Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses: An
Analysis of Architectural Tradition

by

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ABSTRACT

Four Greco-Roman Temples of Fertility Goddesses: An Analysis of Architectural Tradition

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Lucian, writing in the mid-second century AD, recorded his observations of an “exotic” local cult in the city of Hierapolis in what is today Northern Syria. The local goddess was known as Dea Syria to the Romans and Atargatis to the Greeks. Lucian’s so-named De Dea Syria is an important record of life and religion in Roman Syria. De Dea Syria presents to us an Oriental cult of a fertility goddess as seen through the eyes of a Hellenized Syrian devotee and religious ethnographer. How accurate Lucian’s portrayal of the cult is questionable, though his account provides for us some indication that traditional religious practices were still being observed in Hierapolis despite Greek and Roman colonization.

The origins of Near Eastern fertility goddesses began in the Bronze Age with the Sumerian goddess Inanna who was later associated with the Semitic Akkadian deity
Ishtar. The worship of Ishtar spread throughout the Near East as a result of both Babylonian and Assyrian conquests. In Syria some of the major sites of her worship were located in Ebla and Mari. The later Phoenician and Canaanite cultures also adopted the worship of Ishtar melding her into their religions under the names of Astarte and Asherah respectively. By the Greco-Roman era, the Nabataeans and Palmyrenes also worshipped a form of the Near Eastern fertility goddess, calling her by many names including Atargatis, Astarte, al-Uzza and Allat.

The Greeks and Romans found parallels between this eastern goddess and their deities and added her to their pantheons. Through this process of adoption and adaptation, the worship of this goddess naturally changed. In her many guises, Atargatis was worshipped not only at Hierapolis in the Greco-Roman period, but also at Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur. At all of these centers of worship vestiges of traditional practices retained in the cult were apparent. It is necessary to look at the cult as a whole to understand more fully whether her cult retained its original Oriental character or was partially or fully Hellenized.

Temple architecture is an important part of Atargatis’ cult which is often overlooked in the analysis of her cult. This thesis examines whether Atargatis’ cult remained Oriental or became Hellenized by tracing the historical development of the temple architecture, associated cult objects, and decoration from their traditional origins down to the introduction of Greco-Roman styles into the Near East.
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Goddess worship was an important part of religions in ancient Mesopotamia. The earliest written accounts of female deities appeared in the records of the first civilizations that emerged in the fourth millennium BC. The supreme fertility/mother deity was always the most important goddess. The Sumerian goddess Inanna and her Akkadian counterpart Ishtar were two of the most prominent fertility/mother goddesses in the Bronze Age. The worship of Semitic Ishtar eventually took precedence over that of Inanna as the Babylonians and Assyrians spread the worship of Ishtar throughout Mesopotamia.

In the Iron Age (c. 1300-600 BC) other cultures, including the Phoenicians and Israelites, adopted the worship of fertility/mother goddesses. Many years later as the Greek Empire expanded into the East during the Hellenistic period (c. fourth century BC-first century BC), the Greeks encountered the worship of a powerful female deity who, by this time, was a mixture of many cultural influences and was known by many names. They adopted her worship and called her Atargatis, seeing in her parallels with many of their goddesses including Hera and Aphrodite. The Romans, who came into power in the first century BC, also worshiped Atargatis under the name Dea Syria and connected her with Venus. The Nabataean al-Uzza was another manifestation of this fertility goddess.

Whether the cult of Atargatis and other goddesses like her retained their Semitic character as they encountered Western influences, or whether they became predominantly
Hellenized like so many other Eastern religions is hard to ascertain.¹ In trying to address this issue scholars often discuss Atargatis and similar deities in terms of the Hellenization of their images and cults. However, they neglect the issue of the Hellenization of their temples. A thorough investigation of the temples of the fertility goddesses in the Near East is paramount to discerning the level of Hellenization that occurred in the cults of these goddesses. The sanctuaries of Atargatis and related goddesses in the Greco-Roman era at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur are key to understanding the transformation of goddess cults in the Near East (Figs. 1-4). The sanctuary at Hierapolis in Syria, supposedly first built in the Seleucid Era, now only exists in the second-century AD treatise by Lucian of Samosata, entitled De Dea Syria.² However, this record combined with the temple of Atargatis at Delos, also built in the Seleucid Period, provides a good comparison of architecture and cult ritual that was lost with the destruction of the temple at Hierapolis. The temple of Atargatis at Dura Europos is a comparable Roman age example located in Syria, as was Hierapolis, which demonstrates continuity of style. Finally the sanctuary of Al-Uzza at Khirbet et-Tannur offers a parallel from the seemingly more Hellenized civilization of the Nabataeans.

Past scholarship on these temples often falls in two categories, archeological records of the temple architecture with little or no interpretation or interpretation of cult rituals and iconography with little discussion of the temple architecture. Bilde mentions the Hellenization of her cult into a mystery religion but dismisses the temples without further explanation by saying they are surprisingly “Oriental.” Lightfoot discusses the

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basics of the temples at Hierapolis, Delos, and Dura Europos but includes no plans and only one picture of temple ruins. Bellinger postulates some similarities between the temple at Dura Europos and earlier Mesopotamian temples but only briefly. Downey discusses the temple at Dura Europos with very little stylistic interpretation. Will describes the Delos sanctuary in detail but does little comparison with earlier temples and includes no plans of the temples that may have influenced Delos. The key works which discuss Hierapolis, Delos, and Dura Europos in any significant way are noticeably dated, with the exception of Lightfoot’s book from 2003. Khirbet et-Tannur, fortunately, has been researched more thoroughly in Healey’s work from 2001 and McKenzie’s essay from 2003, which includes good quality pictures and well-researched reconstructions. However, none of these works attempts a comparison of the temples of Near Eastern fertility goddesses across cultures and time as they do with cult rituals and iconography.

The iconography and cult practices cannot be fully understood without considering the role of the temple architecture and its development throughout the history of fertility cults in Near East. This thesis will briefly outline the origins of fertility goddess cults in the Near East in order to establish a context for the analysis of the Greco-Roman age temples. Four major sanctuaries will be described along with important cult objects and architectural decoration in order to understand what the key elements of each temple were. The typical design of Greek and Roman temples will also

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be discussed in order to provide a background for what is considered Greco-Roman and what is considered Near Eastern. The four Greco-Roman sanctuaries will then be analyzed in the light of the historical background of the Near East before and after the Greco-Roman period in order to ascertain their level of Hellenization. Additional temples of the Greco-Roman era will also be briefly discussed as support for the architectural development in the Near East.

In addition to the architectural evidence, literary sources such as De Dea Syria, will be analyzed. Questions about whether what is reported in De Dea Syria is the traditional version of the cult or a Hellenized one will be addressed in this thesis. Lucian’s description of the temple of Atargatis in Hierapolis is especially important in discerning what Hellenizing elements were introduced to the temple of Atargatis and how much came from local tradition. Lucian’s work along with the architectural remains of the sanctuaries reveal that the cults of fertility goddesses were complicated mixtures of influences which cannot be categorized as completely Hellenistic or completely Semitic. In the course of examining the early temples of the divine antecedents of Atargatis as well as her Greco-Roman counterparts many questions about both Semitic culture and architecture will be considered. What religious practices did the native people see as traditional? What was traditional religious architecture for them? What are the similarities between the temples of Atargatis and deities like her in the Greco-Roman period and preceding Semitic deities and their temples?

The long history of these fertility goddesses makes it extremely difficult to see the extent of Greco-Roman influence in their cults. No direct connection can be made between the early fertility goddess like Ishtar and the later Greco-Roman fertility
goddesses because there has never been one Near Eastern culture or religion. However, given certain traditions and characteristics connections can be made with the fertility goddesses of the early Near East. Most importantly, the enduring Oriental nature of these goddesses demonstrates the strong history and power of the Near East despite the relentless tide of Hellenism brought by the Greeks and Romans. To further complicate the issue of Hellenism versus traditionalism, it is possible that the Greeks and Romans took what they saw as Oriental and transformed the various cults of the Near East, including that of Atargatis, to reflect this concept. Oriental religions were fashionable among the Greeks and especially the later Romans.5 As a result it may be that the process that the cults of the major Near Eastern fertility goddesses went through may more appropriately be called Orientalization rather than Hellenization or Romanization. This process, no matter its name, demonstrates both the long standing importance of the cults of Near Eastern fertility goddesses for native Near Eastern people, as well as the draw of Oriental religions for both the Greek and Roman civilizations.

Despite the adaptation of Oriental motifs by the West it seems Eurocentric to assume that the West dictated the Oriental nature of the East. This thesis proposes that a majority of traditional elements remained in practice in the cults of fertility goddesses through the Roman period based on architectural evidence as well as important iconography and cult practices. In addition, this thesis also acknowledges that these sanctuaries and their cults experienced a certain degree of Hellenization; however, not to the point of becoming entirely Greek or Roman cults equipped all of the trappings common to the typical Greco-Roman temple.

5Bilde, 156, 165; Lucinda Dirven, “The Author of ‘De Dea Syria’ and His Cultural Heritage” Numen 44, no. 2 (May, 1997), 164, 166; Lightfoot, Commentary, 37-8, 48-9, 80-82, 175-6, Lucian seems to be trying to fit the cult into a Greek mold in many of the sections of De Dea Syria including 14, 16, 32.
Chapter 2

The Development of the Cult of Atargatis

Understanding what is “traditional” in Near Eastern religions and religious architecture is difficult since there were many religions practiced in the region, each with its own take on architecture based on location, time period, and ritual use. A significant number of civilizations parade in and out of Near Eastern History including: Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, and Phoenician. These cultures dominated parts of Mesopotamia at different times and sometimes came into power again many years after their first ascendancy. These resurgences of power add another level of complexity to deciphering when temples were built and who built them. Despite the disparity between cultures, certain important and basic similarities are apparent when the temple architecture of the major Mesopotamian cultures is examined. In studying the plans of one or two temples of either Ishtar or her equivalents from each of these cultures and time periods, a pattern that seems to indicate at least a certain degree of continuity or tradition can be ascertained. In addition, the continuity is strengthened because most of the civilizations in the Near East who worshiped Ishtar were Semitic in origin.6

Ishtar’s worship seems to be a product of a basically Semitic tradition. Ishtar and the later goddesses that descend from her, or who at least share many attributes with her, were integral to the religious life of Mesopotamia for thousands of years. Therefore, when the relatively young civilizations of the Greek and Romans encountered the Near East they were naturally influenced by long standing religious traditions of the Near East.

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6Gwendolyn Leick, *A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 96; Ishtar’s name is Akkadian and was adopted by the Babylonians, Assyrians, Eblaites, Canaanites and many other Semitic cultures.
The impact is undeniable, although extremely complex and varying in its effects. The origins of the Ishtar cult, and most especially its architecture, need to be explored in order to gain a better understanding of how traditional her cult and its architecture remained by the time she became known as Atargatis in the Greek and Roman eras.

**Sumerian Temples as Basis for the Mesopotamian Style Temple (mid-fourth millennium-late-third millennium BC)**

Sumerian temples are the first examples of the temple type that may be an influence for the temple found at cult sites of fertility goddesses in the Greek and Roman Periods. The style is not only used in the Ishtar cult but is typical to most temples of Sumerian deities as well as the temples of later Mesopotamian deities. The Sumerian culture was the earliest true civilization to develop in the Mesopotamian region. In Uruk, one of the major centers of Sumer, the temple of Ishtar, called Eanna, became a major sanctuary around 3300 BC until Neo-Babylonian times, c. 522 BC (Fig. 5). The sanctuary consists of multiple temples surrounded by a temenos wall. The temples were located on various terraces with podia upon which the temples were built. The walls were casement walls, or double walls, with space for storage, a kind of wall often used in other later temples as discussed below. These casement walls created multiple open courtyards inside which several antechambers and cellae create more than one temple building. Eanna has the common Sumerian arrangement of one cella dedicated to the

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8Downey, 32.
10Downey, 34.
main god or goddess of the sanctuary with consorts or other associated deities sharing smaller cellae to the side of the main one. These numerous cult areas and the multiple courts comprise the basic arrangement of the Sumerian type temple.

The seemingly haphazard arrangement of courts and rooms at Eanna contributes to an asymmetrical layout, which is also a hallmark of the Sumerian plan. Entrances from outside of the sanctuary and from room to room do not line up, creating a bent axis approach which cuts off the line of sight to the cult rooms and the cult statues. This arrangement seems to be deliberate because the shrines usually were not meant to be seen by the general public from the outside of the temple and often times only priests were allowed in the room where the cult statue stood, thus the cult room was not visible from the outside. The exterior of Eanna also demonstrates common elements of Mesopotamian temples. The walls of the various temples in the Eanna precinct temple, as can be seen in the plan, were decorated by the niche and projection articulation common to Mesopotamian temples.

The cult rituals and objects of Eanna demonstrate early examples of Mesopotamian practices that would become a standard of Semitic religions and may have influenced Atargatis’ worship. Altars probably stood in the courtyard and sacrifices of animals and liquids as well as burning of incense were preformed on various altars. Stepped altars are depicted on vases from Eanna. The altars were often architectural and represented miniature versions of temples or “houses” for the gods. Altars in

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11 Black, 176.
13 Black, 109, 159.
15 Black, 29; van Buren, 230.
Sumerian times were usually small tables constructed of stone upon which either animal, liquid, grain, or incense offerings were made. Altars were originally not the elaborate “high places” developed by the later Canaanites and Israelites. The first altars were most likely piles of stones which in early Mesopotamian religion remained smaller than the elaborate high altars of biblical times. Ritual sacrifices to the gods were common in Semitic religion and are well attested to in the Bible and other literary sources as well as archaeological finds. Burnt offerings were not as commonly used in Mesopotamian rituals, except for when used during the ritual banquet, since they were not used in the same “sin offering” manner as later Israelite religion.

An important ritual object found in Uruk that was related to Inanna’s worship was the ring-post (Fig. 6). It derived from “a doorpost for a structure built of reeds and probably made of a bundle of reeds bound together, with the upper ends bent over to make a loop for the cross-pole.” It was originally the written symbol for her name and came to symbolize her temple. The ring-post features prominently in temple objects that depict cult rituals taking place. A vase found in Uruk depicts Inanna receiving offerings while standing in front of ring-posts which designate her temple (Fig. 7). It is interesting that the first symbol for Inanna was a pillar since pillar worship became a large part of later Semitic religion and was prominent in Atargatis’ cult in Hierapolis.

The vase found in Uruk also reveals Inanna’s nature as a goddess of fertility and sexuality. The vase depicts a naked priest offering fruit—symbolizing fertility—to the goddess and a high altar upon which stand worshippers. Fertility and sexual associations

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17Smith, 201-4.
19Black, 154.
were naturally a part of Inanna’s—and later Ishtar’s—worship as she was the goddess of fertility. These aspects of Inanna/Ishtar are recorded in many myths such as The Descent of Inanna and the later version in which she is called Ishtar. This myth originates from the Sumerian period in Nippur but was not recorded until 1800 BC.20 The story relates how, “[n]o bull mounted a cow, [no donkey impregnated a jenny], no young man impregnated a girl in [the street?]” essentially describing how all sexual activity on earth had stopped because Inanna/Ishtar had descended into the underworld.21 Since her power of sexual attraction was what kept the world going and without her all fertility ceased, it is natural that cult objects associated with fertility would be found in her temples. Other myths, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, also record her power over sexuality. Ishtar’s proposal of marriage to Gilgamesh, the mythical king of the Early Dynastic II (2800 and 2600 BC), reveals Inanna/Ishtar’s insatiable lust. In the story, Gilgamesh refuses her advances by brusquely enumerating the horrible fates faced by many of her previous lovers.22 Since Eanna is mentioned as the local temple for Gilgamesh in this tale and Inanna/Ishtar is portrayed as a goddess of fertility and sexuality this proves that she was worshiped as such at Eanna.

Cult paraphernalia found at other Sumerian temples such as the Temple of Ishtar in Nippur (Fig. 8) bring to light other typical Mesopotamian religious rituals. On the inside of the temple next to the main entrance was a drainage facility which was probably

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22 Dalley, 77-80.
used for washing or libation rituals. Libations were a common practice in later Semitic religions, especially that of the Jews. Other rituals of Inanna practiced in Nippur may have also included ritual banquets as seen in votive plaques found in her temple which date from c. 2750-2600 BC (Fig. 9). Ritual banquets were practiced in many ancient Semitic religions and were also an important part of the later Atargatis temple rituals in both Delos and Dura Europos. In Mesopotamia the sacred banquet was celebrated in order to provide food and drink for the gods, one of the roles humans were created to provide.

The Sumerian plan temple took hold in Mari in Syria because of ties with Sumerian culture (Fig. 10). Despite its architectural and religious dependence on Sumerian culture, Mari was also influenced by Syro-Palestinian culture. A raised podium located in the courtyard upon which sacrifices were probably offered reflects a typical Semitic cult object (Fig. 11). This podium may be what is referred to in the Old Testament as the “high place” where the Ancient Israelites worshipped the idols of Ashtoreth—the Canaanite version of Ishtar—and Baal. The podium ties the temple to traditional Semitic religious practices. There is also the interesting feature of a drainage canal leading from the offering table and many small basins found in the courtyard of the temple. These were probably used for ritual libations. A vase depicting snakes and lions

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27Malamat, 3.
found in the temple represents a cult object which further attests to Ishtar’s fertility aspects and association with lions in Mari.  

**Akkadian Temples (c. 2300-2150 BC)**

Because of the strong hegemony that the Sumerian civilization had over the region Akkadian rulers took on much of the trappings of Sumerian civilization in order to tie themselves to the powerful culture of the previous Sumerians. The deities of the Akkadians were melded with those of the Sumerians which seemed most similar and given Akkadian names. Thus, Inanna became Ishtar but retained her same fertility aspects while gaining some more militant masculine elements. This early Semitic religion, as will be demonstrated, featured much of the same elements found in the West Semitic Israelite religion of about one thousand years later.

One of the main cult centers of the Akkadian period was the nineteenth-century BC Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh. As Akkadian power grew so did the popularity of Ishtar in Nineveh and abroad because she was main goddess of the Akkadian pantheon. Although built in the Akkadian period, the best remains of her temple in Nineveh temple come from the Assyrian period and are attributed to Shamshi-Adad I (r. 1813-1791) (Fig. 12). Although Shamshi-Adad I ruled after the Akkadians fell he rebuilt the Nineveh temple after the Akkadian manner in order to legitimize his rule by tying himself to the glory of the Akkadian empire. Little of Akkadian religious architecture is known thus

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30 Parrot, 116.
31 Bottero, 9-11, 13.
32 Bottero, 204.
33 Julian Reade, “The Ishtar Temple at Nineveh,” in *Nineveh: Papers of the XLIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, London, 7-11 July 2003* edited by Dominique G.A.R Collon and British School of Archaeology in Iraq, (London: Published by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial) with the aid of the MBI Foundation, 2005), 362.
the exact plan of the Akkadian period temple is unknown. Therefore Shamshi-Adad’s reconstruction in the Akkadian manner may give us some idea of the original structure.\textsuperscript{34} The temple exhibits the typical Sumerian plan with the addition of towers flanking the entrances.

The decoration and cult objects and rituals of the temple at Nineveh reveal its dedication to Ishtar. Shalmaneser I (c. 1263-1234 BC) recorded that he refurbished the lion decoration on the temple, thus demonstrating Ishtar’s early association with lions.\textsuperscript{35} During Assyrian times obelisks were added in front of the entrance gate, a trait influenced by Egyptian temples.\textsuperscript{36} Typical Semitic cult objects were found at Nineveh during the Neo-Assyrian period. As recorded by the kings, the objects included a bed, either used for sexual rituals or ritual dining, built by Ashurnasirpal I (r. 1050-1031 BC) and altar built by Ashurbanipal (r. 669-631 or 627 BC).\textsuperscript{37} In addition, the typical libation offering of wine (water is also used) was also present in Nineveh as recorded by Ashurnasirpal and Ashurbanipal.”\textsuperscript{38}

The fertility nature of Ishtar continued in her worship in Nineveh. Sexual rituals were practiced at the temple in Nineveh and Ishtar is often mentioned in hymns from Nineveh as a patron goddess of prostitution.\textsuperscript{39} One hymn dates from sometime between 2000 and 1600 BC and although not from the Akkadian period it reflects beliefs about Ishtar from the time period of Shamshi-Adad’s reconstruction of the temple.\textsuperscript{40} Ishtar’s

\textsuperscript{34}Black, 175. \\
\textsuperscript{35}Reade, 371. \\
\textsuperscript{36}Reade, 373. \\
\textsuperscript{37}George A. Barton, “The Semitic Ištar Cult,” \textit{Hebraica} 9, no. 3/4 (Apr. - Jul., 1893): 133, 143, 152. \\
\textsuperscript{38}Barton, 133, 135, 141. \\
\textsuperscript{39}Reade, 372; Mark E. Cohen, "The Incantation-Hymn: Incantation or Hymn?" \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society} 95, no. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1975): 606:19-21. Ishtar often refers to herself as a prostitute in hymns such as this. \\
\textsuperscript{40}Cohen, 593.
relation to fertility and sexuality seemed to be quite fluid. She was often worshipped as an androgynous deity and referred to as being bearded. Ishtar’s relation to sexual ambiguity is further attested to in the early myths *The Descent of Inanna* and *The Descent of Ishtar*. In these myths Asushunamir, a eunuch created by Ea, helps Ishtar escape from her sister Ereshkigal who is holding her captive in the underworld. Asushumanir succeeds in entertaining Ereshkigal who then lets Ishtar go free. Her early worship involved an astral relationship to the planet Venus as the male morning star and the female evening star. Her dual characteristics as the goddess of sex and procreation and the goddess of war further support this gender dichotomy.

Ishtar’s sexual ambiguity is also demonstrated by some of her male cultic personnel. Many of them were eunuchs who may have practiced self-castration or were transsexual. It seems strange for a goddess of fertility and sexuality to have eunuch followers. However, they may have been attempting to emulate their patron goddess who herself transcended gender boundaries. Their castration may also reflect Ishtar’s dual nature as goddess of creation and goddess of destruction. She may have possessed a kind of “creative negation” since she was the one who perpetuated fertility and the power to end it. These hymns and myths also reveal Ishtar’s notorious cruelty in punishing

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42 Dalley, 83-84.
43 Leick, 96.
45 Harris, 276-277.
46 Harris, 277.
47 Harris, 275-6. Harris discusses “creative negation” only in connection with the riotous nature of Ishtar’s festivals as a time to let loose of all thing productive and indulge in animalistic things and does not specifically apply it to castration. However, castration seems to be the ultimate form of “creative negation.”
followers, in this case with gender change but which could also include diseases or other misfortunes.48

Ishtar’s cult seems to have been one in which the general populace could act out certain rituals in which social norms were ignored. Sexual rituals, gender transcending, play acting, and a general carnivalesque atmosphere prevailed during her festivals.49 Her cult eunuchs were probably an integral part of the play-acting that occurred in her worship. Harris relates that, “Bawdy theater was very much a part of the celebration in which the goddess’s personnel enacted (probably with appropriate costumes and masks) the roles of their goddess.”50 The presence of theater in the cult of Ishtar may be an important precedent for the theatrical areas found in the temples of Atargatis in Delos and Dura Europos. Some of this “bawdy theater,” may have involved prostitution and ritual reenactments as seen in the sacred marriage between Ishtar and her consort Dumuzi (Tammuz) as portrayed by a priestess and priest (or priest-king).51

**Assyrian Temples (fifteenth-tenth century BC)**

Temples of Ishtar continued to be built as the Assyrian civilization came into power in the Mesopotamian region. Under the reign of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243 BC – 1207 BC) the Temple of Ishtar was rebuilt in the capital city of Assur (Fig. 13). The plan of this Middle Assyrian temple follows the typical Sumerian style. The altar of the temple was located in the main shrine which was at the top of a staircase. The altar in the shrine would have been stepped, similar to those depicted on vases at Eanna,

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49 Harris, 273-275.
50 Harris, 275.
51 Bottero, 123.
and decorated with birds, serpents, and lions since altars of that kind were found in the oldest levels of the Temple of Ishtar in Assur.\textsuperscript{52} These stepped altars as depicted on cylinder seals (Figs. 14, 15) may be influenced by the ziggurat, a high tower or podium upon which the temple stood or which was located in the sanctuaries of many Sumerian and later Babylonian temples.\textsuperscript{53} The cult room seems to have been raised at least since Level D which predates Tukulti-Ninurta’s level.\textsuperscript{54} Mesopotamian temples were often set on podia although to have the inner shrine raised as well seems to be an Assyrian invention.\textsuperscript{55} Both the ziggurat connections and the raised cult room demonstrate a preference for “high places” because these “high places” brought the worshipper and the home of the god closer to heaven.\textsuperscript{56}

Cult objects found in Tukulti-Ninurta’s temple attest to the continued association of Ishtar with fertility. Ritual phallic and pubic amulets found in the temples reflect the sexual nature of Ishtar and relate to the sexual rituals practiced in her temples to insure fertility (Fig. 16).\textsuperscript{57} Additionally, various votive offerings decorated with date palms, a symbol of fertility, were found in graves near the temple.\textsuperscript{58} The date palm symbolized the tree of life because one plant was male and one female. The tree was very fertile and produced life sustaining fruit. Its association with Ishtar is natural as she is the goddess who represents “the creative force of nature.”\textsuperscript{59} Ishtar’s ties with the symbolism of the

\textsuperscript{52}van Buren, 234.
\textsuperscript{53}Crawford, 74.
\textsuperscript{54}Ernst S. Heinrich and Ursula Seidl, \textit{Die Tempel und Heiligtümer im Alten Mesopotamien: Typologie, Morphologie und Geschichte}, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), 198.
\textsuperscript{55}Black, 177.
\textsuperscript{56}Crawford, 73.
\textsuperscript{57}Black, 152.
\textsuperscript{59}Paul Popenoe, "The Date-Palm in Antiquity," \textit{The Scientific Monthly} 19, no. 3 (Sep., 1924): 313, 316; Porter, 138
date palm during the Assyrian period are further attested to by a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal dating from c.750-650 BC. This seal depicts Ishtar astride her characteristic lion standing next to a date palm (Fig. 17).

An altar or pedestal found in Tukulti-Ninurta’s temple reveals an interesting part of Assyrian religion (Fig. 18). The altar depicts two worshippers in front of a pedestal holding a rectangular stone. This scene indicates that pillar worship was common in Assyria beginning in at least the thirteenth century BC. Mesopotamian religion generally used anthropomorphic representations of their divinities. However, sometimes a deity’s symbol, such as the star of Ishtar on the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, would stand in for the normal anthropomorphic representation. The symbols of deities are also found on stones in temples, called *kudurru*, which represent land grants to the temple and define the temple borders.

**Neo-Babylonian Temples (seventh century-sixth century BC)**

In their second rise to power the Neo-Babylonian’s built on the architectural and iconographic traditions of their predecessors. The Temple of Ishtar of Agade (Akkad) in Babylon probably dates to the reign of Nabupolassar (c. 625-605 BC). The temple had a regular Babylonian ground plan based on the Sumerian prototypes (Fig. 19). Two towers, the typical grooved pattern and the bent-axis approach are combined in the fully developed Mesopotamian style (Figs. 20, 21). Smaller sanctuaries surrounded the cella

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60 Black, 29.  
62 Bottero, 64; Black, 113.  
63 Heinrich, 314.  
complex which was completely separate from the walls of the temple. Various rooms and hallways ran behind the cella and to the side, an arrangement echoed in the side rooms of the later Temple of Solomon (Fig. 22). Common Semitic rituals were also practiced in the Ishtar temple in Babylon. The hall behind the cella probably had a ramp to the roof since many Babylonian temples had roof access so animal sacrifice, burning incense, and the pouring of libations could be performed on the roof. The water tank or *apsu* located in the courtyard, similar to the Inanna temple in Nippur, demonstrates that water rituals were practiced in this temple. Also an open-air altar near the front entrance, or more commonly in the courtyard, was an integral part of Semitic religion.

**Syro-Palestinian Temples**

In addition to the sanctuaries and cults of Mesopotamia, those of the ancient Syro-Palestinian region are also important in understanding the development of the cult of Atargatis. Hierapolis and Delos, two major centers of the cult of Atargatis in the Greco-Roman Period, were located in Syria. These centers are thus tied to the Syro-Palestinian tradition because of location as well as the Mesopotamian one because of Mesopotamian cultural influence in the Syro-Palestinian region. During the Bronze and Iron Ages the regions of Syria and the Levantine Coast were highly influenced by the various cultures that ruled it throughout its history. As seen in the Temple of Ishtar at Mari (Fig. 10) the

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66 Heinrich, 315; Anu-Antum in Uruk, Temple of Enlil in Nippur, Sin Temple in Khafaje, Eanna (Temple C) (Fig. 1) and many other temples. Seymour Gitin, “The Four-Horned Altar as Sacred Space,” in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 99, 105.
67 On the plan there is a circular shape with the German word Brunnen which means fountain.
68 Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 472.
Sumerian style architecture that was common in areas in eastern Mesopotamia was introduced early into Syria.

Despite the rule of strong civilizations over the region, the Syro-Palestinian style managed to produce a unique culture and temple architecture of its own. This architectural style seems to be a mix of Egyptian and Babylonian influences with its own distinctive style that is commonly referred to as Phoenician since the Phoenicians seem to be its most prolific users. However, pre-Phoenician cultures as well as the Hittites used the style before the Phoenicians, as will be discussed. The predominance of the Syro-Palestinian style seems to demonstrate that the conventions of the powerful empires of the East were not the only traditions that may have contributed to the later Atargatis cult. Thus, important temples of Ishtar found in certain cities in the Syria-Palestine region are necessary to explore in order to understand their architectural and cultic impact on Greek and Roman temples of Atargatis. In addition, other temples most evocative of the Syro-Palestinian style and Semitic religion will be examined.

**Ebla (third millennium BC-1600 BC)**

The two temples dedicated to Ishtar in Ebla both demonstrate a Syro-Palestinian temple style. The temple designated P2 in Ebla was built in the lower town sometime between 2000 and 1900 BC with continued additions until about 1600 BC (Fig. 23). It was located in a rectangular compound with a temenos wall on the north side, the wall of the acropolis on the east and the street on the other sides. Next to Temple P2 there was a large open courtyard and a high podium (Monument P3) on which sacrifices occurred,

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much as in the temple at Mari and other Mesopotamian temple complexes. This podium is related to the “high place” at Mari and others found in Syria-Palestine. It also most likely had stairs for climbing to the top upon which sacrifices could be offered.

Temple P2 shares elements with Mesopotamian temples including towers and a large niche in the cella where a statue of Ishtar and perhaps her consort Hadad, the North Syrian/Phoenician storm god similar to Babylonian Bel and known as Baal in the Old Testament, would have rested. Hadad’s association with Ishtar reflects a more North Syrian and Anatolian influence on the cult than a Mesopotamian one and is part of the generic Anatolian coupling of a weather god and fertility goddess. Temple D is very similar to Temple P2, although Temple D has both a porch and a pronaos (Fig. 24).

Unlike most Mesopotamian plans the temples at Ebla strictly emphasize axial symmetry. Both Temples P2 and Temple D seem to represent a classic Syro-Palestinian plan. Temple D, with its porch and pronaos, seems to be the earliest precedent to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem built around 1000 BC, which will be discussed below (Fig. 22).

Common Semitic practices and iconography were part of the Ishtar cult at Ebla and seem to further tie the religion to later Israelite religion as well as earlier Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian practices. Water basins for ritual ablutions have been found next to both Temple P2 and Temple D, a cult ritual that seems to echo the font in the

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70Marchetti, 1, 35, 37.
72Marchetti, 3; Paolo Matthiae, “A New Monumental Temple of Middle Bronze II at Ebla and the Unity of the Architectural Tradition of Syria-Palestine,” Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes 40 (1990): 112.
73Lightfoot, Introduction, 6, 12.
74Matthiae “A New Monumental Temple,” 113.
court of Solomon’s temple. Food offerings found in the area of the temple attest to large communal food rituals. Several pieces of art, including a basin found in Temple D, depict ritual banquets and tie the banquets to fertility rites (Fig. 25). The high podium on which sacrifices were made, a common Semitic practice, also had a large courtyard on one side. It has been suggested that the courtyard was either a place where sacred trees where kept to protect them from the wind or where the sacred animals of Ishtar including lions were kept some of which would be used for sacrifices. The use of sacred trees had fertility associations that Biblical prophets would later warn against, as discussed below. Votive statues of snakes and nude female figurines found in ritual pits or cisterns under the courtyard attest further to the fertility nature of the cult.

Other items found at Temple P2 reveal additional traits that were commonly associated with Ishtar. Figurines of lions found near the temple firmly show that the temple was dedicated to Ishtar (Fig. 26) as do jars depicting doves and nude women, two symbols of Ishtar. Cylinder seals found nearby show the image of a priestess standing next to a standard representing Ishtar and Hadad (Fig. 27). The presence of a priestess on this seal indicates that at Ebla the Mesopotamian tradition of having priestesses in Ishtar’s cult continued. Priestesses were often associated with sacred prostitution, sacred marriage, and sacred banquets.

A written document dating from the Middle Bronze Age found in level VII of the excavations at Alalakh, a Syro-Palestinian temple located near Ebla, reveals an important

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76Marchetti, 7.
77Marchetti, 37.
78Matthiae, “L’aire Sacrée,” 652; Marchetti, 4 n. 16.
79Marchetti, 24, 31.
81Black, 149.
sexual ritual of the cult of Ishtar which may have also been practiced at Ebla. The writer of the document prays that if anyone tries to attack the city that Ishtar will “impress feminine parts into his male parts.” This phrase seems to indicate that Ishtar was worshipped as a “castrating goddess.” The Mesopotamian *Great Hymn to the Queen of Nippur* also relates that Ishtar “turns men into women and women into men.” The Alalakh document seems to tie the Syro-Palestinian tradition to earlier worship of Ishtar found in Mesopotamia.

**Ain Dara (1300 BC-740 BC)**

In the Hittite city state of Ain Dara, located in Northern Syria, the inhabitants built a temple to Ishtar around 1300 BC and continued to add to it until c. 740 BC (Fig. 28). By the thirteenth century BC the people living in Ain Dara seem to be influenced by a variety of cultures more than the Hittite culture, including a strong Syro-Palestinian tradition.

The Temple of Ishtar at Ain Dara demonstrates the continuity of the Syro-Palestinian temple type because it was built after the temple found at Ebla and serves as precedent for the Temple of Solomon. The plan of the temple at Ain Dara is typically Syro-Palestinian because of its three part division and strict axially. It strongly resembles

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84 Naaman, 211.
the earlier Temple D from Ebla (Fig. 24). The cella was elevated and may have been divided from the main hall by a screen. In addition, Ain Dara possesses an outer ambulatory of hallways and storage rooms that seem to reflect the casement walls of Eanna in Uruk and the Temple of Ishtar of Agade in Babylon (Figs. 5, 19). This arrangement is also mentioned in the Bible for the Temple of Solomon. Ain Dara appears to corroborate the Biblical account of the Temple of Solomon. The deliberate use of a Syro-Palestinian temple plan in Ain Dara reveals that a strong traditional architecture was present in the area despite influences from other cultures.

The decoration of the temple reveals ties to Ishtar with the many relief sculpture of lions and sphinxes. The most unique depiction of deity found at Ain Dara are giant footprints on the stones entering the temple. Two feet are shown at the entrance, then a left foot followed by a right foot, thus depicting the deity striding forward into the sanctuary (Fig. 29). An interesting relation between the anthropomorphic absence of this deity, who is only indicated by feet, and the empty throne found in the Temple of Solomon will be discussed below. Another relief sculpture depicts a goddess wearing a thin see-through gown that reveals her prominent pubic area, indicating her fertility associations, and holding various weapons, demonstrating her martial attributes (Fig. 30). The presence of this deity along with the figures of lions (Fig. 31) has led many scholars to attribute the temple to Ishtar, or Sausga in the Hittite language. The temple decoration also included lily and palmette designs, much like those found in the later

88 Monson, 28.
89 1 Kings 6:5.
Temple of Solomon. A water basin found in the courtyard that flanked the temple, a similar arrangement to the open air courtyards of earlier Mesopotamian temples, also underscores the fertility connections. The many different fertility objects found at this temple demonstrate a mix of Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian influences present at Ain Dara. This temple as a whole represents a combination a typically Syrian temple with Hittite sculptural and some similarities with Mesopotamian architecture. It seems to be a truly cosmopolitan sanctuary combining many of the influences that will be important to later temples like the Temple of Solomon and the Greco-Roman temples of fertility goddesses.

**Temple of Solomon (c. 1000 BC-586 BC)**

Although not a temple dedicated to Ishtar, the Temple of Solomon is one of the best examples showing the combination of Semitic traditions in one site in order to understand the influence of these traditions on the later Atargatis cult (Fig. 22). The temple, which dates from around 1000 BC, was surrounded by two courtyards, an outer court which all the people could enter and the inner court, called “the court of the priests.” 91 The temple was set on a podium, a conclusion that comes from the account that it had to be reached by stairs. 92 It was built by the Phoenician Hiram of Tyre and thus was most likely built in the Syro-Phoenician tradition. 93 The porch was probably flanked by towers as it was common in many Syro-Palestinian temples that may have been influenced by Egyptian pylons, through Phoenician influence, as well as Babylonian

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91 2 Chronicles 4:9.
92 Ezekiel 40:49 mentions the stairs up to the temple.
93 Osgood, 12; Monson, 35.
Most reconstructions by Biblical scholars recreate the temple with towers topped with the characteristically Mesopotamian merlon motif indicating a general agreement of Mesopotamian influence in Phoenician architecture (Figs. 32-35).

The porch of the Temple of Solomon was followed by an antechamber and then the cella, or holy of holies. This cella was raised up from the level of the antechamber similarly to the raised shrine found in the temple of Ishtar in Assur and Ain Dara. Evidence for the raised cella comes from the biblical measurement in which the temple is 30 cubits tall (13.7 m) but the cella is said to be only 20 cubits (9 m) tall from its floor to ceiling. The inner shrines at Ain Dara and Tell Ta’yinat, another Syro-Palestinian style temple, are both raised (Figs. 28, 36). These raised shrines may relate to the biblical “high place.” The exact form of the “high place” is unknown but it could take the form of an elevated altar upon which rituals were preformed or even an entire temple elevated on a podium could be considered a “high place” since it raised the worshipper closer to heaven (Fig. 37). Only the priests were allowed in the temple itself as was typical of Mesopotamian temples.

Another feature of the temple which demonstrates its eclectic borrowings is the side rooms that flank three sides of the temple. They were probably used to store temple goods and treasures and echo the side rooms found at Ain Dara. Ultimately the precedent for these side rooms comes from 2,000 years earlier in the casement walls of Eanna and subsequent Mesopotamian style temples. Ebla, Ain Dara, and the Temple of Solomon represent a continuous Syro-Palestinian tradition infused with Mesopotamian borrowings.

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94 Osgood 16, 39-40; Schmidt, 170.
95 1 Kings 6:2, 20.
The temple at Mari also combines West Semitic elements, such as its “high place”, with the Eastern Semitic elements, its Sumerian plan. Thus, it seems that all of these temples embody “a hybrid tradition of high terraces, which unifies western and eastern aspects and which comes down from the Early Dynastic period.”

Like many earlier temples an altar stood in the courtyard of the Temple of Solomon (Fig. 22). According to 2 Chronicles 4:1 the altar was 10 cubits high which is roughly 4.5 meters. This passage indicates that the altar was very tall and would have necessitated stairs to reach the top of the altar on which sacrifices would have occurred. The altar was probably stepped and may reflect influence from Babylonian ziggurats.

Many of the altars in the Canaanite region were either tall altars or if they were small they were shaped like towers, which also reflect Babylonian influence of rooftop rituals. The stepped altar may be specifically associated with female deities and the use of one at the Temple of Solomon and other Israelite sites like Beth-Shan may indicate her worship there or at least Mesopotamian influence in the cult. The altar may represent a kind of “high place” because of its elevation. Early altars in Semitic religion were small piles of stone which later evolved into two different practices in the Israelite period: firstly, the setting up of sacred pillar stones and secondly, monumental altars or “high places.”

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97Marchetti, 3 n. 12; Monson, 35.
98The description of Solomon’s Temple can be found in I Kings 6-7, 2 Chronicles 2-4, and Ezekiel 40-46.
99King, 339; Lucian, *Commentary*, 422.
101Gitin, 99.
102van Buren, 233.
103Smith, 201-4.
before reforming prophets in Israel banned them.\textsuperscript{104} The temple complex at Dan from the eighth century BC has not only a high stepped altar but also a sanctuary set on a podium (Fig. 39).

Water is the life force of the land therefore it is evident that there were fertility associations in the use of water in Semitic temples. A water basin was also located in the courtyard of the Temple of Solomon (Fig. 22). This basin possibly derives from the Egyptian use of sacred lakes at their temple sites.\textsuperscript{105} It also has a counterpoint in the Babylonian \textit{apsu}, or tank filled with water, found in temple courtyards. The term \textit{apsu} stems from the ancient Mesopotamian belief in an underground freshwater ocean which fed the rivers and lakes.\textsuperscript{106} The word for the basin in Hebrew was \textit{yam}, meaning ocean.\textsuperscript{107} A link between these basins and the later lake at Hierapolis is thus not inconceivable.

Ritual banqueting was also a part of Syro-Palestinian religions. Side rooms in the sanctuary at Dan may have been used for ritual banquets.\textsuperscript{108} But the only evidence for Biblical ritual banquets comes from sources not related to the Temple of Solomon itself. 1 Samuel 19-23 records Samuel inviting Saul to dine with him at a “high place” and Amos 6:7 warns that those who participated in the banquets, or revelries, supposedly of “other” gods, will be taken captive. The passage in 1 Samuel is also important because it reveals that “high places” and ritual banquets were not always a taboo part of the Israelite religion. A Phoenician bronze bowl depicts these lascivious revelries and demonstrates

\textsuperscript{105}Schmidt, 170.
\textsuperscript{106}Black, 27, Wright, 74.
\textsuperscript{107}King, 332.
\textsuperscript{108}King, 325.
that these rituals were common in Canaanite religion (Fig. 40). Mesopotamian rituals of sacrifice were much more tied to sacred banquets than the sacrifices practiced by the later Israelites. “High places” were also associated with the setting up of sacred pillars or trees discussed below.

Besides cult objects, some of the beliefs of the Israelite religion are similar to earlier Semitic religions. One of the key differentiating elements of Israelite worship was the strict ban on any anthropomorphic representations of Yahweh. This aniconism is seen in the lack of a cult statue in the cella of the Temple of Solomon. Rather, an empty mercy seat with flanking cherubim represented the presence of God in the temple. Mettinger calls this phenomenon “empty space aniconism.”

The feet prints found at Ain Dara may also represent a kind of “empty space aniconism.” The Bible records that representing deities in the form of pillars, sacred stones, or groves of trees is well attested in the Canaanite religion at the time the Israelites were introduced to it, as will be discussed. This religious atmosphere, coupled with the injunction against “graven images” found in Exodus 20:4, makes Israelite adoption of aniconism seem more understandable.

By the time of Solomon’s reign the worship of Ishtar had traveled across Syria into Lebanon and even penetrated the religious monotheism of Israel. Ishtar became

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109 King, 356.
111 King, 321.
112 Exodus 25:22.
114 Lewis, 40.
known under the various titles of Astarte, Ashtoreth, and Asherah. Asherah was the chief Canaanite goddess as recorded on tablets found in Ugarit.\textsuperscript{116} It is evident that Asherah was a descendent of the Babylonian Ishtar as seen in the account in Ezekiel in which the Israelite women were in the temple weeping for Tammuz, the Babylonian lover of Ishtar whom she rescues from the underworld.\textsuperscript{117} This may show that some continuity of mythology was retained from the Babylonian period into Solomon’s time. Asherah was worshipped with the Canaanite god Baal and was one of the “idolatrous” deities that ancient Israel was always attracted to because of her fertility aspects. In the Canaanite context Ishtar’s fertility worship was merged with local aniconic tendencies. Israel’s aniconism not only included “empty space aniconism” but also incorporated more the Canaanite use of sacred stones or pillars, termed \textit{massebah} in Hebrew.\textsuperscript{118} The worship of sacred stones was not new in Semitic religions as evidenced in the altar found in Assur; however, the Canaanites seem to have more widely used the practice.

Pillar worship was especially associated with the goddess Asherah in the Old Testament. The two columns in the porch of the Temple of Solomon are a common element in Syro-Palestinian temples such as those at Ain Dara, Tell Ta’yinat, and Hazor. The fertility cult of Asherah involved setting up a wooden image of her next to an altar of Baal in a wooded area, “high place” or temple.\textsuperscript{119} Asherah’s image was set up, removed and replaced in the temple in Jerusalem many times throughout the history of Ancient Israel. King Asa (r. 908-867 BC) was the first to reform the idolatrous practices of

\textsuperscript{116}Patai, 38.
\textsuperscript{117}Ezekiel 8:14.
\textsuperscript{119}Judges 6:25, 28; I Kings 16:33; II Kings 17: 10, 26; Isaiah 27:9; II Chronicles 33:3, 19; these are only a few of the many references to Asherah that can be found in the Old Testament.
Asherah. The Biblical record shows multiple similarities still existed between the Ishtar cult and the Asherah cult including male prostitutes, altars, and pillars.\textsuperscript{120} King Josiah (r. 639-609 BC) also reformed the Israelite religion which had reverted to the old ways and still featured male prostitutes and pillar worship.\textsuperscript{121} Nude female cult figurines found in various locations throughout the Palestine region reveal that the fertility and pillar symbolism of Asherah may be justified, although some refute that Asherah is associated with these figures.\textsuperscript{122} These figurines have the head and bare torso of a woman with exaggerated breasts that rest on a pillar shaped base (Fig. 41).

The two pillars found at the Temple of Solomon and Ain Dara may also have had sacred tree associations or phallic symbolism. The decoration of the Temple of Solomon may reveal fertility associations because it was decorated with palm motifs and the pillars featured lilies and pomegranates, two other plants associated with fertility.\textsuperscript{123} Even if the palm trees by this time had lost their association with Ishtar or Asherah, they still represented the forces of fertility.\textsuperscript{124} Many scholars believe the two pillars in front were free-standing.\textsuperscript{125} However, the two pillars in the porch of the temple at Ain Dara and Tell Ta’yinat were load bearing columns and seem to support the idea that the two columns in Solomon’s temple were not freestanding.\textsuperscript{126} However, freestanding or not they may still have represented pillar worship and fertility symbolism. Scholars disagree about the form

\textsuperscript{120}II Chronicles 15:8-12.  
\textsuperscript{121}II Kings 23:4-14.  
\textsuperscript{122}King, 350; Lewis, 45.  
\textsuperscript{123}1 Kings 6: 29, 32, 35; 1 Kings 7:18-22; Osgood, 50.  
\textsuperscript{125}Schmidt, 167; Osgood, 54; Garber, 8; Hirsch, 557.  
\textsuperscript{126}Monson and King support the idea that they were load bearing. Monson, 30; King, 332, 335-6.
of the Asherah pillars and that they “may signify an image representing the goddess herself, or the wooden pole symbolizing the goddess, or a sacred tree or grove.”

In the prophet Jeremiah’s time, around 640 BC, Asherah was being worshiped in Jerusalem under the epithet, the Queen of Heaven, and had a similar fertility cult to that of Ishtar who was also known as the Queen of Heaven. The relative importance of Asherah over Baal is seen later in Atargatis’ preeminence over Hadad in the Greco-Roman period. This cult demonstrates the continuity of some element of Ishtar’s worship into the worship of Asherah. In Jeremiah 44:19 her followers burned incense, poured out libations, and made cakes for her. These cakes were made in the form of a nude goddess with exaggerated breasts and pubic region. The burning of incense and making offerings is consistent with earlier Babylonian practices, as evidenced on cylinder seals (Figs. 14, 15). By 592 BC Ezekiel records that the Asherah cult still being practiced at the temple only a few years before it was destroyed by priests who burned incense to the image of Asherah and worshipped the sun.

Since the cult of Asherah was still in existence in the sixth century BC in almost the same form, it may be possible that not much change occurred in the worship of Asherah until the Greeks began influencing the cult. A sixth-century BC temple to the god Eshmun in Sidon attests to the continuing worship of Asherah/Astarte. It was built in a Mesopotamian style and had a stepped or ziggurat shaped podium. The temple of

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127King, 352.
128Jeremiah 44:17.
129Lucian, Introduction, 40, 48.
130King, 52.
131Ezekiel 8:11, 16.
Eshmun incorporated a chapel dedicated to Astarte from probably the fourth century BC. At Sidon Asherah was worshipped as Astarte and was associated with the sea. Inside the chapel was a large throne with sphinxes holding up the seat and surrounded by a pool of water (Fig. 42). The throne, with its with lions or sphinxes, demonstrates the continuation of one of Ishtar’s most enduring attributes down as far as the worship of Astarte in the fourth century BC.

The Eshmun temple possessed not only the lake but multiple water channels and basins connected to a spring which were probably used for water rites and ablutions. These urns conjure up ideas about the need of water for fertility and the water pouring rituals associated with Astarte. A small bronze in the shape of throne flanked with sphinxes found in Sidon holds an urn similar to those set up in Astarte’s chapel. Dunand believes this urn to be a kind of betyl stone representing Astarte. The throne in the chapel of Astarte in Sidon could have held one of these urns representing Astarte. Or it could have been empty, as was the mercy seat that represented Yahweh in the Temple of Solomon. This kind of “empty space iconism” was also seen also at Ain Dara. The chapel of Astarte in Sidon is one of the last religious structures related to the worship of the long line of female fertility goddesses that was built before Hellenistic culture began to heavily influence the Near East.

The Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian temples discussed in this chapter exemplify the basic elements which repeatedly appear in the pre-Hellenistic era. The

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133 Markoe, 127.
135 Betlyon, 53.
136 Markoe, 127.
137 Dunand, 24.
138 Dunand, 24, plate II.
139 Mettinger, 113; Lewis, 38.
most common elements include open-air courtyards, non-symmetrical plans, bent-axes, an inner sanctuary or holy of holies, altars, “high places” or podia, some kind of water feature, and gateways with towers or obelisks. These elements are not exclusive to the temples of goddesses. However, combined with the fertility nature of the cults emphasized either through decorative elements and cult objects found in the temples or records of cult practices, these temples clearly belong to fertility goddesses. Associations with aniconism and lion imagery and banqueting are also a typical part of these sanctuaries. These elements, as discussed in the following chapters, were all combined in the eclectic temples of the Greco-Roman period clearly demonstrating that Hellenism was not as strong as has been thought amongst the cults of fertility goddesses in the Near East.
Chapter 3

Temples at Hierapolis, Dura Europos, Delos, and Khirbet et-Tannur

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the worship of female deities in the Near East had long been an important part of the religions practiced there. By the time the Greeks encountered Near Eastern mother/fertility goddess worship, thousands of years of evolution in religion had occurred. The goddess Sumerian Inanna who was later incorporated into the Babylonian deity Ishtar had spread throughout the Near East as a result of Babylonian conquest. Then later Phoenician and Canaanite cultures adopted the worship under the names of Astarte and Asherah. In essence the goddess that the Greeks named Atargatis was an amalgamation of all of the major Semitic mother/fertility goddesses including Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Syro-Palestinian, and Hittite.140 This amalgam implies that a fundamentally similar tradition in iconography, cult practices, and temple architecture existed in the Near East region when the Greeks adopted the Atargatis cult. However, a concise categorization of the Atargatis cult as a Near Eastern fertility cult is an oversimplification since there was not one homogenous Near Eastern religion existing in the region.141 Thus, by the Greco-Roman period the Atargatis cult encompassed the practices of many major cultures. This chapter will describe the temples of four major centers of the worship of fertility goddesses in the Near East in order to compare and contrast the sites. The subsequent chapter will analyze these temples to ascertain which elements are the Greco-Roman, in view of the

140 Bilde, 151; Lucian, Introduction, 13.
architectural trends of the Greco-Roman West and Near East, and which elements may be traditionally Near Eastern, in light of the history of Near Eastern fertility cults.

**Hellenistic Adoption of the Near Eastern Fertility Goddess**

The Greek civilization was a culmination of centuries of many civilizations building upon each other’s literary, artistic, and technological advancements, especially those of Egypt and the Near East. The Greeks looked to the Egyptians and the cultures of the Near East as the oldest civilizations and held them in high regard. Much of Greek religion, art, science, and philosophy began in Egypt and the Near East and was adopted and adapted by the Greeks as their own civilization grew in power and influence. Trade with these ancient civilizations and Greek colonization in the East brought many eastern influences into Greek civilization and vice versa. After Alexander the Great took control of Greece in the late fourth century BC he and his later successors succeeded in disseminating Greek civilization even further throughout the Near East.

The impact of the meeting of Greek and Near Eastern cultures was immense and influenced many areas of each civilization, including that of religion. Although many Eastern religions were known to the Greeks through previous contact, the increased exchange during the Hellenistic age caused substantial change in both civilizations. One cult that the Greeks came in contact with in Syria was the Semitic cult of Atargatis. Scholars are divided about how far they believe the Hellenization process went. Bilde argues that the Atargatis cult became a Greek Oriental mystery cult like those of Isis, Cybele, and Mithras, which is convincing if one looks at the iconography and certain
practices of the cult. However, he also admits that the Atargatis temples were “remarkably non-Western (Greek or Roman) and rather ‘Oriental’.” He criticizes those authors who saw the cult as retaining its fertility nature, citing that Atargatis had the ability to “expand beyond her original “natural” territory and attract new non-local and non-Syrian believers in Graeco-Roman times.” Bilde’s argument is convincing because one must take into account the entire cult—history, evolution of iconography, rituals, and temple architecture—to truly understand how the cult changed. However, he conveniently ignores the temple architecture in order to fit the cult into his mold. His argument is also discredited by the nature of Atargatis and her many divine predecessors, who were already masters of “expanding beyond [their] territory.”

Greco-Roman elements will be demonstrated as an integral part of the Atargatis cult which by no means remained free from Hellenization. However, much of the evidence supports that the strength of tradition overshadowed the effects of Hellenization. However, these kinds of generalizations are fraught with their own troubles. Lightfoot is wary of making them and says, “[s]ome of these labels may be partly true but in need of qualification, others too global to be meaningful; they may be purchased at the cost of ignoring local context, which is where meaning most inheres.” The local peculiarities of the cult are where we must look to find a more accurate picture of fertility goddess cults in the Near East. It is in the peculiarities however that we find threads that run through and connect the various cults.

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142 Bilde, 152, 156.
143 Bilde, 168.
144 Bilde, 156. These authors are listed in Bilde, notes 13, 19, 20.
145 Lucian, Introduction, 36.
It was a common Greek, and later Roman, practice to understand the deities they encountered by seeing common traits with their own gods. Accordingly, Atargatis came to represent aspects of those deities as well. This practice reveals the Greek attempts to not only make eastern religions digestible in a form consistent with the Hellenistic cosmopolitan lifestyle, but to also tie their deities to a long illustrious history.\(^\text{146}\)

Accordingly, Pausanias mentions that “hard by [the temple of Hephaestus] is a sanctuary of the Heavenly Aphrodite; the first men to establish her cult were the Assyrians, after the Assyrians the Paphians of Cyprus and the Phoenicians who live at Ascalon in Palestine; the Phoenicians taught her worship to the people of Cythera.”\(^\text{147}\) Thus, the Greeks themselves acknowledged the antiquity and eastern origins of many of their deities.

Although much of Greek religion seems to be indebted to eastern religions, Greek pride in their culture did not allow them to let Eastern religious practice remain unscathed by the Hellenization process.\(^\text{148}\)

**Roman Adoption of the Near Eastern Fertility Goddess**

By the Roman era the cult of early fertility goddesses like Ishtar had been merged with Astarte of the Phoenicians, Asherah of the Israelites, and Artemis and Aphrodite of the Greeks. In the second century AD a Roman historian and ethnographer named Lucian of Samosata wrote a treatise on the cult of Atargatis at Hierapolis called *De Dea Syria.* This treatise serves as the most important evidence of state of the worship of Near Eastern fertility goddesses after the Hellenistic period and well in to the Roman. Lucian considered the deity worshipped at Hierapolis to be Hera as well as many other Roman

\(^\text{146}\)Bilde, 179.


\(^\text{148}\)Dirven, “Author,” 164.
Goddesses including Aphrodite and Athena. Atargatis’ consort, Hadad, had also adopted attributes of Greek and Roman deities including Zeus and Jupiter. In Sumerian and later Mesopotamian mythology Inanna/Ishtar’s consort was Dumuzi rather than Hadad, but, her nature as the goddess of sexuality seems to contribute to her having multiple lovers. Thus, it is almost impossible to trace Atargatis and Hadad’s direct antecedents since so many ancient cultures contributed to their make up.

By the time of Lucian’s writings, Atargatis had lost many of the attributes of Ishtar including her blatantly aggressive sexuality and warlike character. Because of the cult of Near Eastern fertility goddesses was influenced over many years by many cultures it is impossible to make a direct connection with one specific preceding cult. However, based on temple architecture and related cult objects and rituals, as will be seen, Atargatis’ cult seems to share a significant number of characteristics with Near Eastern cults. Despite the Hellenistic elements of the cult as expressed by Lucian the strongly emphasized exoticism of her cult is very apparent in his treatise and may reflect that the cult had been transformed by the Greeks and Romans into their idea of what was exotic. This idea of an interpretatio Graeca implies that the Greeks and Romans took everything they saw as exotic and melded into pan-Near Eastern cults of Greco-Roman creation. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, this kind of melding of traditions happened long before the Greeks and Romans came into the Near East. In order to understand more fully what degree of Hellenization temples dedicated to Atargatis

\[149\] Lucian, 1.
\[150\] Bilde, 175.
\[151\] Black, 108.
experienced the layouts of cult centers at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos will be discussed in this chapter and will be compared with Near Eastern and Greco-Roman temples in the next chapter.

Hierapolis as Iconographical Cult Center

The written and physical evidence of Atargatis cult in the second century AD comes from her greatest center of worship in Hierapolis, located in what is now Syria. The site of Hierapolis seems to have first been occupied by the Aramaeans around 900 BC, although the Hittites ruled the area many years before that. The traditional name of the city was Manbug which was later changed to Hierapolis under the Seleucids. Lucian records the temple as having been built under the patronage of Stratonice, wife of Seleucus Nikator (r. 305 BC-281 BC), some time around 300 BC. The primary source as to the appearance of the temple at Hierapolis and associated cult rituals is Lucian’s De Dea Syria, written between AD 120 and 180. Hierapolis seems to have remained an important religious site for the local people despite the change to a Greek name since Lucian’s treatise seems to reflect a low level of Hellenization in the city, as will be explored in Chapter 4. The temple of Atargatis is no longer standing in Hierapolis. Franz Cumont visited the site in 1907 and made a crude plan of the area (Fig. 1). He described that an area which may have been the sacred lake along with some columns, a courtyard with a well, and a raised platform were the only remains of the temple.

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154 Goossens, 34.
155 Lightfoot, 17, Commentary, 389-90.
156 Lightfoot, Introduction, 9, 41.
157 Cumont, 37-8.
Since the earliest coins found at Hierapolis date the site to at least 332 BC, it is possible that the iconography of Atargatis in the Greco-Roman period originated there and was adapted by the other cult centers, as seen in a relief from Dura Europos (Fig. 43). Some of the coins reveal Atargatis’ association with lions (Fig. 44) which, along with other cultic objects and rituals found at all three of these centers including phallic symbolism, fish/water elements, banqueting, and similar temple plans, tie the centers together. Lucian’s account of Hierapolis gives a detailed record of a cult which can be substantiated by what is known of the cults at Delos and Dura Europos. Ultimately, as will be explored, Hierapolis itself relies on an even older tradition from whence its iconography and rituals derive.

**Plan of the Temple at Hierapolis**

As there are no extant remains at Hierapolis, Lucian’s description of the temple at provides the most complete evidence as to what kind of temple may have existed there. According to *De Dea Syria* the temple was located on a hill with two walls around it and a propylaea, or monumental gateway. The gateway to the temple was flanked by two large columns called *phallobatai* upon which the priests would climb at certain times of the year. Lucian associates the phallic cult of Dionysus with these columns and ties them to the ritual castration practiced by Atargatis’ male followers because both demonstrate the exotic nature of the cult. These followers were known as the *galli* and their manner of castration was clearly a key ritual that Lucian focused on:

> On set days the multitude gathers at the temple…On these days men become galli. While other are piping and performing the rituals, a madness communicates itself, and many who have come as spectators behave in the following manner. The

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158 Lucian, 28-31 for the description of the temple and the phallobatai.
young man for whom this fate lies in store casts aside his garments and comes to the centre with a great cry, seizing up a sword. This, I think, stood there for many a long year. Seizing it he castrates himself, then runs through the city carrying in his hands the objects he has excised. He receives female clothing and ornament from whatever house he threw them into. And this is what they do at their castrations.\textsuperscript{159}

The origin of this ritual, according to Lucian, was the story of Combabos, a man who oversaw the construction of the temple at Hierapolis. Combabos emasculated himself when he was put in charge of the king’s wife Stratonice who would be at the site during the temple’s construction.\textsuperscript{160} He did so in order to not be found guilty of taking advantage of Stratonice which he thought of as inevitable accusation if she accompanied him to the temple site. The ritual of self-castration practiced by many of the priests of Atargatis seems to share fertility symbolism with the giant phalli placed in front of the temple. It seems antithetical that eunuchs acted as priests of a cult with giant phalli in front of the temple but both represent a ritual devotion to the goddess by dedicating sexual organs to the goddess whether in large symbolic format or in actuality.

The gateway to the temple at Hierapolis and its flanking pillars and were followed by an open-air courtyard which surrounded the temple proper. Inside the courtyard rested a large altar, used for sacrifices which would take place twice a day.\textsuperscript{161} How large the altar was or whether or not it necessitated stairs is unknown. Inside the courtyard also rested the temple proper at Hierapolis which sat on a podium which had a frontal staircase.\textsuperscript{162} The interior of the temple had an unusual arrangement according to Lucian’s description. It consisted of two chambers: an antechamber and a cella with a raised

\textsuperscript{159}Lucian, 51.
\textsuperscript{160}Lucian, 19-27.
\textsuperscript{161}Lucian, 44.
\textsuperscript{162}Lucian, 30.
adyton, or chamber at the back, in a sort of tripartite arrangement. The temple may have been a Hellenized temple because Lucian describes it as being like those built in Ionia (Turkey). Whether Lucian was describing a Hellenistic temple or a Roman one is debated. No mention of a colonnade, triangular pediment or any other distinctly Greek characteristic is made by Lucian.

The description of the interior of the temple is brief because Lucian chooses to focus on important cult objects inside the temple, the most important being the cult statue. This statue depicted Hadad and Atargatis, better known as Zeus and Hera to Lucian, enthroned next to each other. Hadad is seated on a throne flanked by bulls while Atargatis sits on one with lions. It is in Lucian’s description of the statue that the complicated nature of Atargatis is revealed. He states that, although it is clear that the statue depicts Hera, one can also see attributes of Athena, Aphrodite and a multitude of other Greco-Roman deities. In addition to the cult statue, Lucian also mentions an empty throne dedicated to the sun located just inside the temple. The dimensions of the interior of the temple and its decoration are ignored by Lucian in favor of the oddities of the cult paraphernalia. Thus, it leaves much to conjecture as to what type of temple really existed at Hierapolis.

Outside of the gateway to the temple rested a large pool, or sacred lake similar to many Egyptian temples. The sacred fish in the lake at Hierapolis relate to Atargatis’ fertility aspects, as goddess of the sea and water. As a result of the sacred nature of fish to

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163 Lucian, 31.
164 Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 428.
165 Lucian, 30-31.
166 Lucian, 31.
167 Lucian, 1.
168 Lucian, 24.
the Atargatis cult fish was not consumed by her worshippers. 169 Another ritual performed at Hierapolis which links Atargatis to the life-giving properties of water was that of pouring libations in a crevice under the temple. The original name of the city, Manbug, testifies to Atargatis’ water connections. The name derives from the Semitic root nb’ meaning “to come out” thus relating it to the spewing forth of water. 170 The city was probably sacred because of some source of water. 171

Lucian’s account of Hierapolis adds to limited evidence about Hierapolis which comes down from the Hellenistic period. The Roman period in Hierapolis offers slightly stronger evidence that Greco-Roman culture was taking hold in Atargatis’ cult. Cult iconography, such as relief found in Rome, represents a more Hellenized looking Atargatis (Fig. 45). In addition, inscriptions record Greco-Roman government bodies and games were present in Hierapolis. 172 However, Lucian’s account of pillar climbing and sacred fish offers an entirely different view of the city in which traditional elements are prominent. Such conflicting accounts only serve to reveal that Greco-Roman and traditional factors were probably combined at Hierapolis. This mix was probably reflective of the mixed population as it was at many Greek and Roman colonies. 173 Even if the temple as described above was built in Hellenistic times and survived to be described by Lucian, the cult objects and rituals he describes are most assuredly part of a Roman era practice since he was observing them in the second century AD. The typical Classical Greek temple was not common to the Near East in the Hellenistic period and

169 Lucian, 14.
173 Lightfoot, Commentary, 431.
Roman era temples like the Temple of Bel in Palmyra demonstrate that purely Roman temples were also not the norm in the Near East. These aspects of the cult can help us see more surely what traditions were retained at Hierapolis from an earlier tradition since the temple no longer exists and thus we cannot deduce its level of Hellenization.

**Delos**

Hierapolis is not the only center of worship that one must consider in determining the extent of the Hellenization of her cult. Next to Hierapolis one of the most important centers of Atargatis worship was on the Mediterranean island of Delos. Although not a Seleucid colony, as was Hierapolis, Delos had many ties with Syria through the merchant and slave trade. By the second century BC, many Syrian merchants and slaves lived on the island and became enough of an organized community to set up a sanctuary to the goddess of their homeland. An inscription dating from around 166 BC records that a priest and his wife commissioned the rebuilding of part of the sanctuary so it seems to have existed at least from 166 BC. Another inscription from 128 BC records that a Hierapolitan Priest dedicated various additional structures and altars at the temple. The fact that he was a Hierapolitan priest indicates that the administration of the Atargatis cult had some form of hierarchy that emanated from Hierapolis. If a Hierapolitan priest was in charge of the building of the sanctuary at Delos and it was built in a non-Greek style, it is possible that the style was dictated by the mother temple in Hierapolis.

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177 Morin, 90.
The remains of the temple of Atargatis at Delos have been excavated and give a well preserved example of a Hellenistic era temple of Atargatis. The temple was part of a larger sanctuary that was located near the sanctuary dedicated to Egyptian deities worshipped at Delos. Atargatis’ temple had an open court with multiple cellae and storerooms surrounding the court (Fig. 2). Additional chapels were added as far down at 90 BC giving the sanctuary proper a haphazard arrangement. The temple experienced a building surge after 118 BC when the administration of the sanctuary was passed to an Athenian priest.178 This period is when a marble colonnade employing the Doric order with an Ionic propylaeum, a Corinthian order exedra, and most notably, a theater were added to the sanctuary (Fig. 46).179 Delos had a longer history of ties with Greece than Hierapolis, since it was inhabited by Greeks since at least the tenth century BC, which may account for the inclusion of a theater at Delos while their was most likely not one at Hierapolis.

Cult objects found at Delos have interesting ties with Hierapolis. One such object was an empty throne flanked by lions which sat just across from the theater in the terrace of the sanctuary (Fig. 47).180 A parallel can be made between this empty throne and the one mentioned by Lucian at Hierapolis as well as the fourth-century BC precedent at the chapel of Astarte in Sidon (Fig. 42). Will suggested that the procession of the cult statue of Atargatis similar to the one mentioned by Lucian could have taken place between the temple and the theater near the throne and altar.181 The theater may have been used as part of processions like this which has been used as evidence for the development of

178Will, 98.
179Oden, Studies, 91-104; Will, 135; Lightfoot, Introduction, 45.
180Will, 148.
mysteries in Atargatis’ cult. However, the theater could have been used for various rituals that were not necessary related to mysteries. The lions flanking the throne reiterate the Greek era association of lions with Atargatis as found in the earliest coins of Hierapolis and confirms Lucian’s account of Atargatis’ cult statue being enthroned between lions.

Other objects found in the temple at Delos were also found in Hierapolis. Located near the theater and the throne was a cistern that may be in emulation of the sacred lake of Hierapolis. The sacredness of fish was apparently part of the cult in Delos as it was in Hierapolis as is verified by the injunction against eating fish or pork found on a tablet in the Delos sanctuary listing purity regulations. In the courtyard of the temple were altars used for rituals. Inscriptions record various patrons dedicating altars to the temple. A small phallic offering found in the temple at Delos may tie Delos to the cult practices coming from Hierapolis. Multiple side rooms along the terrace of the sanctuary at Delos were most likely used for ritual banqueting which may also have occurred at Hierapolis.

Despite certain differences in what elements were incorporated at either site, it seems that many elements were shared between Hierapolis and Delos as well as at Dura Europos such as altars, water rituals, lion imagery, phallicism, and perhaps banqueting. Even though the cult at Hierapolis may have dictated certain aspects of the cult, it is evident that each cult center exhibits its own unique blend of iconography, cult practices,

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182 Bilde, 162.
184 Will, 147; Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 49.
185 Oden, *Studies*, 90.
187 Will, 117-118.
and sanctuary architecture.\textsuperscript{188} Regardless of regional differences, both temples demonstrate a common thread in both temple architecture and cult rituals.

**Dura Europos**

Another cult center of Atargatis that further illustrates ties with Hierapolis and now Delos was located in Dura Europos in Syria. The extant remains of the temple of Atargatis at Dura Europos reflect the Roman building level, thus most of what we know about the temple structure of the Hellenistic period is extrapolated from the Roman age temple (Fig. 3). Seleucid coins found at Dura Europos give evidence that the site was used during the Hellenistic period and an earlier temple probably existed on which the Roman temple was based.\textsuperscript{189} A few scholars have noted that the layout of Dura Europos during the Roman period shares many similarities with the sanctuary at Delos from Hellenistic period.\textsuperscript{190} The temples at both sites consist of a gateway followed by a large central courtyard. Inside the courtyard rests a cella with chambers flanking it on either side as well as multiple side rooms arranged asymmetrically around the courtyard. The entrance to the temple at Dura was flanked by buttresses as was the entrance to the sanctuary. A monumental altar measuring approximately 3 meters square sits in the courtyard just off axis of the main entrance. Delos demonstrates that the open court temple type was familiar to the followers of Atargatis in the Hellenistic period because it was built in the second century BC. Therefore the temple at Dura could have looked

\textsuperscript{188}Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 56.
\textsuperscript{189}Baur, 19-21; Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 50.
\textsuperscript{190}Baur, 12, Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 50.
similar to Delos in the Hellenistic period, if it existed at that date since, in the Roman period, it shares many similarities with Delos.\textsuperscript{191}

Other important features of the Dura temple reveal a continuity of tradition with Delos and perhaps Hierapolis. At Dura there are remains of antechamber in front of the cella and side rooms along the courtyard which both have rows of stands along two sides of their walls (labeled 6 and 13 on the plan). These rooms may have been theatrical areas and could have been used for cult rituals as at the theater in Delos.\textsuperscript{192} A theater at Hierapolis is not mentioned in Lucian’s account but since elaborate rituals occurred there, perhaps some kind of viewing area existed. Another architectural feature these temples may have shared are banqueting rooms. Small side rooms surrounding the courtyard in the Atargatis temple at Dura have benches around the sides that may have been used for ritual banqueting.\textsuperscript{193} Similar benches were found in the exedras of the Delos temple and provide a precedent for this ritual being part of the cult at Dura. Ritual banquets are not mentioned as being a part of the cult at Hierapolis by Lucian but the inclusion of banqueting areas in both Dura and Delos gives strong evidence that they did occur at Hierapolis.\textsuperscript{194}

The cult relief found at Dura also underscores iconographic ties with Hierapolis and Delos. The relief depicts Atargatis and Hadad seated on thrones flanked by their customary lions and bulls (Fig. 43). This arrangement strongly parallels the cult statue at Hierapolis as described by Lucian—as does the lions flanking the throne at Delos—confirming that at least some of the elements of his account can be proved to be true. This

\textsuperscript{191}Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 51.
\textsuperscript{192}Downey, 104; Baur, 22, Butcher, 356.
\textsuperscript{193}Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 53.
\textsuperscript{194}Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 47.
clear correspondence of iconography further supports that Hierapolis was the source of cult in Dura. One of the most important elements of Lucian’s account which the relief of Hadad and Atargatis found at Dura Europos corroborates is the standard with circles on it surmounted by a dove placed between the deities. It is called the semeion by Lucian and interpreted to be a symbol of the Babylonian queen Semiramis (c. 800 BC) who supposedly founded the temple in another of Lucian’s foundation myths. An interesting aspect of the cult revealed by the Dura relief is that Atargatis was apparently more important than Hadad because she is depicted as larger than Hadad and he appears pushed to the side and behind her. This belief is underscored by the inscriptions at Delos which mention Atargatis more often than her consort.

Dura Europos was not the only important center of Atargatis in the Roman Era. The popularity of Near Eastern fertility goddesses spread throughout the Greco-Roman Near East and penetrated into the West. In the Near East, however, was where these goddesses were most revered. The Nabataean civilization, which grew to amazing heights in the region now known as Jordan, worshipped fertility goddesses in a way both unique yet strikingly similar to the cults found at Hierapolis, Delos, and Dura Europos.

**Nabataean Religion**

The origins of the Nabataeans are uncertain before the fourth century BC. They were a Semitic people inhabiting the region formerly occupied by the Edomites and Moabites of the Bible. At one point their hegemony extended from as far as Damascus in

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196 Lucian, 14, 33; Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 351-352.
198 Will, 145.
the north, Jordan in the south, Arabia in the east and Egypt in the west. The first definitive record of the Nabataeans comes from the fourth century BC when they were mentioned by Hieronymus of Cardia as recorded around 60 BC by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus. Hieronymus records how Antigonus Cyclops, one of the many leaders vying for control in the Near East after the power vacuum created by the death of Alexander the Great, attacked the Nabataeans in 312 BC. The invading Greeks were eventually beaten. The Romans later tried to annex the Nabataean kingdom and were not successful until AD 106. The Nabataeans became a strong and prosperous civilization between the second century BC and the second century AD due to their control of large portions of the caravan trade as well as adeptness at agriculture. Hellenism had a large impact upon the Nabataean culture and first impressions of the culture reveal strong Hellenistic characteristics, however, as will be discussed, the “enduring Orientalism” of the Nabataeans was also alive and well up until it was absorbed by the Romans.

The Nabataean religion fits into the broad continuum of Semitic religions because the Nabataeans were a Semitic people who spoke Aramaic. The first Nabataean deities were most likely non-anthropomorphic and were worshiped in the form of betyl stones and niches. This type of worship was not unique to the Nabataeans. It had been practiced at least as early as the Assyrian period as evidenced by the altar found at the temple of Ishtar in Assur (Fig. 18) and it was widespread among the Israelites and Phoenicians. The Nabataean religion was a fertility religion which reflected their

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200Glueck, 43.
201Glueck, Deities, 4-5.
202Glueck, Deities, 10.
203Glueck, Deities, 86-7, 90.
agricultural background.\textsuperscript{204} The chief male deity worshipped by the Nabataeans was called Dushares who was initially a fertility/rain/thunder god who may have been equivalent to the Greek Dionysus.\textsuperscript{205} However, he seems to be more of a local manifestation of the ancient Semitic storm god Hadad or the more likely the universal Semitic god Baalshamin, or the Babylonian Bel.\textsuperscript{206} Later as the Nabataeans came in contact with Greek and Roman culture, gradually took on the anthropomorphic attributes of the gods Zeus and Jupiter.\textsuperscript{207} The only inscription found at the Nabataean sanctuary of Khirbet et-Tannur features the name of the old Edomite fertility god Qos, therefore Dushares and his Syrian/Hellenistic equivalent Zeus-Hadad were probably not the original gods worshipped at Khirbet et-Tannur.\textsuperscript{208} Dushares probably took over as the god when the Nabataeans inherited the old Edomite lands.

The major Nabataean goddess was called al-Uzza and she was also worshipped in aniconic form.\textsuperscript{209} Allat was also an important goddess in the Nabataean pantheon and may have been one of two manifestations, along with al-Uzza, of the same goddess. Al-Uzza represented the fertility and planetary aspect of this goddess, equated with Venus/Aphrodite, and Allat the more warlike aspect, equated with Athena.\textsuperscript{210} The Greeks and Romans equated al-Uzza/Allat with Atargatis and Dea Syria because of her fertility nature.\textsuperscript{211} In fact al-Uzza/Allat seems to be influenced more by fellow Oriental goddesses

\textsuperscript{204} Nelson Glueck, "A Newly Discovered Nabataean Temple of Atargatis and Hadad at Khirbet Et-Tannur, Transjordania," \textit{American Journal of Archaeology} 41, no. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1937), 363.
\textsuperscript{205} Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 86.
\textsuperscript{206} Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 86; Healey, 181; McKenzie, 186.
\textsuperscript{207} Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 86.
\textsuperscript{208} Healey, 61; McKenzie, 186.
\textsuperscript{210} Healey, 108, 110, 113-4, 117.
\textsuperscript{211} Wenning, 82 n 7, 83; McKenzie, 183.
Isis and Atargatis then by any Greek and Roman equivalents.\textsuperscript{212} Al-Uzza was most likely the consort of Dushares while Allat was his mother, and perhaps the mother of all the gods.\textsuperscript{213} In certain cases Al-Uzza seems to have outstripped the importance of Dushares to the Nabataeans as she is often depicted as the larger of two betyls (Fig. 48).\textsuperscript{214} Atargatis was not a native Nabataean goddess and one inscription under an eye idol in the Wadi es-Siyyagh near Petra reveals that she was numbered among the foreign deities worshipped by the Nabataeans.\textsuperscript{215} She did seem to have an impact on the attributes of al-Uzza and Allat to a degree but was not worshipped herself in great numbers by the Nabataeans.\textsuperscript{216}

Nabataean religion remains a mystery and even the most notable scholars in the field cannot decide who exactly was worshipped where and what the attributes belong to which deities.\textsuperscript{217} It is clear, though, that as Nabataean commercial and political power spread across the Near East and encountered Greek and Roman society, the popularity of Atargatis grew among the Nabataeans. Reciprocally, the popularity of fertility goddesses in general grew among the Greeks and Romans as trade brought Nabataean religion to far flung locations.\textsuperscript{218} By the first century AD the Nabataean worship of their own fertility goddess was a conglomeration of Semitic and Hellenistic influences.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[212]Healey, 182.
\item[213]Healey, 105, 110; Wenning, 82
\item[214]Healey, 155.
\item[215]Healey, 107, 140.
\item[216]Healey, 107, 140.
\item[217]Healey, 44, 108.
\item[218]Glueck, Deities, 377, 380. Nabataean presence is attested to in inscriptions found in Miletus, Rhodes, and Puteoli, and Nabataeans may have resided at Rome and Delos.
\end{footnotes}
The Temple of al-Uzza/Atargatis at Khirbet et-Tannur

Some of the main sanctuaries in which al-Uzza was revered in the Nabataean Kingdom reflect the eclectic mix of her worship among the Nabataeans. This mix can especially be seen in the temple discovered at the site of Khirbet et-Tannur in Jordan (Figs. 4, 49). Nelson Glueck, who excavated the temple in the 1930’s, referred to the goddess of Khirbet et-Tannur as Atargatis in his extensive work on the Nabataeans published in 1965. However, more current scholarship seems to be confused about the extent to which Atargatis was actually worshipped by the Nabataeans with very few inscriptions mentioning her by name found in their kingdom. The names of al-Uzza and Allat are found more often in the epigraphical evidence in the Nabataean realm.219

Current scholarship seems to lean towards al-Uzza as the actual mistress of Khirbet et-Tannur, although her similarities with Atargatis seem to show they represent essentially the same deity.220

The temple at Khirbet et-Tannur may have existed as early as 125 BC and was built in three stages, the second beginning around 10 BC at the height of Nabataean power and the temple’s influence, and the third around AD 106.221 The ruins of the temple sit on a hill called Jebel Tannur which straddles two canyons and seems to dominate the region (Fig. 50). However, the hill was located far from any cities or even villages and was miles from the main road that ran through the area.222 Glueck suggests that the temple’s isolation and lack of association with a specific settlement may have

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219Healey, 107.
220Healey, 61.
221Glueck, Deities, 138.
222Glueck, Deities, 77.
indicated its status as a great pilgrimage site with regional, and perhaps even national, importance.223

The sanctuary of Period I consisted solely of an altar decorated with sculpture. The more developed temple is a product of Period II with a few additions from Period III (Fig. 4). The temple faced east and consisted of a temenos wall and a courtyard entered through a gateway decorated with columns. The main gate was followed by an open-air courtyard with a colonnade. On the side of the court were multiple side rooms and to the west end of the court rested the inner sanctuary. In addition to the main gate, two additional entrances were found on the northeast and northwest sides of the temple. In the courtyard were two open-air altars. In the northeast corner of the courtyard rested a large altar about 2.5 meters square while another was located in the west end of the courtyard directly behind the main sanctuary.

The main altar of the temple was located inside the inner sanctuary, which consists of a small self-contained elevated cella standing in the courtyard. The façade of this cella was topped with an Egyptian overhanging cornice.224 Egyptian cornices were commonly used by Nabataeans as evidenced by the one found on Qasr al-Bint in the Nabataean capital of Petra (Fig. 51). The cella was probably open to the air as was the courtyard (Fig. 52).225 Inside the cella stood an altar, which in Period I was originally about 1.5 m square and 1.74 m tall, already taller than the average person. By Period II the altar had grown to about 2 m square and 2.61 meters tall necessitating a staircase to reach the top (Fig. 53). The stairs indicate that the offerings took place on top of the altar.

223Glueck, Deities, 77.
225Glueck, Deities, 89, 126.
The altar that remains today should more appropriately be termed an altar base since a smaller altar was most likely placed upon it.\textsuperscript{226} It was on this smaller altar that burnt offerings of animals and grains were offered and the debris of these offerings served as fill between the old altar and the new ones. The practice of offering burnt offerings was common among Semitic religions as was the use of a high altar or rooftop upon which to offer them.\textsuperscript{227}

The Period III altar was built around the remains of its predecessor and was thus even higher of a “high place,” measuring 3.65 m by 3.4 meters and about 3.2 meters high (Fig. 54). It seems that keeping as much of the old structure of the most holy part of the temple as possible intact was a common Nabataean practice and explains why the remains of each previous altar is encased by the succeeding one.\textsuperscript{228} The offerings found inside the layers of altars seem to have acted as fill between the altars and may have been placed there as foundation offerings offered at the dedication of the new altar, similar to the foundation offerings found under some of the paving stones near the altar.\textsuperscript{229} Since the offerings were sacred it seems only appropriate to dispose of them inside of the altar itself. The façade of the shrine was decorated by two pilasters with attached quarter columns and two half columns. These columns were topped by Corinthian capitals more ornate than the Nabataean capitals with floral flourishes found on the façade of the entrance. Over the columns rested a frieze with depictions of Tyche, Hadad and Helios.\textsuperscript{230} Above the frieze there was probably a pediment and, as mentioned, the entire

\textsuperscript{226}McKenzie, 172.
\textsuperscript{227}See notes 66 and 101.
\textsuperscript{228}Glueck, Deities, 87.
\textsuperscript{229}Glueck, Deities, 99.
\textsuperscript{230}Glueck “Nabataean,” 10; Glueck, Deities, 397-8, 400. Tyche was the spirit of the city, perhaps a manifestation of al-Uzza/Atargatis.
façade was topped by an Egyptian style cornice. The doorway of the inner shrine was flanked by Nabataean horned columns and topped with a semi-circular relief of Al-Uzza (Figs. 55, 56). The relief depicts a bust of Al-Uzza surrounded by vines and flowers. Al-Uzza’s chest is bare with only leaves covering her body and face.

The most important manifestation of al-Uzza at Khirbet et-Tannur was her cult statue, of which very few fragments remain. Only parts of her throne, one of her feet, and one of her attendant lions survive (Fig. 57). A companion statue of Hadad/Dushares flanked between bulls was also discovered. These two statues probably functioned as the cult statues located on the façade of the inner sanctuary altar base. This arrangement of al-Uzza enthroned between lions and Hadad between bulls echoes that of Hierapolis and Dura Europos. This form of depicting al-Uzza demonstrates a strong influence of the Syrian cult at Hierapolis. Al-Uzza’s prominence at Khirbet et-Tannur is demonstrated by her many manifestations and demonstrates her preeminence over her consort Hadad.231 This was also the case at the major centers of her worship in Greco-Roman times including Hierapolis, Delos and Dura Europos. In fact at Dura Hadad seems to be deliberately smaller and pushed to the side in the cult relief found in Atargatis’ temple there.232

Surrounding the courtyard were various rooms most likely used for banqueting because of the benches which line the walls on three sides. Banquets were held in these rooms in honor of the gods of the sanctuary and may have existed as early as the first period of the temple but were fully developed by at least the end of the first century

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231 Glueck, Deities, 290.
232 Glueck, Deities, 290.
BC. A large triclinium may have existed in the courtyard for public banquets while the side rooms could have hosted more important private groups. Banqueting seems to have been an extremely important part of Nabataean religion as bicitria and triclinia were found in tombs and sanctuaries all over Nabataean territory, especially in Petra (Fig. 58). The banquet rooms found at Delos and Dura Europos attest to the importance of this ritual at those sites. The similarities between Khirbet et-Tannur and other major centers of fertility goddess worship are striking.

One of the most common traits found at sanctuaries of Atargatis in particular, as well as other fertility goddesses, was a sacred lake or water basin. At Khirbet et-Tannur the tradition may have been carried on in the form of a sacred pool in the middle of the courtyard. There was a sacred pool at the temple of Atargatis in Hierapolis and the same rituals may have occurred at both sites. At Hierapolis one of the main festivals of the Atargatis cult involved taking the statue of Atargatis down to the sacred lake and immersing it as had been done for thousands of years in Egyptian religion. This ritual happened in the spring and along with other water rituals, such as followers bringing water to the temple from the ocean, emphasizes Atargatis’ fertility aspects and her association with water. In addition to the possible existence of a sacred pool, a water basin with a lion headed spout was found at Khirbet et-Tannur. The lion symbolism was also an important symbol of Atargatis and other Near Eastern fertility goddesses that will be discussed below. The existence of a sacred pool at Khirbet et-Tannur is not known for

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233 Glueck, *Deities*, 64, 89-90.
235 Glueck, *Deities*, 164.
236 Glueck, *Deities*, 391.
238 Lucian, 47.
certain, however, water symbolism was an important part of the temple, as evidenced by 
the water basin, and the prevalent fish symbolism found there, discussed below, further 
supports this conclusion.

The inhabitants of Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos and Hierapolis were avid 
worshippers of Near Eastern fertility goddesses. Whether these goddesses were products 
of the Hellenistic age or the Roman age or vestiges of earlier religions is hard to 
ascertain. In analyzing the architecture, a few associated cult objects, and the key cult 
iconography of these four centers of worship, the nature of fertility cults in the Greco-
Roman age becomes clearer. Only in including the architecture can a larger picture of 
these cults come into view. Ties between Classical Greek and Roman temples and the 
temples at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos and among the Nabataeans with be discussed 
in Chapter 4. Similarities between these four centers of worship and Ancient Near 
Eastern temples which preceded the Hellenistic and Roman periods will also be 
discussed. In addition, other temples of the Greco-Roman time period will be discussed 
in order to understand some trends in architecture in the Near East.
Chapter 4
Architectural Analysis

The temples and cults found at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur represent complex blend of cultural influences from thousands of years. Not every element of temple architecture or cult practices that can be traced back to a Near Eastern or Greco-Roman origin can be found at all of the sites. However, certain common components tie all of the sites together. This chapter will consider each component, moving from the exterior to the interior of the temples, with evidence from all of the sites which utilize it. The purpose of this analysis is to understand more fully how much traditional Near Eastern influence was maintained in these cults despite strong incursions from the Greek and Roman civilizations. Whether the populations of the Near East fought to maintain their traditions or the Greeks and Romans adopted them as a fashion statement or a power play is difficult to determine, but will be considered. No matter the reason for keeping traditions alive, this architectural analysis attempts to prove that Near Eastern religion and architecture thrived during the Greco-Roman period.

Classical Greek and Roman Temple Plans

By the time Lucian wrote *De Dea Syria* in the second century AD, Greek and Roman settlements in the Near East had brought Western culture to the East and made a strong impact in politics, religion, art and other areas. The cults of fertility goddesses were not immune to this influence. Atargatis’ complicated nature makes it extremely difficult to sort out what is Greco-Roman and what is traditional in her cult. Many
scholars have studied the effects of Hellenization on the cult practices and iconography of Atargatis but most have ignored or only briefly mentioned the extent of Hellenization that occurred in her temple architecture.\textsuperscript{240} Only in understanding the temple architecture, in addition to the other elements of Atargatis’ religious practices, can we more clearly see the effects of Greek culture on the cult. The extent of Hellenization of Atargatis’ cult can better be ascertained by investigating whether or not the Hellenistic period temple architecture was a Greek product—either completely Hellenized or the Greek idea of what was Oriental—or if it remained essentially Mesopotamian. In order to understand what elements of the temples of fertility goddesses at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur cults were influenced by Greco-Roman culture Classical Greek and Roman temple plans will be discussed as well as Near Eastern traditions that influenced the four cult centers. Other Greco-Roman temples in the Near East will also be analyzed in order to understand the architectural context of the four centers of fertility goddess worship.

Greek and Roman temples share many of the same components but also have defining features that differentiate them. In addition, Greek and Roman cult objects and rituals that also had influence in the Near East will be discussed. The Classical Greek plan begins with the foundation upon which the temple sits. A typical Greek temple, like the Parthenon (Fig. 59), rested upon a podium that is stepped on all four sides. Upon the podium of Classical temples rested columns, usually in the Doric or Ionic order. The Corinthian order was not often used during the Classical era but experienced more usage from the fourth century BC until it became extremely popular in the Roman era.\textsuperscript{241} The

columns of the Classical Greek temple formed a peristyle, or row of peripteral columns; whereas some Hellenistic temples were formed of dipteral columns. Over the columns were various areas for decoration, depending on the order, including metopes and triglyphs or friezes. Above this rested the triangular pediment which usually featured sculptural decoration. The entire temple would be covered with a peaked roof.

Behind the outer row of columns the inner part of the temple rested on a slightly raised podium. The first part of the inner temple was a shallow porch, or pronaos, which usually had some columns in front of it or in antis columns which rested in line with the walls of the porch. Behind the porch was the cella. The cella is a room which is usually longer than it is wide and contained the cult statue. On the opposite side of the temple from the porch is the opisthodomos, a room which acted as a counterbalance to the porch and had the same amount of columns in front of it or in antis as the porch. The opisthodomos was usually used as storage space or as a treasury. The temple was usually part of a larger complex with other subsidiary buildings. The Classical temple emphasized order, balance, and symmetry. Each side of the temple was a replica or close replica of its opposite side. Down the line from the front from the doorway into the cella and the cult statue axial symmetry was very important. The axiality led the worshipper to the cult statue and the symmetry reflected the logic of the Greek culture.

The Romans took many of the architectural components of the Greeks and developed them further, adding some of their own concepts. The typical Roman temple, such as the Maison Carrée, c. 19 BC, also rested on a podium (Fig. 60). However, this podium was usually much higher and had a central frontal staircase rather than a peripteral staircase as in Classical Greek temples. The podium and staircase reflect
influence from Etruscan temples. On top of the Roman temple podium rested what
looked like a vertically rather than horizontally emphasized Classical Greek temple with
a peripteral row of columns around the temple. However, Roman temples usually had full
columns only in the porch area with engaged columns along the sides and back. The
porch was open with only columns and no walls. All of the Greek orders were commonly
used although the Corinthian order became increasingly popular in the Hellenistic period
and was even more popular among the Romans. The porch was topped with a triangular
pediment. The cella took up the entire podium with its walls touching the columns thus
there was no ability to walk around the temple through the colonnade. There was also no
opisthodomos at the back of the cella. The Roman temple did not emphasize symmetry
on all sides as much as Greek temples, though axial symmetry still played a part in
leading the worshipper through the temple to the cult statue in the cella.

Greco-Roman style temples that seem to have little Oriental influence can also be
found in the Near East that. The dramatic complex at Baalbek is an interesting mix of
Greek temples with Corinthian peristyles on top of Roman podia with frontal staircases
(Fig. 61). The floor plans and decoration would seem to indicate an exclusively Western
architecture was used at the site. This may be simply because the sanctuary was a major
Roman site and received more imperial funding and influx of Roman ideas. However, the
deities worshiped here were basically Near Eastern Deities with added Roman names
such as Jupiter-Baal, Venus-Astarte and Bacchus-Dionysus. Oriental elements are
apparent in the architecture. The propylaea of the temple of Jupiter features two towers
common to Mesopotamian temples.242 The monumental altar and the open-air courtyard
of the temple of Jupiter were common elements of Near Eastern cults. The hexagonal

court in front of the main court continues the typical multiple court arrangement of Mesopotamian structures. Most courtyards in Greco-Roman structures were also used for everyday activities in addition to religious rituals and were thus not exclusively distinguished from the outside world as were Mesopotamian courtyards. The most obviously non-Roman structure was a large tower in the courtyard of the temple of Jupiter which was probably built as a concession to the local religion in which “high places” were a fundamental part. The temple of Jupiter and its neighboring temple of Bacchus also had raised cellae, or adytons, similar to the biblical holy of holies.

In contrast to Baalbek, the temples at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur may be more Oriental simply be because they were more provincial. However, Delos was a Greek island and the temple of Atargatis there was not Greek in style. The fact that these four temples retain a significant amount of Oriental characteristics reveals that the cult was not as Hellenized as some scholars have believed. In the centers of Greek and Roman power in the Near East it is easier to understand that the temple architecture would become more Hellenized. However, it seems amongst the general populace traditional Near Eastern elements continued to be used and even penetrated the great centers such as Baalbek.

Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian Courtyards and Bent-Axes

The key element which ties all the temples at Delos, Dura Europos, Khirbet et-Tannur, and most likely Hierapolis, is their use of the open-court Mesopotamian plan. The Mesopotamian plan, as used in temples of Near Eastern fertility goddesses, has at

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243 Ragette, 24, 35.
244 Ragette, 34-35.
245 Ragette, 34, 50.
least a 3,000 year history from Eanna in Uruk, c. 3,300 BC, to the temple of Eshmun at Sidon, c. 400 BC. The choice of this type of plan by fertility goddess worshippers in the Greco-Roman period is significant. The Mesopotamian temple plans stand as testimonies to the power of tradition in the Near East and as grounds to reinterpret past scholarly research which ignores the great amount of tradition which remains in the temples alone, let alone the cults as a whole.

The core of the Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian temple type is the open air courtyard. Within these courtyards is a cella or multiple cellae which often have antechambers. There are also side rooms at all three temples which vary in number and arrangement, creating an asymmetrical floor plan. Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur all feature variations on this general plan (Figs. 2, 3, 4). In cities throughout ancient Mesopotamia the Seleucids patronized ancient religions and rebuilt or remodeled ancient temples using the Mesopotamian plan. Seleucid policy seems to reflect a respect for ancient religions or at least an understanding of the political benefits of depicting themselves as the inheritors of a more ancient Mesopotamian culture. Even the cursory addition of the Seleucid royal cult to the worship services of some of the temples built by the Seleucids did not seem to change the temple architecture. The temple at Delos demonstrates the typical asymmetrical plan of a Mesopotamian temple. The gateway to the temple is off-center from the courtyard. The doorway of one cella lines up with the gateway but the other cella does not line up with any axis and is smaller than the other cella and the side rooms are not arranged in any order and are all of different sizes.

246 Downey, 14; Lucian, *Commentary*, 390-91. This practice started with Alexander the Great and was continued by the Seleucids in order to legitimate their rule of Syria after Alexander’s death and the division of his empire.

247 Hannestad, 122.
The use of a Mesopotamian plan is especially interesting for the temple at Delos since it was a satellite island of Greece. The temple at Delos with its two cellae and multiple side rooms create a typical asymmetrical plan common to many Mesopotamian temples. It seems more logical that Delos should possess a Greek style temple. However, the temple’s association with a Hieropolitan priest definitively ties it to the cult as practiced at Hierapolis. If the temple at their home town of Hierapolis was a Greek style temple it is interesting that at Delos the Hierapolitan priests established a specifically non-Greek temple. On the other hand, it may be that they used a Mesopotamian temple type at Delos because it was also used in Hierapolis. Although the remains of Hierapolis are no longer extant, the sanctuary at Delos and the account written by Lucian serve as evidence that a Mesopotamian style temple may have existed at Hierapolis. Lightfoot stresses that there is absolutely no evidence that the temple at Hierapolis was an open-court temple such as those found in Mesopotamia. However, Lucian specifically says the temple has a courtyard in which rested an altar and other cult objects. The temple at Delos may offer support that the temple at Hierapolis was also an open court temple.

Many of the temples in ancient Sumerian and Neo-Babylonian cities such as Eanna in Uruk and Inanna temple in Nippur were remodeled during Seleucid times (Fig. 62). The continuing power the cults practiced in Uruk even into Hellenistic times is evidenced by the rebuilding of many of the temples and the continuation of cult functions in Uruk. The apparently ancient rituals observed in Hellenistic Uruk reflect that the native inhabitants continued many of their traditions and the Greek colonists followed

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248 Lightfoot, Commentary, 427.
249 Lucian, 41.
250 Downey, 15-47. 32-35 discusses Eanna specifically.
suit. The use of the Sumerian plan all the way into the Hellenistic period reveals that this type of plan was seen as integral to the religions culture of Mesopotamia. In the city of Ai Khanoum, located in what is now Afghanistan, in late fourth to early third century BC the “Temple hor-les-murs” and the “Temple à redans” were built in simplified Mesopotamian style. These temples both have an antechamber, multiple cellae, and walls that were decorated with niches and projections (Figs. 63, 64). The “Temple hor-les-murs” was also preceded by a courtyard. The three-part cella with an antechamber has precedents as far back as Temple C at Eanna (Fig. 5). These temples use a square plan rather than a rectangular Greco-Roman plan. This plan, as well as by the multiple cellae, downplay the symmetricality of the temple and the axis from the entrance to the cella. The temples at Ai Khanoum mix symmetricality with the more square open court plan of Mesopotamian temples. Despite being built in the Greek era by Greek rulers, Greek elements at these two temples are nonexistent aside from the stepped peripteral podia and a Greek style cult statue found in the “Temple à redans.” The non-Greek nature of the temples at Ai Khanoum is especially emphasized by the lack of a peripteral colonnade typical of Greek temples. Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur also lack a peripteral colonnade.

The non-Greek elements at Ai Khanoum plainly manifest that Hellenization in this city was not all encompassing. According to Hannestad and Potts, the temples at Ai Khanoum seem to go against any Greek colonial practice:

* A priori we would have expected the temples, or at least the main temple in the early years of the colony, to have been built according to Greek standards and

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251 Linssen, 168.
252 Hannestad, 98.
253 Hannestad, 93.
254 Hannestad, 93.
This is certainly how a classical scholar would expect the Greeks to behave... For this reason, Ai Khanoum causes surprise among classical archaeologists. We have here a city with a gymnasion and a theatre, but apparently no Greek temple... Had only the remains of the cult statue, and not the building, been found at Ai Khanoum we would have seen it as evidence for purely Greek religious practice there.255

The situation of this city demonstrates that information about the cult worship and images of a deity to not guarantee a complete picture of the Hellenization of a cult. The temple architecture must be included to have a more thorough understanding of the process of Hellenization. Other temples in the Seleucid Near East were more Greek in style but it seems apparent that the Classical Greek temple was not often used in the Hellenistic period especially in the Seleucid Kingdom.256

Delos was not the only Mesopotamian or Syro-Palestinian style temple built by worshippers of Atargatis and other fertility goddesses. The temples at Dura and at Khirbet et-Tannur were also open court temples. These temples were extant at the same time as the temple at Hierapolis and along with Delos’ connection with Hierapolis these temples provide evidence for an open-court temple at Hierapolis. Bellinger specifically compares the temple at Dura Europos to the Neo-Babylonian Temple of Ninmarch in Babylon based on its open court arrangement and lack of symmetry (Fig. 65).257 The open court with bent axes is an important characteristic of Mesopotamian temples. Bellinger states that because the courtyard is open to the sun this lights the sanctuary and therefore, symmetry is not necessary in Mesopotamian sanctuaries.258 Another explanation for this lack of symmetry may come from the common Mesopotamian practice of having a bent-axis entrance to the sanctuaries in order to screen the sanctuary.

255Hannestad, 96-7.
256Hannestad, 102, 123.
257Baur, 19.
258Baur, 18.
from those not permitted to see it which also creates a more dramatic effect when the worshippers enter into the temple.\textsuperscript{259}

Hundreds of years later, bent-axes were still in use at the temples at Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur, although not all of these temples have a bent-axis approach to the cella. Not all Mesopotamian temples had bent-axes to the cella either, however, one of the hallmarks of the Mesopotamian plan is its asymmetricality and multiple axes. At Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur multiple entrance ways downplay the axis to the cella. Subsidiary entrances and the bent-axes they create are a hallmark of early Semitic temples. These doorways are one of the ways in which Semitic temples demonstrate less of a focused on axial symmetry than the Greek and Roman temples.

Multiple side rooms around the courtyard at Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur also served to deemphasize the axiological of the building. Delos has hardly any axiological besides the entrance and one of the cellae lining up. At Dura the entrance to the complex lines up with the altar in the courtyard better than it does with the entrance to the antechamber of the cella. Also the entrance to the cella is off-center from the center of the cella. In addition, the entrance into the antechamber and the cella are both wider than they are long, as is typical in Eastern Mesopotamian architecture. Khirbet et-Tannur demonstrates the most axiological because of its deliberate eastward orientation and clear axis from the main gate to the cella. This temple seems to mix the symmetrical with the non-symmetrical, perhaps indicating a melding of two tendencies in Semitic architecture: the bent-axis and asymmetrical nature of the Mesopotamian plan with the axiological of the Syro-Palestinian tradition.

\textsuperscript{259}Downey, 92, Butcher, 354.
At Delos and Dura Europos the asymmetrical nature of the temple is further emphasized by the multiple cellae which is common in Mesopotamian temples but is not a part of a typical Greek or Roman temple. Greek and Roman temples emphasize a strict axis from the entrance down the single cella to the cult statue with no deviating side chambers or additional cellae. At Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur multiple sides rooms which are different sizes and not aligned symmetrical detract from the symmetry of the plan. The asymmetry of the temples at Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur is also underscored by the square dimensions of the temples which reveals a more Mesopotamian influence than a Greek or Roman one, both of which have a more elongated temple plans. These temples are clearly not Greek or Roman temples, both of which stress axial symmetry. Undoubtedly some axiality exists in Syro-Palestinian and Mesopotamian temples as well as the Greco-Roman temples which emulated them; however, the strict symmetry of Greek temples and to some degree Roman temples is not a part of these Greco-Roman temples. The importance of the asymmetrical open-court plan at these three temples may indicate that the temple at Hierapolis could have also been Mesopotamian in plan. Although the influence from Hierapolis was powerful, local peculiarities of ritual, iconography and architecture were still an important part of the Atargatis cult.260

**Greco-Roman and Near Eastern Podia**

If Hierapolis had such a strong influence on other cult centers and all of these centers used Mesopotamian style temples, it would seem more likely that Hierapolis had a Mesopotamian temple than a Greek or Roman temple. The Mesopotamian style temple

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was not foreign to the Syrian region. The Temple of Ishtar at Mari, which was built between 2700 and 2600 BC, marks an early Syrian example of typical Mesopotamian architecture. It lacks symmetry and most importantly lacks an axial entrance into the cella (Fig. 10). It is one of the local examples of a Mesopotamian plan that may have influenced those built during the Seleucid period such as Ai Khanoum.

Further evidence for a Mesopotamian style temple at Hierapolis may come from Lucian’s account. In *De Dea Syria* Lucian uses the Greek word, ἐργόν, when referring to the temple at Hierapolis, a word that Herodotus commonly uses to indicate a non-Greek temple. However, Lucian also describes the temple as like those built in Ionia. Conflicting comments such as this make it difficult to know for certain what the temple looked like. This description of the temple as Ionic may be supported by a coin found at Hierapolis which depicts a bust of Atargatis on one side and a priest of Atargatis under a triangular roof held up by two Ionic columns, which may represent the temple (Fig. 66). This coin dates from around 332 BC, demonstrating that the cult of Atargatis was being worshipped there before the Seleucids took over the Syrian region. This evidence seems to support the assumption by many scholars that during the Roman period the temple may have been Greek or Roman in style.

Hierapolis has never been excavated and very few remains have been found at the site except for some coins and fragments of sculpture. It is thus difficult to know for sure what the Hellenistic temple looked like, especially without any evidence from excavations. Since the Hellenistic coins show an Ionic columned structure, it is possible

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262 Lucian, 30.
that the temple was originally Greek in style. However, Lucian may have been seeing a later temple either in the Mesopotamian style or in a Roman style. Only the Roman age temple at Hierapolis can be discussed with some certainty because of the date of Lucian’s writings in the second century AD. It may be that under the rule of the Romans a more Hellenized/Romanized temple than was evident in the Greek period was built in Hierapolis than was originally there.266

At first reading it seems most likely that the temple in Hierapolis as described by Lucian in the second century AD was most likely a Roman period temple despite Lucian’s assertions that the original temple was built by Babylonian queen Semiramis and rebuilt by the Seleucid Queen Stratonice, whom Lucian calls an Assyrian queen.267 The evidence for a Roman structure over a Greek one comes from Lucian’s description of the temple resting upon a podium with a front central staircase.268 Lucian could have been referring to a stepped podium like Classical Greek temples, however, he mentions the frontal staircase which rules out a Classical temple, although, some later Hellenistic temples may have had an accentuated front staircase or ramp as seen in the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, c. 330 BC (Fig. 67). Therefore it is possible that the temple at Hierapolis either had a stepped podium with a staircase on the front in Hellenistic style or a raised podium temple with a frontal staircase in Roman style. However, Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian temples were built on podia or sometimes, in the case of Mesopotamian temples, on large ziggurats as a reflection of the Semitic reverence for “high places”.269 The temple at Khirbet et-Tannur reflects this love of “high places”

266Lightfoot, Commentary, 431.
267Lucian, 14 17, 41.
268Lucian, 30-31; Lightfoot, Commentary, 428.
269Crawford, 65, 73.
because the entire sanctuary was placed on a top of a hill. The sacred nature of high mountain tops amongst Semitic religions is common and was probably a motivating factor for placing the temple on a hill. It may have been the site of an earlier Edomite altar since that civilization had occupied the region before the Nabataeans.\(^{270}\) In addition to its height and relative isolation the hill’s location is further made sacred by the large black basalt outcropping which faces it from the north. This outcropping may have signaled to the Nabataean mind that Jebel Tannur was a fitting place for the thunder god associated with volcanic activity to be worshipped along with his consort al-Uzza (Fig. 68).\(^{271}\) Lucian records that the sanctuary at Hierapolis was also set on a hill.\(^{272}\)

Many possibilities exist to what kind of podium the temple at Hierapolis was set on; therefore, it is difficult to conclude if it was indeed a Greek or Roman style temple. Mesopotamian style temples in the Seleucid period often used podia.\(^{273}\) “The Temple hor-les-murs” and “the Temple à redans” both had a stepped podium with stairs on the front (Figs. 63, 64). The temple at Hierapolis could also have been like Greek and Roman period temple of Zeus Megistos in Dura Europos which was built on a non-stepped platform with a staircase on the front of its long side (Fig. 69). Its square shape and multiple cellae, similar to the temples at Ai Khanoum, are distinctly unlike typical Greek or Roman temples and reveal a Mesopotamian influence. Another possible arrangement for the temple at Hierapolis could be the Roman era temple of Bel in Palmyra which had a typical Greek layout with a peristyle but stood on more Roman non-stepped podium.

\(^{270}\)Glueck, Deities, 85.  
\(^{271}\)Glueck, Deities, 86.  
\(^{272}\)Lucian, 28; Lightfoot, Commentary, 421.  
\(^{273}\)Butcher, 358.
and had its entrance staircase on the long side rather than the short side like the temple of Zeus Megistos (Fig. 70).  

It is possible that the temple at Hierapolis was built on a raised platform with a frontal staircase rather than a stepped platform. If so, this supports that the temple Lucian was describing was a Roman temple. However, this arrangement is also found in many Bronze Age temples like those of Solomon’s in Jerusalem, c. 1000 BC (Fig. 35) and Ishtar at Ain Dara, c. 1300-740 BC (Fig. 28). Syro-Palestinian temples are often set on a podium and have a three part temple consisting of a porch, an antechamber, and a cella. In the Seleucid period in the Phoenician homeland, just south of Tyre, the Seleucids built a Phoenician style temple to the Phoenician god Melquart in 132 BC (Fig. 71). This temple is set on a podium and is surrounded by a courtyard, much like the Temple of Solomon. Aside from the Ionic columns that stand in the entrance, very little that is Greek is evident in this temple.

In the Greco-Roman period the builders of temples of the Near East seemed to pick and choose influences from many cultures. Both Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian temples could have been the model for many of the features found at Hierapolis as well and Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur. Lucian’s description of the podium is not infallible proof that the temple at Hierapolis was Greco-Roman in style. It is thus possible that the temple at Hierapolis could have been an elevated Mesopotamian or Syro-Palestinian style temple. Since both the temple at Delos and Dura Europos reflect a more Mesopotamian style it seems more likely that the temple at

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274Lightfoot, Commentary, 427.
275Monson, 3.
Hierapolis would have had that influence as well although its geographical location seems to indicate that a Syro-Palestinian influence is just as likely.

**Temple Proper and Inner Sanctuaries or Holy of Holies**

The most important part of the open-court temple was the temple proper with the most sacred section being the cella. The cella was the resting place of the cult statue. The plans of Delos, Dura Europos and Hierapolis all have cellae in which the cult statue probably stood. Dura Europos had a tripartite cella much like Ai Khanoum and Zeus Megistos. These side chambers flanking the central cella were common in Mesopotamian architecture and as at Eanna and the Temple of Ishtar in Babylon they were usually used as subordinate chapels to other deities, rooms for cult rituals, or storage rooms (Figs. 5, 19).\(^{276}\) Delos had two cellae maybe for the same purpose. This worship of multiple deities in one temple can also be found in Lucian’s account of the temple at Hierapolis.\(^ {277}\) The multiple cellae at Delos at Dura Europos, as well as the temples’ square rather than rectangular shape, de-emphasize axial symmetry, which is typical of Mesopotamian temples. Axial symmetry, such as from the entrance to the door, is found in parts of these temples but does not extend to the whole building. Greek and Roman temples usually only have a one-part cella and a strict axis from the entrance all the way to the cella.

The temple at Dura Europos was preceded by an antechamber as were many ancient Mesopotamian temples rather than a porch like Greek or Roman temples. Mesopotamian temples often had multiple chambers in front of the actual cella which had either a niche or a raised podium upon which the cult statue rested. This arrangement is

\(^{276}\) See notes 10 and 11.

\(^{277}\) Lucian, 28, 31, 35. Lucian mentions Dionysus, Zeus, and Apollo; Downey, 104.
seen clearly in Neo-Babylonian temple of Ninmach (Fig. 65). Syro-Palestinian temples also often had an antechamber in front of the cellae which was preceded by a porch. Both the Temple of Solomon and the temple of Ishtar at Ain Dara use this tripartite arrangement. Khirbet et-Tannur and Delos lack a porch and neither of these temples or that at Dura Europos possessed an opisthodomos like Greek Temples.

The cellae at Delos and Dura Europos are not raised as were some Mesopotamian and most Syro-Palestinian temples. However, the cella at Khirbet et-Tannur was raised. Sometimes in Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian temple the entire cella was raised, as the temple of Ishtar in Assur and the Temple of Solomon, and sometimes only a shrine within the cella was raised, as at Tell Ta’ayinat (Figs. 13, 22, 36). The raised cella of Syro-Palestinian temples is what is termed the holy of holies in the Bible. Khirbet et-Tannur had both a raised cella and a raised shrine in the form of a monumental altar base upon which stood a smaller altar.

Khirbet et-Tannur seems to be part of a general Semitic religious architecture program which existed among the Nabataeans. The great popularity of the fertility goddess cult among the Nabataeans is attested by her wide worship in the capital city of Petra where she seems to have been worshipped under the names of al-Uzza, Allat, and Aphrodite. She was worshipped in the Temple of the Winged Lions and perhaps also in Qasr al-Bint although that temple was probably dedicated to Dushares with al-Uzza featured there as his consort. Scholars debate which deities were really worshipped there and under what names but it seems likely that some sort of divine pair was

278 Lucian, *Commentary*, 428.
279 Healey, 41-2, 110, 113, 117.
worshipped there. Both Qasr al-Bint and the Temple of the Winged Lions temples were built during roughly the same period as Khirbet et-Tannur and were in existence until about the mid-third century BC. These temples have similar plans to Khirbet et-Tannur (Figs. 72, 73). Qasr al-Bint had an open courtyard, and a raised cella (Fig. 74). The Temple of the Winged Lions also had a raised podium in its cella (Fig. 75). The cult object would have rested on or been inserted in a niche somewhere on these raised podium. Qasr al-Bint has a tripartite cella similar to earlier Sumerian tripartite temples, like Temple C at Eanna, and is strikingly similar to the temples at Ai Khanoum as well as the temples of Atargatis and Zeus Megistos at Dura Europos. Both the temple of the Winged Lions and Qasr al-Bint have non-Greek floor plans. Qasr al-Bint specifically mirrors Syro-Palestinian temples with its porch, antechamber and cella arrangement and Mesopotamian temples with its tripartite cellae.

The raised shrines found in many Nabataean sanctuaries may be the motab that is mentioned in many Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions. The motab was the throne of the god and the image of the god rested on top of the sanctuary or in niche in the sanctuary. At Hierapolis the cult statue of Hadad and Atargatis was placed in a niche on the monumental altar in the inner sanctuary of the temple. These motabs may relate to the empty thrones found at the Temple of Solomon, the temple at Hierapolis, the temple of Atargatis and Delos, and the Astarte thrones. The empty thrones represented the deity using “empty space aniconism,” meaning the god was not present physically but his

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282 Healey, 73; Larché, 199.

283 Wenning, 88-90.
absence signaled his presence. The *motabs* of the Nabataeans often used betyls to represent their deities, another form of aniconism. At Hierapolis the cult statues where figural, which may represent Hellenistic influence. However, the empty throne of the sun at Hierapolis represents that some aniconism still existed there.\(^{284}\) Aniconism was an important part of Semitic religion, especially among the Israelites and the Nabataeans. This practice will be discussed below in conjunction with pillar worship.

In addition to structural similarities, the raised podia of the Nabataeans may have shared similar cultic functions with Syro-Palestinian temples. The raised central altar of the Temple of the Winged Lions may have been curtained to hide the cult object from view and that priests were the only ones allowed onto the altar. It was a common practice from Sumerian times forward to obscure the cult object from view by using a bent axis approach and in some Canaanite and Israelite sanctuaries, most notably the Temple of Solomon, the holy of holies was screened from view and could only be entered by a priest. Archeologist Philip Hammond concluded that the screened altar at the Temple of the Winged lions signaled that Isaic mysteries were part of the cult in this temple.\(^{285}\) The small size of the temple as well as the discovery of a fresco in the temple that may depict mystery rituals also contribute to the possibility that mysteries were practiced there.\(^{286}\) The fresco had been plastered over at one point, which may have occurred under the rule of the conservative King Malichus (r. AD 40 -70) who may have not approved of the Hellenized mystery cult being practiced in the Temple of the Winged Lions.\(^{287}\)

\(^{284}\)Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 451, 455.  
\(^{285}\)Hammond, 227-228.  
\(^{286}\)Hammond, 227-228.  
\(^{287}\)Hammond, 229.
It is possible that mysteries were practiced at the Temple of the Winged Lions; however, the veiling of the cult object was not exclusive to mystery religions as evidenced by the screened cella of the Temple of Solomon. Rights involving a priestess standing in for the goddess may also have been observed at the Temple of the Winged Lions. This rite has an ancient antecedent and is no sure indication of Greek mystery rituals occurring in this temple. Petra, by virtue of being the capital of the Nabataeans had much more contact with Greek and Roman culture, thus it is possible that mysteries were practiced in Petra. However, the remote location of Khirbet et-Tannur and its place as a more “native” sanctuary makes it seem less likely that mysteries were practiced there.

The raised separate inner sanctuary is a feature shared by many Greco-Roman Near Eastern Temples. The inner sanctuary at Khirbet et-Tannur along with the temples eastern orientation and large courtyard (Fig. 4) echoes the arrangement of many Semitic temples, especially those of the Syro-Palestinian tradition. It is strikingly similar to the temple Lucian described at Hierapolis:

The sanctuary faces the sunrise…Within, the temple is not all of a piece, but contains another chamber. It too has a low staircase: it has no doors and is entirely open to the onlooker…In it are enthroned the cult statues, Hera and the god, Zeus, who they call by a different name. Both are golden, both seated, though Hera is borne on lions, the other sits on bulls.

Glueck notes the similarities between the temples at Hierapolis and Khirbet et-Tannur as well as other Nabataean sanctuaries because of the above mentioned characteristics.

The striking comparisons between Khirbet et-Tannur and Hierapolis can be made perhaps

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288Healey, 43.
289See notes 51, 82, and 338.
290See note 222 about Khirbet et-Tannur’s native significance.
291Lucian, 30-31.
292Glueck, Deities, 99.
because they were both influenced by the Syro-Palestinian tradition. The raised inner chamber at Hierapolis may correspond to the holy of holies most widely associated with the Temple of Solomon.\textsuperscript{293} The raised chamber that Lucian describes may find a Roman counterpart in the raised adyton of the Temple of Bel at Palmyra.\textsuperscript{294} Further connection with the Temple of Solomon comes from Lucian’s record that the cella of the temple at Hierapolis was also only entered by the priest. However, unlike the Temple of Solomon, it was open to the view of the public.\textsuperscript{295}

The Temple of Solomon was not the only Syro-Palestinian style temple that could have been an influence on the temple at Hierapolis. Other Bronze Age sites in Syria, like Ebla, had Syro-Palestinian style temples. Temple P2 at Ebla had a raised sanctuary termed Monument P3 next to it that may be what is called in the Bible a “high place” (Fig. 23).\textsuperscript{296} The raised inner chamber at the temple of Atargatis in Hierapolis described by Lucian may be one of these “high places.” Also the temple had an altar upon which pilgrims and priests offered sacrifices which may also be a form of a “high place.”\textsuperscript{297} The term was used in the Bible to describe some of the areas where Asherah and her consort Baal were worshipped. The temple of Ishtar at Mari also had a raised platform that could be termed a “high place” (Fig. 11).\textsuperscript{298} The original temple located at Hierapolis could possibly have been a mix of Syro-Palestinian and Mesopotamian plans since worship of Atargatis’ divine predecessors in Syria had been around since at least the second millennium BC, as evidenced in Mari.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{293}{Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 428.}
\footnote{294}{Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 428.}
\footnote{295}{Lucian, 31.}
\footnote{296}{Marchetti, 3; Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 166.}
\footnote{297}{Lucian, 41-44, 57; Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 472.}
\footnote{298}{Marchetti, 3 n14.}
\end{footnotes}
Although the temple at Hierapolis no longer exists, the strong parallels between it and other essentially Oriental temples seem to prove that it was more Oriental in character than Hellenistic despite Lucian’s assertion that the temple was Ionian. As discussed previously, many Greco-Roman temples, such as the Temple of Zeus Megistos in Dura and the Temple of Melquart near Tyre, had veneers of Hellenism while maintaining essentially local floor plans.\(^{299}\) Comparisons with other temples at Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur in addition to the Seleucid practice of retaining traditional temple architecture in Syria may indicate that the Hellenistic temple at Hierapolis could have remained traditional as well.\(^{300}\)

The designation of the temple as Greek style temple based solely on Lucian’s Ionic reference is not enough to designate the temple as being entirely Greek. It is interesting to note that many scholars have indicated the relationship between the Ionic order and the Aeolic order which was so common in the Near East, especially in the Syro-Palestinian region.\(^{301}\) The Proto-Aeolic capital may have originated in the papyrus and palm decoration of Egyptian capitals but more likely was influenced by Assyrian decoration and transmitted to the Syro-Palestinian region as well as the Phoenician region, especially Cyprus.\(^ {302}\) Sacred tree symbolism is part of these precedents of the

\(^{299}\)Hannestad, 118-119.

\(^{300}\)Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 431.


\(^{302}\)Barletta, 142-144. Betancourt, 18-23, 39-40, 42, 60-61 Shiloh, 26-46.
Aeolic capital and by association this symbolism may be part of the Aeolic capital.\textsuperscript{303} It has also been proposed that the Aeolic and Ionic columns derived from the volutes of the gate-post symbol of Inanna and thus the feminine nature usually associated with the Ionic column comes from this symbolism.\textsuperscript{304} The holy of holies in the Temple of Solomon may have been decorated with columns, as recreated in some models, since this kind of capital has been found in multiple Syro-Palestinian temples in Megiddo, Ramat Rahel, Hazor, Madeibia in Jordan and most importantly Jerusalem beginning in at least the twelfth century BC (Fig. 38).\textsuperscript{305} The use of the Aeolic order among the Greeks died out in the fifth century BC and was replaced in popularity by the Ionic order. Therefore, it is most likely that the Ionic decoration of the temple at Hierapolis may not have any of these symbolic meanings to the Greeks but perhaps it had some for the Near Eastern worshippers.

Based on evidence from Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur and in contrast to Lightfoot’s belief, there seems to be little evidence that the temple at Hierapolis was not of the open court variety aside from Lucian’s description of the temple as “Ionian.” This description may indicate that the temple had an Ionian peristyle like a Classical temple. None of the temples at Delos, Dura Europos or Khirbet et-Tannur feature a full column peristyle which is so key in Greek temples. None of these temples feature a Roman style porch with full columns and engaged columns around the temple.

\textsuperscript{304}Barletta, 142-3.
The temple at Dura hardly had any columns except for a few found in some side rooms. The decorative program of the inner shrine and the altar base at Khirbet et-Tannur reflected an eclectic mix of eastern and western traditions. The inner shrine was pedimented and decorated with a mixture of pure Corinthian columns and pilasters and Nabataean horned columns with Corinthian flourishes. It does not seem to be much of a stretch for the Nabataeans to have adopted the Corinthian capital because its prominent abacus finds similarities in the horned decoration of Nabataean capitals. 306 Khirbet et-Tannur also had a columned portico around the courtyard and the sanctuary at Delos had a columned terrace in the Doric order, however, neither sanctuary had a peristyle around the temple. The temple at Hierapolis may have been similar to these temples since no columns are mentioned except for the two freestanding columns in front of the temple. However, if it had a peristyle it does not seem to be a defining factor since it is never mentioned, whereas, the open courtyard is mentioned by Lucian multiple times. Lucian designates the temple as Ionic and perhaps this means that a few columns or pilasters used the Ionic order and perhaps there was an Ionic frieze and pediment on the front of the building, as Khirbet et-Tannur. However, this does not necessarily mean that the plan of the temple was Classical Greek or Roman. It is impossible with Lucian’s brief description of the temple to know what it looked like. However, when compared to the three other centers, the similarities indicate that the temple of Hierapolis was not strictly Greco-Roman and most likely had Greco-Roman decoration with an Oriental floor plan.

The plans of the temples at Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur are distinctly not Greco-Roman. A few Greek or Roman elements exist in these temples but the plans alone demonstrate that Hellenism had not completely transformed these

temples. The temples of Atargatis and Zeus Megistos in Dura Europos demonstrates that “in the Hellenistic period the provincial religious architecture of Syria which, more than any other of the provinces of their realm, was to be the homeland of the Seleucids, was not whole-heartedly Greek in character.” This pertains also to the temples in the Seleucid period built in Jordan, Mesopotamia, and Phoenicia and Roman temples like temple of Bel in Palmyra. The temple at Hierapolis may also have been a part of the trend in the Seleucid and Roman Near East in which traditional architecture remained a part of many cults while Greek and Roman elements were few.

**Gateways**

Monumental gateways were often an important part of ancient Near Eastern temples as well as Greek and Roman ones. The gateways were usually the first impression a worshipper would receive of a sanctuary and the types of gateways and their decoration could be an important indication of what kind of temple lay beyond. The temple of Atargatis at Delos was preceded by a monumental propylaea that looked like a small Classical Greek temple in the Ionic order. Along with the colonnaded terrace in the Doric order that was a part of this sanctuary, this Ionic propylaea may have indicated that a Classical temple lie behind it. However, the temple which lay beyond the propylaea was not a Classical temple or even Greek in plan at all. The important part of the sanctuary remained Near Eastern in style while subsidiary parts of the temple took on Greco-Roman trappings. Perhaps for the Syrian merchants who used this temple the Mesopotamian style was what a temple was and to have an Mesopotamian style temple to worship their Near Eastern deity in was what was important while having a Greek style

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307Hannestad, 119.
terrace and propylaea did not matter. Without the evidence from the non-Greek temple one might conclude the cult worshipped here was Greek or a completely Hellenized Near Eastern cult. The temple helps show that tradition was being maintained at this temple despite any Greek accretions to the sanctuary’s architecture.

At Dura Europos the gateway to the temple of Atargatis lacked any Greco-Roman decoration. On the inside of the temple a few columns were found inside some of the side rooms and a lone Doric column rested in the courtyard. Other than these features the temple was entirely Near Eastern in style, underscoring Seleucid building practices in which traditional Mesopotamian plans were used. The entranceway to the temple and the entrance to the cella were decorated with projections or buttresses which may represent vestiges of towers on ancient Mesopotamian temples which likewise flanked the entrances.308 Or they may have been like the niche and projection pattern on walls of these ancient temples. As mentioned previously, the Seleucid era temples at Ai Khanoum temples were decorated with niches and projections on their outer walls.

The temple of al-Uzza at Khirbet et-Tannur had more Greco-Roman decoration than the temple at Dura Europos. The gateway there was decorated with Corinthian half columns. Significantly, the gateway was only topped with an entablature with no pediment (Fig. 52). Glueck refers to the main gateway as a pylon because it was higher than the walls around it much as Egyptian pylons.309 The entrance to the inner sanctuary was also decorated with half columns topped by Nabataean horned capitals mixed with Corinthian flourishes and topped by a pediment.310 These columns would have reflected immediately to those entering the temple the striking mix between Eastern and Western

308 Heinrich, 315; Downey, 103.
309 Glueck, Deities, 126, 160.
310 Glueck, Deities, 158.
traditions found at Khirbet et-Tannur. The cornice of this entranceway, which was an overhanging Egyptian cornice like at the temple of Qasr al-Bint, would also have introduced this eclectic mixing to the worshippers (Fig. 51).\textsuperscript{311} The Egyptian style cornice may have come to the Nabataeans by the way of the Phoenicians who often used Egyptian influenced pylons and cornices.\textsuperscript{312} The adoption of the Egyptian cornice demonstrates the enduring influence of that culture. Glueck indicates that this cornice was higher than the other walls of the inner sanctuary thus creating a pylon similar to the one found at the front gate.\textsuperscript{313}

The façade at Khirbet et-Tannur may also have been influenced by Egyptian pylons as had Assyrian and Babylonian temple towers and Phoenician architecture. Many Near Eastern temples used a gateway delineated by towers or higher walls. The Temple of Solomon, as recreated by scholars, had towers and some believe an Egyptian style cornice based on evidence that Phoenician architecture was influenced by Mesopotamian and Egyptian architecture.\textsuperscript{314} Multiple coins from the Roman age depict Phoenician temples with a clearly un-Greco-Roman temple façades with towers (Figs. 76, 77). The Roman era temple of Bel in Palmyra, notably, had a pair of towers at both ends which allowed access to the roof upon which rituals may have been performed as was common in Semitic religions.\textsuperscript{315}

Many temples in the Greek and Roman periods were merely adorned with Greco-Roman columns, pediments, and other decorations while the plans remained generally

\textsuperscript{311}See note 224. 
\textsuperscript{312}See note 94. 
\textsuperscript{313}Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 158, 160. 
\textsuperscript{314}See note 69 and 94. 
\textsuperscript{315}Butcher, 358.
non-Western in style. The gateway to the temple of Zeus Megistos was decorated with the Doric order but aside from that the temple followed a simple Mesopotamian plan with an open court with a cella and two side chambers (Fig. 78). The Seleucid temple of Melquart had a simple gateway with no Greco-Roman embellishment and only Ionic columns on the front of the temple which was essentially Phoenician in style. Nabataean temples, especially, used a veneer of Greco-Roman decoration over essentially Semitic temple forms. Hellenistic elements are seen especially at Qasr al-Bint in the form of some Corinthian capitals and a pedimented façade but the temple itself is Near Eastern (Fig. 79). The retention of tradition was more prevalent among the civilizations of the Near East than has been commonly assumed. The veneer of Hellenism at among the Nabataeans is one proof of this:

Starting from what is most visible in the main Nabataean site, above all Petra itself, it may be noted that while there are features in architecture which may be vaguely classed as Hellenistic, in for example the “royal tombs of Petra and the Khazneh, there is not the dominating impression of Hellenism which is characteristic of Palmyra, Baalbek and, at least in regard to the appearance of the minor temples, Hatra. In truth even in Palmyra and Hatra temple architecture is not typically Hellenistic: the rejection of Hellenism is not something confined to the Jewish community of Jerusalem, where again the Herodian temple owed much to Hellenism superficially. The Hellenistic elements at Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur represent a mere overlay of Hellenism on essentially Oriental temples. As to the specifications of the temple at Hierapolis, we must again refer to Lucian’s account. Lucian mentions that the temple was preceded by a propylaea but does not describe if it had any Greco-Roman elements. It is possible that the propylaea or façade of the temple was Greco-Roman but

316 Hannestad, 105.
317 Healey, 71.
the temple behind it was not. That arrangement is found at Delos, Khirbet et-Tannur, and other temples of the time period like Zeus Megistos in Dura Europos.

The very forms of the temples found in Syrian, Nabataean, Phoenician and even a Greek territory like Delos during the Greco-Roman period may indicate that traditional religion was being maintained. The open-air plan of these temples seems to be deliberate in response to “communal liturgical needs of the local cults.” The temples were built as Semitic open-air temples because the people were still practicing Semitic open-air cults. The argument by some scholars that Atargatis’ cult was completely Hellenized, as were the similar cults of Isis or Cybele, is disproved when one looks at the highly varying degree of Hellenized temples built throughout the Seleucid Kingdom and the Roman Empire.

**Pillars**

Another important feature of the entranceway to the temple at Hierapolis which may help decide how Hellenized the cult was is the two pillars which flanked it. Egyptian temples were often flanked by obelisks and some Assyrian temples adopted this feature. Pillars set up in front of temples were also a common Phoenician element. Two Roman coins from the temple of Astarte in Paphos on Cyprus—which may have originated as far back as 1900 BC—depict the temple with triangular cones that represent the goddess Astarte in the temple or along side it (Fig. 76, 77). The cone is surmounted by a dove, a symbol of Ishtar which was apparently inherited by Astarte. The most

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318 Healey, 71; Baur, 22.
319 Bilde, 180; Hannestad, 123.
320 See note 36.
321 Osgood, 14-16; Markoe, 122.
famous temple which was preceded by two columns in the Temple of Solomon. The
meaning of the two columns at Hierapolis, according to Lucian is that they were two
huge phalli set up in honor of Atargatis. This explanation may not be too implausible
based on the meaning of pillars in previous cultures.

Lucian describes the columns at Hierapolis as large phallic symbols an
unbelievably three hundred fathoms tall (600 Feet).\textsuperscript{322} Pillar symbolism was part of the
cult of Inanna since Sumerian times. Her first symbol was the ring-post. These posts were
often set up in front of temples and in depictions of Inanna these posts indicated the
presence of a sanctuary of Inanna (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{323} Aniconic stones representing deities were
also used in Assyrian and Babylonian times as evidence by boundary stones, or \textit{kudurru},
used to delineate boundaries of temple area or by the altar found at the temple of Ishtar in
Assur (Fig. 18).\textsuperscript{324} Phallic symbolism has also been a part of the worship of Inanna and
Ishtar since at least Assyrian times as evidenced by the votive phalli found at the temple
of Ishtar in Assur (Fig. 16). Chapter 1 discussed the importance of Ishtar’s sexual nature
in her cult from its earliest inception. Phallic symbolism was also found at the temple of
Atargatis in Delos in the form of a small phallic offering.\textsuperscript{325} A lone Doric column found
in the courtyard at the temple of Atargatis seems to be not a load bearing column but a
cultic symbol of fertility. This pillar may relate to the phallic objects found at Delos and
Hierapolis.\textsuperscript{326} An inscription found in the temple at Dura, dating from around AD 35,
records that a man named Ammonios dedicated a phallic pillar to the temple.\textsuperscript{327} The lone

\begin{footnotes}
\item[322] Lucian, 28.
\item[323] See note 19.
\item[324] See note 62.
\item[325] See note 186.
\item[326] Downey, 104.
\item[327] Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 52.
\end{footnotes}
column may be this phallus; however, the inscription does not indicate that the phallic offering was of monumental proportions. This dedication indicates the continuing importance of phallic symbolism in the cult of Near Eastern fertility goddesses.

The use of columns to represent fertility aspects can also be traced back to the Canaanite practice of worshipping Asherah posts. Asherah, the Canaanite version of the Phoenician Astarte and the Babylonian Ishtar was worshipped in aniconic form as a tree or post when the Israelites moved into Canaan. Her worship infiltrated the religion of the Israelites, a vice that the writers of the Bible spoke against. The architect of the Temple of Solomon who created the two columns, Boaz and Jachin was a Phoenician, Hiram of Tyre. He may have been influenced by the Phoenician practice of setting up columns in front of temples to represent Baal and Asherah. The Roman coins from Paphos represent a Phoenician style temple with prominent cones or columns of Astarte placed before it. These coins demonstrate that Phoenician pillar worship continued down until the Roman period. Associations with Phoenician deities and ideas of fertility could be inferred for the columns at the Temple of Solomon although the columns may have just been seen as typical Phoenician architectural elements. These columns were topped with lily-shaped capitals and decorated with pomegranates, both of which have fertility symbolism. At the time Solomon’s temple was being built Baal and Asherah posts were still in wide use among the neighboring Canaanites and the sexual connotations were known to the Israelites.

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328 Osgood, 48, Judges 3:7.
330 1 Kings 7:18-20, Osgood, 50-51.
331 Osgood, 52.
The fertility nature of the Asherah cult, its use of tree and pillar worship, and its accompanying orgiastic celebrations that took place at the “high places” was one of the main arguments against the cult by Biblical prophets.\textsuperscript{332} The revelries associated with Ishtar date back to the inception of her cult.\textsuperscript{333} Ishtar and Asherah were both goddesses of fertility and the pillar worship of Asherah can be tied back to Ishtar’s association with the date palm as a symbol of fertility. Tree worship is the origination of later pillar or stone worship and later these pillars or stones came to be known as betyls, a name which may derive from the Semitic word \textit{Beth-el} or house of god.\textsuperscript{334} Pillar worship was especially common among the Phoenicians and Canaanites.\textsuperscript{335} Other fertility connections can be made between the pillar worship of Asherah and the Middle Assyrian use of phallic amulets found in Ishtar’s temple in Assur. However, even if the Biblical columns themselves are not phallic they have a fertility connotation by being part of Asherah’s worship or by representing the sacred tree which, like the phallus, symbolizes fertility.

A marble pillar found in Kition, Cyprus, dedicated to Astarte’s consort Eshmun, further confirms pillar worship among the Phoenicians with an inscription on it that specifically terms the pillar a \textit{massebah}, the Hebrew word for betyl or sacred pillar (Fig. 80).\textsuperscript{336} The sexual nature of the columns derives from Asherah’s association with trees (especially the palm) and the fertility connotations of vegetation. Eventually this natural tree symbolism was superseded by phallic symbolism; however, the sexual or fertility

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{332} Numbers 25:1, 31:16, Hosea 9:10.
\item\textsuperscript{333} See note 49.
\item\textsuperscript{334} Osgood, 47; Hirsch, 558; Wenning, 80.
\item\textsuperscript{335} Markoe, 131.
\item\textsuperscript{336} Markoe, 122.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
association remained despite the formal change. Phallic and tree symbolism together represents the male and the female participating in a ritual of fertility:

When the king, personating some Baal, married some Ashera image or some Temple-prostitute, personating in her turn the goddess whose priestess she was, it was both a recognition of the sexuality of the goddess whose priestess she was, it was both a recognition of the sexuality of the universe and a ritual of “homeopathic magic” whereby the fertility of the land, the revival of the trees and the increase of all nature was insured.338

Accordingly, it can be read into the decorative program of the Temple of Solomon that even in the seemingly staunch monotheism of the Israelites vestiges of this important ritual can still be seen.339

Whether the pillars at the Temple of Solomon or at Hierapolis have sexual or phallic connotations is debatable. Lucian may have simply been exaggerating in the vein of Greek ethnographers such as Herodotus.340 Lucian explains the phallicism at Hierapolis in the form of these large pillars and also some votive figures with large penises as proof of the worship of Dionysus in Atargatis’ temple.341 The Greeks may have encountered the phallicism of Atargatis and equated it with Dionysus since he was the god associated with phallicism in Greek religion. This may have been a Greek interpretation of the presence of these phalli; however, the native peoples may not have interpreted these phalli in this way since votive phalli have long been a part of the worship of Ishtar in Mesopotamia.342 Although phallic symbolism may not be a viable reading of the pillars, pillar worship with its accompanying sacred tree and fertility symbolism was a common in the religion of many ancient cultures.343 So these pillars

337Osgood, 49-50; Smith discusses the loss of power by goddesses in Semitic religion, 58-59.
338Osgood, 51.
339Osgood, 52.
340Lightfoot, Commentary, 366-367.
341Lucian, 16.
342See note 57; Lightfoot, Commentary, 364.
343Lightfoot, Commentary, 420.
may still relate in some way to fertility. Another reading can be seen in one of Lucian’s theories that the men who climbed the pillars may have done so in order to be closer to the gods. This may relate to the Semitic love of “high places” upon which worshippers believed the gods could hear their prayers better.

Pillar worship was also common among the Nabataeans. The Nabataean words for betyl, *nsb* and *msb,* are etymologically connected to the Hebrew *massebah* so intimately connected with the fertility cult of Asherah. In this light, the large phalli in front of Atargatis’ temple at Hierapolis may have simply been large betyls, or *massebah.* Since Nabataean betyl worship was related to the Israelite and Phoenician *massebah,* sacred tree and fertility connotations may have been a part of betyl worship among the Nabataeans. Spring and fall rituals celebrating the fertility of the land were most likely a part of Nabataean religion. Although the fertility rites of al-Uzza’s cult are substantiated as much as they were for the cult of Asherah, an early Islamic source records that sacred trees that are so closely associated with “high places” in Canaanite religion may have been present in al-Uzza’s cult. In *The Book of Idols,* Ibn al-Kalbi records how the Prophet Muhammad ordered him to destroy the sanctuary of al-Uzza, which he did by cutting down three trees and then beheading the goddess herself.

In the Hellenistic and Roman periods the Nabataeans began to adopt some Hellenistic tendencies in their sculpture. Nabataean use of Hellenistic styles demonstrates a more fluid, and perhaps more opportunistic, civilization than that of the Israelites who

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344 Lucian, 28.
345 Lightfoot, *Commentary,* 422.
346 Healey, 156; Wenning, 80.
347 Healey, 160.
were more strict in their aniconism.\textsuperscript{349} At the temple of \textit{al-Uzza} at Khirbet et-Tannur the use of anthropomorphic deities instead of in the tradition betyl stone reveals Hellenistic influence on the cult iconography. The relief of \textit{al-Uzza} over the doorway of the inner sanctuary at Khirbet et-Tannur reflects a more sophisticated and realistic style than some of the other sculpture found there, however, the figure of \textit{al-Uzza} is clearly not a direct copy of a Hellenistic sculpture. Far from incapable of copying a Hellenistic style, which focused on realism and the importance of depicting their gods in human form, the Nabataeans chose rather to adopt an Oriental style. Their artistic abilities are well known as evidenced by their grand tombs or thin beautiful pottery. Therefore it seems that they deliberately chose a more Oriental style which emphasized the attributes and power of the god and the presence of the god who, as a spiritual being, could never be accurately portrayed in physical form.\textsuperscript{350} The Nabataeans did not simply abandon their culture for that of the Greeks and Romans, in contrast, they adopted what they wanted to and melded it with Oriental influences and their own uniquely Nabataean culture.\textsuperscript{351} The choice to adopt some anthropomorphic forms may have also been influenced by surrounding Oriental civilizations, most especially the Parthians.\textsuperscript{352}

Despite Hellenistic sculptural influence, traditional pillar deities still appeared in Petra and other Nabataean sites. A Nabataean eye idol depicting Al-Uzza was found in the Temple of the Winged Lions (Fig. 81) and multiple representations of both Dushares and al-Uzza as betyls are found throughout Petra. In addition, the one certain inscription mentioning Atargatis in the Nabataean kingdom was found under a betyl representing

\textsuperscript{349}Healey, 186.
\textsuperscript{350}Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 247-8, 410, 433, 442.
\textsuperscript{351}Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 195, 312.
\textsuperscript{352}Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 195.
her. This inscription shows that despite outside influence on the Nabataean fertility goddess cult, local tradition was more powerful. Even the non-Nabataean goddess Atargatis appeared in betyl form in the Nabataean kingdom. The aniconic nature of the Nabataeans tied them especially to their Israelite neighbors who also eschewed anthropomorphic representations of their deities in the face of strong Hellenistic influence to the contrary but to greater degree. The use of partially anthropomorphic—the eyes and a nose are often seen on Nabataean betyls—or completely aniconic gods, demonstrates on the part of the Nabataeans a “reluctance shared notably with the Jews and the later Muslim Arabs, to make images of a god in human form” because they believed “[t]he god himself, being spiritual, could not be portrayed.”

In addition to their own traditions, the Nabataeans were very aware of contemporary artistic trends besides Hellenistic ones, and shared many similarities with other Semitic cultures at Palmyra and Dura Europos like the Parthians. The power of Hellenistic figural sculpture was mitigated among the Nabataeans by the counterforce of Parthian Orientalism. It seems that in the face of overwhelming divergent influences the Nabataeans “exchanged the featureless stones of their desert devotion for the sculptured approximations of Greek deities with profound Semitic characteristics.” At Khirbet et-Tannur this seems to be the case, however, on the whole the Nabataeans retained their aniconic betyl stones alongside anthropomorphic deities. The Nabataeans emphasized that the forms of their gods embodied a religious concept rather

353Healey, 157.
354Glueck, Deities, 86.
355Healey, 155.
356McKenzie, 184.
357Glueck, Deities, 262.
358Glueck, Deities, 195.
359Glueck, Deities, 516.
than naturalism of form. The conceptual form was part of the spiritual nature of the deity and adopting a few Hellenistic traits did not detract from this emphasis on essentials. This concept may extend to the retention Oriental temple plans amongst the Nabataeans and Syrians. To the natives of the Near East that type of plan was what signified a temple and decorating it with an Ionic or Corinthian column did not detract from the overall Oriental essence of the building. The mixture of architectural influences found at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur demonstrate that, “We should be wary…of concluding that the use of ‘Graeco-Roman’ architectural styles, Greek cult statues, or Greek inscriptions means that indigenous forms of piety could no longer find material or spiritual expression.”

Amid the great influence of Hellenism strong Oriental cultures, such as the Parthians, also had influence on the cult of Atargatis. The strong Parthian civilization was never conquered by Seleucids or the Romans and it kept Hellenism from fully penetrating the East. Dura Europos was under Parthian control until AD 165 and that control is forcefully expressed in the strongly Oriental flavor of both the plan and cult objects of the temple of Atargatis at Dura. Despite the fluidity of the Nabataean culture they also did not simply let Hellenism take over their culture:

The contact of the Nabataeans with the forces of Hellenism was vigorous and constant and superficially could appear to have been compelling…As Merchants extraordinary, their affairs and interest were cosmopolitan in scope and they could easily have become completely imitative in culture. That, under the pressure of all these circumstances, heightened by the fragility of their political fortunes, they

360 Glueck, Deities, 247-8, 410, 433, 442.
361 Glueck, Deities, 442-443.
362 Butcher, 335.
363 Glueck, Deities, 265.
364 Glueck, Deities, 265.
were able to retain and furthermore sharpen their distinctive identity, is little short of a miracle.\(^{365}\)

This statement is true of so many Near Eastern civilizations that encountered the strong effects of Hellenism. Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur stand tangible evidence of the enduring nature of Oriental religions, especially that of the fertility goddess. The Nabataeans not only maintained tradition at home but seem to have exported their pantheon with them as they traveled and despite great foreign influence the essentially Oriental character of their religion remained.\(^{366}\) The aniconic idols worshipped by the Nabataeans along with the distinctly Oriental temple forms they used demonstrate a strong retention of local traditions among the Nabataeans.

Religious rites associated with the pillars and phallicism at Hierapolis may also demonstrate continuity with cult practices from the time of Ishtar. Ritual castration was performed by the most dedicated male members of the cult of Atargatis called the *galli*. Lucian’s origins for this rite reflect a watered down version of the Ishtar myth in which she has the power to emasculate men. The love of the king’s wife for Combabos reflects the tragic events that happen to the men with whom Ishtar falls in love.\(^{367}\) Scholars have seen Atargatis ability to both harm and bless her worshippers as typical of Greek universal religions.\(^{368}\) However, the existence of this kind of nature in Near Eastern goddesses is well attested to in Ishtar’s cult long before Greek influence came into the Near East.\(^{369}\) As many human rituals reflect the actions of the gods, such as the Sacred Marriage acted out between a priest-king and priestess, perhaps this story reflects a

\(^{365}\) Glueck, *Deities*, 409.
\(^{367}\) Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 389.
\(^{368}\) Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 78.
\(^{369}\) Harris, 264, 270.
humanized version which had lost site of its original divine precedents in which
Stratonice represents Ishtar.  

*The Descent of Ishtar into the Netherworld* and the temple inscription from
Alalakh which mention Ishtar as a “castrating goddess” attest that the origins of this ritual
go back to at least the Bronze Age.  Ritual transvestism is known to have been
practiced in the Ishtar cult and eunuch followers were almost certainly a part of her cult
as well.  Combabos is recorded to have “donned woman’s clothing” as did the eunuch’s
of Ishtar.  Bilde uses the self-castration ritual as one of his main arguments that
Atargatis had become a universalized personal savior deity by this time period.  Bilde
only briefly notes that this was not a Hellenistic practice but still considers it an important
sign of Hellenization based on his belief that it represented ascetic self-denial and
individualism, hallmarks of Hellenistic mystery religions.  However, the ancient origins
of this ritual most specifically tied to the worship of Ishtar demonstrate that his kind of
ritual was not new among devotees and could have just as easily signaled personal
devotion to the goddess back in pre-Hellenistic times as it did Greco-Roman times.  Also Ishtar’s sexuality was ambiguous and her ability to dictate whether a man remained
fertile or not, related to her power as a fertility deity.

Lucian’s focus on many of the fertility and Semitic related cult practices and
objects of Atargatis’ worship may indicate his pride in how “traditional” the cult

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371 See notes 45, 84, and 85.
372 See note 45.
373 Lucian, 15.
374 Bilde, 175.
375 See note 46.
376 See note 47.
remained. The abundance of fertility symbolism at Hierapolis seems to indicate that Oriental traditions were still in place at the temple and that they were obviously not Greek practices since Lucian sets them apart as exotic, or traditional. Bilde acknowledges that many fertility aspects from ancient Semitic rituals still existed in the cult at Hierapolis:

[T]here can be no doubt the in this account [Lucian’s] we find elements of a fertility cult, as assumed by most scholars. This interpretation is supported by the role played in the cult by water and water rites, by the annual sacrificial burning of animals hung up alive in trees placed in the temple-yard, by the existence in the sanctuary of fish, doves, and other animals, and by the phalli.

However, Bilde still maintains his belief that the cult had become a Hellenized mystery cult:

Of, course, the elements of the traditional fertility cult continue to exist, as we have see, in the same way as other Oriental elements such as the temple architecture. What is important, however, is the reinterpretation of some of these elements, in particular the (certainly ancient) institution of self-castration…Finally, in this period, the Hellenistic character of the religion of Atargatis finds expression in its individualism.

Bilde’s statement that the individualism of Atargatis’ cult as well as self-castration were the most important indicators of Hellenization in the cult does not take into account the preexisting individualism that can be found already in Ishtar’s worship. The ultimate self-sacrificial nature and devotion of her followers (prostitutes and eunuchs), the countless hymns and myths written to Ishtar from Sumerian to Neo-Babylonian times that extol her virtues and invoke her protection, the local nature of her worship among each culture— especially its non official status in the religion of the Israelites—and the diffusion of her cult throughout the Near East testifies to the popularity and power that her worshippers

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378 Bilde, 165.
379 Bilde, 181.
found in the cult. Maybe to her Near Eastern adherents she had always been such a powerful deity, while the Greeks and Romans were just barely discovering it. Greek and Roman followers of Near Eastern cults were attracted by the vitality and exotic nature of these cults because they found their own religions inadequate to address the ever-changing unstable climate of the Hellenistic Age.\(^{380}\) Therefore, to the Greeks the cult of Atargatis that they practiced may have seemed more Hellenized since they themselves were Hellenic. However, the cult as described by Lucian is specifically differentiated from the Hellenistic religious paradigm.

**Altars and “High Places”**

At Hierapolis some cult objects which were an important part of the temple layout indicate that many of the rituals practiced in Semitic temples like Solomon’s were maintained. The monumental altar in the courtyard at Hierapolis mentioned by Lucian demonstrates the continued use of this element that is so prominent in the religion of the Canaanites and Israelites.\(^{381}\) Monumental altars were also found at the Atargatis’ temples in Dura Europos and al-Uzza’s temple at Khirbet et-Tannur. Qasr al-Bint featured a large altar platform with a columned portico in its open courtyard. These altars had steps and were probably climbed in order to perform rituals on top of it as at the Temple of Solomon and probably like the large altar in Hierapolis.\(^{382}\) This arrangement was also found in other Seleucid and Roman era temples like the temple of Zeus Megistos in Dura

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\(^{381}\) Lucian, 39.

\(^{382}\) Baur, 9; Otto Eissfeldt, *Tempel und Kulte Syrischer Städte in Hellenistisch-Römischer Zeit* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1941), 121.
The sanctuary of Atargatis at Delos also had a large altar although not as monumental in size as the other temples. All of these altars relate to the biblical holy of holies as do the raised cellae, which are may all be considered Semitic “high places.” Upon these altars ritual sacrifices of animals were made and incense was burned as it had been done for thousands of years in Semitic religions. Lucian mentions that sheep, goats, bulls, and cows were sacrificed but pigs were neither sacrificed nor eaten and incense was also burned in profusion. An interesting parallel between Hierapolis and the “high place” at Ebla is that at Hierapolis sacred animals were kept in the courtyard at Hierapolis much like Monument P3 which may have been an enclosure for Ishtar’s sacred animals including lions. Lucian records that many animals such as cattle and lions were kept in the courtyard at Hierapolis.

Many of these same Semitic rituals were also offered on rooftops. At Qasr al-Bint stairs in the side rooms lead to a mezzanine level and the roof. Ritual libations and incense burning were probably a part of the rites practiced on the high altars and “high places.” A staircase at Khirbet et-Tannur and the Temple of Atargatis at Dura Europos also had stairs to the roof for perhaps the same reason. As mentioned previously the towers at the temple of Bel had staircases to the top where rituals were performed. The Syro-Palestinian love of “high places” may be an explanation for why rituals were practiced on rooftops and high altars. The sacredness of mountain tops are the origins for the love of “high places” and the ziggurats of the ancient Mesopotamians are an

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383 Lucian, 54.
384 See note 78.
385 Lucian, 41.
386 Healey, 72, 162; Larché, 221-213.
387 Healey, 162.
388 Downey, 103.
389 Lightfoot, Commentary, 422.
artificial sacred mountain. The stepped altars found in ancient temples at Uruk and Assur were probably influenced by ziggurats. Early Syro-Palestinian temples in Ebla and the later Canaanite and Israelite sanctuaries such as in Dan and at the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem brought this concept to a new monumental level (Figs. 23, 24, 39, 22).

Greek altars were also often monumental. However, the large Greek altars were most likely influenced by Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian monumental stepped altars. Altars have been an integral part of open-air worship for thousands of years. The Syro-Palestinian altars considered here are most often taller than they are wide and the sacrifices occurred upon smaller altars on top of the monumental altar. Although many similarities exist it was not the Greeks who introduced monumental altars to the Near Eastern region.

**Side Rooms and Banqueting**

A feature which the temples at Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur all share are side rooms used for banqueting. Banqueting was common in the Greek world but it ultimately derives from Near Eastern sources that were adopted by the Greeks and retransmitted back to the Near East. The role of banquets in Mesopotamian religion was very important and benches for dining can be found in reliefs from Sumerian times as well as in sanctuaries in the Israelite period where banquets were tied to “high places.” Will states that the exedrae at Delos, which were used for banqueting, were

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390 Herbert Hoffman, “Foreign Influence and Native Invention in Archaic Greek Altars,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 57 no. 3 (July 1953), 191.
392 Glueck, *Deities*, 165.
built in a Near Eastern style.\textsuperscript{393} Ritual banqueting is found at many of the most important and most Hellenized sanctuaries of the East such as at Baalbek and Palmyra. However, these sanctuaries do not preserve ritual banqueting in such an indigenous form.\textsuperscript{394} The uniqueness of the style of these rooms may indicate that a specifically Syrian version of the banqueting room was in use at Delos and may have been brought there by the Hierapolitans.\textsuperscript{395} If the Hierapolitans brought their homeland form of banqueting to Delos it is likely that such banqueting occurred at Hierapolis. Although not specifically mentioned by Lucian, the ritual of sacred dining possibly occurred at Hierapolis but may not have been mentioned by him since he focused on the exotic nature of the cult and by this time banqueting had become a regular part of Greek religion.\textsuperscript{396}

Banquets were also a part of the sanctuaries of fertility goddesses at Dura Europos and Khirbet et-Tannur. At Dura Europos three side rooms (11, 15, and 17) have benches along 3 sides creating the typical triclinia used for banqueting in the Greek world. The other side rooms acted as storage areas while some, such as rooms 10 and 11 which seem to form a separate unit, were chapels to additional deities as evidenced by statue bases found there.\textsuperscript{397} This was a customary practice in Mesopotamian style temples. At Khirbet et-Tannur three side rooms on the north and one on the south featured the typical triclinia. Banqueting was an essential part of Nabataean religion. Triclinia are found in temples and tombs throughout Nabataean sites (Fig. 58). The Nabataeans seemed to have celebrated these meals not only as funeral rites but also at certain times of the year

\textsuperscript{393}Will, 117-119.  
\textsuperscript{394}Will, 117.  
\textsuperscript{395}Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 46; Will, 117-119.  
\textsuperscript{396}Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 47.  
\textsuperscript{397}Downey, 103.
including the equinoxes in commemoration of the fertility of the gods.\textsuperscript{398} Ritual dining may have been a part of the cult of Dushares and his consort al-Uzza at Qasr al-Bint. Triclinia were located in the rooms on either side of the central adyton of the cella.\textsuperscript{399} Since the Nabataean and the Syrian followers of fertility goddesses were Semitic it seems natural that the sacred banquet was passed down and adopted by many Oriental religions and was preserved as a part of the worship of Atargatis and other fertility deities.

\section*{Lakes, Water, and Fish}

Another tie between the temple at Hierapolis and other Semitic temples, most notably of the Phoenician Astarte, was the sacred lake. Sacred lakes ultimately derive from Egyptian sacred lakes and the Mesopotamian \textit{apsu}. The “molten sea’ of the Temple of Solomon is a prominent example of this tradition and a closer precedent for the lake at Hierapolis.\textsuperscript{400} The use of fish in sacred rituals was common in Egypt and was used in Mesopotamian ritual banqueting.\textsuperscript{401} A plaque from the temple of Ishtar at Nippur prominently displays a large fish which may be part of the ritual feast but could have also had more symbolic meaning (Fig. 9).\textsuperscript{402} This fish could also relate to Inanna’s role as a goddess of fertility.\textsuperscript{403} The goddess Ninni, another epithet for Inanna, was often depicted with fish.\textsuperscript{404} Atargatis fish attributes tie her to the Phoenicians Astarte of Ascalon who, as a goddess of a sea-faring people, naturally had water and fish associations.\textsuperscript{405}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[398] Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 165.
\item[399] Healey, 41, 165-6; Larché, 200.
\item[400] Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 348.
\item[401] Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 354.
\item[402] S. H. Hooke, "Fish Symbolism," \textit{Folklore} 72, no. 3 (Sep., 1961): 536.
\item[403] Lucian, 255:14, 275-277:45-47.
\item[404] Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 67 n 175; Leick, 86.
\item[405] Lucian, 14; Lightfoot, \textit{Introduction}, 65-72.
\end{footnotes}
Sacred lakes were located at the temple of Astarte at Ascalon and the fifth-century BC Greek historian Ctesias records how Astarte was transformed into a fish after jumping into the sacred pool at her temple in Ascalon. Lucian corroborates this story by relating that Atargatis was worshipped as half woman, half fish at Ascalon and explains that is the reason why fish were sacred and not eaten by her worshippers. Lucian describes how the cult statues of Atargatis and Hadad were taken to the lake to see the sacred fish in it (Fig. 82). The water and sacred fish serve to tie the cult to fertility practices, which is reiterated by other Roman sources such as Pliny and Aelian. Early modern accounts confirm this association. Henry Maundrell, a visitor to the ruins of the site in 1697, reported seeing a sculpture of a naked woman surrounded by fishtailed figures.

Another water ritual practiced at Hierapolis was the pouring of water into a crevice under the temple. This was practiced in remembrance of the great flood which destroyed humanity and the waters which receded down the crevice over which the temple is now built. This practice references the Babylonian myth of the flood in which Ishtar was one of the goddesses who helped stop the flood because of her compassion on the human race. Lucian’s account of the flood parallels a Semitic

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407 Lucian, 14.
408 Lucian, 47.
411 Lucian, 13.
version rather than a Greek one although he attributes the story to the Greeks.413 Libations were also a common practice in the Mesopotamian temples of Ishtar and at the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles.414 Many rituals that may be termed “Semitic” were common at Hierapolis, however this term is hard to define and much of the cult practices were common in the Near East and Greece at the time Lucian wrote his treatise.415 So although the practices may have been observed in the Near East long before the Greeks adopted them it is hard to say if the cult at Hierapolis inherited these practices from the Near East or the Greeks.

Other temples of Atargatis had water associations. A cistern at Delos was located under the portico around the theater which may relate to the water basins common to Semitic religions.416 Sacred lakes and water basins were far from exclusive to temples of Atargatis. A large water basin was found at the temple of al-Uzza at Khirbet et-Tannur and demonstrates the fertility aspect of the cult as well as the continued use of ritual ablution fountains commonly found in Semitic religions.417 A sacred lake may also have existed at this temple.418 The Nabataeans had economic connections with Ascalon and other coastal areas and thus may have been influenced in their use of a sacred lake by the Phoenician Astarte in addition to the Syrian Atargatis at Hierapolis.419 The presence of a sacred lake and the use of water basins at Khirbet et-Tannur well into the Roman period demonstrates that a continuous element of worship from as far back as the Sumerian temples of Inanna. Despite regional differences in the specific plans and cult objects of

413Lucian, 12.
414Lightfoot, Commentary, 348, 337.
416Will, 79-80; Lightfoot, Commentary, 489-90.
417Glueck, “Newly,” 373.
419Glueck, Deities, 382.
Khirbet et-Tannur and other Near Eastern temples of fertility deities, it is clear that in the great centers of fertility goddess worship typically Oriental traditions continued unabated.

The fish iconography is found at Khirbet et-Tannur in the form of busts of al-Uzza with fish or dolphins on her head (Fig. 83). These sculptures further connect al-Uzza to the fertility goddesses of the coastal cities, especially that of Ascalon, where Astarte/Atargatis was worshipped as a fish goddess. Glueck seems to think the marine animals on top of al-Uzza’s head may be dolphins since dolphin imagery was common in the coastal areas of the Near East and was also a symbol of Aphrodite with whom the Greeks equated al-Uzza. If she is a dolphin goddess she may represent a protecting goddess for travelers on the sea and by extension on the land and into the afterlife.\footnote{Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 316.} It seems strange that dolphin symbolism would be found at a sanctuary in the middle of the desert. However, it is also strange to find fish symbolism in the desert as well. Some scholars doubt Glueck’s attribution of dolphins for these animals.\footnote{McKenzie, 191.} Whether the figures are fish or dolphins does not matter. What matters is that the association of al-Uzza with water and thus fertility is underscored by the marine animals on her head.

Dolphin and fish symbolism was not exclusive to the Greeks and Romans who were closely connected to the ocean because of geography. Fish and dolphin symbolism are found throughout the Near East and may just represent the import inland of a motive from the coastal region that may have been Oriental first and augmented by Occidental influence later.\footnote{Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 336; Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 352.} Nabataean ties with Israelite and Phoenician merchants who lived near the sea may have had just as much influence as the Greeks. The religious and economic ties with Ascalon especially, point to some kind of Oriental influence in the Nabataean
adoption of marine symbolism. The Greek influence on al-Uzza’s adoption of dolphin symbolism rests on Glueck’s tenuous supposition that the figures found on a sculpture of al-Uzza’s head are in fact dolphins. Fish were known to be an important part of the cult at Hierapolis and Ascalon long before Khirbet et-Tannur was built as related by Diodorus Siculus.

Theatral Areas

Another important architectural feature that the temples of Atargatis share is the use of theaters or theatral areas. The temple at Delos was equipped with a Greek style theater (Fig. 46). However, it is important to note the theater dates to after the construction of the temple thus revealing that some of the major Greek elements were only added to the Delos sanctuary after the Athenian priests took over while at the same time the distinctively non-Greek temple proper was being extensively enlarged. This may signal that the Seleucid leaders were reacting to a situation in which there were “syncretistic deities worshipped by a mixed population” thus they needed to use both Greek and Near Eastern elements to suit the population. Will hypothesizes that the expatriot Hierapolitans in Delos were more Hellenized than other Hierapolitans, so it seems likely that they would have accepted a Greek style theater in their sanctuary. Will also states that traditional temple plans were only used in provincial areas like Delos and Dura Europos that were supposedly less Hellenized than Hierapolis. Although, if they were less Hellenized, why do they have very distinct Greek elements, such as theaters, which

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423 Glueck, Deities, 360, 391.
424 Lightfoot, Introduction, 45.
425 Hannestad, 98.
426 Will, 140.
427 Will, 119 n6.
Hierapolis does not have? It seems contrary that the “more Hellenized” Hierapolitans at Delos would they have made sure to build an Oriental temple in Delos if one did not exist in their homeland.

Often Seleucid cities would build Greek structures like theaters in the same city with a temple that reflected an entirely local style or had very few Greek elements. A theater was built in Babylon in the third century BC, while at the same time extensive efforts were made to restore old Babylonian style temples and construct new ones in that same style. This same arrangement can be seen at Delos. The common understanding that the Greeks turned each city they took over in the Near East into copies of a Greek polis with a theater, gymnasium, and Greek style temple is disproved by how much traditional architecture was retained during the Seleucid reign. Some scholars believe that the Hellenization of religious architecture in Syria was only accomplished by the Romans, which is a problematic statement but still more true than of the Greeks. The temples in Hierapolis and Delos demonstrate that “the classical elements may be more a concession to taste and fashion than a statement about the rituals and natures of the cults themselves.”

At the temple of Atargatis at Dura Europos one side room and the antechamber of the cella were equipped with benches upon which worshippers may have watched cult rituals being enacted (Fig. 3). Play acting and ecstatic rituals were a part of the Ishtar cult long before Greek influence and perhaps the presence of a theater in Delos and a theatrical area at Dura merely continues these practices in, especially at Delos, a more

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428 Hannestad, 107.
429 Millar, 129.
430 Hannestad 119; Millar, 130-131.
431 Butcher, 357.
432 See note 192.
Hellenized setting. Bellinger suggests that the rooms at Dura Europos may have been used for orgiastic rituals performed by the cult eunuchs, known as galli who were part of the cultic personnel. Lucian mentions their rituals at Hierapolis in detail:

On set days the multitude gathers at the temple—crowds of galli and the sacred persons I mentioned before—and they perform the rites, cutting their arms and being beaten by one another on the back. Many stand beside and pipe an accompaniment, many clash the drums, others sing inspired and sacred songs. This takes place outside the temple, nor do those who perform these rites enter the temple. On these days men become galli.

These rituals, as Lucian makes clear, did not happen in the temple proper. Most likely they occurred within the confines of the sanctuary in a room next to the inner shrine or off to the side of it. Thus, it is possible that the theatrical areas at Dura accommodated these rituals. The ritual descent to the lake as well as a torch festival may also have been observed in these rooms. Although some scholars interpret certain these theatrical areas, along with the theater at Delos, as evidence of mysteries being a part of Atargatis cult, no actual archaeological remains, including inscriptions, explicitly support mysteries as being a part of worship in Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, or any other Near Eastern site.

It is possible that Greek mysteries infiltrated the worship of Atargatis, but it seems that the transformation of the Atargatis cult into a mystery religion may have been a phenomenon of mainland Greece, if at all. No records exist from Delos to prove that the theater was used for mysteries and if they did not exist on an island close to Greece it is hard to see them existing at Hierapolis or Dura. The interpretation of these theaters...

433 Baur, 22.
434 Lucian, 50-51.
435 Baur, 22-3.
436 Bilde, 162.
437 Bilde, 162; Lightfoot, Introduction, 76.
being used for cult rituals involving the eunuchs or the descent to the lake seems more fitting with the sources that we have on these sites. The inclusion of mysteries in Atargatis’ worship in Greece is not certain either since the nature of her worship outside of Syria is not well recorded. Inscriptions bearing her name have been found as far as Britain though they reveal nothing about her worship there. A section of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* records encountering the wandering eunuch priests in Macedonia but hardly gives any indication that any mysteries were being performed. The characterization of these priests as strange and exotic, almost in a light of distrust and mockery, indicates a lack of official recognition and perhaps less Hellenization/Romanization of the religion than has been previously thought.

Although the sanctuary of Atargatis at Dura Europos had only small theatrical areas, a large theater was located in the sanctuary of Artemis at Dura Europos next to the sanctuary of Atargatis. It could be assumed that since Artemis was already a Greek deity, that mysteries more likely would have been held in her theater, but since no such theater is found in the Atargatis sanctuary, it is difficult to say whether they took place there. It would seem antithetical to have a Greek-style theater in which Greek mysteries were performed in Artemis’ temple and then have a non-Greek style theater in which Greek mysteries were performed in Atargatis’ temple. The fact that the temple of Artemis was torn down and rebuilt in a Mesopotamian style plan sometime in the middle of the first century BC may indicate cross influence between the Semitic Atargatis cult and the

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440 Dirven, “Author,” 169.
Why, if Artemis was a Greek deity, would the Greeks build for her a Mesopotamian style temple? Maybe the presence of the Greek theater in the temple of Artemis mixed with a Mesopotamian-style temple demonstrates that the power of Hellenism over the cult of Atargatis was apparently not that strong in Dura; in contrast she seems to have had the ability to Orientalize her Greek neighbor.\footnote{Downey, 89.}

Performances may have also been a part of the Nabataean sanctuaries. The porticoes surrounding the large altar base outside of Qasr al-Bint may have been a viewing area or theatron used for a similar purpose as those found at Delos and Dura Europos (Fig. 84).\footnote{Baur, 22.} Also, as mentioned previously, a screen over the raised cella at the Temple of the Winged Lions may indicate that mystery rituals were performed there. Whether the performances and rituals among the Nabataeans and Syrians were musical, sacrificial or play-acting these same types of rituals had long been a part of Semitic religion and do not necessarily indicate the intrusion of mysteries into Semitic cults.

**Thrones and Lions**

One last important element of the temples of Atargatis was their association with empty thrones, deities on thrones, and lions. Lucian mentions that an empty throne of the sun was located inside the temple at Hierapolis which may relate to the empty throne flanked by lions which was found at the temple of Delos across from the theater (Fig. 47). A similar empty throne flanked by lions or sphinxes was found at the chapel of Astarte in the Phoenician temple of Eshmun. A long history of empty thrones is common from Babylonian down to Phoenician times. Empty thrones are common on Babylonian

\footnote{Healey, 40, 78.}
boundary stones, the *kudurru* mentioned above. The most prominent empty throne is the Mercy Seat of Yahweh in the Temple of Solomon. All of these thrones, along with the footprints found at Ain Dara can be placed in the category of aniconic worship. These thrones all represent more specifically a kind of “empty space” aniconism. In Petra, Dushares may have had solar attributes and sun cults were common among the Nabataeans and were accompanied by the aniconic worship of the sun. This is important in connection with Lucian’s description of the empty throne of the sun found at the Temple of Hierapolis. Aniconism was an important part of Semitic religions and, apart from the religion practiced at the Temple of Solomon, was often combined with anthropomorphic representations of deities.

Thrones were also an important part of the cult of Atargatis because in the cult statue Atargatis and Hadad, as described by Lucian, are both enthroned between lions and bulls respectively. The cult relief found at Dura Europos confirms Lucian’s description (Fig. 43). The cult statue at Khirbet et-Tannur was probably similar because the statue of Hadad is enthroned between bulls and a fragment of a foot and throne with lions that belong to the statue of Atargatis was also found in the temple (Fig. 57). The style of the lions found at Khirbet et-Tannur reflects a Parthian influence in the frontality and stylization of the lion and its carefully patterned mane. A Parthian style is also seen in the companion figure of Hadad. His head is disproportionate to his body and his face is characterized by simplified plains and large eyes. Greek elements are also seen in the

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444 Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 450.
445 See note 113 and 114.
446 Healey, 104.
447 Lucian, 34; Healey, 104.
448 Lucian, 31.
beard and curly hair and the Hellenistic style drapery. However, the Oriental style of the sculpture seems to outweigh the Hellenistic aspects.\textsuperscript{450} Atargatis’ association with lions is further corroborated by some coins found at Hierapolis which depict Atargatis with a lion (Fig. 44). As the cult center, Hierapolis may have been the source of cult iconography used during the Seleucid period up until the Roman Era.\textsuperscript{451} The use of lion iconography at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur, whether in coins or sculpture, indicates some level of continuity between the four cult areas.

The iconography of Atargatis enthroned between two lions as seen on the relief from the relief from Dura Europos and more Hellenized versions found in Rome (Fig. 45) is hardly a Greco-Roman invention since some of the earliest depictions of Ishtar depict her thus (Fig. 85). Despite reliefs in Rome reflecting classical iconography, the Syrian sanctuary at the Janiculum in Rome where Atargatis was probably worshiped was not Greco-Roman in style (Fig. 86).\textsuperscript{452} This temple indicates that tradition still had strong staying power in the architecture of “Syrian” cults well into the Roman period. The fact that Atargatis is attired in a classical robe in the Roman relief does not detract from her nature. From Sumerian times forward, her depiction varied widely from enthroned between lions, dressed in military regalia, or nude emphasizing her fertility aspects (Figs. 85, 17, 30). Her attributes still set her apart as “exotic” while her robes may simply indicate the Greek religious paradigm of depicting deities as robed in that manner.\textsuperscript{453}

Atargatis’ dependence on borrowing imagery from other goddesses like Cybele in the Hellenistic period seems to be less certain when one considers both are highly

\textsuperscript{450}Glueck, \textit{Deities}, 196-197.
\textsuperscript{452}Baur, 24.
\textsuperscript{453}Roller, 138, 143.
influenced by the Near Eastern history of goddesses. In *De Dea Syria* Lucian can not even decide which deity Atargatis represents, let alone tie her only to Cybele. It seems that *interpretatio Graeca* is not as strong in Atargatis’ cult as some scholars make it seem because the Greeks and Romans could not even decide which deity Atargatis was. No official iconography existed for the cult of Atargatis, therefore her depiction is highly varied based on local tastes and demographics of the population—whether Hellenized, local, or both. Bilde states that Atargatis’ association with lions indicates a movement towards a universalizing Greek concept of what was an Oriental mystery religion. As Atargatis’ iconography became more like that of Cybele’s, Bilde sees Atargatis’ cult becoming a mystery religion like Cybele’s cult. However, scholars still question whether Cybele’s cult, which Atargatis’ cult seems to mirror the most, was actually a mystery religion. Adherents to mystery religions sought a personal relationship with deity who possessed a kind of strong overarching character capable of salvation. This kind of character has been argued to be a part of Atargatis cult; however, no such evidence exists to prove that her cult had become a personalize mystery cult. One of the symbols of Atargatis, the lion, which was retained in her worship, demonstrates the already powerful universal nature of the goddess:

The presence of the lion has the effect of removing the goddess from her human sphere and making her even more a figure of power and awe. It is this psychological aspect of distance and awe, reinforced through the association with

454Lightfoot, *Introduction*, 34.
455Lucian, 32.
458Bilde, 168.
459Roller, 141.
460Bilde, 180.
wild animals, which seems to be the chief impression we receive from the goddess’s cult in the Greek world.\footnote{Roller, 142.}

This symbol was also used in the worship of other goddesses like Cybele; however, lions in her cult seem to be a Hellenistic accretion.\footnote{Roller, 142; Lightfoot, Introduction, 20.} Atargatis’ lions seem to indicate ties to the ancient Babylonian view of Ishtar as a fierce warlike character along with her aspects as a mistress of the animals in control of the chaotic powers of nature, and thus her control over fertility rather than a trend towards mystery cult status.\footnote{Lightfoot, Introduction, 59; Baur, 124.}

The belief that Atargatis’ connection with lions comes from the cult of Cybele and may have only appeared in the Hellenistic period ignores the possibility of a parallel development of iconography. Both goddesses most likely stem from an earlier mother goddess.\footnote{Roller, 135; Lightfoot, Introduction, 19.} This mother goddess was probably Inanna/Ishtar. Lion imagery in association with these mother goddesses can be traced back as far as Sumerian and Akkadian times (Fig. 85). Specifically in Syria, during the Bronze Age, lion imagery can be found at the temples of Ishtar at Ebla and at Ain Dara (Figs. 26, 31). Cybele is never shown with lions until the Greeks began influencing her cult and perhaps the Greeks equated her with lions because they saw that as typical of Oriental goddesses.\footnote{Lightfoot, Introduction, 20.} If this sort of interpretatio Graeca was present in Cybele’s cult it may also be true of Atargatis’ association with lions. Although, Atargatis is depicted with lions from the moment the Greeks moved into the region which is quite early for Greek influence to be so strong. On the other hand if the Greek process of Orientalization in which Near Eastern cults were made to fit the idea of what Greeks saw as Oriental happened to Cybele’s cult in Ionia many years earlier

\footnote{Roller, 142.}
than the process happened in Syria, Cyble’s cult could have influenced the later development of Atargatis’ cult. However, Ishtar and later goddesses, such as Astarte, were associated with lions in the Syrian region long before the Greeks came into the area. Therefore Atargatis adoption of the lions may reflect both Greek and local influences. Later in the development of Near Eastern fertility cults there does seem to be a tendency to generalize Oriental religions as seen in the adoption of lions by many other Oriental goddesses, such as al-Uzza and Allat in the Roman period.

The mixture of Greco-Roman and Near eastern architecture, cult objects, and iconography discussed in this thesis supports the hypothesis that the cults of Atargatis and al-Uzza retained an overwhelming amount of Near Eastern traditions. Lucian’s account in *De Dea Syria* also supports this idea. To Lucian’s Greek audience the cult must have seemed outrageously foreign despite some attempts by the author to relate the cult to Greek religion. Lucian’s fixation on the exclusively Oriental elements of the Atargatis cult betrays his Greek ethnocentricity in attempting to make the temple at Hierapolis seem exotic. However, Lucian’s audience seems to have been Hellenized Syrians rather than Greek colonists:

> [H]e differentiates Hierapolis from the Greek world and aims to show that the cult in Hierapolis is superior to Greek religion and unique in its kind. Interestingly, he uses Greek devices to illustrate this supremacy. However, he is not an uncritical copyist and refutes contemporary Greek views on Hierapolis and the Syrian goddess that affect the unique character of the cult. As such the DS [*De Dea Syria*] intends to propagate the cult of the Syrian goddess in the Hellenistic world. Given the Syrian self-consciousness, Hellenized Syrians must have been most receptive to the ideas expressed in this work. Probably they were the audience the author had in mind when he wrote his work.

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469 Dirven, “Author,” 165.
It was common among Greek authors to observe and record foreign religions. However, these authors, such as Herodotus, often lampooned Near Eastern cults and to Greek readers the cult of Atargatis may have seemed primitive and ridiculous.\footnote{Dirven, “Author,” 158.} However, Lucian’s sympathetic record and his focus on the exotic nature of the cult seem to be an attempt to demonstrate distinctiveness, superiority, and antiquity of the cult in contrast to the practices of the Greek cults.\footnote{Dirven, “Author,” 164-165.} Lucian’s use of the Greek language and equation of Near Eastern gods with Greek ones demonstrates that his “assertion of self-esteem is made by adopting the language and arguments of his adversaries.”\footnote{Roller, 169.} Lucian tries to demonstrate the superiority of his homeland religion by extolling the antiquity of Near Eastern religions and temples.\footnote{Lucian, 2-10.} It is likely that his treatise was part of the general competition among Near Eastern cults trying to promote themselves in order to gain imperial benefits and attract money from pilgrims.\footnote{Butcher, 337.}

Lucian’s obvious promotion of the Oriental elements of his cult could also be read as anti-Roman propaganda, a form of passive resistance to the infiltration of Greek and Roman cultures.\footnote{Elsner, 193.} The assertion of the superiority and antiquity of the cult at Hierapolis using the language of the Greek occupiers demonstrates the cults continued power and influence in the region despite many years of Greek and Roman influence.\footnote{Elsner, 195.} Lucian was well aware of the tools he needed to use to promote the cult of Atargatis at home among Hellenized Syrians and abroad among the Greeks and Romans.\footnote{Roller, 165.} The characterization of the cult of Atargatis as exotic and unique may just be Lucian’s attempt to make it seem
so. However, overwhelming amounts of traditional elements mentioned in Lucian’s account can be traced back to the worship of Ishtar and other goddesses related to her. Thus, it may be that Lucian’s account records practices that actually occurred in Hierapolis but with added embellishment in order to gain prominence for his cult.
Despite what the true origins of some of the Near Eastern elements of the temple plan or the decorative programs at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur, the temples as a whole reflect an eclectic mix of Hellenistic and Oriental elements. Temples of Atargatis and other similar fertility goddesses were not the only temples exhibiting a mixture of Eastern and Western elements. Temples of other Near Eastern deities also seem to demonstrate the trend, such as the temple of Bel in Palmyra and the sanctuary at Baalbek. The argument that Atargatis was fully Hellenized does not account for the strong continuation of local styles in both the depiction of Atargatis and similar goddesses as well as in the temple architecture. In addition, many Semitic religious practices were still evident in these cults as worshipped. The partly Hellenized and partly Oriental temple and cult at these four centers of fertility goddess worship seems like a compromise of religious practices as a natural reflection of the long history of the development of the cult or as a result of a mixed population. They do not seem to be extremely Hellenized cults which retained a few fertility aspects for fashion’s sake.

Whether Atargatis’ cult can truly be called Semitic, since that term is so broad already, is hard to say. However, Atargatis’ complicated nature may not necessarily reflect a Greco-Roman paradigm. Rather, it may be a result of the combination of many fertility goddesses of the Near East who developed from a common Semitic background and because of regional differences and linguistic changes where known by different

names. The large amount of traditional elements recorded by Lucian that can be identified as having ancient origins at least reveals that the classical people who adopted her worship wanted to preserve her nature as “Syrian.”

The nature of the Near Eastern fertility goddesses makes it difficult to understand how traditional their cults really were. The many attributes they shares with each other in the Greco-Roman period “parallel manifestations of a pan-Anatolian Great Goddess or Mother Goddess.” Certain elements of her cult and temple architecture attest to a sort of regional similarity, or Semitic background, but are the similarities evidence that traditional elements were adopted and adapted by the local population over the years or rather a sign of interpretatio Graeca? The Orientalizing power of Hellenism is often used to explain the great similarities among these goddesses. However, it is possible that a shared history may be a more logical explanation for their similar Oriental characters.

Rather than abandoning their local gods for Greco-Roman ones, the civilizations of the Near East slowly added to their deities a kind of pan-Orientalism with a shared common architecture, iconography and cult. However, both of these theories of a pan-Near Eastern goddess cult ignore the great regional differences evident at the many temple sites of fertility goddesses. It is almost impossible to tell what traditional elements the local population saw as part of their religious paradigm because each locale had its own variation on the fertility goddess theme. To attribute the Orientalism of these cults to the Greeks and Romans gives them too much credit as the “great preservers” of a Near

480 Lightfoot, Introduction, 75.
481 Lightfoot, Commentary, 64.
482 Lightfoot, Commentary, 80.
Eastern culture which was far too complicated for them to have created. As Lightfoot states, Hellenization is a difficult phenomenon to quantify:

‘Hellenisation’ is increasingly recognized as a slippery and unsatisfactory term. It could be applied to a vast and various range of phenomena, is almost completely uninformative about such crucial matters as mechanism and level of penetration, and worse, still sets Hellenism against local culture as if the two were incompatible, antithetical, or even hostile. The ‘Hellenisation’ of a cult might include such matters as its borrowing of Greek formulations and representations, not only iconographical, but also do designate its deities (that is, the use of interpretatio Graeca), the adaptation of Greek institution (such as priesthoods or temple-layouts), and so on. But the mere identification of such features says nothing about the processes that have produced them (which one may wish to call by names such as syncretism, assimilation, or acculturation), nor about the character of the resulting product.483

The level of Hellenization at each cult center of Atargatis was different, as can be seen the adoption of different Greco-Roman architectural traditions or cult practices. In addition, each cult center adopted different traditions indigenous to the Near East and therefore the use of one tradition at one site and not at another is not an indication of more Hellenization or less. As has been done for thousands of years with the cults of Ishtar, Asherah, and Astarte, worshippers molded each cult into something unique. As Ishtar of Nineveh was not like Ishtar of Babylon, neither was Atargatis of Hierapolis exactly like al-Uzza of Khirbet-et Tannur.

Atargatis’ temples built during the Hellenistic period reflected a very traditional style of architecture, but traditional to whom? Do these temples simply represent the Greek interpretatio Graeca of what they saw as fitting for the Oriental deities they were starting to worship? Do they demonstrate that the Seleucids only found Oriental elements exotic and fashionable? The faithful adaptation, rather than an adoption of a few fashionable aspects, of the typical Mesopotamian plan in new temples and the

483Lightfoot, Commentary, 72.
refurbishing of old temples refutes this assumption. The instability of the Mesopotamian area centuries before the Greeks colonized it allowed many cultures to invade and leave their mark on the area before being taken over by other civilizations. The temples that the Greeks encountered already incorporated elements of Babylonian, Assyrian, and Syro-Palestinian influences. So to say that the architecture reflects the *interpretatio Graeca* of traditional Near Eastern architecture insinuates that the Greeks invented the style when in fact by the time the Greeks came along Near Eastern religious architecture was already what could be termed a pan-Near Eastern style. This conclusion is further bolstered by looking at the etymology of Atargatis’ name and the development of her iconography and worship. Bilde concludes that by the time the Greeks encounter Atargatis she had the characteristics of many Near Eastern deities and that the syncretism of deities was not a specifically Hellenistic occurrence. Therefore if her identity reflected a pan-Near Eastern deity her temple architecture probably underwent the same transformation.

The idea that traditional Near Eastern religions were lost in the wake of Greek civilization taking over the region does not seem to be true in either the cult center of Atargatis or more provincial centers. Certain elements of Greek civilization penetrated these areas but on the whole the religious architecture and practices of Atargatis’ cult seem to have remained essentially the same. If such a dramatic shift towards a universal mystery religion really occurred as Bilde suggests, why was traditional architecture retained? Would not new cult practices necessitate architecture capable of supporting them or at least an architecture that was more reflective of the Greek paradigm? Perhaps the fact that many of the Greek mystery religions practiced in the Near East originated in the Near East explains reason why the Greeks maintained traditional elements in the

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484 Bilde, 171.
architecture of the temples in the Near East. Bilde cites the transition that other Oriental cults experienced on the path to becoming mystery cults as exemplary of what Atargatis went through, becoming all-encompassing mother goddess, as the world around her embraced “political, social, and cultural universalism and cosmopolitanism.”

However, it seems that Atargatis’ blending with other Near Eastern goddesses was not a result of Hellenism but rather a result of these goddesses all being Semitic in the first place and all sharing a religious traditionalism rather than being universalized by the Greeks.

It is hard to understand exactly why certain traditional elements were retained in the Atargatis cult. With very few of her Hellenistic temples remaining the extent of Hellenization cannot really be ascertained. The Roman period seems to offer more evidence of widespread Hellenization in her cult although the staying power of long practiced traditions seems to have withstood even the Romans. Evidence about the Hellenization of the cult of Cybele may shed light on how much Hellenization the cult of Atargatis experienced. Roller states that the “Hellenic aspects of the Mother’s cult only reinforced Phrygian aspects that were already present. The Phrygians adopted Greek ideas, but they did so selectively, using the Greek forms and practices which they could relate to their own.” The same could be said of the selective nature of the Hierapolitans, Delians, Dura Europans, and Nabataeans. By the second century AD the cult of Atargatis had accumulated so many traditions from different cultures that it is extremely difficult to say what was “truly meaningful to the cult” or what may have been “the product of popular fashions and meanings unconnected with ritual.” However, the continuity of

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485 Bilde, 172.
486 Butcher, 351.
certain elements of the cult such as architecture, fertility associations including water and phallic symbolism, the use of altars, and many of the cult rituals are strong evidence of what was part of the pre-Hellenic cult that continued into the Roman age.\textsuperscript{487} This continuity is found not only in the temples at Delos and Dura which were more tightly connected to the cult as practiced at Hierapolis but in the temples of fertility goddesses in the Nabataean culture.

It may be more productive to look at Atargatis and al-Uzza as local deities who were not Classical creations but rather part of a continuum of traditional worship which evolved over time and whose worship, by the Roman period, naturally involved Greek and Roman accretions.\textsuperscript{488} However, local cults were still highly varied despite many similarities and the evolution of the fertility goddess cults could have been the result of a number of influences:

\begin{quote}
Change could have come about, both through contact with classical—and other—civilizations, and also through internal development: one of the dangers of the ‘Hellenisation’ debate is that it tends to overlook other mainsprings of change, as if native cultures were inert and capable only of change in response to external stimulus.\textsuperscript{489}
\end{quote}

The worship of the Syrian Goddess changed many times since its inception in the Bronze Age temples of Ishtar. The Hellenization of the cult added many elements to the worship of Atargatis. The lack of remains of Atargatis temples in good condition makes it difficult to really know the extent of the Hellenization that the occurred. However, the examination of similar temples as well as literary accounts provides some evidence. The strength and influence of Semitic religion and temple architecture is evidenced by its continued use even in the face of the homogenizing processes of Hellenization and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[487] Millar, 127.
\item[488] Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 73.
\item[489] Lightfoot, \textit{Commentary}, 73.
\end{footnotes}
Romanization. Despite many Hellenistic elements adopted into the cult and the temple architecture, the worship of Near Eastern fertility goddesses did not necessarily become so Hellenized as to become mystery cults. Conversely, the complete lack of Hellenization seems unlikely in the face of such widespread influence of Greco-Roman culture.

Whether or not a real continuity of culture can be traced does not diminish the fact that the locals and the Greco-Roman colonists professed have an Oriental culture that had not died out.  

This thesis demonstrates that previous assumptions by scholars that the cult of Atargatis and other Near Eastern fertility goddesses had become extremely Hellenized by the 2nd century AD is an oversimplification of these highly complex cults. The temple architecture has been largely ignored as an integral part of the cult. The temples have been discussed separately as archaeological specimens with little effort to explain what they convey about the nature of these cults. This thesis has shown that as the temple architecture is considered in the context of the cult it shows more clearly the effects of Hellenization on Near Eastern fertility religions. The temples at Hierapolis, Delos, Dura Europos, and Khirbet et-Tannur reveal the enduring nature of Oriental religions amidst the strong cultural influence of Hellenism.

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490 Butcher, 337.
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Map 1. The western region of the Ancient Near Eastern (The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago, modified by Author).
Map 2. Ancient Mesopotamia (The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago, modified by Author).
Map 3. The Ancient Mediterranean. Delos is located just north of Naxos.
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