but in a larger cultic framework, these offerings were usually consumed by the family group (Deuteronomy 16, 11). The offerings were not exclusive to the agricultural harvest, but also the firstborn of animals should be offered as well, including goats, sheep, and oxen (Exodus 34:19). The offered animal should be 8 days old and it should be sacrificed at the local sanctuary during the festival season. All these offerings were for personal reasons or requests and the main reason was to secure the blessing of God.<sup>50</sup> Another ritual practiced in the family religion within the Israelites' families was the Passover Ritual, which was a feast celebrated in the central sanctuary and was a celebration of the Exodus (Exodus 16:1–8).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Albertz Rainer, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings", Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Hoboken, 2008, 91–92.

<sup>48</sup> Rainer, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings", 92.

<sup>49</sup> Tolán, et al., "Jews in Early Christian Law", 270–271.

<sup>50</sup> Tolán, et al., "Jews in Early Christian Law", 270–271.

<sup>51</sup> Rainer, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings", 105.

Other family rituals or customs were circumcisions, observance of the Sabbath, and dietary rules, which were a clear sign of religious identity. All these family rituals and practices within the one household and family enabled Judaism to survive during and after the Exile, and also helped to conserve the religion of early Judaism and the Diaspora. The unity preserved the commandments and the practices from fading away as time went by, especially those rituals that were practiced away from the Temple and the Tora.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, all these practices were red lines that the families could not and should not cross when it came to the sacrifices; they were not allowed to interbreed different kinds of animals, to mingle kinds of seeds, or to put on garments woven different kinds of yarn (Leviticus 19:19); also they were not allowed to harvest the whole fruits from their trees (Leviticus 19:9), and in the case of planting new trees, they were not allowed to harvest the fruits in the first three years for themselves, it should be offered to the local or regional temple or sanctuary (Leviticus 19:10) (Leviticus 19:23-5). Besides the resting day, which was the seventh day of each week (Exodus 23:12), also every seventh year they had to let their fields lay fallow.

One more red line was strictly forbidden to cross, was the worship of any other god than YHWH. On the one hand, the national religion was provided with the personal intimacy of family religion; on the other hand, new household rites were invented to implant the beliefs of the official religion into the everyday life of all families.<sup>53</sup>

We conclude that the porous of all these taboos was to raise awareness among people and set the rules to impede the muddling order of creation or to exploit other creatures for their benefit, but respect the needs of plants, animals, and poor people.<sup>54</sup> All of these rules and religious traditions were followed, as well as many more that we still do not know enough

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<sup>52</sup> Saul M., *“Family Religion in Israel, and the Wider Levant”*, 105–120.

<sup>53</sup> Saul M., *“Family Religion in Israel, and the Wider Levant”*, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Saul M., *“Family Religion in Israel, and the Wider Levant”*, 114.

about. By comparing those religious traditions with modern practices, we can easily notice that religious traditions were rich in rules, traditions, and practices that guided the daily life and the agricultural production of the Israelite families.<sup>55</sup> But this does not mean that those families, with their own cultic, family religions and religious practices, lived in isolation from the regional religion, or that they did not follow the same rules, practices, and commandments; on the contrary, they needed the regional religion guidelines to set their family beliefs as well as, of course, they needed to use the local and regional sanctuaries for their ceremonial meals and offerings. They also enlisted the help of religious experts to manage their crises, but they independently and autonomously organized their religious life to a high degree without any major control.<sup>56</sup>

## **1.6 Women's Daily Life**

Israelite women lived with their household mostly in agrarian settlements. Their daily life was concentrated on taking care and conserving the household and helping men in all the basic functions of everyday life, especially when it comes to the economic and religious aspects of the household.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, the sources that describe and explain the daily life of normal women in Judaism are rare and limited, especially if we search in the Biblical texts.

Women in the Israelite houses had many tasks to do, especially since they were fully responsible for the maintenance and management of the household needs. Families at that time lived in what we may call self-sufficient households, and women were the center of the activities. They conducted tasks and activities that started from cleaning and cooking to the

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<sup>55</sup> Rainer, *"Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings"*, 102.

<sup>56</sup> Rainer, *"Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings"*, 91–92.

<sup>57</sup> Carol Meyers, *"Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity, Real Women across the Ancient World"*, Routledge, Oxford Shire, England, 2016, 488.

economical tasks; besides, of course, the religious tasks that were set as a priority. Another important factor is reproducing (childbearing) and raising their children.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the house/family-related tasks they sometimes shared the responsibility of conducting some particular tasks. Certainly, not all duties can be identified, especially those that were not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or in the archaeological record. Yet there is reasonable certainty about the basic tasks.<sup>59</sup>

The most important factor for survival was the production of food, like planting the fields and growing crops and this was a task that men were responsible for, whereas women's duty was to make the food out of their products. But the harvest of the fields was a family affair requiring the whole family to participate. For example, the vines were men's responsibility to grow, but the harvest of the grapes was women's and children's tasks. On the other hand, the preparation of the final product like making wine, spreading fruits and vegetables under the sun, and transforming the grains into porridge or gruel, but more commonly bread, was a woman's job. Those were the most important parts of the Israelite diet, providing 75 percent or more of a person's daily caloric intake. This process started by turning the grains into flour by grinding them (Ecclesiastes 12:3, NIV) then mixing them with water, kneading them into a dough, and finally baking it in the oven.<sup>60</sup>

One more of the women's responsibilities in the household was textiles production; they made fabric from sheep wool and, sometimes, goat's hair, to produce linen.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, this task was not less time-consuming than making bread. They had to take the fabric and turn it into textile and after that make the clothes. Hours could be invested in just washing the wool and spinning it to produce the yarn and so on.

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<sup>58</sup> Meyers, *"Women's Daily Life"*, 489.

<sup>59</sup> Stanley, *"The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions"*, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley, *"The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions"*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Meyers, *"Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity, Real women across the Ancient World"*, 491.



Another contribution from women in the household was pottery work, tool-making, installation builders, and basket weaving; whereas, men were professional craftsmen and were involved in metal production.<sup>62</sup> This was an art of the women's tasks that they had to administer during the day, of course, depending on the seasons besides the daily house chores, like cleaning, cooking, taking care of children, and even producing them. One of the most important rules that women had to follow in ancient times was to maintain their households, family, and communities.<sup>63</sup> Having male children was essential to maintain the bloodline and to be the heirs to the family property unless the man only had daughters.<sup>64</sup> The role of producing children was hard and even dangerous because many women were in danger of getting infections after giving birth or even dying during the parturition, but this did not stop them from doing their job to reproduce children because, from the community's point of view, that was the only way to keep their identity. Women's jobs did not stop at that point, they had to be the children's educators who taught them manners, cultural aspects, family traditions, historical knowledge about their lineage, and religious commandments and obligations towards God. They also had to home-school them, teach them life skills, and train their daughters to be ideal wives to continue this legacy.<sup>65</sup>

## **1.8 Women's Household Religious Activities**

The women's role was not excluded from the household chores and the family demands and needs, but they also had another job to fulfill, which was the religious role. This role, or part of women's lives, was essential. I need to emphasize that religious activities were separated from the daily chores and activities that women were required to perform for their families. Their religious activities were directed to their divine seeking the power in the hope to help and

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<sup>62</sup> Barclay, *"Pauline Churches, and Diaspora Jews"*, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Meyers, *"Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity, Real women across the Ancient World"*, 492.

<sup>64</sup> Stanley, *"The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions"*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> Meyers, *"Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity"*, 493.

protect their family's lives, easing their lives, protecting their crops, protecting them from hunger or disease, saving them during childbirth, saving the new-born children from dying, and, most importantly, to serve their God and please Him to gain his love and blessings for them and their families and household.<sup>66</sup>

The Hebrew Bible mentioned women working alone or in groups were called the professions. Those women were responsible for several tasks to carry out, although several jobs were held by men and women together. Women had to conduct menial labour or maintenance activities in addition to some crafts, or textile skills to create the sumptuous cultic fabric (Exodus 35: 25-26; 2 Kings 23:7, NIV), such as women in proverbs who had a cottage industry producing garments (Proverbs 31:13, 18 -19, 24, NIV).<sup>67</sup>

The women's religious roles varied and they were part of the cultural realm in the Israelite community. Some women used to sing or play musical instruments (e.g., 2 Samuel 19:35; Ecclesiastes 2:8, NIV), whether it was in a cultural context or at funerals.<sup>68</sup>

### **1.8.1 Women and Home Religion:<sup>69</sup>**

To differentiate a family religion within a specific faith, a certain level of religious diversity must be acknowledged. There is still a lot of confusion among Old Testament academics regarding how to deal with the clear plurality in the Israelite religion.

There are five major themes that are employed and occasionally conflated: syncretism, ways to life, popular religion, primary and secondary religions, and internal religious pluralism.

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<sup>66</sup> Meyers, "*Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity*", 495.

<sup>67</sup> Rainer, "*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*", 91– 92.

<sup>68</sup> Meyers, "*Women's Daily Life, Women in Antiquity*", 496.

<sup>69</sup> For more details regarding the course of Israelite history, see Albertz 1994: 1.23–39, 94–103, 186–95; 2.399–411, 507–22, 556–63.

We begin by delving into these notions in order to define the theoretical framework within which family and home religion may be adequately articulated.<sup>70</sup>

Following the idea of internal religious diversity, one may differentiate at least three different levels of Israelite religion in the monarchic period—family, local, and state levels—which essentially reflect the diverse demands of their target populations. Among them, the family and home religion have their own realms and features and may thus be studied as a distinct component of the Israelite religion.<sup>71</sup> However, this heuristic division does not imply that family and home religion formed an independent entity within Israel's religion. Because of their incorporation into bigger clans and local groups, families' religious activities were not limited to domiciles, but also included ceremonies in larger neighborhoods and sacrificial banquets at local, regional, and even state sanctuaries.

As a result, we must consider the joint impacts of family religion and municipal or governmental religion. Families are quite likely to have adapted to their surroundings' religious symbols and incorporated such symbols into their own symbolic systems. The process by which the national deity Yahweh became the most dominant family god in Israel and Judah after the 8th century BC is one example of this type of governmental influence on family religion. Further influences may have come from local cult sites, where cultic stones and trees appear to have indicated the presence of gods and goddesses, which may have resulted in the goddess Asherah (and subsequently, Ishtar) acquiring prominence in the family religion.<sup>72</sup> However, family religion affected state religion as well. When the Deuteronomic reformers constructed the first complete Judean official theology in the late 7th century BC they used a

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<sup>70</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *“King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities”*: De Gruyter, Germany, 2012, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *“Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant”*, Winona Lake, Indiana Eisenbrauns 2012, 55–57.

<sup>72</sup> Albertz and Schmitt, *“Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant”*, 55–57.

familial blessing spell (Deut. 28:3–6, 16–19) to offer supernatural rewards and penalties for their covenant notion.

## 1.9 Women in Ancient Israel

The role of women in Judaism was determined by the laws of the Hebrew Bible. It was also presented in the Oral Law, most of which was later preserved in the Rabbinic literature, as well as in the sources of everyday life.<sup>73</sup> According to these sources, there were models of the female role, e.g., prophetesses like Huldah<sup>74</sup> or rulers like *Salome Alexandra*.<sup>75</sup> There were incredibly important female figures in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>76</sup> from *Eve* to the Matriarchs in Genesis (*Sarah, Rebekah*,<sup>77</sup> *Leah, and Rachel*)<sup>78</sup> who are now included in Progressive Jewish

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<sup>73</sup> Eliezer Segal, *“Introducing Judaism”*, Routledge, Oxford shire, England, 2009, 259.

<sup>74</sup> Both (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22) mention a prophet during King Josiah's reign. In both cases, she advises the King of Judah in her capacity as God's prophet. For further readings see: Holman Bible Staff, *“NKJV Daily Devotional Bible for Women”*, Trade Paper, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2019; Pamela Barmash, *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019; Preston Kavanagh, *“Huldah: The Prophet Who Wrote Hebrew Scripture”*, ISD LLC, USA, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> For more about Queen Salome Alexandra see: Anthony J., and James C. VanderKam, Saldarini, *“Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society”*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2001; Atkinson, Kenneth, *“Queen Salome: Jerusalem's Warrior Monarch of the first century B.C.E.”*, US: McFarland. 2012; Efron, Joshua, *Studies on the Hasmonean Period. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*, v. 39. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987; Enslin, M.S., and Zeitlin, S., (eds.), *“The Book of Judith”*, Jewish Apocryphal Literature VII, Leiden, 1972, 2–24; Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2004; Tal Ilan, *“Integrating Jewish Women into Second Temple History”*, Baker Academic, Ada, Michigan, 2000; Tal Ilan, *“Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women”* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism Book 115, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2020; Josephus, *Antiquities* xiii. 11, § 12; 15, § 16; Laura Tashman, *“The World of Women in the Ancient Near East,”* in M. Székely and N. Dávid, *“Nehez ACTA Antiqua et Archaeologica, XV, Szeged Hungary, 2020, 97–110.*

<sup>76</sup> For further readings see: Angelika Berlejung, Marianne Grohmann, *“Foreign Women - Women in Foreign Lands: Studies on Foreignness and Gender in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East in the First Millennium BCE”*, Mohr Siebeck, Germany, 2019.; Alice Bach, *“Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader”*, Psychology Press, London, 1999; Norma Rosen, *Biblical Women Unbound: Counter-Tales*, Jewish Publication Society, United States, 2010; Tammi J. Schneider, *“Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis”*, Baker Academic, Michigan, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> For more information see: Glenn Pease and Steve Pease, *“Women of the Bible: Amazing Women of the Old Testament and New Testament”*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Scotts Valley, California, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Candida R. Moss, Joel S. Baden, *“Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness”*, Princeton University Press, England, 2015, 121.

For further readings see: David J. Zucker, Moshe Reiss, *“The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views”*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, United States, 2015, 29–86; Katie J. Woolstenhulme, *The Matriarchs in Genesis Rabbah*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, 2020; Mickey Leland Mattox, *“Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs: Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesis 1535-1545”*, Brill, Leiden, 2003; Tammi J. Schneider, *“Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis”*, Baker Academic, Michigan, 2008; Glenn Pease and Steve Pease, *“Women of the Bible: Amazing Women of the Old Testament and New Testament”*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Scotts Valley, California, 2017.

Liturgy when the Patriarchs are mentioned), and *Miriam*, Moses's sister.<sup>79</sup> We can read about impressive women such as the Prophetess *Deborah*<sup>80</sup> in Judges, and *Queen Esther*.<sup>81</sup>

The same is applied to women in Early Christianity. It is obvious that the Early phase of Christianity was affected by Judaism and Christianity came from the heart of Judaism as Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17, NIV). At that time, people still had the same mentality, the same cultures, and the same lifestyle, which indicates that the role of women in life, the way they were treated, and their place in society were the same and no major changes had occurred to their role.

Going back to the Bible, at the very beginning, we realize from the Jewish tradition that there was a covenant concluded between the God of Israel and Abraham on Mount Sinai. In the Tora, it is mentioned that both men and women were presented in the covenant, but the covenant words were directed to men and their households including women, children, and slaves. So, the women bounding to the covenant was indirect. (Genesis 17, NIV).

The Bible texts indicate that the Biblical law always favored men over women whether in marriage life or everyday life.<sup>82</sup>

Being a good wife was essential, and a woman should follow and meet her husband's demands. She should be a helpful assistance to him, whether it's with household chores or kids parenting. As a result, a woman should do all the husband's requests to keep him from living a

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<sup>79</sup> In (Exodus 15:20), the sister of Moses and Aaron, designated as a prophet, leads the people in a victory song and dance as they escape safely from Egyptian enslavement. For further readings see: Jane Yolen, “*Miriam at the River*”, Kar-Ben Publishing, Minneapolis, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> In Deuteronomy 4:4, she is recognized as both a prophet and a judge, and she gives her people confidence via her continuing advice as well as her leadership role in defeating the oppressive Canaanite adversary. For further readings see: Carole M. Lunde, “*Deborah, Judge, Prophetess, and Seer: The Woman Born to Become God's Military Leader*”, iUniverse, Bloomington, Indiana, 2013, 1–36; Joy A. Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, 1–28.

<sup>81</sup> For further readings see Connie Glaser, Barbara Smalley, “*What Queen Esther Knew: Business Strategies from a Biblical Sage*”, Rodale Books, United States, 2003, 223–297.

<sup>82</sup> Juan M. C. Oliver, “*Liturgical Resources 2: Marriage Rites for the Whole Church*”, Church Publishing”, Inc. The United States, 2019, 100.

miserable life,<sup>83</sup> because men were easily persuaded and may commit adultery.<sup>84</sup> The wife should be submissive and constantly make him happy; she should never argue with him or degrade him;<sup>85</sup> and she should be quiet, soft, and modest.<sup>86</sup> This was the method for making a man the happiest of all men. Those qualifications in the wife were reinforced and mentioned in Proverbs 1–9 and Ben Sira.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, women were not allowed to divorce their men without their consent. It was only the man who could do such an act.<sup>88</sup> This and much more than the laws and cultural rules were practiced upon women indicated how much discrimination was conducted against them. As a common belief, women were for giving birth, doing the house chores, taking care of the folks, serving the husband, and bringing water from the wells if they did not have daughters who were old enough to do so.<sup>89</sup> They always sat in a different place at the Temple during the prayers or there was a wall or curtain to separate them from men.

These and other gender differences found in the Torah suggest that Biblical society viewed continuity, property, and family unity as paramount; however, they also suggest that women were subordinate to men during Biblical times.<sup>90</sup> Even in prayers in the traditions of Judaism, men and women should pray separately as in ancient times.<sup>91</sup> Women used to do the service in a different room or on the balcony of the temple, and in some synagogues, it was in another building. This separation was created in the times of Mishnah and the Talmud. This

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<sup>83</sup> Ibolya Balla. "Pillars of Gold on a Silver Base: Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments", edited by Géza G. Xeravits, Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015, 157.

<sup>84</sup> Balla, "Pillars of Gold on a Silver Base", 157.

<sup>85</sup> Balla, "Pillars of Gold on a Silver Base", 169.

<sup>86</sup> Balla, "Pillars of Gold on a Silver Base", 196.

<sup>87</sup> Balla, *Pillars of Gold on a Silver Base*, 157.

<sup>88</sup> Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Encyclopaedia of Love in World Religions*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 2008, 206; Lindsay Jones Editor. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd ed., vol. 5, Macmillan Reference, New York City, 2004., 3352–3354.

<sup>89</sup> John Victor Tolan, et al., *Jews in Early Christian Law: Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th-11th Centuries*, Brepols, Belgium, 2014, 270–271.

<sup>90</sup> Stanley, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*, 76.

<sup>91</sup> Arvind Sharma, Katherine K. Young, *Fundamentalism and Women in World Religions*, T & T Clark, London, 2007, 85.

law came from the Halacha which refers to the woman and her body as a distraction to men and this kind of distraction would give impure thoughts to men during the prayers. Depending on their placement in the synagogue, the women may have followed the same service as the males or performed their own. Because the synagogues were large, there would be a designated woman who would follow the cantor and repeat the prayers aloud for the women.<sup>92</sup> Women, on the other hand, did far more than pray in synagogues. One of the most important responsibilities for women was to decorate the building. There are Torah ark curtains and Torah coverings that women embroidered and that exist now; the synagogue was a communal venue for both men and women where prayer, study, and community activities took place.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the limited role that women had in the synagogues some inscriptions were found that proved that women were honored with titles such as leaders, elder, mother of the synagogue, and woman of priestly class/priestess or who claimed those titles for themselves. Scholars claimed that they bore these titles because their husbands did; that these and comparable titles designated functions when men bore them but were honorific when women bore them; or that, in the case of synagogue mothers and fathers, the titles were honorific for both men and women.<sup>94</sup>

The following inscriptions were mentioned by Bernadette J. Broton in her book, I saw it will be a great addition to my research as these inscriptions mentioning women that donated things to the synagogues as well as inscriptions were commemorating a husband and wife donating together and commemorated a donation on behalf of a woman.<sup>95</sup>

Sambathion, archōn, Byblos:

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<sup>92</sup> Taitz, Sondra; Cheryl, *PS Guide to Jewish Women: 600 BCE-1900 CE*, A JPS Guide, Jewish Publication Society, Old York Road Melrose Park, 2003, 128.

<sup>93</sup> Taitz, Sondra; Cheryl, “*PS Guide to Jewish Women: 600 BCE-1900 CE*”, A JPS Guide, Jewish Publication Society, 2003, 128.

<sup>94</sup> Bernadette J. Broton, “*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*”, Brown Judaic Studies, George St, Providence, 2020, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Broton, “*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*”, 2.

IJO III Syr 30. Epitaph. Byblos, Syria (perhaps midto late-4<sup>th</sup> C. ce2). Reinterpreted by Daniel Stöckl Ben Ezra. “*A Jewish ‘Archontesse’: Remarks on an Epitaph from Byblos.*” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 169 (2009) 287– 93. Incised into a stone found on a house wall. No longer extant. Drawing by Ernst Renan. Stöckl Ben Ezra transcribes and translates as follows:

1[ ירחמ יה[וה ]

2 [ אלהי ]

3 על[ סמבתי[ו ]

4 אר[כונית שנ[ת ]

5[ תיו מרט ל ]

May the pity of YH[WH],

my God, be

[on] Sambathi[on],

[ar]chontesse. Yea[r]

416, Mars 30.<sup>96</sup>

Men were required to perform some specific obligations for their wives, but those often reinforced the gendered roles in the culture of the time. These included the provision of clothing, food, and sexual relations to their wives.

Additionally, we predict that the Judaic and Christian religions grew out of a world where men dominated all areas of life: politics, religion, economy, and even the household. From the above, we can build a fair picture of women as wives and child-bearers in Judaism and Early Christianity.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, we can use the Bible as a source for delineating the details concerning women’s religious practice even with the fact that the Bible tends to focus on the elite classes of society and on the stories that men were their heroes and main characters and women from the royal court, or had a major role in the social or religious life.

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<sup>96</sup> Brooten, “*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*”, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 76.  
Saul M., “*Family Religion in Israel*”, 114.



Another example about women in Ancient Israel is that, on May 11, 218 BC, a woman called Helladote, daughter of Philonides, filed a complaint with King Ptolemy against her husband, Jonathas the Ioudaios, according to a papyrus (CPJ 128) from Fayum (Egypt). Helladote and Jonathas had married according to the "civil [politikon] law of the Jews," but Jonathas rejected Helladote and kicked her out of the house. While Jonathas' unilateral divorce of his wife appears to have followed biblical law and norms as articulated by later Jewish (i.e., rabbinic) tradition, Helladote—who was not necessarily a Jew herself—felt free to seek redress in accordance with Hellenistic norms and through the Ptolemaic legal system. This fragment alluded to the difficulty of researching Jewish women in antiquity. Hollandite's origin is not indicated in the papyrus, but regardless of her religion or ethnicity, she considered the legal treatment of a Jewish wife intolerable. When used to Jonathas, the name 'Ioudaios may refer to a religion ("the Jew") or an ethnonationality ("the Judean")—and, because the same term is not given to Helladote, its use tacitly raises the problem of endogamy.<sup>98</sup>

The fact that Helladote had the power to divorce her husband despite the fact that it was forbidden for women to do so alongside the other examples that I mentioned earlier are indicators of how women in many cases could rebel against the customs rule that was forced against them.

### **1.10 The Role of Women in Religious Practice in Judaism<sup>99</sup>**

During the early phase of settling down in the land of Canaan and in the time of the Judges, Jewish women might have grasped some sacred duties, but when monotheism ruled

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<sup>98</sup> Laura S. Lieber, *Jewish Women: Texts and Contexts; A Companion, to Women in the Ancient World*, Ed. Sharon, L. James; Sheila, Dillon, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Oxford, 2012, 329–342, 329.

<sup>99</sup> For further reading see A. Baker, *The Jewish Woman in Contemporary Society: Transitions and Traditions*, Springer, New York City, 1993, 50–100; Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 2014, 21 – 50; Hartmut Bomhoff, Denise L. Eger, Kathy Ehrensperger, Walter Homolka, *Gender, and Religious Leadership: Women Rabbis, Pastors, and Ministers, Rowman & Littlefield*, Washington, DC, 2019, 33–50; Isaac Sassoon, *The Status of Women in Jewish Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, vii – xviii.

over Judaism, women's duties in Jewish cultic practices were not completely taken away from them. And based on that their role was secondary, and it was epitomized by the existence of a women's court in the Temple of Jerusalem, and they were not allowed to step one step beyond to proceed to the Inner Court of the Temple unless they were bringing a special sacrifice (Josephus, *Bellum*, 5:198–9, *Mishnah Middot* 2:5–6). Moreover, "women did not hold any official role as a member of the Temple staff. Women were mentioned as they were associated with the running of the Temple which was as weavers of the Temple curtains". (*Tosefta Shekalim* 2:6).

After the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the exclusion of women from the religious practice of the Jewish religion continued even with the Rabbinic Legislation,<sup>100</sup> as it exempted them from all time-bound commandments, for example, the daily prayers, wearing of phylacteries, residing in the Sukkah, or going on Pilgrimages (*Mishnah Kiddushin* 1:7). This act had another meaning women were also excluded from the Jewish Cultic life. But as the religious role, they had to do the three mitzvot<sup>101</sup> (commandments) that were reserved for them:

- *Nerot* (lighting candles).<sup>102</sup>
- *Challah* (separating a portion of dough).<sup>103</sup>
- *Niddah* (sexual separation during a woman's menstrual period and ritual immersion afterward).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Arun S. Roy, "Marriage Customs and Ceremonies in World Religions, Trafford", Manchester, England, 2005, 165.

<sup>101</sup> Ra'anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, Marina Rustow, Editors, "Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition", University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 2011, 272

<sup>102</sup> Stanley, "The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions", 76.

<sup>103</sup> Stanley, "The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions", 76.

<sup>104</sup> Stanley, "The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions", 78.

The performance of these mitzvot was a privilege given to women, even though two of them could be performed by men in case there was no woman to perform them. As for the third mitzvot and due to biological reasons, it could not be performed by men.<sup>105</sup>

Under Jewish custom and religion, women also had to cook the meals in a special way and practice ritual bathing. In addition to daily tasks, they had to celebrate annual festivities such as Yom Kippur, Rosh HaShanah, and Sukkot, and the occasional life-changing events: birth, marriage, and death. Those domestic tasks were an integral part of the cultural and religious experience, and they were rules that came from the religious authorities and identified households as Jewish.<sup>106</sup> Among daily practices, one of the most important was the preparation of food. In place of the long-demolished Temple altar, every Jewish table became a replacement “little Temple”. Women not only knew which food was allowed by the religion, but also which type of bread had to be baked for which festivity, especially for the Seder and other dinners of Passover.<sup>107</sup>

The big question now: Was there any discrimination against women in Judaism? In my opinion, it is not too hard to make a decision as we have several facts which I mentioned earlier those women in general had a secondary role in the religious practices in the Jewish religion, it may seem that mostly their roles were in the household religion, and the religious dinners and the household chores, but it does not mean that they did not have any role at all in the temple. And in the perspective of the Jewish religion as it was written in the Old Testament that in the eyes of God men and women were equally equal as he created them in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

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<sup>105</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 78.

Rainer, “*Family Religion in Ancient Israel, and its Surroundings*”, 91–92.

<sup>106</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 280.

<sup>107</sup> Stanley, “*The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*”, 76.

In proportion with traditional Judaism, women were blessed with a greater level of 'Binah' (intuition, understanding, intelligence) than men. The Rabbinic tradition concluded that the word 'Built' (Genesis 2:22) was used when mentioning the creation of the woman rather than using the word 'formed' (Genesis 2:7, NIV), and in the Hebrew Language the root of 'built' has the same consonants as the word "Binah".

Furthermore, it has been said that the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah) were superior to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in prophecy. And we cannot deny that women have had a respected position in Judaism since Biblical times. For example, Miriam was considered one of the liberators of the children of Israel, as well as Deborah who was one of the judges, and if we do statistics, we will notice that seven of 55 prophets of the Bible were women. In the Ten Commandments, respect for the parents was required for both equally, but the mother was mentioned before the father (Leviticus 19:3, NIV).

One writer, a woman, may consider Old Testament women oppressed and discriminated against since they were denied the right to possess property. Another writer, a male, may argue that even though Old Testament women did not normally own property in the sense of being able to dispose of it. Procedures laid down in Numbers and Deuteronomy, nonetheless, provided that they could never be alienated from their property; besides, the levirate laws required that a man marry his brother's widow in order to protect the widow's right to her land regardless of how distasteful the woman herself may have been to the man.

### 1.11 The Women's Presence in the Community of Qumran

*..... they shall separate from the habitation of ungodly men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him; as it is written, prepare in the wilderness the way of... make straight in the desert a path for our God. (Isaiah 40:3; 1QS 8.1-14).*

Since the discovery of the IQS scroll and its publication, scholars and researchers in the field have begun to delve deeper into the topic. When CD and its Cave 4 forebears (which appeared to give norms for a society of men and women), as well as some other ancient evidence, were brought into play, the picture became unclear. The alignment of the texts provided thus far implies that IQS represents the ideal intended for one type of community that lived a celibate life in seclusion. The CD provided a framework for a "Qumran" community that operated as a subset inside the outer world and where marriage was the norm.<sup>4</sup> The recent re-evaluation of the physical evidence supporting the presence of women at the site provided by the Qumran graves necessitates a re-examination of the literary evidence used in the discussion of the same issue.<sup>108</sup>

In this section of my chapter, I will mention the Dead Sea Scrolls that mentioned women in their texts and include the texts as well, put all the pieces of evidence that support the presence

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<sup>108</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, "Women and Children in Legal and Liturgical Texts from Qumran", *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Brill, Leiden, 2004, 191–192.

of women in the community of Qumran, in addition, that I will include in my chapter the story of finding the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a general introduction to gain more knowledge about the significant finding which we can say that it was one of the most important discoveries in the field of the Jewish studies. and last, the studies that tried to prove the presence of women in the community of Qumran.

Khirbet Qumran (or Kumran or Gumran) is the location of one of the most interesting finds in the last decades, the Scrolls of Qumran, or the Dead Sea Scrolls, which took their name from the nearby location which is known as "Wadi Qumran." The origin of the name has not been discovered until now, but there is a theory that the word "Qumran" comes from the Arabic root "Qmr," which has the meaning of "moon" and "being white," and it's possible that the word is the dual of the singular root "qmr," meaning "Qumran" and "two moons," or the white place.<sup>109</sup>

### **1.11.1 The Discovery Qumran Scrolls**

In 1896–97,<sup>110</sup> two fragmentary medieval (10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century) versions of the Damascus Document were discovered among other documents in a repository for old books and manuscripts (Hebrew genizah) in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, Egypt. In 1910,<sup>111</sup> Solomon Schechter published these texts in a book titled *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*. Fifty years later, portions of the same work were unearthed in the Qumran caves.

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<sup>109</sup> Jodi Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"* Peter W. Flinty Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Florentino Garcia Martinez, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, 25.; Geza Vermes, *"The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English"*, Penguin Books, New York, 2004, 25–35.

<sup>110</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 26; Hershel Shanks, *"The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovery and Meaning"*, Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington, 2007, 8–14.

<sup>111</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 26.

Bedouins discovered the first scrolls in Cave 1, about half a mile north of Qumran, in the winter of 1946–47.<sup>112</sup> When they first entered the cave, they discovered a row of roughly ten cylindrical jars. Eight were empty, while the ninth was filled with dirt.

One jar, on the other hand, contained three scrolls, two of which were wrapped in linen. Later, the Bedouins removed four more scrolls from this cave. The scrolls from Cave 1 were well preserved and complete or nearly complete since they had been stored in jars.<sup>113</sup>

- The *Community Rule* (Manual of Discipline) - *Serkeh ha-Yahad*.<sup>114</sup>
- The *Pesher* (Commentary on) *Habakkuk* (a book of one of the 12 minor prophets).
- The *War Scroll*.
- Psalms – Tehillim.
- Phylactery – Tefillin.
- Calendrical Document Mishmarot.
- Some Torah Precepts - *Miqsat Ma`ase ha-Torah*.
- Enoch – Hanokh.
- Hosea Commentary Pesher - *Hoshe`a*.
- Prayer for King Jonathan - *Tefillah li-Shlomo shel Yonatan ha-Melekh*.
- Leviticus - *Va-Yikrah*.
- The Thanksgiving Hymns or Hymn Scroll (Hebrew *Hodayot*).
- The Genesis Apocryphon is among the seven scrolls.
- The Damascus Document:<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 26; Shanks, “*The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovery and Meaning*”, 8–14.

<sup>113</sup> The four scrolls were the bigger Isaiah scroll, the Community Rule, the Pesher Habakkuk, and the Genesis Apocryphon.

<sup>114</sup> For further information see Vermes, “*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*”, 127–159.

<sup>115</sup> For further reading see Vermes, “*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*”, 161–200.

Extensive fragments of the Damascus Document have been recovered from three of the Qumran caves (4Q265-73, 5Q12=CD IX, 7-10, 6Q15=CD IV, 19-21, V, 13-14, v, I-VI, 2, VI, 20-VII, I plus a text unparalleled in CD), but two incomplete medieval copies of this document had been found already many years earlier, in 1896-7, amongst a mass of discarded manuscripts in a storeroom (genizah) of an old Cairo synagogue. S. Schechter published them in 1910 (*Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, Cambridge), and they were reprinted in 1970 with a new Prolegomenon by J. A. Fitzmyer, re-edited by Chaim Rabin under the title *The Zadokite Documents* (Oxford, 1954), and in light of the 4Q fragments by M. Broshi, *The Damascus Document Reconsidered*, Jerusalem, 1992.<sup>116</sup> The manuscripts discovered in Cairo - Manuscript A and Manuscript B - date from the tenth and twelfth centuries, respectively, and contain two different versions of the same work, which raises a variety of textual issues. I solved the problem as best I could by following Manuscript A, to which the 4Q pieces match, and placing the Manuscript B variations in brackets or footnotes. As the reader will see, Manuscript A comes to an end at some time, and we must then rely totally on Manuscript B.<sup>117</sup>

The found scrolls were made from leather parchment,<sup>118</sup> which made them look insignificant to the Bedouins who found them, which led them to take the scrolls to Bethlehem to a cobbler they knew named Kando. His name was "*Khalil Iskander Shahin*," and he was a dealer in antiquities. When he saw the scrolls and tried to read them, at first glance, he thought

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<sup>116</sup> Vermes, "*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*", 161.

<sup>117</sup> Vermes, "*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*", 162.

<sup>118</sup> The prepared skins of some animals, primarily sheep, goats, and calves, to write on them. The name is thought to come from the ancient Greek city of Pergamum (modern Bergama, Turkey), where parchment is claimed to have been developed in the second century BC. Skins had been used for writing material for much longer, but a new, more thorough way of cleaning, stretching, and scraping enabled the use of both sides of a manuscript leaf, resulting in the bound book supplanting the rolling manuscript (codex).

Vellum was the word given to parchment made from the more delicate skins of calf or kid, as well as stillborn or newly born calf or lamb. The word was later applied to any extremely fine paper.

Most early manuscripts up to the sixth century A.D. use high-quality vellum. As demand expanded, lesser materials entered the market, but by the 12th century, when enormous numbers of manuscripts were being produced in Western Europe, soft, pliant vellum was preferred.



that they were written in Syriac,<sup>119</sup> due to his knowledge of the Syriac language from his position in the *Syriac Orthodox Church* in Jerusalem. Afterwards, he took the scrolls and sold them to a man named Samuel for 24 pounds.<sup>120</sup> Another name appeared later in the story, Eleazar Lippa Sukenik, a Biblical professor and archaeologist at the *Hebrew University of Jerusalem* who purchased the second lot of three scrolls from Kando.<sup>121</sup> Sukenik had heard about the scrolls and was eager to get his hands on them. Because the earliest scrolls were for sale on the antiquities market, no one knew their exact find location or date (they had no archaeological context), and some researchers suspected they were modern forgeries! Sukenik was presumably the first to notice that these were genuine old scrolls from about the time of Jesus, and he was also the first to link with the Essenes referenced in ancient texts. After this, the Scrolls started to be famous and attracted all scholars who were interested in Biblical studies due to their importance and the significant information that they included. The importance was not just about the scrolls themselves, but the questions that appeared after the discovery of the Scrolls, like who wrote them and why they were written. Why did they choose this specific place?<sup>122</sup> What kind of community wrote them? How they lived? And what kind of rules and rituals they had to obey and follow? For me, what was the role of women in the Essenes community? Did they help in the process of writing the Dead Sea Scrolls? And what are the pieces of evidence for their presence in that strict community in which purity was one of their most important values?

### **1.11.2 The Location of Qumran<sup>123</sup>**

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<sup>119</sup> For more information about the language of the scrolls see Lim and Collins, “*The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Introduction*”, 8.

<sup>120</sup> 24 pounds equals 100 US dollars.

<sup>121</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 26.

<sup>122</sup> Later on, in this part of my chapter I will give detailed information about the location where the Dead Sea scrolls were found.

<sup>123</sup> For more details see:

The Dead Sea is located at the base of the Great Rift Valley (Afro-Syrian Rift) and it is the lowest point on Earth (approximately 400 m. or 1300 ft. below sea level). The Dead Sea is the saltiest body of water on the planet, with a salt concentration of 30%,<sup>124</sup> which is roughly ten times that of the ocean. The high concentration of salts is owing to the sea's lack of an exit. In other words, flash floods sweep the minerals into the sea, but the Jordan River remains. The Dead Sea was known as the Asphalt Lake by the Romans because of the lumps of bitumen that form beneath the sea floor and float to the top, washing up along the shoreline.<sup>125</sup>

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John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 19; Shanks, *"The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovery and Meaning"*, 8–14.

<sup>125</sup> Jodi Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*. 1st ed., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2002, 19; Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Introduction: Current Issues in Dead Sea Scrolls Research"*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, 1.



Figure 4: The Location of Wadi Qumran where the Dead Sea “Qumran Scrolls” were found.<sup>126</sup>

Many ancient sites in the Jordan Valley and along the Dead Sea,<sup>127</sup> notably Qumran, were built on Lisan marl terraces. The delicate white marl at Qumran contrasts sharply with the rough brown limestone and dolomite cliffs or escarpment beyond the village. Caves 1Q, 2Q, 3Q, 6Q, and 11Q are natural caverns in the limestone cliffs behind the site, while Caves 4Qa-b, 5Q, 7Q, 8Q, 9Q, and 10Q are constructed caves carved into the marl terrace. The marl

<sup>126</sup><https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4204370/Has-12th-Dead-Sea-Scrolls-cave-found.html>, (Downloaded, 24. 03. 2021).

<sup>127</sup> The excavation at the Dead Sea shores discovered remaining docks at the shores of the Dead Sea in many places, such as Khirbet Mazin, which is located south of Kherbit Qumran. Besides the docks, there were also findings of boat depictions, but this was in the "Holy Land" mosaic that was found in Madaba. This is an indication that the Dead Sea shores were used for sailing and boats were a means of transportation at that time. In addition to these findings, there was another important discovery to support that theory, which was a graffito of boats at the entrance of King Herod's palace "Masada".

terrace's southern end features a 200-foot drop into *Wadi Qumran*, a riverbed that runs into the Dead Sea.<sup>128</sup>

The high and rough cliffs surrounding the Dead Sea's shoreline act as a natural traffic barrier. The principal roads down to the Dead Sea from the west have always followed the escarpment breaks at the Dead Sea's northern and southern ends, following two major riverbeds: Nahal Prat (*Wadi Qelt*) to the north and *Nahal Zohar* to the south. Additional but secondary west-east highways were built along the Dead Sea's western shore.

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<sup>128</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 26; Wilfred G. E. Watson, “*The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*”, E. J. Brill, Leiden New York Cologne, 1994, xxxii – xlviii.



Figure 5: The Location of Qumran Scrolls Caves.<sup>129</sup>

The trails zigzagging up the cliffs are known as *maalot* (*maaleh* [singular] means "ascent" in Hebrew). The ancient road from Teqoa to Ein Gedi is one example. Other routes lead up the cliffs behind Ein Feshkha (to Ras Feshkha) and Qumran (to the Buqeia).<sup>130</sup>

### 1.11.3 The Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>131</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a popular title for the texts or manuscript fragments discovered in the 11 caves around Qumran. Many researchers now refer to these writings as "the Qumran Scrolls" or "the Qumran Library." Other ancient scrolls discovered in caves around the Dead

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.bibleplaces.com/blog/2013/05/picture-of-week-qumran-caves/>, (Downloaded: 24. 03. 2021).

<sup>130</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 19.

Lim and Collins, "*The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Introduction*", 5—6.

<sup>131</sup> For a comprehensive view I advise you to see Vermes Geza, "*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*", Penguin Books, New York, 2004.



Sea, such as the *Wadi Muraba'at* Bar Kokhba papers, are not referred to as Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>132</sup> The majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls are written on parchment (processed animal hide). The remainder (approximately 100 texts, or 13% of the total) are on papyrus. The Copper Scroll is written on bronze sheets. The parchment scrolls were constructed by sewing strips of animal skin together, which were most likely strengthened with glue. Similar to modern Jewish Torah scrolls, the writing was normally done on one side of the sheet with a reed pen dipped in ink (which preserves this Greco-Roman tradition).<sup>133</sup> There were no books or codices discovered in the Qumran caves, in which parchment or papyrus pages were covered with writing on both sides and bound together (a tradition that developed in the later Roman period and was adopted by the Christian church for the New Testament).

The majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew. About 20% are in Aramaic, with a tiny amount in Greek. Most of the Hebrew and Aramaic scrolls are written in the Aramaic script (letters),<sup>134</sup> an early variant of the Hebrew alphabet that is still used today. The Hebrew language was written using a variation of the Phoenician script during biblical times.

During the Babylonian exile and Persian control that followed the collapse of Judah's Kingdom in 586 BC,<sup>135</sup> the Jews abandoned the Biblical Hebrew script in favor of a distinct but related script, the Aramaic alphabet.

Later, the Jews restored the Biblical-Hebrew alphabet (thus "Paleo Hebrew") on coins produced during the First and Second Jewish Revolts against the Romans. For example, interestingly, this script was also utilized for some of the Qumran books of Moses and Job, as

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<sup>132</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 30.

<sup>133</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 32; Lim and Collins, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls"*: Introduction, 5—6.

<sup>135</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 32.

well as the name of God (YHWH), presumably as a demonstration of respect for the authority of these ancient texts and the Tetragrammaton.

Depending on one point of view, the types of works exhibited at Qumran can be classified or described in a variety of ways. Devorah Dimant, for example, has proposed categorizing the scrolls into three categories:

- Biblical manuscripts.
- Works having vocabulary associated with the Qumran Community.
- Works lacking such terminology.

Remarkably, Cave 4 produced around three-quarters of the whole collection (from all 11 caves). Furthermore, each cave contains at least one duplicate of a work discovered in Cave 4.<sup>136</sup> I split the scrolls into three major groups for this discussion: biblical literature, sectarian works or compositions, and works that are neither biblical nor sectarian. Only a few incomplete documentary records, such as land deeds or commercial transactions, are included in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 4Q342-358).

*4Q342 4QLetter? ar*

*A. Yardeni, DJD XXVII, 285-286, fig. 28, pl. LIV*

*PAM 43.404, 43.405*

2 [...] 3 [...] 7 עבדי מזה די עבד [...] [...] 1

4 [...] ... לאלישוע די [...] <sup>137</sup>

Why were these scrolls hidden in the caves near Qumran? The two most likely (though not mutually exclusive) theories are that some of the caverns were utilized as the community's

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<sup>136</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 34

<sup>137</sup> Florentino García Martínez & Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar (Ed.), "The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition", Brill, Leiden, 1999, 710.

library or archive (for storing records) and that some of the scrolls were placed in the caves for safekeeping on the eve of the Roman destruction of Qumran in 68 AD.<sup>138</sup>

The earliest extant copies of the Hebrew Bible are included in the first category of scrolls (biblical literature). With the exception of Esther, all 24 books of the Hebrew Bible are represented at Qumran<sup>139</sup> (albeit most are partial copies) (this is an accident of preservation of this book was not present at all; Nehemiah is also not represented, but there is one copy of Ezra). Prior to 1947,<sup>140</sup> the earliest copies of the Hebrew Bible we have dated from the ninth and tenth-century AD.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written (but not necessarily composed) between around 200 BC and 70 AD. bring us far closer to the Hebrew Bible's original date of authorship. The books of the Hebrew Bible were composed and edited over several centuries, with the finished result dating from the 6th or 5th to the 2nd centuries BC.

The Qumran Biblical Scrolls are significant because they can be compared to the current form of the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretic Text (from the Hebrew word Masorah which means "tradition") is the Hebrew Bible text used today. However, numerous versions or variants of the text of the Hebrew Bible circulated in the Pre-Christian centuries (mostly with relatively minor differences). The other versions ceased to spread and vanished after the Masoretic Text became canonical (about 100 AD.).<sup>141</sup>

The Qumran scrolls contain not only early copies of the Masoretic Text (dubbed "Proto-Masoretic"), but also samples of other versions that vanished or were preserved in the Samaritan Bible or translations in Greek, Latin,<sup>142</sup> and Syriac. A few fragments of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was written between the third and second centuries

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<sup>138</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 34.

<sup>139</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 33.

<sup>140</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 33.

<sup>141</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 34

<sup>142</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 35.



BC, are also found at Qumran. This Greek translation served as the foundation for the Christian Old Testament at the time (but eventually only for the Roman Catholic Old Testament).

The second category of Qumran Scrolls includes sectarian literature such as the *Damascus Document* (CD with Qumran cave fragments), the *Community Rule* (*Manual of Discipline*) (1 QS)<sup>143</sup>, the *War Scroll* (1QM/4QM), and *4QMMT* (*Miqsat Maaseh HaTorah*).

There are also biblical book comments (Hebrew *peshet*; plural *pesharim*), such as the *Peshet Habakkuk* from Cave 1. Unlike his modern contemporaries, the Qumran exegete (commentator) felt that the predictions recorded in the Bible were specifically addressed to his own time and that the true interpretation had been revealed to the *Teacher of Righteousness*.<sup>144</sup>

Poetic works, such as the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, can also be included in this category (Hebrew *Hodayot*). The sectarian literature describes the beliefs and practices of the group that used and, in some cases, composed these scrolls and deposited them in the Qumran caves. They claim that this group split from the rest of the Jews in Judea about the middle of the second century BC<sup>145</sup> or even earlier, due to disagreements over the interpretation and application of Jewish law. In general, this sect interpreted Jewish law more strictly than other Jews.

The third type of Qumran Scroll is neither Biblical (in the sense that it did not become part of the Hebrew Bible) nor sectarian (that is, they are not sectarian compositions, although they were used by the sect). Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are two examples of such writings:<sup>146</sup>

- Apocrypha is a Greek word that means "hidden literature." This word refers to the books found in the Catholic Old Testament (also known as the Deuterocanonicals) but not in

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<sup>143</sup> For further reading see Charlotte Hempel, *"The Community Rules from Qumran A Commentary"*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2020, 1 – 10.

<sup>144</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 36.

<sup>145</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 35.

<sup>146</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 36.

the Hebrew Bible (Protestant Old Testament). Tobit and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) are among the Qumran Apocrypha.

- Pseudepigrapha is a Jewish religious text from the first centuries BC and AD that is not found in the Hebrew Bible or the Catholic Old Testament.<sup>147</sup>

#### 1.11.4 The Sect of the Essenes

Most of our knowledge about the Essenes comes from the Greek and Roman historians and writers, and one of the most important historians who wrote about them is Flavius Josephus<sup>148</sup>, He was a Jew from a Jerusalem priestly family. Yosef ben Mattitياهو was his Hebrew name (Joseph's son of Mattathias).<sup>149</sup> Josephus was named commander of the Jewish soldiers in Galilee when the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans began in 66 AD. He surrendered to the Romans in 67 AD and settled in Rome following the insurrection. There, Josephus authored works about the Jewish people's history. Jewish War (which narrates the account of the First Jewish Revolt, including the legendary mass suicide at Masada) and Jewish Antiquities are among his surviving works (a history of the Jewish people beginning with creation). In *Bellum* 2.119–61 Josephus gives a long and thorough description of the Essenes, with shorter sections about them in Antiquities. Josephus occasionally couched his answers in Greco-Roman terms to enable his Roman (non-Jewish) readership to understand the Essenes'

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<sup>147</sup>Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 36. The word Pseudepigrapha (Greek for "false writings") refers to the fact that the authors occasionally used fictitious identities (pseudonyms), mainly those of biblical figures, to give their work greater credibility (a behavior that Vanderkam describes as a form of reverse plagiarism). The volumes of Enoch and Jubilees are among the Qumran pseudepigrapha. The Temple Scroll (11QTS) also comes into this category because it is not a sectarian composition, despite the fact that the Qumran community clearly regarded it as authoritative.

<sup>148</sup> For Further and more detailed reading about Flavius Josephus see Josephus, Flavius, “*Josephus: The Complete Works*”, Grand Rapids, Eds. J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, Translator: William A. M. Whiston, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Burton St. SE, 1998, 1–44.

<sup>149</sup> Josephus, Flavius, “*Josephus: The Complete Works*”, Grand Rapids, Eds. J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, Translator: William A. M. Whiston, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Burton St. SE, 1998, 1.

and other Jews' lifestyles and beliefs and to make the Jews more sympathetic to his non-Jewish readers.

For example, his paragraph on the Essenes begins, "*Indeed, there exist among the Jews three schools of philosophy: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and people who have a reputation for pursuing a particularly virtuous life, known as Essenes*" (*Bellum* 2.119). Josephus' testimony regarding the Essenes is especially noteworthy because he claimed to have had intimate knowledge of them in his autobiography: "*At around the age of sixteen, I desired to obtain the experience of the schools of thought to be found among us*". The Pharisees are the first, the Sadducees are the second, and the Essenes are the third.

Philo (ca. 30 BC – 45 AD), a Jewish philosopher who resided in Alexandria, Egypt, is our second important source for the Essenes. Philo admired Jewish sects with ascetic lifestyles, such as the Essenes and another Egyptian group called the Therapeutae. Much of his knowledge of the Essenes may be found in his book *Every Good Man Is Free* (75–91) and *The Hypothetica*. Although part of Philo's knowledge is similar to that of Josephus, it is less specific. Philo may or may not have visited Judea or had first-hand knowledge of the Essenes.<sup>150</sup>

Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, 23/24 – 79 AD) is our third important source for the Essenes. Pliny was a famous Roman geographer and naturalist who died after Mount Vesuvius' explosion in 79 AD. He had no first-hand experience with the Essenes, and his depiction is limited to a single paragraph in a text written around the year 77 AD (*Natural History* 5.73). However, this paragraph gives information regarding the location of the Essenes' settlement that the other authors do not:

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<sup>150</sup> Paul Bernard Decock, "*Philo of Alexandria: A model for Early Christian 'spiritual readings' of the Scriptures*", HTS Teologiese Studies, Theological Studies 71(1), 2015, 1.

*“To the west [of the Dead Sea] the Essenes have put the necessary distance between themselves and the insalubrious shore. They are a people unique of its kind and admirable beyond all others in the whole world, without women and renouncing love entirely, without money, and having for a company only the palm trees. Owing to the throng of newcomers, this people is daily re-born in equal numbers; indeed, those who, wearied by the fluctuations of fortune, life leads to adopt their customs, stream in great numbers. Thus, unbelievable though this may seem, for thousands of centuries a race has existed which is eternal yet into which no one is born: so fruitful for them is the repentance which others feel for their past lives! Below the Essenes was the town of Engada [Ein Gedi], which yielded only to Jerusalem in fertility and palm groves but is today become another ash heap. From there, one comes to the fortress of Masada, situated on a rock, and itself near the Lake of Asphalt [Dead Sea].”<sup>151</sup> (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* V.17.4)*

*“Lying on the west of Asphaltites, and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Essene, a people that live apart from the world, and marvelous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers who resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus, it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, these people eternally prolong their existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of the population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others. Below these people as formerly the town*

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<sup>151</sup> Magness, *“The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls”*, 30, 164.

*of Engada second only to Hierosolyma in the fertility of its soil and its groves of palm trees; now, like it, it is another heap of ashes. Next to it, we come to Masada a fortress on a rock, not far from Lake Asphaltites. Thus, much concerning Judæa. (Pliny the Elder, Natural History, V.15.17)."*

The Sect of the Essenes was established and headed by priests known as the sons of Zadok (the high priest during the reigns of David and Solomon),<sup>152</sup> and it had a strong priestly bent. Many of the differences in Jewish law were centered on the cult (sacrifices) at the Jerusalem Temple; notably the Sect's preference for a solar calendar over a lunar calendar. This means that their holidays and festivals would have coincided with dates different from those observed by other Jews.<sup>153</sup>

The Zadokites lost their monopoly on the function of the high priest in the Jerusalem temple in the second quarter of the second-century BC following the formation of the Hasmonean dynasty (as a result of the Maccabean Revolt). These circumstances not only aided in the establishment of this group but also prompted its adherents to perform the most radical act a Jew could do at the time. They renounced the cult in the Jerusalem Temple, and by giving sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple, Jews atoned for their sins.<sup>154</sup>

This sect held that the sacrificial worship at the Jerusalem Temple would not produce salvation or atonement since it was not carried out properly. Instead, the Community Rule (9.4 – 5) states that *"they shall atone for guilty rebellion and sins of unfaithfulness so they may earn loving-kindness for the Land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of the sacrifice"*. Additionally, virtuous prayer shall be like an acceptable aroma of righteousness and a path of perfection as a sweet free-will offering.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 37.

<sup>153</sup> Lim and Collins, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Introduction"*, 2—4.

<sup>154</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 37.

<sup>155</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 38.

Lim and Collins, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Introduction"*, 2—4.

For instance, it has been proposed that the Wicked Priest is either Jonathan or Simon, brothers of Judah Maccabee. The *Teacher of Righteousness* may not even be mentioned in current historical records; in this case, his identification cannot be established. These nicknamed figures cannot be identified with Jesus and his associates (such as *John the Baptist* and *James the Just*), contrary to the assertions of a few researchers, because the scrolls that reference these figures were authored or written (or allude to events that occurred) before their time.

Those who wanted to join the group had to go through a rigorous initiation process that lasted two to three years. They surrendered at least some of their personal property and goods to the cult once admitted. The group was structured in a rigid hierarchical structure commanded by priests.<sup>156</sup> Some members were married and resided in towns and villages throughout Palestine, including Jerusalem, according to the *Damascus Document*.<sup>157</sup> Others survived alone in the desert under harsher conditions. The Qumran colony was one such desert community; we do not know if there were others.

The Qumran community (named the *Yahad*, which means "the togetherness")<sup>158</sup> was fashioned after historical Israel. It was separated into two groups: Priests and Levites on one side and Israelites on the other. We also do not know if the Qumran community had married individuals from other regions of the country who may have joined the group for short periods or on specific occasions. Many scholars believe that the group at Qumran was celibate because they were concerned with ritual purity and because the *Community Rule (Manual of Discipline)*, which includes the sect's penal code, does not include legislation dealing with marriage, women, and children (in contrast to the *Damascus Document*, *Rule of the Congregation*, *War*

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<sup>156</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 38.

<sup>157</sup> Eileen Schuller, "Women in The Dead Sea Scrolls: Some Observations from A Dictionary", *Revue de Qumrân*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (93), Peeters Publishers, Leuven/Louvain, Belgium, 2009, 49 – 59, 49 – 51.

<sup>158</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 38.

*Scroll*, and *Temple Scroll*, for example, the Qumran community was made up of mature and celibate men.<sup>159</sup>

According to their interpretation of Halakhah, they saw their society as a substitute temple and believed that they would soon re-establish the cult in the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>160</sup> As a result, the cult-imposed temple purity requirements on its members' life. In other words, the sectarians lived as if the society was a virtual shrine. As a result, they followed the same stringent purity restrictions (including immersion and the purity of food, drink, and dishes) as the temple cult. There is no definitive proof that this sect sacrificed animals at Qumran, but they most likely believed at least some of their communal meals to be a substitute or preparation for the sacrifices.

The Qumran group replicated the ancient Mosaic 40-year desert migration<sup>161</sup> in expectation of God's rising reign and the arrival of two Messiahs (a secular Messiah "of Israel" descended from David and a priestly Messiah "of Aaron").<sup>162</sup> They thought that a 40-year struggle (note the symbolic number 40 again) between the forces of good ("*Sons of Light*") and the forces of evil ("*Sons of Darkness*"), as depicted in the *War Scroll*, would usher in the Messianic period. They called themselves the Sons of Light and everyone else — not just the *Kittim* (Romans), but even other Jews — the Sons of Darkness. This cult thought that God had predetermined everything, even their victory in this conflict.

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<sup>159</sup> This is the part of the life of the essence community sect that is known to us but later in this part of this chapter, I will discuss in detail whether this theory is completely true and whether women did exist in the community of Qumran.

<sup>160</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 38.

<sup>161</sup> We can read more about it in the Bible.

<sup>162</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 38.

#### 1.11.4.1 The Sect of the Essenes Marriage and Celibacy:

The contrast between the depiction seen in ancient writers Josephus, Philo, and Pliny the Elder on the one hand and sectarian rule scriptures on the other is well-known. While classical authors describe the Essenes as male and celibate (with the important addition of a reference to a branch of married Essenes by Josephus<sup>3</sup>), there is no explicit statement about celibacy in sectarian literature, though an allusion to non-married sectarians is likely in CD 7:4–8.<sup>163</sup>

#### 1.11.5 Women's Presence in Qumran and the Community of the Essenes<sup>164</sup>

In recent years, there has been a heated and impassioned dispute about the cemetery and who is buried there. Questions have arisen, in particular, over the identity and gender of those who were buried there. The debate should be understood in the context of recent attempts to separate the archaeology of Qumran from the literary context of sectarian scrolls discovered in the surrounding caves, as well as the hegemony of the theory that identifies the occupants of Qumran and the surrounding caves with sectarians known as the Essenes.

Male researchers with an androcentric orientation have traditionally dominated the field of Dead Sea Scrolls research. This was due, in part, to the fact that de Vaux and some of the other early publication team members were Catholic priests (and all of them were men).

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<sup>163</sup> Cecilia Wassen, "Women, Worship, Wilderness, and War: Celibacy and the Constructions of Identity in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Eds., Baden Joel, Najman Hindy, Tigchelaar Eibert, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Brill, Leiden, vol. 175/1, 1997, 1362–1385, 1363.

<sup>164</sup> For more information on the discussion about women's presence in Qumran see. Schuller, "Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (eds P. Flint and J. VanderKam; Leiden: Brill, 1999, 2.117–44; Schuller, "Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects* (ed. M. Wise et al.; New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994) 115–32; S.W. Crawford, "Not According to Rule: Women, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran," *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (eds S. Paul, R.A. Kraft, L. Schiffman, and W. Fields; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 127–50; see also M. Gruber, "Women in the Religious System of Qumran," *Judaism in Late Antiquity* 5.1 *The Judaism of Qumran: A Systemic Reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds A.J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Handbook of Oriental Studies 1.56; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 173–96; Nóra Dávid, "Women in Qumran? [Nők Qumránban?]", *Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica Supplementum* 16 (2022) 6–17.



Furthermore, our knowledge of the Essenes is offered by men with sexist tendencies (Josephus, Philo, and Pliny). The fact that most modern researchers assumed the Qumran community was made up of adult celibate men did not promote feminist or gender studies to be introduced into the topic.<sup>165</sup>

At the beginning of his description of the Essenes, Josephus reveals a similar bias:

*"The Essenes renounce pleasure as an evil and regard continence and resistance to the passions as a virtue. They disdain marriage for themselves but adopt the children of others at a tender age in order to instruct them; they regard them as belonging to them by kinship and condition them to conform to their own customs. It is not that they abolish marriage or the propagation of the species resulting from it, but they are on their guard against the licentiousness of women and are convinced that none of them is faithful to one man." (Bellum 2.120–121)*  
*"Moreover, they take no wives and acquire no slaves; in fact, they regard slavery as injustice and marriage as causing strife." (Ant. 18.21)*

Pliny, Philo, and Josephus appear to indicate in these passages that the Essenes were celibate men who adopted children or were joined by new members from outside the community.<sup>166</sup> However, Josephus, the only one of these three writers who had first-hand knowledge of the Essenes, mentions that at least some Essenes were married and had families. First, in (*Bellum* 2.120–21),<sup>167</sup> he qualifies his statement that the Essenes *"disdain marriage for themselves"* by noting, *"It is not that they abolish marriage... but are on their alert against women's licentiousness..."*.

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<sup>165</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 163.

<sup>166</sup> Jodi Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"* Peter W. Flinty Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Florentino Garcia Martinez, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, 164.

<sup>167</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 164.

Indeed, they believe that people who do not marry cut off a very important part of life, namely, the propagation of the species; and even more, so that if everyone adopted the same opinion the race would very quickly disappear. Nevertheless, they observe their women for three years. When they have purified themselves three times and thus proved themselves capable of bearing children then they marry them. And when they are pregnant, they have no intercourse with them, thereby, showing that they do not marry for pleasure but because it is necessary to have children. When women bathe, they had to wear a dress, whereas men wear a loincloth.<sup>168</sup>

According to Josephus's account, the society or groups referred to as Essenes contained both individuals who practiced celibacy (at least occasionally, if not permanently) and married people. As we will see, the archaeological evidence implies that the Qumran community was primarily composed of adult men. This (or, more likely, a comparable) village appears to have been the subject of Pliny's, Philo's, and much of Josephus' descriptions.<sup>169</sup>

The absence of female Essenes in his depiction shows that the community at Qumran was the focus of his description. Josephus acknowledges that some Essenes married but explains that this was intended for "*species propagation*." Whether this was the case or Josephus's perspective (possibly contrived to explain why there were married Essenes), the fact remains that some Essenes were married. Furthermore, Josephus' evidence suggests that the women followed at least part of the Essene's purity standards, such as immersion in ceremonial baths (while wearing a dress to ensure modesty). The Dead Sea Scrolls also give equivocal (or at least conflicted) information about women in the group.<sup>170</sup> Magness continues to interpret

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<sup>168</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 164; Elder, "*The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes*", 225.

<sup>169</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 164.

<sup>170</sup> The *Community Rule (Manual of Discipline; IQS)*, which many scholars regard as a sort of constitution for the Qumran community and contains the community's penal code, contains no references to women (except for the biblical idiom "one born of woman," IQS 11.21) or legislation concerning sexual relations, marriage, and children.

and says that these absences show that women were not present at Qumran due to the community's concern for ceremonial purity. “Geza Vermes agrees, but claims that the absences in the *Community Rule* show that the Qumran community was made up of male celibates:

*“The evidence here [in the Community Rule] is not evident because no regulation expressly specifies that all members are prohibited from marrying.”<sup>171</sup>*

But, to employ an oxymoron, the argument from silence to shouts is loud and clear in this document. “In contrast to other sectarian writings that contain references to or regulations affecting women and children, the *Community Rule* does not. Marriage and families were the norms in Damascus society, according to the *Damascus Document*. One verse expressly mentions married groups living in camps”:<sup>172</sup>

אַלֶּה תַּחֲלִימִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ בֵּין־אָב לְבָתּוֹ בְּנִעֻרֶיהָ בֵּית

”אֶרֶץ: {פ}”

*“Those are the laws that "יהוה" enjoined upon Moses between a husband and his wife, and as between a father and his daughter while in her father's household because of her youth.”<sup>173</sup>*

*“And if they live in camps according to the rule of the Land, marrying and begetting children, they shall walk according to the Law and the statute concerning binding vows, according to the rule of the Law which says, between a man and his wife and between a father and his son”.<sup>174</sup>*

This document also includes legislation regarding marriage, divorce, and oaths given by women.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 165.

<sup>172</sup> CD 7.6–9.

<sup>173</sup> Numbers 30:17 NRSV.

<sup>174</sup> Numbers 30:17 NIV.

<sup>175</sup> And each man marries the daughter of his brother or sister, whereas Moses said, you shall not approach your mother's sister; she is your mothers near kin (*Leviticus* 18:13 NRSV).

In its picture of the sectarian society at the *End of Days*, a scroll called the *Rule of the Congregation* or *Messianic Rule* (IQS<sup>a</sup>) includes women and children: "When they come, they shall summon them all, the young ones and the women likewise and they shall read into their [ears a] 11 the rules of the Covenant."<sup>176</sup>

Women and children (as well as disabled or dirty males) are barred from the camps in the War Scroll (1QM 7.3), implying that they were once a part of the community: "No boy or woman shall enter their camps, from the time they leave Jerusalem and march forth to war until they return (IQSa 1.4–5)."<sup>177</sup> Despite the fact that it was not written by a sectarian, the group clearly regarded this letter as authoritative. According to one text in the Temple Scroll, "A woman who has been abducted in battle and married her captor may not touch pure food for seven years. She shall not eat an entire offering until seven years have passed; then she shall eat (it)" (11QT<sup>a</sup> 63.14).

Despite Josephus' testimony and allusions to women's legislation in some sectarian scrolls (including women referred to as "mothers"), it is unknown whether (or how) women were admitted to the Sect or what status they could attain.

The question here is not whether they were married (or female) Essenes in general (which depends on how the literary sources are understood), but is there archaeological evidence for women's presence at Qumran? The presence of women at Qumran has been confirmed and refuted using archaeological evidence.<sup>178</sup> This evidence falls into three main categories:

- The human remains from the cemetery.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 164; Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 225.

<sup>177</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 167; Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 225.

<sup>178</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 167.

<sup>179</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 125.

- The findings from the settlement.
- Gender objects.

The graveyard or the cemetery which was found in the community settlement is a large cemetery located around 30-40 meters east of Qumran<sup>180</sup> and isolated by the settlement's eastern boundary wall. The cemetery is distributed across the plateau's summit (this is the "western sector," which de Vaux believed to be the cemetery's major component), with extensions (or "secondary cemeteries") on slopes to the north, east, and south (including to the south of *Wadi Qumran*).<sup>181</sup>

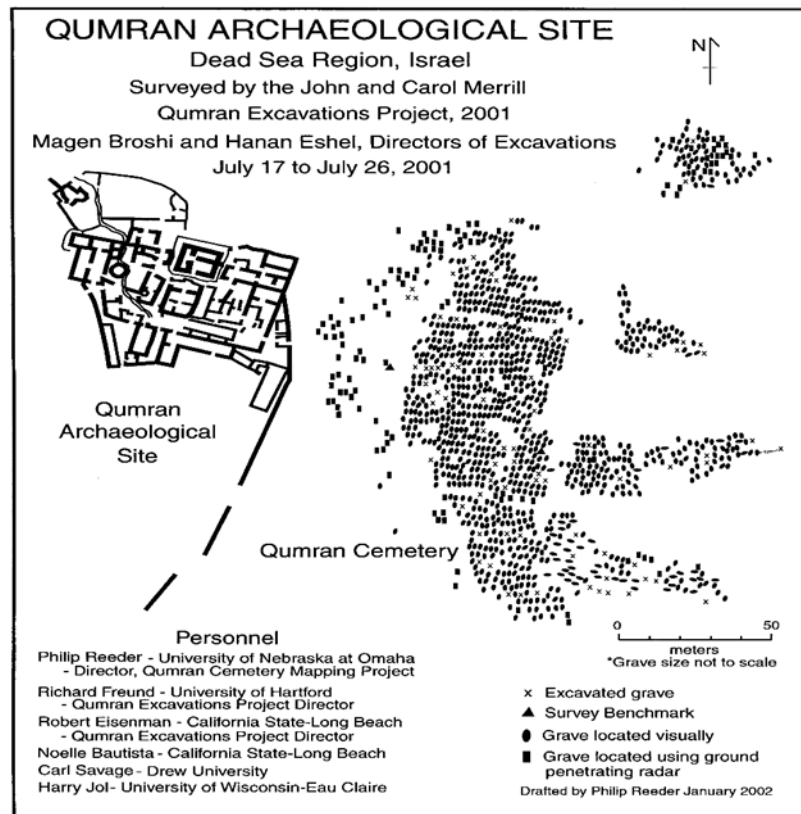


Figure 6: The Qumran Cemetery Compared to the Settlement of Qumran.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 170; Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 222.

<sup>181</sup> Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 222; Rob Kugler, and Chazon Esther. "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays." *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2004, 67–173, 168.

<sup>182</sup> Hanan Eshel, Magen Broshi, Richard Freund and Brian Schultz, "New Data on the Cemetery East of Khirbet Qumran", *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 9, No.2, pp. 135–165, Brill, Leiden, 2002, 139.

The cemetery of Qumran, while some experts believe it is more correct to refer to the cemetery, is expected to have 1100 to 1200 graves<sup>183</sup> (those excavated by de Vaux were serially numbered and labeled "T" for a tomb), except for T4, all the tombs in the western sector are organized in clean rows with regular orientation, with the head to the south and the feet to the north. The burials are marked by little stone heaps, with a huge headstone at either end. Individual burials are typically indicated by little heaps of stones on the surface, frequently with two larger stones on either end and are aligned north-south. The majority are shaft tombs ranging in depth from 0.80 to 2.50 meters. Capstones or mud bricks are frequently set over the deceased on an angle in graves with a loculus and horizontally in tombs without it. Four tombs contained multiple burials and three cemeteries had reburials, all of them were, most likely, from the contemporary era.<sup>184</sup>

The graves are divided into three groups separated by two broad east-west pathways. The majority of the burials on the hill to the southeast (the "southern extension"), as well as all of the graves in the southern cemetery (to the south of Wadi Qumran), are orientated east-west, with the deceased's heads lying to the east.<sup>185</sup>

When Clermont-Ganneau, Condor, and Tyrwhitt-Drake, the 19th-century explorers, excavated two graves on top of the plateau, Clermont-Ganneau observed that the burials could not be Muslim because they were oriented north-south orientation. In fact, Muslim burials in

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<sup>183</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 170; Elder, *"The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes"*, 225; Eric M. Meyers, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs"*, Eds. John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, 10.

<sup>184</sup> In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the cemetery, with an emphasis on sites. The first consideration is gender and age: how many of the burials are of women and children? If Qumran researchers agreed that the community was Essene and celibate, why were there female and infant burials?

Except for those discovered in the southern cemetery extension, bodies were reportedly wrapped in linen shrouds and some were interred in wooden coffins. There were no burial artifacts in any other tomb.

<sup>185</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 170; Elder, *"The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes"*, 224.

Palestine are oriented east-west, with the head laid to the east and the face turned south towards Mecca.

De Vaux unearthed 43 burials in the Qumran cemetery (including the "extensions") over several seasons. The tombs are dug into the terrace's marl to an average depth of 1.5–2.0 meters,<sup>186</sup> with the majority containing a single inhumation (that is, one whole body, with the flesh still intact, was laid in the grave). Each of the T16, T24, and T37 tombs in the western cemetery and the T3 tomb in the southern cemetery had two burials. Three tombs showed obvious re-inhumations (Tu, T24, T37; a re-inhumation means that a body was buried a second time after it was buried elsewhere and the flesh had decomposed). The dead were covered in linen shrouds and possibly placed in wooden coffins (as suggested by fragmentary wood remains and iron nails found in T17, T18, and T19).<sup>187</sup>

For instance, during studying one grave in the western cemetery, the body in that grave was placed inside with goods and a few objects, then the grave was sealed with stone slabs as well as mud bricks, and then the tomb was filled with soil. On the contrary, we notice that in the southern cemetery, there are almost no burials accompanying the bodies in the graves. Unfortunately, the lack of burial materials made it hard for scientists to date the graves, which led scholars to assume that this burial place was not permanent.

There are 22 skeletons excavated by de Vaux whose whereabouts are known, nine in Jerusalem and eight in Paris. Some of the skeletons ended up in Europe when Vallois and Kurth took them to France and Germany for further research. Kurth's assistant, Olav Röhrer-Ertl, recently re-examined the 22 skeletons in Kurth's collection in Munich (in collaboration with Ferdinand Rohrhirsch and Dietbert Hahn). Nine of the 22 skeletons have been identified as

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<sup>186</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 171.

<sup>187</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 172.

adult males, eight as adult females, and five as youngsters by Röhrer-Ertl.<sup>188</sup> In another search, nine adult males and two adult females from the western sector (where all the excavated burials except T4 were lined up in rows facing north-south) have been identified by Röhrer-Ertl. These 11 bones were discovered in the following graves: T20, T21, T22, T23, T24a-b, T26, T28, T29, T30, and T31; the females were discovered in T22 and T24b.

Furthermore, Vallois identified a female skeleton from T7 in the cemetery's western sector (this skeleton is not among those re-examined by Röhrer-Ertl, but is part of Vallois' collection, which is currently in Paris; see below). The additional females and children were buried in the extensions, which de Vaux regarded as secondary. These extensions have central addition where one grave [T1] containing an adult male was excavated. In the southern extension, located on the south side of Wadi Qumran, six graves [T32-T37] apparently containing six adult females and one child were also excavated. Also, four graves [T1-T4] containing one adult female and four children were excavated in the northern cemetery and northern extension.<sup>189</sup>

The identifications of skeletons have been contested between Röhrer Ertl and Joseph Zias, an Israeli physical anthropologist. According to Zias, all three of the presumed ladies from the cemetery's western sector (T7, T22, T24b)<sup>190</sup> outstrip the average height range of Judea's female population in the first century BC and first century AD by 11–14 cm. As a result, Zias believes that all three are adult males. Furthermore, Zias believes that the women and children discovered in the southern extension and cemetery reflect relatively recent Bedouin graves based on their condition of preservation and changes in burial procedures and orientation.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 225; Kugler & Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays", 168–172.

<sup>189</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 172; Kugler & Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays", 168–172.

<sup>190</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 172; Kugler & Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays", 168–172.

<sup>191</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 173.



These are the only burials with grave goods which include beads, earrings, and a bronze ring. While jewelry is infrequently found in Jewish tombs from the Second Temple era, it is common in Bedouin burials (particularly the Bedouin graves excavated by de Vaux at *Ein Feshkha*).

De Vaux continued his excavations in the cemetery to reach a conclusion about the female presence in the Essene community and this excavation another nine skulls found by de Vaux were recently discovered in storage in Jerusalem and re-examined by Susan Sheridan, a physical anthropologist at the University of Notre Dame. These skeletons are from T12, T13, T15, T16 (which contains two skeletons from Ti6a and Ti6b), T18, T19, and Tombs A and B<sup>192</sup> (a box marked T17 contained pieces of wood and iron nails, but no bones). The first seven skeletons are all adult males from graves in the cemetery's western sector (including one 15– or 16-year-old "subadult" male from T15). There is some uncertainty about the location and origin of the remaining two skeletons in this group. They are from "Tomb A" and "Tomb B," according to the markings on the crates and the bones themselves. Some academics, such as Humbert and Chambon, have identified these two graves as T9 and T10 in the northern cemetery.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 174; Elder, *"The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes"*, 225; Kugler & Chazon, *"Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays"*, 168–172.

<sup>193</sup> Elder, *"The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes"*, 226; Kugler & Chazon, *"Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays"*, 168–172.

Cumulative Results of Published Excavation Reports for Cemeteries at Qumran by Roland De Vaux O.P. and S.H. Steckoll			
(De Vaux 1953, 1954, 1956; Steckoll 1967-68)			
Main Cemetery			
	Male	Female	Child
Vaux:	25	1	
Steckoll:	6	2	2 (1 w/Mother)
West Section of Main Cemetery (Graves arranged differently from Main)			
Vaux:	3 (Early report shows 2 + 1 uncertain)		
East Section of Main Cemetery (Graves arranged differently from Main)			
Vaux:	1 (Early report=uncertain)	4	1
Secondary Qumran Cemetery (A) (Graves arranged like Main Cemetery)			
Vaux:	1	1	
Secondary Qumran Cemetery (B) (Graves arranged with varying orientations)			
Vaux:	1	1	3
Totals:	36	9	6 (1 w/Mother)

Figure 7: The Results of DeVaux's Excavation.<sup>194</sup>

However, as Emile Puech has pointed out, Tombs A and B appear to be graves separate from T9 and T10. They could be part of a group of 12 to 15 graves to the north of the Wadi at the northern end of Khirbet Qumran (that is, to the northwest of the northern cemetery).<sup>195</sup> In theory, T9 and T10 could potentially have been in the northern extension, in that case, Tombs A and B should be in the northern cemetery. Sheridan mentioned the skeleton from Tomb A, is unmistakably an adult female, aged 45-50.<sup>196</sup> Tomb B's skeleton is an elderly man in his sixties.

<sup>194</sup> Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 225.

<sup>195</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 173; Kugler & Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays", 168-172.

<sup>196</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls", 173; Kugler & Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays", 168-172.

These two burials were north-south in orientation. Sheridan has also re-examined the eight skeletons from T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T10, and T11 in Vallois' Paris collection (the remains from T3 were mixed with those from T8 and were labeled as coming from T8). Except for T10, which appears to be in the northern cemetery (described above), and T11,<sup>197</sup> which appears to be in the central extension, all of these are found in the western sector of the cemetery (to the north of the southern extension). Despite the differences in orientation, the Bedouin remains at Qumran resemble (and were previously classified as) sectarian remains which suggest that more than simple morphological criteria must be employed to identify the inhabitants. Recent excavations in the first to second centuries AD have emphasized this issue.

The excavations resulted in finding another five burials stelae unearthed in tombs that had been disturbed. This evidence suggests that shaft tombs with a sealed loculus at the base and a single inhumation were not only employed by the sectarian community at Qumran. This also means that cemeteries containing these kinds of graves cannot be assumed to be Essene or sectarian.

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<sup>197</sup> Magness, *"The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls"*, 173; Elder, *"The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes"*, 226; Kugler & Chazon, *"Women at Qumran: Introducing the Essays"*, 168–172.

Excavated graves at Qumran				
Grave#	Orientation	Gender	Age	Excavated Yr.
De Vaux: Main Cemetery				
T.1.	North/South	Male	20–40 yrs.	1949
T.2.	East/West	"	"	"
T.3.	North/South	"	"	"
T.4.	"	"	"	1951
T.5.	"	"	"	"
T.6.	"	"	"	"
T.7.	Not Aligned Head/South	Female	"	"
T.8.	North/South	Male	"	"
T.10.	"	"	"	"
T.11.	"	"	"	"
T.12.	"	"	30 yrs	1953
T.13.	"	"	uncertain	"
T.15.	"	Male(?)	ca. 16 yrs.	"
T.16.	"	2 Male	ca. 30, 30–40 yrs.	"
T.18.	"	Male	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.19.	"	"	30–40 yrs.	"
T.20.	"	"	30 + yrs.	1956
T.21.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.22.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.23.	"	"	ca. 49 yrs.	"
T.24.	"	2 Male	1 ca. 25–1 uncertain	"
T.25.	"	Male	ca. 50 yrs.	"
T.26.	"	"	30–40 yrs.	"
T.27.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	1956
T.28.	"	"	ca. 22–23 yrs.	"
T.29.	"	Male (?)	30–40 yrs.	"
T.30.	"	Male (?)	30–35 yrs.	"
T.31.	"	Male	25–30 yrs.	"

Figure 8: Excavated Graves at Qumran.<sup>198</sup>

For instance, in *Khirbet Qazone*,<sup>199</sup> at the southeast edge of the Dead Sea, there is a Nabataean cemetery. The 3500 burials of *Khirbet Qazone* are oriented north-south and the burials were inhumed at the bottom of a hole excavated into the ground and sealed with mud bricks, like at Qumran. However, there are at least two significant discrepancies between these cemeteries:

- There were an equal number of men, women, and children buried at *Khirbet Qazone*.

<sup>198</sup> Elder, "The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes", 225.

<sup>199</sup> A word of caution about *Khirbet Qazone*: there was a considerable Jewish presence there in the Roman and Byzantine periods, which produced the recently found "Gabriel Vision" and countless tomb inscriptions in the later period. Rather, the absence of females and children is a far more meaningful indicator, though caution is advised here due to the limited number of skeletons available to physical anthropologists.

- Few had grave goods (mostly bracelets, earrings, and beads, but no whole pottery vessels).

Another example of this sort of cemetery is located at *Ein el-Ghuweir*, a site on the western side of the Dead Sea to the south, contemporaneous with the settlements of Qumran and *Ein Feshkha*. The remnants were identified as a sectarian village by Pesach Bar-Adon, an Israeli archaeologist who excavated at *Ein el-Ghuweir*. Bar-Adon also dug two graves, one to the north of the village and the other to the south, on the opposite side of a ravine, and the burials resembled those in Qumran's western sector. Each held an inhumed body wrapped in a disintegrating shroud and placed in a sealed loculus at the bottom of a shaft. The northern cemetery's eighteen tombs contained twelve men and six women, while the southern cemetery's two graves contained a man and a seven-year-old child. Bar-Adon makes no further distinction between the burials in the two cemeteries beyond saying that the southern cemetery is Bedouin.<sup>200</sup> However, unfortunately, it is impossible to identify whether this population was sectarian or connected to the Qumran community. Other cemeteries of a similar sort have been discovered near *Ein el-Ghuweir*, at *Hiam el-Sagha*, and in Jerusalem. Because the graves are comparable to those found at Qumran, the excavators of these cemeteries believe they were utilized by an Essene or sectarian population.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Elder, “*The Woman Question and Female Ascetics among Essenes*”, 226; Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 173.

<sup>201</sup> This form of burial is substantially different from that used by other Jews in Judea in the first and second centuries BC and AD. Many Jews buried their deceased in underground, rock-cut burial caves with one or more rooms that were utilized by extended families for decades. *Jericho* and *Ein Gedi* both have rock-cut burial caverns. By the first century CE, the burial caverns in *Jerusalem* and *Jericho* had loculi cut into the walls to accommodate individual bodies, which were shrouded and sometimes placed in a wooden coffin. The aperture was sealed with a stone slab after a body was deposited in the loculus. After the flesh had decomposed, the loculi were sometimes emptied, and the skeleton bones were collected and deposited in little carved stone boxes known as ossuaries. The ossuaries were left on the cave floors and in the loculi, or on benches that lined the walls of the burial rooms. Inside the tombs were also placed pottery objects such as cooking pots and perfume bottles. Coins were often placed on the deceased's eyes or in their mouth. The coins were supposedly used to pay Charon, who carried the deceased across the river Styx into the underworld, a rite that some Jews adopted from the Greeks. The openings to the burial tunnels were usually sealed with large stone slabs or rolling stones. According to the Gospels, Jesus was buried in a burial cave owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Burying the deceased in rock-cut caves utilized by multiple generations of the same family was an ancient Judean Jewish custom dating back to the First Temple period. In

As a result of the evidence from the western sector of the cemetery, we cannot rule out that (some) women were present at Qumran but made up a disproportionately small share of the population. However, the Bedouin grave goods also excavated there reminds us to be careful with such conclusions. Given the high rate of newborn and child mortality in antiquity, the entire lack of infants and children among the excavated tombs in the western section is noteworthy. Despite the limited sample size, this data shows that the Qumran society did not include families. If we reject Zias' assertion that the burials in the extensions belonged to Bedouins, women, and children were present in significant numbers among the sectarians (albeit still in the minority),<sup>202</sup> yet their graves were ignored. It would also imply that those female sectarians were buried with personal ornamentation (jewelry).<sup>203</sup> The significance of this is that no jewelry or other gendered artifacts have been found at Qumran. If the absence of such artifacts in the settlement is attributed to the ascetic lifestyle of the female sectarians, we should not expect to discover them in their graves. In other words, it is contradictory to argue that the absence of jewelry and other gendered objects from Qumran does not imply that women were not present (on the assumption that ascetic women would not wear any personal adornment), while also identifying the women buried with jewelry in the southern extension and southern cemetery as sectarians.

Regarding the second category, the finds from the settlement, recent research on Qumran archaeology has logically seen a renewed interest in the subject of ceramics, particularly the pottery that has historically been characterized as being distinctive to the Qumran community. The cylindrical jars in which numerous scrolls had been stored in the caves (as we have already noted, these distinctive jars have been found both in the caves and at the

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contrast, the people of *Qumran*, *Ein el-Ghuweir*, *Hiam el-Sagha*, and similar Jerusalem cemeteries were buried separately rather than with their families and ancestors.

<sup>202</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 172.

<sup>203</sup> Magness, "*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*", 172.

Qumran site, though we also know that such jars have been found in the larger Dead Sea region, particularly at Jericho and Masada) are among the forms that have frequently been identified as scroll containers.<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, Bar Nathan's main argument is that there is an astonishing connection "in all dimensions" between the ceramic assemblages at Qumran Ib and Hasmonean Jericho. Thus, Bar Nathan's conclusion highly strengthens the issue effectively argued by Zangenberg (2004)<sup>205</sup> that the site of Qumran, when evaluated in the context of other sites in the region ranging from Jericho to the Lisan on the south-eastern side of the Dead Sea, reveals intimate material culture linkages.

The bigger question is whether such linkages can be supported by other characteristics of culture, such as if Qumran was a crucial regional 'player' in the area's commercial and economic life and the extent to which its citizens participated in such a life. Magness's opinions<sup>206</sup> have shifted significantly with the publishing of Bar Nathan's documents from Masada and Jericho, while their disagreements on more substantial issues persist. Zangenberg interpreted the similarity in pottery types found at the Dead Sea sites and elsewhere in the region as evidence of local workshops that supplied the sites on the western shore of the Dead Sea with mutual wares, "including the users of the caves in the vicinity of Qumran, the inhabitants of *En-Feshkah*, *En-el Ghuweir*, *Rujm el Bahr*, and others." Significant results have been achieved for a relatively diverse selection of thirty-one pottery pieces from Qumran, including four covers of cylindrical jars and eight samples from *Ein Ghuweir*, demonstrating that no distinctions exist in the local ware of the four Qumran groups, pottery discovered in the community center, the limestone caves, the marl plateau caves, and the encampment.

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<sup>204</sup> Meyers, "The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs", 11.

<sup>205</sup> Meyers, "The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs", 11.

<sup>206</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Women, and the Cemetery at Qumran", 163—187.

Furthermore, this same investigation of provenance revealed that part of the pottery originated in Jerusalem and some of the *Ein Ghuweir* pottery was discovered to have a Jerusalem composition but no tie to Qumran. This conclusion casts doubt on Zangenberg's notion of local workshops.<sup>207</sup> It does, however, support the idea that the Qumran community was more in touch with the outside world, particularly Jerusalem. This is a supposition we support because the Essene community was very much a part of the larger world, albeit opposed to aspects of it due to their own peculiar belief system.

Another key conclusion drawn by Bar-Nathan from her study comparing Qumran pottery with that of Jericho is that there is no imported ware, a feature that typified all of Judaea. She went so far as to argue that the two sites might have shared the same workshop and that the considerable similarities across 1b late Hellenistic ceramics do not support an isolation or sectarian separation theory.<sup>208</sup> She went on to say that throughout the Herodian era and subsequently, Qumran II, along with the general flood of imported commodities into Judaea, had a moderate influx of such wares, including a small amount of Nabataean ware.

However, the ramifications of this are debatable. In this regard, we shall explore Magness's<sup>209</sup> assertion that the usage of cylindrical and ovoid jars is a clear indication of the consumer's concern for purity. In fact, Bar-Nathan agreed that the unusual shape of those vessels made them especially ideal for archival storage.

Another point of contention between Magness and Bar-Nathan is whether scroll jars from the caverns are dated to the 1b or late Hellenistic periods. Though most recorded instances are from the Herodian period, Qumran II de Vaux reported finding cylindrical jars in the earlier period.<sup>210</sup> However, until all of the evidence is published, it is difficult to declare with precision,

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<sup>207</sup> Meyers, "The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs", 12.

<sup>208</sup> Meyers, "The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs", 12.

<sup>209</sup> Magness, "The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Women, and the Cemetery at Qumran", 163—187.

<sup>210</sup> Meyers, "The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs", 13.



what the proper situation is. In any case, Bar-Nathan used this datum,<sup>211</sup> which is by all accounts not beyond doubt, that the so-called cylindrical scroll jars must be dated to the Great Revolt, to bolster her support for the idea that the scrolls were deposited in the caves before or during the Great Revolt and that there was no link between the jars found at the site and the caves in the Hasmonean (late Hellenistic) period because the jars were produced in several places, including Jerusalem and Jericho.<sup>212</sup>

We should thank Bar-Nathan, Galor, Zangenberg, and others who wished to use these statistics to demonstrate that the Qumran community was not isolated and self-selection, but rather a part of its current context. However, as we have seen in other situations in contemporary Palestine, different communities can utilize comparable ceramics in their homes.

The ceramic assemblage from Hasmonean Jericho, for example, is identical to the pottery assemblage from the same period at Sepphoris in Galilee. However, the population of Sepphoris appears to be made up of soldiers rather than the royal family. In fact, both settlements had ritual baths, shared common pottery styles, and used Hasmonean and Tyrian money,<sup>213</sup> which indicates that the two communities could not have been more dissimilar. All of this is to argue that while the community of Qumran demonstrated parts of the mutual material culture that connected many of the distinct groups of Greco-Roman Palestine; it also distinguished itself dramatically from the surrounding culture in other ways.

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<sup>211</sup> A datum is an old-fashioned solution to the practical challenge of creating an accurate map. If you do not have a precise location on a benchmark in your area, you create a map by selecting a mark and designating it as the reference point. You then survey the area and create a map. Because you are using a different datum, the one you formed, it may not match other maps from neighbouring locations with great precision. The solution is obvious if you want to calculate the relative location of two spots a few meters apart. Simply use a tape measure to determine the difference. The problem of direction remains, but it can be overcome by using two "known" sites to measure a third. Alternatively, observations of the stars can be utilized to determine the north. This effectively specifies a local datum. The location of points measured from the known point is defined by the known point and some method for calculating the direction of the north. If the reference point is off by 100 meters to the north, all of the points that use it will be off as well. They move in unison. This, of course, presupposes that the inaccuracies are tiny in comparison to the radius of the earth.

<sup>212</sup> Meyers, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs"*, 13.

<sup>213</sup> Meyers, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs"*, 14.

Some of the most compelling arguments for identifying Qumran as a place where communal activities for much larger numbers took place are the disproportionate amount of kitchen wares, the lack of sleeping space at the site of Qumran for more than about twenty individuals, and the presence of an assembly hall or dining room or two. Despite the dense contemporaneous population on the Dead Sea coast up to Jericho, the Essenes who inhabited Qumran were isolated by the laws they followed and the beliefs they held. In short, the presence of identical pottery, whether created in Jerusalem, Qumran, or Jericho, does not allow historians to conclude that the people in each location were similar, except maybe in their humanity. Magness has made a compelling case for linking the use of particular types of vessels, including the cylindrical jar and the ovoid storage jar with bowl-shaped covers, to the residents of Qumran's concern for ritual cleanliness. To be sure, she relied to a large extent on scrolls and apocryphal writings to support her arguments, but some aspects of her presentation are unarguable. Cylindrical jars can be found at a variety of locations at Qumran, including loci 2, 13, 34, 61, 80, 81, 110, and 120.<sup>214</sup>

In addition, two unbroken jars were recovered from Cave 1, together with a scroll and linen fragments. Despite the fact that similar ones can be found at Jericho, they are excessively rare and distinct from other storage jars of this period, namely Qumran Ib and II, late Hellenistic and early Roman to 68 AD.<sup>215</sup> Particularly, the more common bag-shaped storage jar, as even Bar-Nathan agreed, is for archival materials or scrolls, as opposed to the more common bag-shaped ones that are intended for the storage of foodstuffs. The cylindrical and tubular jars, on the other hand, could be snugly covered and even tied down with their bowl-shaped lids. With the Sect's rigorous restrictions regarding purity and defilement from liquids in mind, Magness gathered pertinent literary materials and decided that their distinctive shape, although ideal for

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<sup>214</sup> Meyers, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs"*, 14.

<sup>215</sup> Meyers, *"The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Khirbet Qumran and Its Environs"*, 15.

preserving sacred books, was also suitable for storing pure food and drink. This leads us to the conclusion that the theory of the Essenes using the pottery and vessels from the other communities and further locations helps us to prove that they were not as isolated as we thought, and they did not force their sect members to stay inside the borders of Qumran. On the opposite, they had some sort of communication with the outside world and this communication with other people and the cultural life in the outside borders of Qumran led many members of them to have contact with women and to bring them into the community of their sect, at least from the urge of the continuity of their sect.

The third category, the gender objects, proves that women who existed in the Qumran community might not have been in large numbers or equal to the male numbers, but, at least, they lived for a certain period. The question that arises now is: Do the objects discovered during de Vaux's digs indicate the presence of women in the Qumran community? As we will see, although particularly negative, the archaeological evidence shows only a minor female presence at Qumran. Aside from uncovering women's bodily remains in the community (such as female burials in the cemetery), one method of identifying women in the archaeological record is to find items that show their existence; that is, objects used or possessed only by women.

These are usually described as "gendered" things by academics. Tampons and brassieres are examples of gendered objects in the modern era. Were there any gendered items discovered in Qumran? Unfortunately, few organic elements from de Vaux's excavations have survived. This implies that things like hairnets, which could witness the existence of women at Qumran, did not survive (assuming they originally existed).

*“In a society where many tasks were clearly gendered... certain objects were specifically used by women: combs, mirrors, cosmetics, even jewelry like beads, necklaces, earrings, nose*

*rings, and spindle whorls or other artifacts indicating specialized women's domestic labor.*<sup>216</sup>”

Taylor observed. Gathering and preparing wild foods, dairy production, spinning, laundry, fetching water, cooking, and pottery manufacturing have traditionally been vital female tasks around the world.

Women in Roman Palestine also worked outside the home; for example, in ceramics, trading, agriculture, butchery, and bread-making. Women were typically in charge of household responsibilities while men, on the other hand, worked outside the home. Regardless of the chronological and interpretive issues surrounding rabbinic sources and their relationship (if any) to the Qumran community, they are essential for this debate because they give information about women in Roman Palestine. Women’s jobs varied, but I may mention the following:

- Grinds flour.
- Bakes bread.
- Does laundry.
- Prepares meals.
- Feeds her child.
- Makes the bed.
- Works in the wool” (Mishnah Ketubot 5:5).

Because there has not been a formal publication of the material from de Vaux's excavations, none of the results offered here can be regarded as definitive. De Vaux's published field notes provide listings of the artifacts discovered in each locus. But Taylor said that there are no combs or mirrors among the gendered objects listed in the findings.<sup>217</sup> Taylor also mentions jewelry and spindle whorls as examples of gendered things. Although males in the

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<sup>216</sup> Joan E. Taylor, “The Cemeteries of Khirbet Qumran and Women’s Presence at the Site,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6 (1999): 285–323 (291).

<sup>217</sup> Taylor, “The Cemeteries of Khirbet Qumran,” 317; Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 176; Ilan, “*Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 125.

Roman era wore finger rings and fibulae (a type of safety pin used to attach a cloak), according to Alexandra Croom, “*Men tended not to wear much jewelry, as those who did were deemed effeminate.*”<sup>218</sup>

Women wore a wide range of jewelry, including necklaces, earrings, finger rings, and bracelets. Spindle whorls are linked to spindles which were used to spin wool. The raw wool or linen was tied to a rod called a distaff and then teased out by hand, twisting the raw material into thread with a weighted stick (the spindle).



Figure 9: Ancient Roman, Israelite, Spindle Whorl, Loom Weight, Qumran, Israel.<sup>219</sup>

Even in industrial situations at Pompeii, it appears that the spinners were women and the weavers were men. I agree with Taylor that “*spinning does not appear on the list of 'barred'*

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<sup>218</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 176.

<sup>219</sup> <https://www.ebay.com/itm/144060087952> (Downloaded 14. 06. 2021).

*male employments in the rabbinic sources, possibly, because in Graeco-Roman Palestine spinning — like midwifery — was something men did not practice.*”<sup>220</sup> The sectarian scrolls do not appear to contain any references to spinning or weaving. Furthermore, despite numerous references to Essene clothes, Josephus and Philo make no mention of spinning or weaving. Although it is an argument from silence, if male Essenes engaged in spinning, this activity would likely have been proscribed (in the sectarian scrolls) or singled out for description and possibly mockery by Josephus, Philo, and other authors.

According to Tal Ilan, when women are mentioned in the Dead Sea Sect's publications, it is virtually always in halakhic situations. Thus, it appears safe to correlate spindle whorls with the presence of women in Roman Palestine (including Qumran). The archaeological data, however, contradicts Taylor's claim that the most stunning artifacts for engendered archaeology to be discovered at Qumran are bone spindle whorls.<sup>221</sup>

Other listed artifacts, such as *fibulae*, were worn or utilized by men. It is impossible to tell whether the pearl "ornament" and the two copper "ornaments" depict gendered objects without drawings and only five beads, which are mentioned in de Vaux's notebooks,<sup>222</sup> were found in the excavation. Another object found in the caves of Qumran was a copper earring or nose ring that was discovered in Cave 24, about 50 meters north of Cave 11. Domestic occupancy on a small scale is suggested by comb fragments and a cooking vessel discovered in Cave 1.<sup>223</sup> There are no gendered artifacts from the freshly unearthed dwelling caves in the marl terrace north of Qumran. To recapitulate, the gendered items linked with the Qumran sectarian settlement consist of one spindle whorl and no more than four beads.

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<sup>220</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 177.

<sup>221</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 178.

<sup>222</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 178.

<sup>223</sup> Magness, “*The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*”, 179.

This evidence is consistent with that from the cemetery, which attests to the presence of women, albeit very briefly. The evidence from the site is, of course, suggestive rather than definitive, for two reasons:

- The final publication of the material from de Vaux's excavations may reveal the presence of additional gendered objects.
- The conclusion that women are only minimally represented at Qumran is based on negative evidence — an argument from silence.

#### **1.11.6: Texts related to Women from Qumran:**

The issue of women in Qumran is quite new. When the scrolls were unearthed sixty years ago, it was supposed that Josephus and Philo's celibate Essenes were the writers. Early Qumran excavators were influenced by early Christian monasticism and described Qumran as a setting analogous to a Christian monastery, with celibate males as its occupants. The site's and scrolls' interest in and knowledge of women was slow to emerge, and it was coupled with the birth of intellectual feminism, which had as its primary purpose the finding of women where none had previously been recorded.

It may be impossible to prove that women were not there and functioning in diverse capacities just based on archaeological evidence (as bakers, cooks, potters, agricultural laborers, etc.). Nonetheless, this argument from silence is compelling, especially when compared to modern Judean Desert sites where women were clearly present. Therefore, the presence of women was necessary and important in a community so dedicated as the Essenes, at least, to maintain their culture and their blood. Here is a brief summary of what Josephus writes on Essenes living in towns in families. Because also those women could go to Khirbet Qumran, e.g., on special occasions, and festivals, and maybe some of them died and were buried there.

There were many texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls that mentioned women, the topics were varied and included many aspects concerning women's life and how should they act also what are the consequences of their signs. The new consensus, which includes married male members and women who are only spouses, must also cope with those passages that do not fully support it: Women testifying against their spouses are mentioned in 1QSa 1: 11; women elders are mentioned in 4Q502; Both 4Q159 and 4Q271 describe trustworthy women (זקנות), designated by the overseer, who do gynecological tests on potential brides; and 4Q270 cites moms (נאמנות) in parallel to community fathers, who produce respect.<sup>224</sup> These occurrences contradict the emerging consensus of male members and their non-member spouses. Scholars who choose to prioritize these texts continue to support Schuller's notion that women may have been members of the Yah.

#### **1.11.6.1: Biblical Texts:**

Ideally, biblical texts are excluded from discussions of women in Qumran since it is assumed that these writings are continuous, pre-Qumranic, and the women in them may be studied elsewhere. However, in addition to the LXX, the biblical manuscripts from Qumran are important testimonies of the Hebrew Bible's textual history.<sup>225</sup> Here are four such examples that have been noted by scholars and discussed in the literature:

1. Exodus 2: 3. In 4QExod<sup>b</sup>.
2. Exodus 15.
3. Malachi 2: 16.
4. Tobit (passim)<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 126.

<sup>225</sup> Emanuel Tov, "Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible". 2nd rev. ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, northwest Philadelphia, 2001, 117.

<sup>226</sup> On the motive of burial in the book of Tobit and in Qumran see: Nóra Dávid, Burial in the Book of Tobit and in Qumran



### 1.11.6.2: Apocryphal Texts:

Aside from biblical writings, the Qumran library revealed a significant store of nonbiblical pieces; some of them (such as the Book of Jubilees) were known before the Qumran corpus was discovered, while others (such as the Genesis Apocryphon) were unknown. In the context of Qumran, it is difficult to address the question of what exactly a non-biblical (or apocryphal) document is. Some works, such as 4Q365 (Song of Miriam), show that the borders between biblical and non-biblical material are permeable. This might be highly relevant to the topic of women. Allegro (1968), for example, labeled 4Q179 as 'Lamentations,' despite the fact that, despite language and subject parallels, it is not a fragment of the biblical Lamentations.<sup>227</sup> The passage has received little attention, and no one has pointed out that the majority of the variations between it and the biblical text are due to gendered terminology. While Jerusalem is represented as a sad, widowed lady in Masoretic Lamentations 1 and a callous, whoring mother in Lamentations 4, the text emphasizes the metaphorical nature of these designations. The line between metaphors and actual women becomes further blurred in 4Q179.<sup>228</sup>

Fragment 1 is verbally similar to Lamentation 4, but where the Masoretic text describes 'the daughter of my people' as ruthless (אכזר, Lam. 4: 3), and speaks of the 'dear sons of Zion' (4: 2), 4Q179 uses the feminine (אכזריה) and refers to 'the gentle daughters of Zion'. The same is true for Fragment 2, which has a similar word structure to Lamentations 1. Jerusalem is characterized as a widow (1:1, אלמנה) and maybe as a menstruant (1:8, נידה) in the Masoretic

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In: Armin, Lange; Emmanuel, Tov; Matthias, Weigold (szerk.) *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the DSS in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages and Cultures*. Leiden: Brill, 2011, 489-500.

<sup>227</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 128.

<sup>228</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 128.

language. In 4Q179, she is portrayed as neither, but rather as an abandoned Woman (שוממה), barren (עקרה), and bitter (אשת מרורים).<sup>229</sup>

Her men are forsaken (וממים) in Masoretic Lamentations 1: 16, and she weeps for them. However, in 4Q179, she weeps for her daughters, who are constantly identified as forsaken (עזובות) and in grief (אבלות). It makes no mention of sons. In conclusion, gender is a wonderful tool for properly discussing this poem and its link to traditional Lamentations.<sup>230</sup>

#### Lamentations 1:<sup>231</sup>

- (1) א איכה ישבה בדד, העיר רבתי עם--היתה, פאלמנה; רבתי בגוים, שרתי במדינות--היתה, למס. {ס}
- (2) ב בכו תבכה בלילה, ודמעתה על לחיה--אין-לה מנחם, מכל-אהביה: כל-רעה בגדו בה, היו לה לאיבים. {ס}
- (3) ג גלתה יהודה מעני, ומרב עבדה--היא ישבה בגוים, לא מצאה מנוח; כל-רדפה השיוגה, בין המצרים. {ס}
- (4) ד דרכי ציון אבלות, מבלי באי מועד--כל-שעריה שוממים, כהניה נאנחים; בתולתיה נוגות, והיא מר-לה. {ס}
- (5) ה היו צריה לראש איביה שלו, כי-יהנה הוגה על רב-פשעיה; עולליה הלכו שבי, לפני-צר. {ס}
- (6) ו ויצא מן בת-מבת-ציון, כל-הדרה; היו שריה, כאילים לא-מצאו מרעה, וילכו בלא-כח, לפני רודה. {ס}
- (7) ז זכרה ירושלם, ימי עניה ומרודה--כל מחמדיה, אשר היו מימי קדם; בנפל עמה ביד-צר, ואין עוזר לה--ראוה צרים, שחקו על משבתה. {ס}

#### 1.11.6.3: Wisdom Literature:

The Biblical Proverbs are often used to exemplify wisdom literature, and writing of the same kind is sometimes referred to as wisdom literature. Following Proverbs 1-9, the biblical scholar is familiar with two feminine stereotypes: the personification of knowledge (abbreviated 'Woman knowledge') and the unusual, sexually appealing woman.<sup>232</sup>

Scholars have become more interested in the recurrence of this motif in apocryphal literature. Some Qumran pieces have aided the dispute. For example, White Crawford wondered to what

<sup>229</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 128; Ilan, Tal, *Gender, and Lamentations: 4Q179 and the Canonization of the Book of Lamentations*. Lectio Difficilior 8.2: [http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08\\_2/Tal\\_Ilan\\_Gender\\_of\\_Lamentations.html](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08_2/Tal_Ilan_Gender_of_Lamentations.html), 4 – 6.

<sup>230</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 128; Ilan, Tal, *Gender, and Lamentations: 4Q179 and the Canonization of the Book of Lamentations*. Lectio Difficilior 8.2: [http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08\\_2/Tal\\_Ilan\\_Gender\\_of\\_Lamentations.html](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08_2/Tal_Ilan_Gender_of_Lamentations.html), 4–6.

<sup>231</sup> Ilan, Tal, *Gender, and Lamentations: 4Q179 and the Canonization of the Book of Lamentations*, Lectio Difficilior 8.2: [http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08\\_2/Tal\\_Ilan\\_Gender\\_of\\_Lamentations.html](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/08_2/Tal_Ilan_Gender_of_Lamentations.html), 6.

<sup>232</sup> Crawford White, "Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran", DSD 5, 1998: 355–66.

degree one might uncover independent Qumran fragments of these two sorts, and in what context they may be found. She examined three pertinent compositions (4Q184–folly, 4Q185–wisdom, and 4Q525–wisdom) and concluded that they do not reflect a "Qumranic" phenomenon but are common in Second Temple literature. This would imply that these works are not "sectarian."<sup>233</sup>

#### 1.11.6.4 Sectarian Texts:

The Qumran group created texts that are typically classified as sectarian. These works are distinguished by the use of distinct vocabulary and the presence of sectarian issues. These are, in particular, 1QS, 1QSa, CD, 1QM, 4QMMT, 11QT<sup>234</sup> and the Pesharim. Just as it is difficult to distinguish between scriptural and apocryphal writings in Qumran, it is impossible to address the question of what defines a sectarian document. For example, the previously mentioned Book of Jubilees, which is known from places outside of Qumran, has numerous traits that are unique to Qumran sectarian literature. One of them is particularly relevant to the issue of women.<sup>235</sup> Jubilees 3: 8 explains why Leviticus 12: 2–5 provides a distinct purification period for a woman who has a male and one who has a girl. The reasoning is based on the order of creation: man was formed first; thus, he needed a shorter cleansing period. A similar tradition may be found in 4Q265, often known as Miscellaneous Rules and defined as a mix between 1QS and the CD by Joseph Baumgarten. This piece was interpreted as sectarian by Garca-Mart'nez<sup>236</sup>, indicating that the Book of Jubilees functioned as a basis for the sect's halakhic approach here.

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<sup>233</sup> Crawford White, "Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran", DSD 5, 1998: 355–66, 365.

<sup>234</sup> Nóra Dávid, Death, Burial and Sacred Space in the Temple Scroll. In: C. de Vos K J Wenell; J. Økland (eds.) *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred*. London: T&T Clark International, 2016, 130–141.

<sup>235</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 123.

<sup>236</sup> Martínez García, Florentino, "Man, and Women: Halakhah Based upon Eden in the Dead Sea Scrolls", in Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, ed., *Qumranica Minora II: Thematic Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls* by Florentino García Mart'nez. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 57–76, 71–72.

Himmelfarb,<sup>237</sup> on the other hand, used Jubilees as a source. If she is accurate in her reconstruction, we must infer (together with other academics) that Jubilees is a sectarian document published in Qumran.

#### 1.11.6.5 Damascus Document (CD):

The CD is most likely the Qumranic text that lends itself most to gender study (Grossman 2004). Cecilia Wassen (2005) evaluated all sections linked with women in CD and found that it is the result of a patriarchal, authoritarian society (which she identifies as the Essenes) that nonetheless considered women as members, but of a lower order. The following are the most important and disputed subjects in CD.<sup>238</sup>

- Polygyny/Divorce:

One of the most often examined texts in the Qumran corpus is CD 4: 20-1. It depicts one of the 'nets of Belial' into which the sect's opponents have fallen as 'having two spouses in their lifetime'. This scripture became a source of debate even before it became clear that members of the Dead Sea Sect supported marriage. Vermes summarized the scholarly argument at the time in his 1974 essay, demonstrating that all of the above ideas had been raised. He reasoned that in light of a pericope from the then recently released Temple Scroll concerning the king He may not marry another wife in addition to her, for she alone shall remain with him all the days of his life. But if he dies, he may marry someone else. 11QT 57: 15–19.<sup>239</sup> The problem was polygyny. He came to the conclusion that the Qumran group outlawed polygyny. The foundation of creation is "*Male and female he created them (Genesis 1: 27) and those who came into the ark, "two by two they came into the ark" (Genesis 7: 9), and of the king it is written: "he shall not*

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<sup>237</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, "Sexual Relations and Purity in the Temple Scroll and the Book of Jubilees", DSD, 1999, 6: 11–36, 25.

<sup>238</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 132.

<sup>239</sup> Geza Vermes, "Sectarian Matrimonial Halakhah in the Damascus Rule". JJS 25, 1974, 197–202.

*multiply wives for himself*” (Deuteronomy 17: 17) (CD 4: 21–5: 2).<sup>240</sup>

Even King David's polygyny is explained away: “*And David did not read the sealed Book of Torah which was in the ark, because it was not opened in Israel from the deaths of Eleazar and Joshua... and the disclosed remained concealed until the days of Zadok*”. According to Daniel Schwartz, this type of reasoning is founded on "nature" and "reality." Monogamy is the 'basis of creation, i.e. it is justified by nature. He believes that this is what renders the DSS Halakhah priestly.<sup>241</sup>

Fitzmyer, on the other hand, argued that CD 4-5 forbids both polygyny and divorce. Fitzmyer made this case by emphasizing 11QT 57: 15-19: 'He may not take another wife in addition to her, because she alone shall be with him throughout the days of his life,' which he regarded as prohibiting divorce. If Fitzmyer is correct that this is the rule even for the monarch, it must also be the law for the commoner. Fitzmyer's viewpoint, however, remained in the minority. Several researchers challenged it, offering new evidence that divorce was legal at Qumran.<sup>242</sup>

- Marriage with Niece:

Marriage to a niece is a second Belial net into which the adversaries of the Qumranites fall. While this restriction is not included in the list of incestuous relationships in Leviticus 18, the mirror opposite, marriage to an aunt, is, and “*the law of incest is written for males but pertains equally to women*” (CD 5: 9-11). This is a pretty intriguing exegesis of biblical masculine language from the standpoint of reading for women and gender. CD contends that masculine language does not always imply male referents. Schwartz,<sup>243</sup> on the other hand, pointed out a distinct feature of this implicit exegesis, claiming that, like the restriction on polygyny, it depends on “natural” rather than legal logic, making this rule priestly. Two other Qumran

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<sup>240</sup> Vermes, “*Sectarian Matrimonial Halakhah in the Damascus Rule*”, 197–202.

<sup>241</sup> Daniel R. Schwartz, “*Law, and Truth: On Qumran-Sadducean and Rabbinic Views on Law*”, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1992, 229–240, 230–231.

<sup>242</sup> Joseph A Fitzmyer, “*Divorce Among First-Century Palestinian Jews*”, Eretz Israel 14, 1978, 103–110.

<sup>243</sup> Schwartz, “*Law, and Truth: On Qumran-Sadducean and Rabbinic Views on Law*”, 231.

writings express the restriction on marrying one's niece, making it one of the most often underlined parts of sectarian Halakhah. One mention may be found in 1QT 66: 15-17, where the taboo against marrying one's, niece is included in the list of biblically forbidden couplings (Leviticus 18), as though it were written in the Bible. As a result, although CD thinks that one may derive this restriction from the other, barring marriage to an aunt, the Temple Scroll feels the need to declare it out. In a tiny halakhic fragment-4Q251, the same tactic of expressly integrating the prohibition on marrying a niece into a list of forbidden unions is replicated.

- Oaths:

In Numbers 30: 4-16, a husband is informed about his wife's vows and given the power to cancel them under specific conditions. According to the common interpretation of this scripture, CD 16: 10-11 limits the husband's power solely to circumstances when the female vows violate the commandments. He may not cancel her vows if they are in accordance with the commandments. The CD contradicts the Temple Scroll (11QT 53: 16-54: 5) and the wisdom book Musar Le Mevin (4Q416 fr. 2.4: 8-10), both of which correspond to the biblical text more closely. What this indicates in terms of the sectarian/nonsectarian character of the final two is debatable.<sup>244</sup>

Physical Exam of a Potential Bride 4Q271 was discovered to be an extra CD fragment. It teaches us that, as part of a marriage agreement, if a woman is accused of being unchaste, trustworthy women (נאמנות) must physically inspect her. The same ladies are referenced in 4Q159, albeit as Tigay shows, they do the inspection after intercourse rather than before. These dependable women must have had a professional position within the group, imposing patriarchal standards on the importance of virginity.<sup>245</sup>

- Mothers:

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<sup>244</sup> Ilan, "Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls", 137.

<sup>245</sup> Wassen, "Women in the Damascus Document", 87 – 88.

Another CD fragment, 4Q270, has the composition's most noteworthy comment on women in the group. We read that [whomever comp] lains about the fathers [will be ejected] from the congregation and never return [and if (he complained)] about the mothers, he shall be punished te[n] days because the mothers have no *rqmh* within [.....]. The significance of this passage is that it compares males with honorary titles—fathers—to women with honorary titles—mothers. Both appeared to be community appointments.<sup>246</sup> However, the dads clearly have something called, which the women have not. The majority of the debate about this text has centered on the definition of "*rqmh*." While noting that in Hebrew means embroidery, Elwolde interpreted this term in light of Psalms 139: 15, Ezekiel 17:3, and Psalms 68: 28, all of which were translated in LXX as indicating some form of authority (hypostasis; hegema; hegemones), and proposed that the mothers in Qumran actually had no authority.<sup>247</sup> Hurowitz, on the other hand, derived the phrase from the Akkadian legal term *ruggumu*, which means 'legal claim' in a similar way.<sup>248</sup>

#### 1.11.6.5 The War Scroll:

The Struggle Scroll (1QM) portrays the cataclysmic struggle between the sons of Light (the sect) and the sons of Darkness (the rest of humanity). Only one passage is applicable to women, 1QM 11: 3-6, in which they are specifically prohibited from participating. amid this cataclysmic conflict. The cult agrees with other contemporary ideas in the patriarchal concept that war is men's job.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ilan, "*Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls*", 137.

<sup>247</sup> John F Elwolde, "RWQMH in the Damascus Document and Ps 139: 15", T. Muraoka and John Elwolde, Eds., *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and ben Sira*, Brill, Leiden, 2000 65–83.

<sup>248</sup> Victor A Hurowitz, "רִוּקָמָה [M29] in Damascus Document 4QDe (4Q270) 7 I 14", DSD 9: 34–7.

<sup>249</sup> Ilan, *Women in Qumran and The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 140.

In conclusion, the role of women in religious practices within the Jewish context during the Hellenistic Roman Era and in the Qumran, Scrolls reflects a complex and multifaceted dynamic. The available historical and textual evidence suggests that women played varied roles, often influenced by cultural, social, and religious factors of the time.

During the Hellenistic Roman Era, Jewish society experienced significant external influences that impacted traditional practices. While historical records indicate that women in this period generally held domestic and familial roles, there is evidence of their involvement in religious activities, albeit often within the confines of more private and domestic spheres. The extent of their participation may have been influenced by cultural norms and the evolving socio-political landscape.

The Qumran Scrolls, discovered in the mid-20th century, shed light on a sect within Judaism that existed contemporaneously with the broader Hellenistic Roman Era. These texts provide glimpses into a community's unique religious practices, where a strict adherence to ritual purity and communal living was emphasized. While specific references to women in the Qumran Scrolls are limited, some scholars argue that women may have had a distinct role within the community, perhaps contributing to its economic and spiritual functions.

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of available historical evidence and the interpretive challenges in understanding the roles of women during this period. The scarcity of direct references to women in certain sources and the influence of cultural biases in historical records make it challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the diversity of women's participation in religious practices.

In summary, women's roles in Jewish religious practices during the Hellenistic Roman Era and within the context of the Qumran Scrolls were likely shaped by a combination of cultural traditions, societal expectations, and the specific religious milieu of each community. While historical documentation may be incomplete, ongoing scholarship and interdisciplinary



approaches continue to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which women participated in and contributed to religious life in ancient Judaism.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Nomads of the Desert – The World of the Nabataeans**

#### **The Women's Role in the Nabataean Religion**

The Nabataean Kingdom is known for its strong connections with the other political entities in the Southern Levant during the Hellenistic Roman period, as they emerged from their nomadic life-style, into an enormous wide spreaded kingdom which was influenced by the other civilizations around it. Being open to the world behind their massive walls that they built their main city inside it gave them insight to how they should treat their women, and as I will

demonstrate in this chapter, how they were influenced and interacted with the entities that surrounded them.

## 2.1 Introduction

Resources and references available that include all the aspects of the Nabataeans' culture are rare and most of them are introductions about a certain topic. In this chapter, I dealt with the Nabataean Kingdom as a whole entity, the rulers, and the people who lived and established what we can see now in the remains. I started with their origin, their careers mainly in trade, their settlements, politics, and arts, and finally their religion and the women's role in the religion and community.

The Nabataean Kingdom was and still has been a mystery for many centuries till now. Unfortunately, it is difficult to trace back when exactly this powerful political entity put itself on the map between the 4th century BC and 106 AD.

The name Nabataean came from the root “Na-ba-ṭu” (نبطي), which means “distinguished man”; furthermore, their name was written in their inscriptions as “*nbṭw/nabaṭu*”, but Dan Gibson says that the origin of the name is the Nabatu, meaning people who draw water.<sup>250</sup>

## 2.2 The Origin of the Nabataeans

Originally the Nabataeans were nomads dwelling in the *Negev Desert* and some scholars believe that they emerged from the Aramaean Kingdom that was in Babylonia.<sup>251</sup> They are also

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<sup>250</sup> Dan Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, Xlibris, Indiana, 2004, 9.

<sup>251</sup> Robert Wenning, “*The Nabataeans in History, the world of the Nabataeans*”, Vol. 2, of the International Conference the World of the Herods and the Nabataeans held at the British Museum, 25-44, Wiesbaden, 2015, 26.

mentioned in the Assyrian Annals of the prominent King *Tiglath-Pileser III* (745-729 BC),<sup>252</sup> but this theory faced many objections. Lipinski, for example, due to his studies of the *Tiglath-Pileser III's* Summaries, believed that they should be identified as the entity that reigned under the reign of Ashurbanipal<sup>253</sup> and he also noticed that there was no mention of Nabaṭu, but in another case, while studying Sennacherib's Inscriptions, there was a mention of the tribe.<sup>254</sup> "The Ancient Records of Tiglath-Pileser III list, among the rebels, the *Hagaranu* (perhaps the descendants of Hagar, the mother of Ishmael), the *Nabatu* (perhaps the Nabataeans descendants of Nebayoth, the son of Ishmael,) and the tribe of Qedar. The Qedarites are mentioned in Genesis 25:13 as descendants of a son of Ishmael named Qedar".<sup>255</sup>

They were one of the tribes who were mentioned in the texts written under the rule of King Asurbanipal (668–627 BC) under the name Nabaiat-Nabaiati. One more theory mentions that they were descendants of another tribe and the name came from the same root that I mentioned previously, and the theory suggests that they were descendants of *Nebayoth*, which was one of the sons of Ishmael's tribes, as stated in the Bible.<sup>256</sup> I should clarify here that the Bible was not the only source for this theory, in the book of Genesis there was a mention of the dwellers of the desert under the name of *Nabathena*<sup>257</sup> as one of the twelve sons of Ismael as mentioned in the Book of Genesis and we can see that in Chapters 25, 13, 28, 9 and 36) also in his writings, he identified the Nabataeans with the Arabs.<sup>258</sup>

The theories about the Nabataeans' origins are varied, nonetheless, the lack of resources about the Nabataean's origins before their settlement, changing their lifestyle, and formation of

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<sup>252</sup> Francisco del Río Sánchez, "Nabatu the Nabataeans Through Their Inscriptions", Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2015, 25.; Gibson, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra", 9.

<sup>253</sup> Gibson, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra", 25.

<sup>254</sup> Del, "Nabatu the Nabataeans Through Their Inscriptions", 25.

<sup>255</sup> Gibson, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra", 9.

<sup>256</sup> Del, "Nabatu the Nabataeans Through Their Inscriptions", 25; Gibson, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra", 9.

<sup>257</sup> Del, "Nabatu the Nabataeans Through Their Inscriptions", 22.

<sup>258</sup> Dan, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra, 25; Dan, *The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*", 9.

the great kingdom that we know today, for instant some theories indicate that they may come from South Arabia what is called Yemen in the present day, but no evidence supports this theory due to the lack of similarities, whether in the cultural lifestyle, archaeological remains and most importantly the language and the writing styles. In my opinion, this theory came to light based on our knowledge of their strong relationships with the South Arabian Kingdoms which were formed as a result of their trading business with them and that is an important topic that I will speak about later with more details in this chapter.<sup>259</sup>

A further theory acknowledges that they were one of the North Arabian tribes that dominated Northern Arabia during the 8th – 5th centuries BC. Until they left the dwelling life and settled down and built their entities in what is now called Jordan and the north of Saudi Arabia (precisely the same region that was occupied by the ancient Biblical Edomites, with whom they shared customs without identifying with them).<sup>260</sup> This theory has the most support and it is the most believable one.

Approaching the particular part of the Arabic literature which is involved in studying the later Islamic period, we notice that there was a mention of at least two different groups under the name the Nabataeans in what is now known as the Middle East. The first group originated in Mesopotamia and they were known as “Nabat- ‘Irak” (Iraq Nabataeans), and the second group was “Nabat-al-sham” (Nabataeans of Damascus). As we know, the Nabataeans controlled Syria including Damascus, and this is well interpreted in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* Volume VII, under ‘Nabat’.<sup>261</sup>

## 2.3 Settlement and Location

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<sup>259</sup> Bedal Leigh-Ann, *"The Petra pool -complex: A Hellenistic paradise in the Nabataean"* capital (results from the Petra “Lower Market” survey and excavation, 1998), Gorgias Press LLC, Piscataway, New Jersey, 2000., 4–9; Gibson, *The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*, 9.

<sup>260</sup> Del,” *Nabatu the Nabataeans Through Their Inscriptions*”, 25; Dan, *“The Nabataeans Builders of Petra”*, 9.

<sup>261</sup> Gibson,” *The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 10.

From their early stages as nomadic tribes to their settled society (before 312 BC), the Nabataeans were a significant culture and political entity that proved itself among great Empires such as the Greek Empire, The Jewish Kingdom, South Arabian Kingdoms, and later on the Roman Empire. They chose one of the most strategic, and safest places in the area. They chose it wisely depending on their significant knowledge of the Arabian Desert because they needed a place where they could be protected, at the same time, in the middle of the trading route, not too far from the water sources, and not too isolated from the other kingdoms. Also, it was easily reachable for those who seek peace, knowledge, business, and a dive cultural and knowledge exchange, but, at the same time, well protected. Therefore, they chose the city of *Rekem* or *Rekmu*, what is now known as Petra or The Rock City.<sup>262</sup> They built their amazing capital city Petra in southern Jordan about 80 kilometers southeast of the Dead Sea in modern Jordan (30o19'N, 35o25'E).<sup>263</sup> They used the mountain ridge that lines up from the eastern border of Wadi Arabah, which is the borders between Palestine and Transjordan, to the north located in modern Saudi Arabia. They even expanded their Kingdom to the south close to Syria, and from the west, they reached the Oasis at Duma almost to the Nile Delta. With this expansion, they covered around 700 kilometers.<sup>264</sup> The ancient Greek geographer, Strabo, mentioned them in his books and described their location as follows:

*“The capital of the Nabataeans is called Petra (“the Rock”). It is situated on a spot surrounded and fortified by a smooth and level rock, which externally is abrupt*

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<sup>262</sup> More information will be provided on the Nabataeans' cities later on in this section of the chapter.

<sup>263</sup> Tali Erickson-Gini, “*Piecing Together the Religion of the Nabataeans*”, Religion Compass 9/10, 309–326, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2015, 309.

<sup>264</sup> Peter Alpass, “*The Religious Life of Nabataea*”, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2013, 1–2; Wenning, “remains the most comprehensive guide to Nabataean sites throughout the Negev” (see particularly 137–182); see also Quellen 1987, 394–409. The most recent guide to archaeological developments in the area can be found in Erickson-Gini 2006 and 2010. The number of sites has led to some discussion of the exact itinerary of the trade routes during the Nabataean period. The Peutinger Table indicates what was probably the chief route that moves through Elusa and Oboda (both occupied in the Nabataean period) before reaching Gaza (see, for example, the section of the map reproduced in Hirschfield, 2006. 170 where both Oboda and Elusa are named). Cohen 1982a, 246 considers many stations along this road to have been first built in the third and second centuries BC, although he notes that there has been much disagreement over so early date (241–242); Alpass, “*The Religious Life of Nabataea*”, 149–151.

*and precipitous, but within there are abundant springs of water both for domestic purposes and watering gardens. Beyond the enclosure, the country is for the most ,part a desert, particularly towards Judea (Geog. XVI.4.21) ”.*<sup>265</sup>

There are many theories about the Nabataeans' settlements and their social life, the most famous one is their occupying the Edomites and cities, after their move to the cities of Israel right after the Babylonian Exile (597 BC for the first, with others dated at 587/586 BCE, and 582/581 AD. respectively.<sup>266</sup> The first urban life and settlement for the Nabataeans are not known, but we have knowledge that their first social, communal way of life with more stability was in the city of Petra,<sup>267</sup> or as it was called *Rekem* where they built their magnificent, mesmerizing city. Before that, they did not construct a house or even a temple for their worshipped gods/goddesses. The city of Petra before the Nabataeans was nothing but a barren cannon; it is believed that most probably it was? a graveyard for their dead.<sup>268</sup> This place was never occupied by the Edomites, as their capital city was Bushra, which is located in what is called present-day Tafila in southern Jordan. But this does not revoke the idea that the Nabataeans were not living close to it and maybe within the Edomite's settlements, as some Nabataeans started their occupation of a mountain that was known as Selah.<sup>269</sup> Moving to the

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<sup>265</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*, published in Vol. VII, of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1932, XVI.4.21.

<sup>266</sup> For more information about the Exilic period see:

Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, Society of Biblical Lit, Atlanta, 2003, 45 -98; Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE*, Leiden, 2020, 24- 27; Anne Katrine Gudme, Ingrid Hjelm, *Myths of Exile: History and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, Routledge, England, 2015 Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers eds., *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, Berlin, 2015, 40 -76; Niels Peter Lemche, *The Old Testament Between Theology and History: A Critical Survey*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2008, 154, 233.

<sup>267</sup> The strategic location of the city of Petra in the gradient of the rocky range known now as Ras An-Naqab on the Eastern edge of the Wadi Araba, which all form a rocky range forming hills and clefts at the highest point in a gigantic valley that extends from Transjordan to the Gulf of Aqaba. This fortified location gave the city protection. Being on the trading and travellers route made it one of the most famous cities and one of the multicultural cities. As Diodorus said: "There is also in the land of the Nabataeans a rock [πέτρα], which is exceedingly strong since it has but one approach, and using this ascent they mount it a few at a time and thus store their possessions in safety. And a large lake [the Dead Sea] is also there which produces asphalt in abundance, and from it, they derive not a little revenue" (II, 48.6, Oldfather 1935).

<sup>268</sup> Gibson, *The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*, 10–11.

<sup>269</sup> Lemche, *The Old Testament Between Theology and History: A Critical Survey*, 154.

great new city and building those enormous or, in better words, engraving buildings did not mean that they completely let go of their nomadic life<sup>270</sup> and their previous way of living. They kept having the tents settled and ready to have them in different places, in case they needed refuge for the women, children, and elders, as well as they did not leave the cattle-raising behind them, so they needed those during their search for food and water.

## 2.4 Social Background

*“Some of them raise camels, others sheep, pasturing them in the desert.... the Nabataeans far surpass the others in wealth although they are not much more than ten thousand in number; for not a few of them are accustomed to bring down to the sea frankincense and myrrh and the most valuable kinds of spices, which they procure from those who convey them from what is called Arabia Eudaemon. They are exceptionally fond of freedom; and whenever a strong force of enemies comes near, they take refuge in the desert”.*<sup>271</sup> And he continued to describe their way of life as he describes how they watered and took care of their cattle, as well as what they used to eat:

*“They water their cattle every other day, so that, if they flee through waterless places, they may not need a continuous supply of water. They themselves use as food flesh and milk and those of the plants that grow from the ground which are suitable for this purpose; for among them there grow the pepper and plenty of the so-called wild honey from trees, which they drink mixed with water”.*<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> John F. Healey, *“The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus”*, Brill, Leiden, 2001, 27.

<sup>271</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *“The Geography of Diodorus Siculus”*, Book XIX, 94: 2–4.

<sup>272</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *“The Geography of Diodorus Siculus”*, Book XIX, 94: 9–10.



## 2.5 The Nabataean Kings<sup>273</sup>

The expansion of the Nabataean Kingdom occurred mostly between the late 4th, 3rd, and 2nd centuries BC, as they established an important and powerful political entity in Transjordan. Their expansion was from all directions and the motivation behind it was to keep their control of the trading routes and maintain their wealthy lifestyle and keep up with their lavish buildings and gatherings.<sup>274</sup>

In their Kingdom, they had kings and ruling families, and the king was assisted by the prime minister and was called “brother”. Queens also ruled alongside the kings, alone as well (one of the queens even ruled for five years while her son, King *Rabbel II*, was still too young to rule).<sup>275</sup> They were deeply affected by the Greek and Roman culture, which was shown not only in their architecture, but also in the army officers’ titles, such as centurio, hipparch, chiliarch, strategos, and so on.<sup>276</sup> The Nabataeans’ kingdom was ruled by different kings. It had periods of prosperity like the development they had under the rule of King *Obodas III* (30–9 BC) and King *Aretas IV* (9 BC – 40 AD), as they both supported a Hellenized way of life. Also, during this period, The Nabataean society was open to absorb the Mediterranean influences. The Nabataeans Kings were able to establish a strong provenance that reached Syria but having this expanded Kingdom made it somehow hard to control. Subsequently, the southern part of the Kingdom seemed to lose control and importance after the act of making *Bostra* the capital city under the rule of King *Rabbel II* (70–106 AD).

After the death of Alexander, the Great following his conquered of the Middle East (356 BC –323 BC),<sup>277</sup> his generals took control of his territories. The Syrian Province was under

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<sup>273</sup> For further readings about the Nabataean kings see Francisco del Río Sánchez, “*Nabatu. The Nabataeans through their inscriptions*”, Edicions Universitat Barcelona, Barcelona, 2015.

<sup>274</sup> MacKenzie, Ed. “*The Encyclopedia of Empire*”, 1; Alpass, “*The Religious Life of Nabataea*”, 167–168.

<sup>275</sup> Alpass, “*The Religious Life of Nabataea*”, 167–168.

<sup>276</sup> MacKenzie, Ed. “*The Encyclopedia of Empire*”, 1.

<sup>277</sup> Debra Skelton, Pamela Dell, “*Empire of Alexander the Great*”, Infobase Publishing, New York, 2009, 7.

what was known late as the Seleucid Kingdom, which grew weaker by the 2nd century BC, and this was the time when the Nabataean Kingdom got stronger. After building a powerful army and establishing their Kingdom, they started to extend their kingdom. They moved to the north, east, and south, all the way along the eastern coast of the Red Sea.<sup>278</sup> The Nabataeans moved to occupy *Ḥawrān* exactly in 85 BC. After *Ḥawrān*, it was Damascus's turn which was controlled by the Nabataeans under the rule of King *Aretas III* when the inhabitant of Damascus asked for help against the Ituraea, who were attacking their merchants' caravans. King Aretas III reigned in Damascus from 85 to 72 BC, he even minted coins there.<sup>279</sup>

As for the Nabataean cities, one of the most significant cities in the first century BC was *Hegra* (*Madâin Sâlih*), which received particular care under King *Aretas IV* (8 BC–40 AD). He surrounded the city with about a hundred rock-cut tombs, which was more than they had in Petra. which means that the city of Hegra came to dominate attention at that point and gained status.<sup>280</sup> Which increased the Nabataeans' power within their own kingdom. They were able to build a strong, stable kingdom that set them apart from other kingdoms in the southern Levant at the time. On the other hand, this attracted more attention from the great powers in power at the time, specifically the Roman Empire.

Under the rule of the Romans, the Nabataeans enjoyed special and close relationships with the Romans due to the mutual interest of both parties. The Nabataeans strengthened those relationships by sending contingents of soldiers whenever Rome was in need of support in its expeditions and battles. Also, they had a close relationship with the Hasmonaeon Dynasty

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<sup>278</sup> Gibson, "*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*", 14.

<sup>279</sup> MacKenzie, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, 1.

<sup>280</sup> Ted Kaizer, "*A Companion to the Hellenistic and Roman Near East*", John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, 2021, 279–282.

which was ruling at that time, but sometimes they had conflicts. (Books of the Historian Flavius Josephus).<sup>281</sup>

The Hasmoneans were under the rule of *Jannaeus* when they started their campaign against the Nabataeans. Their strategy was different from the Greeks, as they started to capture the cities and territories step by step. At first, they occupied territories in Transjordan located in the north of Nabataea, including Moab and Gilead; despite the fact that these areas were not under the direct control of the Nabataeans, this affected the Nabataeans excessively because this cut the communications and trading routes to Damascus which was under the control of the Seleucid Empire. Otherwise, the Nabataeans were under the rule of King *Obodas I*, who was in a good relationship with the Seleucid King *Demetrius III*, who helped him to fight back and restore the lost areas.<sup>282</sup> The reason that helped the Nabataeans win the war besides the help of the Seleucids was that their slyness used the divisions in the Hasmonean Kingdom and that they were busy with their inside affairs. So, they took the advantage to persuade *Janneus* to relinquish the territories that he took over to King *Obodas I* in order to dissuade him from supporting his opponents. In this way the Nabataeans gained full control over these territories, but, on the other hand, the Greeks started to feel the threat which made them decide that they needed to put an end to this growing power and started their campaigns against the Nabataeans under Seleucid King *Antiochus XII*. King *Antiochus XII* thought that he could defeat the Nabataeans, but the plan did not succeed as he was expecting as the young King was caught in the scuffle and killed by the Nabataean's soldiers. After the death of their King and leader, the Greek soldiers fled to an unknown village called Cana, and mostly perished in the desert. With this victory, the Nabataeans grew in power and attacked Damascus and conquered it. This was

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<sup>281</sup> Kaizer, "A Companion to the Hellenistic and Roman Near East", 279–282; Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, Richard Payne, "Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World", 300–1100, Routledge, Mar, England, 76.

<sup>282</sup> Pearson, "Contextualizing the Nabataeans", 12–13.

not the only benefit that king Obodas I had after his victory, but he also became the first King that the Nabataeans worshipped as a god, and they built a temple for him in the Negev Desert which was called *Avdat*.<sup>283</sup>

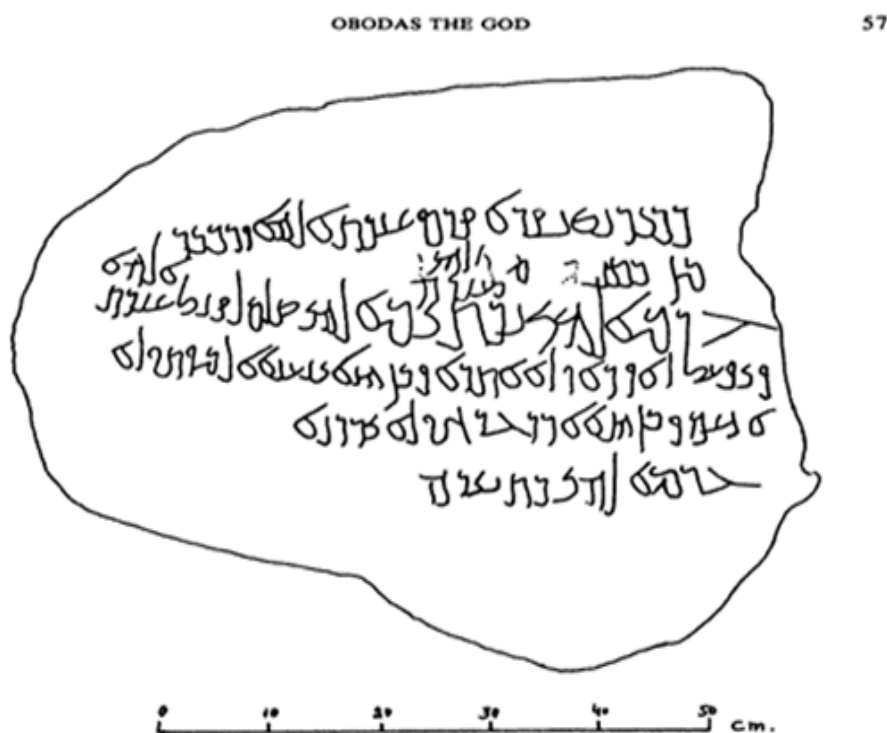


Fig. 1. The inscription.

*Translation*

1. May he who reads(?) be remembered in good (memory) before Obodas the god, and may there be remembered
2. who(ever)...
3. Garm'alahi son of Taym'alahi [set up] a statue before Obodas the god.
4. And he acts neither for benefit nor for favour. And if death claim us let me not
5. be claimed. And if affliction seeks, let it not seek us.
6. Garm'alahi wrote this with his own hand.

*Commentary*

*Line 1.* קרא is probably not a proper name, although this might be expected after a formula such as דכיר בטב. The name of the author of the inscription occurs in

<sup>283</sup> Pearson, "Contextualizing the Nabataeans", 12–13.

Figure10: The Inscription of King Obodas Mentioned him as a god for the Nabataeans.<sup>284</sup>

Damascus stayed under the Nabataean rule till the reign of King *Malichus II* (AD 40 - 70 AD), son of *Aretas IV*. Unfortunately, we do not know much about him, but we know that he was the King who sent aid to Titus in the war against Jerusalem in 70 AD, and he sent 1000 cavalry along with 5000 infantries according to Josephus.<sup>285</sup>

*“Petra is always ruled by some king from the royal family; and the king has as Administrator one of his companions, who is called ‘brother’. It is exceedingly well-governed; at any rate, Athenodorus, a philosopher and companion of mine, who had been in the city of the Petraeans, used to describe their government with admiration, for he said that he found both many Romans and many other foreigners sojourning there and that he saw that the foreigners often engaged in lawsuits, both with one another and with the natives, but that none of the natives prosecuted one another, and that they in every way kept peace with one another.”*<sup>286</sup>

## 2.7 The Nabataeans Queens

Nabataeans showed through time that women were respected and equal to men. This was obvious in their behavior towards women and from the coinage system that women had the title of queen in the ruling families. Moreover, their pictures were printed on the coins with the fact that the kings were alive at that time, so it was not a replacement for the dead king, but it was an indication that they were ruling together. For instance, under the rule of King *Obodas*

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<sup>284</sup> NEGEV, AVRAHAM, J. Naveh, and S. Shaked. “Obodas the God.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. 1/2 (1986): 56–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27926010>, 50.

<sup>285</sup> Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 25. Josephus, Flavius, *Bellum*, 3.4.1. 63.

<sup>286</sup> Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 25, the quoted texts is: Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.21.

II (30–9 BC)<sup>287</sup> and in the second year of his rule, a Nabataean queen picture was on their coins for the first time.

Unfortunately, we do not have detailed information about the role of women in the political aspect of the Nabataean society, but according to the inscriptions, coins, and historical resources I discuss below, we, at least, know that they had a strong presence in it, and they seemed to have a good political status. It is crucial to understand that studying the rulers of the Nabateans, like with other ancient societies, does not allow us to make broad judgments about society and the role of women. Accepting women as rulers in the Nabataean culture was a significant indication of their appreciation and value, demonstrating that women's opinions were respected and not disregarded. For example, we know that in some periods the Nabateans were ruled by queens, whether alone or next to their husbands. According to the Nabataean inscriptions, we could document the Nabataean queens' names as follows:

- Queen *Khaldw*, the wife of King *Aretas IV* (9 BC).<sup>288</sup>
- Queen *Shaqylat*, the second wife of King *Aretas IV* (18/19 BC).<sup>289</sup>
- Queen *Shaqylat II*, the wife of King *Malecus II*, and the mother of King *Rabel II*.

II. She ruled as a Queen instead of her son who was too young to rule,<sup>290</sup> Queen (40-70 AD).<sup>291</sup>

- Queen *Gamalat*, the wife of King *Rabel II*, and the sister to Queen *Shaqylat II*.<sup>292</sup>
- Queen *Hagrwth*, the second wife of *Rabel II*. She was one of the most frequent.
- Queens whose picture was printed on the Nabataean's coins and inscriptions.

In the Nabataeans inscriptions, we found the word “*MLKT*”<sup>293</sup> which means Queen, and also found the term “*T MILKW*”<sup>294</sup> which means the queen sister. These two terms occurred

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<sup>287</sup> Rachel Barkley, “*Nabataean Queens as Reflected on Coins*”, The Israel Numismatics Society Publications 19, Tel Aviv, 13-32, 2015, 13.

<sup>288</sup> Mahdi Alzoubi, Eyad al Masri and Fardous al Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry, Vol. 13, No 1, pp.153-160, MAA, Greece, 2013, 154.

<sup>289</sup> Alzoubi, Al-Masri, Al-Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, 154.

<sup>290</sup> E. Abbas, “*Al hadharah al-Nabtayyah*”, Dar al-Shorooq, Amman, 1987, 67.

<sup>291</sup> Alzoubi, Al-Masri, Al-Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, 154.

<sup>292</sup> Alzoubi, Al-Masri, Al-Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, 154.

<sup>293</sup> J. Hoftijzer; K. Jongeling, “*Dictionary of the North West Semitic Inscriptions*”, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 1995 II, 634.

<sup>294</sup> J. Hoftijzer & Jongeling, “*Dictionary of the North West Semitic Inscriptions*”, 634.

many times in the inscriptions that mentioned Queen Huldu and Queen Shuqailat, who were mentioned as King *Aretas IV*'s sisters,<sup>295</sup> but we cannot be sure if they were his actual sisters or if it is just a title that was used to indicate some sort of respect to them. For example, in Arabic societies today, it is common to use the term sister “أخت” to other women even when they are not blood-related with men, but it is a sign of respect and an indication that the man is not having any harmful thoughts towards the woman. From this, we had the idea that there is a possibility that they were not King *Aretas IV*'s real sisters, but it is a strong indication that women had high and respectful political and social positions in the Nabataean community due to the great importance of the fact that they were mentioned in their inscriptions and their faces were printed on the coins.

In another occasion, the queen had her picture alone on the coins<sup>296</sup> She was dressed with a vale and diadem, with a phrase written on the coin that says “with the blessing of Dushara”<sup>297</sup> which indicates that these coins were minted on a special occasion and helps us to reach to the conclusion that women were treated in a special way in the Nabataeans community and they did not hesitate to represent their special occasions with their queens' pictures.

But later around the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King *Obodas* 's rule, there was a coin that showed him with two different queens, which gives us the indication that polygamy was one of the acceptable matters in the Nabataeans community, especially in the ruling family when a queen could not give birth to a male heir to rule after his father, which was something common in the Ancient Eastern communities.

When the figures of the Nabataean Queens were depicted on the coins or inscriptions, they were accompanied by botanical and faunal symbols<sup>298</sup>, which varied in shape and subject,

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<sup>295</sup> Alzoubi, Al-Masri, Al-Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, 155.

<sup>296</sup> Barkley,” *Nabataean Queens as Reflected on Coins*”, 16.

<sup>297</sup> Barkley,” *Nabataean Queens as Reflected on Coins*”, 15.

<sup>298</sup> Alzoubi, Al-Masri, Al-Ajlouny, “*Woman in the Nabataean Society*”, 155.

such as eagle, corn of laurel, and fruits, wheat spikes, palm leaf, and pomegranate. The reason for choosing these symbols over others was that they were the indication of the prosperity and richness in addition to the peaceful life that the Nabataeans had under the rule of their kings and queens. Also, having the queen's figures along with these symbols indicates the significant role in peace and prosperity that the queen had given to their people.

Coins were not the only object where women's pictures were printed or their names were mentioned. Queen *Hagaru* was mentioned in an inscription that was found in *Wadi Musa* and named after her the "*Hagaru Inscription*." This inscription was dated to the 18 years of the rule of King *Aretas IV* (9 AD). Queen Hagaru was the daughter of Malichus and the mother of King *Aretas IV*, but Barkley argues in her article (Nabataean Queens as Reflected on Coins) that if she was truly the wife of *Obodas II*, they should have been got married at the age of 18 around (20 BC), and she should be born around (39 BC) to be the daughter of *Malichus*, and according to the dating of the inscription, at the year 18 of his rule (9 AD, she should be 48 years old. Based on these facts, it is unlikely that she is the same female figure referred to by specialists.<sup>299</sup> Therefore, who was she, and how important she was to leave an inscription about her? The main problem or the question that we are trying to answer here is how she could be the mother of *Aretas IV* if he has never been mentioned as the son of *Obodas II* her husband in his genealogical inscription. In this case, we have two options: If *Hagaru I* was the mother of *Aretas IV*, his father would not be *Obodas II*, but he would be from a previous husband, or she was not the mother of *Aretas IV*, which is less acceptable. Another archaeological piece of evidence that was found goes back to the ruling of *Obodas II* on a bronze material, which has the queen standing alone. This is the first time when the queen's full figure was presented on an object.

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<sup>299</sup> Barkley, *Nabataean Queens as Reflected on Coins*, 17.



The political role of the Nabataean women in the ruling family was not about ruling their people or being involved in the political events that were occurring, it also went beyond that to being given to marriage to the political leaders in the Levant. Throughout history, we have multiple pieces of evidence about that, one of them being the acclaimed marriage between the daughter of King *Aretas IV* with Herod Antipas. This marriage had critical political issues between the Nabataeans and the Maccabees.<sup>300</sup>

In another incident, Syllaeus, the vizir of *Obodas III*, asked to marry *Salome*, who was the sister of Herod, but he had the condition of converting *Syllaeus* to Judaism in order to accept his condition. Again, there was a marriage between the son of Herod, *Antipas*, and a Nabataean princess, who was the daughter of *Aretas IV*, but unfortunately, this marriage did not last because Antipas had an affair with the wife of his brother, which leads her to ask help from her father for revenge, who, in the other hand, attacked back with a great military force.<sup>301</sup> This indicates that the Nabataean women had a high and valuable place in society.

The presence of their faces on the coins, whether alone or with the Kings, is obvious evidence of how important and strong their effect and role in the Nabataeans societies and an indication that the queens played an active role in maintaining the legitimacy of the kings. They also ruled alone or side by side with their kings. Moreover, the Nabataean women were involved in all aspects of life, and they even had the power to establish laws for Nabataean women to protect their social and economic life.<sup>302</sup> The queens were involved in the protection and establishment of legal rights to create a good work environment, and also to have the chance to obtain wealth independently without being associated with men.

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<sup>300</sup> Alzoubi, Al- Masri, Al- Ajlouny, *Woman in the Nabataean Society*, 155.

<sup>301</sup> Politis, "*The World of the Nabataeans*", 38–39.

<sup>302</sup> Salam Hawa, "*Reimagining Arab Political Identity: Justice, Women's Rights, and the Arab State*", Routledge, London & New York, 2021, 86.

A study of tombs stones that belong to the Nabataean women, which were found in the city of Hegra, gave a clear elucidation that there was a matrilineal practice in the Nabataean society, and it had an indication that there were households managed by single mothers, and belonged to women, also women had the rights to inherit their belongings to their daughters.<sup>303</sup>

## **2.8 The Nabataeans Trading Routes**

The Nabataeans traveling through the *Negev* Desert and dwelling in the area from the south to the north of the Arabian Peninsula gave them the advantage and the upper hand to become familiar with the area. They knew all the suitable traveling routes, as well as the cities and kingdoms in the Peninsula, and this advantage, helped them to form a strong trading business. They were dominating the area by transporting the goods from the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Qataban (in modern-day Yemen) through neighbouring Saba, and towards Gaza on the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>304</sup>

The Nabataeans' Kingdom's strategic location provided it with the advantage of being the last stop of the caravan trade routes carrying goods from the South Arabian Kingdoms to the North. This location helped the Nabataeans to take control of these caravans in many ways: Firstly, they would buy these goods and take them through the desert, which they already knew by heart and knew the exact location of the water sources because they built them, and hid them away with signs that they only understood, and carrying these goods to the Northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, mainly to Gaza and other Mediterranean ports<sup>305</sup> passing through cities like the Qedarite centers of Northern Arabia, Jauf, and Taymam<sup>306</sup> so it would be exported to Egypt across the Red Sea. They also took their goods and caravans to Syria and even to Mesopotamia.

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<sup>303</sup> Hawa, "Reimagining Arab Political Identity", 86.

<sup>304</sup> Healey, "The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus", 23–33.

<sup>305</sup> Alpass, "The Religious Life of Nabataea", 149–150.

<sup>306</sup> Gibson, "The Nabataeans Builders of Petra", 10.

After establishing a good trading business, they did not stop during transferring the goods to the ports of Gaza, but they extended their trade beyond the Red Sea and they even sailed through it. They also established bases in several seaports, including the port of Alia (modern-day *Aqaba* in Jordan).<sup>307</sup> On the other hand, as Michael Rostovtzeff states, such a place, such a city, could turn one of two ways. “Such a mass of cliffs not far from the main road of the caravans might be both a blessing and a curse to them [the merchants]. This depended on the inhabitants of the oasis, who, under the protection of their inaccessible cliffs, might organize themselves into a band of robbers and pillage the caravans or make them pay a high ransom for their safety; or they might choose another way—welcome the caravans, guarantee them rest, water, food, and safety in their journey farther to the north.”<sup>308</sup>

Secondly, they traded their main products for frankincense, incense, and mare that were transported through the “Incense Routes or the Spice Road” that linked Southern Arabia with Gaza Port. They also controlled the well-known “The Silk Road” which linked the Arabian Peninsula with the Far East,<sup>309</sup> between the 7th/6th Centuries BC and the 2nd century AD, but it was most effective and used during the 3rd century BC when the Nabataeans took over the trade in the Route. Merchants carried their goods through that route which had several stops and cities along the way, such as Mamshit which was widely famous for the Arabian horses. Those stops were for rest, doing business, selling, buying, and trading goods. By the 3rd century BC, all of these cities were under the Nabataean’s control, which gave them the advantage to establish a taxation system that serves them the best. Accordingly, the caravans had to pay a 25% tax for the Nabataeans when passing their territories. So, they received money from the

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<sup>307</sup> Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 10.

<sup>308</sup> Michael Rostovtzeff, “*Out of the Past of Greece and Rome*”, Biblo & Tannen Publishers, New York, 1963, 71.

<sup>309</sup> Charles River, “*Petra: The History of the Rose City, One of the New Seven Wonders of the World*”, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Scotts Valley, California, 2016, 9.

taxes, their own goods trading, and the profit from the accommodation that they provided to the merchants.

Thirdly, and I would say another indication of how smart they were, they got paid for providing protection services to the caravans from the thieves in the desert by escorting them till they reached their destination, as well as building fortresses in these cities to offer more protection from the raiders. Diodorus Siculus<sup>310</sup> wrote this about the Nabataeans:

*“The Nabataeans far surpass the others in wealth although they are not much more than ten thousand in number; for not a few of them are accustomed to bringing down to the sea frankincense and myrrh and the most valuable kinds of spices, which they procure from those who convey them from what is called Arabia Eudaemon. (Hist. XIX. 94:5–6).”<sup>311</sup>*

*“It appears that such are the customs of the Arabs. But when the time draws near for the national gathering at which those who dwell round about are accustomed to meet, some to sell goods and others to purchase things that are needful to them, they travel to this meeting, leaving on a certain rock their possessions and their old men, also their women and their children. This place is exceedingly strong but unwallled, and it is a distant two days journey from the settled country.” (Hist. XIX. 95:1–2)<sup>312</sup>*

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<sup>310</sup> Diodorus Siculus, or Diodorus of Sicily, (Διόδωρος), is a 1st-century BC Greek historian, he is well known for his universal historical book, the Bibliotheca Historica, which was written in forty books, he wrote fifteen books between 60 and 30 BC which survived in a good condition, he divided his writings to into three sections, each one of them dealt with a different area, The first part dealt with the mythical history for the Greeks up to the destruction of Troy, The second part dealt with the period from the Trojan War till the death of Alexander the Great, and lastly, the third part covers the period to about 60 BC. (Lisa Irene Hau, “Diodorus Siculus”. In “Moral History from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus”, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, Edinburgh, 2016, 73–123.

<sup>311</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, published in Vol. X, the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1954, Book XIX, 94: 5–6.

<sup>312</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, Book XIX, Vol. X of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1954 95: 1–2.

The Nabataeans were different from the other Arabian tribes as they insisted to enhance their trade by using the sea. They were trained in the marshlands of southern Iraq, where they found it easier to transport their goods than on land. There were theories about how they started their sea trading: one of them as they started it during the time when they visited the ports of Persia, and adopted the many Zoroastrian customs that were attributed to them. Another theory was that they developed their sailing abilities while sailing in the Red Sea transporting goods from India to Egypt.<sup>313</sup> Diodorus gives an account of Nabataean life, where he describes the Oasis of Feiran:<sup>314</sup>

*“After one has sailed past this country the Laeanites Gulf comes next, about which are many inhabited villages of Arabs who are known as Nabataeans. This tribe occupies a large part of the coast and not a little of the country which stretches inland, and it has a people numerous beyond telling and flocks and herds in multitude beyond belief. Now in ancient times these men observed justice and were content with the food which they received from their flocks, but later, after the kings in Alexandria had made the ways of the sea navigable for the merchants, these Arabs not only attacked the shipwrecked but fitting out pirate ships preyed upon the voyagers, imitating in their practices the savage and lawless ways of the Tauri of the Pontus some time afterwards, however, they were caught on the high seas by some quadriremes and punished as they deserved.”*<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 30.

<sup>314</sup> It's one of the Oasis that is located near the Red Sea, and it was famous for the palm grove as well as a large Egyptian shrine, this area was for the Lihyanites and later on, the Nabataeans took over it, even with that they became strong allies after that. To support that there was an inscription found in the city of Egra which mentions Mas'udu the Lihyan king, and the city was known as the Lihyanites Gulf in the Nabatean time.

<sup>315</sup> Diodorus Siculus, Book XIX, Vol. X, III, 43: 4–5.

One of the ports that the Nabataeans used was the Seaport of Berenike Berenice which was one of the most active Egyptian Seaports during the Hellenistic-Roman period. Originally, it was established by Ptolemy II around 283 BC.<sup>316</sup> and he named it after his mother. At the time of the Nabataeans, they used it along with the Red Sea to pirate that port as they were known for their piracy. They built strong ships and mastered sailing and their ships had oars along with a sail, to give them more speed.

The Nabataeans dexterously used the situation as they used the lands of the Edomites when they left it. Around 250 BC.<sup>317</sup> they founded Selah as their capital city and Aila (modern-day Aqaba) as their main port. This was not their only port to the Red Sea, but they also used the port of Gaza to have access to the Mediterranean Sea.

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<sup>316</sup> Gibson, *"The Nabataeans Builders of Petra"*, 30.

<sup>317</sup> Gibson, *"The Nabataeans Builders of Petra"*, 30.

From this, we can reach the conclusion that the Nabataeans were multi-skilled as they did not only control the land but exceeded the sea. They did not only use trade but also pirate and they seized every opportunity to prove themselves in the area as a fearful power and they did.



Figure 11: A Map of Major Trade Routes During the Nabataean Empire.<sup>318</sup>

## 2.10 The Nabataean Language and Inscriptions

In order to have more understanding of the Nabataean Language, and the Nabataean inscriptions, we are required to know the main regions of the Nabataean Kingdom to accentuate the size and diversity of the territories involved. The main regions are Petra, which was the main region, northern Hijaz, Sinai, and southern Syria. Each one of these regions has a

<sup>318</sup> [https://nabataea.net/explore/travel and trade/nabataean-trade-routes/#images](https://nabataea.net/explore/travel%20and%20trade/nabataean-trade-routes/#images), (Downloaded, 10.02.2021).

connection with the Nabataeans of Petra. Their inscriptions had a different dialect and the reason behind that was that the Nabataean Kings ruled a wide area and each of the territories that were under their rule had a different ethnic, linguistic and cultural background that affected the Nabataean Language. For example, the language in the region of Petra was clearly not a traditional Aramaic-speaking<sup>319</sup> area, but, on the other hand, the region of Hauran was influenced by the Arabic Language.

The Nabataeans carved their inscriptions in a local form of Aramaic known as "Nabataean Aramaic," which has been well-described and recognized since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They regarded it as the written language of diplomacy, culture, and religion. The situation was, however, made substantially more difficult by the fact that the people of the kingdom, or of the cultural region, spoke many dialects of northern Arabic, various forms of Aramaic, and even Greek and Hebrew in their everyday lives.<sup>320</sup>

The Nabataeans never had their own unique alphabet, nor did the people who lived under their cultural impact. They simply employed their own handwriting, which was derived

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<sup>319</sup> Arabic, Hebrew, classical Ethiopian, ancient Akkadian, and Aramaic are all Semitic languages. This indicates that it has numerous similarities to other languages in the family in terms of phonetics, grammar, syntactic structure, and lexicon. In fact, the similarities between Semitic languages are very comparable to those between some of the Germanic languages, including German, Dutch, and even English, as well as between some Romance languages, like French, Spanish, and Italian. This has always allowed for linguistic interchange between the many Semitic peoples and the development of some of their common languages, such as Aramaic, which served as a means of communication.

Some of the nomadic tribes living in Upper Mesopotamia towards the end of the second millennium BC are where the Aramaic language first emerged. The Canaanite-Phoenician script was modified to write Aramaic as a national language, but it was not until certain minor governments dispersed around Syria and Mesopotamia in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC that the earliest written records are known to exist. The first manuscripts in Hebrew are those produced at that time by the little kingdoms of Israel and Judah using the same writing system.

Aramaic should have disappeared into oblivion when these nations perished since their collapse was quick. Due to numerous demographic, cultural, and political considerations, Aramaic served as the primary language of communication across the huge Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires (8<sup>th</sup> –6<sup>th</sup> century BC), and after them, the Achaemenid Persians (6<sup>th</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC). Aramaic did so precisely in this last period, spreading beyond its own borders into Egypt, Asia Minor, and at one point even the Indian subcontinent. All of this was made feasible by the standardization process, which made it possible for lots of people to use the language as a universal language. Due to Alexander the Great's conquests, which left the Persian Empire in ruins after his death in 323 BC, Hellenic dynasties developed throughout the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Aramaic remained the primary language of communication for the vast majority of people, but Greek began to replace it as the official tongue in those areas. The powerful memory of Imperial Aramaic, which had permeated over time from the centers of authority, was a contributing factor in this.

<sup>320</sup> Sánchez, "*Nabatu. The Nabataeans through their inscriptions*", 38.



from the colossal Canaanite-Phoenician letters cursive script utilized throughout the era of the great empires. This cursive writing style was far less angular than that used on stone and was created specifically for writing on papyrus or parchment. The many ethnic groups that spoke Aramaic as their primary language embraced it.<sup>321</sup>

The main features of the Nabataean language are:

- 1) The writing system of the Nabataean language is right to left opposed to the Latin or Greek alphabets, which are written left to right.
- 2) The word only contains consonant phonemes. In other words, vowels are absent.
- 3) The 22 indicators that were originally present are still present.

Nabatean was heavily influenced by Arabic; in addition to borrowing some of that language's lexicon and practically all of its proper names, it also isolated several grammatical structures. Up until the time (at the beginning of the fourth century AD) when it was decided to write nearly pure Arabic [l'arabe it peu pres pur] while maintaining Nabatean script, it appears that Nabatean gradually emptied itself of the Aramaic elements it had and replaced them one by one with Arabic loans.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Sánchez, “*Nabatu. The Nabataeans through their inscriptions*”, 46.

<sup>322</sup> M. O'Connor, “*The Arabic Loanwords in Nabatean Aramaic*”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 213–229, 214.

	Aramaic	Nabataean	Arabic		Aramaic	Nabataean	Arabic
,	𐤁	𐤁	ا*	l	𐤌	𐤌	ل
b	𐤂	𐤂	ب	m	𐤍	𐤍	م
g	𐤃	𐤃	ج**	n	𐤎	𐤎	ن
d	𐤄	𐤄	د	s	𐤏	𐤏	
h	𐤅	𐤅	ه	,	𐤐	𐤐	ء**
w	𐤆	𐤆	و	p	𐤑	𐤑	ف
z	𐤇	𐤇	ز	ṣ	𐤒	𐤒	ص
ḥ	𐤈	𐤈	ح**	q	𐤓	𐤓	ق
ṭ	𐤉	𐤉	ط	r	𐤔	𐤔	ر
y	𐤊	𐤊	ي	š	𐤕	𐤕	س
k	𐤋	𐤋	ك	t	𐤖	𐤖	ت

All Arabic letters are isolated forms, except \* denotes final form, and \*\* denotes initial form

Figure 12: the Nabataean Alphabet Compared with the Arabic Language and the Aramaic Alphabets.<sup>323</sup>

## 2.11 The Status of Women in the Nabataeans Society

The Nabataeans had a tribal law that was applied to everyone who had diminished possessions; for instance, the families could own sheep and camels but the pasture and water were owned by the tribe and it was the rules of the tribal which were applied to the members of their society; therefore, the punishment was applied to the members who violated the law.<sup>324</sup> On the other hand, Athenodorus claimed that the Nabataeans lived without having slaves even with their wealth and the lavish lives that they had because they were served by the members of their relatives. This is evidence that supports the fact of having a tribal way of life. The Nabataean's culture and civilization developed gradually they built their cities and culture in

<sup>323</sup> <https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/252201647859219151/>. 2019. (Downloaded 01.09.2021).

<sup>324</sup> Konstantinos D. Politis, "The World of the Nabataeans", The World of the Nabataeans. vol. 2, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 34, 2007.

slow but steady steps this is how they could build a strong foundation for their culture and for centuries they could protect their way of life and increase their wealth and political relations.

The Nabataeans women could own their own houses and lands and sell their property as mentioned in the Yadin Papyri.<sup>325</sup> It is also mentioned in the Papyri that the woman had two husbands, but, unfortunately, it was not clear if the woman was married to both husbands in signing the contract, which cannot be evidence that polyandry was prevalent in the Nabataean society.

Nabataean women were not different from the women in the Ancient Near East. They had their own traditional style of dress for their social appearance in addition to a wide range of accessories and clothing varying according to their social and political status, as noted in archaeological excavations in Nabataean cities. Women in the royal family and women with high political positions were required to wear crowns as part of their dress style, and each occasion had its own custom. For example, high-ranking women from wealthy families wore diamonds, but rings and bracelets made of silver and other metals were worn by all women. Women wore crowns, earrings, nose rings, necklaces, torques, brooches, girdles, rings, and hand, arm, and ankle chains.<sup>326</sup> They considered the care of women a necessity in their society and their appearance was as important as other legitimate matters in their daily lives.

## **2.12 Women and the Nabataean Religion**

The Nabataeans, as traders transported valuable goods from Arabia to the Mediterranean basin, were influenced by foreign cults and religious trends. In the Roman period, Petra

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<sup>325</sup> In 1960 Yi Gael Yadin and his team conducted an archaeological expedition in the Judaean desert, where they discovered "the cave of letters" which contained three separate groups of letters that were dated to the second century CE, mostly from the Bar Kokhba revolt, these letters were mostly personal letters, one set of these letters was written by a woman named Babatha, the daughter of Simon, and they were written mostly in Greek, while the other two groups of letters were written in Aramaic and Hebrew.

<sup>326</sup> Alzoubi, al Masri and Al-Ajlouny, " *Woman in the Nabataean Society*", 157.

experienced the Egyptian cult of *Isisthat*, which was popular in the rest of the Mediterranean world. However, their early religion was very similar to that of their immediate neighbours, the Edomites and the Judeans. According to Herodotus, the Arabian peoples of the fifth century BC worshipped a god, *Orotalt*, identified as Dionysus, and a heavenly goddess, *Alilat*, identified as Aphrodite Uranea, the Queen of Heaven. This may reflect the primacy of belief among early Arabian peoples in a divine couple similar to YHWH and his Asherah' discovered at the site of *Kuntilat Ajrud* northwest of the Red Sea, around 800 BC.<sup>327</sup>

The Arabian trade in aromatics increased, and small limestone cubic altars used for burning incense resins such as frankincense and myrrh appeared in sites throughout the region as late as the Hellenistic period. The *Qederites*, a nation of Arab traders who preceded the Nabataeans in the Persian period, worshipped *Han- Al-Lāt*, or the Goddess. The national god of the forerunners of the Nabataeans in the Petra region, the Edomites, worshipped a national god known as *Qos*. By the end of the fourth century BC, the Nabataeans occupied Petra and the former territories of their Edomite neighbours and apparently shared in the worship of *Qos*.

One of the earliest accounts about the Nabataeans, *Hieronymous* of Cardia (late fourth century BC), states that they forbade the drinking of wine, the cultivation of plants, and the building of houses. However, this is considered a literary taboo and their proficiency in quarrying and plastering large underground water cisterns points to a well-developed tradition of construction techniques generally not found among non-sedentary cultures.

When you visit Petra, the capital of the Nabataean civilization, you will get a sense of the opulent lifestyle that these people once led. Wandering the city and taking into consideration the architectural beauty of the city's structures will show you how intelligent, hard-working,

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<sup>327</sup> Smoak, Jeremy – William Schniedewind: Religion at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. *Religions* 10/3 (2019) 211; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030211>

and wealthy those people were. Additionally, the harsh conditions of living in the desert had an impact on the city's methodology and religion.

By studying other religions in the kingdoms and civilizations around the Nabataeans, who inhabited the Northern and central parts of the Arabian Peninsula, we observe that Nabataean mythology and religion did not originate in the Nabataean Kingdom. Instead, we observe many similarities in their religious practices and the deities they worshipped with those of the kingdoms and civilizations around them. But we could also see some differences, particularly when it comes to the temples and the way that they were built, as well as the representations of their deities.

Their mythology and worship can be divided into three main categories: The first is the mythology that was influenced by their lifestyle and harsh living conditions in the desert; the second one is the agricultural mythology and the third is the mythology that was affected not only by the Arabic tribes and kingdoms surrounding the Nabataean kingdom, but also by the Hellenistic–Roman presence in the Levant, which is, in my opinion, normal due to the relationship with the Greeks and the Romans, whether politically, culturally, or economically.

As Vogue mentioned that one of the religious traditions in the Arabian Peninsula is that each male god had its equivalents as a goddess; for instance, the god Bael and Balet as well as *El* and *Al-Lāt*. Also, he indicated that most of the gods and goddesses' names were adjectives more than personal names, mostly to describe their power and abilities, which apply to the Nabataean pantheon and religious traditions. We observe that the Nabataean religion went through two stages: the first stage was when they were nomads and dwellers in the Arabian desert and the second stage was when they settled down and built their civilization and cities. Due to the enormous change in the lifestyle, their main worship was for fertility gods and goddesses because they needed their help with their agriculture. We even could see this change in their decorative art in the temples and buildings as we could see the vines decorated the walls,

which is something that was forbidden for them to do before settling down (agriculture I mean and drinking wine as I mentioned before). Another change that occurred in their religious practices was that their worship became more centralized as they had their temples in certain places and not moving around with them as they traveled as before. They also started to give sacrifices and gifts to their gods and goddesses and, certainly, this change was not just because of their settling down, but what accompanied this settling like their blending with the surrounding Semitic and non-Semitic entities.

In the beginning, the Nabataean religion was very simple. It only had two deities, *Al-Lāt* and *Al-Uzza*, with other secondary deities, but their deities only had names, and their natures were not determined yet, around the fifth century BC.<sup>328</sup> Also, their deities did not share any religion with each other yet. The Nabataean religion had three main features:

- The shrines and tombs.
- The Kings.
- Banquet and rituals for their dead.<sup>329</sup>

The Nabataean pantheon was broad; it comprised numerous gods and goddesses with various occupations and purposes; yet, their gods were not artistically portrayed, no particular statues were retained for them and in many cases, they were not more than a stone block<sup>330</sup>, stelae, or a carved square djinn. Their pantheon was represented by their supreme gods and goddesses and their idols were placed in their cities' entrances, temples, or in the center of their

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<sup>328</sup> [Ahmad Al-Ajluni, “*The Nabataean Civilization throughout their inscriptions*”, Bayet Al-Anbat, Petra, Jordan, 1997.]182، 1997، الاردن، البترا، الانباط، بيت الانباط، نقوشهم، احمد العجلوني، حضاره الانباط من خلال نقوشهم، بيت الانباط، البترا، الاردن، 1997.]182

<sup>329</sup> The Nabataeans revered their deceased, and since their kings enjoyed the advantage of immortality, they did so by offering gifts, sacrifices, and offerings to their gods. They also treated shrines with respect since they considered them to be holy places that should always be treated with reverence. They put curses on the tombs to deter thieves and other people from disturbing the dead and to prevent them from being taken or destroyed by others. Many details were learned through reading and decoding the inscriptions from tombs and shrines that we uncovered during the excavations. For instance, we learned that there was a fee to be paid for the deities and temples to be able to bury the dead in accordance with the inscriptions.

<sup>330</sup> “The Arabs serve I know not whom, but I saw this statue which was a square stone.” Maximus of Tyre. (Where?) (Gibson, “*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*”, 100.

cities. Moreover, the Nabataean gods are that they had Arabic names, and many of them were similar to other North and Central Arabian gods and goddesses and secondary gods. But compared to the pantheon of North and Central Arabia, for example, the Palmyrene or the Safaitic pantheon, the Nabataean pantheon is considered to be small and does not have many deities<sup>331</sup>. Here I will concentrate only on the Supreme deities:

- Dushara:<sup>332</sup>

*Dushara* was a supreme god, whose name means the lord of the mountain *Al-Shara*, which is a chain of mountains that encircle *Mada'n Saleh* and Petra, located on the rim of what is now known as Wadi Araba, *Dushara* was one of the day gods, and it is believed that he was the son of the goddesses Allāt, he was a daytime (the sun god) god, in contrast to *Al-Qaum* god, who was a night-time god, and his job was to protect people's souls while sleeping and be their protector during their journey in the heaven realms, back to Dushara was represented by a square block, and he was also one of the features of the Nabataean coinage.<sup>333</sup>

As I previously mentioned, the Nabataeans revered *Dushara* as the Sun God, as evidenced by the holy days that were held in his honor. Manāt:<sup>334</sup> Manāt was the goddess of faith according to Arabic mythology and had her sanctuary and worship place in the temple of *Al-Mushalla* near *Yathrib*. She was presented as a large dark marble stone, and sometimes as a simple stone. She was one of the sisters' trinity the daughters of Allah, she was the eldest sister of the trinity that was formed by the three Nabataean goddesses (*Manāt*, *Al-Lāt*, her and *Al-'Uzza*) her worship cult was from the tribes of *Yathrib*, *Banu Awas*, and *Banu Al-Khazraj*. Her worship extended to

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<sup>331</sup> Healey, "The Religion of the Nabataeans", 83.

<sup>332</sup> Healey, "The Religion of the Nabataeans" 80–82.

<sup>334</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans* 135.

the Nabataeans in the North, and she was the spouse of the god *Quzah*, the thunder god. In Greco-Roman sources, she was identified as the fortune goddess.

Manāt worship reached as far as Palmyra and she was associated with their god Bel Ḥammon. She also had her sanctuary in 8 AD, as well as an inscription dedicated to her in Latin.

- *Al-Qaum*:<sup>335</sup>

This god was referred to as the warrior god who guarded the caravans. He was also known as the "Clan Protector." He is claimed to have consumed no wine, as was usual of non-agricultural desert gods. *Al-Qaum* was then connected with the Greek/Roman god Ares or Mars in order to blend in with Western civilization. There are several inscriptions bearing his name, and some archaeologists believe he was a major god to the Nabataeans, safeguarding them at night. As a night deity, he guarded the sleepers' souls in the shape of stars, accompanying them on their nightly trip through the heavenly regions and directing caravans through the desert via the stars.

- *Al-Lāt*:<sup>336</sup>

*Al-Lāt* was a North Arabian goddess. She was one of the three daughters of the great God *Allah*, *Manāt* (Fate), and *Al-‘Uzzā* (Strong). The goddesses were also worshipped by various Arab tribes located outside the borders of *Hijaz* and their worship cult reached Palmyra in Syria, and the Nabataeans of Petra, as well as the people of Hatra. *Al-Lāt* was the goddess of vegetation and was called “the Great Goddess” in Bi-lingual inscriptions. The Nabataeans believed *al-Lāt* was the mother of Hubal (and hence the mother-in-law of *Manāt*). *Al-Lāt* was a white stone called *AL-Rabba* or Sovereign with

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<sup>335</sup> Gibson, *The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*, 102.

<sup>336</sup> Abdul-Rahman Muhammad Saed, “*The Meaning and Explanation Glorious Qur'an*”, MSA Publication Limited, London, 2009, 368.



inscriptions on it, she had a house as her sanctuary and was covered with curtains in *At-Ta'if*.

- *Al-'Uzza*:<sup>337</sup>

*Al-'Uzza* was the last goddess in the trinity of *Allah's* daughters, and she was the youngest of them her name meant the Most Mighty. These sisters were even mentioned in the *Qur'an* as the three daughters of *Allah*. She was a goddess who was represented by a star and a lion and associated with Venus the planet and the goddess. She used to present fertility as well as the protection of worriers. She was worshipped as the highest goddess and one of the main characters that were known to accept human sacrifices. Her cult spread to the Nabataean pantheons, and she was called the Mistress of Heaven. She even had her idols in the temples in Petra their main city.

As for the worship of *Al-'Uzza* in northern and central Arabia, she was introduced to the *Hijazi* tribes by *Zeyd Ibn-Amr Ibn-Nufayl*, and he placed her as one of the supreme gods. She also had a special place and sacred sanctuaries where she received her sacrifices and offerings, especially from the people who were seeking oracles and communications with gods and needed to ask for personal favors. The place of offerings was named *Al-Ghabghab* and her sanctuary was located in a valley in *Nakhl* on the way from *Mecca* to *Iraq*, but in the Nabataean cities, she had two temples one in Petra and the other one found in *Wadi-Rum Al-Kutbay*.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Al-Kalbi Ibn, "*Book of Idols*", Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2015, 16–20.

<sup>338</sup> This god was the protector of commerce, writing, and deviation; its name is derived from the Arabic root KTB, which means to write; several inscriptions mentioned this god not only in the Nabataean kingdom but also in North and Central Arabia; as I previously stated, the kingdoms that inhabited the Arabian Peninsula shared several gods and goddesses; for example, There was a graffiti in the Lihyanite of Dedan – a significant stop in the Nabataean's commerce between Mecca and Hegra – that named him, which is identical to an inscription found in Wadi Mousa in Petra that says: "*Al Kutbay*, the one who is in Gaia." Another inscription at Wadi Es Siyyagh, on the route to Petra's mainspring, references 'this very God in front of *Kutbay*. The same name appears on a piece of Safaitic graffiti at Basta, located on the caravan road from Petra near Ayl and Sadaqa. (Gibson, "*The Nabataeans Builders of Petra*", 102). There is a debate about the gender of this deity, whether it's a god or goddess, on the one hand, Fawzi al-Zeaden mentioned that it is a male deity based on his translation of the inscription that was dedicated to him, and also studied the Arabic names in order to support that the root and the name is a masculine name and it

- Betyls, Altars, and Figurines:

The Nabataean religion was firmly established in the early indigenous beliefs and was shaped by the contemporary influences in the Mediterranean region. An exceptional motif is the inclination towards venerating stones, which stems from the biblical narrative of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob who erected and consecrated a stone (*massebah*) at Beth *El*, the abode of the powerful deity. The biblical geographical name, Bethel, is etymologically connected to the term "betyl," which refers to sacred stones. Over time, this Semitic association appears to have been adopted into the Greek language as "baitulos."<sup>339</sup>

During the Roman era, the Nabataeans had a notable inclination to depict both *Dushara* and deities, including the prominent goddess *Al- 'Uzza*, using independent or carved stone artifacts in the shape of cubes. Abundant examples of Nabataean betyls shown in relief and niches designed for freestanding betyls have been extensively unearthed at Petra. Additionally, these artifacts have been uncovered in areas outside the Petra region. These can be found either alone, in pairs, or groups of three or more.

The rise in popularity of betyls in the Near East occurred around the third century AD, coinciding with a growing fascination with the worship of the deity *Dushara*, during the reign of the Roman Emperor *Philip the Arab*. Prior to the emergence of Islam, Arabs commonly established and venerated stones, engaging in the act of offering sacrifices to these objects. Clusters of mase both and a road-side open shrine, characterized by un-

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cannot be a feminine name, but on the other hand, we have another opinion from Strongle, who mentioned that this is a goddess and she is connected and related to *Al- 'Uzza* and she has a temple in the north of Sinai, and a third opinion was for Starky that she and *Dushara* represent the same deity and he built his theory based on translating some inscriptions. Whether this deity is female or male, it was the deity for writing, and his or her worship spread till Egypt, and excavations discovered two temples in Egypt dedicated to *Al-Kutbay*. It was also worshipped by the northern Arabian tribes, as well as in Syria, as we learned from a book that was dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and was written by a Syriac writer named Pseudo Melito, and he was also mentioned by another writer, Bar Koni, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Al-Ajlouny, "*The Nabataean Civilization Throughout Their Inscriptions*", 202).

worked stones on a low platform, were unearthed along the Petra-Gaza Road. These findings were found in settings that may be dated back to the second to third century AD at Horbat Qasra. The Nabataeans maintained the veneration of stones, as shown by the Ka'bah in Mecca, during the classical era.

Ongoing archaeological investigations in Petra have revealed several instances of the symbolic depiction of both indigenous and foreign gods, dating back to periods preceding the Roman acquisition of Nabataea in 106 AD. The evidence found in the Khirbet Tannur temple indicates a transition from non-representational depictions, namely of the deity *Qos*, to sculptures representing the deity in human form during the era following conquest.

Nabataean religious customs also encompass the predilection for compact, easily transportable altars, which seem to be a continuation of previous rituals, some of which were inspired by commercial interactions within the Arabian region. The incorporation of the horned altar design into Nabataean iconography is seen in the Negev region, namely at *Mampsis* and *Oboda*, during the Roman era. This design is also observed among a collection of niches and betyls located on the *El-Biyara* hill, which overlooks Petra. During the era after the annexation, there was a notable increase in the presence of horned altars. One such example is the relief carving of a horned altar found on the *En-Nusra* Tomb in *Oboda*, dating back to the third century AD.



Figure 13: The Nabataean goddesses Trinity, *Al-Lāt*, *Al-'Uzza*, *Manat*.<sup>340</sup>

- Ba'alshamīn:<sup>341</sup>

Ba'alshamīn or *Ba'lsmin*, the lord of heavens, originally, he is a Syrian deity, at *Ugarit* in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, he was regarded as the storm and fertility god “*Ba'lu*” was his name in the Ugaritic texts, Ugarit was not the only Syrian civilization that had him in its pantheon, he was in the Palmyra, *Hatra*, and the Edessa's region pantheon, also, he appears frequently in the Safaitic inscriptions, in all these cultures as well as the Nabataeans he was associated with the agriculture, fertility, and storms, his main city of worship was Ḥawran, and from that, his worship spread to the other Nabataean cities, as well as he has his own temple in *Ḥawran*.<sup>342</sup>

This god also appeared in the Canaanite religion as the thunder god, also in the Aramaic religion he appeared in the story of Aheqar but his name was “*BaalQadshn*”, and

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<sup>340</sup> <https://www.booksfact.com/religions/pre-islamic-goddesses-al-lat-al-uzza-manat.html>. (Downloaded: 08.09.2021)

<sup>341</sup> Al-Ajlouny, “*The Nabataean Civilization throughout their inscriptions*”, 190.

<sup>342</sup> Healey, “*The Religion of the Nabataeans*”, 124–126.

his exists in a papyrus which was written in the Amharic language that tells the story. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, we find the word “Ἐχίος” which was connected with higher-level deities, in Syria, Horan, and Palmyra.

- Isis:<sup>343</sup>

Isis, as we all know, is an Egyptian goddess, one of the ultimate deities in the Egyptian pantheon. As we all know, there are innumerable stories about her and her abilities. Her devotion was not limited to the Egyptian people; it expanded to the Arabic world, and even to the Roman Empire, which does not make it surprising that her cult and worship was part of the Nabataean Kingdom, as they travelled with their caravans to Egypt and had economical, and political connections with the Egyptian and Roman Empire.

going back to the Nabataean kingdom, having Isis as one of the primary deities in their pantheon was a phenomenon that had to be studied; how was the worship of this deity imported to the Nabataean society from the Egyptian kingdom, and did it have the same methodological, chronological or topographical characteristics all these questions were answered through the excavations in the Nabataean cities, where they discovered several inscriptions, shrines, and temples all devoted to Isis, demonstrating the depth of her cult in the Nabataean civilization.

Healey<sup>344</sup> demonstrates that the Nabataean religion was a blend of pilgrimage and household religious activities<sup>345</sup> and their prayers were not limited to their temples. Digging deeper into their religion, we discover that they possessed the notion of the supreme god, who

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<sup>343</sup> Schmid, Stephan G Author & Editor, and Mouton, Michel Editor. “*Men on the Rocks: The Formation of Nabataean Petra (Supplement to the Bulletin of Nabataean Studies)*”. Logos Verlag, Georg-Knorr-Straße Berlin, 2012., 351–358).

<sup>344</sup> Healey, “*The Religion of the Nabataeans*”, 91–119.

<sup>345</sup> For more information about the household religion in the Ancient Near East see Rainer Albertz, Rüdiger Schmitt, “*Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*”, Penn State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2012, 387 – 429; Lanham, Maryland. Joy McCorriston, “*Pilgrimage, and Household in the Ancient Near East*”, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 2011, 135–164; John Bodel, Saul M. Olyan, “*Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*”, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2012, chapter 5.

was *Dushara*. We can see his aniconic slabs, or Betyls<sup>346</sup> as archaeologists refer to them, in the temples devoted to him, as well as in the cities where he was worshiped.

The Nabataean cultic and sacred objects were varied and widely spread throughout the Nabataean Kingdom, temples, shrines, and statues, which in Arabic are called “*noṣb*” and in Nabataean “*nṣyb*’, *nṣbt*’, and *mṣb*”. Figures and objects were found in the temples, offerings, and inscriptions, but the most interesting remains in the Nabataeans' pantheon were the female figures of their goddesses, which can be considered a reflection of the Nabataean society mindset and it is also an indication of the respectable role that the Nabataeans women had in their society. The Nabataeans' art and inscriptions show that the Nabataeans' women were part of the rituals, ceremonies, and festivals and also part of the religious practices and rituals that were held in the ancient Nabataeans temples.

The Nabataeans held many temples and statues for him, and they were many priests and priestesses there was a mention of the name بعلت (كاهن) which means the priest of Baal, also in other inscriptions there was the mention of “ك ه ن ت” and this is the feminine name of the world priest.

Priestesses were often affiliated with a governing male related in ancient. *Baranamtara* of *Lagash*, the wife of *Lugalanda*, and *Shag-Shag*, the wife of *Urukagina*, both of the Early Dynastic Period in Ur, were the first queens or spouses of a king known to be high priestesses. *Eneduanna* (2371-2316 BC), the daughter of *Sargon* of Akkad, was the high priestess of the Moon-God *Nanna* of Ur and the temple of An, the supreme God of Heaven, at Uruk.<sup>347</sup> *Eneduanna* is also recognized as the first poetess, having written poetry and hymns to the goddess *Inanna*. She was succeeded by *Enmenanna*, *Naram-Sin's* daughter, who had the same

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<sup>346</sup> For further information see Wenning, Robert. “*The Betyls of Petra*”, Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, no. 324, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 79–95, 2001.

<sup>347</sup> Woolley C. L., “*The Royal Cemetery Text*”, Ur Excavations Vol II, The True Steeds of the Two MU Seums, Pennsylvania, 1934, 33.

rank as *Eneduanna* and referred to herself as the "wife of Nanna." Throughout the Sumerian and Akkadian eras, princesses were appointed as high priestesses.<sup>348</sup> Priests and priestesses were guardians of the gods' and goddesses' interests, preservers of their temples, overseers of the gifts offered and sacrifices presented, mediators between gods and worshippers, revealing their oracles, supervising the fertility cult of sacred marriage (particularly in Sumer and Akkad), and writers and readers of appropriate hymns and poems.<sup>349</sup>

John F. Healey has presented a thorough explanation of their possible functions,<sup>350</sup> and it appears that using multiple of these titles for the same deity or goddess shows a hierarchy rather than a linguistic distinction. Two inscriptions from Wadi Ramm mention three priestly titles for Allāt: “khn ’ltw ’lht(’), kāhin” of *Al-Lāt* the goddess, and a “’pkl”. A third, dated from 47 AD and discovered in Ebran in awrān, alludes to a kmr ’lt, Kamar of *Al-Lāt*.<sup>351</sup> *Al-’Uzzā* priests were granted the title *kāhin* and regularly appeared in Sinai.<sup>352</sup>

A third, dated from 47 AD and discovered in Ebran in awrān, alludes to a kmr ’lt, Kamar of *Al-Lāt*.<sup>353</sup> *Al-’Uzzā* priests were granted the title *kāhin* and regularly appeared in Sinai.<sup>354</sup>

Savignac has remarked that the term *khn* is unusual in Aramaic and believes it is a loan from Arabic,<sup>355</sup> although Teixidor believes it is more pertinent to Canaanite culture than Arabian culture.

According to Healey, the title “ptwr’” is attested twice in Egra and Raqamū-Petra inscriptions (H 29),<sup>356</sup> and could mean "diviner or perhaps a military augur advising on

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<sup>348</sup> Birot, Maurice. “*Bernard Frank Batto, Studies on Women at Mari*”. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1974.” Syria 54, no. 3 (1977): 278-280, 8.

<sup>349</sup> T, Frymer-Kensky, “*In the Wake of The Goddesses, Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*”, Random House Publishing Group, Manhattan, 1992, 64.

<sup>350</sup> J. F., Healey, “The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus”, Brill, Aylesbury, 2001, 164.

<sup>351</sup> R Savignac, “Note de Voyage-Le Sanctuaire d’Allat à Iram”, RB 41, 58–597, 1932, 2.

<sup>352</sup> R Savignac, “Le Sanctuaire d’Allat à Iram (1)”, RB 42, 405–422, 1933, 2.

<sup>353</sup> Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. II: sec.2. 1902–1907 (Paris), 170.

<sup>354</sup> Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. II: sec.2. 1902–1907 (Paris), 611.

<sup>355</sup> Savignac, “Note de Voyage-Le Sanctuaire d’Allat à Iram”, 592 – 593.

<sup>356</sup> P. J Parr “Recent Discoveries in the Sanctuary of the Qasr Bint Far’un at Petra”, ADAJ 12–13, 5 –19, Amman, 1967– 68, 10.

campaigns based on entrails, dreams, and astrology," a function possibly related to the early Arab tradition of divination by bird flight.<sup>357</sup>

Women and men were equal in their rights of visiting the temple and participating in the prayers and even in the privilege of giving sacrificial offerings to the gods, which was prohibited in other Semitic civilizations, whether these visits took place in the main temples or in the other places. According to Strabo, one of the rituals that women participated in was religious dinners which included thirteen men who were permitted to drink only eleven times, each time in a different golden cup, along with the food, and with them, there were only two women whose part was to sing to these men during their religious dinner.<sup>358</sup>

The singing at the religious dinner was not the only part that women took in the religious practices, but they also participated in another singing ritual in the Temples. In this ritual, the singing group included two women and one man, one of the women played the guitar while the second woman played another musical instrument with different cords. This is another indication of the Nabataean women's education that had the chance to play musical instruments, as well as they, were on the same level and team with the male priests while performing the religious rituals inside the Temple.<sup>359</sup>

Speaking about the Nabataean temples and goddesses and how women had a different role in the Nabataean religion, I recall the terracotta figurines<sup>360</sup> of the Nabataean goddesses and how they were given the shape of women. Most of their goddesses were carved and had their unique shape and status, then they were placed in the temple to be worshipped or presented with offers, presents, and sacrifices, and in some cases, they were presented by nude women

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<sup>357</sup> Healey, "*The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*", 164.

<sup>358</sup> *Strabo*. Translated, with notes, in three volumes. London. George Bell & Sons. 1903 Chapter XVI. 4.26.

<sup>359</sup> Alzoubi, "*Woman in the Nabataean Society*", 156.

<sup>360</sup> we can find more details about them in Emily R. Gray, "*The Enthroned Nude Female: An Exploration of Nabataean Domestic Religion Through a Terracotta Figurine*", Senior Honors Thesis Curriculum in Archaeology University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2018.



with some motion because they believed that women represented beauty and fertility and so did their goddesses, power, and love. Therefore, they reasoned that the best way to respect and honor their goddesses who constituted a substantial number in the Nabataean pantheon was to be presented to the standards of their women.

The Nabataean religion is undoubtedly similar to the religion of the previous and synchronous civilizations due to their continuous travel through the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. They had strong connections with the nations who lived under the rule of their Kingdoms, even before that they were nomads traveling from one place to another. With their mindset, we can surely say that they were smart enough to create and copy other mythologies, rituals of worship, and even the pantheon from other nations and after that combined them with their own beliefs and create their fabulous religion and amazing Temples all around their Kingdoms cities. For example, the worship of the goddess Isis, whose cult was originally located in the Egyptian pantheon, was, surprisingly, found many figures as well as statues which were erected to her, in addition to, the temple for her worship. Another example was the stone that represented their gods, and the worship of stelae (*masseboth*), which is, as we know, an early practice that was found in the Bible in the story of Jacob the Hebrew patriarch who set up the (*massebah*) stone in “*Beth El*” (Genesis 28:11–19, NIV). Unfortunately, we do not have complete documents of the Nabataean’s mythology or religious rules, but only pieces that were gathered during the excavations in their area. The most unfortunate fact is that the role of women is even harder to be determined by only focusing on the inscriptions and the epigraphical remains, but this does not cancel the fact that the women had their position in the Nabataean society, whether they were from the royal family or from the citizens. Women could sell and buy, own their own businesses, and inherit and own properties. In comparison with the other surrounding nations, this was not possible for women. Furthermore, the Nabataean pantheon included many goddesses, and they had their own priestess to serve them in the temple

also women could present sacrifices to the gods and goddesses which is again another evidence of the high position that women had during the rule of Nabataeans Kings. Another fact is the Nabataean women had their own heard voices in the royal family, their images were minted on their coins, they could participate in festivals and political meetings and even had the chance to rule by themselves as I mentioned previously, all of this and more only means that the Nabataean women had a high place in the Nabataean society, and they were treated at some level equal to men, and one of the most things that can support this is their pantheon that includes many goddesses including the powerful trinity (*Manāt*, *Al-Lāt*, *Al-‘Uzzā*), who had their powerful effect on the Nabataeans, they held Temples for them, offered sacrifices, they even dedicated prayers and priests and priestess for them, they turned to them in the time of need and did not respect them or worship them in any different way from the gods, but also they had their own festivals to celebrate each year, that and there is a theory that says that the Nabataeans built their famous building *Al-Khazna* to be the place of worship and temple to the goddess *Manāt*, this fabulous and enormous building which is considered one of the seven wonders of the world today, that building that if you stand in front of it you will feel the greatness of that civilization how they engraved it in the stone was dedicated to that goddess who they took as the protector of their city “Petra”. All of this is nothing but an indicator of how women had an important (if not equal at some points) role in Nabataean society, not only at the cultural level but also exceeding the religious and political aspects in the Nabataean’s society which in this case will give women an opportunity to be able to make independent dissension without the need of following the male power and rules over them, This follows by the freedom that women will have in the roles that they will have in the community, and for sure that include their important roles in the religious practices.

The Nabataean women were and still are some sort of a mystery for us, as we could not find that much archaeological and epigraphical evidence, they demonstrated and described their

place in the society, and how much they were as influences in the Nabataean community, we tried to conclude their role whether it was in the religious aspect of the social aspects, but from my study, we can conclude that the Nabataean women were nor ordinary or marginalized in the Nabataean kingdom, they had major roles in ruling the kingdom, also participated in the political treaties, in some cases they were the case of wars, The Nabataean women were strong and independent as they could have they own business and could sell and buy without the permission of a man controlling their decisions. Most importantly they could participate in religious practices, whether by giving sacrifices or by being priestesses themselves to worship and dedicate their life to their gods.

In conclusion, the exploration of women's roles in Nabataean society and their engagement in religious practices during the Hellenistic Roman era unveils a complex tapestry of cultural dynamics and social intricacies. Through a meticulous examination of historical records, archaeological findings, and scholarly interpretations, it becomes evident that women in Nabataean society held multifaceted roles that extended beyond traditional stereotypes.

The Nabataean women's involvement in religious practices emerges as a particularly intriguing aspect of their societal engagement. While historical documentation may be scarce, the remnants of religious sites, artifacts, and inscriptions provide valuable insights into the active participation of women in rituals and ceremonies. These challenges prevailing assumptions about the limited agency of women in the Hellenistic Roman era and underscores the importance of acknowledging their contributions to the religious fabric of Nabataean society.

Moreover, the examination of women's roles in the Nabataean context sheds light on the intersections between cultural influences, economic activities, and religious beliefs. The Hellenistic and Roman presence in the region undoubtedly played a role in shaping gender

dynamics, yet local traditions and customs also persisted, influencing how women navigated their social, economic, and religious spheres.

In summary, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of women's agency and contributions in the Nabataean society of the Hellenistic Roman era. It underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of various aspects of life in ancient societies. As we delve deeper into the complexities of Nabataean history, it becomes evident that women were active participants in shaping the cultural and religious landscape, challenging preconceived notions and enriching our comprehension of the past.

## Chapter Three

### Palmyra and Women

*“Palmyra, for a while, stood forth the  
rival of Rome; but the competition  
was fatal, and ages of prosperity were  
sacrificed to a moment of glory.”*

(Edward Gibbon)

Palmyra was the Kingdom which defined and challenged the Roman Empire under the rule of its marvellous Queen Zenobia, a kingdom that against all odds established an enormous kingdom, lavish life, wonderful architecture, and a strong economy, the Kingdom of Palmyra had so many connections with its neighboring kingdoms, and it could form a strong political presence in the Southern Levant, the Kingdom of Palmyra existed in the same time frame as the rest of the Kingdoms that was included in my study, and the religious section, also by comparing it with the Nabataean kingdom we will be able to conclude till which level they were in contact and how much they influenced each their religion, all of this and more it will be demonstrated in this chapter.

The study of women's role in Palmyrene society involves analyzing epigraphic data and visual representations. Palmyrene sources provide a privileged standpoint for studying women and their roles, but little is known about their roles and capacity. The majority of available inscriptions mentioning women are funerary epitaphs added to relief busts or family groups, containing names and patronyms of women and their status within the family. However, some inscriptions are commissioned by women, such as Queen Zenobia. The second group of texts, originating from a funerary context, provides a higher degree of information, including foundation inscriptions mentioning women or containing provisions regarding women, and almost twenty cession texts featuring women in the role of sellers or buyers of funerary properties. Honorific and decatenatory texts present women as dedicators and dedicatees to inscriptions, statues, and other artifacts.

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Palmyrene women have been studied in more depth in recent years, with an emphasis on female activity in the funerary and public worlds. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in the study of women's roles in Palmyra in general, and religious practices in particular, as a result of the discoveries made in Palmyra, which was a revelation because in that man-oriented world, women had a different role than the housewife role that we are used to reading about.

According to Yon, Palmyrene women rose to prominence through their customary roles as mothers, spouses, and daughters of powerful men. Eleonora Cussini concludes from her examinations of funerary epigraphic evidence that Palmyrene women had the right to own, buy, and sell cemetery property as early as the second century AD. She bases her results on inscriptions found in Palmyra graves that contained abstracts of legal documents, known as cession texts. Women are mentioned as buyers or sellers of funeral property in seventeen of the

sixty-three cession texts which were found during the excavations in Palmyra. On the other hand, other researchers have concentrated on funerary portraiture.<sup>361</sup>

According to Maura Heyn,<sup>362</sup> the position of a Palmyrene woman is generally linked to the status of her family and her domestic virtues, as evidenced by qualities found in funerary portraitures, such as the spindle, the distaff, and keys. Cussini, on the other hand, claims that the humility of the women depicted in the burial paintings is deceptive because some Palmyrene women controlled their own funerary property and were prominent in Palmyra's civic life.

The ability of women to buy and sell burial property suggests that some Palmyrene women were more independent than images in the funerary domain suggest. Sign Krag and Rubina Raja<sup>363</sup> of the Palmyra Portrait Project investigated funeral images of women and children. They conclude that women are depicted more frequently than males with their young and older child or children, emphasizing elements of motherhood. In the funerary domain, the family was an essential indicator of social identity similar to what can be seen in inscriptions from Palmyrene public life.

The current study focuses on the role of Palmyrene women in Palmyra's religious life, a topic that has gotten little scholarly attention to date. There is no clear proof in epigraphic or visual material that Palmyrene women served as priestesses.

Notwithstanding, five reliefs depict women as participants in religious processions and sacrifice acts, and I will demonstrate that Palmyrene women were active participants in religious rites based on these reliefs. In addition, several limestone dedicatory altars for libations and burning incense were built by or on behalf of women.

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<sup>361</sup> Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra. Archimède*”: *Archéologie et Histoire Ancienne* 8, 2021: 54–64 (55).

<sup>362</sup> Klaver, S.F., “*Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos, Palmyra, and Seleucia on the Euphrates*”, *UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)*, 2019, 124. (Download: 01.05.2022).

<sup>363</sup> Signe Krag and Rubina Raja, “*Representations of Women and Children in Palmyrene Funerary Loculus Reliefs, oculus Stelae and Wall Paintings*”, *Zeitschrift für Orient- Archäologie*, 9, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Orient-Abteilung, 134–178, Ernst Wasmuth Verlag Tübingen, Berlin, 2016.

According to Aleksandra Kubiak, these ladies were predominately from Palmyra's middle class, demonstrating that not only elite women were involved in the city's religious life. Finally, information on the religious function of Palmyrene women can be obtained from a small number of so-called religious benefactions.<sup>364</sup>

## 4.2 Palmyra<sup>365</sup> in History<sup>366</sup>

The Palmyrene Empire in the Southern Levant, with its renowned capital city, Tadmor,<sup>367</sup> is situated in the Syrian desert halfway between the Euphrates and Syria's

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<sup>364</sup> Klaver, S.F., “*Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos, Palmyra, and Seleucia on the Euphrates*”, 155.

<sup>365</sup> Is often referred to as the “*Bride of the Desert*”.

<sup>366</sup> For further readings see Bernard Goldman, “*Nabataean/Syro-Roman Lunate Earrings*”, *Israel Exploration Journal*, Jerusalem, Vol. 46, 77-99, 1996, 86; Andrew M. Smith II, “*Roman Palmyra: Identity, Community, and State Formation*”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 13 –21; Michael Sommer, “*Palmyra: A History*”, Routledge, London, and New York, 2017, 14 – 53; Rubina Raja, “*Pearl of the Desert A History of Palmyra*”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, 87 – 117; Ted Kaizer, “*The Religious Life of Palmyra: A Study of the Social Patterns of Worship in the Roman Period*”, Steiner, Serbia, 2002; Signe Krag, Rubina Raja, “*c*”, Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2019; Trevor Bryce, “*Ancient Syria: A Three Thousand Year History*”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, 275 – 319; Trevor Bryce, Jessie Birkett-Rees, “*Atlas of the Ancient Near East: From Prehistoric Times to the Roman Imperial Period*”, Routledge, Milton Park Abingdon, 2016, 282 –258.

<sup>367</sup> The city was referred to as “Palmyra” in classical writings because of the palm tree groves that undoubtedly embellished the area throughout its history. However, Tadmor was the ancient name of Palmyra. This historical name, whose origin is still unclear, first appears in documents written by Assyrian traders in the 19th century BC. Later, it reappears in writings from the Euphratean city of Emar, which dates to the Late Bronze Age. And the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser tells us that Tadmor belonged to the nation of Amurru, at the time of his conquests in Syria, in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Another narrative seems to give Tadmor a significant biblical consortium. According to (2 Chronicles 8:4), *Tadmor* was “*built up in the wilderness*” by King Solomon. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. chronicler John Malalas, who interpreted this to be a reference to the city, David's battle with Goliath is said to have taken place at Palmyra. Thus, according to the well-known historian Josephus, who was a discerning, intelligent, and knowledgeable Jewish historian, Palmyra was founded by Solomon. However, it is more accurate and correct to read “*Tamar*” here rather than “Tadmor” as in (1 Kings 9:18), which states that Solomon founded a city called Tamar in the Judah desert. Even if it may be appealing, we must disassociate Tadmor from King Solomon, the legendary builder-king of Israelite mythology. Apart from anything else, Solomon dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, which is far too early—as we'll see—to be connected to any known building activity at Palmyra. (Bryce, *Ancient Syria*, 276). This is also evident in Josephus' writings. It is obvious that Josephus' assertion that Palmyra was King Solomon's foundation when he wrote about it at the end of the first century AD is a myth, but it also helps to create a literary image of Palmyra as an exotic and legendary place. When he saw that the city was known as Thadamora by the Syrians and Palmyra by the Greeks, Josephus was able to infer something about the local culture at the time (Tadmor). Here, Josephus emphasizes the impact of Hellenism on Palmyra together with the persistence of the Semitic culture there. Inscriptions from Palmyra that are bilingual in Greek and Palmyrene show that Josephus was accurate in his assertions and that these significant aspects of the Palmyrene civilization was well-known. Thought to be derived from Tamar, which means “palm” subsequent findings have disproved this theory. Instead. According to some theories, the word Tadmor comes from the West Semitic root dmr, which means “to observe”. Consequently, the city's name signifies “observation post.” (Lucinda Dirven, “*The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos: A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*”, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 1999,18).



coastlands. Because of this advantageous location, Tadmor became one of the most significant and frequently visited stops for trading caravans traveling across the Arabian Peninsula desert.

As an urban center, Palmyra started to grow in the first century BC. Before this time, there is no evidence of organized and established habitation. In fact, even then, our evidence for its existence as a city is rather flimsy and indirect. It derives from the two hundred-years-later writings of the Greek historian Appian.<sup>368</sup> According to Appian, Mark Antony sent a cavalry army to the village in 41 BC.<sup>369</sup> with the intention of attacking and plundering it for financial gain. However, the Palmyrenes were notified that the Romans were on their way so they fled their city taking all they owned with them and found their way to the Euphrates. They took up a defensive position across the river threatening anyone who came near them with the use of their skilled bowmen (The Euphrates was not as close as Appian appears to believe; it was about 200 kilometers away). As a result, when Antony's cavalry entered the city in search for treasure, they discovered neither a soul nor anything of value. And so, having accomplished their mission without even catching a fleeting glance of the foe, they were ordered to destroy the Palmyrene city and returned to their home base with empty saddlebags, heavy hearts, and probably sand-filled lungs.<sup>370</sup>

The story that was referred to previously by Appian leads to two conclusions. First, the Palmyrene city either appears to lack any fortress or walls to protect the city, which forced the troops to flee to a more protected place, to take good positions, to fight back and protect their territory. Although we assume that by the middle of the first century, the city of Palmyra was populated but not yet fully developed. Secondly, and more significantly at that time, was that

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<sup>368</sup> Appian of Alexandria (c.95–c.165): Appian of Alexandria authored an autobiography, but it has nearly entirely vanished, and as a result, we know very little about the Alexandrian historian. We must glean knowledge about his life from his works and a letter by Cornelius Fronto, a well-known writer who was Marcus Aurelius' instructor and lived in Rome in the middle of the second century.

<sup>369</sup> Trevor Bryce, *"Ancient Syria: A Three Thousand Year History"*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, 277.

<sup>370</sup> Bryce, *"Ancient Syria"*, 277.

Palmyra already had a settled population and some form of an urbanized metropolis. Notwithstanding, it may have been part of what was known as the Arab tribal organization, as being part of the Arabian tribes that inhabited the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, this can be proved by the Greek historian Polybius, who mentions that the leader of the Palmyrene tribe, Zabdibel, made a contribution of 10,000 troops to the army of Antiochus III in his showdown with Ptolemy IV at the battle of Raphia.<sup>371</sup>

Despite their defeat and subsequent submission to the Roman Empire following their battle with Mark Antony, Palmyra benefited significantly from their association with the Roman Empire. At the same time, and Pompey gave the Province of Syria its independence at the same time, and the province kept its independence until the attempt of Mark Antony to capture the city of Palmyra (41 BC),<sup>372</sup> and up until the time of the emperor Tiberius (14–37 AD). After that, the Province of Syria started to pay tribute to the Roman Empire to be seen as part of the Empire.

The material metamorphosis of Palmyra had already started by the time of the Roman Empire. Over the course of the next three centuries and due to its diverse cultural heritage, the city gradually transformed into one of the most unique hubs of urban civilization in the ancient Near East.

In the first century, the Nabataean kingdom's capital city of Petra and the remaining territories were taken over by the Roman Emperor Trajan in 106 AD, substantially enhancing the city's circumstances. This year, Trajan founded the Roman Province of Arabia in the Nabataean city of Bosra (Roman Bostra). Although Petra remained a significant part of Nabataean society, the commercial center of the area became Palmyra. When the Nabataeans' dominance over the trade routes ended towards the end of the first century AD,<sup>373</sup> Palmyra's

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<sup>371</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 277–278.

<sup>372</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 278.

<sup>373</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 278.

unique geographic position provided it a significant advantage, according to archaeologist Warwick Ball to be one of the best destinations of the trading caravans. The commercial routes shifted further north, which was forced by Antioch's growing significance as well as the decrease of commerce under Petra's rule. As a result, Palmyra developed into the eastern commerce center.

After this considerable turn in its history, Palmyra became under the spotlight of the Roman Empire, especially after the visit of Emperor Hadrian to Palmyra during one of his visits to the province. He was completely astonished by the great city, its architecture, and its lavish lifestyle. This focus gave it the advantage of growing more and gaining more importance from the Roman Empire. Besides, this made it a destination for many people to come and live there and gave it the advantage of being able to absorb some of their cultures as well. In fact, Palmyra appeared to have a lot in common with a Greco-Roman metropolis on the surface. But in reality, a combination of these factors and indigenous ones led to the development of the peculiar Palmyrene culture, which is reflected in the sculptures of various Palmyrene deities and in rituals associated with their cults.

This also led the Roman Emperor to upgrade the city to the highest municipal rank that could be given to a city in the Empire, the status of a *Roman Colonia*. As a result, its residents now had full Roman citizenship privileges.<sup>374</sup> One fact remains that Palmyra flourished and prospered under the Roman rule, especially after it supplanted Petra as the leading economic hub of the Near East in 106.<sup>375</sup>

The city's extensive rebuilding effort, which included the construction or renovation of its temples as well as the restoration of historical and monumental buildings, is a tangible indication of the city's prosperity in this period. By this time, Palmyra had developed into a

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<sup>374</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 280.

<sup>375</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 283.

distinctly multicultural city, with its streets thronged with people from many different nations, particularly those engaged in commerce, including Syrians from various cities, Aramaeans, Jews, Parthians, Babylonians, Persians, traders, and businesspeople from the West. However, despite its cosmopolitanism, Palmyra never lost sight of its Arabic heritage, as seen by several of its gods' military attire and representations of them riding horses and camels.

The city of Palmyra's richness was primarily due to the location of its oasis in the center of Syria and the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of its citizens in creating and sustaining international trade lines that connected the Far East with the Mediterranean region. The city also served as a tax checkpoint for merchandise that was transported further on to the western areas of the ancient world and vice versa and camel caravans arriving from the East were reloaded there.

This sizable commerce played a significant role in the city's prosperity and massive expansion throughout the first three centuries AD. The wealth of Palmyra's upper class resulted in a greater embellishment of the city's physical features and visual aesthetics. At the beginning, of the first century AD when the increased material prosperity first emerged in the archaeological record, Palmyra produced a vast corpus of funeral sculptures. With more than 3,000 pictures surviving in existence, it is the biggest collection of people from the Roman Era shown in any setting. This makes the corpus an excellent tool for academics researching identity, social representations, and the funerary domain. Nearly 20% of the overall number of men are represented and about 10% of the total number of people represented are Palmyrene priests.<sup>376</sup>

The trading roots connected the cities along the Syrian coast with the rest of the world through China, Trans-Oxiana, and India.<sup>377</sup> Spices and silk were two of the wealth-producing

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<sup>376</sup> Rubina Raja, "You can leave your hat on." *Priestly representations from Palmyra: Between visual genre, religious importance and social status*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2017, 418.

<sup>377</sup> Bryce, "Ancient Syria", 283.

exotic goods that were widely traded. When managing these worldwide business operations, the Palmyrenes were highly “hands-on” avoiding the employment of foreign agents or intermediaries wherever feasible along the routes to carry their goods.

As a result, along these paths, we discover colonies or outposts of the native Palmyrenes. Additionally, there were enclaves of Palmyrene traders or their agents in Babylon, as well as at Coptos in Egypt and Merv in contemporary Turkmenistan.

Additionally, traders from Palmyra frequently sailed the Red Sea for business. When we eventually come to the account of Zenobia, we will discover that this was a matter of considerable importance.

### **4.3 Zenobia – The Warrior Queen of the East<sup>378</sup>**

According to Arab sources, Zenobia had a different name than the well-known name which was Na'ilah. But in the Manichaean documents, her name was Queen Tadi. Also, in other sources, she was mentioned in the name of Nafsha. Moreover, the name Zenobia occurred in an inscription found in the city of Palmyra and it was translated as "sptymy'btzby, or Septimia Bat-Zabbai". But on the coins, in Palmyra, it was printed as Septimia Zenobia Sebaste."<sup>379</sup>

*“She had a brownish complexion, a dark color, with black eyes that were unusually lively. She had a god-like spirit and an exceptional charm. Her teeth were*

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<sup>378</sup> For further readings see David S. Powers, “*Demonizing Zenobia: The Legend of al-Zabbā’ In Islamic Sources*”, Brill, Leiden, 2011, 127–182; Haley Elizabeth Garwood, “*Zenobia*”, The Writers Block, Inc., Las Vegas, 2005; Judith Weingarten, “*The Chronicle of Zenobia: The Rebel Queen*”, Vanguard Press, New York, 2006; Miss O’Keeffe, “*Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra; A Narrative*”, Founded on History ... Volume 2, The Classics Press, USA, 2013; Muṣṭafā Ṭalās, “*Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyra*”, Tlass House, Damascus, Syria, 2000; Pat Southern, “*Empress Zenobia: Palmyra’s Rebel Queen*”, Bloomsbury Publishing, London Borough, 2008; Rex Winsbury, “*Zenobia of Palmyra: History, Myth, and the Neo-Classical Imagination*”, Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2010; Richard Stoneman, “*Palmyra, and Its Empire: Zenobia’s Revolt Against Rome*”, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1992; Trevor Bryce; Rees Birkett, “*Atlas of the Ancient Near East: From Prehistoric Times to the Roman Imperial Period*”, Routledge, , London, 2016; William Ware, “*Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra; a Tale of the Roman Empire in the Days of the Emperor Aurelian*,” Palala Press, Illinois, 2013.

<sup>379</sup> Pat Southern, “*Empress Zenobia Palmyra’s Rebel Queen*”, Pat Southern, London, 2008, 3.

*so white that many thought that they were pearls, not teeth. Her voice was imposing and manly.*"<sup>380</sup>

#### **4.3.1 The Family of Queen Zenobia**

Zenobia was born between the years 240 and 241, and although her Palmyrene name, Bat-Zabbai, means "the daughter of Zabbai," she preferred to go by the name Zenobia, which translates to "One whose life emanates from Zeus." Although Zenobia is Palmyrene but it is unclear where she came from. Palmyra had a mix of Arab and Aramaic tribes; thus, we are unsure of her exact place of birth. Other than what we know from Augustan History<sup>381</sup> and one inscription that has been discovered, there is no conclusive proof regarding her family. It mentions "*Bat-Zabbai, daughter of Antiochus*", but Antiochus' identity is not clear and his ancestry is not recorded. The Augustan History mentions that she is the decedent of the Seleucid King Antiochus who himself was the decedent of Cleopatra VII of Egypt. As evidence for this theory, Zenobia was described in Palmyrene as "*bt 'ntywkws*" which means the daughter of Antiochus, but nothing is known about her mother.<sup>382</sup> Although we cannot rely only on that, but it is the only source we have about her. her hobby as a child was hunting, and she spoke Egyptian, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic fluently in addition to her mother tongue Palmyrene also received an education appropriate for a noble girl. Zenobia followed the Palmyrene paganism, she worshipped several Semitic gods, and the head of the pantheon was Bel.<sup>383</sup>

#### **4.3.2 The Rise of Queen Zenobia**

At that time, Palmyra was a very significant region because it served as a bridge between the Roman Empire and the Sassanids (the Persian Empire), who were generating troubles for

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<sup>380</sup> J. - P. Callu et al., "*Histoire Auguste*", Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992.

<sup>381</sup> Southern, "*Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen*", 2.

<sup>382</sup> Southern, "*Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen*", 3-4.

<sup>383</sup> Southern, "*Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen*", 5-6.

the Romans since they were able to access the Eastern Trade into and out of Rome. This led Valerian, the Roman Emperor, to march against them but was ultimately defeated. Following this defeat, King Odaenathus went with his army to battle against the Persian Empire and succeeded in defeating them, which gave him a great benefit to the Romans and they made him the King of Kings and the Governor of all the East, but these glorified moments did not last due to Odaenathus assassination with his co-ruler and son from his first wife.

Vaballathus, Queen Zenobia's son, was the legitimate heir at that time, but he was too young to hold the throne. Therefore, Queen Zenobia assumed her duty as monarch at that time.<sup>384</sup> Her prior training, linguistic fluency, brilliance, and attractiveness contributed to the creation of a singular personality and an extraordinarily daring queen. When Queen Zenobia started her reign over the Kingdom of Palmyra, she was following her husband's path by maintaining a good political relationship with the Roman Empire; however, the unstable political situation and the Imperial Crisis in the Roman Empire were characterized by the incessant civil conflicts which led to the unstable economic situation. Due to the battles that the Roman generals had to fight to put down the conflicts, another outcome of the situation was the disentanglement of the Empire which broke into three separated regions: The Gallic Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Palmyrene Empire.<sup>385</sup>

This was the ideal opportunity for such a driven Queen to conquer Egypt with the assistance of her devoted and valiant generals in 269 AD. She continued to have her own vision of what her Kingdom should be in the future, though. The first step was to establish a strong base for her citizens and army, stabilize the internal situation in Palmyra, and build impregnable defenses to ensure the safety of her Kingdom. Once she had Egypt under her authority, she immediately marched to Asia Minor. This gave her more confidence, and she then proclaimed

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<sup>384</sup> Southern, *"Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen"*, 83.

<sup>385</sup> Southern, *"Empress Zenobia Palmyra's Rebel Queen"*, 83–86.

her independence from Rome. Her initial action in Asia Minor was traveling to *Bosra* with her General *Septemius Zabdas* (the capital of the Province of Arabia Petraea nowadays Petra). She ordered Septimius to take the city by force and destroy the *Zeus Hammon* Temple, but this was insufficient. Then, he marched to the Jordan Valley and after a confrontation with some resistance, he gained control of Arabia and Judaea. Serious action needed to be taken for Syria and with the support she already had in *Antioch*, Syria's capital city. She finally managed to take control and enclose it with her expanded Empire and subjugated it under her control.<sup>386</sup>

Her accomplishments extended beyond the realms of politics and warfare. Not only was she aspired to provide her society and people with trade, money, and expansion, but, since she was an educated woman, she exerted enormous efforts to provide them with the educational and cultural aspects. Based on it, she transformed her court into a center for learning, and it is said that during her rule, Palmyra was home to numerous intellectuals and sophists. She also worked on some outstanding restoration projects in Egypt, including the Colossus.<sup>387</sup>

In addition to altering the coins that featured Aurelian's likeness and issuing new tetra drachms in the names of *Vaballathus* and Zenobia on April 272 AD, she made the brave decision of claiming for herself and her son the same titles that her husband held from the Roman Empire, which she carried on after this. In addition to all of her previous acts, she expanded her Kingdom without consulting Rome and entered into commercial relations and discussions with the Sassanid Persians. She had control over an empire by 271 AD that extended from what is now Iraq to Turkey and Egypt.<sup>388</sup>

#### **4.3.3 Queen Zenobia's Fall and Final Days**

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<sup>386</sup> Nathanael J. Andrade, "*Zenobia: Shooting star of Palmyra*", Oxford University Press, New York, 2018, 143–147.

<sup>387</sup> Andrade, "*Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra: Rising Star*", 109–161.

<sup>388</sup> Andrade, "*Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra: Rising Star*", 109–161.



The preceding emperors did not pay enough attention to Queen Zenobia or, more likely, lacked the resources and army to march on her and stop her despite the fact, that her acts were regarded as difficult and seemingly revolutionary to the Roman Empire. But Emperor Aurelian, who merged his roles as a soldier and a politician by moving up the ranks of the Roman Army from an infantryman to a general, was fully aware of what she was doing. Despite the fact, that Queen Zenobia did not desire to directly engage with Rome in a military confrontation, her behavior toward the Roman Emperor clearly demonstrated the contrary. He did not write her a letter requesting an explanation or even surrender, and he did not wait for her to deliver an offer; instead, he just marched an army to the Palmyrene Empire.<sup>389</sup>

With a large force, Aurelian invaded Asia Minor and razed every city that supported the Queen and when Zenobia recognized what was waiting for her, she organized her army for a bloody conflict. Uncertainty surrounds Aurelian and Zenobia's prior interactions, but following the beginning of his campaign against her.

“A letter of his is still in existence, addressed to Mucapor, in which, without the wanted reserve of an emperor he confesses the difficulty of this war: "The Romans are saying that I am merely waging a war with a woman, just as if Zenobia alone and with her own forces only were fighting against me, and yet, as a matter of fact, there is as great a force of the enemy as if I had to make war against a man, while she, because of her fear and her sense of guilt, is a much baser foe. It cannot be told what a store of arrows is here, what great preparations for war, what a store of spears and stones; there is no section of the wall that is not held by two or three engines of war, and their machines can even hurl fire. Why say more? She fears like a woman and fights as one

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<sup>389</sup> Andrade, *Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra: "Epilogue: Fallen Star"*, 213–228.

who fears punishment. I believe, however, that the gods will truly bring aid to the Roman commonwealth, for they have never failed our endeavors”.<sup>390</sup>

*"From Aurelian, Emperor of the Roman world and recoverer of the East, to Zenobia and all others who are bound to her by the alliance in war. You should have done of your own free will what I now command in my letter. For I bid you surrender, promising that your lives shall be spared, and with the condition that you, Zenobia, together with your children shall dwell wherever I, acting in accordance with the wish of the most noble senate, shall appoint a place. Your jewels, your gold, your silver, your silks, your horses, your camels, you shall all hand over to the Roman treasury. As for the people of Palmyra, their rights shall be preserved. (Augustan History, Life of Aurelian 2.26.7)<sup>391</sup>."*

*"On receiving this letter Zenobia responded with more pride and insolence than befitted her fortunes, I suppose with a view to inspiring fear; for a copy of her letter, too, I have inserted." (Augustan History, Life of Aurelian 2.27.1)*

*"From Zenobia, Queen of the East, to Aurelian Augustus. None save yourself has ever demanded by letter what you now demand. Whatever must be accomplished in matters of war must be done by valour alone. You demand my surrender as though you were not aware that Cleopatra preferred to die a Queen rather than remain alive, however, high her rank. We shall not lack reinforcements from Persia, which we are even now expecting. On our side are the Saracens, on our side, too, the Armenians. 5 The brigands of Syria have defeated your army, Aurelian. What more need to be said? If those forces, then, which we are expecting from every side, shall arrive, you will, of a surety, lay aside that arrogance with which you now command my*

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<sup>390</sup> *Historia Augusta. The Life of Aurelian*, Vol.III, 1932, published in the Loeb Classical Library. 247.

<sup>391</sup> *Historia Augusta. The Life of Aurelian*, Vol.III, 1932, published in the Loeb Classical Library. 247.

*surrender, as though victorious on every side.*"<sup>392</sup> (*Augustan History, Life of Aurelian* 2.27.2–5).

The two armies finally engaged in combat outside of Emesa, but, unfortunately, Zenobia did not succeed in this war against Aurelian as she had anticipated and desired. After suffering the defeat, she went back to the city and prepared for a new conflict by strengthening the fortifications to withstand a strong defense. She also anticipated assistance from her allies and the Persians, but none came through.

She was defeated and was unable to continue with the struggle and she was forced to flee with her son on camels as she made her way into Persia. When Aurelian arrived in Palmyra in the interim and learned that she had already left, he was outraged and dispatched cavalry to find her. They captured her as a prisoner when she attempted to cross the Euphrates River. For Aurelian, capturing her was crucial because, to him, a woman defying the authority of the Roman Empire was the greatest possible offense. She was, therefore, taken before him in shackles and then returned to Rome.

The narratives concerning what happened to her after are diverse. As they were being carried back to Rome, she and her son perished in the Bosphorus. But, the Augustan History asserts that she landed in Rome without her kid. She was tried, found innocent, and then resided in a villa before being married to a Roman. According to the *Historia Augusta*, she was led through the streets of Rome while wearing gold chains and carrying a heavy load of jewels during Aurelian's triumphal procession. After that, she was set free and granted a mansion outside of Rome where she "lived her dying days in peace and luxury.

*"But to return to my undertaking: despite all this, there arose a terrible uproar among all the soldiers, who demanded Zenobia for punishment. Aurelian,*

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<sup>392</sup> *Historia Augusta. The Life of Aurelian*, Vol.III, 1932, published in the Loeb Classical Library, 249.

*however, deeming it improper that a woman should be put to death, killed many who had advised her to begin and prepare and wage the war, but the woman he saved for his triumph, wishing to show her to the eyes of the Roman people. It was regarded as a cruel thing that Longinus the philosopher<sup>106</sup> should have been among those who were killed. He, it is said, was employed by Zenobia as her teacher in Greek letters, and Aurelian is said to have slain him because he was told that that over-proud letter of hers had been dictated in accord with his counsel, although, in fact, it was composed in the Syrian tongue”.*<sup>393</sup> (*Augustan History, Life of Aurelian* 2.30.1–3).

#### **4.4 The Language of Palmyra**

The language we refer to as Palmyrene is an adaptation of Aramaic that incorporates Arabic words and phrases (In Palmyra, there is no further evidence of the written Arabic Language). The city has 3,000 Palmyrene-language inscriptions that have been discovered so far; the earliest dating to 44 BC and the most recent to 272 AD. However, the spread of Palmyrene inscriptions is significantly wider. While some were found on the west in Numidia, Dacia, and far-northern Britain, some were found as far east as the Euphrates. They, undoubtedly, suggest the presence of Palmyrene battalions in local Roman military garrisons by showing up in these areas.<sup>394</sup>

The governmental system of the city was reportedly set up in the Greek Language, with the establishment of an assembly known as a deliberative council known as a boule. Along with Palmyrene terminology, Greek and Latin nomenclature were commonly utilized.<sup>395</sup> However, the language most often heard in the city's streets, but the main thoroughfares were Aramaic.

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<sup>393</sup> *Historia Augusta. The Life of Aurelian*, Vol.III, 1932, published in the Loeb Classical Library, 253.

<sup>394</sup> Bryce, “*Ancient Syria*”, 280-281.

<sup>395</sup> Bryce, “*Ancient Syria*”, 280.

At least half of the population, perhaps more, of the city was likely made up of people of Arabic descent.

In addition to our knowledge about their cults and rituals, we may infer this information from the names of some of their deities and from the proper names of the people who worship them. They continued to organize their society along tribal lines, indicating that their ancestors were likely nomadic, desert nomads, who later embraced a sedentary lifestyle and amassed a fortune as caravaneers.<sup>396</sup>

Nevertheless, Aramaic, the most widespread language in the Near Eastern regions starting from the Achaemenid era to the era of the Seleucid and Roman Empires, was the language that appeared most frequently in the city's official written documents. The language, which we consider and refer to as Palmyrene, is an adaptation of Aramaic that incorporates Arabic words and phrases.

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<sup>396</sup> Bryce, "*Ancient Syria*", 280.

### Early Aramaic alphabet

The Early Aramaic alphabet was developed sometime during the late 10th or early 9th century BC and replaced Assyrian cuneiform as the main writing system of the Assyrian empire.

𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊
kāph	yudh	ṭēth	ḥēth	zain	waw	hē	dālath	gāmal	bēth	ālah
k	y	ṭ	ḥ	z	w	h	d	g	b	ʾ
𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕
tau	shin	rēsh	qoph	ṣādhē	pē	ʿē	semkath	nun	mim	lāmadh
t	sh	r	q	ṣ	p	ʿ	s	n	m	l

### Imperial Aramaic alphabet

This version of the Aramaic alphabet dates from the 5th century BC and was used to write Imperial Aramaic, the standardised and official language of the Archaemenid Empire. It was adapted to write Hebrew during the 5th century BC, and the modern version shown below is still used to write Neo-Aramaic dialects.

𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊
kāph	yudh	ṭēth	ḥēth	zain	waw	hē	dālath	gāmal	bēth	ālah
[k/x]	[j/i/e:]	[tʰ]	[h]	[z]	[w/o/u:]	[h]	[d/ð]	[g/ɣ]	[b/v]	[ʔ/a/e:]
𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕
tau	shin	rēsh	qoph	ṣādhē	pē	ʿē	semkath	nun	mim	lāmadh
[t/θ]	[ʃ]	[r]	[q]	[sʰ]	[p/f]	[ʕ]	[s]	[n]	[m]	[l]

### Square script for Aramaic

𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊
kaph	yudh	ṭet	ḥet	zayin	waw	he	dalat	gammal	beth	ʾalah
[k]	[j]	[tʰ]	[h/x]	[z]	[w]	[h]	[d]	[g]	[b]	[ʔ]
𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕
taw	shin	resh	qoph	ṣadhe	pe	ʾayin	semkath	nun	mim	lammadh
[t]	[ʃ]	[r]	[q]	[sʰ]	[p]	[ʕ]	[s]	[n]	[m]	[l]

Figure 14: The Aramaic Alphabet.<sup>397</sup>

<sup>397</sup> <https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/517702919644603282/>. (Downloaded: 05.06.2022)



## 4.5 Religious Life in Palmyra

Syria, like the other entities in the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt, was religiously a place of passion and the colorful manifestations of which either enthralled or scandalized the rest of the Empire. But the ancient beliefs about the hereafter were not purely religious; the cult of the gods and the cult of the dead were two distinct entities. In Palmyra, Syrian exuberance must have existed, such as haunting music, priests who sliced their arms or castrated themselves, transvestites, and sacred courtesans but, unfortunately, our documentation from Palmyra, while extensive, makes no mention of this.

The documentation from Palmyra states a rich pantheon, with amazing vestiges of very ancient mythology as well as extremely "contemporary" theological musings about how Syrian gods and those of the dominant Greek religion should be placed on the same level. Very various gods coexisted happily in paganism. Palmyra is said to have sixty different divinities who were not competitors: clan gods, the local god (Bel) who ruled over the city, and foreign divinities such as Isis. The most revered were Bel and Baalshamin, the "Lord of Heaven" and the god of storms and rain, who were beloved by Syrian farmers and herders.<sup>399</sup>

Palmyra's religion was no different from the other entities that inhabited the Arabian Peninsula during the Hellenistic Roman period. It was polytheistic religion,<sup>400</sup> and its pantheon

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<sup>399</sup> Paul Veyne, "*Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*", The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2017, 69–71.

<sup>400</sup> Ancient polytheism as we know it is diametrically opposed to the monotheistic creeds that have shaped our idea of religion. For starters, there was no ideology. People trusted what previous generations had passed down to them but were unconcerned about the disparities they would encounter when confronted with the views of others. All were accepted as the truth, even though they were conflicting. Many varieties, as reported by different authors, were all admitted in the best-known sphere of Greek mythology, free for anybody to select and choose what he wished. There was no revelation or binding authority for everyone. Second, worship entailed following time-honoured customs. These rites were followed by prayers, which primarily praised the powers and virtues of a particular god. They were carried out by appointed individuals in the name of the community or individually. Making a sacrifice was central to religious rituals and was thought to ensure the gods' goodwill if done correctly. Third, every sanctuary, city, and tribe had its divine patrons worshipped in predetermined ways. People had favourites among the many divine forces known in the tradition and they were inclined to focus their attention on them, but their attitude was not exclusive. The same was true for other people's beliefs. There were no false gods, merely foreign gods who might be contacted as needed. (Gawlikowski, *Tadmor – Palmyra*, 176).



was rich in different powerful gods and goddesses, with different functions, vocations, and powers. Furthermore, each of them had their own temple and religious practices separately or formed a group together. Thousands of inscriptions<sup>401</sup> were discovered throughout the city's excavations, and its pantheon contained around sixty gods and goddesses, many of whom were brought from neighboring nations such as North Arabia, Babylon, and Egypt; for example, worshipping the sun god Šamš which is originally an Arabian god.

The city's religious life has become an obvious focus of scholarly activities due to the presence of over a dozen major temples and shrines, including the massive Temple of Bel which is one of the best reconstructed religious buildings in Syria, besides the discovery and location of over 2,000 inscriptions (many bilinguals, some even trilingual) as well as thousands of reliefs of religious significance.

On one hand, the Aramaean, the Mesopotamian, the Arab and even the Persian or the Egyptian gods arrived at Palmyra and were warmly received. The Palmyrenes were unconcerned about the origins of their ancestral gods; the descendants of an ancient native family included the Egyptian Isis among them. There was one exception that Palmyra did not import any Greek or Roman gods. On the other hand, the presence of Greek gods in Palmyra was due to translation rather than importation. When the Palmyrenes wrote in Greek, they called their God *Bel* "*Zeus*".<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> The inscriptions from Palmyra are published in different works and corpuses: e.g. *CIS=Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*. <https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AWPAIPColl>, this is one of the websites where we can find many inscriptions from Palmyra; <https://journals.openedition.org/syria/index.html>; haled Al-As'ad, Michal Gawlikowski et Jean-Baptiste Yon, "Aramaic Inscriptions in the Palmyra Museum," *Syria*, 89 (2012), 163–183; Petrantoni, Giuseppe. *Corpus of Nabataean Aramaic-Greek Inscriptions*. Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2021; Daniela Rošková. "*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum-minulost', prítomnost' a budúcnost' zbierky latinských nápisov*." *Studia Bibliographica Poseniensia* (2017); P. W. M. Freeman, "*Mommsen, Hübner, Haverfield, Watkin and Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum vol. vii*." *Journal of the History of Collections* 26, no. 3 (2014): 423–437; Jeremy. Hutton, "*The First Palmyrene Aramaic Inscription Discovered at Porolissum (MJIAZ CC 799/2002)*." *ACTA MVSEI Porolissensis* 2019; Han Jw, Drijvers, and John F. Healey. "*The Language of the Inscriptions*." In *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osroene*, pp. 21–34. Brill, 1999; Jeremy M. Hutton, Atwood Preston L., Heyn Maura K., et al. "*Two Palmyrene Inscriptions in the Collection of the Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA: PAT 0960 and 1773*." *Maarav* 20, no. 2 (2013): 135–161.

<sup>402</sup> Veyne, *Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*, 76–77.

In this section, I will discuss the supreme and primary gods and goddesses worshiped in the Palmyrene society in order to have a better understanding of their mentality by examining what their intellectual minds produced and how they regarded their world.

- *Bel:*

Under the influence of the Mesopotamian religion of *Bel Marduk*, the name of the god *Bol*<sup>403</sup> of pre-Hellenistic Palmyra was altered to *Bel*. Since the element *Bol* frequently appears in personal names like *Zabdibol*, *Borrefa*, and *Gaddibol*, the transition must have occurred recently. Due to the lack of information about the cult of *Bel* at Palmyra, historians are obliged to piece together archaeological remains from various sources. However, according to the inscriptions, a divine trio composed of *Bel*, *Yarhibol*, and *Aglibol*, whose cult was practiced in the city at least since AD. 32, was worshipped there. The pedestal of a statue discovered in the temple of *Bel* in 1932 carries the following significant inscription:

1. byrḥ tšry šnt 357
2. šlm' dnh dy lšmš br tybwl
3. br škybl dy mn bny kmr' dy
4. ḥnk hykl' dy bl wyrḥbwl
5. w'glbwl 'lhy' bqdšwhy
6. ywm štt' bnysn šnt 343
7. dy 'qymw lh bnwhy lyqrh<sup>404</sup>

(Inv. IX, I.)

**Translation:** *In the month of Tishri, the year 357 (October, AD. 45). This is the statue of Lishamsh son of Taibbol son of Shokaibel of the Bene Komare who dedicated*

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<sup>403</sup> Veyne, “*Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*”, 71.

<sup>404</sup> Javier Teixidor, “*The Pantheon of Palmyra*”, Brill, Leiden, 1979, 1

*the Temple of Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol, the gods, on the day of their feast, the sixth day of Nisan, in the year 343 (April 6, AD. 32). His children erected the statue in his honor.*<sup>405</sup>

The cult of the trinity of Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol appears to have emerged from theological hypothesizing to which political entities added their considerable influence. *Yarhibol* and Aglibol, two ancestors of the Oasis gods, were made into his acolytes and stood in for the Sun God and the Moon God, respectively. Bel granted a cosmic role in the city's pantheon 1st millennium BC.

- *Yarhibol* ("idol of the spring"):<sup>406</sup>

*Yarhibol* was the patron of Palmyra's Efca Spring. He must have fulfilled this position since the Amorites, the area's first known inhabitants, settled in the spring's vicinity. According to an inscription on a gypsum relief excavated in Dura-Europos, *Yarhibol* was the spring's idol: (mšb' dy 'yn' "The one who answers"). *Yarhibol* was dressed in military garb and stood with his right hand raised to hold a lance and his left hand gripping the hilt of a sword. The god wears a crescent on his shoulders; however, this symbol should not be used to conclude that *Yarhibol* was a lunar god. *Yarhibol's* presence in Palmyra's civic life may have been tainted by his elevation to the Palmyrene pantheon's official triad. *Yarhibol* symbolized the sun in Bel's triad, which was a cosmic divinity. Nonetheless, the writings, in contrast to artistic portrayals of the god, highlight his divine position as judge. While the reliefs depict *Yarhibol* to the right of Bel along with *Aglibol* who stands for the moon when he is on the opposite side of *Bel*. The inscriptions continuously describe *Yarhibol's* active involvement in the daily lives of the residents. Throughout the city's history, his civic responsibilities had never been decreased.

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<sup>405</sup> Teixidor, "The Pantheon of Palmyra", 1.

<sup>406</sup> Gawlikowski, "Tadmor – Palmyra", 177.

- *Aglibol* ("The Moon") and *Malakbel* ("Bel's Messenger").<sup>407</sup>

The only documented aspect of *Aglibol's* moon god ("calf of Bol")<sup>408</sup> cult is that he was worshipped with *Malakbel* at a Palmyra sanctuary known as "the Holy Garden". However, the varied pronunciations of the element *Baal* in *Aglibol* and *Malakbel* plainly suggest that each deity's original cult may be traced back to a separate environment. Their cults must have fused for reasons that appear to be related to nature's cyclical cycle. This is implied by the temple's name as well as the way the two gods are depicted in the artwork. *Aglibol* and *Malakbel* were indeed committed to vegetation and flock welfare, making their cult more appropriate to the mores of settled tribes than nomads. Their friendship can be interpreted as an example of Phoenician and Aramaic influences on Palmyra. In the Southern Levant sanctuaries, we find examples of affiliation between gods, such as *Eshmun* and *Melqart* or *Reshef* and *Mukal* in Cyprus; *Astarte* and *Tanit* at Sarepta in Phoenicia; *Bel* and *Nebo* at *Daskyleion* or among the Syriac-speaking communities of Edessa and Sahar and *Shamash* at Nerab.

The three gods mentioned previously formed a trinity as *Bel* with one god on his right and the other on his left. The moon deity, *Aglibol*, wears a moon disc on his head, while *Yarhibol* wears a sun disc. They did not display the deity of the sun and the god of the moon in this triad, but instead, they function as bearers of the double astral emblem that denotes "forever" all around the empire. The moon and the sun or allegories of twilight and dawn encircled individuals who were promised endless life. Surprisingly, *Malakbel* was a solar figure after *Yarhibol*. Other inscriptions refer to a god known as *Shamash* or *Sun*. At the same time, all three embodied the great light. This startling result can only to be explained by the fact that they were worshipped by people from various

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<sup>407</sup> Gawlikowski, *Tadmor – Palmyra*, 177.

<sup>408</sup> Veyne, *Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*, 72.

origins, each with their own traditions. The fact that such a thing was feasible, demonstrates how loosely these many beliefs were linked. There was no Palmyrene religion, no universally accepted system, and simply several cults. No cult was exclusive, and they all accepted one another.<sup>409</sup>

- *Ba'alshamīn*:

The semi-nomadic people who lived in the Syrian desert and relied on rain for survival worshipped *Ba'alshamīn* in particular. These two characteristics of a cosmopolitan and a fertility god are combined in the god's imagery. He is typically seen wearing a long mantle and he occasionally carries a globe, a bouquet of fruit and corn, or thunderbolts in his hand.

In contrast to *Bel*, *Ba'alshamīn* has a beard making him the sole bearded god in the whole Palmyrene pantheon. He occasionally wears a calathus or a crown. The inscriptions that bear his name combine the two qualities of the god by referring to him as "Lord of the World," or *Zeus Hysistos* in Greek, as well as "kind and rewarding," or "he who hears petitions."

Up until the end of Palmyra's greatest era of wealth, the Lord of Heaven's cult persisted, and after that, his Temple evolved into a Christian church. Although there are remnants of *Ba'alshamīn* worship in the city's western section, his cult remained confined to his temple.

*Bel* and *Ba'alshamīn* have a formal resemblance according to the organization of a trio. In addition to *Malakbel* as the sun god and *Aglibol* as the moon god, *Bel* and *Ba'alshamīn* also had their own trio. It can be inferred that the establishment of the triad of *Ba'alshamīn* was the result of both theological and astrological inquiry because these

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<sup>409</sup> Gawlikowski, "Tadmor – Palmyra", 177.

holy brethren appear to have been historically well-established in the religion of Palmyra and had their own sanctuary, a sacred grove. *Aglibol*, the moon, was positioned to the right of Ba'alshamīn and Malakbel in the second triad, whereas *Aglibol* was always to the left of *Bel*.

It should be noted that *Al-lāth* frequently travels with Ba'alshamīn. The Ma'zin ("Goat-herders")<sup>410</sup> tribe offered particular adoration to both deities. Although the two gods are also found together in the Palmyrene, both Ba'alshamīn and *Al-lāth* had a worship center in the western part of the city.<sup>411</sup>

- Nabu:

A Babylonian deity who ascended from obscurity to prominence as one of the most significant Babylonian deities during the course of Mesopotamian history. Since the seventh century BC, the cult of Nabu has been documented among the Aramaic-speaking inhabitants of Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia. Long after the Common Era, the god was quite popular in these places, especially in northern Syria. It is worth noting that, in keeping with Nabu's rising prominence throughout the Neo-Babylonian period, Syrian sources frequently mention *Nabu* before *Bel*. *Nabu* and *Bel* were the prime gods of Edessa, according to the *Doctrina Addai*, the *Acts of Sharbel*, and *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Fall of the Idols*. Nabu was a significant deity in Palmyra, where his name appears in a variety of personal names. It was formerly assumed that the god Nabu was extremely popular in Hellenistic Palmyra and that his cult died out in the Common Era, but this idea has been proved to be false by the recent identification of a prime Temple as the sanctuary of *Nabu*.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Gawlikowski, "Tadmor – Palmyra", 179.

<sup>411</sup> H.J. W. Drijvers, "The Religion of Palmyra, Iconography OF Religions", Brill, Leiden, 1976, 14–20.

<sup>412</sup> Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos*, 128–130.

- *Al-lāt* (“the virgin warrior”):<sup>413</sup>

*Al-lāt* arrived in Palmyra in the first century BC<sup>414</sup> and was honoured with a statue at a tiny shrine. Surprisingly, she was not yet depicted as an armed goddess, but as a queen, sat on her throne flanked by lions and with a lengthy scepter, much like *Bel* or *Ba‘alshamīn* power insignia. Her sanctuary in Palmyra (near the temple of *Ba‘alshamīn*) adds a unique flavor to the city's western sector, where Arab tribes settled in the second century BC. The Temple of *Al-lāt* must have served as a religious center for the Arab tribes. The goddess was entitled "*Lady of the Temple*" (*mrt byt*). But she was not alone in the sanctuary, but other gods, such as *Shamash* and *Rahim* (*rhm*), were adored alongside her.

This religious concept of a collegium of deities may be of Phoenician or Aramaic origin. In the Phoenician pantheons, not only the notion of a community of gods but the apparition of a deity was surrounded by a swarm of holy beings—"Dominus in splendorous Sanctorum"—are known. The worship of these deities must have resulted in the religious and political union of Arab tribes. It may have aimed to boost the tribes' prestige in the oasis.

The cult of *Al-lāt* is also mentioned early in the Hauran. A Nabataean inscription from Salḥad in 56 AD recounts the construction of a temple to *Al-lāt* in the following terms:

1. dnh byt' dy bnh rwḥw br mlkw br 'klbw br  
rwḥw l'lt 'lhthm
2. dy bṣlḥd wdy nṣb rwḥw br qṣyw 'm rwḥw  
dnh dy 'l'

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<sup>413</sup> Veyne, "*Palmyra: An Irreplaceable Treasure*", 77.

<sup>414</sup> Gawlikowski, "*Tadmor – Palmyra*", 180.

3. byrḥ 'b šnt 'sr wšb' lmnkw mlk nbṭw br ḥrtt  
mlk nbṭw [r]ḥm 'mh<sup>415</sup>

**Translation:** *This is the temple that Rawahu son of Maliku son of Aklabu son of Rawahu built for Allāt, their goddess, who is in Salḥad and whose (cult) Rawahu son of Qaṣiu, the great-grandfather of the Rawahu, had established (there). In the month Ab, the seventeenth year of Maliku, king of the Nabataeans son of Haretat, king of the Nabataeans, lover of his people.*<sup>416</sup>

Needless to say, Arab nomads and tribesmen were not always well-versed in Greek mythology. Their imagination was aroused by the provincial adaptations of Greek statues that abound in the Ḥawran region in contemporary Syria's south. Many used to move between the desert and the sowed every year. The so-called Safaitic inscriptions, which are graffiti scratched on rocks by idle shepherds, are found in large numbers throughout Arabia, Jordan, and the south of Syria, including some reported in the Palmyra region.

When these inscriptions take the form of prayers, they frequently invoke *Al-lāt* whom the tribesmen invoked for protection from their enemy as well as loot for themselves; these are, of course, two sides of the same coin. It's no surprise that they imagined their deity as a warrior.

As *Al-lāt* was Athena and *Arsu* was *Ares*, the Babylonian Nabu was transformed into Apollo. Sometimes the native name was simply written, as in "*Aglibolos* and *Malachbelos*," indicating that they were native.

There is no need to list the other deities found in Palmyra, about which little can be spoken. Some came from Babylonia, others from Phoenicia, but only a few from the ancient world: *Herakles*, *Nemesis*, and *Isis*. In other circumstances, a Greek god's name is simply used to refer to a local deity, frequently in a bilingual book.

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<sup>415</sup> Teixidor, "The Pantheon of Palmyra", 55.

<sup>416</sup> Teixidor, "The Pantheon of Palmyra", 55.



### 3.6 The Women's Role in the Religion of Palmyra

The inscriptions mentioning women in Palmyra are mostly either funerary epitaphs added to relief busts or family groups or written on stone tablets originally placed onto the walls of the monumental tombs. The majority of these inscriptions contained names as well as the women's relations and status in their families. The third and final group of inscriptions are honorific and dedicatory texts.

Honorific and Dedicatory Inscriptions: Six honorific inscriptions, including PAT 0293,<sup>417</sup> which is dedicated to Zenobia, make up the smallest collection of texts among the specified categories together with eleven dedicatory texts. PAT 0315<sup>418</sup> is the oldest honorific inscription still in existence. It was presented in 17 BC by two males, maybe her sons and the Bani Komara tribe, and is carved on the base of a statue of a lady named 'Ateim.

PAT 0293:<sup>419</sup>

Greek:

1. Σεπτιμίαν Ζηνοβίαν τήν λαμ
2. Προτάτην εύσεβῆ βασίλισσαν
3. Σεπτίμιοι Ζαβδας ό μέγας στρα
4. Τηλάτης καί Ζαββαίος ό κράτιστοι, τήν
5. Στρατηλάτης, οί κράτιστοι, τήν
6. Δέσποιναν, ἔτους βπφ', μηνεί Λώφ

Palmyrene:

1. šlmt spṭmy' Btzby nhyrṭ' wzdqṭ[']
2. mlkt' spṭmyw' zbd' zbd' rb ḥyl'

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<sup>417</sup> D. R. Hillers and E. Cussini, "Palmyrene Aramaic Texts", Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1996, 70.

<sup>418</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "Palmyrene Aramaic Texts", 74.

<sup>419</sup> Prov: Palmyra, Great Colonnade. Loc: Palmyra. In situ. Honorific, On Column. Bib: HNE 462 a. 15; XXXVIII, 4, INV 3 20; RosAH 17. 271 A.D.

3. rb' wzby rb hyl' dy tdmwr qrtstw'
4. 'qym lmrthwn byrh 'b dy šnt 5.100+80+2

**Translation:** *This statue was offered by Sptmya and Zadqat the queens, the queen Sptmya, the wife of Zbad the son of Rab Haylaa, Rabaa and Zby the elder<sup>420</sup> of Hayla, which lived / ruled in Tadmor, and this statue was held for Marthwn in the Abb month “August” in the year 5.100+80+2.*

PAT 0315<sup>421</sup>:

1. šlmt' dh dy 't'm b[rt...]
2. 'wšy 'tt bwlh' [br...]
3. dy 'qym lh 'glbwl w? [mlkbl]
4. 80+10+4

**Translation:** *This statue was erected by Ataam the daughter of [...], Awshay, the wife of Bwlḥaa the son of [...] which was erected and offered for the god Aglibol and the god Malakbel, in the year 80+10+4.<sup>422</sup>*

The Other texts on the column, PAT 1346,<sup>423</sup> are still not dated: “[Statue of . . .] daughter of Makkay, or [(son of) Ummabi, which] was made for her by Ma'anay.

PAT

1346<sup>424</sup>

(A)<sup>425</sup>

1. [šlmt...] ' brt mqy

<sup>420</sup> It may have two meanings in this case, it's either the grandfather of Hayla or the great God of Hayla.

<sup>421</sup> Prov: Palmyra, re-employed in Byzantine church. Loc: Palmyra. Honorific. On the door lintel. Bib: RES 2152; Herzig and Schimidt - colinet 91 p. 68.

<sup>422</sup> The translation was done by me.

<sup>423</sup> Hillers and Cussini, “*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*”, 198.

<sup>424</sup> Prov: Palmyra, E of the Village. Loc: Palmyra, A 454. Honorific. On column. Bib: Drawing; IP 45; Ber 36 5; Ded p 325.

<sup>425</sup> The translation was done by me.

2. [ʾmby dy] ʾbd lh mʿ

(B)<sup>426</sup>

1. šlmt hgr brt mqy

2. ʾmby dy ʾbd lh mʿny

(C)

1. ʾhwh<sup>427</sup>

**Translation:** (A): [the statue] A the daughter of Many

*Which was built for him*

(B): the statue of Hager the daughter of Many

*Which was built for the god Maan by him*

(C): his brother.

Statue of Hagar, daughter of Makkay, or (son of) Ummabi, which was made for her by Maʿanay. PAT 0300<sup>428</sup> dated AD 179”, is a bilingual Greek-Aramaic text on a column in the Transversal Colonnade, originally accompanying the statue of Martay, offered to her memory by her husband “Shuraiku”.

PAT 0300:<sup>429</sup>

Palmyrene:

1. šlmtʾ dnh dy mrty brt yd[ʾ br whblt]

2. br šm ʾwn dy ʾqym lh šryk? [w bʾlh btr]

3. dy mytt lyqrh byrh ʾdr š[nt 4.100+]

4. 80+100

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<sup>426</sup> The translation was done by me.

<sup>427</sup> The translation was done by me.

<sup>428</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 71.

<sup>429</sup> *Prov: Palmyra*, Transversal Colonnade. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Honorific. On column console. Bib: Inv. 5 5.

**Translation:** *This stele/statue was erected for Marty<sup>430</sup> the daughter of Yadaa son of Waheblat, and son of sham which was erected to help in the service/rituals of the passing of his daughter and in honor of her god, in the month of Adar (March) of the year 4.100 + 80 + 100.<sup>431</sup>*

According to numerous inscriptions discovered in the temples of Palmyra, the Palmyrene women were able to offer sacrifices and offerings in the temples of their gods, as well as they had the right to offer columns or ex-voto inscriptions to gods. This indicates that women were once on par with men, at least in this particular religious role, which is common with the Nabataean women.

Only eight of the numerous examples of the dedicatory inscriptions are dated, but as I demonstrated above, women in Palmyra were able to present columns or ex-voto inscriptions to the gods.<sup>432</sup>

- Three women—‘Attay, Shabhay, and ‘Ate, daughters of Shahra and Firdush—offer two columns to the deity Baalshamin in accordance with PAT 0167,<sup>433</sup> which dates to AD 23.

PAT 0167: <sup>434</sup>

1. byrh knwn šnt 3.100+20+10+5
2. qrbw 'tw wšbh'y bnt šhr'
3. w't' brt brdš 'mwdy' 'ln
4. tryhwn lb' lšmyn 'lh' 'tb'
5. 'l hyyhn whyy bnyhn w' hyhn

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<sup>430</sup> This personal name means the lady of the temple, which may indicate that this woman was responsible or somehow managing or maybe a priestess in the temple.

<sup>431</sup> In this inscription we notice that the dating of the inscription came at the end of the inscription, not at the beginning as in the other inscriptions.

<sup>432</sup> Cussini, “*Beyond the Spindle: Investigating the Role of Palmyrene Women*”, 29.

<sup>433</sup> Hillers and Cussini, “*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*”, 45.

<sup>434</sup> Prov: Palmyra, Temple of Baalshamin, re-employed. Loc: Palmyra, Museum, exc no. 283. Dedicatory. On column drum. Bib: Dunant 71 pl IV, 2. /23 AD.

**Translation:** *In the month Kanun (November), in the year 3.100+20+20+5, Atw and Shabhy the daughters of šhraa, and Atteen, the daughters of Perdesch offered to erect two columns for their good and generous god Ba'alshamīn, for their life and the life of their children, and the life of their brother.*<sup>435</sup>

- Amattallat, the wife of Belhazay and the daughter of Barea, presented a column to Baalshamin in PAT 0168,<sup>436</sup> AD 52. In the incidents that followed, women-built altars for the Unknown God.

PAT 0168:<sup>437</sup>

1. byrḥ ṭbt šnt 3.100+60+3
2. 'md' dnh qrbt 'mtlt b[r]t
3. br' be 'tntn dy mn bnt myt'
4. 'tt tym' br blḥzy br zbdl dy
5. Mn pḥd bny m'zyn lb'lsmn 'lh'
6. ṭb' wškr' 'l ḥyyh wḥyy bnyh
7. w'ḥyh

**Translation:** *Amtallat, daughter of Baraa, son of Atenatan, of Bene Mita, wife of Taima, son of Belhazai, son of Zabdibel, of the tribe Bene Mazin, offered this column to Baalshamin, the Good and Bountiful deity, for the lives of herself and her sons and her brother (s).*<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> The translation was done by me.

<sup>436</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 45.

<sup>437</sup> Prov: Palmyra, Temple of Baalshamin, re-employed. Loc: Palmyra, Museum, exc no. 277. Dedicatory. On column drum. Bib: Dunant 71 I V, 3.1 52 AD.

<sup>438</sup> The translation of this inscription was done by me.

- Tidal freedwoman of Bassos, PAT 1434<sup>439</sup> of A.D 165; PAT 0352 <sup>440</sup> of A.D 178 (Hannate).
- PAT 0360<sup>441</sup> of A.D 207 (for "her life and the life of her daughter," Makki, the daughter of Oga).
- PAT 0373 A.D 230 (Batzubaida, daughter of Gaddarsu, for herself and her spouse Ubaidu); PAT 0366<sup>442</sup> of A.D 220 (Domnina, daughter of Yadibel).
- PAT 0356,<sup>443</sup> lost date (Ala, daughter of Zubaida). The remaining documents were either not dated, or the date formula is no longer available.
- PAT 0065,<sup>444</sup> Greek-Palmyrene, presented to the Unidentified God by Akamat, the daughter of Male, "... there sends gratitude Daughter of [Male, Son of E] lahbel called to him in darkness.

Two distinct reliefs associated with the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Al-Lāt show groups of ladies, each with hands lifted to chin level and clasped tightly to the breast. There is no evidence that the raised arm is connected to religious observance in the funeral world. The "palm out" gesture in which the woman raises her right hand with the palm pointing outward, is another gesture frequently seen in funeral portraits of women. Both Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian religious contexts are familiar with the gesture as a sign of adoration.

The gesture appears to have been connected to religious activity in Palmyra as evidenced by depictions of hands alone held in this manner on votive altars and a fragmentary

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<sup>439</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 211; *Prov: Palmyra. Loc:*" Palmyra, A 525. Dedicatory. On altar. Bib: pl I.

<sup>440</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 211; *Prov: Palmyra. Loc:*" Palmyra Museum. Dedicatory. On altar.

<sup>441</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 80; *Prov: Palmyra. Loc:*" Strassburg, University Library. Dedicatory. On altar. Bib: HNE p 475 c. 6XL, 3; RES 391.

<sup>442</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 81; *Prov: Palmyra. Loc:*" Istanbul Arkeoloji Muzesi, 3703 T. On altar / 220 A.D.

<sup>443</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 80; *Prov: Palmyra, Loc:*" Palmyra, A 249. Dedicatory. On Altar. Bib: Inv. 11 23 pl XIII.

<sup>444</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 33; *Prov: Palmyra. Loc:*" *Palmyra*, Museum, 519. Dedicatory. On stone plaque. Bib: Ingholt 35 pl XIX 2; p 182; BMB 55 p 43 (16). N. D.

relief that features a figure of a woman in a sacrifice scenario with her right-hand outstretched palm outwards. This motion is most likely an allusion to the woman's involvement in sacerdotal functions in Palmyrene funeral imagery.

In Palmyra, there are many inscriptions and findings that support the theory of “women had a role in the Palmyrene religion; for instance, Euergetism was primarily concerned with the construction of religious structures or sections of religious structures. Those certain Palmyrene inscriptions are ambiguous in nature; they may be honorary inscriptions, but they also give us insights into the religious realm. One of the most intriguing inscriptions mentions Thomallachis, the daughter of Addoudanos (Haddudan), for whom the Bene Khonites erected a statue in the Temple of Bel is:

1. Θομαλλαχίς τοῦ Ἀδδουδανου τοῦ  
    Ἰαριβωλεου[ς].
2. τοῦ Ἀδδουδαν τοῦ Φιρμωνος οἱ
3. ἀπ( ) φυλῆς Χωνειτῶν Τειμῆς ἔνε-
4. κε( ) φειλοτειμησαμένην
5. δηνάρ( ) α δισχεῖλια πεντα-
6. κόσια εἰς οἰκοδομὴν βα-
7. λανείου Ἀγιλβου (sic) καί
8. Μαλαχιβηλου θεῶν
9. ἔτους γ(ρ)υ Λώου<sup>445</sup>

**Translation:** *Thomallachis (daughter of) Haddudan, (son of) Yarhibol, (son of) Haddudan, (son of) Firman, those of the tribe of the Khonites in her honor. She*

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<sup>445</sup> Klaver, “*The Participation of Palmyrene Women in the Religious Life of the City*”, 158; The inscriptions were found in the literature in the transcript form, not all the inscriptions were bilingual to have them with the Greek inscriptions, also it was not possible to find them in their original language.

*had presented 2500 denarii towards the building of the bath of the gods 'Aglibol and Malak be! Year 493 August (182 AD)7 Thomallachis donated 2500 denarii towards the building of the baths of the gods Aglibol and Malakbel and she received her statue in honor of this gift.<sup>446</sup>*

Thomallachis was linked to Addoudanos Firman, a member of the Bene Komare, a tribe affiliated with the gods Aglibol and Malakbel; therefore, her offerings were both evidence of euenergy and devoutness. The woman was most likely the heir to her family's wealth. In another inscription, she is referred to as “daughter of Firman (*bat-firmon*)”, which could be a Palmyrene expression used when a household had only a female heir.

Thus, it appears that Thomallachis was responsible for maintaining her family's presence in the public and religious spheres. Thomallachis was not the only lady who contributed to the construction of religious structures. A dedicatory inscription from 23 AD cites many benefactresses: Attai and Shebhai, daughters of Shahra, and Atta, daughter of Perdes, offered two columns in the temple of Baalshamin for the lives of themselves, their sons, and their brothers.

1. byrḥ knwn šnt 3.100+20+10+5
2. qrbw 'ty wšbh̄y bnt šhr'
3. w't' brt prdš 'mwdy' 'ln
4. tryhwn lb' lšmyn 'lh' ṭb'
5. 'l ḥyyhn wḥyy bnyhn w' ḥyhn<sup>447</sup>

**Translation:** *In the month of Kanun, the year 335 (23 AD), Attai and Shebhai, daughters of Shahra, and Atta, daughter of Perdes have offered these two columns*

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<sup>446</sup> Klaver, “The Participation of Palmyrene Women in the Religious Life of the City”, 158

<sup>447</sup> Klaver, “The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city”, 159.



*to Baalshamin, the good god, for the life of themselves and for the life of their sons and their brothers.*<sup>448</sup>

In another inscription, there was the mention of Amtallat, daughter of Baraa and wife of Taima, who also presented a column to Baalshamin for the lives of herself, her son, and her brother. The inscription most likely specifies her husband's name and tribe to legitimate her social position and presence in the temple of Baalshamin, which was guarded by the tribe of Bene Mita.

1. byrḥ ṭbt šnt 3.100+60+3
2. 'mwd' dnh qrbt 'mtlt b[r]t
3. Br'' br 'tntn dy mn bnt myt'
4. 'tt tym' br blḥzy br zbdbl dy
5. mn pbd bny m'zyn lb'lšmn 'lh'
6. tb' wškr' 'l ḥyyh ḥyy bnyh
7. w'ḥyh<sup>449</sup>

**Translation:** *In the month of Tebet, the year 363 (52 AD), Amtallat, daughter of Baraa, son of Atenatan, of Bene Mita, wife of Taima, son of Belhazai, son of Zabdibel, of the tribe Bene Mazin offered this column to Baalshamin, the Good and Bountiful god, for the life of herself and for the life of her sons and her brother(s).*<sup>450</sup>

This could be the explanation for the addition of two new statutes. In the year 17 BC,<sup>451</sup> the gods Aglibol and Malakbel, as well as the tribe Bene Komare, erected a statue base on a

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<sup>448</sup> Klaver, "The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city", 159.

<sup>449</sup> Klaver, "The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city", 159.

<sup>450</sup> Klaver, "The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city", 159.

<sup>451</sup> Klaver, "The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city", 159.

woman named Atteemm near the Efqa spring. It is the oldest known honorary statue of a woman, as well as the only known example of a female statue erected by the gods.

1. Ṣlmt' dh dy 't'm b[rt ...]
2. 'wsy 'tt bwlh' [br ...]
3. dy' qym lh 'glbwl w?[mlkbl]
4. wbn̄y kmr' byrh' dr š[nt 2.100]
5. 80+10+4<sup>452</sup>

**Translation:** *This statue is that of Atteemm [daughter of ..., son of] Ausai, wife of Botha, [son of ...] which was erected for her by Aglibol and [Malakbel] and Bene Komare, in the month of Adar, year [2] 94 (17 BC).*<sup>453</sup>

Women are more visible in burial portraiture in a private setting than in religious evidence. Even lately, scholarly debates have regularly addressed the problem of women in Palmyra. It is sufficient to list the recent studies of E. Cussini, C. Finlayson, M. Hayn, S. Krag, S. Klaver, and J.-B. Yon, all of which shed new light on the issue.

Surprisingly, no woman has made a commitment to any female divinity in our archives. We have no epigraphic evidence of female names associated with the cults of Allāt or Atargatis, both of them had sanctuaries in Palmyra.<sup>454</sup> All of the dedications include the stated formula, although three of them associate the Blessed name with the Merciful, and one is specifically devoted to the Lord of all Living Creatures. According to prior research, this number of texts demonstrates that women were especially focused on addressing their dedications to the so-called Anonymous God of Palmyra. When compared to the same corpus of votive inscriptions from beyond Palmyra, both in Semitic and Greek, where women play the same role as agents

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<sup>452</sup> Klaver, “*The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city*”, 160.

<sup>453</sup> Klaver, “*The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city*”, 160.

<sup>454</sup> Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, *Archimède Archéologie et histoire Ancienne*, Vol. 2, Toulouse, 54–64, 2021, 55.

as men, this hypothesis loses strength. Female dedicants portray themselves as daughters (in most cases) or wives of a male representative of their families in dedications to other gods.<sup>455</sup>

Scholars typically say that foreigners did not provide their affiliation, but it appears to me that mentioning the family in votive writings was a question of personal preference rather than a strict necessity. However, the majority of the dedicants are men (total: 169 letters with the formula *bryk šmh l'lm* and 22 texts with *rḥmn*).<sup>456</sup> Among the inscriptions with female names are those with dedications made by entire families. See, for example, PAT 1911, dated 251 AD:<sup>457</sup> “May his name be blessed forever, merciful, and compassionate (*lbryk šmh l'lm rḥmn wtyr*)”,<sup>458</sup> in thanksgiving (*mwd*)<sup>459</sup> Naarai, son (*br*) of Moqimu Titus Iulius and Ada, his wife (*'tth*),<sup>460</sup> and his children (*bnwh*)<sup>461</sup> and all associated to his house (*bny byth klhwn*)<sup>462</sup> because they called upon him in distress (*b'q*) and he answered in serenity (*brwh*)”.<sup>463</sup> Year 251 AD, month Nisan”. The term (*bnwh*) should be translated as “his boys,” but in this plural form it also has a more generic meaning, “his children, which includes female progeny but is not marked in this example. It is worth noting that the collective is always created in the masculine form with no mention of “daughters”. Women address gods in thankfulness in the same way as males do and there is no difference in speech between dedications made by men, women, and entire families.<sup>464</sup>

This is also true when we look at votive inscriptions in general. They remain consistent regardless of the gender of the donor. For example, we might contrast the inscription PAT 1908 written by a male with another dedication written by a woman, PAT 0373, PAT 1908 “Blessed

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<sup>455</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 56.

<sup>456</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 57.

<sup>457</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 57.

<sup>458</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>459</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>460</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>461</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>462</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>463</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

<sup>464</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 58.

his name forever, good (*tb'*) and merciful. Made (*'bd*) in thanksgiving (*mwd'*) by Malku and 'Ataai, sons of Haggegu, son of Malku Zuzai for their life and the life of their children. In the month of Elul (*'lw*l), year 241 AD". vs. PAT 0373 "May his name be blessed forever, good, and merciful, made (*'bdt*) Batzabideh, daughter (*brt*) of Gaddarsu for her life and the life of 'Obaidu, her husband (*b'lh*). In the month of Ab, year 230 AD."<sup>465</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, the grammatical forms of verbs correspond to the gender of the dedicatee. To have a better understanding of the relationships between Palmyrene women and gods, consider the theophoric female anthroponyms. Only four female dedicatory names are unmistakably theophoric: Shalmat, a divine name employed as an anthroponym Shalmallat ("*Peace by Allāt*"), Belta ("*Lady*" - the cultic title of Zarpanitu, wife of Bel-Marduk, venerated in Palmyra),<sup>466</sup> and Hanita ("*Athe is kind*"). The first two names are epicene, which is used by both men and women in the same grammatical form. When it comes to the social functions of the mentioned ladies, there is no more information regarding their occupation or activity in the votive inscriptions.

In the votive set, information on the occupation or status of the dedicators, whether female or male, appears to be considered secondary. Tribal or cultic affiliations are mentioned less frequently in these inscriptions than in construction and honorific inscriptions or brief narratives excavated on Palmyrene tesserae. Votive dedications also refer to personal "salvation." The presence or absence of information indicating a family or professional link in this context is due to the male or female dedicatory's specific choice, who is not obligated to specify which tribe or association he or she belongs to.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 58.

<sup>466</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 59.

<sup>467</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 59.

According to the document PAT 1434 with the formula "Blessed his name eternally," dated 165 A.D, the female dedicator named Tadel was a freedwoman (*bnt hry*)<sup>468</sup> of Bassos, son of Malku. Nothing further is known about her or her family (for instance, whether she was married or had children). We do not know anything else about a freedman or freedwoman except the name of their prior master and his family. As seen by the examples, women can serve as dedicants on their own or in partnership with their spouses or other family members.

They are occasionally the recipients of dedications conveyed through prayers containing the formula "for the life of (... *l hry*...)"<sup>469</sup> studied by K. Dijkstra. These prayers ask for an "extension" of the divine blessing experienced by dedicants to other members of the household, such as mothers, sisters, wives, and so on.<sup>470</sup>

Religious sculptures in addition to benefactions attest to Palmyrene women's involvement in religious life. Five reliefs show ladies in religious processions and sacrifice procedures. These reliefs show that Palmyrene women were active participants in religious events. Three reliefs depict women in self-sacrifice scenarios. A first-century AD relief from the temple of Bel depicts a man and a woman offering a sacrifice.<sup>471</sup> The man in a long-sleeved tunic and cloak stands before a now-invisible altar on the left side of the relief. The man is most likely holding incense in his right hand and something in his left hand, possibly a jug, but, because the man's outfit lacks the priestly headpiece known from the funerary sphere, it is unclear whether the man was a priest; yet, we have encountered priests without headgear. Behind him, the woman in profile appears, clothed similarly: an ankle-length long-sleeved tunic with a mantle wrapped around the top of her head and her left arm. The woman is holding a pointed receptacle, which is probably filled with sacrifices.

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<sup>468</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 59.

<sup>469</sup> S.F., *Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos*, 159.

<sup>470</sup> Schneider, *Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*, 62.

<sup>471</sup> Klaver, *The Participation of Palmyrene Women in the Religious Life of the City*, 161.

A second sacrificial relief from the temple of Bel is similar to the first one: a lady dressed in a tunic and mantle raises her right hand in an expression of worship while holding an undetermined object in her left hand in addition to two men stand around an altar on the left side of the relief. The man on the left is badly maintained, but the man on the right is better preserved and has been identified as a priest because of the libation jug in his left hand.

A third relief was discovered in the agora in a secondary context depicting a sacrificial scene with two men performing sacrifices on the left and two female devotees holding offerings in their upraised right arms: the first an incense burner and the second a cup with two handles.

Aside from these reliefs, a well-known relief from 180 AD<sup>472</sup> on the crossbeam of the peristyle of the temple of Bel depicts a religious procession cantered on a donkey, a camel driver, and a camel carrying a tent. This was most likely a "*qubba*"<sup>473</sup>, or a shrine initially used by Arabs to transport religious goods.

Their right arms are raised above their heads. Aside from their small stature, the women on the upper left side of the relief are surprisingly similar to these people. Lucinda Dirven described the tableau as the arrival of the goddess *Al-lāt* in Palmyra, while the authenticity of the relief is still questioned. A similar relief from *Al-lāt*'s temple depicts a group of fully veiled females trailing a camel, hinting that these women are also taking part in a religious procession.<sup>474</sup>

Women do not only offer small altars, as mentioned above, but they also fund the construction of parts of temples in Palmyra. Two inscriptions from the temple of Baalshamin, dated from the first half of the 1st AD (23 and 52 AD), mention women who probably participated in the construction of the sanctuary, probably by donating money. In the first one,

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<sup>472</sup> Klaver, "*The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city*", 161.

<sup>473</sup> Klaver, "*The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city*", 161.

<sup>474</sup> Klaver, "*The participation of Palmyrene women in the religious life of the city*", 161.

text PAT 0167, three women dedicate two columns for Baalshamin, “the good god” (‘lh’ ṭb’).<sup>475</sup> “In the month *Kanun*, year 23 AD, Attai and Shabhai, daughters (bnt) of Shahra and Atta, daughter (brt)<sup>476</sup> of Pardash offered (qrbw)<sup>477</sup> these two columns (‘mwdy’ ‘ln tryhwn)<sup>478</sup> for Baalshamin, the good god (‘lh’ ṭb’)<sup>479</sup> for their lives (hyyhn), the lives of their children (bnyhn i.e., sons) and brothers (‘hyhn).”<sup>480</sup>

### 3.6.1 Female Support for Constructions in Cultic Places

They did that with the intention of well-being and for the protection of the life of their children and siblings. The second text, PAT 0168, commemorates an offering of a column by a woman called Amtallat, daughter (brt) of Baraa, son of Atenatan, who (the woman) is from the tribe (pḥd) of the daughters of Mīta (bnt myt’, female counterpart of bny myt’) to the same deity as in the previous dedication, but qualified as “the good and rewarding god” (‘lh’ ṭb’ wškr’). These epithets also appear in the dedications made by Palmyrene men. The inscription PAT 0170, dated from 67 AD, mentions a similar offering to the donation of Attai made by a man called Malku, son (br) of Alaysha, son of Malku from the tribe (pḥd)<sup>481</sup> of Maazin to Baalshamin and Durahlun (drḥlwn), labelled “the good and rewarding gods” (‘lhy’ ṭby’ wškr’y’).<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 61.

<sup>476</sup> S.F., “*Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos*”, 134; Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 59-61;

<sup>477</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 60.

<sup>478</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 60.

<sup>479</sup> S.F., “*Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos*”, 134, 137, 138, 156, 157, 158, 163; Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 61; S.F., “*Women in Roman Syria the cases of Dura-Europos*”, 124, 323, 324; Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 60.

<sup>480</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 61.

<sup>481</sup> The Aramaic word pḥd can have two meanings. It is usually translated as “tribe” in Palmyrene studies (see, for example, Gawlikowski 1973, 38, with his theory of four civic tribes involving the tribes of Bene Mīta and Bene Maazin, and Yon 2002), but it can also borrow its meaning from the Akkadian puhru, “assembly.” This new interpretation could spark a debate regarding cultic groups in Palmyra, which the author is now researching. The names of the “tribes” appear to be quite meaningful (“bny kmr” - priesthood members, “bny šyrt” - caravan members). Their occurrence on tesserae is perplexing because it suggests that they are either specific districts or associations (cultic or civic). The question of Palmyra’s social structure is a separate study problem that must be rectified (paper in preparation).

<sup>482</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 60.

Besides the votive context, the text PAT 0315, probably dated from 17 AD (the date is partly damaged), attests to the name of a woman Atem (*t'm*), daughter (*brt* ?) of and wife (*tt*) of Bolha whose tribal affiliation is not mentioned. This inscription mentions that Atem and her daughter offered (*qym*) a statue (*šlmt* ?) to Aglibol and Malakbel, the gods (labelled *lhy* ?),<sup>483</sup> and the tribe of Bene Komare (*bny kmr* ' lit.: 'the assembly of priests').

However, the text does not specify the reason for this commemoration. We shall only deduce that she made some kind of benefaction for the gods, maybe the foundation of construction within the cultic place or a valuable offering to the gods. It could also have been a service for the temple. Another woman equally honored by the same association (ἀπὸ φυλῆς Χωνειτῶν Τειμῆς ἔνεκεν φειλοτειμησαμένην)<sup>484</sup> was Thomallachis (Θομαλλαχίς), daughter of Haddudan, son of Iarhibola (Αἰδουδανου τοῦ Ιαριβωλεους), known from the text IGLS 17.312, dated to 182 AD, who donated 2500 denarii (δηνάρια δισχέιλια εντακόσια) for the construction of the baths of Aglibol and Malakbel, the gods (εἰς οἰκοδομὴν βαλανείου Ἀγλιβολου καὶ Μαλαχιβηλου θεῶ ν).<sup>485</sup> The sum that she gave was outstanding and a big amount of money managed independently by a Palmyrene woman. According to Jean-Baptiste Yon, she was a descendant of a great Palmyrene noble family.

Both women, Atem and Thomallachis, are honored alone in a similar way as men. They do not act with the help of a male representative, but with full autonomy. Unfortunately, we do not know anything more about them, nor about the specific part they played in the cult. They undoubtedly belonged to the Palmyrene nobility.

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<sup>483</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 61.

<sup>484</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 60.

<sup>485</sup> Schneider, "Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra", 60.





Figure 16: Religious Procession on the Crossbeam of the Peristyle from the Temple of Bel.<sup>486</sup>

Women's active participation in religious spheres suggests that it was socially acceptable for them to participate in the religious life. According to the reliefs, women participated in religious processions and sacrifices at least until the middle of the first century AD. It should be emphasized that women's levels of involvement were lower than men. There is no evidence that Palmyrene women served as priestesses and the visual evidence shows that women participated in or observed processions and carried sacrifices, but men performed the actual sacrifice.

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<sup>486</sup> (Wikimedia, photo: Gianfranco Gazzetti / GAR Temple of Baal, frieze with Gods sequence, detail, Palmyra in 2002;  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple\\_of\\_Bel#/media/File:PALMYRA\\_Tempio\\_di\\_Baal\\_particolare\\_del\\_fregio\\_con\\_sfilata\\_degli\\_dei\\_-\\_GAR\\_-\\_6-057.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Bel#/media/File:PALMYRA_Tempio_di_Baal_particolare_del_fregio_con_sfilata_degli_dei_-_GAR_-_6-057.jpg) (Downloaded: 18.10.2022).

Religious benefactions and altars, on the other hand, show that Palmyrene women were still involved in religious life as donors and beneficiaries in the second and third centuries AD. The fact that the majority of the modest altars were dedicated by middle-class women implies that a sizable number of Palmyrene women had access to Palmyra's religious life. Palmyrene women participated in religious life as members of their family unit, as they did in the public and funerary realms. Finally, the family remained the most significant social unit for women in Palmyra.

### **3.6.2 Was the Priesthood in Palmyra Exclusive to Men?**

We are not sure if any of the Palmyrene women were priestesses because none of the inscriptions describe such a title, function, or position. In fact, the feminine form of “*kmr*” (priest), “*kmrt*”, is not seen in Palmyrene literature.<sup>487</sup> Neither burial inscriptions nor funerary reliefs show a Palmyrene woman performing a cultic duty. The inscription PAT 0167 and PAT 0168 mention a tribal connection (*bnt myt*).<sup>488</sup> This is the only tribe (or association) listed in conjunction with a woman's name. This highlights the issue of not just the organization of Palmyrene society and its tribal division, but also the role of women in these groupings.

Women are present in Palmyrene religious life, even if their professional role as priestesses, singers, or musicians is not expressly declared. In most circumstances, they are referred to as the daughters and wives of a male relative, but their affiliation is not always mentioned. Palmyrene males likewise identify themselves by their connection; however, they are exclusively identified as the son of a male member of the family, emphasizing the patrilinear nature of the community. We notice that women, like men, devoted themselves to the city gods;

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<sup>487</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 61.

<sup>488</sup> Schneider, “*Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*”, 62.

they also got honours in the same way that Palmyrene males did with a decree and a statue set up in public space, but the number of these images is limited.<sup>489</sup>

Furthermore, they acted for their own and their families' well-being, and they could be the recipients of graces in the dedication of others. They belonged to the elite class of Palmyrene society and might, thus, contribute a substantial sum of money for the construction of cultic buildings demonstrating that they handled valuable items independently.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the dedications made by women were only addressed to male divinities. Furthermore, feminine names and images are related to the great Palmyrene gods, such as Baalshamin, Bel, Aglibol, Malakbel, and Al-Lāt. On the one hand, in the dedicatory setting, a woman's face was represented standing in front of the god, extolling his name. Public ceremonial reliefs, on the other hand, reveal women with their faces and heads totally veiled. This indicates that the completely covered face denotes a status other than marriage, but rather membership in the priestess hood and women's unique function during the ceremonies. This image may be associated with a specific function. However, there were some honorific statues that were regrettably not preserved, but we can assume that statues of women may show them with their faces exposed.

### **3.7 The Role of Women in the Family and Society of Palmyra<sup>490</sup>**

In the Palmyrene society, women had many rights and they were treated equally in many social aspects. For instance, as I mentioned previously, women had the chance to work and have jobs, such as grave builders, as we saw in PTA 1142.<sup>491</sup> The grave "was built and adorned" by Julius Aurelius Hermeias and Phirma, according to a Greek-Palmyrene

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<sup>489</sup> Schneider, *Women in the Votive Dedications from Palmyra*, 62.

<sup>490</sup> Most of the inscriptions that were found in the excavations which occurred in Palmyra, were a genealogical inscription, mostly mentioning names, and they were dedicated for these women by their husbands or family members, religious and honourable inscriptions are considered to be rare comparing to the genealogical inscriptions.

<sup>491</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*", 177; Prov: Palmyra, Diocletian Camp, Hypogeum. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary: Foundation. On door lintel, Bib: IP 40; Gaw 70c MF foundation 63; Gaw 75 pp 127-33.

inscription from 232 AD. This was not the only inscription where this occurred. It was also mentioned in PAT 0523,<sup>492</sup> PAT 0524,<sup>493</sup> and PAT 0525,<sup>494</sup> all of AD 160.

An additional privilege that the Palmyrene women had was the chance to own proprieties, but it is not clear if it was by inheriting, receiving them as gifts, or buying them. It is clear that women could buy or sell proprieties independently as they did not need a male approval or help in order to do such a thing. They were independent at least in making such decisions, which is something surprising due to our previous knowledge of other civilizations where women did not have any essential roles in the community, as shown in the inscription PAT 2727,<sup>495</sup> of AD 95.<sup>496</sup>

They also devoted architectural objects and inscriptions to their husbands as well as reliefs and inscriptions for the graves of male and female relatives. Women were given dedicatory and honorific inscriptions at the same time. But compared to honorific or dedicatory writings for males, these text categories only make up a minor portion of the epigraphic corpus. The statistics suggest that female presence is restricted but, undoubtedly, well-attested when we analyze cession texts. Women are administrators of their own family properties in Palmyra, such as selling and purchasing real estate.<sup>497</sup> Daughters were usually mentioned in the inscriptions of their fathers as well in some cases they were portrayed with them, as we can see in the bilingual inscription (PAT 0761):<sup>498</sup>

Greek:

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<sup>492</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 101; Prov: Palmyra, S-W Necropolis, Hypogeum of Yarhai, 'Atenuri, and Zabdibol ("Tomb of the Three Brothers"). Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary: Cession. On door lintel. Group: Ber 38 pp 102ff; C4171-86; Syr. 36 p 335 = Tad 27. Bib. MF Cession 2; RES 1041.

<sup>493</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 101; Prov: Palmyra, S-W Necropolis. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary: Cession. On door lintel. See 4171. Bib: MF Cession 1; RES 1042.

<sup>494</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 101; Prov: Palmyra, S-W Necropolis. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary Cession. On door lintel. See 4171. Bib: MF Cession 4; RES 1043.

<sup>495</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 316; Prov: Palmyra, S-W Necropolis, Hypogeum. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary: Cession. On door lintel. Bib: pl I.

<sup>496</sup> Cussini, *Beyond the Spindle: Investigating the Role of Palmyrene Women*, 33.

<sup>497</sup> Cussini, *Beyond the Spindle: Investigating the Role of Palmyrene Women*, 37.

<sup>498</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, 131; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: Louvre, AO 1556. Funerary. On relief. Bib: RES 1056; Lou 166. L N.D.

1. Μάρκος / Ίούλιος / Μάξιμος / Ἀριστείδης /
2. κολών / Βηρύτιος / πατήρ Λου- / κίλλης γυ- /
3. ναικὸς Περ- / τίνακος

Palmyrene:

1. mrqws ywlyws mksmws / 'rstyds qwlwn / brty' 'b<w>h
2. dy / lwql' 'tt prtnks

**Translation:** “*Marcus Julius Maximus Aristides of the colony of Beirut, father of Loukilla, wife of Pertinax.*”

The inscriptions which were mentioned earlier prove the fact that Palmyrene women were allowed to purchase, sell, and inherit real estate in addition to their active participation in the roles of legal guardians and tomb owners and their ability to devote inscriptions, columns, altars, and ex-voto to gods, I want to focus on the names given to women and the connections between women and their family members shown in the epigraphic sources.

Female occupations are seldom ever listed or shown. The lengthy Greek-Palmyrene inscription known as "the Tariff", which records the Fiscal Law of Palmyra from 137 AD, is an outlier since it contains a reference to prostitutes.<sup>499</sup> In that passage, the terms "*znyt*" and "*lymh*," which are levied against prostitutes, are mentioned. The elusive social group known as the *bt hry* (and its male version, *br hry*) is another sort of classification. Referring to the correspondence "Liberta bt hry," wife of *Bar'ate*, that was discovered in the Latin-Palmyrene epitaph of Regina, we find out that the position of these women was presumably akin to that of manumitted slaves.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Hillers and Cussini, “*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*”, 131; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: Louvre, AO 1556. Funerary. On relief. Bib: RES 1056; Lou 166. L N.D.

<sup>500</sup> Signe Krag and Rubina Raja Ed., “*Women, children and the family in Palmyra, In. Scientia Danica. Women, Children and the Family of Palmyra*”. Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, København, 2019., 68.

In general, ethnonyms and toponyms are scarce in the Palmyrene epigraphic corpus, and the adjective "Palmyrene" is mostly documented in inscriptions discovered outside the city (e.g., epitaphs of Palmyrenes buried abroad).<sup>501</sup> In addition to Aristeides from Beirut, there are a few additional instances from Palmyra.

Two epitaphs refer to two different women as "the Egyptian" and "the Greek," respectively. Apart from those notations, we discover that the poses, representations, names, epitaph structures and types of the script used in the reliefs do not stand out as particularly distinctive or foreign despite the fact that one might assume from the two adjectives that the reliefs were undoubtedly made in regional workshops.

A second-century relief is accompanied by the first epitaph (PAT 0908).<sup>502</sup> To the left of the lady is written: "*Shagal / daughter of Boropa / an Egyptian woman.*" The woman is dressed in a himation and has a frontlet and turban on her head. She has a spindle and a distaff in her left hand and her veil in her right. The other epitaph is on a relief of a woman from the third century accompanied by a little kid who is holding her veil.<sup>503</sup>

The other epitaph is on a relief of a woman from the third century accompanied by a little kid who is holding her veil. The woman's left hand supports her chin while her index finger caresses her face. She is decked up with a long, elaborately embroidered tunic, three necklaces, a bracelet, and rings. Her himation is secured with a circular brooch and is embellished with wool tassels. The formal scripted four-line inscription to her left reads, "'Alas! / Amata/daughter of Zubaida/a Greek lady," without mentioning the child (PAT 0907).<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Krag, "*Women, Children, and the Family in Palmyra*", 69.

<sup>502</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*", 148; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 1954.30.1. Funerary. On relief. Bib: RES 1082; PS 424; RES 721.

<sup>503</sup> Krag, "*Women, Children, and the Family in Palmyra*", 69.

<sup>504</sup> Hillers and Cussini, "*Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*", 148; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: Strassburg, Museum (formerly: Schlumberger Collection). Funerary. On relief. Bib: PS 480.

The majority of allusions to women are found in burial inscriptions, primarily in epitaphs. In the cession writings and other key text types from the funeral setting, feminine names also appear. They have preserved portions of missing original legal documents that detail the sale of burial plots. We can also see women among the vendors and buyers. Additionally, women dedicated altars with inscriptions. They were honored by their fathers, mothers, or spouses in a modest number of preserved honorific inscriptions. Female names are plainly used to refer to women. Shalma' is an example of a proper name that may be used for either men or women. When the inscription is used to indicate a man, such as in the epitaph on a bust-relief (PAT 0018<sup>505</sup>) or an honorary inscription on a column from 267 AD (PAT 0289)<sup>506</sup> as well as in funeral reliefs, the name in the inscription appears as a female name, for instance instances (PAT 0576,<sup>507</sup> PAT 0647)<sup>508</sup> and other examples.

Hence, the opposition "son of" or "daughter of" followed by the patronym is the characteristic element denoting gender when the relief is destroyed or when a visual representation was not present, to begin with. In the past, an interpretation of two inscribed female burial pictures that was based on an examination of iconographic elements led to incorrect conclusions.

In this way, the names of women occurred in the Palmyrene inscriptions and were portrayed. They were also mentioned along with their husbands as the wife of.... or the mother of.... If this indicates something, it does definitely show that women were appreciated in the Palmyrene community. They appear in the inscriptions, being portrayed alone or, in some cases, with their family members, but still, they could appear in them. In fact, my indication here is

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<sup>505</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *"Palmyrene Aramaic Texts"*, 101

<sup>506</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *"Palmyrene Aramaic Texts"*, 69; Prov: Palmyra, Great Colonnade. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Honorific. On column. Bib: Inv 3 6. / 267 A.D.

<sup>507</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *"Palmyrene Aramaic Texts"*, 109; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: Palmyra, in situ. Funerary. On wall. See 4219. Bib: Res 399.

<sup>508</sup> Hillers and Cussini, *"Palmyrene Aramaic Texts"*, 118; Prov: Palmyra. Loc: Ciba, Museo Nacional de l'Havana. Funerary. On relief. Bib: RES 1019.

about normal women in the society not the women in the royal family. It may seem a simple thing that women were able to have their own inscriptions, their own portraits or even offer and immolate them to their husbands or family members; they could own, sell and buy properties even tombs, it was one of the most significant things that a woman could have but in the historical man concentrated communities in comparison with the present days as the simplest right for a woman to have. Thus, Palmyrene women gained their independence due to economic and military needs as well as cultural customs, which helped them to have a wide range of opportunities to influence the political and economic activities of this significant oasis emporium.

In addition to participating in the local textile industry, women held property and had influence over political and economic decisions in the city. Through carefully planned unions, they were given access to riches and trade channels through clan affiliations to possibly distant locations like Gandhara, India.

According to Palmyrene's funeral portraits, Tadmor's women's workers played a significant role in textile manufacture. From the oldest preserved funeral stelae from the late 2nd century BC to the more complex portraits of the third century after Christ. The distaff and spindle were frequent burial objects carried in the hands of images of deceased Palmyrene women. However, in Palmyrene circumstances, the distaff and spindle could have had a twofold connotation within the tomb. The great female deity of Syria, as recounted by the Roman writer Lucian in his work *De Dea Syria*,<sup>509</sup> was shown in sculpture with a distaff signifying her ability to weave cosmic destiny and exert influence over fate.

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<sup>509</sup> Cynthia Finlayson, "*The Women of Palmyra – Textile Workshops and the Influence of the Silk Trade in Roman Syria*", Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings, University of Nebraska - Lincoln 2002,5.



Additionally, it seems from funeral genealogies that some Palmyrene women may have engaged in the “mot'a<sup>510</sup>” marriage, a typical tribal matriarchal marriage arrangement in which the woman selected a male spouse for a set amount of time in order to bear offspring for her clan or tribe. The marriage lasted for a brief time, and the children that were born belonged to the lady and the clan she belonged to, not to the male spouse. This implied that certain women had the capacity to create their own families and tribes.

Another important woman who was mentioned in an honoring inscription was Batti<sup>511</sup>, Batti certainly belonged to a significant family within the Mattabol tribe, judging from the number of honorific texts devoted to members of this clan. In addition to her husband's and other members of his family, we know her own inscription: she was the daughter of a certain Mukianos, whose name occurs in a Greek dedicatory inscription carved on an altar. Nonetheless, the circumstances surrounding the creation of a monument in her honor are unknown: we believe that she provided the construction of the temple devoted to the god Arsu, as did Maliku and his son, both of whom are referenced in another honorific inscription found in the same place.

Unfortunately, the knowledge we currently have about the women of Palmyra is limited, with the exception of Queen Zenobia, who is regarded as one of the most well-known Queens of her time in the Ancient Near East. The main sources to follow in order to have information about the women in Palmyra are the inscriptions and epigraphical<sup>512</sup> evidence that were left from the great conilization of Palmyra.

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<sup>510</sup> There is epigraphic evidence that Zenobia's marriage to her famous warrior/husband, Odainat, was of the mot'a type.

<sup>511</sup> Eleonora Cussini, “*Regina, Martay and the Others: Stories of Palmyrene Women*”, Gregorian Biblical Press, Roma, 2004, 239.

<sup>512</sup> Cussini, “*Beyond the Spindle: Investigating the Role of Palmyrene Women*”, 27–29.

## **Conclusions**

We can conclude by observing that presumptions about Palmyrene women playing a secondary role based on gendered iconography and, especially, on the appearance of the mentioned objects in female images are false and do not do credit to the impression provided by the inscriptions. The cession texts, a legal document, as well as other events and facets of Palmyrene's life that are described in civil and religious honorific and dedicatory writings, can be used to trace the active participation of women. The details we discovered about women and their activities by sifting through the abundance of preserved inscriptions provide light on a particular period of Palmyrene social history. In my personal opinion, the Palmyrene women had more roles in their society and among their family members whether it was in the royal and upper-class society or it is about the lower-class people. Women reached a point they were an important factor in helping the Palmyrene community to rise and become more progressed compared to the surrounding entities in that era and having the chance to own businesses as I mentioned before, is a great privilege they had. Also participating in the religious practices, offering sacrifices, and being priestesses to honor their gods indicate that they were seen as equals in their community, even with the fact that most of the inscriptions that were found that mentioned women were mostly genealogical or funerary inscriptions, but on the other hand, we found many reliefs in the tombs with women with their children beautifully designed and engraved, being equal with men in that way.

Another point is that women could dedicate inscriptions to their gods, to protect their families members, it is another privilege it may sound odd that I mention this as a privilege, but we need to see the ancient men-oriented point of view, not our open-minded nowadays world, even with the fact that in some places in the world that still men does not see or treat women as equal to them, this is why I call that as a privilege, and a great honor that women could have in that era.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Women and the New Testament**

## 4.1 Introduction

Early in the Common Era, the impoverished, the helpless, and women all turned to Christianity as a religion to escape their oppression and marginalization. Women were crucial to the development of Christianity in its early years because they discovered a level of influence in Christian communities that they did not have at the time in the Roman Empire. However, as time went on, women lost the power they had and were more and more oppressed and removed from significant positions.<sup>513</sup>

Due to a combination of maternal deaths and female infanticide, the Greco-Roman world had more men than women. However, throughout the early years of Christianity, more women than men converted, creating a community with a very different sex ratio. A higher percentage of women may have survived pregnancy due to marrying at a "substantially older age" and a ban on abortions, which at the time were a "major cause of death among women," as well as the fact that Christianity forbade infanticide.<sup>514</sup>

It is noticeable that women's influence and stories started to be mentioned in the New Testament much more than in the Old Testament. Also, while reading the New Testament women were addressed by their names and some of them were powerful and wealthy and even could teach alongside with Jesus and his apostles. Furthermore, they had a more significant noticeable and remarkable role, yet none of them was a prophet like Debora, but their role was not less important than her. They may did not lead armies, but they could convey Jesus' teachings and accompany Him while travelling among the different cities. Many of them were his strongest supporters and listeners and they believed in Him and tried to influence their families. They could approach him and seek his help and He never let them disappointed in any

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<sup>513</sup> Rodney, Stark, "*The Role of Women in Christian Growth*," *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, 98 & Stark, Rodney. "Reconstructing the Rise of Christianity: The Role of Women." *Sociology of Religion*, 232, 236.

<sup>514</sup> Stark, "*The Role of Women in Christian Growth*," 236.

way. Jesus gave women value as this is reflected in the New Testament and the verses which mentioned women.

Some of the cultural customs seen in the Hebrew Bible are reflected in the texts of the New Testament. For example, in the first three Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, women frequently appear briefly and then disappear, as do some of their male counterparts. They frequently do not play an important role in the plot. However, we must keep in mind that these nameless and mute women might have played a larger role in the story than the text allows. The women who followed Jesus, as well as the early Christian communities, were most likely much more involved in the Jesus movement than appears in the text. Fortunately, despite their absence in many passages, several of the New Testament literature show the presence of female leadership.

Women, in fact, did lead Christian communities throughout the Greco-Roman globe in early Christianity. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, we read about unique women who followed and lived as disciples of Jesus. As committed role models for others, those women lived exemplary the life of compassionate service and openness no matter whatever their futures might hold. Names of several woman leaders appear in both the authentic writings of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles during the early formation of Christianity. Women served as "apostles" (Rom 16:7)<sup>515</sup>, "deacons" (Rom 16:1), presidents of home Churches (Rom

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<sup>515</sup> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. Greet Priscilla[c] and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among[d] the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. Greet Urban's, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. (Rom 16:1-8, NIV)

16:5), theological professors (Acts 18:26)<sup>516</sup> and prophets, according to numerous New Testament sources (1 Cor 11:5).<sup>517</sup>

In addition to the New Testament texts about female leaders, there is textual evidence in non-canonical literature that depicts Mary of Magdala's leadership, such as *The Gospel of Mary*, a late second-century gospel or early third-century work. Despite the fact that only fragments of this work remain, they represent the only known gospel devoted to a woman. A sentence in these fragments indicate Mary the apostle's authority as a source for the male apostles.

In addition to literary textual evidence, other historical sources, such as epigraphic documents educate us about the behaviors of women as ecclesiastical leaders in the early centuries of Christianity. Epigraphs on sculptures, monuments, walls, or books describing a person or theme. Women figures in the Bible are shown as apostles, prophets, presbyters, instructors, deacons, stewards, and even bishops. Different manuscripts, tombstones, monuments, and other antique texts mention women as well.<sup>518</sup> Ute Elsen argues clearly and thoroughly in her work, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity* that Christian women held active formal leadership positions within the Church. They would have been given particular titles in these circumstances. Furthermore, additional women served in leadership positions without an official title from the community. Therefore, women emerge as dynamic producers of ecclesiastical history during the early decades of the Church in both categories.

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<sup>516</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (Acts 18:26, NIV).

<sup>517</sup> Judith Schubert, RSM, 101 *Questions & Answers on Women in the New Testament*, Paulist Press, New York, 2014, 18.

5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. (1 Cor 11:5, NIV)

<sup>518</sup> Jean LaPorte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity*, Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1982, 16.

#### **4.1.1 Women in Jesus Teaching:**

In His public teaching, Jesus never said anything derogatory or humiliating about women. They were never the target of nasty jokes or criticism, nor were they ever made fun of just because they were female. Jesus taught that women should not be regarded as sex objects in His condemnation of adultery and divorce (Matthew 5:27–28 and 19:3–10). At least twice in His sermons, He used the example of a woman to chastise the unbelieving males of His generation: the widow of Zarephath to the men of Nazareth, (Luke 4:25–26), and the Queen of Sheba to the Pharisees, (Luke 11:31). Jesus used a woman to illustrate faith and determination at least twice in His parables: the persistent widow (Luke 18:2–8) and the lady seeking the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10).

#### **4.1.2 Women in Jesus Actions:**

Jesus had a really revolutionary attitude not only in what He taught but also in how He openly connected to women—in the sense that He was smashing the incorrect societal traditions of His day. Consider the three occurrences throughout His ministry that each included a woman. Rather than ignoring women, Jesus constantly attempted to cater to them, even if it meant risking the misunderstanding of his male disciples. Jesus' highly public ministering to a Samaritan woman at a well, as reported (John 4:1–42), went against conventional procedure for a Jewish male of His day. He not only spoke to the woman in public, but He also instructed her and revealed Himself to her as the Messiah. *"And upon this came his disciples, marveling that he talked with the woman,"* (John 4:27). Jesus disregarded the rabbinic prohibition on engaging in public dialogues with a woman. He constantly tried to minister to women rather than neglect them, even if it meant risking the misunderstanding of his male pupils.

Another illustration of His sympathetic approach toward women is the story of the woman taken in adultery, which is reported in (John 7:53–8:11, Jesus chastised her accusers for deliberately ignoring the guilty guy. While He did not approve of her actions *"go, and sin no*

*more,"* (John. 8:11), His loving treatment of her contrasted strongly with the harsh and hypocritical attitude of those who were so ready to sentence her to death. The episode at Mary and Martha's house, (Luke 10:38–42), is yet another illustration of Jesus's habit of defying conventional societal standards regarding female education at the time. Not only did Jesus take the time to train Mary, but His remarks to Martha imply that Mary had "*chosen that good part*" (Luke. 10:42). While Jesus would never blame a woman for performing home responsibilities, He did laud Mary for her desire to study and learn the Word.

Aside from these episodes in his lifetime, it is worth noting that women were the last ones at the cross, when all of the male disciples, except John, abandoned their Master and fled. They were also the first to arrive at the tomb when those same guys fled in terror. Jesus picked a lady to be the first witness to His resurrection. This tremendous honor was bestowed upon Mary Magdalene, (Luke 24:1–10). He then charged her with testifying to its veracity. Women were not considered trustworthy witnesses by the rabbis. Jesus, on the other hand, had a different opinion. Remember the men's reaction when they heard the women's testimony: "*And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed not*" (Luke. 24:11). It's no surprise that Jesus had such a spiritual fascination for women, who were frequently overlooked by the instructors of the day. (Luke 8:1–3), numerous women followed Him and catered to His necessities. It is crucial to note that Jesus did not select women as His apostles, which is consistent with subsequent Pauline admonition that the authoritative teaching function in the church is the duty of men (Timothy 2:11–15). This limitation, however, does not imply that women should be treated as second-class citizens in the church. They can take on a variety of duties both inside and outside of the church. It is not unexpected, however, that everywhere the gospel has entered the civilizations of the globe, the social standing of women has always increased. Rather than criticizing Christianity for enslaving women, we must acknowledge that



the gospel message promises genuine emancipation for both males and females, who are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

## 4.2 Martyrdom of Women:

Women suffered with males in the first persecution of the *Church of Jerusalem*, as recorded in (Acts 8:1–3).<sup>519</sup> Sometimes women refuse to confess or submit to torture, but so do males. On other occasions, women exhibit such bravery and awe of the supernatural that they serve as models and leaders to other confessors. They usually bear the same tribulations as men, demonstrating that men and women are equal before God and receive the same Holy Spirit gifts. The women martyrs' visions feature feminine elements like dresses, depictions of gardens and flowers and sorrow when their modesty is violated.<sup>520</sup>

However, a form of paradigm may be found among the instances from Scripture offered by Origen in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. The intervention of the mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs who exhorted her sons to suffer for God, as well as Origen's comment: "But she, acting as though she would try to win over her son to his (the king's wishes), mocked the tyrant and gave her son an earnest exhortation to perseverance - so much so that he did not wait for the torture to be inflicted upon him: he anticipated it and challenged the executioners, saying: Why do you hesitate and delay? We obey the law given by God. We may not obey a commandment that is contrary to the words of God" (II Mac. 7:30).<sup>521</sup> From this we recognize

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<sup>519</sup> On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. (Acts 8:1–3, NIV).

<sup>520</sup> LaPorte, "The Role of Women in Early Christianity", 16.

<sup>521</sup> *The Martyrdom of Seven Brothers*:

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and straps, to partake of unlawful pig's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." The king fell into a rage and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the

how the mother withstood courageously the sufferings and the death of her sons, for the hopes she had in God.<sup>522</sup>

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king[a] ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers[b] and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'" After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to a renewal of everlasting life because we have died for his laws." After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands and said nobly, "I got these from heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him, I hope to get them back again." As a result, the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. After he, too, had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you, there will be no resurrection to life!" Next, they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. But he looked at the king and said, "Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!" After him, they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, "Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account because of our sins against our own God. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!" The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore, the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, in his mercy gives life and breath back to you again since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws." Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: "My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb and nursed you for three years and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life and have taken care of you. I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way, the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers." While she was still speaking, the young man said, "What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the Almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers, after enduring a brief suffering for everlasting life, have fallen under God's covenant, but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation." The king fell into a rage and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So, he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord. Last, of all, the mother died, after her sons. Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures. (II Mac. 7:30, NRSV).

<sup>522</sup> LaPorte, "The Role of Women in Early Christianity", 19.

### 4.3 Women Changed or Healed by Jesus:

- **Widow of Nain:**

Luke 7:11 describes the miracle in this way. Soon after, Jesus traveled to Nain, followed by His followers and a big throng and when He arrived at the town's entrance, a funeral procession was leaving. It was for a widow's sole and young son whom Jesus resurrected because of his mother's faith.<sup>523</sup> The Rising of Jairus's Daughter:

The raising of Jairus' daughter is a purported miracle of Jesus that is linked with the tale of the healing of a bleeding woman in the synoptic Gospels. Mark 5:21–43, Matthew 9:18–26, and Luke 8:40–56 include the stories.<sup>524</sup>

- **The Healing of Simon's Mother-in-Law:**<sup>525</sup>

Narratives are selected groupings of material that do not simply report what happened. The call of Simon, for example, is presented differently in the Gospel of Mark than it is in the Gospel of Luke. The call in Mark is brief and comes before the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:16–18, cf. 1:29–31), but the call in Luke is more developed and comes after the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (cf. Luke 5:1–11 with 4:38–39).

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<sup>523</sup> Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. (Luke 7: 11–17, NIV).

<sup>524</sup> While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment. When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region. (Matthew 9:18–26, NIV)

<sup>525</sup> After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them. (Mark 1:29–31, NIV).

- **A Grappled Woman Who Could Stand:**<sup>526</sup>

According to the Gospel, Jesus was speaking on the Sabbath in one of the synagogues when he saw a lady who had been handicapped by a demon for eighteen years. She was hunched over and could not straighten up. "Woman, you are set free from your affliction," Jesus replied to her when he saw her.

- **The Syrophoenician Woman:**<sup>527</sup>

The Syrophoenician woman stands out in the gospels<sup>528</sup> because she effectively questions Jesus and receives praise for it (Mark 7:24–30)<sup>529</sup>. This story stands in stark contrast to the typical format of New Testament short tales, which highlight one of Jesus' sayings and give Jesus the final word. The woman is reported to be a Phoenician from Syria (Mark 7:26)<sup>530</sup>. Syria was the name of a Roman province that covered portions of modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and Israel and which subsequently merged with Judea to become Syria-Palestina. The Phoenicians were ancient Semitic people who lived in city-states around the Mediterranean and were linked to the biblical Canaanites. Tyre, a seaside city in modern-day Lebanon, about twelve miles north of the Israeli border, was one of their population concentrations. The Syrophoenician woman denotes

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<sup>526</sup> On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. (Luke 13:10–13, NIV).

<sup>527</sup> See RSM, "101 Questions & Answers on Women in the New Testament", 28.

<sup>528</sup> Brent A. Moody, "The Syrophoenician Woman: Mark's Narrative Purpose", Harding School of Theology, Memphis, 2013, 1.

<sup>529</sup> Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "For it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone. (Mark 7:24-30, NIV).

<sup>530</sup> The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. (Mark 7:26, NIV).

someone on the boundary between Jews and gentiles, both geographically and ethnically. The term “Greek” in verse 7:26 also labels her as a non-Jew.

- **The Samaritan Woman:**<sup>531</sup>

The Biblical story of the Samaritan woman is probably familiar to many of us. When she drew water, she was approached by the Lord Jesus who begged for a drink. She realized He was the Messiah predicted in the prophecies after her conversation with the Lord Jesus. She was an ordinary woman with little Bible knowledge, but she was able to do so. This is very incredible. We are all aware that throughout the three and a half years that the Lord Jesus labored on earth, numerous individuals had brief encounters with Him and heard Him speak. However, there were far too few who recognized Him as the Messiah.

The Samaritan woman was suspicious of the Lord Jesus because He was a Jew and Jews were not allowed to associate with Samaritans. She addressed the Lord Jesus

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<sup>531</sup> The interoperation of the story was done by me, based on the story from the New Testament.

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although, in fact, it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” (John 4:1-42, NIV).

as Sir once she realized He was different from what she was used to. Her sense of authority and power was enhanced when she heard the Lord Jesus say, *"Whoever drinks from this water will thirst again, but who drinks from the water that I shall give shall never thirst, and the water that I shall give shall become a well springing up into everlasting life in him."*

Suddenly, the Lord Jesus revealed her deepest secrets to tell her: *"You have had five husbands and he you have now is not your spouse."* She was taken aback because no one knew about her covert activities. But the Lord Jesus knew everything about her, despite never having met her. She was certain that regular people could never achieve it thus she saw the Lord Jesus as a prophet. Therefore, she expressed perplexity and asked Him whether she should worship God on the mountain or in Jerusalem. The hour comes when you shall not worship the Father in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus stated".

*"For the Father desires such people to adore him," he said emphatically when they worship in spirit and in truth. She acknowledged the Lord Jesus as the Messiah after hearing all of this. Her misunderstanding was addressed by the Lord Jesus with just a word, and the Lord Jesus also explained to her the way of practicing the will of God. This taught her that when worshipping God, believers need not strictly stick to exterior formalities, but instead worship God in spirit and truth and that only praying really and sincerely is after God's heart".*

She delighted and felt even more persuaded that He was the Messiah after hearing the Lord Jesus remark, "I that speak to you am he." As a result, she rushed to the city to inform the people of the good news. Though the conversation between the Lord Jesus and her was brief, the name she gave Him changed very fast. It was because she recognized the Lord's words have authority and power and He was able to unveil

her deepest secrets and corruption, fix her dilemma and uncertainty and show her the obvious path to follow. As a result, Mary acknowledged the Lord Jesus as the coming Messiah.

- **Daughters of Jerusalem:**

The most plausible identification of the daughters of Jerusalem is that they were young and unmarried women from Jerusalem, Solomon's home city. Some translations use the terms "maidens," "virgins," or "young ladies" instead of "daughters," and a glance at how this phrase is used in the book supports this interpretation. In Song of (Solomon 1:5),<sup>532</sup> the Shulammite says, "Dark am I, yet lovely, girls of Jerusalem," implying that the daughters of Jerusalem had a lighter complexion than Solomon's lover. Because the Shulammite attributed her dark skin to laboring in the heat of the sun, this might suggest that the girls of Jerusalem were more prosperous or worked indoors (verse 6).

At one point in the New Testament, Jesus addresses a group of women as "daughters of Jerusalem." When many women mourned as Jesus bore His cross to Calvary, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not mourn for me but weep for yourselves and your children, He tells them" (Luke 23:28).<sup>533</sup>

- **The Woman with Haemorrhage:**<sup>534</sup>

The nameless woman in this Gospel account had been suffering from a type of bleeding for 12 years; it is sometimes described as "hemorrhaging." She had seen several physicians and healers, but none had been able to cure her. It appears hectic and

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<sup>532</sup> Dark am I, yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. (Solomon 1:5, NIV).

<sup>533</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. (Luke 23:28, NIV).

<sup>534</sup> Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment. (Matthew 9:18–22, NIV).

as though she was acting out in desperation. In that society, her mere appearance in a huge gathering would be frowned upon since she was considered "unclean." Her regular life would have been spent watching others avoided touch with her by skirting around her. She lived alone and would have been notorious for her filthiness.

A woman with a blood flow, for example, should consume a tumbler of wine with a powder of rubber, alum, and garden crocuses, or Persian onions cooked in wine, according to the Jewish Talmud. Some experimented with unexpected shocks or carrying an ostrich egg in a particular fabric. Ridiculous treatments, yet they did work occasionally for psychosomatic reasons.<sup>535</sup> This unfortunate woman, for whatever reason, had no trust in anything she was given, and as a result, she got worse rather than better. She was not only physically unwell but also filthy and socially isolated. She was in the same boat as the leper.

One of the reasons she operated in such secrecy was because she was embarrassed to be recognized publicly and to have her condition revealed to everyone. She did not want Jesus to find out. She merely wanted to steal a miracle from Him and then walk away quietly, never letting anybody know what had transpired. She did not want to be on the front page, and she did not even want to be on the back page. She simply wanted hit-and-run mending that was only known to her. She had been a victim enough as a result of her issue and she desired nothing more than anonymity. It is excellent to observe the humanly hopeless case of the chronically ill victim since her recovery gives hope to everyone who believes their situation is hopeless.

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<sup>535</sup> Pease and Pease, *"Women of the Bible"*, 223.



#### 4.4 Women of Prominence:

- **Herodias and her daughter:**<sup>536</sup>

Herodias, (15 BC– after 39 AD), sometimes known as Herodiade, was a Jewish princess of the Herodian Dynasty and Queen of Galilee. She is best known in the New Testament as the wife of Herod Antipas who plotted the assassination of John the Baptist.<sup>537</sup> She was the granddaughter of Herod the Great, Herodias. In the beginning, she was the wife of her uncle Herod II, with whom she lived in Rome and Judea. During her visit to Rome, it happened that she met her brother-in-law Antipas who fell in love with her and asked her to marry him, an offer that was accepted by her. But this marriage did not last long and they got divorced soon after it.

The marriage also had significant political implications, as Antipas was the tetrarch of Galilee and Herod II held no position of authority. In the meanwhile, Antipas lacked Herodias' illustrious Hasmonean ancestry. Their relationship, however, heightened tensions with Antipas' neighbor, King Aretas of Nabataea, the father of Antipas' first bride. It also drew harsh condemnation from the famous Jewish preacher John the Baptist who claimed that the union broke Jewish law. As a result, John was imprisoned and subsequently killed at Herodias' request through her daughter Salome.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people because they considered John a prophet. On Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. (Matthew 14:2–14, NIV).

<sup>537</sup> Jennifer Lassley Knight, "Herodias, Salomé, and John the Baptist's Beheading: A Case Study of the Topos of the Heretical Woman," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 93: Iss. 1, Article 1, 2017, 4–10.

<sup>538</sup> Knight, "Herodias, Salomé, and John the Baptist's Beheading, 5.

- **Claudia Procula the Wife of Pilate:**

Claudia<sup>539</sup> begged Caesar not to leave the house on that fateful March Ides. She had a rough night and screamed out for help three times in her dream. It was a sign to her, and she pleaded with her recalcitrant husband to take her advice. But Caesar was not ready to join the pitiful minority who gave weight to their wives' ridiculous sentiments. He would rather die than recognize the reality of a woman's intuition, so he went out for the last time and died.<sup>540</sup>

Another Roman leader Pilate who also ignored his wife's warning. Her name was Claudia Procula and she was the only one who came to Jesus' defense when he was on trial. Jesus refused to defend Himself, but Claudia had a dream about Jesus and told her husband not to mess with this innocent man. Pilate, rejected the warning and committed the worst folly of his life when he nailed Jesus on the cross. He has been reviled throughout history on a par with Judas because he did not listen to his wife.<sup>541</sup> Jesus would have died anyhow, for it was His plan, and the Jewish leaders would have defied Pilate.

Nevertheless, he could have become a noble hero by listening to his wife. There would have been St. Pilate churches all through history and Pilate could have become a popular Christian name. But Pilate blew it because he would not listen to his wife. Her lone voice said to Pilate, "He is innocent, and it is wrong to condemn an innocent man. Do not do it". But the loud voice of the mob mobilized by the enemies of Jesus cried out for His blood.

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<sup>539</sup> While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." (Matthew 27:19, NIV).

<sup>540</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 164.

<sup>541</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 164.

## 4.5 Women and Discipleship

- **Mary Magdalene.**<sup>542</sup>

The woman who had been healed of demonic spirits and diseases was recognized as Mary Magdalene from whom seven demons had been cast out. As well as Joanna, Khuza's wife (Herod's commissioner), Susanna, and many more who were released from their possessions with help of Jesus.<sup>543</sup>

In this brief section from Luke's Gospel (8:2—3)<sup>544</sup>, Mary appears for the first time in the chronology of Jesus' life. Luke describes how she came into Jesus' life and why she sought him out. Jesus' fame must have drawn her the ten difficult miles from her home in Magdala to Capernaum. She, most likely, traveled alone to him on foot across steep roads and rugged trails with her garments in tatters and possessed by demons. According to my estimates, Mary sought Jesus out after He had become renowned in Galilee that welcomed sinners and battling demons that tormented them.

Among the ladies mentioned by Luke, Joanna, who was married to a government, aristocratic, maybe affluent and well-connected official. Mary, on the other hand, lacked Joanna's prominence and connections. What she possessed were devils; no ancient scripture (or plausible assumption) shows that Jesus ever visited Magdala or that

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<sup>542</sup> For further information see: Bruce Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, Crown Publishing Group, Midtown Manhattan, 2005; Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*, Shambhala Publications, Boulder, Colorado, 2010; Ingrid Maisch, *Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman Through the Centuries*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1998; Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2004; Liz Curtis Higgs, *Unveiling Mary Magdalene: Discover the Truth About a Not-So-Bad Girl of the Bible*, Crown Publishing Group, Midtown Manhattan, 2009; Margaret Starbird, *Mary Magdalene, Bride in Exile*, Bear & Company Publishing, Rochester, 2005; Meggan Watterson, *Mary Magdalene Revealed: The First Apostle, Her Feminist Gospel & the Christianity We Haven't Tried Yet*, Hay House, Inc., London, 2021; Ralph Ellis, *Mary Magdalene, Princess of Orange: Mary in Provence*, France, CreateSpace Independent Pub, Scotts Valley, California, 2011.

<sup>543</sup> Bruce Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, Crown Publishing Group, Midtown Manhattan, 2005, 5.

<sup>544</sup> And some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. (Luke 8:2–3, NIV).

Mary held land there that she gave to Jesus.<sup>545</sup> Additionally, Luke does not say how old Mary was when she met Jesus, but she was probably in her twenties, somewhat older than him and mature enough to have acquired a sophisticated case of possession (indicated by the reference to "seven devils"). Her family is not mentioned in the Gospels as well.

Given Mary's demonic possession, it is no surprise that she was single. Possession was associated with impurity, not the natural filth of childbirth, but the infection of an unclean spirit. Because of her numerous demons, she was undoubtedly shunned in Magdala.<sup>546</sup> In contrast to the Gentiles surrounding them, the Jews of Galilee characterized themselves by their adherence to severe purity regulations prescribed by the Torah, the Law of Moses that was recorded in Hebrew and passed down orally in the Aramaic language.

Mary became impious as a result of her daimonia in Jewish Galilee society. She was most likely alone when she arrived at Capernaum. Women without families were vulnerable in ways we can only fathom in antiquity. The Gospels usually refer to a woman as a man's sister, wife, or mother. That bond was her shield. As is common in many cultures, a wife who was alone with any man other than her husband in a secluded area was charged with adultery (Sotah 1:1–7 Mishnah, the tradition of Rabbinic teaching that put the Law of Moses into practice). Luke's mention of Mary's seven devils aided the Western tradition that portrays her as a prostitute. Typical paintings depict her in a gaudy gown arranging herself in front of a mirror or abasing herself in humility at Jesus' feet.

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<sup>545</sup> Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, 7.

<sup>546</sup> Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, 12.

By the fourteenth century, Mary Magdalene had become renowned as the patron saint of flagellants,<sup>547</sup> and devotion to her and the practice of self-inflicted suffering was prevalent. In one narrative, she clawed at her flesh until it bled; slashed her breasts with stones and tore out her hair as punishment for her self-indulgence.

When Mary Magdalene sought Jesus, she went to the appropriate rabbi. He took pride in his reputation for dating purportedly loose women (the term "loose" referring to any woman who did not wear her husband's or father's name, or some other symbol of male protection). Many unattached women were among Jesus' disciples; when people referred to Him as "the buddy of customs agents and sinners" (Matthew 11:19).<sup>548</sup> It was not a compliment and Jesus' opponents included these female disciples among the "sinners."

Jesus had gone from Nazareth to Capernaum when Mary first encountered Him after a near-stoning (Luke 4:16-30)<sup>549</sup> and convinced Him that the parochial village he had known since boyhood would never accept Him as a rabbi. He found his stride in Capernaum. This little fishing village of a few thousand people provided Him with a safe refuge and maintained his reputation as an exorcist blossomed.

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<sup>547</sup> Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, 14.

<sup>548</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds." (Matthew 11:19, NIV).

<sup>549</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" "Truly I tell you," He continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy[b] in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:16–30, NIV).

Jesus exorcised and cured many women by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20). These two forces -the Spirit and God's Kingdom- were important to His work and they were undoubtedly in the forefront of His thoughts as He treated Mary Magdalene.

Mary attended Jesus' meetings and joyful dinners in and around Capernaum when Jesus spoke of God's wonderful hidden "malkhuta", the Kingdom of God.<sup>550</sup>

- **Salome the Mother of James and John:**

The mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John. According to Mark, her name was Salome. she played a significant role in Jesus' life, yet most Christians are ignorant of her existence since. I had no idea she existed, but she is suddenly one of the most wonderful mothers in the Bible.

Her husband, Zebedee, was a wealthy and well-known businessman who owned a major fishing enterprise. He had two sons working with him in addition to Peter, Andrew and other hired laborers.<sup>551</sup> Salome was the mother of a prosperous household. She was probably upper middle class, which explains her ambition for her two sons to be number one and two in the Master's realm. This may lead us to think of her as a spoilt affluent mother who demanded the best for her children, but the entire tale necessitates that we see her in a broader context.<sup>552</sup>

She was one of the ladies who followed Jesus and, because of her wealth, helped Him and his followers serve people. She is mentioned in (Matthew 27:56)<sup>553</sup> as one of the women who accompanied Jesus and cared for his needs. She was one of three

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<sup>550</sup> Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, 14.

<sup>551</sup> Glenn Pease and Steve Pease, *Women of the Bible: Amazing women of the Old Testament and New Testament*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Scotts Valley, California, 2017, 155.

<sup>552</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 155–156.

<sup>553</sup> Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Josés, and the mother of Zebedee's children. (Matthew 27:56, KJV)

women who came with spices to anoint Jesus' body on the first Easter (Mark 16)<sup>554</sup> and she was one of the three women who stood at the crucifixion (Mark 15).<sup>555</sup> Salome, in other words, was not a wealthy snob who felt she was superior to everyone else but she was a devoted disciple of Jesus who stuck with him even after others deserted Him.<sup>556</sup> She utilized her money all the way to the end purchasing spices for Jesus' body, besides she was a very exceptional follower who remained true until the end.

She is the only mother of the twelve mentioned in the New Testament and she is the mother of two of the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus. These two were in Peter's close group. This reveals that she was one of Jesus' favorite moms and people, so let us not pass judgment on her, but rather learn from her as we study the most motherly role in her son's lives.<sup>557</sup>

- **Martha and Mary:**

Jesus stated in the Gospel that the narrative of what they accomplished for Him would be repeated in their honor throughout the globe. We wish to honor our Lord by honoring them, whom He regarded as the most important of His followers. We know little about Simon, but it is certain that he was healed by the Great Physician. He would not be holding a feast for Jesus if he was still a leper.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> And when the sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices that might come and anoint him. (Mark 16, KJV).

<sup>555</sup> There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses and Salome; (Who also when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem. And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath (Mark 15:40–42, KJV).

<sup>556</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 155–156.

<sup>557</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 156.

<sup>558</sup> While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:6–13, NIV).

According to John, Lazarus, who was resurrected from the dead, a man who was healed of leprosy and others from Bethany who benefited from Jesus' healing miracles were present at the meal of huge thanksgiving party served by Martha. It was certainly a joyous and delightful occasion. A lady entered the room and approached Jesus as He was eating and poured an expensive ointment on His head, she filled the room with a beautiful perfume.<sup>559</sup>

He claims it was Mary, Martha's sister. He also says she anointed His feet and cleaned them with her hair at the same time. In this scene, many excellent individuals focused on numerous good things, but only Mary was focusing on the best. Martha was scurrying about in service as usual, and the 12-plus<sup>560</sup> those who had been the beneficiaries of magnificent miracles were undoubtedly having a good time and were appreciative of their excellent health and enough resources. Only one, Mary, was concerned with Jesus' needs. She had spent time at His feet absorbing His message and spirit. She knew Him on a deeper level and understood what He was going through as the cross neared like no one else. "I suppose this pious woman understood more about our Lord than all His Apostles together," Spurgeon observed. Mary adored Jesus for raising her brother Lazarus from the grave. She might thank Him for recovering Simon the leper, who was said to be her uncle. But she went farther than the others, loving Him for who He was rather than what He could achieve.<sup>561</sup>

She was the only one of His disciples who recognized Him as more than a miracle worker and the Messiah. She recognized Him as a person who required love and encouragement. The crucifixion was in Jesus' thoughts as He was aware that He

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<sup>559</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 186.

<sup>560</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 286.

<sup>561</sup> Pease and Pease, *Women of the Bible*, 187.



was on the verge of death. Only Mary amid all His supporters and offered Him any encouragement, and that was via her bold gesture of devotion.

- **The Poor Widow:**<sup>562</sup>

Although she would have had no source of income following her husband's death, presented the two little copper pennies that she had to God. Jesus taught his pupils that the lady outdid the affluent. As a widow, the poor lady.

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<sup>562</sup> Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” (Mark 12: 41–44, NIV).

- **The Woman of Bethany Who Anointed Jesus:**<sup>563</sup>

The specifics of the tale as reported by the four gospels differ significantly.

According to Matthew and Mark, an unidentified woman entered Simon the Leper's

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<sup>563</sup> When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the festival," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matthew 26, 6–13, NIV).

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot." While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. The poor will always have them with you and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So, he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Mark 14, 3–9, NIV).

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7, 36–50, NIV).

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." (John 12, 1–8, NIV).

house carrying an alabaster container full of expensive ointment (in Bethany) while Jesus was eating his lunch. The ointment was splattered all over his head by the woman.

His followers gossiped because they thought it would have been far more beneficial to spend the money from the fragrances on assisting the needy. However, Jesus defended the woman who put perfume on His corpse to prepare Him for burial. More information is provided by Luke, who confirms that Jesus was eating lunch at the home of Simon the Pharisee. He further claims that the sinful woman not only poured ointments on Jesus, but also bathed his feet with tears, wiped them with her hair and kissed them. Simon spread rumors about the woman being a sinner, but Jesus said, "Do you see this woman? I entered your home. You did not offer me any water for my feet, but she dripped tears on them and wiped them with her hair."

Jesus said, "You did not kiss me, but this woman has been kissing my feet since I walked in. You did not use oil on my head, but she actually applied perfume to my feet. As a consequence, her numerous misdeeds have been forgiven—for she loved deeply. But he who has been forgiven has little love." After that, Jesus forgave the woman's sins.

John tells a different account of the story. He claimed that Jesus ate lunch at the homes of Lazarus, Marta and Mary in Bethany. There, Mary took roughly a pint of pure nard, a costly perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. Judas Iscariot declared that the perfume was a waste of money that should have been used to benefit the needy. "It was intended that she should preserve this fragrance for the day of my burial," Jesus stood up for Mary. You'll always have the poor among you, but you will never have me." According to John and Luke, the woman seems to spill the ointment over Jesus' feet rather than his head.

## 4.6 Women of the Upper Room

- **Phoebe and the Women of Rome:**

Phoebe was among a group of women who worked closely with the Apostle Paul, including Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11),<sup>564</sup> Nympha (Colossians 4:15),<sup>565</sup> Apphia (Philemon 2),<sup>566</sup> Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3),<sup>567</sup> and Junia (Philippians 4:2-3). (Romans 16:7)<sup>568</sup>. Paul is sometimes described as "anti-women," but Phoebe and her sisters would undoubtedly disagree.

Paul's reference to Phoebe as "our sister," but do not investigate it thoroughly. When I checked family allusions throughout Paul's works, I discovered that the only one to whom he refers as a sister in the KJV and NKJV is Phoebe. Versions such as the NIV and Revised Standard Version (RSV) refer to 'Apphia our sister' as well.

Following the sister, Paul appoints Phoebe as a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. The NIV's translation option includes a textual note that suggests servant as an alternative. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) uses deacon as well but includes a note recommending a minister as an option. The English Standard Version (ESV) and the King James Version (KJV) both use servant. The Orthodox Jewish Bible refers to her as "the Messianic Shammash of the Kehillah at Cenchreae," while the Complete Jewish Bible refers to her as "the shammash of the congregation at

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<sup>564</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. (1 Corinthians 1:11, NIV).

<sup>565</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (Colossians 4:15, NIV).

<sup>566</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: Grace and peace to you[a] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philemon 1:1-3, NIV).

<sup>567</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, to help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Philippians 4:2-3, NIV).

<sup>568</sup> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. (Romans 16:1-2, NIV).

Cenchreae." A shammash is the person in charge of directing and leading the public order of worship.<sup>569</sup>

## 4.7 Women of Expectant Faith

- **Anna the Prophet:**

Anna is the daughter of Phanuel, a member of the Asher tribe.<sup>570</sup> After her husband died, she lived as a widow till the age of eighty-four. She was one of the most devoted women and almost did not leave the temple as she stayed there for her prayer's day and night. When Joseph and Mary arrived at the temple to give Jesus their eldest son to God and to fulfil the ceremonial commandment, they first encounter Simeon, the pious old man to whom the Holy Spirit had prophesied that he would not see death until he had seen Christ, 'the Anointed of the Lord.

Simeon blessed the family and made a prediction about the child's fate as a symbol to the people of Israel while praising God (Luke 2.25–35).<sup>571</sup> Anna, Phanuel's daughter, entered the scene at that very moment. She was an elderly woman who had been a widow for a long time. Based on how the Greek language is interpreted, she was either 84 years old or has been a widow for 84 years. She was staying permanently in the temple and worshipping (λατρεύω) there 'with fasting and praying night and day.'

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<sup>569</sup> Robin Gallaher Branch, *Female leadership as demonstrated by Phoebe: An interpretation of Paul's words introducing Phoebe to the saints in Rome*, AOSIS, Novi Sad, 2019, 3.

<sup>570</sup> Martti Nissinen, *Anna the Prophet in Luke 2:36–38*, Sheffield phoenix press, Sheffield, 2021, 1.

<sup>571</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2.25–35, NIV).

She began to praise (ἀνθομολογέομαι) God and to ‘speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem’.

Anna is the only woman in the New Testament who is given a proper name as well as the title "prophet". She is one of the important women that Luke gives to his readers as models of faith and the unidentified sinner, including Mary and Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, (Luke 7.36–50).<sup>572</sup> The frequent appearance of women in Luke's gospel has been seen as a symbol of his unique relationship with women, but it has also been understood as an attempt to limit and control women and present readers with a modest and subservient female role model. Anna, too, may be viewed from both sides. "Anna was not a harmless widow whose devout habits did not bother anybody," writes Barbara E. Reid.

- **Elizabeth:**<sup>573</sup>

Scholars and archaeologists think Mary, the soon-to-be mother of Jesus, visited her cousin Elizabeth, the soon-to-be mother of John the Baptist, on or near Ein Kerem.

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<sup>572</sup> When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7.36–50, NIV).

<sup>573</sup> "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped into her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (Luke 1:39–45, NIV).

Mary was visited by the Angel Gabriel who told her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God, Jesus. This was incomprehensible to her, yet she was prepared to believe in God and do what He requested. Her fiancé Joseph, who was aware that he was not the father, got an angelic visit and bravely accepted to care for Mary and the baby. Six months before this, Zechariah, a Hebrew priest in Jerusalem, encountered an angel while burning incense at God's altar. This angel declared that Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, both of whom are long past reproductive age, would produce a son. Mary's distant cousin was Elizabeth. Zechariah, like Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth, and us have difficulty believing this is true. Mary, pregnant by the Holy Spirit, travelled 80 miles to Ein Kerem to see her cousin Elizabeth, an elderly woman who has never had children and was suddenly pregnant - not by the Holy Spirit, but by her ageing husband - a miracle in itself.

#### **4.8 Mary the Virgin the mother of Jesus**

As the annunciation makes clear, Mary is first and foremost the beneficiary of a direct infusion of divine grace,<sup>574</sup> which she greets with exceptional hospitality and openness.<sup>575</sup> This elegant intervention, her "impossible maternity," and her conception of a messianic child bring her into close touch with the Holy One of Israel as God and Father, also putting her in an especially strong mother-son relationship. The intensity of this encounter, as well as the entirety

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<sup>574</sup> God's messenger, Gabriel, came to Mary. Only he and Michael are named in the Bible. They are unique messengers. They do not simply pay somebody a visit. Only three persons in the Bible were ever visited by Gabriel.

<sup>575</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled?" Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38, NIV).

of its maternal character, pose challenges to the human duties of fatherhood, the development of delimited communities and the production and transmission of Israel's spiritual legacy across time.<sup>576</sup>

The majority of the Mary stories we know through church or museum were written in the decades following Jesus' death. However, only a few were recorded in the gospels. The stories of Jesus' biography that produced the gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John include just a few details regarding Mary's life. They were compositions based on Jesus' disciples' memories that transmitted his message and provided significance to his death. Nonetheless, Mary's life unfolded virtually simultaneously. There was an understandable desire among Jesus' disciples to learn the "back story," flesh out the specifics and comprehend the origins of the God-made Flesh.<sup>577</sup>

None of the gospels tell the account of Mary's early life and origins; their goal was to present Jesus. Therefore, Mary enters the frame as a girl ready to be conceived. The efforts to comprehend and describe Jesus' mother were part of a long-term cultural shift driven by the belief in a god-made flesh. The co-emperors Constantine and Licinius, who acknowledged Christianity as a legal religion in 313 AD,<sup>578</sup> provided substantial fuel to this movement. The local nature of the congregations that worshipped Jesus and revered his mother was progressively influenced by the sovereign's desire and the authority of the Roman State throughout the fourth century. Constantine constructed a new metropolis on the Bosphorus, a capital for the Greek-speaking eastern section of the Empire under his command, the Christian city of Constantinople.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Cleo Mcnelly Kearns, *"The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice"*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2008, 16.

<sup>577</sup> Sylvia Browne, *"The Two Marys: The Hidden History of the Mother and Wife of Jesus"*, Penguin Group, New York, Hudson Street, 2007, 18.

<sup>578</sup> Miri Rubin, *"Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary"*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2009, 18.

<sup>579</sup> Rubin, *"Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary"*, 18.



Its narrative foundation, however, is laid in the gospels, where Mary herself goes through a series of ordeals that helps to qualify her as a witness to both paternal sacrifices; as one with her particular role to play in its closed economies; and to a broader vision, as one who stands with her kind of universality outside these limits.<sup>580</sup> In the gospels, Mary dramatizes a direct link to heavenly fertility that is even more scandalous than that of her foremothers Sarah, Rachel, Ruth and Hannah. Her motherhood, for example, occurs without any action or even the presence of a human spouse or father. Unlike many of her predecessors, she is not only infertile before conception, but also without a spouse. Thus, God must act extraordinarily and with maximum (and maximally scary and envied) inventiveness and power to inspire her pregnancy.<sup>581</sup>

Mary endured a aporetic, patriarchal, normative, and self-perpetuating function of sacrifice designed to maintain a religious patrimony "throughout the generations forever" and a movement beyond those closures into a more open, communal, and welcoming sacrificial community based on feasting and celebration. To some extent, this latter construction acts only as a postponed or deferred eschatological hope, but the seeds of that hope are as apparent in the gospel stories as the horrible realizations of its prolegomena in specific ordeals and expiations.<sup>582</sup>

When she died, Jesus and the angels arrived to take her soul. She rose from the dead after three days and ascended to God's right hand to join her Son in the act of intercession. She became the Christian divinity, succeeding all the goddesses of the pagan world. Mary's statues were placed where Venus formerly stood. Thousands of paintings of the Madonna contributed

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<sup>580</sup> Cleo Mcnelly Kearns, *"The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice"*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2008, 119.

<sup>581</sup> Kearns, *"The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice"*, 119.

<sup>582</sup> Kearns, *"The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice"*, 118.

significantly to the growth of Mary's worship. She did not rot, but her body was mysteriously lifted to heaven. In his message, She holds all of Christianity's major teachings together.

The Virgin Mary was and will always be one of the most important female figures in the New Testament. We can never neglect her significant role, first of all, as the mother of Jesus Christ then the unlimited support to Him and her courage in continuing what he started. She was the perfect example for women who broke their cultural rules and image that was put by men. She was a virtue, honest, a loving mother, a mentor and a sanctuary for whom people came seeking for safety and advice.<sup>583</sup>

So many other women were mentioned in the New Testament, some of them were nameless and others had their minor stories in the New Testament. For me, this raises questions in my mind: Were the women in the New Testament Era had been influenced by the women in the Old Testament Era? Did they hear their stories, so they had the courage to act like them? Maybe, or at least to feel strong enough to break out of the chains that the cultural man-oriented rules applied to them by that time. In my opinion, Jewish women in the New Testament would have grown up hearing stories of women from the Book of Genesis like Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and so on. They would have known of Jochebed, Miriam's and Moses' mother, and the midwives Shiphrah and Puah from the Book of Exodus. Furthermore, additional heroines such as Ruth the Moabite, Judith and Deborah the prophet/judge would have been familiar to them through stories from the Bible as well as expanded biblical legends (midrashim) of the rabbis.

The Gospel of Luke has one of the clearest examples of women from the Hebrew Bible influencing women in the New Testament. When the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:47-55)<sup>584</sup> and exclaimed the lovely canticle of thankfulness, “*My soul*

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<sup>583</sup> Kearns, “*The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice*”, 118.

<sup>584</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones

*magnifies the Lord...*”, the Lukan author had her echo Hannah's plea (1 Samuel 2:1-10).<sup>585</sup>

Another instance in Luke (Luke 2:36-38)<sup>586</sup> is when Anna the prophet encountered Mary and Joseph in the Jerusalem temple.

Furthermore, as a widow, Anna worshiped and fasted in the temple on a regular basis. As a result, her adoration for the young Jesus as the redeemer would have been regarded seriously. This New Testament character joins the ranks of other well-known Hebrew Bible female prophets such as Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister, and designated as a prophet in (Exodus 15:20),<sup>587</sup> led the people in a triumph song and danced as they escaped safely from Egyptian slavery.

So, in (Luke 2:38),<sup>588</sup> Anna the prophet led the temple bystanders in hope as she proclaimed the importance of the child, Jesus, to all in Jerusalem who awaited the redemption of Israel. Deborah, identified as both prophet and judge in (Deuteronomy 4:4),<sup>589</sup> gave

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but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” (Luke 1:47–55, NIV).

<sup>585</sup> Then Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD, my horn[a] is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. “There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. “Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him, deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. “The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. “For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s; on them, he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. “It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the LORD will be broken. The Highest will thunder from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.” (1 Samuel 2:1–10, NIV).

<sup>586</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36–38, NIV).

<sup>587</sup> Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. (Exodus 15:20, NIV).

<sup>588</sup> Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38, NIV).

<sup>589</sup> but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today. (Deuteronomy 4:4, NIV).

confidence to her people through her continued guidance as well as her leadership role in the defeat of the oppressive Canaanite enemy.

While Anna the prophet did not lead wars, she conveyed the hope of future redemption by joyfully praising God for the child Jesus in their midst. Finally, Huldah, a prophet during King Josiah's reign, is mentioned in both (2 Kings 22:14)<sup>590</sup> and (2 Chronicles 34:22).<sup>591</sup> In both cases, she advised the King of Judah in her capacity as God's prophet. So, Anna in (Luke 2),<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter. (2 Kings 22:14, NIV).

<sup>591</sup> Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter. (2 Chronicles 34:22, NIV).

<sup>592</sup> In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Jesus Presented in the Temple When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph, and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord" and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee

did the same when she promised deliverance via the child, Jesus, to her fellow Jewish worshippers in the Jerusalem temple.

In my opinion, the role of women in the New Testament was much stronger than we think. I believe, based on reading the New Testament, women were almost in every step of Jesus's teaching, also they helped to continued his sacred teaching and message that came to give the world redemption. In general, women in the New Testament helped to establish a strong presence of themselves.

In fact, women led Christian communities throughout the Greco-Roman globe in early Christianity. We read about unique women who followed and lived as followers of Jesus as mentioned in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels.

In addition to the New Testament texts concerning female leaders, there is textual evidence in non-canonical literature that shows Mary of Magdala's leadership, such as The Gospel of Mary, a late second-century gospel or early third-century work. Despite the fact that only fragments of this work exist, they constitute the only known gospel devoted to a woman. The sentences in these fragments indicate Mary the apostle's authority as a source for the male apostles.

Other historical sources, such as epigraphic documents, educate us about the behaviors of women as ecclesiastical leaders in the early years of Christianity, in addition to literary textual evidence. Inscriptions inscribed on sculptures, tombs, buildings, or books that characterize a person or idea are known as epigraphs. (Chen, Christine, Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity, 19.)

Inscriptions depicting women as apostles, prophets, presbyters, teachers, deacons, stewards, and even bishops may be found in numerous manuscripts, tombstones, monuments,

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to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. (Luke 2:2–39, NIV).

and other ancient literature. Ute Elsen argues clearly and thoroughly in her work “Women Officeholders in Early Christianity”, that Christian women had active formal leadership positions within the Church. They would have been given particular titles in these circumstances. Furthermore, additional women served in leadership positions without an official title from the community. Women emerge as powerful producers of ecclesiastical history throughout the early decades of the Church in both categories.

We can conclude this chapter by saying that, in many communities, women frequently adopted Christianity first and played a significant role in its propagation. Due in great part to evangelizing within the home—especially in upper-class Roman marriages—pagan husbands of Christian women were a frequent source of converts. Since women often became Christians first, they also had a tendency to raise their offspring as Christians or under the influence of Christianity, like Saint Augustine's mother, thus creating a new generation of Christians. House churches were also frequently led by women. Early Christian gatherings frequently took place in individual houses because the religion was not very open or organized.<sup>593</sup>

Whether it is the woman who touches the fringe of the mantle, where Jesus highlights her faith and proclaims her renovated purity and life in front of the crowd (Luke 8: 43–48), or the nameless sinful woman at Simon the Pharisee's house (Luke 7: 36–50), it is Jesus who initiates the conversation with them, and he also announces forgiveness, healing, and peace (Mark 5: 27–34; Luke 7: 36–50).<sup>594</sup> Jesus accepts the speech and cures a lady of faith and humility, a Syrophoenician by origin and culture, who was in excruciating pain in the area of Tire and Sidon (Mark 7:24–30). As stated in 1 Timothy 2:15, “Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing” (KJV), Christ did not limit the woman's obligation to parenting. Jesus

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<sup>593</sup> Stark, “*The Role of Women in Christian Growth*”, 236.

<sup>594</sup> Joel B. Green, “*The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*”. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997, 346-48; Francois Bovon and Helmut Koester, Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002, 338.

responds to the woman who said, “Happy the woman who bore You and fed You” (Luke 11:27), “*Happy the woman who bore You and fed You,*” rather than those who hear God's message and put it into practice (Luke 11:28).<sup>595</sup>

Thus, Mary is honored not as a mother but as the one who meditates on the word and implements, does, and obeys it (Luke 1:26–56). The regularity of meetings documented by the Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, prompted his concern for the acknowledgement of women's status. He meets Mary, Elizabeth, Anne, the widow of Nain, and the sinner at Simon's house, all of whom he finds important. "Luke has portrayed her as one who hears and reflects on the divine word, who responds to it positively, even as one who proclaims it prophetically (1:26–38, 46–55; 2:19, 51).<sup>596</sup> The primary reason Jesus wants to enhance women's position and treat them as equal to men is that God, according to the Scriptures, believes all human beings to be equal. He gives his redemption to all people (John 3:16), men and women alike (Acts 8:12). As a result, everyone has the same rights (Gal 3:26–28).

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<sup>595</sup> The Pulpit Commentary: St. Luke Vol., ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004, 176.

<sup>596</sup> William L. Lane, “*The Gospel of Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*”. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974, 259.

## Conclusion

The regions of feminine spirituality were frequently the ones least touched by urbanization.<sup>597</sup> Nonetheless, urban women's interaction with the divine, like other elements of women's life, varied by area. The major role that goddesses continued to play in the world's first civilizations demonstrates the enduring significance of feminine spirituality. Many people of the towns of the Indus Valley, for example, worshipped deities associated with agriculture and fertility.

After three years of research on this topic, I came to the conclusion that even with the fact that most of the historical references were written by men and despite the fact that we cannot argue that the historical world was dominated by men and they had the ultimate power over it, women could and had a major role throughout all human history. Maybe, as we saw in the previous chapters that the number of women was not high and the percentage in comparison to men, unfortunately, is low, but women could and made a difference in men's world. They could rise and fight the cultural chains that men put to them. The strongly cultural rules were strongly forced upon them. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, the fathers or brothers had the authority to choose a husband for their daughters, or, even worse, they would not give her heritage unless they did not have a son to inherit them, like in the Jewish culture. In spite of these detrimental facts, women could prove themselves as equal to men. They had their role in the royal families and ruled their people and the history is full of the names of those women. Women also assumed positions that were male-preserved, such as priestesses and even ascension to the level of prophets, and men used to come to them for answers and assurance.

The part of my research that took most of the time was searching for inscriptions and scripts related to women. I had to read and go through so many historical scripts to find the

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<sup>597</sup> Clay, *Envisioning Women in World History Prehistory–1500*, 28.



parts where women were mentioned. Also, it was challenging to go through different ancient language scripts as well as covering different entities at the same time. It took me an enormous amount of reading to reach my goal to prove and highlight the women's role in the Southern Levant in general and in the religious aspect in particular.

The importance of this research is derived from the data that was collected within it as well as from the rare researches that dealt with different geographical and political entities at the same time. I can say that most of the researchers dealt with one specific area and tried to interoperate and study it, but in my case, I choose to expand my research area and put my experience in the epigraphy in the Southern Levant into my research. Also, this research dealt with many aspects and was not exclusive to one part of life. I spoke about politics, trade, culture, and social and religious life in the eras that I covered in my research. In every step in my research, I proved and documented the presence and the role of women and their contribution to their societies, even when they did not belong to the royal families.

Concerning Jewish history, we had two parts that I elucidated, the first part was about the women in Judaism, and we came to the conclusion that women did not have their own freedom to have their choices they were not allowed to be independent or were able to make their own decisions, even when it was about their own life matters, such as marriage and divorce, in religious practices even when they could not perform any special prairies or practices in the temple such as the offerings, and they had to be separated from men during the prairies, they could do the religious practices at home, they could prepare the special meals, make the conduct the prayers and offerings for their families safety and prosperity.

Women were not ordained to the priesthood in the Old Testament. This is not to say they were unimportant. It simply implies that they were not anointed to the Aaronic priesthood or anything else. Deborah was a prophetess who referred to herself as a mother in Israel.

Jochebed may have had the highest power in the Hebrew people. Ruth and Rahab were aliens, yet Providence orchestrated events so that they would be the progenitors of Messiah.

Hannah's prayed-for son Samuel would become a priest, prophet, judge, and savior of the nation—all because of his prayerful mother. Jezebel was a 16 horrifying influence, but she had an impact on Israel. The same goes for the evil Athaliah. Esther rescued the country from genocide. All of these, and many more, were powerful "mothers in Israel." However, even though women were powerful throughout the Old Testament, there were no female priests or elders. But this does not minimize or cancel their important roles in other matters as I mentioned in details in my first chapter.

Women were excluded from the duty to attend the annual festivals throughout the Old Testament period (Ex. 23:17), although they were permitted to do so if they were able (1 Sam. 1:9, 21-22). The Mosaic Law acknowledged that spouses and mothers had domestic obligations that made public participation at religious meetings difficult. Women, on the other hand, may serve at the Tabernacle's door (Ex. 38:8), take a Nazirite vow (Num. 6:2), hear God's Word (Neh. 8:2-3), engage in music ministry (Ex. 15:20-21; 1 Chr. 25:6), and even prophecy (Ex. 15:21; Jud. 4:6-7). However, it is obvious that the priestly office was confined to male members of the priestly family (Ex. 28:1; Num. 18:1-7). Aside from this constraint, women had significantly more independence than is commonly believed.

The second part of the first chapter was about the women's presence in the community of Qumran, which is a community formed by men, and for men to dedicate their lives to the services of God, and to write the holy and sacred books, but surprisingly from the archaeological evidence they concluded that women were presented in Qumran and had a role in that closed man-oriented community, unfortunately, we do not know how effective and strong was their role, how deep they were involved in the community of Qumran, but they had their presence there and as I explained in details in the chapter how we could prove that, this

was an amazing discovery, as it proves that no community no matter how strong it was can survive without women.

The Hellenistic-Roman period was a unique moment for Jewish women because of the numerous difficulties given by the dominating Hellenistic culture and the Jewish community's reactions to it. Hellenization began in earnest with Alexander the Great's dissemination of Greek civilization, and while it did not completely overrun Jewish culture or any other culture that met it, the alterations it brought via assimilation of their traditions were irreversible and lasting.

Since the Babylonian exile, Jewish communities have been dispersed across Asia Minor, with those residing outside Palestine outnumbering the region's Jewish population. Naturally, diaspora Jewish communities felt the effects and influence of Hellenism the most, but even those who were less exposed needed to craft a reaction and decide how much influence they would allow it to have. Women were gradually gaining emancipation in Greek society, and their social and religious liberties had increased substantially since the Classical period. The portrayal of the principal female characters in the Testament of Job, Aesenth, and Joseph, and The Book of Jubilees reveals this Hellenistic influence. Finally, regardless of what writers of the day saw as the ideal position of women in Jewish society, non-literary evidence speaks of women's specific roles in both society and the synagogue and reveals that, at least in some areas of the diaspora, Jewish women were prominent in a religious setting that had previously been unavailable to them.

A significant number of examples where ancient writings are linked to ancient social groups have had a scholarly concentration on elites. As a result, classical literary depictions are not always regarded to be indicative of the lived experience of most ordinary people. The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) on the other hand, present credible portrayals of mixed societies of elites and common people and hence can provide insights into the lives of the Essenes throughout the Second Temple era. Scholars who have discussed purity and impurity in the DSS, such as Jacob

Neusner, Hannah Harrington, and Jonathan Klawans, have built their understanding of Jewish purity systems around priestly traditions and the relationships between purity and sin in relevant texts. Although such ideas on cleanliness and impurity in Second Temple Judaism are definitely essential, they must typically be mitigated because real life in the DSS communities was probably certainly not that regimented and strict.

The celibacy lifestyle of a Qumran movement group appears to be a rare instance within Judaism, which generally favours marriage and children. Importantly, according to Genesis 1:28, the prescription to "be fruitful and multiply" is God's first mandate to humans. As a result, the practice of celibacy must be explained. The sectarian desire to live a life of holiness and purity is frequently stated as the driving motivation behind marriage abolition. And, as we know, the community of Qumran was a religious community whose main purpose was to follow the teachings of the Jewish religion, and I believe that they lived according to the Torah, Old Testament teachings, and thus they needed to produce and have families for their community to follow their tradition, continue, and inherit their way of life. which may be a reason why we should search and put more effort into digging for all the evidence possible to prove or deny the presence of women in the Qumran community.

The Question of Women living in Qumran and with the community of the Essene will always be in debate and the only way to prove that women actually lived in Qumran with the Essen and they were included in their everyday life matters and rituals is by finding a clear text that prove their presence there.

As for the Nabataean Kingdom, The Nabataean women were and still are a mystery to us because we could not find much archaeological and epigraphical evidence demonstrating and describing their place in society, and how influential they were in the Nabataean community, we tried to conclude their role whether it was in the religious or social aspects, but from my research, The Nabataean women were and still are a mystery to us because we could

not find much archaeological and epigraphical evidence demonstrating and describing their place in society, and how influential they were in the Nabataean community, we tried to conclude their role whether it was in the religious or social aspects, but from my research, We can conclude that the Nabataean women were not ordinary or marginalized in the Nabataean kingdom; they had major roles in ruling the kingdom, also participated in political treaties, and in some cases were the cause of wars. The Nabataean women were strong and independent because they could have their own businesses and sell and buy without a man's permission controlling their decisions. Most importantly, they could participate in religious rites, such as offering sacrifices or becoming priestesses to worship and commit their lives to their gods.

In the Kingdom of Palmyra, one may infer those presumptions about Palmyrene women having a secondary role based on gendered iconography, particularly the appearance of the stated objects in female figures, are erroneous and undermine the picture produced by the inscriptions.

The cession texts, a legal instrument, and other events and aspects of Palmyrene's existence detailed in civil and religious honorific and dedicatory works can be utilized to track women's active involvement. By sorting through the multitude of intact inscriptions, we uncovered facts about women and their activities that shed light on a specific time of Palmyrene social history. In order to provide a fair picture, this study emphasizes a combined evaluation of visual data and epigraphic materials.

Palmyrene women, in my opinion, had greater roles in their society and among their family members, whether it was in the royal and upper-class society or among the lower-class people. Women reached a position where they were a significant role in helping the Palmyrene community improve and become more advanced in comparison to the surrounding entities at the time, and having the opportunity to own companies, as I previously indicated, was a fantastic advantage they had. Participating in religious practices, offering sacrifices, and being

priestesses to honor their gods show that they were seen as equals in their community, despite the fact that most of the inscriptions that mentioned women were mostly genealogical or funerary inscriptions, but on the other hand, we found many reliefs in tombs with women with their children beautifully designed and engraved, showing that they were equal with men in that way. Another point is that women could dedicate inscriptions to their gods, to protect their family members, it may sound strange that I mention this as a privilege, but we need to see the ancient men-oriented point of view, not our open-minded nowadays world, even with the fact that in some places in the world, men still do not see or treat women as equal to them, this is why I call that a privilege, and a great honour that women could have in that era.

In the Fourth and last chapter, it was me a much easier job to prove the role of women in early Christianity, as all these details were mentioned in the Bible, I had to go through the New Testament and locate the areas where women were mentioned in demonstrate in the chapter, women had a more heard voice in the Christian era, they could teach Jesuses teachings, they could participate in his teaching sessions, they were able to approach him for personal requests, they could offer for him their offerings to worship him, secretly and loudly defining all the rules around them, we could see that women could do business and have their own wealth, and they had the complete freedom in how to use it and spend it.

Nobody, especially women, was despised by Jesus. He never rejected them or crushed them. On the contrary, Jesus delivered them from loneliness (Luke 7:12–15), injustice (Luke 18:1–8), deformity and infirmity (Luke 13:10–17), sin (Luke 7:36–50), and qualified them as disciples par excellence (Luke 10:38–42). “Jesus is the compassionate benefactor of the poor,” those who are miserable, misunderstood, humble, and persecuted (Matthew 5:22). “Luke's own desire expresses emotion and draws attention to Jesus' care for women.” “When anyone is in need to an unusual degree, Christ takes a special interest in him or her.” Christ's conversation with women is mentioned several times in the gospels, although in the Palestinian society,

males, particularly rabbis, interacted rarely with women unless they had to judge one of them, and even then, they did not communicate much with them. Even the apostles were taken aback when Jesus spoke with a woman, specifically a Samaritan (John 4:27).

In his time Jewish society was very patriarchal.<sup>31</sup> Women transitioned from their father's authority (Num 30:3–8) to that of their husband's (Num 30:10–15; 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23), or from their brother's (Gen 24:29–50), or from their son's (Luke 7:11–17; John 19:27).<sup>32</sup> It was unimaginable for a woman to be self-sufficient. Unhappiness and sorrow frequently fell on unprotected widows (Mark 12:42) or discarded wives. The Gospels describe widows' terrible poverty (Mark 12:41–44, Luke 21:1–4, Luke 7:11–17, Luke 18:1–8). The repudiated may be consigned, at best, to domesticity in the house of their father or brother and, at worst, to prostitution (Gen 38:15–26, Judg 19), despite the fact that the Old Testament provided regulations to protect widows. As a result, Jesus upholds God's principles of compassion that were inscribed in the Old Testament regarding widows. Those laws were not strictly followed by God's people. Jesus' objection to rejection is clearly a restriction on men discarding wives like old discarded garments (Matthew 19:3–11). In this regard, Jesus is the guardian of women against the "hardness of men's hearts" (Matthew 19: 8). "The Mosaic legislation in Deut 24:1–4 was thus not normative, but only secondary and temporary, a concession based on the people's sinfulness." It acted as a check against misuse and excess in that environment.

The disparities in women's life in the Jewish society and early Christianity are explained by the following points:

1. Although written after the first century, rabbinical works in the Mishna and Talmud reflect customs that were prevalent throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. In Jesus' day, the four social standards listed below were followed.

2. Women were to avoid public social interaction. Consider this text from Mishna tractate (Abot, 1, 5): *"Don't engage in too much conversation with women." This was expressed in reference to one's own wife. How much more does the rule apply to the wife of another man? As long as a man participates in too much talk with women, he causes himself harm because he neglects Torah study, and his final result will be that he inherits Gehenna."*
3. Women were not to be taught the Torah in public. This was not the case in the Old Testament (Josh. 8:35; Neh. 8:2-3). were separated from males.
4. Women were forbidden from speaking the Torah to others, even children. Consider Mishna Kiddushin 4, 13: "Neither an unmarried man nor a woman shall be a teacher of children." This prohibition also extended to publicly reading Scripture in the synagogue (Megillot 73a) and even saying the blessing after a meal at home (Mishna Bereshit 7:2).

Women's taboos have changed over time, they have had more room to breathe and practice their religious beliefs more freely, but there are many religious rules they cannot break even today, women in the southern Levant in general and the Middle East in particular have suffered and continue to suffer from significant discrimination, and men still have the ultimate power over them, even by modern regulations and rules (which were put down by men), women in every country have suffered and continue to suffer from significant discrimination, They were always required to follow the male members of their families, whether it was a father, brother (even if he was younger than her), or a husband; unfortunately, in some places in the Middle East, this is still the case for millions of women who live there; from my close friends' experience, they were not allowed to go and pray in the church without the permission of their father or brother, and if we go back in time to the Hellenistic - Roman era, we will notice that this kind of attitudes towards women was applied as well.



The Kingdom in the Southern Levant were not isolated from each other, they had so many aspects to interact with each other, and even be influenced from each other cultures and lifestyles, religions, and mindsets, we cannot deny that the Ancient world was a man-dominated world, and women in rare cases could have their chance to break these chains that were forced upon them, but they could do that, and break the rules the cultural customs that they were forced to live among them.

Women had their own print in history, they could leave their trace and effect despite the fact that the historians and the written monumental inscriptions were written by and about men, mostly graffiti and dedicatory inscriptions mentioned women, but they found that small space to prove that they were there and they did more than what we thought before I start my study I did not know that women had such a power, that women were able to define all these customs and emerged from their cultural rules to shine finally and be leaders, Queens, Priestesses, and businesswomen in a man's world.

The Following maps are another explication of how close geographically, economically, and politically the kingdoms that I included in my study were, I choose to put it at the end to give a more comprehensive idea about what I had already explained in my study in the previous chapters.

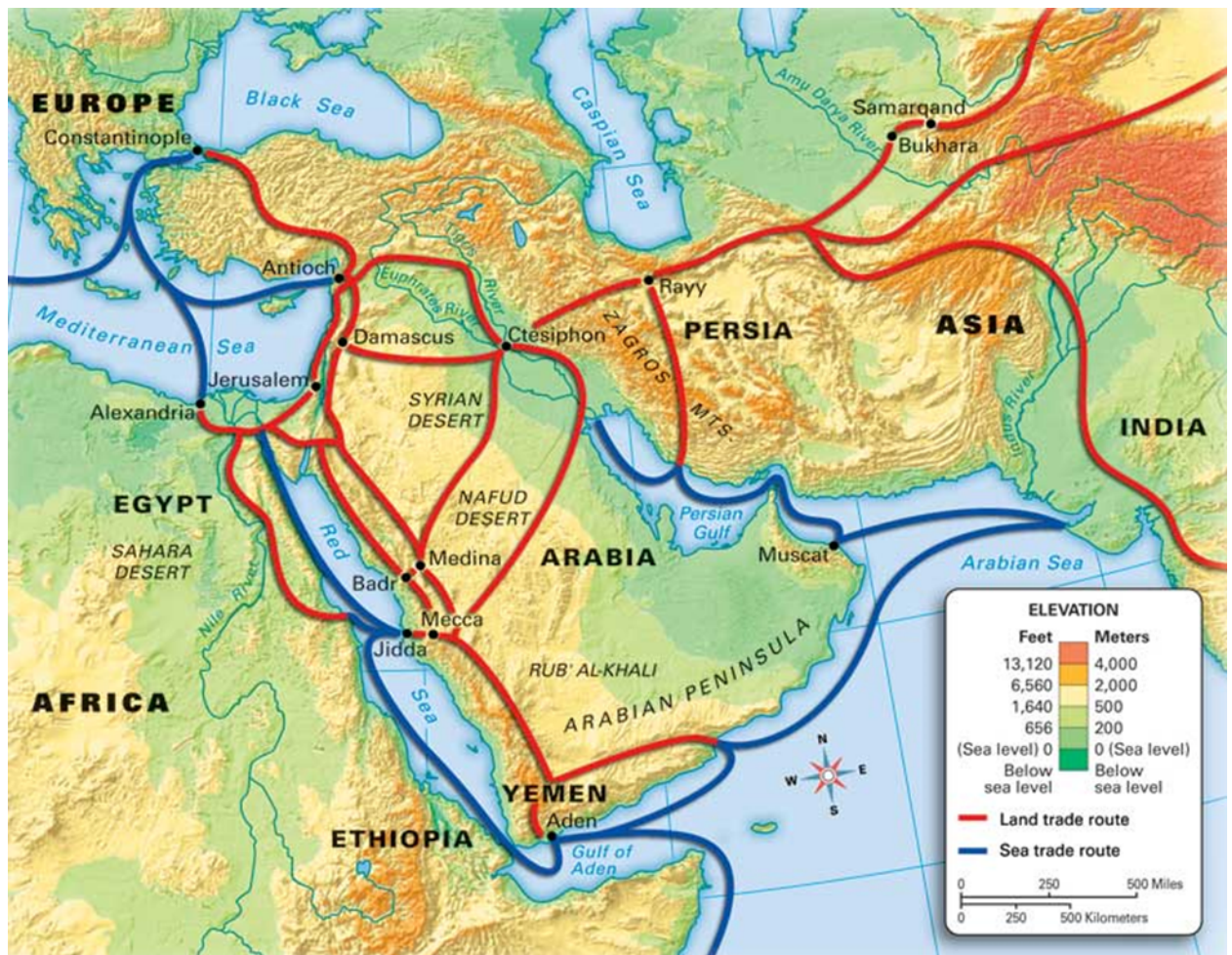


Figure 17: The Trading Routes in the Ancient Near East.<sup>598</sup>

<sup>598</sup> <http://learwoodsocialstudies7thgrade.weebly.com/islam-mini-unit.html>. (Downloaded. 28.10.2022).

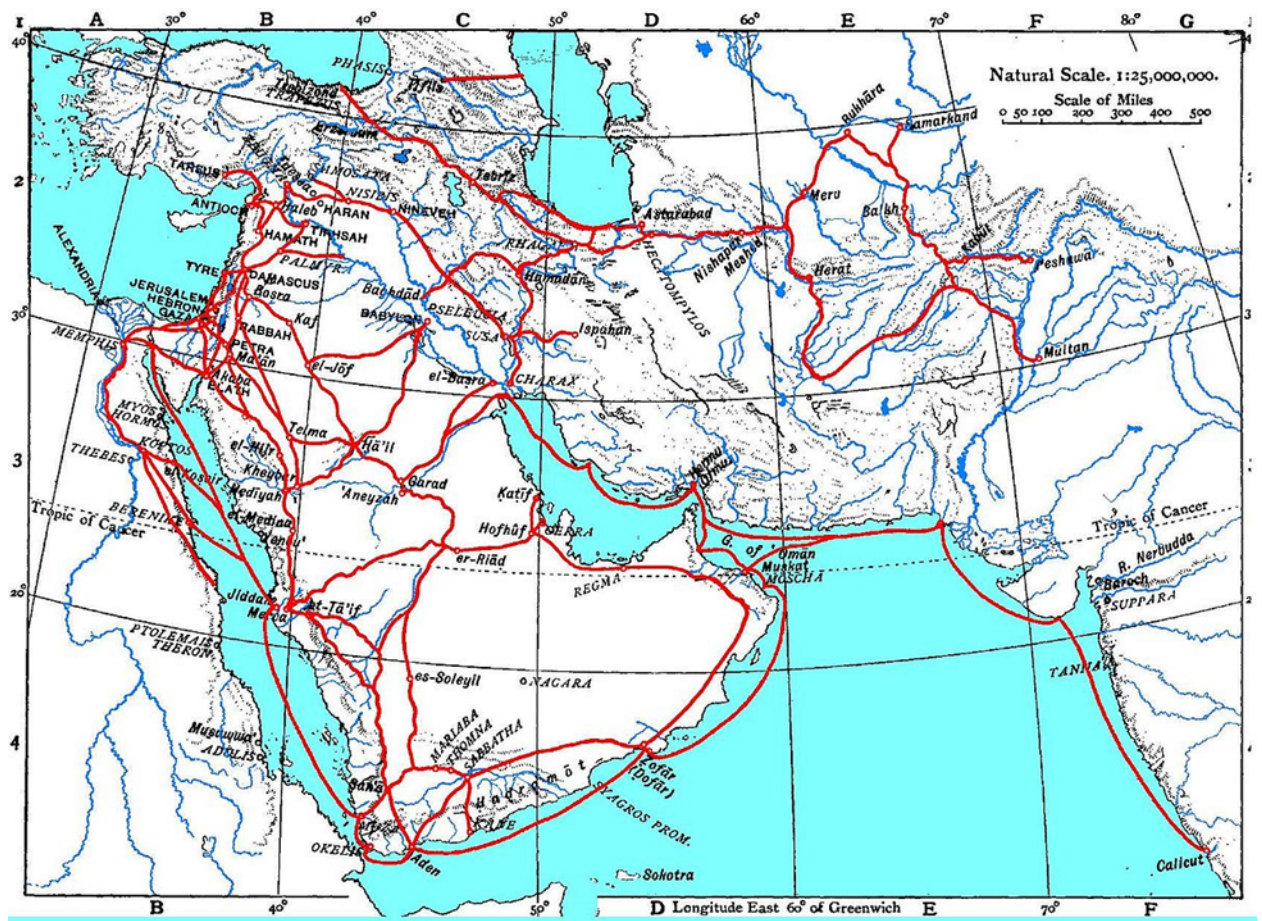


Figure 18: Trading roots in the Hellenistic-Roman time.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>599</sup> <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C%2BBB-Trade-Map1-HitherAsiaTradeRoutes.JPG>. (Downloaded: 28.1002022)

## Glossary

- 'b: nm father, forefathers, ancestors, grandfather  
also, it can be Ab (name of the month of August).
- 'b<w>h: Root 'b see 'b, the father of.
- 'brt: Root 'br, nm corps, unit of auxiliary troops.
- 'dr: nm Adar (name of the month March).
- 'wsy: nm, Awsi
- 'wšy: nm, Awshi
- 'ḥwh: root aḥ, brother (his/her brother).
- 'klbw: nm, Aklabu.
- 'l: nm, God, the lord of heavens.
- 'lhy': see 'l, my god.
- 'lh': see 'l, pl. (to her/ his god).
- 'lhthm: see 'l, (their gods).
- 'mby: nm, Amby
- 'mtlt: nm Amtallat.
- 'qym: v. to erect.
- 'qymw: see 'qym. (The subject here is pl. they erected.)
- 'tt: nf, the wife of.
- 'tw: nf, Ataw.
- 'ty: nf Attai.
- b: prep. In, within, inside, at, by, with accompanying, with or by an instrument, by (in the oath), marking object or modifier with certain verbs.
- bl: Cj certainly, indeed  
nm, Bel (name of a deity).
- blḥzy: nm, Belahazi.
- bnh: root bn, son, (the son of / his son)
- bnt: nf, daughter, child, a daughter, daughter of, grandchild, and member of a family.
- bnwhy:
- bny: nm, the family of PN.
- bnyh: see bny. (His son).
- bnyhn: see bny. (The family of PN)

- bnysn: nm, Bany (the family of) Yassin.
- bqđšwhy: nm, Feast. (This is a compound name it includes the prep. “b”, which means in, and the nm feast). (In the feast of)
- br: nm, son, a son, child, son of, half-brother, grandchild, nephew, member of a family, and it can be as a second meaning to the word outside, and exterior.
- br<sup>‘</sup>: nm, Baraa
- brdš: nm, Bardish.
- brt: nf, daughter of.
- brty<sup>’</sup>: nf, Beirut.
- bšlḥd: another noun that includes a preposition in its structure, the “b” is the preposition that means in, and the šlḥd is a nm a place name.
- Btzby: nf, daughter of Zabby.
- bwlḥ<sup>’</sup>: nm, Botra.
- byrḥ: nm, month (another example of the noun connected to a preposition the meaning is in the month).
- byt<sup>’</sup>: nm, house, home.
- dh: pron, this.
- dnh: pron, this.
- dy: pron. Connecting particle.
- dy<sup>’</sup>: v. to erect.
- hgr: nm, Hager.
- hykl<sup>’</sup>: root hykl, nm, temple, his/ her temple.
- w: Cj, connecting with verbs, and connecting with nouns.
- w b<sup>’</sup>lh: see w, b<sup>’</sup>l: nm husband, and h: is a suffix that indicated second person feminine (her Husband).
- w?[mlkbl]: see w. Mlkbl: nm, Malakbel (name of a deity).
- wbny: see w, also see bny.
- wdy: see w, also see dy.
- w<sup>’</sup>glbwl: see w, <sup>’</sup>glbwl: nm Aglibol (deity name).
- whblt: nm, Waheballat. (in Arabic Wahab is to give and this name was popular to use in the north Arabian inscriptions and also in the Nabataean inscriptions, and it means the gift of Allāt or Allāt gave).
- w<sup>’</sup>ḥyh: see w, see ḥyyh.

- w'hyhn: see w, see hyyh.
- whyy: see w, see hyyh.
- wšb: see w. šb: num, seven (سبعة) in Arabic it occurs in the same way.
- wšbḥy: see w, nf, Shebhai
- wškr': see w, škr': root škr; v. to thank, or to be thankful.
- w't': see w, 't': nf Atta.
- wyrḥbwł: see w, yrḥbwł: nm, Yarhubel.
- wzby: see w, zby, nm, zby.
- wzdqt[']:
- zbd': nm, Zabda.
- zbdbł: nm, Zabdibel.
- zbdł: nm Zabadł.
- ḥnk: v. to dedicate.
- ḥrtt: nm, Haretat.
- ḥyl': see hyy.
- hyyh: Root hyy, v. to live, if it occurs as a noun, it means alive. (Usually, it is in the dedication inscriptions and it means in the concept of the life of PN)
- hyyhn: see hyyh, (for their life,).
- ṭb': Root ṭb adj. good.
- ṭbt: nm Tebet (name of month = January).
- yd[']: it may be yd', v. to know, and to make knowing.
- ywlyws: nm Julius, and julii as the title.
- ywm: nm day.
- kmr': nm, root Kmr, priest.  
w'sq ḥmr' 'tyq' lkmry'; and he brought out old wine to the priests.  
Kmr' PN tribal name.
- knwn: nm brazier  
nm; Kanun (name of month = November).
- l: to complement various verbs, speak to, give to, etc.
  1. with verbs like dy y' mr lh; who will say to him.
  2. With verbs of giving, to give him/her ...etc.
  3. With words denoting what is pleasurable or the reverse.
  4. With verbs expressing motion or direction toward something.



5. With time expressions.
  6. Objects of verbs.
  7. Other kinds of adverbial complementation or modification.
  8. To, for in sense belonging to;  
belonging to, of.  
as periphrasis for the construct state.
  9. For referring to aim.
  10. With passive verbs, the agent by.
  11. With an infinitive, in sense of purpose.
  12. Equivalent of 'l, for, on behalf of.
- Combining with other prepositions or with conjunctions.  
lb'šmn: for Ba'alshamīn.
  - lh: for him/ for her.
  - l'lt: see l, for Al-Lāt: ("the virgin warrior").
  - lmrthwn: for Marthwn; nm.
  - lšmš: for the deity šmš.
  - lwql': nf Loukilla
  - lyqrh: in her/ his honor.
  - m':
  - mksmws: nm, Maximus.
  - mlk: nm, king. nf mlkt.
  - mlkt': see mlk.
  - mlkw: see mlk.
  - mn: From, out of, as part of, on, at, according to, by, and in several idiomatic combinations.
  - m'ny: root m'n, nm Maan, Maanu (name of a deity).
  - mqy: nf, meaning uncertain.
  - mrqws: nm, Markus.
  - mrty: nf, the lady of the temple, (name of a deity).
  - myt': v. to die.
  - mytt: Root mwt, nm death.
  - m'zyn: nm, Mazin (A tribe name).
  - nbṭw: nbṭy the Nabataeans.

- nhyrt': Root nhyr, adj, illustration.
- nşb: v. to erect, nşb' dnh nşb PN, PN erected this, Stele. mşb, nşbh n stele.
- sptmy': sptmyw': nm Septimii, as title, sptmyw' PN rb ɣyl' rb' wPN rb ɣyl' the Septimii PN major general and PN the general.
- sptmyw': nm Septimii(pl.), as title, sptmyw' PN rb ɣyl' rb' wPN rb ɣyl' the Septimii PN major general and PN the general.
- 'bd: v. to do, to make, to build, to erect, to have made, and build.  
w 'bd šlm' bynyhwn and he made peace between them.  
w'n şb'dy y'bd and if he wishes to make.
- 'glbw: nm, Aglibol (A deity name), the moon god.
- 'wn: nf, Service, ritual, or corps of priests.
- 'l: prep on, upon, on top of, above, at for, on behalf of, over, in charge of, concerning, and against.
- 'ln: see 'l.
- 'lmnk: A compound name, 'l: pre. Of. Mnk: nm, to his king.
- 'm: Pre, with, towards, bdyl dy hlk 'mh špr because he behaved well towards him.
- 'md': nf, Amada.
- 'mh: nm, pl, nation (his nation).
- 'mwdy': Root, 'mwd, nm column, pl. 'mwdyn; em. 'mdwy', 'md' wtpyt' wšrtyt' wtłyl' 'bd PN, the column and the coping and the entablature and the ceiling were made by PN.
- 'sr: num, ten.
- 't'm: nf, Atteen.
- 'tntn: nf, Ateantn.
- P: CJ, and, that is; ɣbl PN wbnwhy pPN brh wɣbl PN brh alas, PN and his children; that is PN his son alas.
- pbd: pron, of.
- pɣd: nm tribe, PN dy mn pɣd bny PN; PN who is of the tribe of the Bani PN.
- prdš: nm, Perdesh.
- şlm': Root şlm, nm; statue, and image, it can occur in the following forms; şlm', şlmyn, şlmy, and şlmy'.
- şlmt: see şlmt'.



- šlmt': Root šlmh, nf, statue (statue of a woman), e.g: šlmt PN brt PN: statue of PN daughter of PN, šlmt' dh dy PN b[rt PN] this statue is for/ of PN daughter of PN.
- qrbt: see qrbw.
- qrbw: root qrb; v. to offer.
- qrtštw': see qrtštw' adj.
- qšyw: adj; most powerful, distinguished, excellent, and it can be used as a title of honor. / Also, it can be as nm, Qašiu.
- qwlwn: nm; colonist "qwlwn brty'; a colonist of Beirut.
- qym: adj; root qdmy; first, former, and in the first place.
- rb: adj. large, great (also as epithet or name of a deity); elder; chief of (followed by name of a group of things).
- rb': see rb.
- rwḥw: Root rwḥ, nm relief, and space, w'nnwn brwḥ' and he gave them relief. / it also can be nm, Rawahw.
- [r]ḥm: nm, love and affection, dy 'qym l[h b]wl' lyqrh mn rḥm' which the Senate and people erected for him in his honor out of affection.

In Syriac and Arabic, it means affection, favor mercy, and grace, rḥm: n, rḥym; rḥmn adj.

- šḥr': nm, Shahra.
- škybl: nm, Shokaibel.
- šm: nm. name.
- šnt: nf; year.
- šryk: root: šwr; v.; to pass.
- štt': num, root "št, šth", it means the number six, or it can indicate the sixth of something like in: ywm štt' bnysn; the sixth if Nisan. Nisan is the fourth month of the year; April.
- tryhwn: From the root "tryn" num, two when we say for example 2 dy trty3 this can be translated as a second time.
- tšry: nm, Tishri, Tishreen (name of a month October").
- tdmwr: nf, Tadmor, Palmyra, mn tdmwr l'lgšy; from Tadmor/ Palmyra to Vologesia.
- tym': nf, Tayma.

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