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NABATAEAN FERTILITY MYTH, PLACE, TIME, RITUALS AND ACTORS BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to shed light on the Nabataean fertility mythology, based on the sculptures found at Khirbet et-Tannur Temple, located in south of Jordan. The unearthed temple and statues are important as they offer us considerable information about Nabataean religion. This paper concentrates on two high-relief statues discovered at the temple, both appeared as a female and male couple, a depiction of enthroned Atargatis with two lions on either side guarding her, and the enthroned Baalshamin with two bulls. In addition to the fertility mythology and rituals, the study focused on Khirbet et-Tannur site, where such rituals were performed, an emphasis was on practices and occasions of relevance.

The results achieved in this paper insured that the main Nabataean fertility couples deities were Baalshamin, the sky god and Atargatis, the earth goddess. The isolated place on a high place, the architectural plan of Khirbet et-Tannur temple, some of its features and the plenty of sculptures found at the site, all that, qualified it to be one of the main Nabataean temples to hold their cycle fertility ceremonies in which they practiced and performed different kinds of rituals with the company of the royal family, priests, musicians.

KEYWORDS: Fertility mythology, Religious rituals, Nabataean sculpture, Khirbet et-Tannur, Atargatis, Baalshamin.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the concepts that emerged with the beginning of creation and in all mythologies is fertility; it is strongly related to the human desire for reproduction and survival (Ardakani et al, 2016). The mythologies of Ancient Near East and Greek/Roman world are dominated with fertility deities, rituals, and symbols (Whyte, 2018). In Mesopotamia, the main Sumerian deity of fertility was Inanna, who was linked with her consort Dumuzi, the daughter of An and Enlil was not only a war deity, but the goddess of fertility and love. This goddess was known by Akkadians as Ishtar, occurred in cuneiform texts of all periods, and was related to the Syrian Astrate and Biblical Ashtaroth (Fig. 1). This goddess was a manifestation of the planet Venus and had many symbols of which the earliest was the reed bundle (Forty, 2004), she was also associated with the moon, her animal was the lion, and had major shrines at Uruk and Kish (in Sumer), Agade (in Akkad), and Arbil and Nineveh (in Assyria), where her priestesses served her as sacred prostitutes (Bertman, 2003). Other fertility deities included Dumuzi or Dumuzi was the ancient Mesopotamian god of shepherds, and was associated with the growth of plants and spring time. Another was Dagan, the inventor of the plough. Ninhursag, or Ninmah, the Sumerian mother goddess was associated with agricultural fertility. Another goddess of grain was Nisaba or Nanibgal, who later developed into a goddess of writing, accounting, and scribal knowledge (Black & Green 1992). Other gods included: Nanshe, Sumerian goddess of social justice, prophecy, fertility, and fishing (Nieke, 2004), also Ama-arhus and Amasagnul the Akkadian fertility goddesses, Gatumdag and Sharra Itu the Sumerian fertility goddesses and Nin-imma the goddess of the female sex organs (Jordan, 2002).

In ancient Egyptian mythology, numerous deities are associated with fertility; the god that was most clearly symbolizing fertility was Min, the vegetation and rain-bringing god that had his cult centers in Koptos and Panopolis, the usual depiction of him was a human standing with his feet close together, holding an arm above his head and in his hand is a fail. Hathor, who was originally a sky goddess, became the protector of women and goddess of pleasure, fertility, love and birth, she was usually represented as a cow or as a woman wearing a solar disk between cow horns on her head (Fig. 2). Osiris, was the god of afterlife and fertile flooding of the Nile River. Isis, the wife of Osiris was also a goddess of wifely love and

motherhood (Armour, 2001) (Fig. 3). The female goddess Heket who took the form of a frog or a frog-headed woman, was responsible for childbirth, creation and grain germination (Forty, 2004). The Nile River was personified as the god Hapi, who was depicted as a man with long hair and heavy breasts of an old woman, combining both the male and female life producing forces, carrying lotus and papyrus flowers (Fig. 4). Khnum, the chief god in Elephantine Island in the Nile at Aswan, was the god of region that contained the sources of the Nile guarded by Hapi, he was another god of fertility that was represented in artworks as a man with a ram's head holding a scepter and ankh, usually he was crowned by either a white crown of Upper Egypt decorated with plumes, a disk or cobras, or by a jug of water representing the Nile.



Figure 1. Astrate in details of cylinder seals of the Akkadian and Neo-Assyrian Periods (Black & Green, 1992).



Figure 2. The goddess Hathor, Tomb of Horemheb. Dyn. XVIII (Hart, 2005).

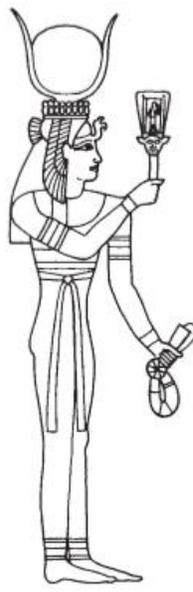


Figure 3. Isis in cow-horn crown, holding ritual rattle and necklace, Temple of Sety I, Abydos, Dyn. XIX (Hart, 2005).

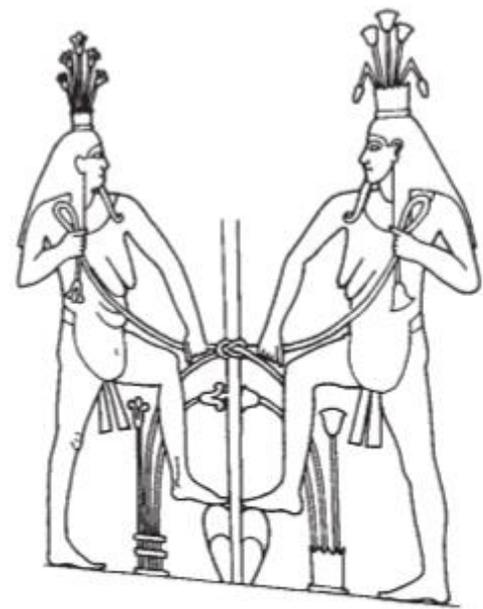


Figure 4. Hapy's fertility symbolized by the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt (Statue of Senwosret I, Dyn. XII), (Hart, 2005).

Baal, also known as Baal-Hadad was the Canaanite/Phoenician fertility and water god, and the paramount weather and war god; the son of Dagon, brother and husband to Astrate (Forty, 2004) (Fig. 5). Ram and bull were his holy animals, which frequently appeared on the artistic works representing him. This god, as well as other deities in the Canaanite pantheon was worshiped by the Amorites, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Edomites, Philistines, and Aramaeans, major difference between these cultures was the chief deity: in Philistia it was Melkart, in Moab it was Chemosh, in Aram it was Baal-Hadad, and in Ammon Milcom (also known as Melech. Anat was the sister of Baal-Hadad, the daughter of El and Asherah, her worship was widespread throughout Canaan, as a fertility goddess, she was depicted as a nude figure standing upon a lion and bearing serpents and/or lotus blossoms (Fig. 6). Asherah, later known as Astrate, provided comfort for women and mothers, her symbol was the Asherah pole, a wooden idol planted in her temple or a tree planted in her name close to the altar dedicated to Baal (https://freeronin.com/gr_files/testament_pre_1.pdf)



Figure 5. Baal-Hadad statuette found near his temple Ugarit (<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hadad>).

Anahita was recognized in the pantheon of the Par-sees as a goddess of fertility and of victory. She was depicted in artistic works wearing a high crown, in her left hand she held a water-pot (in her capacity as goddess of water) and at her breast a pomegranate blossom. The dove and the peacock were her sacred birds (Lurker, 2004). In Anatolia, the storm god was

the chief god of fertility, his pre-Hittite Hattic name was Taru, his Luwian name was Tarhunt, in south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria, he was known as Teshub. In art he was depicted with axe and lightning flash, bull was his sacred animal, symbolizing his strength and fertility. Ishtar was also worshipped and known with her Hurrian name Shaushka, her cult centers were dedicated to her at Samuha on the Upper Marassantiya River or Upper Euphrates and Lawazantiya in Kizzuwadna (Bryce, 2004).

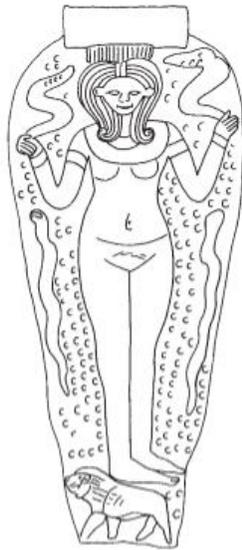


Figure 6. Astarte. Gold pendant, Ugarit/Syria, c. 1500 BC, Louvre Museum (Hart, 2005)

Many deities in the Greek/Roman mythology were associated with fertility as well, the most important and well known were: Demeter, the Greek goddess of the earth and of fertility, her symbol is the ear of corn. Diónyisos, was the Greek god of fertility, wine and drunkenness (Roman Bacchus), he is the god who created the vine, and made milk and honey flow from nature, in artistic works, he was represented as a goat or a bull, both were symbols of animal fertility. Aphrodíte, was the Greek goddess of beauty and love, identified by the Romans as Venus, her attribute was the dove, and was venerated in Athens as the goddess of gardens. Hera (Here) (Roman Juno), was the goddess of childbirth, her sacred animal was the cow, and among her attributes were the peacock, the diadem and the scepter. Priapos, was the Phrygian god of fertility, gardens, bees, goats and sheep, usually depicted as an ugly, satyr-like man with exaggerated genitals. Pan was the god of fields and woods, he

appeared in artworks as was half-human with the horns and legs of a billy-goat (Lurker, 2004).

From this brief presentation on fertility in some ancient civilizations, it becomes clear how fundamental is such aspect to the human race. Though, such aspect was not extensively investigated in the Nabataean culture, most of the studies were descriptive in nature for the works of art revealed in archaeological works. This study aims at shedding the light on the fertility artistic representations and ceremonial practices in the Nabataean Civilization; the case study of Khirbet et-Tannur was investigated for this purpose.

2. KHIRBET ET-TANNUR SITE/ TEMPLE, THE MAIN PLACE WHERE THE NABATAEAN FERTILITY CEREMONIES WERE PERFORMED

A wide number of temples, high places and open areas have been discovered in Petra and other Nabataean cities, these where religious ceremonies used to be performed. Among these temples, Khirbet et-Tannur is unique one. Many similarities between Khirbet Dharih temple and Khirbet et-Tannur suggest that worship in these two sites was undertaken in a similar manner; both have a colonnaded courtyard with steps probably intended as seats for participants, triclinia and rooms surrounding the courtyard, also access to the roof through stairs. Both have more than one altar in the courtyard, which are placed at the sides of the temple. The innermost chamber of both temples was also unroofed; though, Tannur was provided with more than one altar outside the temple where sacrifices could take place (Alpass 2011, 269).

Kherbit et-Tannur did not have the same facilities that seem to have been provided for travelers at Dharih. There were no substantial arrangements for water storage, nor was there a settlement attached to the sanctuary. It must therefore have served primarily as a place of pilgrimage and was most likely reserved for certain festival days. It has been suggested that Tannur may have been the destination for the processions starting at Dharih, carrying idol blocks from one site to the other (Alpass 2011, 271). From the uniqueness of et-Tannur Temple, the writers suggest in this context that it was one of the main destinations of Nabataean pilgrimages to practice special and ceremonies. The temple was dated to the late second century B.C., the hill of et-Tannur mount stands above Wadi el-Hasa, 300 m above the sea level, on the Kings Highway, 90 km to the north of the Nabataean capital

of Petra, and 7 km away from the Nabataean site Khirbet edh-Dharih. Caravaners stopped here with the intention of securing the fertility of their animals, gaining protection from evil, and fostering their commercial success (Lindner and Zangenberg, 1993). According to Glueck, it was a religious center for no particular village or town, nor it was close to any crossroad. It was most likely regarded as sacred spot for the general public and as an important place for pilgrimage. (Glueck, 1965, 77).

The site and its temple have the characteristics that qualified it to be suitable for pilgrimage and for practicing religious rituals, and in particulate to what

was concerned with fertility cult, being close to water resources of Wadi el-Hasa and its fertile land, manifest its relation with fertility beliefs and makes it a preferable destination area for pilgrims.

The completely isolated temple without a residential area around, makes it a destination for pilgrims who were seeking for spiritual rituals. Being on the top of a mount gave it importance and uniqueness as a sacred place, also to become available not only for the elite and wealthy people, but also for others who are looking for very special and unique religious rituals.

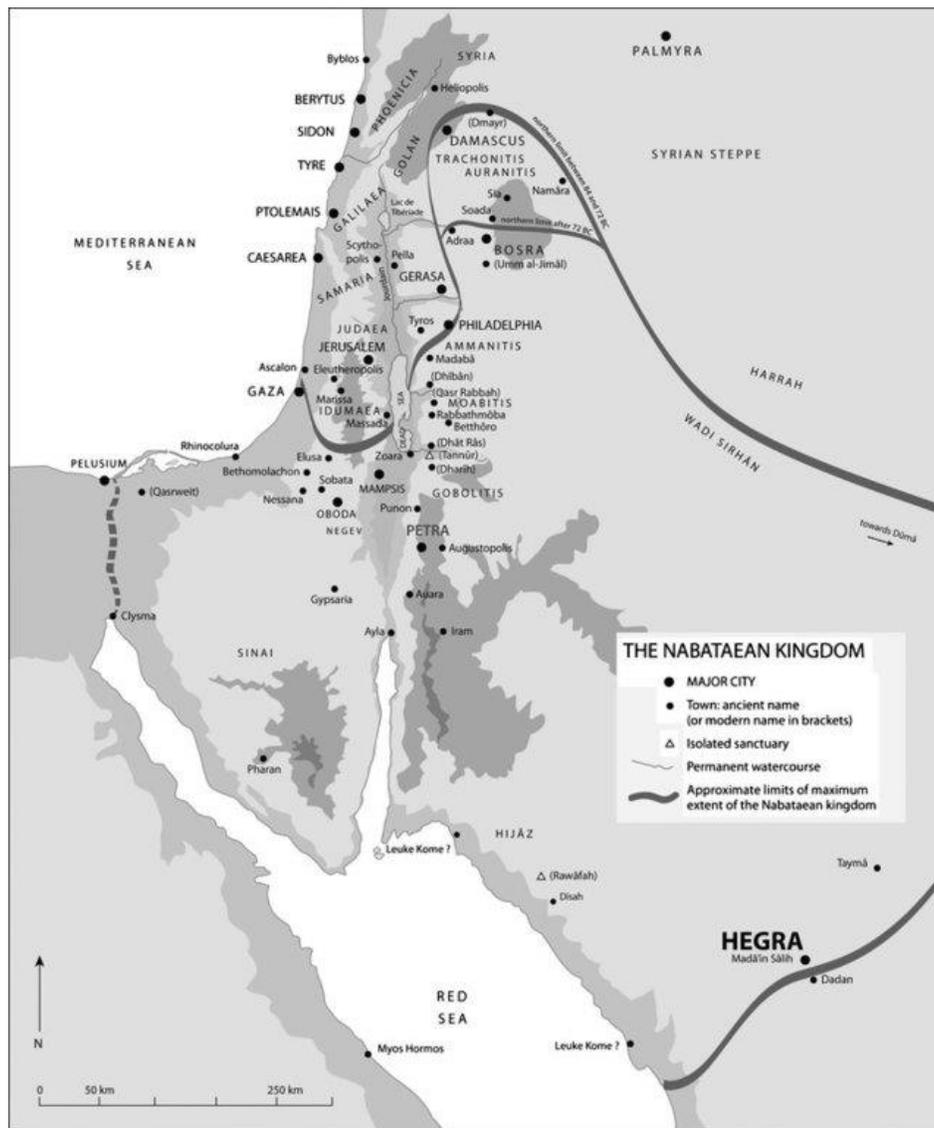


Figure 7. A map of the Nabataean Kingdom, showing Khirbet et-Tannur temple as isolated sanctuary (Bouchaud and others 2015: Figure 1).

Housing the deity's statues, with being similar to the Mesopotamian Ziggurat in having holy of holies to keep the statues of deities and being on high places, the worshippers were in direct contact with the planet deities, particularly the Sun god and the Moon goddess, the main players in the fertility process. The worshippers were also witnessing the natural and cosmic changes made by different deities, and receiving the sacred rain water which gives life, prosperity and protection to humans and earth. Finding the zodiac high relief statue at the site insures the relation of the site to the planets' deities.

The architectural plan of the temple is reflected on how the worshippers used to practice their rituals. For example, the middle part of the temple included an altar and a passage around for circumambulation rite (Figs. 8, 9 & 10) (El-Khoury, 2006-2007, 335). The inner enclosure at the temple was unroofed, rain water was collected and then used as holy water for purification in religious rituals. Furthermore, the evidence of sacrificing is evidently clear at the site (McKenzie and others, 2002 a, b, 2003; El-Khoury, 2006-2007, 330, 333).

Outside the sanctuary, other features included a small cistern and rock-cut sections of the pathway leading to the temple. Being isolated on a summit, this evokes the image of a religious 'high-place' (Alpass 2011, 243). The full plan of the sanctuary is essentially a rectangular temenos, colonnaded on both sides, containing a roughly square altar enclosure in its western end. Both areas were open to the air, as indicated by the sloping pavements and channels to aid drainage. The walls of the inner altar enclosure were the highest point of the temple. Whatever cult practices that occurred at Tannur Temple, these were conducted in the open air (Alpass 2011, 245). Along the north and south sides were a series of rooms with access from the courtyard (Fig. 8). Benches surrounding a number of these rooms show that they were used as triclinia, a feature widely spread in Nabataea's sanctuaries (Alpass 2011, 245). McKenzie et. al. suggested that one of the rooms may have been a staircase, indicating the possibility of rituals being performed on the roof (2002, 71).



Figure 8. Khirbet et-Tannur, looing south-west towards the inner Temenos enclosure (Whiting & Wellman, 2016, Pl.16, P.12)

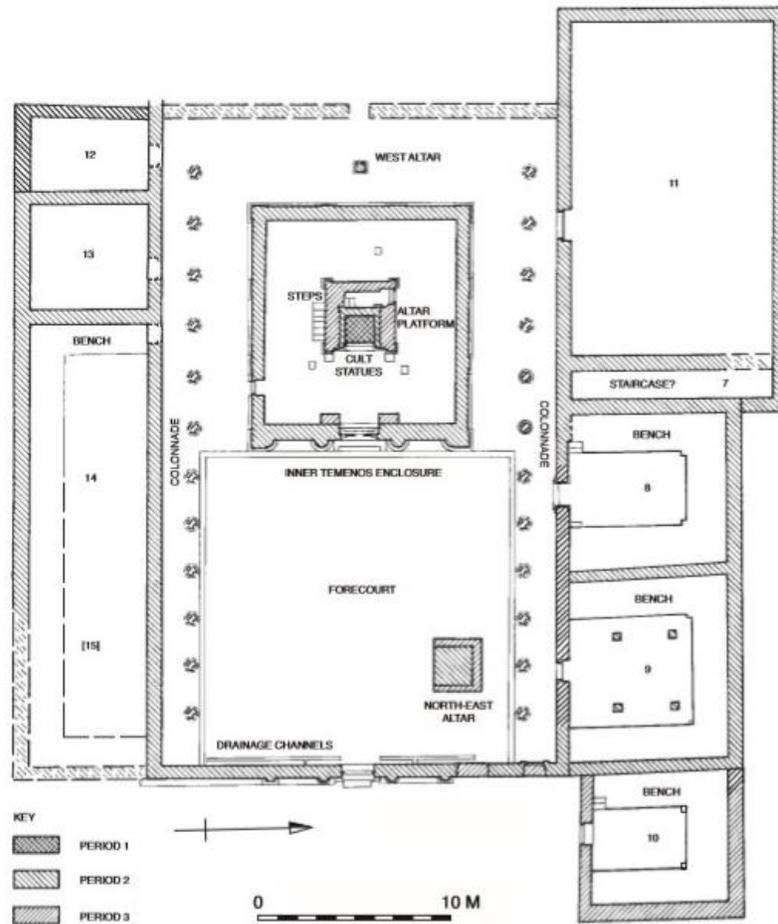


Figure 9. Plan of Khirbet et-Tannur Temple (Whiting & Wellman, 2016, Pl.17, P.13)



Figure 10. Inner Temenos Enclosure and Altar Platform (Whiting & Wellman, 2016, Pl.24, P.17)

3. THE TIME OF NABATAEAN FERTILITY CEREMONIES

The celebration by the Nabataeans in fertility ceremonies, as related to cyclic sacred seasons, gives indications on times dedicated for a special kind of sacrifices, or festival celebrations. Glueck, in his

analysis of the iconography of the Et-Tannur zodiac panel, in which he found the unusual order of the months, suggested two "New Year" festivals celebrated by the Nabateans. One in spring, the time of harvest, and one in fall, the time of ploughing, sowing and planting (Glueck 1970, 231). Two Nabataean inscriptions dedicated to Dushara-A'ra were dated in

the month of Nisan, which indicated a spring festival (Healy 2001, 169-175). It is known that the Nabataeans held annual meetings at Petra and Elusa as early as the fourth century BC (Diodorus Siculus XIX, 95. 1-2). It is possible that such meetings were also held at other places like Khirbet et-Tannur temple. Rooms adjacent to the Nabataean temples, were most probably places where ritual meals were held and offered to be eaten afterwards by the worshippers (Glueck 1965 166-190, el-Khoury 2007: 87). The word 'marzaha' was mentioned in Nabataean inscriptions and was understood as a type of religious festival, symposium, ceremony, ritual feasting societies or act in the Nabataean halls (the triclinia and biclinia), (Healey 2001, 165-169; el-Khoury 2007: 87; Sachet 2010: 249-262; Al-Salameen and Falahatt 2012). Different classes of people must have participated in these ceremonies, there were normal people who were seeking for deities' blessings in their daily and afterlife, while the elites and high court people were seeking for victories and more blessings; and of course, the main players in these rituals were the priests and musicians, number of terracotta figurines representing group of musicians, have been discovered at Petra (Khairy 1990, Figure 27: 9). These figurines insure the main part played by the musicians, as bands or singles and as males and females in Nabataean religious rituals, they participate in performing the religious hymns and prayers. It is also known from some historic sources, that royal family participated in these religious ceremonies to gain dignity, honor, and legality. These practices gave holiness not only to the event, but also to the site.

4. THE MAIN COUPLE ACTORS OF NABATAEAN FERTILITY MYTH

The Nabataean fertility myth was always presented and performed by the worshippers in front of the deity couple, the god Dushares / Baalshamin and the goddess al-Uzza / Allat / Atargatis (Fig. 18. e). The Nabataeans once settled on the land, accepted the current Syro-Palestinian chief deities into their own religious pantheon (see the introduction), as a consort for their native deity, Dushares or Baalshamin, and Atargatis who was the reigning fertility goddess throughout the area (Hammond 1973: 96). So, Atargatis and Baalshamin have been identified by scholars as being 'foreign' introductions to the Nabataeans (McKenzie 2001, 109; Alpass 2011, 70). This goddess may have been worshiped by the Nabataeans by the name of Allat, the native Arab goddess, as Hammond mentioned later in some of his

research (Hammond 1990: 123-124). The cult of this goddess appears to be essentially similar to the cult of fertility goddesses in other cultures (Fig. 11. a & b). Al-Uzza was equated occasionally with the Syrian Atargatis, who in turn was linked with Ashtart in Mesopotamia, Isis in Egypt, Aphrodite and Demeter in Greece, Cybele in Anatolia, and Venus in Rome (el-Khoury 2007: 82).



Figure 11. a. A relief of enthroned Atargatis with a lion, Palmyra <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35720366>



Figure 11. b. A relief of enthroned Atargatis with two lions, Palmyra.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35720366>

The cult statues of Baalshamin and Atargatis were discovered during the excavations of Khirbet et-Tannur site in 1937, under the direction of Nelson

Glueck (Figs. 16, 17 & 18. e), according to an inscription found on a stele on the site; Glueck gave the name Qōs to the male statue (1937, 1965; McKenzie et al. 2013). Healey added 'Dushara' to the name, suggesting that Tannur was "dedicated to 'Qōs-Dushara' as a supreme deity with international claims" (2001, 140). McKenzie follows Healey, stating that "the male cult statue... could represent the god of the sanctuary dedicated to a version of Qos-Dushara, in the form of Zeus-Hadad" (2002, 469). Healey thought that Allat or Al-'Uzza would fit well alongside his Qos-Dushara (2001, 61). Even with any preferred candidate, the writers of this article think that the representations of these statues are for the Syrian origin deities: Baalshamin and Atargatis for these reasons; first, because both deities were mentioned in Nabataean inscriptions and worshiped by them. Second, both statues appeared in the same pose and attributes (Fig. 18. e) of the statues discovered in Manbij/Syria where the cult of them is well attested there. The male statues of Baalshamin, the lord of deities as one of the Nabataean inscriptions described him, was the god of storm, thunderbolt, lightning and rain; this was indicated by a thunderbolt mace held in his left hand and the bulls' statues on the two sides of him). While the female depicted his consort, Atargatis (al-Uzza in Petra or Allat elsewhere) (McKenzie 2003: 186) identified by her guardian lions on either side of her statue (Fig. 18. a - e). This group of deities, as represented in the temple of Khirbet et-Tannur, makes clear that the Nabataeans tried to control the natural elements, amongst them was the weather, this was by worshipping fertility deities, and carving them on the temple reliefs. These gods in Nabataean belief, were thought to have the power to influence and control the cycle of life; they controlled the weather, and ensured the growth of crops (el-Khoury, 2007, 82). Both Baalshamin and Atargatis were ornamented with twisted torques and lion's heads around their necks (Glueck 1965, 265-284; Almasri et al., 2012). Wearing jewelry was a common practice in ancient orient cultures, reflecting both divinity, immortal nature, dignity and honor. Atargatis was popular among Arab cultures, such as Palmyra in Syria (Fig. 11. a, b) and in Hatran in Iraq. Two impressive representation of Atargatis (Fig. 11, c) should be mentioned here, in one of them she was depicted enthroned upon two lions with an eagle above her head, which resembles the examples from Khirbet et-Tannur (the relief statue of Atargatis). She also appeared seated on a throne, and crowned with a scepter in her right hand. She was wearing a necklace as yet another sign of divinity. An

eagle is standing on the left arm of the throne (Safar & Mustafa: 1974, 175, 190). A very similar work of art was found at Dura-Europos in Syria (Millar 1993, 245) (Fig. 11. d), where Atargatis appeared enthroned with two lions siding her, while Hadad, was also enthroned on two bulls (Fig. 11. e).



Figure 11. c. A relief Panel of Nergal and enthroned Atargatis with two lions, Hatra (Dirven 2013: Figure 7).



Figure 11. d. Drawing of a relief of Atargatis enthroned with two lions (on the right), on the left is the god Hadad with a bull, Dura-Europos. Yale University Art Gallery (Stuckey 2009: 4).



Figure 11. e. Drawing of a relief of Atargatis and her consort. Roman, source unknown (Stuckey 2009: 3).

It's worth here to mention that Atargatis was originally worshipped at Manbij in northern Syria, her temple still exists in the city which was called by the

Greeks as Hierapolis. Another base-relief sculpture of basalt was uncovered at Manbij or Hierapolis, it was of a High Priest worshipping Atargatis and her consort Hadad or Baalshamin (Fig. 18. a) (Millar 1993, 242-245). In the Roman period, coins minted in the city were stamped on the obverse with the name of the Emperor, and on the reverse with the Syrian Goddess of Hierapolis with her consort other coins minted in later periods had shown the goddess seated on a throne, with a lion standing on each side (Figs. 16, 17) (Millar, 1993, 243; Butcher 2007, Figs. 6, 10, 11. a, b, c), these were similar to her statues with her consort Baalshamin, the lord of heaven found in Khirbet et-Tannur. In addition to mentioning Atargatis name in Nabataean inscriptions, several temples and sanctuaries along the trade route from Petra to Syria and Mesopotamia were also dedicated to Atargatis, such as those located in *Hauran, es-Suweda and Gebel ed-Druz* (Lindner and Zangenberg 1993).



Figure 16. Civic bronze coin of Hierapolis, from the reign of Severus Alexander (AD 222-235). Obverse: bust of Alexander. Reverse: Atargatis seated right on throne flanked by lions, wearing cylindrical head dress and holding drum (Butcher, 2007, Figure 6).

This goddess had other different representations in the sculptures of Khirbet et-Tannur (Figs. 17, 18. a, b), one was in the form of a sea-goddess crowned by dolphins or fish (Glueck 1965, Pls. 1-2); another was as a mother of the earth and the power behind crops, as she was crowned by grain spikes (1965, Pls. 25-26); and as a sky goddess crowned by an eagle, acanthus

leaves, figs, pomegranates, vine leaves and rosettes (Glueck, 1965, Pls. 31-32). All of these may be representations of the Nabataean goddess al-Uzza/Atargatis, encompassing the earth, the sky and the sea in the powerful goddess of the temple (Glueck, 1965, 459-92; el-Khoury, 2007, 82).



Figure 17. Detail of the reverse of silver tetradrachm of Caracalla, sole reign, AD 212-217. Eagle, with wings spread, lion walking right between eagle's legs; above, image of the Syrian Gods: Hadad (on left), seated on throne, facing, between two bulls, wearing tall head dress, sceptre in left hand and uncertain object in right; Atargatis (on right), seated on throne, facing, between two lions, holding scepter in left hand and distaff in right; between them, an ensign topped by a triangular pediment-like structure with long pennants hanging from it, at the summit of which is a bird (Butcher 2007, Figure 6).

All the symbols appeared with Atargatis statues in Khirbet et-Tannur temple such as the fish, grain spikes, eagle, acanthus leaves, fig, pomegranate, vine leaves and rosettes (Fig. 18. e) are signs of plenty, fertility, renovation and rebirth. They serve to underscore the phenomenon of birth and ripening (Glueck, 1965, 291). Fig was a sign of peace and prosperity (Stewart 1998, 166), and because the fig tree lasts for a long time, it can be viewed as a sign of life and immortality. The wide number of seeds inside the fig and pomegranate fruits can be seen as a symbol of fertility. The rose is a sacred symbol of goddesses everywhere and was particularly adopted by the prostitute priestesses of Venus in Roman times (Stewart 1998, 366). Since it was associated with the spring season, it symbolized regeneration and rebirth. And from the interlaced and circular shape, the vine leaves are considered to be a symbol of eternal life.

One of the main features reflecting fertility is the bare breasts of Atargatis, she appeared covering the body, part of the face, neck and the rest of the bust

with acanthus leaves, while leaving the breasts uncovered, making it the visual focal point and of the entire focus in terms meaning. It directs attention to this sacred source of giving and ensuring life.

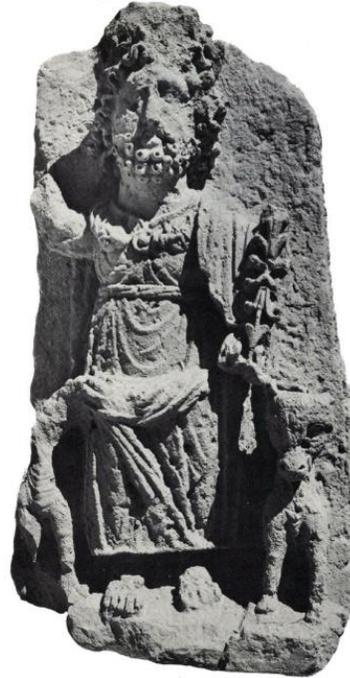


Figure 18. a. High relief statue of Baalshamin, Kherbit et-Tannur. Cincinnati Art Museum. (Glueck, 1965).

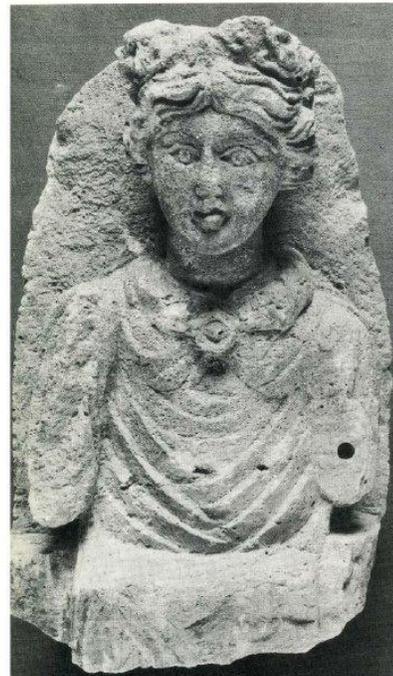


Figure 18. b. High relief statue of Atargatis, Kherbit et-Tannur (Glueck, 1965)



Figure 18. c. High relief of a lion, guard of Allat/al-Uzza/Atargatis, Kherbit et-Tannur (Glueck, 1965)

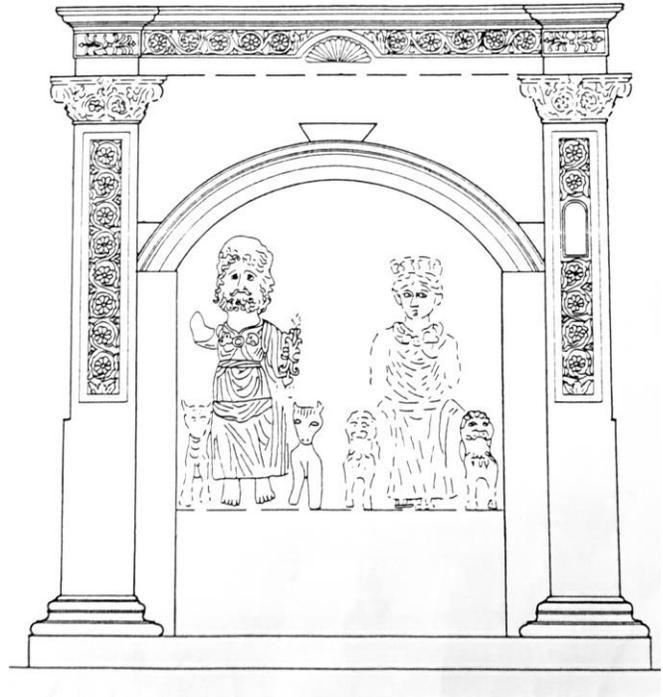


Figure 18. d. Drawing the statues of Baalshamin with his consort Atargatis inside a niche of Period II altar. Kherbet et-Tannur (Mckenzie 3003, figure 179).



Figure 18. e. Atargatis Panel, Kherbit et-Tannur, The Jordan Museum in downtown Amman (photo by Eyad Almasri).

Apparently, Atargatis assumed many forms, and played many roles as a goddess worshiped by Nabataeans, as a grain or wheat goddess, a vegetation goddess, a guardian goddess, a fish goddess, and a zodiac goddess (Glueck, 1965, 472). Some scholars think that the fish and wheat goddess are representations of

Virgo and Pisces (Alpass, 2011, 264). Atargatis in her statues and roles are connected in one way or another with the Syrian goddess Atargatis, and the Egyptian goddess Isis (Lyttelton, 1990, 19-29), and Allatt (Milik, 1982, 262), which makes her a chief among the gods in the temple and Nabataean religion.

In addition to the statues from et-Tannur site, a relief of the head of Atargatis and a wide array of terracotta figurines were discovered in the Petra (Lyttelton & Blagg, 1990, Pl. 9; Horsfield & Conway, 1942, 161, Pl. XXX, 257, 258; Parr, 1990, 85, Figures 3,5; Parlasca, 1990, Pl. 1. 1, 2; Schmitt-Korte, 1976, Pl. 26). Atargatis appeared nude in some of these figurines, raising her right hand in the gesture of blessing and ornamented with different types of jewelry. The nudity may reflect her role in fertility, while jewelry was reflecting her divinity. The extensive use of these symbols in the Atargatis statues reflects a variety of religious concepts. Not only is the fertility aspect of the goddess highlighted, but there was also clear reference to the concepts of after-life, revival and protection. Furthermore, the appearance of other symbols in other Atargatis statues found at the site, like the zodiac, revealed the cosmic power of the goddess and her relations to time, seasons and the future of humans.

Baalshamin, lord of heaven, protector of nature, and guarantor of fertility, is one of the deities worshipped by the Nabataeans and other ancient Arab Kingdoms like Palmyra (Fig. 19. a). He was popular in ancient Syria as a sky god, one might have expected him to be identified with Dushara (Healy, 2001, 126). His name is attested in a number of texts found north and south

of the Nabataean kingdom (Al-Salameen, 2014, 66). Few inscriptions were dedicated to him in the southern part of Nabataean Kingdom, contrary to the northern part, where he was more popular. The inscription "lord of the world" from Hegra may refer to Baalshamin as Teixidor suggested (1977, 84-85). Another Nabataean inscription, however, seems to associate him strongly with the royal family (Alpass 2011, 70). A group of inscriptions were found in Hawran, these commemorated dedications made by a tribe "to their god Baalshamin" (Littmann, 1914, No. 11). Similar inscriptions were found in Bosra, Salkhad, al-Mṣayfra and from Si'a (Al-Salameen 2014, 67). In Si'a, the text commemorated the construction of a temple to Baalshamin, which is dated to the period (33-12 B.C.) (Littmann, 1914, No. 100). This reflects the high status of the god since the temples were built for him. A fragment of sculpture in high relief from the temple in the sanctuary of Si'a was dedicated to this god, placed at the center of the lintel over the main gate of the temple, this head of a beardless young man crowned with rays was interpreted as a representation of the sun god or of Baalshamin himself (Fig. 19. b) (<https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/part-lintel-head-god>).



Figure 19. a. Limestone bas-relief dedicated by Ba'alay to Bel, Baalshamin, Yarhibol, and Aglibol. Limestone, dated January 121 CE. Palmyra, Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon, France (<https://brewminate.com/temples-tombs-and-funerary-portraiture-of-ancient-palmyra/>).



Figure 19. b. A high relief head, temple of Baalshamin, Si'a. (<https://www.louvre.fr/en/mediaimages/element-de-linteaute-de-dieu>).

5. FERTILITY RITES AND RITUALS PERFORMED IN KHIRBET RT-TANNUR SITE

Very scarce information about Nabataean religious rites and rituals reached us. According to the historian Strabo in his writing about their feasts: 'They prepare common meals together in groups of thirteen persons; and they have two girl singers for each banquet. The king holds many drinking-bouts in magnificent style, but no one drinks more than eleven cupfuls, each time using a different golden cup' (Strab. 7.16.4). According to this text, we can conclude some facts about Nabataean religious rituals: First, these were group and common ceremonies with the participation of the king who is serving his people. Second, males and females participated in them. Third, performing of music and songs was part of these ceremonies. Fourth, drinking and eating were essential in these sacred events. And fifth, the use of cups made of gold, the precious metal, reflects the holiness and significance of these ceremonies. In the writings of Lucian of Samosata about the Syrian goddess Atargatis, dated to the 2nd century CE (Attridge and Oden 1976; Meyer 1987: 130-141), he wrote in Greek about his visit to the great temple at Hieropolis, a walled sanctuary on a hill in the center of the city. Lucian identified Atargatis with the Greek goddess Hera, but he also connected her to several other goddesses, for instance, Rhea (Cybele), Athena, Artemis, and Aphrodite (Stuckey 2009: 3). Lucian described the temple's numerous cult objects and statues, the multitude of its priests, and the various rituals celebrated there. Twice a day there were sacrifices to Hadad being performed in silence, while to those Atargatis were accompanied by flute

playing and rattle shaking. In one rite, young men castrated themselves to become cross-dressing priests at the temple (Attridge & Oden, 1976, 23, 37, 39, 55). There was also a lake or a pond nearby, full of sacred fish which no one could eat; nor could anyone eat Atargatis' sacred doves (Stuckey, 2009, 3).

Having information from this source is relevant, because both temples Hieropolis and Kherbith et-Tannur are dated almost to the same periods, both dedicated to the couple of fertility, in addition to that, both have close representation of deities iconography and attributes. The similarities between the two temples are clearer also in different aspects such as: building both sanctuaries above a hilltop, a high place that was suitable for deity's high status. The existence of water sources beside both of them and also the numerous number of cult statues found; all these similarities lead us to assume that the fertility religious rituals in both sanctuaries were very close. It seems that the water installations were specific structural features deemed necessary by the Nabataeans to be included in their sanctuaries. Water-holding devices included: cisterns, libation pools, basins, or water channels (Rymond, 2008, 105). This may force the conclusion that water played a major role in the Nabataean religion and rituals (Almasri and Alawneh, 2018, 75). The connection between Atargatis and water is clear not only in Kherbit et-Tannur but also in other sites such Hieropolis and Duro-Europos. It seems that the goddess was guardian of the springs and the nearby river (Stuckey, 2009, 4).

The ritual use of water for purification was practiced (MacDonald, 2006). In some niches, water was directed over betyl via a drain leading out of a basin in the rock platform. The connection of basins with tomb complexes, usually in its entrances (Wadeson, 2011, 7- 8), may suggest the role of ritual purification upon entering the sacred space of the tomb's property. Nabataeans used water, which was sacred, in their religious rituals. This theory can be supported from the wide water installations connected with tombs, temples and niches in Petra, and also because the cult of their main god Dushara is associated with the importance of the holy water collected from the mountains of Petra (El-Khoury, 2006-2007, 328, 239, 330).

Group of musicians, terracotta figurine, Petra (Khairy 1990, Figure 27: 9).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Nabataean fertility mythology is well represented in Khirbet et-Tannur temple by the union of the

goddess Atargatis and her consort, the god Baalshamin. It was celebrated in special occasions, like in the beginning of winter when the rain fertile the land or/and in the beginning of spring, when the earth become green and gives its birth. This sacred marriage between the two deities gives life not only to the plants but also to animals and humans, she is the natural cause which supplies the beginnings and seeds of everything. She is in this case, the source of renovation, plenty, prosperity, fertility and blessings.

Baalshamin and Atargatis played an important role in Nabataean religious life. Wide number of evidences have been uncovered in Petra and other sites, such as idols, inscriptions and temples. One of these temples is Khirber et-Tannur dedicated to worship her with her consort Baalshamin. A wide number of Atargatis statues have been found in the site representing her roles as grain or wheat, a vegetation, a guardian, a fish, and a zodiac goddess. While the couple appeared in two statues beside each other, she is sitting on her throne with two lions guarding her and reflecting her power, while her consort Baalshamin, is sitting on his throne, holding the sign of thunderbolt with two bulls in either side to reflect the god power and his role in

fertilizing the earth and controlling the thunderbolt, rain and wind (Fig. 18. c, d, e). In this case we can assume that the sky as a source of rain is presented here by the god Baalshamin, while the earth as a source of birth is presented by the goddess Atargatis.

The Nabataean fertility rituals may include purification using a sacred water, sacrificing, making offerings and praying to deities, pouring libations on their idols, circumambulation around altars inside temples and burning frankincense for their deities and to get rid of bad spirits. They also participated in sacred processions through.

This can be simply linked to the death of Baal and reign of Mot, and then after the defeat of Mot and Baal ruling again. A kind of fertility ritual ceremony was practiced by the Nabataeans who gathered as pilgrimages in special occasions at Khirbet et-Tannur site where there were: the open air, high place and isolated temple, to revive this yearly cycle religious ceremony. The beginning of winter season when the rain starts to fall to water the earth, and the beginning of spring season when the land become green as a sign of giving birth are suitable times for such fertility religious ceremonies.

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