

THESIS BOOKLET

to the PhD dissertation

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

by

Laura Habes Tashman

University of Szeged

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Doctoral School of History

Antiquities Program

Supervisor: Dr. Nóra Dávid

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1. Research goals

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.

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.

2. Methods and sources

In my dissertation, I collected the sources books, articles, studies, researches, annuals, and websites in the field of the study as well as those that contain inscriptions of the targeted civilization, and studied, examined, analysed, interpreted, and translated, 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 of 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 Kingdom 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).

3. Dissertation Abstract:

This study This abstract provides an in-depth examination of the presence and significant religious roles played by women in the Southern Levant during the transformative Hellenistic and Roman eras. Throughout this period, the region witnessed a rich tapestry of religious diversity, intercultural exchanges, and shifting power dynamics, all of which influenced the participation of women in religious activities and institutions.

Women in the Southern Levant during the Hellenistic and Roman eras were active participants in various religious traditions, encompassing indigenous, Hellenistic, and Roman belief systems. Their involvement spanned a wide spectrum, including priestesses, devotees, benefactors, and patrons of religious sanctuaries. This abstract explores the multifaceted nature of their religious roles and their impact on the spiritual life of the region.

The study draws upon a rich array of sources, including archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, religious texts, and iconography. These sources illuminate the diverse religious practices in which women engaged, such as temple worship, votive offerings, rituals, and festivals. Additionally, they provide insights into the social and economic aspects of women's participation in religious life, shedding light on their agency, status, and influence within religious communities.

Furthermore, this abstract examines the intersection of gender with other identity markers, including ethnicity and social class, to understand how these factors shaped women's religious roles. It highlights the unique experiences of elite and non-elite women, considering how their access to resources and education affected their involvement in religious activities.

The Hellenistic and Roman eras introduced new religious elements and challenges to the Southern Levant, as the region experienced a blend of indigenous practices, Greco-Roman influences, and the spread of mystery cults. Women were instrumental in facilitating this religious syncretism and adapting to evolving religious landscapes, as evidenced by their active roles in cults dedicated to goddesses, gods, and local deities.

This study provides a comprehensive overview of women's presence and influential religious roles in the Southern Levant during the Hellenistic and Roman era. It underscores the dynamic interplay between gender, religion, and societal changes, emphasizing the importance of recognizing women's contributions to the spiritual and cultural development of the region during this transformative period. This exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex religious dynamics in the Southern Levant and their impact on women's lives and identities. 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 practised 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 mentions 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.

1. Chapter One: The Role of Women in Religion Practices in Judaism:

In the first chapter, my main focus was women in the Jewish community in the Hellenistic Roman Era, I divided this chapter into two parts. The first part included a general introduction to the Jewish religion and I demonstrated the main principles of the Jewish religion and practices, also the concept of household and family in the Jewish religion (the purpose was to elucidate how women lived in the Jewish household and community), the main topics that I dealt with in this chapter were The Jewish religion and the religious practices, Marriage and family, Household and family in the Jewish community, Women's daily life, Women's household religious activities, and women in Ancient Israel. The second part was about the women's presence in Qumran and the community of the Essenes, This part had a general introduction about the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), and the sect of the Essenes, afterwards, I demonstrated the main factors that I built this chapter on to try to prove that women were present in the community of Qumran, and which were the Cemetery and the human remains that were found next to Qumran, the Gender Objects which were discovered in Qumran and the findings from the settlement, the last part of this chapter was about the texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that mentioned women their rights and obligations.

To summarize the role of women in religious practices and presence in Judaism I reached the conclusion that the role of women evolved over time and varies within different branches of Judaism. Historically, women's participation in Jewish religious rituals and leadership roles was limited, with a primary focus on their responsibilities within the family and community. However, in modern times, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of women in religious life, leading to increased opportunities for their involvement.

Historical Context: In ancient Judaism, women primarily played domestic roles and were responsible for maintaining Jewish traditions within the household. While they were essential for passing down traditions to the next generation, they had limited involvement in formal religious rituals conducted in synagogues or temples.

Synagogue and Prayer: Traditionally, women were seated separately from men in Orthodox and some Conservative synagogues, and their participation in public prayer services was often more passive. However, in Reform and Conservative Judaism, women's roles in the synagogue have evolved, with greater opportunities for active participation in prayer and Torah reading.

Religious Leadership: In Orthodox Judaism, women are generally not permitted to become rabbis or lead Orthodox prayer services. In contrast, Reform and Conservative Judaism have made significant strides in ordaining female rabbis and allowing them to assume leadership roles within congregations.

Lifecycle Rituals: Women have always played central roles in certain Jewish lifecycle rituals. They light the Shabbat candles, participate in the Passover Seder, and hold significant roles in events like weddings and baby-naming ceremonies. These rituals are often conducted in the home, highlighting the importance of women in transmitting Jewish traditions.

Educational Opportunities: Modern Jewish communities have increasingly recognized the importance of women's education in Jewish religious texts and traditions. This has led to the establishment of women's seminaries and educational programs, enabling women to become knowledgeable about Jewish law and tradition.

Changing Perspectives: Over the last few decades, there has been a growing movement within Judaism to promote gender equality in religious practices. Many Jewish communities now strive to create more inclusive and egalitarian worship spaces where women have equal access to religious roles and leadership positions.

In summary, the role of women in religious practices in Judaism has evolved over time, with significant variations across denominations. While traditional gender roles limited women's participation in formal religious rituals, contemporary Judaism is witnessing a shift towards greater inclusion and recognition of women's contributions to religious life, including leadership roles, education, and active participation in synagogue services. This ongoing transformation reflects the evolving dynamics of gender and religion within the Jewish tradition.

2. Chapter Two: Nomads of the Desert – The World of the Nabataeans the Women's Role in the Nabataean Religion

The second chapter was about the Nabataeans. I began by providing a general overview of the Nabataeans, beginning with their history and the location of their settlement. This historical context was necessary to provide a complete picture of the Nabataeans. Next, I explained their language, social structure, and economic system. However, the main emphasis in each of these sections was on the Nabataean women and their roles.

To sum up my chapter I can say In the Hellenistic Roman Era, the Nabataean religion was an ancient Arabian polytheistic belief system practiced by the Nabataean people, who inhabited the region corresponding to modern-day Jordan, southern Syria, and northwestern Saudi Arabia. While our knowledge of the Nabataean religion is somewhat limited, available evidence suggests that women played significant but indirect roles within this religious context.

Limited Information: Information about the Nabataean religion is scarce due to the absence of comprehensive written records or scriptures. Most of our understanding comes from inscriptions, iconography, and archaeological findings.

Goddess Allat: One prominent figure in the Nabataean pantheon was the goddess Allat, who was often associated with fertility, protection, and possibly the moon. While we lack detailed records, it's believed that women may have had a special connection to and involvement in the worship of Allat, given her associations with aspects of feminine power.

Votive Offerings: Archaeological discoveries include various votive offerings and inscriptions at Nabataean religious sites. Some of these offerings were likely made by women, suggesting their participation in religious rituals. These artefacts include figurines, pottery, and dedicatory inscriptions.

Ceremonial Spaces: Nabataean religious sites, such as the famous city of Petra, feature spaces dedicated to rituals and worship. Women may have had access to these spaces, possibly participating in ceremonies and rituals alongside men.

Symbolism in Art: Nabataean art and iconography often depicted deities and religious scenes. Some of these artworks might have included representations of women engaged in religious activities, though interpreting the precise roles and meanings can be challenging due to the lack of written records.

Cultural and Social Context: In the broader Hellenistic Roman Era, women's roles in religious practices often varied based on local customs and cultural norms. While women may have played significant roles within the Nabataean religion, their exact roles would likely have been influenced by broader societal expectations and the specific practices of the Nabataean people.

In summary, our understanding of women's presence and roles in the Nabataean religion during the Hellenistic Roman Era is somewhat limited due to the scarcity of written records. However, archaeological evidence and the broader cultural context suggest that women likely had important, if indirect, roles in religious rituals and may have had a particular connection to certain deities, such as the goddess Allat. Further research and discoveries may provide additional insights into the specific roles and practices of women within the Nabataean religious tradition.

3. Chapter Three: Palmyra and Women:

I followed the same method when I researched the role and presence of women in the community of Palmyra for the third chapter, I began by outlining the historical context for a better understanding, and then I outlined the language and economy of the Palmyrene. In this chapter, I allotted a section for Queen Zenobia, as she was one of the first women that came to mind to mention in my research about women. I gave an overview of her life and accomplishments in the second part of the chapter.

In the Hellenistic Roman Era, the ancient city of Palmyra, located in present-day Syria, had a unique religious landscape that offered women opportunities for active participation and prominent roles in religious practices. The role of women in Palmyra's religion during this period can be summarized as follows:

Prominent Religious Deities: Palmyra had a diverse pantheon of deities, and several of them had strong female associations. The goddess Allat, often depicted with a crescent moon and considered a mother goddess, held a central place in the Palmyrene religion. Women played significant roles in the worship and veneration of deities like Allat.

Priestesses: Women in Palmyra had the opportunity to serve as priestesses in the city's temples. These priestesses were responsible for conducting religious rituals, offering sacrifices, and maintaining the sanctity of the temple. Some inscriptions and reliefs depict priestesses in ceremonial attire, emphasizing their religious authority.

Votives and Offerings: Archaeological evidence from Palmyra includes inscriptions and dedicatory offerings made by individuals, including women, to honor and seek favor from the gods. These votive offerings demonstrate the active involvement of women in religious practices and their desire to engage with the divine.

Iconography and Art: Palmyrene art often depicted religious scenes and rituals. Women are frequently portrayed in these artworks, highlighting their active participation in religious ceremonies and their roles as devotees of various deities.

Cultural Context: The religious roles and presence of women in Palmyra were influenced by the broader cultural context of the Hellenistic and Roman world, which allowed for a certain degree of gender diversity in religious practices. This cultural openness facilitated the active involvement of women in Palmyrene religious life.

Cultural Integration: Palmyra's location at the crossroads of trade routes allowed for cultural exchange, including religious syncretism. This may have further encouraged the inclusion of women in religious rituals and ceremonies, as Palmyra absorbed influences from various cultures.

In summary, women in Palmyra during the Hellenistic Roman Era held significant and active roles in the city's religious practices. They served as priestesses, made votive offerings, and played essential roles in the worship of deities like Allat. Palmyra's unique religious and cultural context allowed for a more inclusive approach to women's participation in religious life compared to some other contemporary societies.

4. Chapter Four: Women and the New Testament

The final chapter dealt with women in the early Christian era. Its key points were how Jesus treated women, how they may aid in the spread of Christianity, and what roles the women mentioned in the Bible played.

In the Hellenistic Roman Era, as depicted in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, women played a significant but often complex and multifaceted role in the emerging Christian communities. Their presence and roles can be summarized as follows:

Disciples and Followers: The New Testament portrays women as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Women such as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joanna, and others were part of Jesus' inner circle of followers. They provided support, both emotional and material, and played a vital role in spreading Jesus' teachings.

Financial Support: Many women in the New Testament are noted for their financial contributions to Jesus' ministry and the early Christian community. They used their resources to support the needs of the disciples and further the message of Christianity.

Witnesses to Key Events: Women were key witnesses to significant events in Jesus' life and the early Christian narrative. For example, women were the first to discover the empty tomb

after Jesus' resurrection, and they were the initial bearers of the news of his resurrection. Their role as witnesses is emphasized in the Gospels.

Hospitality and Leadership: Some early Christian communities met in the homes of women who acted as hosts and leaders. Lydia, for example, is mentioned as a prominent woman who opened her home to Paul and his companions. These women provided spaces for worship and fellowship.

Prophetesses and Teachers: In the early Christian community, women such as Priscilla were recognized as prophetesses and teachers. They played active roles in instructing and guiding others in matters of faith.

Deaconesses: The New Testament mentions deaconesses, including Phoebe, who served in roles of leadership and ministry within the early Christian church. They assisted in various practical and pastoral functions.

Challenges and Cultural Norms: It's important to note that the New Testament also reflects some of the challenges and cultural norms of the time. For instance, the Apostle Paul's writings contain passages that have been interpreted as imposing certain restrictions on women's leadership roles in the church. These interpretations have led to differing views on women's roles within Christian denominations.

In summary, women in the Hellenistic Roman Era, as depicted in the New Testament, played diverse and crucial roles within the early Christian communities. They were disciples, financial supporters, witnesses to key events, leaders, and even deaconesses and teachers. Their presence and contributions helped shape the foundations of early Christianity, even as they navigated the cultural and societal norms of their time. The New Testament reflects both their significant involvement and the complexities of gender dynamics within these communities.

5. Publications and conference papers connected to the dissertation

Publications:

- **The World of Women in the Ancient Near East.** In Székely Melinda – Dávid Nóra (eds.): *“Nehéz is asszonynak újszerű dicséreteket szerezni” Női szerepek az ó- és középkorban.* (Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica. Acta Universitatis Szegediensis: Supplementum XV.) Szeged: JATE Press, 2020, 97–110.
- **The Female Goddesses in Pre-Islamic Arabia.** In Székely Melinda – Dávid Nóra (eds.): *Lányok, asszonyok, istennők. Női identitás, női életutak az antikvitásban.*

- (Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica. Acta Universitatis Szegediensis: Supplementum XV.) Szeged: JATE Press, 2022), 73–81.
- **The Role of Women from Judaism to the Apostolic Times. *Ab ovo usque ad mala - selected studies from the “Destinies and processes” Conference.* Budapest: TITE Alapítvány. 2023, 17–26.**
 - **Qaşr al-Bint Temple “Sanctuary of the Nabataeans. *Sapiens Ubique Civis*, Vol. 4, (under publication).**
 - **'Silver and Gold:' Metals Used in the Cult Mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. *Axis (Ancient North Arabian (Safaitic) Inscriptions from Wadī Salḥub in North Eastern Jordanian Badia. *Studia Epigraphica Pannonica XV.* (under publication).***

Conference papers:

1. *The Palm Trees in Judaism and Early Christianity.* .2nd Workshop on the History of Religions (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 9th May 2019) on the 9th of May 2019. I presented a paper about
2. *The World of Women in the Ancient Near East.* “The World of Women” conference (Szeged, University of Szeged, 2022)
3. *The Role of Women from Judaism to the Apostolic Times.* Történelmi Ismeretterjesztő Társulat online conference, 2021)
4. *Silver and Gold - and the Main Metals that were Mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.* 2nd Workshop on the History of Religions (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 9th May 2019)
5. *Household and Family Religion in Ancient Israel.* XV. Magyar Ókortudományi Konferencia, University of Pécs, 2021)
6. *Ancient North Arabian (Safaitic) Inscriptions from Wadī Salḥub in North Eastern Jordanian Badia.* XVI. Magyar Ókortudományi Konferencia, Pécs, 2022)
7. *The Female Goddesses in Pre-Islamic Arabia.* “The World of Women” conference (Szeged, University of Szeged, 2022)
8. *Qaşr al-Bint Temple “Sanctuary of the Nabataeans.* *Sapiens Ubique Civis* conference, The University of Szeged, 2022)

9. *Reading History Through Ancient Inscriptions and Languages*. International Conference in History, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, 2021).
10. The *Researcher's night* (University of Szeged, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences)
 - *The Plant Symbolism in Religions in the Ancient Near East* (2020).
 - *The Evolution of the Alphabet of the Bible* (2021)
 - *The Religion of Palmyra: Local gods* (2022).