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Water and Religious Life in the Roman Near East.
Gods, Spaces and Patterns of Worship

Eris Kathlyn Laura Williams-Reed

A thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Classics and Ancient History

Durham University

2018

Acknowledgments

It is a joy to recall the many people who, each in their own way, made this thesis possible. Firstly, I owe a great deal of thanks to my supervisor, Ted Kaizer, for his support and encouragement throughout my doctorate, as well as my undergraduate and postgraduate studies. I thank him wholeheartedly for sharing with me his knowledge of and enthusiasm for both the Roman Near East and *The Roman Near East*. I also extend my thanks to my secondary supervisors, Andrej Petrovic and James Corke-Webster, for engaging with my work and asking me challenging questions that rightfully stayed with me throughout this process. I would also like to thank here Jennifer Ingleheart for her support and tenacity as Director of Postgraduate Research. Finally, with fondness, I thank Anna Leone for introducing me to the region as an undergraduate and continuing to be a source of encouragement long after.

I would also like to thank several people for engaging so readily with my work and sharing their own research with me: Lucinda Dirven, Rubina Raja, Kevin Butcher, Dominic DalGLISH, Esther Eidinow, Jaś Elsner, Margherita Facella, Ben Isaac, Robin Lane Fox, Stefanie Lenk, Michael Macdonald, Nicholas Purcell, Josephine Quinn, Veronica Strang and Olivia Webster. Many students of the Roman Near East are also, in one way or another, indebted to Fergus Millar and I am no exception: I warmly thank him for the discussions we have shared. It is also a pleasure to thank Arthur Segal for inviting me into his home during a visit to Israel and sharing his passion for the region's architecture with me. Here too I would like to remember Tony Wilkinson, who introduced me to the importance of landscape as an undergraduate and reminded me of it during the early phases of my doctorate.

Likewise, it is a pleasure to thank several people connected to the Department of Classics and Ancient History for their encouragement and interest in my research: above all, Justine T. Wolfenden and Mark Woolmer, as well as Thorsten Fögen, Ivana Petrovic, Kathryn Stevens and Edmund Thomas. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Department's administrative staff, especially Viv Arbia, for their support and assistance throughout my time at Durham. I would also like to thank here the staff of Durham University Library, particularly James Bisset for ensuring that the Postgraduate Research

Room continues to exist; Richard Holmes for purchasing countless books over the years; Judith Walton for sourcing obscure literature via the Document Delivery Service; and Gary Cheek for good company. I also extend my thanks to Durham University's Counselling Service and Disability Support Office.

I also acknowledge the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose provision of a doctoral scholarship made this thesis possible, and it is a pleasure to express my gratitude to the departmental Research Committee who nominated me for it. I have also been very fortunate to receive financial assistance from several funding bodies, whose support gave me the opportunity to present my work at various conferences and to conduct research visits to Oxford, Jordan and Israel. I wholeheartedly extend my thanks to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University; the John Simpson Greenwell Memorial Foundation and the Caedmon-Ceolfred Trust, College of St. Hild and St. Bede; the Stokes Fund, Department of Classics and Ancient History; the Hugh Last Fund, the Roman Society; and the British Association of Near Eastern Archaeology. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of several funding bodies that enabled myself and Stephen Humphreys to organise a conference on water and religious life in March 2016 including, the Institute of Advanced Study and the Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Durham University; the Ritual, Religion, Belief and Place Research Group, Department of Archaeology; and the Classical Association.

Finally, it is a delight to thank the friends and family who have been at my side during the course of this thesis. In particular, I thank Julia Tomas, Alison Ewins and Paula Rondon-Burgos for good company, support and kindness; and Barney Chesterton and Abi Molenaar for laughter, thoughtfulness and enduring friendship. I thank my parents – all three of them – for their love and instilling within me a passion and curiosity for the environment, each in their own way. Above all, I thank Donald MacLennan, my favourite person, and our wonderful pride of cats – one of whom is characteristically sat purring in my lap as I write this – for their love and joy, and everything in between.

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Abbreviations

<i>AAAS</i>	<i>AA(A)S: Annales archéologiques (arabes) syriennes.</i> Damascus.
<i>ADAJ</i>	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan,</i> Amman.
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i> (1972–).
<i>ARAM</i>	<i>Aram Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies,</i> Oxford.
<i>BMC Arabia</i>	Hill, G. F. 1965. <i>Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia.</i> Bologna.
<i>BMC Palestine</i>	Hill, G.F. 1963. <i>Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine (Galilee, Samaria, and Judaea).</i> Bologna.
<i>BMC Phoenicia</i>	Hill, G.F. 1980. <i>Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia.</i> Bologna.
<i>BMC Syria</i>	Wroth, W. 1899. <i>Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Galatia, Cappadocia and Syria.</i> London.
<i>BNJ</i>	<i>Brill's New Jacoby</i> (Available online at: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-jacoby)
<i>CIIP</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae</i> (2010–).
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1893–).
<i>CIS</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> (1881–).
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions</i> (1857–).
<i>DDD</i>	van der Toorn, K., Becking, B. and van der Horst, P.W. eds. 1999. <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.</i> Leiden.
<i>DNWSI</i>	Hoftijzer, J. and Jongeling, K. 1995. <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions.</i> Leiden.
<i>ECODIT</i>	<i>State & Trends of the Lebanese Environment 2010.</i> A Report Prepared by the Lebanon Ministry of Environment (MOE) / United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (Available online at: http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/environment_energy/state--trends-of-the-lebanese-environment.html).
<i>EI</i>	Daftary, F. and Madelung, W. eds. 2008. <i>Encyclopaedia Islamica.</i> Leiden.
<i>EJ</i>	Berenbaum, M. and Skolnik, F. eds. 2007. <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica.</i> Second Edition. Detroit, MI.
<i>HJP</i>	Schürer, E. 1973-1987. <i>The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC – AD 135).</i> Vols. I-II (eds.) Vermes, G. and Millar, F. Vol. III (eds.) Vermes, G., Millar, F. and Goodman, M. Edinburgh.

<i>IAGL</i>	Pococke, R. 1752. <i>Inscriptionum Antiquarum Graecarum et Latinarum Liber</i> . London.
<i>ID</i>	<i>Inscriptions de Delos</i> (1950–).
<i>IEstrOriente</i>	Canali De Rossi, F. 2004. <i>Iscrizioni dello estremo oriente greco</i> . Bonn.
<i>IGLS</i>	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i> (1929–).
<i>IGRR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes</i> (1911–).
<i>IvP</i>	<i>Die Inschriften von Pergamon</i> (1895–).
<i>KAI</i>	Donner H. and Röllig, W. 1969. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Wiesbaden.
<i>Lewis&Short</i>	Lewis, C.T. and Short, C. 1891. <i>A New Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford.
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> (1981–).
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, H.G and Scott, R. revised by Jones, H.S. 1968. <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Ninth Edition. Oxford.
<i>Mediterranean Pilot V</i>	<i>Mediterranean Pilot Volume V. Coasts of Libya, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, South coasts of Greek islands from Kríti to Ródos and Turkey with the island of Cyprus</i> . 2005. Ninth Edition. Published by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office.
<i>NEAEHL</i>	Stern, E. 1993-2008. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Jerusalem.
<i>PAAE</i>	<i>Atlas Archéologique et Épigraphique de Pétra</i> . (2012–).
<i>PAT</i>	Hillers, D.R. and Cussini, E. 1995. <i>Palmyrene Aramaic Texts</i> . Baltimore, NJ.
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestinian Exploration Quarterly</i> , London.
<i>PGM</i>	Dieter Betz, H. 1986. <i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation</i> . Chicago, IL.
<i>Quellen</i>	Hackl, U., Jenni, H. and Schneider, C. 2003. <i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Nabatäer</i> . Freiburg.
<i>OCD</i>	Hornblower, S., Spawforth, A. and Eidinow, E. eds. 2012. <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . Fourth Edition. Oxford.
<i>OCIANA Safaitic</i>	Al-Manaser, A. and Macdonald, M.C.A. eds. <i>The OCIANA Corpus of Safaitic Inscriptions. Preliminary Edition</i> . (Available online at: http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/resources/ociana/corpora/ociana_safaitic.pdf)
<i>POxy</i>	Parsons, P. J. ed. 1974. <i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> . London.
<i>Rep</i>	Rostovtzeff, M. et al. Eds. 1929-1952. <i>The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters. Preliminary Reports</i> . New Haven, CT.

<i>RIC</i>	Mattingly, H. and Sydenham, E.A. 1986. <i>The Roman Imperial Coinage. Vol. 2: Vespasian to Hadrian</i> . London.
<i>RPC</i>	<i>Roman Provincial Coinage</i> (1992–).
<i>RPC Online</i>	<i>Roman Provincial Coinage Online</i> (2006–). (Available online at: http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/).
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> (1923–).
<i>SHAJ</i>	<i>Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan</i> , Amman.
<i>SNG Copenhagen</i>	<i>Sylloge nummorum Graecorum. The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Danish National Museum</i> . Copenhagen (1945–).
<i>Tübinger</i>	Abdusalam, A., Denk, W. and Stöhr, V. 1983. <i>Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Sonderforschungsbereich 19</i> . Tübingen.
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i> , Wiesbaden.

Conventions

Where ancient languages are quoted, the following conventions are used: texts composed in Latin and Greek are presented in their own scripts; Aramaic dialects – Nabataean, Palmyrene and Hatrean – are transliterated into lower case Latin alphabet; and Safaitic follows the particular transliteration format presented in *OCIANA Safaitic*. Certain Greek terms are transliterated using the Latin alphabet; and the majority of Greek names are Latinised, e.g. Seleucia, not Seleukia. A key exception is divine names, which are directly transliterated using the Latin alphabet, e.g. Zeus Kasios, not Zeus Casius.

Unless indicated otherwise, Loeb translations are used for Greek and Latin sources. A key exception – that is not signalled throughout the main text – is Lucian’s *On the Syrian Goddess*, for which the translation of J.L. Lightfoot (2003) is used. Abbreviations used to indicate works of ancient literature follow those listed in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2012). For Christian literature that is not widely available, the edition consulted is cited in the text wherever possible.

Geographical features are identified by their modern Arabic names – thus, Jebel (mountain), Nahr (river), Ain (spring) and *wadi* (seasonal water course) – unless an ancient designation is more well-known in anglophone scholarship, e.g. the River Orontes (Nahr Aasi), Mount Lebanon (Jebel Sheikh) or the Efqa Spring (Ain Efqa). In light of the ongoing conflict in the region, efforts have been made to indicate the current or last-known location of any material remains discussed at the length in the study, although it has not been possible to do so comprehensively.

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(© author)

Chapter One: Introduction

There is another marvel in Byblian territory. A river from Mount Lebanon discharges into the sea, and the river's name is Adonis. Each year the river grows bloody and, losing its normal hue, flows into the sea and incarnadines the greater part of it, signalling the rituals of mourning to the Byblians. The story is that on these days Adonis is wounded on Lebanon, and the blood that reaches the water changes the colour of the river and gives the stream its name. This is what most of them say. But a certain Byblian who seemed to be telling the truth gave another explanation. His account was this: "The river Adonis, stranger, passes through Lebanon, and Lebanon has very yellow soil. Strong winds which arise on those days carry the earth, which is red in the highest degree, into the river, and it is the earth that makes it bloody. So, the reason for the phenomenon is not the blood, as they say, but the terrain." So said the man of Byblos; but even if what he said was right, the wind's timing seemed to me to be miraculous indeed.¹

Lucian's description of the religious traditions associated with the River Adonis takes us to the heart of this study's fundamental claim: that the religious communities of the Roman Near East engaged critically with water in the development of their traditions and practices, and that the nature of this engagement was directly influenced by local environmental conditions. Indeed, the conclusion of this passage suggests that environmental and religious explanations for natural phenomena were not necessarily mutually exclusive, as Lucian regards the appearance of the wind that allegedly incarnadined the river to be miraculous

¹ *Syr. D.* 8: "Ἐνὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο θωῦμα ἐν τῇ χώρῃ τῇ Βυβλίῃ· ποταμὸς ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου τοῦ οὖρεος ἐς τὴν ἄλα ἐκδιδότ' οὖνομα τῷ ποταμῷ Ἄδωνις ἐπικέεται. ὁ δὲ ποταμὸς ἐκάστου ἔτεος αἰμάσσεται καὶ τὴν χροιάν ὀλέσας ἐσπίπτει ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ φοινίσσει τὸ πολλὸν τοῦ πελάγεος καὶ σημαίνει τοῖς Βυβλίοις τὰ πένθεα. μυθεόνται δὲ ὅτι ταύτησι τῆσι ἡμέρησιν ὁ Ἄδωνις ἀνὰ τὸν Λίβανον τιτρώσκεται, καὶ τὸ αἶμα ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ ἐρχόμενον ἀλλάσσει τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ τῷ ῥόφῳ τὴν ἐπωνυμίην διδοῖ. ταῦτα μὲν οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν. ἐμοὶ δὲ τις ἀνὴρ Βύβλιος ἀληθέα δοκέων λέγειν ἐτέρηγ ἀπηγέετο τοῦ πάθεος αἰτίην. ἔλεγεν δὲ ὧδε· "ὁ Ἄδωνις ὁ ποταμὸς, ὃ ξεῖνε, διὰ τοῦ Λιβάνου ἔρχεται· ὁ δὲ Λίβανος κάρτα ξανθόγεός ἐστιν. ἄνεμοι ὧν τρηχέες ἐκείνησι τῆσιν ἡμέρησιν ἰστάμενοι τὴν γῆν τῷ ποταμῷ ἐπιφέρουσιν ἐοῦσαν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα μιτώδεα, ἡ δὲ γῆ μιν αἰμάδεα τίθησιν· καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ πάθεος οὐ τὸ αἶμα, τὸ λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' ἡ χώρη αἰτίη." ὁ μὲν μοι Βύβλιος τοσάδε ἀπηγέετο· εἰ δὲ ἀτρεκέως ταῦτα ἔλεγεν, ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ κάρτα θείη καὶ τοῦ ἀνέμου ἡ συντυχίη.

nonetheless.² Moreover, the passage and its context – the subject of our discussion in **2.2** – shine light on the different spheres of religious life with which water might intersect. The reddening of the river is explained by the Byblians with reference to Adonis’ mythological death, a process of characterisation informed by the local riverine landscape. We learn elsewhere that Adonis had a temple in Aphaca at the source of his river, a sacred space that was purposely established alongside a significant body of water.³ And the religious community at Byblos performed certain cultic activities in response to the river’s changing colour, a pattern of worship conducted with reference to the local environment. These three aspects of religious life – the characterisation of gods, the organisation of sacred spaces and the development of patterns of worship – and the ways in which they intersected with water will form the basis of this study.

This passage also provides an anchor around which we can discuss two key issues facing this study. Firstly, previous scholarship has often sought to understand Adonis’ cult at Byblos – as described by Lucian and evidenced by other material – from a cultural perspective by analysing aspects of his Byblian reverence in relation to his cult elsewhere in the ancient world.⁴ Accordingly, such studies have often overlooked the role of the natural environment in the development of his cult at Byblos and further afield. Yet, as Lucian himself indicates, the river was a fundamental component of Adonis’ Byblian cult, such that neglecting the role of water is to neglect a core aspect of religious life at Byblos. Indeed, an attitude of indifference towards water manifests throughout scholarship on religious life in the Roman Near East, a topic that will be discussed fully in **1.2**. Secondly,

² Lucian’s use of θεῖος underlines the potential divinity of this miraculous occurrence, as the term most commonly describes something originating ‘from the gods’ – cf. e.g. *Odyssey* (4.691) and Herodotus (1.126.6).

³ See further **2.1**.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Soyeux (1977), Mettinger (2001: 113-154) and Bonnet (2015: 171-188).

Lucian's description calls attention to the challenges we face with regard to the material from which we might comprehend the religious traditions and practices of the region's communities. The passage appears as part of Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*, a text that constitutes both our most helpful and most challenging literary description of religious life in the Roman Near East. The material record for Adonis' cult at Byblos is likewise complicated: no archaeological or sculptural remains affirmatively bear witness to his cult in the city, and the epigraphic and numismatic record is equally elusive. Again, the challenges of the evidence-base for the region overall will receive our full attention in **1.2**.

Finally, both Lucian's description of Byblian Adonis and the difficulties we face when studying the region's religious communities in general invite us to affirm here that this study will not produce a comprehensive or definitive examination of the relationship between water and religious life in the Roman Near East. On the one hand, such a study is not possible: certain localities lack the necessary evidence from which we might comprehend their gods, spaces and patterns of worship in any meaningful level of detail. On the other hand, and more importantly, such study is not necessary: both the environments and religious communities that occupied the region defy simple synthesis. This study does not aim to provide conclusive answers to questions such as, how did the region's religious communities characterise their storm-gods, organise their spring sanctuaries, or use water in patterns of worship associated with healing, precisely because doing so would not accurately bear witness to the diversity with which the relationship between water and religious life manifested in the Roman Near East. Instead, this study will offer a focused examination of the varied interactions certain religious communities had with their local hydrological environment and, in doing so, aim to expand our understanding of the ways in which the region's worshippers characterised their gods,

organised their sacred spaces and developed patterns of worship. Accordingly, we will now outline the various environments and communities that occupied the Roman Near East.

1.1 The Roman Near East: Environments and Communities

The Roman Near East offers a compelling case-study through which to examine the relationship between water and religious life due to the variety of environments and communities it encompassed. Occupying a vast area between the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the western banks of the River Euphrates, the Near East comprises a striking variety of microclimates each defined by its proximity to different water sources (**Maps 1 and 2**). Under Roman influence and rule, the region bears witness to the flourishing of various communities whose religious traditions and practices combined a variety of Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern elements. This study does not attempt to unpick the nuances nor the significance of the interplay between the Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern components in these traditions; this is a topic that has been explored admirably by numerous studies.⁵ Instead, this section will serve to outline, in brief, the varied hydrological environments and religious communities – specifically, the *pagan* religious communities on which this study focuses principally – that occupied the sub-regions of the Roman Near East, as well as summarising the key historical developments within them.⁶ In doing so, this section will contextualise the subsequent discussions in this chapter and illustrate that the region’s diversity precipitates its suitability for the study of the relationship between water and religious life.

⁵ See below **1.2**.

⁶ The sub-regions presented here mostly mirror those designated by Fergus Millar (1993: 236-488) in his examination of the region’s communal and cultural identities. Millar’s final sub-region, ‘The Euphrates and Mesopotamia’, is not included because our own study does not examine this area in detail.

Before we begin our sub-regional survey, it is important to comment further on the geographical and temporal limits of the Roman Near East and thus establish the scope of our own enquiry. Geographically, the region was firmly defined by the Mediterranean Sea in the west and Egypt in the southwest; whilst its northern and southeastern limits stretched more loosely into the Amanus and Hijaz Mountains respectively.⁷ The Euphrates river commonly denoted the region's eastern border, although this expanded to the Tigris river and beyond on several occasions. As we will see throughout this study, this vast area includes a variety of distinctive local environments that often appear in juxtaposition to one another: for instance, the regularly snow-capped Anti-Lebanon mountains overlook the fringes of the Damascene steppe and the verdant Jordanian Highlands abruptly give way to the comparatively arid landscape around Petra. Therefore, in order to examine a variety of sites in necessary detail, our discussion will focus on the geographical nucleus of this vast area and range from Hierapolis in the north to Petra in the south and Dura-Europos in the east, although material from beyond this core area will be acknowledged where relevant.

With regards to the temporal delineation of the Roman Near East, we can draw upon several historical reference points but these chronological boundaries are similarly mutable.⁸ The creation of *provincia Syria* around 64 BC provides a firm point at which certain areas of the Near East were incorporated into the Roman Empire but some parts of region were certainly in contact with the Roman world before this date. Moreover, the new province did not encompass the entire region and it was only with the later creation of *provinciae Judaea* and *Arabia* in the first and second centuries AD that the majority of the region became part of the empire. We should also acknowledge the many kingdoms and

⁷ For a succinct summary of the region's geography, see Butcher (2003: 11-15).

⁸ Narratives of the region's chronology include Millar (1993: 27-222), Sartre (2001: 436-637), Butcher (2003: 19-78) and Ball (2016: 1-27). See also, Isaac (1992).

principalities that, despite their ostensible independence, played an important role in Rome's overall administration of the region and often expressed their loyalty to the Roman state through major building projects.⁹ Indeed, as we will see at Caesarea Maritima in **3.3**, some of these projects had a profound impact on local religious life. It is likewise arbitrary to specify a precise end-date, particularly when both political and religious changes have a bearing on this study.¹⁰ Whilst Constantine's formal recognition of the Christian Church in AD 313 is often regarded as a key turning point in the decline of paganism, its immediate impact on the religious landscape remains ambiguous. Similarly, Julian's brief revival of paganism in AD 361-363 was centred on Antioch where, as we will see in **4.2**, his activities elicited some of our most detailed descriptions of Apollo's cult at Daphne that was itself founded by Seleucus I around 300 BC. As a result, although this study will focus on religious life from the first century BC through to the fourth century AD, our discussion will also draw upon material outside these boundaries where doing so enriches our understanding of certain traditions and practices.

The Tetrapolis and Northern Syria

Northern Syria is one of the most fertile areas of the Near East due to both consistently high levels of rainfall and rich soil that can be utilised for a variety of agricultural endeavours (**Map 3**). This 'fertile crescent' curves from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean to the western bank of Euphrates and is home to the harbour of Seleucia Pieria, the city of Antioch and the cult centre of Atargatis at Hierapolis, all sites that we will examine more closely in

⁹ On Near Eastern kingdoms and principalities, see e.g. Braund (1984), Millar (1996: 111-137), Kaizer and Facella (2010) and, most recently, MacLennan (2018). On the monuments of Near Eastern dynasts in particular, see Kropp (2013).

¹⁰ Previous studies of the region have applied various end-dates: e.g. Millar (1993: 23) opts for AD 337, the year of Constantine's death; Sartre (2001: 15-16) ends his discussion in the third century AD after the sack of Palmyra and Diocletian's reorganisation of the province; and both Butcher (2003: 9) and Ball (2016: xxxv) conclude their studies in AD 636 when the Muslim Arab armies seized the region from Roman control.

this study. The area is also fed by several rivers, most notably the Orontes which flows through Antioch before discharging into the sea at Seleucia some 25km southwest. The agricultural potential of the landscape, combined with its accessibility, not only permeated the religious sphere but also made the area particularly attractive to foreign powers in antiquity. The Seleucids founded the Tetrapolis cities of Apamea and Antioch along the Orontes river valley and Laodicea and Seleucia at the coast before the area was incorporated into the Roman Empire under the initiative of Pompey. Several Roman emperors later used the Tetrapolis as a base from which to launch their eastern military campaigns and this military presence is made plain by multiple Greek and Latin inscriptions that record the construction of a large tunnel by Roman soldiers in order to divert a seasonal stream away from Seleucia.¹¹

Accordingly, a variety of material bears witness to the impact of this consistent Graeco-Roman presence on the area's religious life, a case in point being a Greek inscription detailing that the 'higher council' (πρόβουλος) of Seleucia gave permission for a statue of the Tyche of Laodicea to be erected in the Temple of Zeus Kasios on Jebel Aqra (2.3). Yet distinctively Near Eastern traditions also existed in parallel: for instance, the aforementioned Zeus Kasios was visualised on the coinage of Seleucia in aniconic form, a practice that – as we will discuss in 1.2 – was often regarded as characteristic of Near Eastern iconography. More importantly, northern Syria was home to the cult centre of Atargatis, the Syrian Goddess, whose sacred fish swiftly became regarded by Graeco-Roman authors as a definitive aspect of Near Eastern religious practice (1.2). Nevertheless, regardless of this juxtaposition of various cultural traditions, many aspects of religious life

¹¹ *IGLS* III.2: Nos. 1131-1140. One particular inscription records that work was carried out by the *legiones IV Scythica* and *XVI Flavia Firma* under Antoninus Pius (*ibid*: No. 1135). See further Millar (1993: 87-88) and Butcher (2003: 164).

in northern Syria were underpinned by the area's verdant landscape and reliable water provision. For instance, the Tyche of Antioch held vegetation in her hands and sat above the Orontes (2.1); Atargatis' cult centre featured a lake around which several cultic activities were conducted (3.4 and 4.1); and the oracular cult of Apollo at Daphne centred on an effusive spring in a thickly wooded grove (4.2). The religious communities of northern Syria thus took inspiration from the area's abundant rainfall and the fertile landscapes it created.

The Phoenician Coast and its hinterland

The relationship that the communities of the Phoenician coast and its hinterland had with water was broadly determined by their proximity to the sea and the mountains (Map 4). The coastal plain stretches from the offshore island of Arados in the north down to Tyre in the south and rises into the Lebanon Mountains in the east. Ascending the Lebanon Mountains, one eventually reaches the verdant Bekaa Valley overshadowed by the Anti-Lebanon Mountains further east. Several river valleys carve tumultuous paths down the mountains before emptying into the sea. As we will explore in 2.4, the coast was well-suited to seafaring due to reliable winds and currents, as well as multiple natural harbours around which several maritime cities developed. Whilst Graeco-Roman authors referred to the area occupied by these cities and their hinterlands as 'Phoenicia', the extent to which the inhabitants of these localities shared a common cultural identity remains contested in modern scholarship.¹² Moreover, the entire area gradually came under the direct control of the Roman state, with the coastal city of Berytos becoming a *colonia* around 15/14 BC. Testament to the impact of this political shift is the introduction of a new coin type featuring

¹² For a comprehensive discussion of the debate, see now Quinn (2017: 1-62, esp. 56-59).

the city's leading god, Poseidon, with the iconography of the so-called 'Lateran Poseidon' that adorned the harbour at Ostia (2.4).

Yet the religious traditions of the various communities along the coast largely developed in line with their maritime activities and the cultural interaction facilitated by it. A case in point is the cult of Melqart, Tyre's patron god, who had temples erected in his honour at numerous ports across the Mediterranean and later came to be equated with Herakles on account of his adventurous nature (2.4). Equally, the surrounding mountains and their river valleys also impacted upon the development of religious life in these coastal communities. As we saw at the very beginning of this study, the Byblians attributed the annual reddening of the Nahr Ibrahim to the death of Adonis in the mountains. Likewise, an extra-urban healing sanctuary at Sidon was established on the banks of the Nahr Awali in the hills outside the city where, as we will see particularly in 4.3, the religious community took advantage of the restorative natural setting. Ascending the Lebanon Mountains and reaching the Beqaa Valley, various rural communities with their own individual religious traditions also come into view, many of which reveal diverse relationships with water. For instance, a temple dedicated to Aphrodite and Adonis once stood before the sources of the Nahr Ibrahim at Aphaca (2.2); at Deir el-Qalaa in the Berytian hinterland, a Latin inscription bears witness to the cult of Mater Matuta, a goddess often associated with Leucothea who was known to rescue sailors (2.4); and a seasonal lake with a giant sinkhole captured the imagination of the religious community at Yammoune (3.4). Most importantly, many of these communities in the mountains and valleys did not operate in isolation to those along the coast: in particular, the immense sanctuary complex at Baalbek/Heliopolis in the Beqaa Valley drew visitors from across the area and the Near East more widely, not least to consult its oracle (4.2). An anonymous, undated epigram

offers a simple encapsulation of the interdependent relationship between coast and mountain: apparently, Jupiter Heliopolitanus issued an oracle threatening to punish Berytian Poseidon if he failed to return the columns lost at sea that were intended for Baalbek/Heliopolis.¹³ Therefore, in many respects, the communities of the Phoenician coast and its hinterland were influenced by their dual proximity to both the sea and mountains, and the prevailing immediacy to different types of water.

Eastern Syria Phoenice: mountain, oasis and steppe

In contrast to the communities of the Phoenician coast and its hinterland, those who occupied the vast area east of the Lebanon Mountains had a comparatively vulnerable relationship with water due to its reduced availability (**Map 5**). Travelling east from the coast, the Anti-Lebanon range descends into an increasingly arid steppe that stretches east to the Euphrates and south to the Jordanian Highlands. The sporadic incorporation of this area into *provincia Syria* – and, after AD 197, *Syria Phoenice* – is reflective of the area’s unruly geography and the administrative challenges it engendered. Nevertheless, Rome’s presence certainly pervaded many aspects of daily life, religious or otherwise. For instance, a Latin inscription carved into the rock-face above the course of the Nahr Barada close to Fijeh records a dedication to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus by a centurion who supervised repairs to the road following damage by the river;¹⁴ and a fresco preserved in the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods at Dura-Europos depicts Julius Terentius, tribune of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, performing a sacrifice before several divine figures, including the *tychai* of Palmyra and Dura accompanied by personifications of local water sources (**2.1**). Equally, religious life in some of these localities was influenced by the proximity of

¹³ *Greek Anthology* 14.75. For a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between Berytos and Baalbek/Heliopolis, see Hošek (2012: 294-474).

¹⁴ *CIL* III: Nos. 199-201. For further discussion, see Aliquot (2009: 47-48).

the Parthian Empire: a relief, once visible in the so-called ‘Temple of Bel’ at Palmyra, depicting a scene from the Babylonian myth of creation is a representative example of the permeation of religious traditions from this cultural milieu beyond the Euphrates (2.4).

However, the religious customs of many communities living in the steppe and on its fringes bear witness to a tenacious relationship with the environment underscored by the area’s limited water supply. The city of Damascus, located in a lush oasis between the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon mountains and the steppe’s edge, issued coins depicting the spring sanctuary at Fijeh, the waters of which supplied the Nahr Barada and nourished the oasis (3.2). To the northeast of Damascus, a chain of mountains stretches out into the steppe and terminates at another oasis where the city of Palmyra was founded. As we will see in 2.5 and 3.2, the Efqa Spring and its associated gods became an integral part of religious life in Palmyra precisely because the springs were essential to the city’s prosperity. By contrast, the area southwest of Damascus gives way to the barren Trachonitis and the basalt lands further east, where erratic rainfall and shallow *wadis* supported little more than nomadic pastoralism. The communities who occupied this area recorded their observations of the environment in thousands of Safaitic inscriptions, including many that lament the failure of Baalshamin’s rains (2.3). The relationship the communities of this area had with water was therefore largely dominated by a concern to obtain and maintain consistent access to water.

From Judaea to Syria Palaestina

The diverse communities of Judaea occupied a striking variety of natural landscapes, of which all had varying levels of access to different types of water (Map 6). The coast stretches from the natural bay of Akko-Ptolemais in the north down to Gaza in the south

where it then curves towards Egypt. Unlike the Phoenician coast, that of Judaea features few natural harbours and gives way to a wide, flat plain largely nourished by scant winter rains and faint *wadis*. This plain then gently rises into the well-watered Judaeian Highlands, the eastern slopes of which abruptly plunge into the Jordan Rift Valley. The River Jordan curves through the Valley, starting in the north around Caesarea Paneas at the foot of Mount Hermon and winding south through the Sea of Galilee before emptying into the Dead Sea. This diversity of landscapes also found expression through the political organisation of the area, with different communities operating under Herodian and Roman rule at various stages between the first century BC and the second century AD. Such administrative oscillation likewise resulted in changes to the religious landscape: Herod the Great initiated the construction of a new harbour and sanctuary at Caesarea Maritima (3.3); and the erection of multiple religious structures around the springs at Caesarea Paneas are attributed to several members of the Herodian dynasty (3.1). Of greatest significance however was the conspicuous juxtaposition of various communities who identified as Jewish, Christian, Greek, Roman or something else entirely, which precipitated discord on both a local and regional scale.¹⁵ Consequently, some locations became places of religious significance for multiple communities: for instance, the pools at St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem were originally used by the Jewish community, then recognised as the site of one of Jesus' miracles and later seemingly converted into a healing sanctuary in honour of Sarapis (4.3). Thus, in many respects, the communities of Judaea experienced changing religious landscapes in otherwise unchanging natural environments.

Accordingly, many aspects of religious life in Judaea were ultimately shaped by their local environmental context. For instance, Herod's investiture of a new harbour at Caesarea

¹⁵ The conflict in Judaea is discussed further in 2.1.

Maritima was prompted by the dearth of major ports along the Judaeian coast, a situation undoubtedly caused by the lack of natural anchorages (3.3); and the pools at St. Anne's probably remained in use on account of their relatively hygienic waters (4.3). Several localities also took inspiration from their local environment for the elaboration of their mythological traditions including Iope, where the dangerous reefs protruding from the sea probably legitimised the city's claim to be the setting of Perseus' mythological rescue of Andromeda from the sea monster (2.4); and Ascalon, where the unusual marshy landscape gave rise to a series of myths centring on a young woman casting herself into a lake following a shameful pregnancy (3.4). Moreover, in some cases multiple religious communities took inspiration from similar environmental circumstances: as we will encounter in 4.3, both pagan and Christian communities utilised the hot springs at Emmatha near Gadara for therapeutic purposes. The diverse local environments of Judaea thus influenced religious life across the area's equally distinctive communities.

Arabia

Turning finally to Arabia, this vast area incorporates an especially striking variety of environments and communities, the local nature of which was determined primarily by their exposure to different rainfall levels (Map 7).¹⁶ The area largely follows the course of the Jordan Rift Valley and broadly ranges from the Hauran in the north down to Petra in the south.¹⁷ In political terms, the area was intermittently claimed by the Nabataean Kingdom from the first century BC onward before being annexed in AD 106 by the Roman state and designated as *provincia Arabia*. The various communities that occupied the area

¹⁶ Millar (1993: 398) also notes that the area presents 'exceptional complexities' on account of its "strikingly different environmental and cultural zones."

¹⁷ Several towns in the northern Hijaz – a mountainous zone in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula – also came under Nabataean and Roman control during first and second centuries AD. On the religious communities of this area, see Alpass (2013: 111-149).

were therefore influenced by different cultural spheres. Thus, we encounter a Greek inscription recording the dedication of a *nymphaeum* and *temenos* to the emperor Trajan by the city of Soada-Dionysios in the Hauran;¹⁸ the reverence of Zeus Epikarpos in an extra-urban sanctuary at Gerasa (4.1); and the representation of Khirbet Tannur's storm-god in both the aniconic and frontal style (2.3).

Nevertheless, given that rainfall levels declined sharply from north to south, the various religious traditions and practices honoured by the area's multifarious communities also bear witness to different relationships with the environment. For instance, the Sanctuary of Baalshamin at Sia was located in the foothills of the Jebel Arab massif, where it enjoyed relatively high and consistent rainfall levels and fertile soil that supported various agricultural activities (2.3). Accordingly, the sanctuary was decorated with sumptuous vegetal motifs and incorporated rainfall into the space through several open-air structures. Although similar open-air structures are also found at Petra, annual precipitation levels were far lower and ancient agricultural production could only be maintained through meticulous water capture and storage. As a result, numerous religious installations were established in association with the water management infrastructure, ranging from divine figures being carved into the rock-face alongside various *wadis* through to the establishment of cultic spaces adjacent to the water channels and dams that lined the *Siq* (2.5 and 3.1). Thus, for many communities in Arabia, the relative profusion of water and its impact on the surrounding landscape influenced the development of their local religious traditions and practices.

¹⁸ *IGRR* 3: No. 1273. For further discussion and bibliography, see Bru (2011: 47-48).

This brief survey has demonstrated not only the variety of religious traditions and practices honoured by the communities who inhabited the Roman Near East but also the diversity of the environments in which these communities resided. Accordingly, these communities developed a range of different relationships with water that were primarily underscored by local environmental conditions. These relationships found expression through numerous sources of evidence, including literature, sacred architecture, inscriptions, sculpture and coinage. We will now examine the key limitations and considerations of working with this particular evidence-base and evaluate how previous scholars have used this material to comprehend religious life in the Roman Near East.

1.2 Religious Life in the Roman Near East: Sources and Scholarship

Sources

Literature

Ancient literature can reveal numerous details about religious life. Authors can narrate myths, describe iconography or discuss how worshippers perceived their gods, all factors that can be drawn upon to reconstruct divine identity. Certain accounts might include descriptions of sanctuaries and their religious installations, as well as how worshippers interacted with the space through the performance of certain patterns of worships. Yet we face two major problems when dealing with the ancient literature relating to religious life in the Roman Near East. Firstly, the majority of the extant literature was composed by individuals who were not native to the region and may have never even visited it. Secondly, the few works we do possess that were written by native authors are not without their complications and, crucially, none of them conforms to what we might regard as a canonical or doctrinal text. In other words, unlike the Graeco-Roman world, we cannot claim that the religious communities of the Roman Near East shared a common mythology or that they were united by a common literary reference point that mitigated their religious traditions and practices. As a result, we will now examine the benefits and limitations of several key texts, or groups of texts, available to us for the study of religious life in the Roman Near East.¹⁹

In the context of this study, Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* is both the richest and most complicated literary source available.²⁰ This periegetical text was likely composed in the

¹⁹ The potential implications of using literature composed by authors in the fourth century AD and later – such as Eusebius, Libanius, Nonnos and Malalas – is discussed where relevant in the main study.

²⁰ Many of these complications have been analysed in the exceptional commentary of J. L. Lightfoot (2003), a study to which the following discussion owes much. In particular, the authorship of this text was once heartily debated but Lightfoot has now established beyond reasonable doubt that it was indeed written by

mid-second century AD and purports to be an eye-witness account of the religious traditions associated with the cult-centre of the Syrian Goddess at Hierapolis, as well as the religious customs of several other sites across the region. The sanctuary was dedicated to a divine couple whose indigenous names were Atargatis and Hadad, although Lucian refers to them throughout using their Greek names, Hera and Zeus. On the face of it, the text is especially informative to our study because it testifies to the significance of water in the religious life of various localities. As we saw at the very beginning of this chapter, Lucian remarked that the Byblians regarded the reddening of the Nahr Ibrahim as indicative of Adonis' death, a matter we will explore further in **2.2**,²¹ and, as we will discuss in full in **3.4**, Lucian also describes an enormous lake at Hierapolis with various religious traditions associated with it.²² However, we must remain sensitive to the literary style of the text when we assess its evidential value as a witness to religious life in the Roman Near East. It has long been recognised that *On the Syrian Goddess* was intentionally composed in imitation of Herodotus and the periegetical genre but the extent to which the text parodies the events it describes remains debated. In her commendable analysis, J. L. Lightfoot concludes that “only a complex reading can suffice for this most complex text,” such that we need to assess the evidential value of the text as and when we draw upon it, something we will do in the most detail in **2.2** and **3.4**.²³ Central to this assessment is not only corroborating Lucian's descriptions with parallel material but also contemplating how particular comments might relate to his literary objectives. Lucian's description of Hierapolis' 'sacred fish' (ἰχθύες

Lucian of Samosata, a satirist active in the second century AD and self-professed Syrian. For further discussion and a full summary of the earlier debate, see Lightfoot (2003: 184-208). Other studies of particular aspects of the text include Oden (1977), Elsner (2001:123-153), Lightfoot (2005: 333-352) and Kaizer (2016a: 273-285).

²¹ *Syr. D.* 8.

²² *Syr. D.* 45-48.

²³ 2003: 221. For a more recent discussion of the text's evidential value, see Andrade (2013: 288-313).

ἰποί) provides an illustrative example of how we might balance both factors.²⁴ According to Lucian, the sanctuary's lake was home to many sacred fish:²⁵

Some of them are extremely large. These even have their own names and come when called. In my time there, one among them wore gold. On its fin was fastened a golden device: I often saw it, and it truly did wear that piece of jewellery.

On the one hand, we can readily verify Lucian's description by citing other material that indicates the importance of fish in the cult of the Syrian Goddess: fish-eating is one of the practices penalised according to the cultic regulations in her sanctuary at Delos;²⁶ two reliefs found beyond the Euphrates depict her seated on a throne decorated with fish;²⁷ and various Graeco-Roman authors mention lakes filled with fish in relation to her cult at Hierapolis and Ascalon, a matter we will explore in 3.4.²⁸ Yet we also need to consider the possibility that Lucian's description is a direct response to the Graeco-Roman fascination with sacred fish in Atargatis' cult: perhaps the lake at Hierapolis was indeed filled with fish but their extraordinary size, obedience and jewellery was added explicitly to mock this fascination.²⁹ In this particular case then, we might conclude from Lucian's comments that sacred fish were indeed part of Atargatis' cult at Hierapolis but we should refrain from

²⁴ For an overview of fish in Atargatis' cult, see Lightfoot (2003: 65-72).

²⁵ *Syr. D.* 45: γίνονται δὲ αὐτῶν ἔνιοι κάρτα μεγάλοι· οὗτοι δὲ καὶ οὐνόματα ἔχουσιν καὶ ἔρχονται καλεόμενοι· ἐπ' ἐμέο δὲ τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖσι χρυσοφορέων. ἐν τῇ πτέρυγι ποίημα χρύσεον αὐτέῳ ἀνακέατο, καὶ μιν ἐγὼ πολλάκις ἐθεσάμην, καὶ εἶχεν τὸ ποίημα.

²⁶ *ID* 2350. We will return to this text again in 2.1 and 4.1.

²⁷ *LIMC* sv. Dea Syria Nos. 12 and 16. On the fish featured on this latter example, see Kaizer (2013a: 161-168). A panel from Khirbet Tannur depicting a female figure crowned by fish was once commonly regarded as Atargatis on the basis of her relationship with fish but Judith S. McKenzie and Andres T. Reyes (2013: 221) have since demonstrated that the panel once formed part of a zodiac and therefore represents a personification of Pisces.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. Xanthus of Lydia (*BNJ* 765 F17a) and Eratosthenes (*Catast.* 38). Atargatis' connection to fish in the Graeco-Roman literary tradition is also bound up in the myth of Derceto at Ascalon, a matter discussed further in 3.4.

²⁹ Lightfoot (2003: 66) rightfully notes that the Greeks often associated fish with complex notions of luxury, which they might have readily projected onto an 'oriental cult'; but we should also mention here the distinctively Roman fancy for keeping pools of expensive fish at villas, which was likewise criticised by some as overly indulgent. For instance, Pliny (*HN* 9.80/170) relates that Pompey called Lucullus, *Xerxes togatus*, after he built an enormous channel from the sea to supply his huge fish pond. For further discussion of fish ponds, see Higginbotham (1997); for a recent collection on the varied interactions between animals and humans, see Fögen and Thomas (2017), especially McInerney (2017: 253-273) and Wilkins (2017: 389-407) who deal with aspects of fish; and for a representative sample of ancient sources relating to fish in antiquity, see Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones (2018: 651-673), with further commentary and bibliography.

offering any more than speculation as to their function or significance. It is difficult to determine precisely where Lucian has drawn the line between parody and cultic reality; we can only utilise his account by carefully considering each detail where relevant.

The works of two other authors native to the Near East in the Roman period deserve further comment here.³⁰ Firstly, the *Phoenician History* – as it has survived to us – is a euhemeristic narrative of Phoenician theogony that claims to have been composed in Phoenician by a certain Sanchouniathon of Berytos around the time of the Trojan War before being translated into Greek by Philo of Byblos who lived between the reigns of Nero and Hadrian.³¹ The text begins with a brief cosmogony before describing the origins and early activities of the various gods associated with different cities along the Phoenician coast. As a result, the text is the sole attestation to a common mythological past – albeit one confined to the Phoenician community – and offers an insight into the characters of various divine figures. In particular, it appears that Philo also ‘updated’ Sanchouniathon’s alleged text by adding the current names by which certain gods were recognised, such as Melkarthos who was also known as Herakles – an important equation that we will explore in **2.4**.³² On occasion, the text also reveals important details about the sacred landscape of ancient Phoenicia: for instance, Philo relates that Kronos castrated his father, Ouranos, at an inland spring where the blood of his genitals dripped into the waters, a detail on which we will

³⁰ We should also acknowledge here the Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*, which is briefly mentioned in **2.2** and **4.1**. This text is a Christian apology of the second or third century AD and includes a section on the euhemeristic origins on various cults in the ancient world, including the Near East – for text, translation and commentary on this section, see now Lightfoot (2007: 59-110) and Nichols (2014: 271-276). It is difficult to assess the evidential value of the text: although the text originates from a Syrian milieu, the use of Syriac does not “imply a privileged insight into local realities,” (*ibid*: 78).

³¹ For text, translation and commentary of the fragments relating to Philo of Byblos, see *BNJ* 790, esp. F1 and F2 for the *Phoenician History*; for the *Phoenician History* only, see Baumgarten (1981). Excerpts of Philo’s text are preserved in Eusebius’ *Preparation for the Gospel* (primarily 1.9.30-1.10.42, with 1.9.19-29), who was in turn quoting a now-lost work by the third-century AD Neoplatonist Porphyry of Tyre. For a summary of the entire transmission history as indicated in the texts, see Baumgarten (1981: 31-40). For a recent discussion of euhemerism and religious life in the Roman Near East, see Kaizer (2014: 295-306).

³² *BNJ* 790 F2: 27.

briefly touch in 2.2.³³ Secondly, we should also acknowledge the works of Flavius Josephus, a Jewish political leader who was captured during the First Jewish Revolt but later granted Roman citizenship after becoming close to the Flavian dynasty.³⁴ The *Jewish War* and the *Jewish Antiquities* are two of Josephus' longest extant works and both texts were composed in Greek and written in Rome in the second-half of the first century AD.³⁵ The *Jewish War* narrates the development of the First Jewish Revolt and the events that preceded it and the *Jewish Antiquities* relates the history of Judaea from the time of Moses until the destruction of the Second Temple. Although Josephus' works are underpinned by a variety of socio-political and religious motivations, he is often an invaluable witness to the religious traditions and local environments of Judaea.³⁶ For instance, as we will explore further in 3.3, his lengthy discussion of Caesarea Maritima includes descriptions not only of the harbour and the coastal sanctuary of Roma and Augustus but also the dangerous seafaring conditions that prevailed along the Judaeian coast.³⁷

Josephus was not the only author to write about the Near East from elsewhere in the Roman Empire; in fact, the Graeco-Roman authors whose varied literary outputs provide glimpses into the region's religious life are too numerous to list in full here.³⁸ Nevertheless, particular attention ought to be paid to Strabo and Pliny the Elder, whose periegetical works devoted entire sections to the Near East and captured numerous details about its religious communities.³⁹ Strabo was born in Amaseia, Pontus, around 65-60 BC before moving to

³³ *BJ* 7.9.2: 30.

³⁴ Josephus and his works have been the subject of numerous studies, including Rajak (1983) and Bilde (1988), and the numerous articles collated in Edmondson *et al* (2005) and Chapman and Rogers (2016).

³⁵ Josephus also wrote two further works: the *Life of Josephus* and *Against Apollonius*. Steve Mason is currently leading a project that aims to translate all four works with accompanying literary-historical commentary.

³⁶ The historical value of Josephus' works has been assessed variously by many scholars, including Beard (2003: 543-558), Eck and Cotton (2005: 37-52), Rajak (2007: 23-34) and Mason (2016: 87-107).

³⁷ *BJ* 1.21.5/408-414 and *AJ* 15.9.6/331-341.

³⁸ On the periegetical genre in general, see Clarke (2001) and Roller (2015). For wide-ranging discussion on ancient geography in the classical tradition, see the articles collected in Bianchetti *et al* (2015).

³⁹ For a discussion of how these two authors address religious life in the region, see Kaizer (2017a: 31-48).

Rome and later travelling around the Mediterranean, excluding many parts of the Near East. His *Geography*, written during the reign of Augustus, describes the various communities of the ancient world in light of his own observations and those of others.⁴⁰ For the purposes of this study, it is noteworthy that Strabo is particularly interested in the historical geography of different localities, which occasionally enters the religious sphere. For instance, he relates the mythological origins of the Orontes River, describing how the dragon Typhon carved the river's course whilst fleeing from Zeus (2.2); and also mentions that the cult of Apollo at Daphne was located in a thickly-shaded grove intersected by springs (4.2). The *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder (hereafter, Pliny) is similarly intrigued by the environment. Pliny was born at Como in AD 23 and, after a brief education in Rome, began a military and political career that took him across the western empire until his sudden death in AD 79. The *Natural History*, his only surviving work, is a vast encyclopaedia of not only geography but also astronomy, meteorology, mineralogy, zoology and botany.⁴¹ In a similar vein to Strabo, Pliny also describes the various ways in which the environment intersected with the region's religious traditions: for instance, he narrates how the inhabitants of Iope pointed out the rock to which Andromeda was chained and alleges that the bones of the sea-monster who tormented her were brought to Rome for display (2.4). Thus, although Ted Kaizer recently lamented that these two authors offered 'limited and seemingly arbitrary' evidence for religious life, the works of both Strabo and Pliny can be particularly useful to our study due to their curiosity about religious geography.⁴²

⁴⁰ The Near East is the subject of Book 16. For a detailed commentary, see Biffi (2009) and Roller (2018: 885-940). In general, see Dueck *et al* (2005).

⁴¹ The Near East is the focus of Book 5 and details about the region's religious customs also appear elsewhere. A major commentary on this section of the *Natural History* is currently lacking. In general, see Beagon (1992, esp. 159-201), Conte (1994: 67-104), Carey (2003: esp. 102-137) and Murphy (2004).

⁴² 2017a: 32.

Religious Architecture

The religious architecture of the Roman Near East – which, as we will discuss in **3.1**, could encompass sanctuaries, temples and standalone religious installations – can shine light on two particular aspects of the relationship between water and religious life.⁴³ Firstly, the arrangement of religious architecture can reveal the various ways in which water was integrated into certain sacred spaces. For instance, the sanctuary below the summit of Jebel Haroun in Petra was organised around a natural fissure that captured rainfall (**3.1**); the Temple of Roma and Augustus at Caesarea Maritima was purposefully designed to be part of the harbour (**3.3**); and the extra-urban Sanctuary of Eshmoun featured numerous pools and basins (**4.3**). Secondly, some aspects of religious architecture can suggest how worshippers might have interacted with water in particular contexts. As we will note in **4.1**, the presence of particular water installations in association with sanctuary complexes implies that worshippers cleansed themselves before conducting cultic activities: the large pools in the courtyard of the Sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus at Baalbek-Heliopolis are a case in point. Similarly, the presence of steps leading into some bodies of water indicates that worshippers purposefully descended to the waterside and possibly immersed themselves – both practices that we will encounter at the Efqa Spring in **3.2** and Jerusalem/Aelia-Capitolina in **4.3**. Nevertheless – as we will see particularly with regard to ‘incubation facilities’ in **4.3** – we should refrain from transferring the cultic practices of one locality to another simply because they share similar architectural features.

⁴³ For a comprehensive overview of many of the region’s temples and sanctuaries, see Segal (2013). Key architectural studies also include Taylor (1967), Downey (1988), Ward Perkins (1994: esp. 307-361), McKenzie (1999) and Richardson (2002).

We should also mention here how scholarship on the region’s religious architecture has focused on the particular juxtaposition of both Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern forms.⁴⁴ Whilst the adoption of classical architectural principles as laid out in Vitruvius’ *On Architecture* is evidenced widely, we also encounter countless structures and installations that find few counterparts in the Graeco-Roman world. For instance, the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus at Baalbek/Heliopolis seemingly adhered to a *peripteros* plan and yet the courtyard that lay before it was dominated by two enormous multi-story altars (**Figure 1.2.1**).⁴⁵ Accordingly, different scholars have emphasised the importance of different traditions. On the one hand, Warwick Ball has forcefully argued that the application of Graeco-Roman architectural designs and styles was a superficial veneer behind which a truly Near Eastern sacred space dwelt.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Arthur Segal recently divided his typological analysis of the region’s temples and sanctuaries into ‘Vitruvian’ and ‘non-Vitruvian’ categories and – although his discussion bears witness to the local nuances of their execution – thus underscored the influence of the Roman state.⁴⁷ This study does not seek to polarise this debate any further and, indeed, it is now more common to speak of the region’s religious architecture in terms of a “mélange de traditions indigènes et d’emprunts gréco-romains,” or “the product of multiple voices and interests,” embracing aspects of Graeco-Roman, Near Eastern and local traditions.⁴⁸ Rather, we will make use of religious

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. Sartre (2001: 908-927), Richardson (2002, esp. 16-24), Butcher (2003: 351-363), Segal (2008: 97-132) and Ball (2016: 372-407). Ball (*ibid*: 294-371) also discusses this topic at length with regard to secular architecture.

⁴⁵ For a summary of the sanctuary’s plan in light of various archaeological enquiries, see Aliquot (2009: 282-289) and Segal (2013: 120-129). Aspects of the sanctuary’s architecture have also been discussed by Hoffman (1998: 279-304), Butcher (2003: 363-370), Thomas (2007: 46-50 and *passim*), Kropp and Lohmann (2011: 38-50) and Ball (2016: 38-49). Style and form were, of course, not the only means by which a structure might exhibit Graeco-Roman influence. The courtyard also featured columns rendered in Aswan granite from the imperial quarries at Mons Claudianus, thus indicating (and showcasing) the involvement of the Roman state in the construction process – see further Thomas (2007: 46).

⁴⁶ 2016: 372-407, esp. 383-389. In particular, speaking of the region’s temples in general, *ibid* (446): “None of these frills made the temple Roman (...) the real architecture remained what it had always been: Near Eastern.”

⁴⁷ 2013: viii-x and 1-67.

⁴⁸ Sartre (2001: 913) and Butcher (2011: 456). Equally, we are not concerned with utilising religious architecture to deduce the cultural inclinations of the worshippers who engaged with those spaces – on this

architecture to examine the various ways in which water was integrated into local religious life.

Inscriptions

The inscriptions of the Roman Near East can shine a light on many aspects of religious life across the region.⁴⁹ These texts can suggest how worshippers perceived their gods based on the epithets and descriptions they used, such as the capricious Baalshamin whom worshippers implored to provide rain in basalt lands (2.3). Some texts allow us to deduce how sacred spaces developed: for instance, several inscriptions carved into the rock-face at Caesarea Paneas describe the construction activities of the local community (3.1). On occasion, inscriptions provide an insight into the performance of certain cultic activities and the motivations behind them: for instance, a Greek inscription from Hierapolis describes that a priest depicted on the accompanying relief is pouring a libation whilst praying for the health of the city (4.1). Yet this particular text constitutes a rare example of an inscription detailing the precise motivations of the worshipper; by contrast, many epigraphic texts embody multiple layers of information that we can only hope to appreciate.⁵⁰ A case in point is a short cultic regulation, composed in Palmyrene Aramaic, whose prohibition of bloodshed in the Temple of Allat at Palmyra has elicited numerous but insoluble questions about ritual purity (4.1). Most importantly, we are often at a loss

topic, see e.g. Richardson (2002: 164-166 and 177-179), Butcher (2003: 289-295; and 2013: 195-211), Ball (2016: 372-373 and 445-446) and Wenning (2017: 109-125).

⁴⁹ Key corpora include the *IGLS* series, covering the Greek and Latin epigraphy of various areas and localities across the region, and its Semitic language equivalent, *CIS*; the *CIIP* series, focusing on the epigraphy of Judaea/Palestine produced in all languages from the Hellenistic period to the Muslim Arab conquest; *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (1996), including those from outside Palmyra; and *OCIANA Safaitic*, an online database of Safaitic epigraphy. The epigraphy of Nabataea – including both that rendered in Greek and Latin, and in Nabataean Aramaic – has a particularly haphazard history of publication. Many key religious texts are presented in Healey (2001) and Alpass (2013), and Laïla Nehmé is currently producing a multi-volume archaeological and epigraphic atlas of Petra (*PAAE*) that will fill an acute gap in research. Only the first volume of *PAAE* – ‘De Bāb as-Sīq au Wādī al-Farasah’ – was published at the time of writing, such that reference to its entries is restricted to our discussion of the Siq and the Madbah High-Place (3.1).

⁵⁰ On the epigraphy of the Roman world in general, see Millar (1983: 80-136).

when it comes to determining the extent to which the worshippers themselves were involved in the creation of these texts, although their personal nature encourages us to assume a not insignificant degree of participation. Nevertheless, the content and form of some texts leaves no doubt as to their composition and production by the worshipper himself, such as a Palmyrene Aramaic inscription set up in a cave on the island of Socotra (3.1).

It is also fitting to mention here that the region's distinctive linguistic situation is most apparent in its inscriptions. Greek was widespread across the region, from Hierapolis in the north all the way to Petra in the south. By contrast, Latin was largely concentrated around Roman *coloniae*, including Berytos and its hinterland where we encounter a Latin dedication to Mater Matuta (2.4); and Aelia Capitolina where we find a dedication to Sarapis by the *legio III Cyrenaica* in association with a water-based healing complex (4.3). In addition, various Aramaic dialects were widespread across the region in the Roman period, particularly Palmyrene and Nabataean; and Safaitic, a North Arabian dialect with a distinctive script found especially in modern-day southern Syria and northern Jordan. In some areas, we also encounter a plethora of bilingual – and, on occasion, trilingual – texts, particularly at Palmyra, which Fergus Millar once described as “the only publicly bilingual city in the Roman Near East.”⁵¹ The phenomenon of bilingualism comes into the sphere of this study most notably when we encounter texts that equate different gods in different languages.⁵² For instance, as we will discuss in 2.4 with reference to a bilingual text that renders Greek Poseidon with Palmyrene Aramaic El Qonera, such equations can sometimes

⁵¹ 1993: 470. On bilingualism and language choice in the region in general, see the articles collected in Cotton *et al* (2009), especially Millar (2009: 1-12).

⁵² This topic is currently being examined in detail by Ewins (in preparation).

reveal important details about the local perception of certain gods. The epigraphic corpus of the Roman Near East therefore has much to offer this study.

Sculpture and mosaics

The sculpture of the Roman Near East was executed in a variety of forms, styles and materials and reveals numerous aspects about the region's religious traditions and practices, including those associated with water.⁵³ First and foremost, both free-standing sculptures and images carved in relief are essential for discerning the iconography of divine figures and subsequently comprehending aspects of their characterisation. For instance, a marble statue of the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima demonstrates her fitting reverence as a maritime protectress who derived her Amazonian iconography from Dea Roma (2.1); and a limestone cult relief from Khirbet Tannur portrays a male god accompanied by bulls and holding a lightning bolt, thus capturing his role as a virile storm-god (2.3). Sculpture can also illustrate the mythological traditions recognised by certain communities. A relief from Palmyra serves as a case in point: commonly referred to as the 'battle relief', a scene rendered on a peristyle beam within the 'Temple of Bel' seemingly depicts the defeat of the Tiamat, an episode known primarily from Babylonian mythology (2.4). In a similar vein, mosaics can also contribute to our understanding of the myths with which different communities were familiar and their local interpretation.⁵⁴ For instance, a mosaic uncovered at a villa in the suburbs of Antioch depicts the nymph Daphne at the moment of her metamorphosis in a bid to escape Apollo (4.2); whilst mosaics found in Apamea, Cyprus and Palmyra represent Cassiopeia winning the mythological beauty contest against

⁵³ For a collection of wide-ranging articles on this topic, see Eliav *et al* (2008). Key catalogues of the region's sculpture remain restricted to certain localities, e.g. Dura-Europos (Downey 1977), Palmyra (Tanabe 1986), the Sanctuary of Eshmoun near Sidon (Stucky 1993), and Caesarea Paneas (Friedland 2012). Thomas Weber is also currently preparing catalogues of the sculpture in the National Museum of Damascus – on the sculpture of central and southern Syria, see Weber (2006).

⁵⁴ The key corpora of Near Eastern mosaics are those by Balty (1977 and 1995). Bowersock (2006) also presents a rich collection of the later material.

the Nereids, a departure from the original story (2.4). We can therefore use sculpture and related visual arts to shine light on numerous aspects of religious life in the region.

We should also mention here that some of the region's religious communities rendered their gods in aniconic form and amalgamated visual reference points from both the Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern spheres. Although the aniconic tradition has previously been regarded as characteristic of religious practice in the Near East, Milette Gaifman has convincingly demonstrated that the cultic realities associated with the region's aniconic figures were remarkably varied and by no means homogenous.⁵⁵ Indeed, the ancient evidence indicates that certain religious communities in the region could visualise their gods in a diverse range of aniconic forms. For instance, we will encounter various aniconic figures carved into the rock-face of Petra's Siq (3.1), ranging from rectangular, square and ovoid blocks through to abstract shapes with stylised facial features.⁵⁶ Likewise, some worshippers visualised their gods with reference to both Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern traditions. A case in point is a relief uncovered close to the Temple of Nabu in Palmyra that centres on an unnamed goddess (Figure 1.2.2).⁵⁷ This female figure is depicted frontally and wears long necklace decorated with a crescent, both aspects that resonate with the Near Eastern sphere. Yet she also wears a *peplos* and a *chiton*, both items of clothing that originated in the Graeco-Roman world, and a small figure – presumably a personification of the River Euphrates – appears to be swimming at her feet, thus borrowing from the

⁵⁵ In particular, Gaifman (2008: 37-72) sought to challenge the assumption inherent in the term *aniconic*, namely: to define aniconism solely in contrast to anthropomorphism is to risk rendering all such non-figural images as homogenous – see also, *ibid* (2012 and 2017: 335-352). See also, Mettinger (1995), Stewart (2008: 293-310) and Alpass (2013: 229-232). For a summary of the terminology used to refer to aniconic forms, including *bt'l* and βαίτυλος, see Gaifman (2008: 39-44). The term *'mšb* is discussed further in 2.5.

⁵⁶ We should also note here the representation of the so-called 'Goddess of Hayyan' (*'lht hyn*) discovered in Petra, who was depicted in the form of a rectangular block with almond-shaped eyes, a narrow nose and petite lips – see further Patrich (1990: 84-85) and Gaifman (2008: 62-63). The object is now in the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman.

⁵⁷ For further discussion of the relief, see Dirven (1999: 109-110, with additional references).

iconography of the Tyche of Antioch. As a result, such an example encourages us to recognise that some religious communities readily visualised their gods with a range of attributes from different cultural traditions.⁵⁸

Coinage

The designs rendered on the coinage struck by the cities of the Roman Near East offer an insight into several aspects of local religious life.⁵⁹ The depiction of certain divine figures usually indicates their importance to the local community and, in some cases, designs can reveal details about their iconography. For instance, Berytos regularly issued coins featuring Poseidon (2.4); and several reverse designs on the coinage of Seleucia Pieria imply that Zeus Keraunios was worshipped in the form of a lightning bolt (2.3). Some coin designs also bear witness to the mythological traditions recognised by different religious communities: the inclusion of the ‘Ambrosial Rocks’ on various coins struck by Tyre is a representative example, as is the appearance of Andromeda and Perseus on the coinage of Iope (2.4).⁶⁰ Some coin designs also centre on religious buildings, although it can be difficult to determine the extent to which they represent real-life structures.⁶¹ In some cases, coin imagery is consistent with the archaeological remains of the buildings they depict, such as the spring sanctuary at Fijeh (3.2); but many structures find no counterpart in the archaeological record, including an unusual temple complex centred on an enormous pillar known only from a coin struck by Byblos during the reign of Macrinus (2.2). Despite these

⁵⁸ On the fusion of iconographic details from different cultural traditions, see e.g. Friedland (2008: 340-342), who advocates that the region’s religious communities represented their gods in accordance with a ‘visual vocabulary’.

⁵⁹ Key catalogues include those produced by the *RPC* project, which are steadily replacing the earlier *BMC* catalogues. The coinage of some cities and regions has also been subject to detailed study, cf. e.g. Northern Syria, Butcher (2004); the Decapolis and Arabia, Spijkerman (1978); and Berytos, Sawaya (2009). For an introduction to the coinage of the Roman Near East in general, see Butcher (2012: 468-484) and Gitler (2012: 485-498), on Syria and Palestine respectively.

⁶⁰ On the depiction of local mythologies on coins, see Lichtenberger (2004: 23-34) and Price (2007: 115-124).

⁶¹ On the representation of architecture on ancient coins in general, see Price and Trell (1977).

challenges, it is clear that many of the region's religious traditions found expression on local coinage.

Nevertheless, in order to interpret the region's coinage faithfully, we must also consider the circumstances surrounding its issue. The striking of coinage in the Near East both before and after the arrival of the Roman state was confined to cities and orchestrated by the dynasties or authorities that operated within them.⁶² The majority of coins consulted in this study fall within the category of bronze civic coinage, which was predominantly inscribed in Greek and struck by provincial cities themselves.⁶³ As far as our evidence indicates, the circulation of such coins was restricted to the city in which they were issued and its surrounding territory.⁶⁴ This limited circulation therefore suggests that the designs of such coins were produced with local audiences in mind, including both those who lived in the city and those who visited it. Nevertheless, the nature of the design process largely escapes us: did civic councils collectively debate and agree upon new coin designs, or did designated individuals take responsibility for the design process before seeking a cursory approval from the necessary authorities?⁶⁵ In any case, we can often only speculate as to the range of factors that probably informed the issue of a new design or the re-issue of an old design.⁶⁶ For instance, during the reign of Caracalla, Berytos issued a new coin design of Poseidon standing in a chariot drawn by four *hippocampoi*, which was reminiscent of an

⁶² There are several studies on the coinage of Near Eastern dynasts, cf. e.g. on Herod, Ariel and Fontanille (2012); the Nabataeans, Meshorer (1975); the Ituraeans, Herman (2006: 51-72); and a comparative study by Dahmen (2010: 99-112).

⁶³ This study does not engage in detail with imperial coinage produced directly by the Roman state. On the different sub-categories of provincial coinage issued in Northern Syria, see Butcher (2004: 15-21).

⁶⁴ On coin circulation and use in Northern Syria and parts of the Near East, see Butcher (2004: 143-195).

⁶⁵ Similar questions are posed by Butcher (2005: 143-156). By contrast, many issues from Asia include the name of a particular individual but we do not know whether this inclusion was due to their involvement or simply a dating mechanism. This practice is comparatively rare in the Near East – see further Butcher (2004: 20-21 and 241-245).

⁶⁶ For various approaches to the ways in which coinage might communicate the identities of those responsible for its issue, see the articles collected in Howgego *et al* (2005), particularly Butcher (2005: 143-156) on Syria. This topic is also being examined in relation to Phoenicia by Webster (in preparation).

earlier type regularly struck during the second and first centuries BC before the city became a *colonia* around 14/15 BC (**Figure 1.2.3**).⁶⁷ One might interpret the appearance of this new design under Caracalla as part of a broader shift to ennoble the Phoenician heritage of the Severan dynasty.⁶⁸ Yet the plausibility of such an interpretation depends upon the interlocking of several complex factors and therefore raises several questions. Do we assume that the Berytians recognised the Poseidon of Caracalla's day as representative of Phoenician culture precisely because it evoked a design in circulation several hundred years earlier? Or, was the design an independent imagining of what the Berytians considered to be a 'Phoenician Poseidon'? The fact that we cannot give conclusive answers to such questions should not prohibit us from exploring them but it does encourage us to acknowledge that a seemingly simple decision might conceal many complex layers of meaning for multiple audiences.

Our summary of the sources available for the study of religious life in the Roman Near East has revealed several themes, namely: the absence of both a common mythology and a shared language of religious expression, as well as a plurality of reference points in both architecture and iconography. Whilst these themes therefore encourage us to treat the Roman Near East as distinct from the rest of the Graeco-Roman world, we cannot sincerely speak of 'Near Eastern religion' in the same way as we do of 'Greek religion' or 'Roman religion'. Indeed, the nature of our evidence urges us to adopt the phrase 'religious life', rather than 'religion', in our study. Now, our discussion will take a wider approach and

⁶⁷ Sawaya 2009: Série 82. Cf. *ibid* Supp. Série 1.

⁶⁸ See also Jones Hall (2004: 134-136).

provide a general overview of the history of scholarship on religious life in the Roman Near East and its particular engagement with water.⁶⁹

Scholarship

The earliest scholarship on religious life in the Roman Near East often condensed the varied traditions and practices of different localities and presented them as an overall ‘religion’. Of particular importance was William Robertson Smith’s *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, the first series of which was published in 1889 and examined “not the history of the several religions that have a Semitic origin, but Semitic religion as a whole in its common features and general type.”⁷⁰ Yet, in some respects, Smith’s study inadvertently bore witness to a variety of local religious traditions. He divided his discussion into different thematic aspects of ‘Semitic religion’, including studies of ‘the relation of the gods to natural things’ and ‘holy waters’.⁷¹ Both sections narrated the varied role of water in the region’s religious communities and indeed some of Smith’s preliminary observations resonate with this study. In particular, Smith recognised that bodies of water were regarded as both places frequented by the gods and embodiments of divine presence, a dynamic we will explore throughout Chapter Two; and also, that some water features could underscore the religious significance of certain places, a matter with which we will engage in Chapter Three. However, Smith understood these traditions as a product of the ‘primitive imagination’ of the ancient worshipper, a deeply flawed perspective that was potentially responsible for the reticence of future scholars to engage critically with the religious significance of water and the environment more generally.⁷² In addition, despite

⁶⁹ For further discussion of the historiography of scholarship in this field, see Kaizer (2006a: 27-30) and (2008a: 11-21), albeit with no commentary on water.

⁷⁰ 1894: 1.

⁷¹ 1894: 82-109 and 150-168.

⁷² 1894: *passim*. Representative examples include: “In many respects the religion of heathen Arabia (...) exhibits an extremely primitive character, corresponding to the primitive and unchanging character of

acknowledging the local variety of myths attached by worshippers to different water features, Smith's final conclusion that "the practical beliefs and ritual usages connected with sacred waters were much the same everywhere, and so are plainly based on general conceptions independent of the variations of local story," ultimately set the tone for subsequent research: the religious significance of water was so inherent that it barely merited further comment.⁷³

Shortly after the appearance of *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, Franz Cumont published several iterations of his study on 'religions orientales', culminating in the definitive fourth edition of *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* in 1929. In contrast to Smith, Cumont aimed to explore the diffusion of 'oriental religions' across the Roman Empire and, in doing so, examined the most prominent cults to emerge from Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and Persia. Although Cumont recognised a lack of unity between the Near East's various religious communities, he still regarded a variety of traditions as emblematic of the region as a whole, including those related to water. Cumont did not discuss water in as much detail as Smith but he was similarly derisive about its perceived religious significance, commenting that the worship of water belonged to a "couche inférieure et primordial" distinct from the other less rudimentary forms around which 'paganisme sémitique' was based.⁷⁴ However, a major legacy of Cumont's work was the

nomadic life," (15-16); "...all primitive peoples believe in frequent theophanies, or at least in frequent occasions of personal contact between men and superhuman powers. When all nature is mysterious and full of unknown activities, any natural object or occurrence which appeals strongly to the imagination, or excites sentiments of awe and reverence, is readily taken for a manifestation of divine or demoniac life," (112); and, "...the places where the life of nature is most intense (...) appeared to the primitive Semite to be the habitations, not of abstract divine powers, but of very concrete and tangible beings," (124). Significantly, Ailsa Hunt (2016: 29-71) relates a similar historiography of research in relation to sacred trees, concluding that: "Roman sacred trees have never been allowed to escape relegation to a simplistic, primitive stage of religious thinking, meaning that scholarly engagement with them today often feels intellectually distant from constructions of 'mainstream' Roman religion," (*ibid*: 70).

⁷³ 1894: 158.

⁷⁴ 1929: 109. Cumont also described the 'culte des eaux' as belonging to "un fonds d'idées très primitive, de naturisme aborigène..." (*ibid*: 107).

establishment of ‘religions orientales’ as a viable framework for the study of the multifarious religious traditions of Rome’s eastern provinces, which set the agenda for the next generation of scholarship. This legacy was later consolidated with the establishment of the series, *Études préliminaires sur les religions orientales dans l’empire romain*, by Brill in 1961;⁷⁵ and further studies appeared during the twentieth century with similar intentions, including Javier Teixidor’s *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (1977) and Robert Turcan’s *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain* (1989). As for the role of water, both Teixidor and Turcan acknowledged its presence where relevant but offered minimal analysis of its significance.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the twentieth century was also a time of great archaeological discovery in which an extensive range of material evidence was uncovered, published and often afforded extensive commentary. As a result, scholars were increasingly able to draw upon an immense corpus of material relating to various aspects of religious life in a range of localities. This situation arguably nurtured the development of two key studies that appeared in the early 1990s and prompted major shifts in scholarship. Firstly, Maurice Sartre’s *L’Orient romain* (1991) signalled a clear departure from ‘oriental religion’ and spoke instead of ‘la vie religieuse’.⁷⁷ With regards to the Near East, Sartre recognised from the outset that the region’s religious life presented such a diverse picture that it defied synthesis and, accordingly, offered a wide-ranging discussion of the various religious

⁷⁵ The series was later re-named *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* in 1992.

⁷⁶ E.g. Teixidor (1977: 110) noted only that springs precipitated permanent settlement in his discussion of the Efqa Spring at Palmyra; and Turcan (1989: 211-216) commented in general on the presence of water installations within *mithraea*.

⁷⁷ 459-500. In particular, Sartre (*ibid*: 459, n.2) voiced his hesitancy to identify certain gods – such as Atargatis, Adonis, Isis and Cybele – as ‘oriental’ when they seemed to be, at least in the Roman period, as Greek as Dionysos, Demeter or Artemis and concluded that “la distinction traditionnelle entre dieux grecs et dieux 'orientaux' ne parait plus guère justifiée.”

traditions observed in different localities.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the religious significance of water was afforded only the briefest of acknowledgments: when speaking of the Phoenician coast, Sartre simply recognised that the region’s cults had “une forte teinture agraire” because the local Baal was associated with rain and vegetation, and Ashtart with love and fertility.⁷⁹ Yet, as we will see particularly in **2.2** and **2.3**, many local environmental concerns informed this overall picture. Secondly, Fergus Millar’s *The Roman Near East* (1993), established the now-commonplace precedent for the close examination of the ancient evidence in its local context, including that related to the region’s religious communities. In the second half of his study, Millar examined the ‘communal and cultural identities’ of six sub-regions of the Near East and engaged with the varied religious traditions attested throughout, often drawing upon individual pieces of evidence to illuminate different aspects of local religious life.⁸⁰ In contrast to Sartre, Millar was more attuned to the varied impact of the local environment on the region’s communities but the role of water in religious life remained ultimately marginalised: for instance, when discussing Lucian’s description of Adonis at Byblos, he connects the myth with the Nahr Ibrahim but says little more about the god’s relationship with a river.⁸¹ Whilst Millar therefore demonstrated the necessity of approaching the Roman Near East from a local perspective, this emphasis did not extend to the region’s environments.

⁷⁸ 1991: 490-497. Sartre (*ibid*: 482-486) also discussed the cults Atargatis and Adonis (‘Dieux syriens du salut’), and Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus (“deux dieux orientaux [!] dont le succès est dû essentiellement à leur adoption par les soldats”).

⁷⁹ 1991: 490. Sartre (*ibid*: 491) also fleetingly mentions the various Zeus figures associated with mountains elsewhere in the Near East. Sartre’s next major study, *D’Alexandre à Zénobie* (2001), likewise hovered around the significance of the environment but refrained from discussing it in detail.

⁸⁰ 1993: 225-488. In particular, Millar (*ibid*: 235) emphasised that the “various local cultures could find expression in ways which were strikingly different one from another” in such a way that transcended a simple conflict between ‘classical’ and ‘oriental’ traditions.

⁸¹ 1993: 276.

Since the publication of these key studies, scholarship on religious life in the Roman Near East has adopted a distinctively local focus and now frequently bears witness to the plurality of religious communities across the region.⁸² A number of studies on local religious life have since appeared, such as Lucinda Dirven's *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos* (1999) and Ted Kaizer's *The Religious Life of Palmyra* (2002), as well as multiple edited volumes dedicated to the examination of religious life from a local perspective.⁸³ Similarly, a range of sub-regional studies have sought to shine light on the diverse religious traditions observed by different communities within certain areas: Nichole Belayche's *Iudaea-Palaestina. The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine* (2001), Julian Aliquot's *La vie religieuse au Liban sous l'Empire romain* (2009) and Peter Alpass' *The Religious Life of Nabataea* (2013) are especially representative examples.⁸⁴ Several scholars have also shown awareness of the local nuances of religious life in their studies of the region as a whole. As we noted above, Warwick Ball drew attention to the Near Eastern heritage of religious architecture in *Rome in the East* (2000; second edition 2016), in which he analysed the different elements of sanctuaries and temples from a local perspective; and Kevin Butcher explored the various ways in the religious sphere informed the construction of Near Eastern communities in *Roman Syria and the Near East* (2003), stressing that "local or regional cults became a channel through which local or regional identities could be affirmed."⁸⁵ Thus, in various ways, these studies have paved the way for a local appreciation of religious life.

⁸² On approaching the Near East from supra-regional, regional and local perspectives, see Kaizer (2003: 283-295).

⁸³ Cf. e.g. Kaizer (2008b), Blömer *et al* (2015) and Raja (2017).

⁸⁴ See also, Healey (2001), Lichtenberger (2004) and Bonnet (2015). Several broader studies of the region's culture also deal with aspects of religious life, such as Raja (2012), Kropp (2013) and de Jong (2017).

⁸⁵ 335.

However, despite the local sensitivity with which they were conducted, many of these studies overlooked the diverse relationships religious communities had with their local environment, such that discussions of the religious traditions and practices associated with water were often brief and generalised. For instance, Ted Kaizer's examination of Yarhibol's cult at the Efqa Spring in Palmyra is prefixed by a cursory acknowledgement of the spring's sulphurous properties and the general inclination of Near Eastern communities to connect water sources with protective gods;⁸⁶ but, as we will see in **2.5** and **3.2**, there is much more to be said about how the Efqa's physical properties and environmental setting underscored its religious importance. Similarly, whilst Nicole Belayche recognised the presence of water in the healing sanctuary at St. Anne's in Jerusalem, she offered no further exploration of the water's function in the healing process, nor the role of the pools within Jerusalem's landscape;⁸⁷ yet, as we will discover in **4.3**, both of these aspects are essential to appreciating the patterns of worship associated with the site. We might initially regard Julian Aliquot as an exception to this trend, as he devoted a chapter to the 'paysage sacré', including a sub-section in which he incisively examined the mythological traditions associated with the region's most prominent rivers, the ancient Adonis, Orontes and Litas.⁸⁸ However, this discussion was part of a wider commentary on 'la relecture du paysage sacré' by the region's inhabitants in light of Rome's growing involvement, such that the environmental dimensions of these riverine landscapes were not a major concern.⁸⁹ Yet, as we will see in **2.2**, we stand to develop a deeper understanding of the mythological figures associated with these rivers if we explore their environmental character. Significantly, we should also mention here Zena Kamash's *Archaeologies of Water in the Roman Near East* (2010), in which the relationship between water and religious life was explored only in a

⁸⁶ 2002: 143.

⁸⁷ 2001: 160-174.

⁸⁸ 2009: 39-69, esp. 58-69.

⁸⁹ 2009: 39-69, *passim*.

relatively slim final chapter.⁹⁰ Whilst Kamash certainly brought to light some of the most salient ways in which the region's religious communities engaged with water, this topic was nonetheless a minor concern within the overall study and her examination of the material was, understandably, succinct.⁹¹ Yet perhaps most illuminating is one reaction to Peter Alpass' brief acknowledgement of the prevalence of water alongside Petra's many religious installations: according to Laurent Tholbecq, such a conclusion was 'weak' precisely because "to underline the 'role and prominence' of water in Petra's religious spaces is a truism."⁹² The enduring marginalisation of water and religious life across multiple research agendas is thus confirmed.

As this summary highlights, scholars of religious life in the Roman Near East have continuously discounted water in numerous ways. This disregard began with the classification of water as a primitive layer of religion and continued with either indifference to the nuances of the local environment or unquestioning acceptance of water's presence in the religious sphere. Perhaps the most detrimental outcome of this generalising approach is its perpetuation – knowingly or otherwise – of water as a primitive dimension of religious life. As a result, by neglecting to explore the nuances with which the relationship between water and religious life manifested, we have overlooked the many ways in which ancient worshippers interacted with the varied bodies of water that formed their local environment. Yet, as this study aims to demonstrate, the various religious communities of the Roman Near East did engage critically with water, and that the nature of this engagement was

⁹⁰ 157-176. Kamash (*ibid*: 135-138) also touches on the religious sphere in her discussion of *miqveh*, Jewish ritual baths.

⁹¹ Indeed, Kamash (*ibid*: 15) acknowledges that this chapter was not originally part of her doctoral research on which the book was based. By contrast, Kamash's doctorate (2006) demonstrates a clear focus on the intricacies of water management in the Roman Near East and is accompanied by an outstanding gazetteer of the region's water installations.

⁹² Alpass (2013: 86-87) and Tholbecq (2014: 314).

directly influenced by local environmental conditions. Accordingly, we will now consider how we might develop an approach through which we might productively reconcile these aims.

1.3 Water and Religious Life: Approaching and Elevating the Environment

Environmental approaches to religious life

We cannot hope to evaluate here the many studies that have touched upon different aspects of the relationship between water and religious life, or indeed the ancient environment more broadly. There are, however, two particular studies around which it will be helpful to anchor our discussion: *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000) by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, and *Reviving Roman Religion: Sacred Trees in the Roman World* (2016) by Ailsa Hunt. *The Corrupting Sea* is an examination of the human history of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastlands from early antiquity to the Middle Ages. From the outset, Horden and Purcell identify a significant distinction that places the environment at the forefront of their analysis:⁹³

There is history *in* the Mediterranean, and there is (or can be) history *of* the Mediterranean. The first need not comprise a large area, time-span, or topic, and is related only contingently or indirectly to its geographical setting. By contrast, history *of* the region presupposes an understanding of the whole environment. And the environment in question is the product of a complex interaction of human and physical factors, not simply a material backdrop or set of immutable constraints. It is the history *of* the Mediterranean that concerns us.

As a result, their study analyses the human-environment relationship through the Mediterranean's micro-ecologies and explores the nuances of this relationship through a series of thematic chapters, including one devoted to the religious sphere. This chapter

⁹³ 2000: 9. We might also locate the environmental emphasis of this approach within the field of post-phenomenology, which stresses the agency of the environment itself and argues that humans have an experience *with* the environment rather than *in* it – see further Lea (2009: 373-378, esp. 376-377), with further references.

investigates the three major points at which the environment intersected with religious life: firstly, the physical environment itself and the various landscape features that were “conceived in religious terms” and came “collectively to compose a religious environment”;⁹⁴ secondly, the so-called ‘sacralised economy’, including the religious dimensions of productive and extractive landscapes, festivals and fairs, and epiphenomenal towns; and thirdly, the ‘religion of mobility’, which found expression most noticeably through seafaring and pilgrimage, or ‘religious journeying’. The first category is most informative to our own enquiry and we will explore it in more detail shortly. As for the second and third categories, it is not feasible within the scope of this study to examine these aspects in full, although we will briefly consider their most pertinent aspects here.

This study does not aim to analyse the economic dimensions of the relationship between water and religious life but there are nevertheless points at which these dimensions come into focus. In addition to its multifarious religious functions, water was also managed for utilitarian purposes and could consequently be harnessed for economic gain.⁹⁵ For instance, the Efqa Spring in Palmyra was managed by a divinely-appointed individual and the use of its waters incurred a high tax (2.5); and worshippers who participated in the bi-annual water-pouring festival at Hierapolis allegedly had to pay a fee for the inspection of their vessels by the sanctuary’s sacred cock (4.1). Although not discussed in detail in this study, we should also mention here the rural Sanctuary of Zeus Baetocaece located in the mountains above the coastal city of Arados and regarded as an important economic centre due to its various fiscal privileges.⁹⁶ The sanctuary complex was constructed across two

⁹⁴ 2000: 411.

⁹⁵ Water management in the Roman Near East has been the subject of numerous studies. Site-specific studies are cited where relevant below; in general, see Ohlig (2008), Mouton and Al-Dbiyat (2009), Wilson (2010) and Kamash (2010 and 2012: 65-74).

⁹⁶ An inscription (*IGLS VII*: No. 4028), erected on the wall of the sanctuary next to the main gate, indicates that the sanctuary enjoyed various economic advantages, of which the most notable was a tax-free bi-monthly

natural terraces and centred on a natural spring that was seemingly utilised for religious and economic purposes (**Figure 1.3.1**).⁹⁷ From the Hellenistic period onward, the sanctuary's authorities directly controlled the local water supply by diverting the spring's waters into several subterranean chambers close to the sanctuary's walls.⁹⁸ This water was also channelled into several pools where – according to some scholars – therapeutic rituals took place, presumably with some form of monetary charge.⁹⁹ Thus, whilst the economic significance of water will not be a focus of this study, the case of Baetocaece encourages us to acknowledge from the outset that the pragmatic dimensions of water often did not operate in isolation to its religious importance.

With regards to the 'religion of mobility', Horden and Purcell explore this concept in relation to seafaring and pilgrimage, or 'religious journeying'. The most pressing issues surrounding seafaring are discussed in detail at **2.4** but it is worth highlighting here the emphasis Horden and Purcell place on considering the sea in both physical and metaphysical terms, a point to which we will return later.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, this study will not directly examine the various points at which water intersects with pilgrimage, although the topic certainly merits some further comment here. Horden and Purcell rightly draw attention to the problems of applying the term 'pilgrimage' in non-Christian contexts but

fair. The text claims that the sanctuary's privileges were originally granted by one of the Seleucid dynasts known as Antiochus and later ratified during the reigns of Augustus, and Valerian and Gallienus. For further discussion of these texts and the sanctuary's economic activities, see Dignas (2002: 74-84 and 156-167); see Mazzilli (2014: 338-339, Table 2.15) for an accessible presentation of all texts, with translation. For a recent overview of religious life at the site, see Bonnet (2015: 132-149).

⁹⁷ For further discussion of the site's layout, see Steinsapir (2005: 31-45) and Freyberger (2009: 265-290). According to Mazzilli (2014: 96, with Fig. 55), the spring was no longer flowing in 2010 and only a wide patch of vegetation marked its previous course.

⁹⁸ On a related note, the control of water systems by Christian church authorities in the Near East is currently being examined by Stephen Humphreys (in preparation).

⁹⁹ E.g. Freyberger (2009: 284-285) and Mazzilli (2014: 96). The therapeutic function of the sanctuary is confirmed by a lacunose inscription that describes an individual being cured after invoking an unnamed god – although what role, if any, water played in this process is not clear. The text also seems to record that the god requested a fee of 10,000 in an unknown currency; if drachmas, it would represent a staggering cost. For text, translation and commentary, see Rey-Coquais (1997: 931-934).

¹⁰⁰ 2000: 445.

we can certainly identify several instances in our own study when ‘religious journeying’ – or, perhaps, a religiously-charged movement through the landscape – appears in relation to water.¹⁰¹ For instance, the Hierapolitans participated in a bi-annual journey to the sea where they collected seawater before conveying it back to the sanctuary (4.1); and the sick travelled to Emmatha near Gadara to benefit from its therapeutic waters (4.3). Of particular note in these examples is the emphasis on travelling to a certain environment in order to access a particular body of water: the Hierapolitans had to venture to the coast in order to collect seawater specifically and the sick journeyed to Emmatha precisely because its waters had healing properties. As we will now see, this emphasis on the local environmental properties and context of water is important for appreciating its religious significance.

Returning finally to the first category, Horden and Purcell also examine the multifarious religious traditions and practices associated with a variety of landscape features, including several related to water. Their analysis offers numerous insights into the diverse nature of these associations and most important is their emphasis on placing the environment at their centre of their discussion. In doing so, Horden and Purcell stress that, in order to appreciate their religious significance, different bodies of water must be studied in their particular local context. Thus, in their discussion of the religious significance of springs, they highlight that the religiosity of such water features was not simply due to the inherent indispensability of water but rather a whole range of local factors related to the spring’s role within that particular community. As a result, Horden and Purcell regard the overall relationship between water and religious life as one of provenience, which entailed “a far

¹⁰¹ In particular: “what is absent from ancient Greece and Rome is not sacred mobility in the broader sense, but a particular terminology and ideological consciousness that is characteristic of medieval Christendom...” (2000: 446). For a summary of pilgrimage in the Graeco-Roman world and its problematic terminology, see Elsner and Rutherford (2005: 1-38); for a brief discussion of ‘travel to sacred centres’ in the Roman Near East, see Kaizer (2006a: 35-39).

more dynamic concern with the whole environment.”¹⁰² Put another way, whilst all communities might depend on rainfall, for example, varied patterns of precipitation necessitated different relationships with rain and the types of environment it yielded – and the impact of this variation on the religious sphere will come to the fore in **2.3**. Accordingly, we can only begin to comprehend the impact of the environment on religious life by approaching individual bodies of water – such as rainfall, the sea, rivers, lakes and springs – on a local level.

We shall now turn briefly to Ailsa Hunt’s *Reviving Roman Religion: Sacred Trees in the Roman World* (2016), a study that offers several insights into how we might approach our own enquiry. Although the subject of Hunt’s study is different from ours, both trees and water are dynamic entities that seemingly operated in both the human and divine spheres. Moreover, the historiography of research on sacred trees shares parallels with that of water and religious life: as Hunt artfully outlines, the enduring distaste for sacred trees originated from the comparativist approaches of nineteenth-century scholarship, such that contemporary scholars of Roman religion largely discount sacred trees or treat them with indifference.¹⁰³ Yet the fundamental claim of Hunt’s study – in a similar vein to our own – is that ancient religious communities engaged critically with trees. Hunt frames this critical engagement as follows: “trees provoked the inhabitants of the Roman world into grappling with challenging theological questions that took them to the heart of their understanding of where they stood in relation to the divine,” with the result that “sacred trees reveal Roman theological thinking in action.”¹⁰⁴ Under the premise of ‘theological thinking’, Hunt advocates for a reassessment of the assumption that “Roman religion is better understood

¹⁰² 2000: 421.

¹⁰³ 2016: 29-71, with further bibliography.

¹⁰⁴ 2016: 2-3 and 14.

as an orthopraxy rather than an orthodoxy” and thus aligns with nascent scholarly debate on theological thinking and the role of belief in the ancient world.¹⁰⁵ In the context of our own enquiry, the nature of the evidence for religious life in the Roman Near East – coupled with the scope of our study – does not allow for a full assessment of the role of belief amongst the region’s various communities. However, we can recognise a plurality of religious mentalities, which informed the various ways in which worshippers characterised their gods, organised sacred spaces and developed patterns of worship. Whilst this study cannot claim to be an active advocate for re-evaluating the extent of theological thinking in the ancient world, it might implicitly add a voice to this increasingly complex discussion.

We also stand to learn from the ways in which Hunt approaches her study. Akin to Horden and Purcell, Hunt lays emphasis on examining trees with an alertness to their particular environmental qualities and context. For instance, in analysing the religious significance of the tree pruning undertaken by the *fratres Arvales* at the Sanctuary of Dea Dia just outside Rome, Hunt stresses the need to appreciate these trees as organic and vulnerable sacred objects and, in doing so, invites us to reconsider the extent to which the religiosity of certain objects was defined by their inviolability.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Hunt structures her enquiry around the various ways in which trees “raised theological questions for Roman thinkers.”¹⁰⁷ Even if the nature of the evidence in the Roman Near East prevents us from conducting our enquiry in terms of ‘theological questions’, Hunt’s study does highlight how we might expand our understanding of different aspects of religious life by approaching them from an environmental perspective. As this study hopes to demonstrate in the following chapters, elevating water and its particular environmental dimensions to the forefront of our analysis

¹⁰⁵ 2016: 9-19, esp. 10 and 14. The key contributions to this debate are the various articles collated in Eidinow *et al* (2016) and Petrovic and Petrovic (2016).

¹⁰⁶ 2016: 135-172.

¹⁰⁷ 2016: 26. For a summary of the questions raised by each chapter, see *ibid* (26-27).

stands not only to broaden our understanding of religious life in the Roman Near East in general but also to enrich our appreciation of the various ways in which worshippers characterised their gods, organised their sacred spaces and developed patterns of worship. We will further outline the reasoning behind the structure of this study in **1.4**. Beforehand, we will comment briefly upon the resources at our disposal to elevate water and its associated environments to the forefront of our discussion.

Elevating the environment: data and evidence

In order to elevate the environment to the forefront of our discussion, we need to determine its local nuances. To this end, we can draw upon a range of resources that enable us to reconstruct ancient environmental contexts in varying levels of detail. This corpus of material encompasses studies dedicated to reconstructing the ancient environment on local, regional and global scales; modern environmental data and analysis, as well as investigations of environmental change; the accounts of early-modern travellers to the region that often not only bear witness to now-lost environmental features but also describe how they experienced certain landscapes; and historical evidence that testifies to the environmental conditions encountered by the region's ancient communities.

Studies that aim to reconstruct certain aspects of the ancient environment at a local level are particularly valuable to our enquiry, not least because they can reveal landscape features that may no longer exist. For example, archaeobotanical analysis at the now-waterless site of Ascalon revealed that the area was once home to several wetland plant species and therefore confirmed the existence of a lake in antiquity (**3.4**). Equally, regional surveys can reveal how ancient communities engaged with the landscape, such as varied and intensive cultivation of Antioch's hinterland brought to light by the Amuq Valley Regional Project

(2.1 and 4.2). To add to this, numerous studies have compiled proxy data from various sources with the aim of reconstructing ancient climate on a global scale.¹⁰⁸ For the purposes of our own enquiry, it is most important to note that, between the first century BC and the early-third century AD, mainland Europe and the Mediterranean Basin experienced a remarkably favourable climate characterised by warmer temperatures, higher precipitation and more stable levels of volcanic and solar activity than those of the preceding and ensuing centuries.¹⁰⁹ In the Near East specifically, this climatic situation is broadly reflected in the sedimentary record of the Dead Sea, which indicates high levels of precipitation between 200 BC and AD 200.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, we need to appreciate that the environments of the Near East in the Roman period were generally wetter than those of today, due not only to the prevailing climatic conditions of antiquity, but also the rapid climate change caused by anthropogenic activities since the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the environments of the Roman and modern Near East are broadly comparable in several respects, such that we can also utilise modern environmental data for certain aspects of this study.¹¹¹ Whilst the climate of the Roman period might have been wetter, many rainfall patterns in the Near East are determined by regional and local topography.¹¹² The mountainous Phoenician coast of the north has always received higher precipitation than the flat coastal plains of the south, whilst the easterly transit of the winter rains mandates drier conditions for those communities living on the leeward slopes of

¹⁰⁸ Such studies typically present and analyse scientific data in a level of detail that sets a high barrier to entry for most scholars of the humanities. For a comprehensive and accessible synthesis of research, see McCormick *et al* (2012: 169-220) and Izdebski *et al* (2016: 189-208).

¹⁰⁹ This climatic phase is commonly referred to as the 'Roman Warm Period' and its impact on the Roman world has been studied from various perspectives – cf. e.g. the collected articles in Hermon (2009) and Harris (2013, especially Manning (2013: 103-170)).

¹¹⁰ For a synthesis of research, see McCormick *et al* (2012: 217-219, with Fig. 7b).

¹¹¹ For a comprehensive exploration of the region's various hydrogeological conditions – to which this study owes much – see Wagner (2011).

¹¹² Thus, when modern rainfall figures are cited in this study, they will serve to highlight the relative precipitation of different areas.

Mount Hermon. Similarly, the local currents and wind patterns that determine different seafaring conditions along the coast have remained unchanged since antiquity.¹¹³ We can also consult modern chemical analyses of certain bodies of water in order to appreciate their local properties: for instance, analysis of the thermal springs at Emmatha confirmed that they are indeed sulphurous, a quality noted by several ancient authors (4.3). Finally, research into modern environmental change can also inform our discussion by highlighting the vulnerabilities of certain water networks: for instance, declining discharge rates at the Ain Fijeh have been linked to reduced precipitation and snow coverage, with ramifications for the entire Damascus basin (3.2).

We can also gain an insight into the pre-modern environmental conditions of the Near East through the accounts of various European travellers who visited the region before the mid-twentieth century. For instance, multiple visitors to Yammoune in the northern Beqaa observed the annual inundation of the site's lake, which was later blocked in the 1930s (3.4); and several individuals journeyed to Hierapolis where they reportedly saw some sort of lake that has since disappeared under a modern-day football pitch (3.4). This last example in particular highlights that we should sometimes approach these accounts with caution: many European travellers associated the environmental phenomena they witnessed with particular passages of ancient literature such that, in the example of Hierapolis, they expected to see a lake in accordance with Lucian's description. Perhaps more reliable, however, are their observations about travelling through different environments. Amongst others, Gertrude Bell describes her springtime journey through the various landscapes between Damascus and Baalbek/Heliopolis, during which she ascended from verdant river

¹¹³ See further Murray (1987: 139-167) and Morton (2001: 5-8).

valleys into driving rains in the mountains.¹¹⁴ Despite the purposefully evocative style of this genre, such descriptions can help us to envisage how ancient travellers might have experienced the region's diverse environments in ways no longer accessible to us.¹¹⁵

Finally, the ancient evidence itself also bears witness to the environmental conditions experienced by different communities. Accordingly, such material will be discussed at length in the chapters that follow but it is worth highlighting some particularly illustrative examples here. Numerous Safaitic inscriptions from the basalt lands of the Jebel Arab massif record the movement of nomadic pastoralists across the landscape in search of rainfall (2.3). The vast harbour at Caesarea Maritima stands as testament to the need for safe anchorage along a particularly hazardous stretch of coast, the dangers of which are narrated by several authors (3.3). The images depicted on Damascus' coinage reveal the importance of the River Barada and its source at Ain Fijeh, where archaeological and epigraphic evidence demonstrate its careful management (3.2). Finally, returning to subject-matter discussed at the very beginning of this study, Lucian's description of the Nahr Ibrahim demonstrates the potential for environmental phenomena to be understood in relation to religious traditions and practices (2.2). Indeed, as we will now see, the communities of the Roman Near East recognised many points at which water intersected with the religious sphere.

¹¹⁴ 1907: 160.

¹¹⁵ The example of Bell's journey to Baalbek/Heliopolis is particularly meaningful here given that the area's precipitation and river flow levels have declined markedly in recent years – see further 3.2.

1.4 Structure

Our discussion thus far has firmly advocated that we examine the relationship between water and religious life by placing the environment at the forefront of our discussion. Accordingly, the following chapters are internally organised around various local or regional case studies that analyse the ways in which different religious communities engaged with particular local water sources and the environments that they engendered. The reasoning behind the sub-division of each chapter will be outlined in each chapter introduction. With regard to the structure of the overall study, we have indicated on several occasions thus far that our discussion will focus on the three main ways through which religious communities engaged with water. As a result, we will begin by examining how worshippers characterised some of their gods with particular reference to the hydrological environment and, in some cases, recognised divine figures within the landscape itself (Chapter Two). We will then move on to examine the ways in which worshippers organised some sacred spaces around certain bodies of water and, on some occasions, recognised particular water sources as sacred spaces in their own right (Chapter Three). Finally, we will examine in what ways worshippers developed certain patterns of worship in accordance with the physical and metaphysical qualities of the water sources with which they conducted these activities (Chapter Four). In doing so, we aim to demonstrate that the various religious communities of the Roman Near East did engage critically with water and that the nature of their engagement was directly influenced by local environmental conditions. There is, of course, some overlap between these chapters: the organisation of sacred space can reveal aspects of a god's characterisation, patterns of worship can shine light on how religious communities interacted with sacred spaces and the religious traditions associated with certain gods can advance our understanding of the patterns of worship performed in their honour. As a result, it should be stressed from the outset that

this thematic division is not arbitrary. Rather, it enables us to focus our attention on the key manifestations of the relationship between water and religious life and to highlight the local diversity with which this relationship found expression.

It is also worth briefly addressing why, when such an emphasis has been placed on examining religious life in its local environmental context, this study is not structured around a selection of localities. In my opinion, such an approach would potentially create a false reality in which, for instance, the religious traditions and practices associated with the Efqa Spring were regarded as representative of the overall relationship between springs and religious life in the Roman Near East. Indeed, as we stressed at the very beginning of this chapter, this study does not aim to produce a comprehensive or definitive examination of the relationship between water and religious life in the Roman Near East. Yet to conduct this study as a compilation of how *some* religious communities engaged with water in their respective localities would be to risk claiming that it offered a conclusive examination of the topic. Instead, our aims are better served by a thematic structure that allows us not only to examine the varied relationship between water and religious life, but also to analyse freely the diversity with this relationship manifested in the Roman Near East.

Chapter Two: Gods

2.1 Characterising the Divine

In this chapter, I analyse the relationship between gods and water by examining references to local environments in the characterisation of associated divine figures. In doing so, I propose that worshippers in the Roman Near East characterised some of their gods with particular reference to the local environment and in some cases recognised divine figures within the landscape itself. In this introductory section, I aim to establish that the character of a god could be both varied and reflective of the local environment. Throughout, I will indicate the sources from which we might pick up hints about the character of gods – namely, their iconography, mythology and the divine terminology that accompanies their reverence – and unpick some of the issues surrounding divine identity in the Roman Near East. Finally, through focused studies of Mithras and Atargatis, I will justify why this topic is best approached through different water types and their associated divine figures, rather than studying individual gods across numerous localities. Accordingly, I then structure this chapter around the environments themselves and thus present case studies in relation to rivers, storms and rainfall, the sea, and springs.

Divine identity and the environment: tychai in the Roman Near East

Tychai – often invoked as the singular Tyche of a given place – provide a productive lens through which to explore matters of divine identity and the environment.¹¹⁶ By their very nature, these figures reflect the interests of their associated localities, for which water and

¹¹⁶ There is an abundance of modern literature on *tychai* in the Near East. In particular, for the purposes of this study, cf. e.g. Matheson (1994), Dirven (1999: 102-105), Belayche (2003: 111-138) and Kropp (2011: 389-396). Introductory summaries and further bibliography are also provided in *DDD*, *LIMC* and *OCD*.

its impact on the surrounding landscape often played a significant role. Concordantly, *tychai* often offer an example of ‘identity construction’ in action, wherein we can track alterations to their characterisation and thus investigate the significance of such processes. Most important however is that, of all the divine figures in antiquity, *tychai* most explicitly straddled the boundary between person and concept. Throughout this chapter, we will encounter a number of figures who likewise sat astride this boundary on account of their capacity both to reflect the qualities of associated water bodies in their characterisation and to be recognised within the watery landscape itself. As a result, an examination of several Levantine *tychai* will serve to introduce the key methodological underpinnings of this chapter and provide an opportunity to think through matters of divine identity.

The *tychai* of the Roman Near East expressed the interests of their respective localities in numerous ways. When visualised on the coinage of their associated cities, many *tychai* exhibited references to local religious traditions within their iconography – a phenomenon clearly prompted by their role as patron city goddesses.¹¹⁷ Amongst the most striking examples from the Roman Near East are Harran, where Tyche was rendered with a crescent above her mural crown in a likely reference to the city’s cult of the Moon;¹¹⁸ Nysa-Scythopolis, where she appeared as Nysa nursing the new-born Dionysos;¹¹⁹ and Petra, where she held an aniconic block, a divine image that was ubiquitous in the city and will be discussed further in 2.5.¹²⁰ To add to this, a horse (and later Pegasus) accompanied the

¹¹⁷ On this topic in particular, see Broucke (1994: 34-49). The following discussion draws heavily on the numismatic representations of Levantine *tychai*, although complementary evidence will be cited where available.

¹¹⁸ *BMC Arabia*, Nos. 6-7, 54 and 56-57. On the cult of the Moon at Harran, see further *DDD* and Green (1992).

¹¹⁹ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 23, 32, 40-41, 46 and 57-58 – see also Barkay (2003). The mythical past of Nysa-Scythopolis is narrated by Pliny (*HN* 5.16/74) and Malalas (*Chron.* 5.65-66/139-140). On the relationship between myth and religious life in the city, see Lichtenberger (2004: 24-26) and Kaizer (2017a: 42).

¹²⁰ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 36-42, 44-45, 47, 51 and 53. An inscription uncovered in the temenos of the Qasr al-Bint preserves a dedication “to the Tyche of Hadriane Petra” (Alpass 2013: 106, No. 24: Τύχη Ἀδριανῆς Πέ[τ]ρας); but little is otherwise known about her cult in the city.

Tyche of Hippos-Sussita, a city that owed its name to the horse-shaped ridge on which it lay.¹²¹ We can identify similar environmental undertones in other examples. For instance, at Laodicea on the coast of northern Syria, Tyche wore a lighthouse in her mural crown and a bunch of grapes in her hair, features that resonated with the city's coastal location and its famous vineyards watered by the area's high rainfall.¹²² Likewise, at nearby Seleucia Pieria, she appeared holding a lightning bolt, presumably in reference to the thunderstorms that erupted around Jebel Aqra, whose associated storm-god we will encounter in **2.3**.¹²³ In sum, *tychai* embodied the locality with which they were associated.

However, despite this local specificity, many *tychai* – including those cited above – drew iconographic inspiration from one of the most famous cult images of the Roman Near East: the Tyche of Antioch.¹²⁴ According to Pausanias, her eponymous statue was created by Eutychemes of Sicyon around 300 BC and was highly valued by the Antiochene community.¹²⁵ Although this Hellenistic statue is now lost to us, we can reconstruct her

¹²¹ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 1, 4, 7, 8-9, 13, 15-19, 24-25, 27, 32 and 33-34. For a history of the site in light of archaeological excavations, see now Segal *et al* (2013).

¹²² Tyche's grapes are clearly visible on many issues (e.g. *BMC Syria*, Nos. 54-74), whilst her lighthouse is most prominent on a coin types issued under Hadrian (*RPC* III: No. 3806) and Antoninus Pius (*RPC* IV: No. 8587 [temp.]). A fascinating inscription (*SEG* 36: No. 1297) reveals that the council of Seleucia Pieria gave permission for a certain Damasias to erect a statue of the Tyche of Laodicea in a temple close to the summit of Jebel Aqra. For further discussion, see Aliquot (2015: 157-167).

¹²³ Butcher (2004: No.60). On the thunderstorms of Jebel Aqra, see **2.3**.

¹²⁴ Numerous studies are dedicated to the Tyche of Antioch, including Christof (2001) and Meyer (2006). Her iconography and its impact are also discussed in detail by Stansbury-O'Donnell (1994: 50-63), Butcher (2004: 231-232 and 298-299) and Kropp (2011: 389-407). See also, *LIMC* 'Antiocheia'. On Antioch in general, see Downey (1961) and De Giorgi (2016).

¹²⁵ 6.2.6-7. Malalas (*Chron.* 8.13/200-201 and 11.9/275-276) presents an alternative tradition: when Seleucus founded Antioch, he sacrificed a virgin girl and then erected a bronze statue "above the river" (ὑπεράνω τοῦ ποταμοῦ) in her image as the city's Tyche. Then, after an earthquake struck the city in AD 115, Trajan apparently sacrificed another virgin "for the city's atonement and purification" (ὑπὲρ λύτρου καὶ ἀποκαθαρισμοῦ τῆς πόλεως) before setting up another bronze statue in her image. This particular statue was located at the theatre, where it apparently stood within "the middle of the nymphaeum in the proscenium" (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ νυμφαίου τοῦ προσκηνίου) and formed part of a group in which Seleucus and Antiochus were crowning her as the Tyche of the city. A coin type issued under Severus Alexander (Butcher 2004: No. 488 (= *LIMC* 'Antiocheia' No. 63) possibly alludes to this statue group: the Tyche of Antioch is accompanied by another Tyche and is being crowned by a male figure in military dress. On the Tyche sacrifices in Malalas, see Garstad (2005: 83-135). The Tycheion of Antioch is the subject of an article currently in preparation by E.V. Thomas.

iconography from later sculptural reproductions and other images (**Figures 2.1.1** and **2.1.2**).¹²⁶ In essence, the Tyche of Antioch comprised a female figure seated on a rock and wearing a mural crown, veil and long *chiton* with a thick mantle enclosing her body.¹²⁷ Her left hand rested on the rock, whilst her right held a bundle of grain, fruit and flowers in her lap. At her feet was a nude male youth, who was visible only from the waist up and appeared as if swimming through a body of water below the rock. Through her iconography, the Tyche of Antioch makes several references to Antioch's local environment.¹²⁸ The city, now largely obscured by modern-day Antakya, once sprawled along the banks of the Orontes river in a deep valley overshadowed by Jebel Habib Neccar (ancient Mount Silpios), a spur of the limestone massif that culminates in Jebel Aqra (**Figure 2.1.3**). Accordingly, the rock on which Tyche sits is today recognised as Jebel Habib Neccar, whilst the nude youth is interpreted as the Orontes river at the bottom of the valley. The bountiful bundle Tyche holds in her lap is also noteworthy: although agriculture was an essential feature of daily life in many localities of the Levant, Antioch and its hinterland stood out as an area of exceptional abundance in the region. Indeed, the numerous field surveys conducted by the Amuq Valley Regional Project (AVRP) between 1995 and 2005 established that the area was rapidly and intensively cultivated during the Roman period.¹²⁹ Thus, much like other Levantine *tychai*, the Tyche of Antioch referenced numerous features

¹²⁶ For a compilation of the material and further discussion, see *LIMC* 'Antiochea'. For numismatic representations, see now Butcher (2004: 48c, 54c, 474-485, 489-491 502, 504 and 507-508). For a synthesis of her iconography, see Butcher (*ibid*: 298-299) and Kropp (2011: 390-391).

¹²⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of the history and significance of the mural crown and its appearance on figures other than Tyche, see Metzler (1994: 76-85) and Lightfoot (2003: 22-24).

¹²⁸ For a summary of Antioch's natural landscape, see Downey (1961: 15-23).

¹²⁹ For the main results of the AVRP, see Yener (2005); and for a detailed synthesis, see Gerritsen *et al* (2008: 241-314). In the first and second centuries AD, the density of rural settlement increased rapidly due to Antioch's growing population taking advantage of the agricultural opportunities offered by the landscape – see further De Giorgi (2007: 283-298). For a review of the main landscape features of Antioch's hinterland, see *ibid* (284-285). De Giorgi (2016) also offers a comprehensive discussion of the development of the city and the hinterland in the Roman period primarily in light of the archaeological material.

of the landscape in her iconographic composition and accordingly embodied these particular environmental aspects in her character.

However, it is precisely the Tyche of Antioch's local specificity that problematised Levantine *tychai* for some scholars because many other cities chose to employ her iconography for their own local *tychai*.¹³⁰ For example, at Dura-Europos, two female figures form part of a fresco depicting the tribune of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* performing a sacrifice to three Palmyrene gods.¹³¹ These female figures are each labelled in Greek as the 'Tyche of Palmyra' and the 'Tyche of Dura', and both derive their iconography from the Tyche of Antioch.¹³² Elsewhere, some localities seemingly took further steps to appropriate Antiochene Tyche: at Gerasa, Tyche appears on the city's coins in Antiochene form and is accompanied by the legend "Antioch by the Chrysorhoas, the former Gerasa".¹³³ Significantly, the environmental references in the Antiochene composition of Tyche were also relevant for Gerasa, as the city lies within fertile hills and is divided by the River Chrysorhoas.¹³⁴ There were probably several reasons why Gerasa chose to depict this particular image and legend on its coinage but, as we will see throughout this section, the importance of the local environment in adding legitimacy to such decisions should not be underestimated. To add to this, Gerasa is also a prime example

¹³⁰ Thus, Kaizer (2013b: 126-127): "the tension is palpable: in order to emphasise the divine power looking after a specific city, that city would turn to an image it shared with all other cities!"

¹³¹ For a synthesis of the fresco's content and interpretation, see Dirven (1999: 302-307); and for further discussion, see Kaizer (2006b: 151-159) and Dirven (2007: 115-127).

¹³² SEG 2: Nos. 767-768: Τύχη Παλμύρων | Τύχη Δούρας. They are also accompanied by two swimming figures: a naked female figure appears alongside the Tyche of Palmyra, whilst the Tyche of Dura is joined by a bearded male. It is commonly assumed that the figures represent the Efqa spring and the Euphrates river, the dominant water sources at Palmyra and Dura respectively. Elsewhere in the Levant, Euphrates is commonly depicted as a recumbent river god in the classical style – see further entries in *LIMC*, as well as Cumont (1917: 247-256) and Campbell (2012: 156).

¹³³ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 11-12, 17 and 21-23: AN ΤΩ ΠΙΡ ΧΡ ΤΩ ΠΙΡ ΓΕ. This title is also known from several inscriptions discovered in the city (Welles 1938: Nos. 30, 58 and 144). For further discussion of Tyche on Gerasa's coinage, see Lichtenberger (2008: 133-153) and Raja (2012: 203). The community at Hippos-Sussita also employed the name Antioch on their coinage (Spijkerman *ibid*: Nos. 1, 4, 6-40).

¹³⁴ On the riverine landscape of Gerasa, see Lichtenberger and Raja (2016: 98-115).

of a city in which multiple forms of Tyche seemingly operated in harmony. In addition to the Antiochene type, Tyche was also represented as a standing figure holding a cornucopia and placing her foot on the prow – a particular composition to which we will soon return.¹³⁵ Moreover, she was explicitly rendered with Artemis: from the reign of Hadrian onward, the city issued coins featuring a bust of Artemis – identifiable by her bow and quiver – accompanied by the legend “Artemis, the Tyche of the citizens of Gerasa,” (**Figure 2.1.4**).¹³⁶ Such examples therefore demonstrate that divine figures, including *tychai*, could exhibit attributes more commonly associated with other gods and that doing so by no means problematised them in the mind of the ancient worshipper.¹³⁷

The custom of identifying Tyche with a local divine figure is known from elsewhere in the Roman Near East. As noted above, Dionysos’ nurse-maid Nysa appeared as Tyche on the coins of Nysa-Scythopolis in the Decapolis; and at Bostra, Athena was named as the Tyche of the city.¹³⁸ Yet in most cases, our evidence enables little more than speculation as to the gods that were recognised with Tyche, or even if such an assimilation occurred at all. For instance, many modern scholars have regarded the maritime *tychai* of the Phoenician coast as being assimilated with Astarte,¹³⁹ but, as Andreas Kropp highlighted, these two figures are never explicitly equated in the ancient record.¹⁴⁰ In any case, these *tychai* often appear

¹³⁵ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 9-10 and 16. She is also accompanied by a male figure holding a spear and wearing a long cloak, a composition reminiscent of Hellenistic rulers – see further Lichtenberger (2008: 141-142).

¹³⁶ Spijkerman 1978: Nos. 4-7, 13-14, 18, 24-27: ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ ΤΥΧΗ ΓΕΡΑΣΩΝ.

¹³⁷ Thus, Sartre (2001: 887): “Sans doute y a-t-il entre eux des syncrétismes et des assimilations, mais il faut se garder de les confondre et chacun conserve une personnalité propre qui devait apparaître nettement aux fidèles.” The modern terminology used to describe this phenomenon – be it ‘assimilation’, ‘syncretism’ or another alternative – is variable. Although Drijvers’ preference (1980: 17-18) for ‘assimilation’ is well-founded, Kaizer’s proposal (2013b: 115-116) that we should recognise different forms of ‘syncretism’ (‘unequivocal’, ‘embedded’ and ‘academic’) more accurately reflects the local focus of our evidence.

¹³⁸ Spijkerman 1978: No. 8.

¹³⁹ Thus, for instance, Belayche (2003: 130): “Dès les temps hellénistiques, l’Astarté syro-phénicienne avait été assimilée à la Tychè poliade.” See also, *BMC Phoenicia* (lvi-lvii), *LIMC* (‘Astarte’: 1084), Sawaya (2009: 226) and Bonnet (2015: 250 and 298, *passim*).

¹⁴⁰ 2011: 398-403.

as fully formed figures in their own right, with the Tyche of Berytos providing representative example. Situated on a long coastal promontory, the religious life of Berytos was dominated by the sea and the city's maritime endeavours.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, the Tyche of Berytos was represented as a maritime protectress: when depicted on the city's coinage, she stands frontally wearing a mural crown and a long dress, which she lifts to reveal her left foot resting on a prow (**Figure 2.1.5**).¹⁴² She holds an *aphlaston* in her left hand and a *stylis* in her right; a Nike, perched atop a beautiful spirally-fluted column, crowns her. Both items were religious objects commonly seen on ships and therefore symbols of her role as a patron of seafarers.¹⁴³ Thus, regardless of whether worshippers identified the Tyche of Berytos with other goddesses, her iconographic composition clearly communicates the maritime focus of her character. Our inability to identify a particular goddess behind the Tyche of Berytos in no way prohibits our comprehension of the ways in which her character reflected the local environment with which she was associated. Moreover, seeking the 'real' gods that lurked behind these *tychai* is not a primary concern for this study because ultimately divine figures could be interpreted variously by different worshippers. Gods were not static entities but complex individuals whose nature was constantly being negotiated in the mind of the ancient worshipper and the religious communities with which they were connected. As we will see throughout this chapter, this concept holds true in particular for those gods whose characters were informed by watery environments because such landscapes were themselves prone to change.

¹⁴¹ As we will see in **2.4**, this environmental situation stimulated the characterisation of Berytos' leading god, Poseidon.

¹⁴² Sawaya 2009: Séries 36-37, 39-40, 53-54, 61, 65, 72, 77, 81, 83, 86, 90, 92, 94-96, 112, 118, 120 and 122. In one particular issue (*ibid* Série 104), she stands within a ship. On the Tyche of Berytos, see now Kropp (2011: 389-407).

¹⁴³ An *aphlaston* was the curved stern of a ship that was often decorated with religious symbols and a *stylis* was a pole with a crossbar upon which an image of the ship's protective deity was placed. On both items, see Svoronos (1914: 81-152).

Thus far, much has been said about the character of gods, and divine identity in general, and it is now time to examine this concept in more detail. At the heart of this discussion is the extent to which worshippers were actively and consciously responsible for this construction process, a matter underpinned by the fact that – as we have already noted – the divine inhabitants of the region could communicate many shades of other gods without there being any doubt as to their identity.¹⁴⁴ Fergus Millar was amongst the first to advocate the significance of the ancient worshipper in this process, suggesting that “...it is futile to ask what an ancient deity ‘really was’: for he was whatever his worshipper said he was.”¹⁴⁵ Ted Kaizer has since proposed that this argument was not without its complications: “the ancient worshipper would certainly not have agreed with the idea that he had ‘made up’ or generated his own deity (...) he simply addressed his deity in such manner that seemed to fit the appropriate situation best.”¹⁴⁶ Yet a common thread between these two nuances is the acceptance that the ancient worshippers themselves did indeed choose how to conceive and engage with the inhabitants of the divine world, a premise that will be maintained throughout this chapter. Moreover, Kaizer’s emphasis on context is particularly important to our study because, as this chapter will demonstrate, the characterisation of gods could reflect the local watery environments with which they were associated. Indeed, as we will now see, the character of a divine figure could be constructed with reference to numerous contextual factors.

¹⁴⁴ Thus, Ewins and Williams-Reed (forthcoming): “When we try to answer the question ‘who were the gods of the Roman Near East?’, we are really asking ‘who did the people of the Roman Near East imagine their gods to be?’”

¹⁴⁵ 1993: 270. See also *ibid* (248-249) on the particular case of Jupiter Dolichenus: “...the very fact that the deity was transposed into so many different environments makes the already difficult question of his ‘real’ nature infinitely more complex (...) his worshippers could literally make of him what they would.” See also, Butcher (2003: 340): “[the gods] were not beings autonomous of their worshippers’ desires.”

¹⁴⁶ 2013b: 118.

The Tyche of Caesarea Maritima provides the best example of how the character of a divine figure could be constructed to reflect a range contextual influences, none of which were mutually exclusive. Caesarea Maritima was home to divergent Greek, Jewish and Roman communities and, just like Berytos, was a coastal city whose socio-economic interests were primarily embedded in the maritime realm. A huge harbour, constructed during the late-first century BC, dominated the urban landscape and was overlooked by the similarly awesome Temple of Augustus and Roma, a space we will fully examine in **3.3**. Herod the Great was responsible for initiating the construction of the entire complex, an act broadly interpreted as an affirmation of his ties to Rome.¹⁴⁷ This act formed the foundation of the city's complex relationship with the Roman state, the tensions from which led to increasingly violent riots amongst its communities throughout the early first century AD and culminated in the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt in AD 66. Many scholars have analysed the various factors surrounding the escalation of conflict in the city and the wider region but this is not the place to evaluate the nuances of the debate.¹⁴⁸ Rather, for the immediate purpose of this discussion, it must simply be stressed that the tensions in the city were underpinned not only by religious convictions but also a variety of socio-political inclinations.¹⁴⁹

This is the context from which the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima developed. In her most popular form, her iconography is known from the city's coins, as well as a marble life-size statue uncovered in a secondary context at the site (**Figure 2.1.6** and **2.1.7**).¹⁵⁰ She adopts

¹⁴⁷ On Herod's building activities and his relationship with Rome, see Kropp (2013: 315-341 and 344-357).

¹⁴⁸ Most pertinent here are the comments of Millar (1993: 351-366) and Andrade (2010: 342-370), who lay importance on the conflicting self-expression of divergent communities in shared civic spaces. See also, *HJP* I (1973: 484-513), Goodman (1987), Kasher (1990) and Kloppenborg (2000: 227-248).

¹⁴⁹ Thus, Millar's incisive maxim (1993: 353): "...at one level it was a conflict between Judaism and *paganism*, and at another between Empire and a claim to liberty."

¹⁵⁰ Numismatic representations include *BMC Palestine* (Nos. 5-29), and *RPC* (I: No. 4862; II: No. 2231; and III: Nos. 3954 and 3960). On the sculpture and other representations, see Gersht (1984: 110-114 and 1996: 305-310). Tyche had previously appeared on the city's coins in AD 42 as a standing figure clothed in a long

a dominant stance by planting her right foot on the prow of a ship, carries a small sword on her hip and wears a short *peplos* exposing her right breast – details reminiscent of the Amazonian iconography most commonly adopted by Roma.¹⁵¹ Her head is adorned with a mural crown and faces to the right. The object of her attention is an imperial bust that she holds in her outstretched right hand. In her left hand she holds a *stylis*, the base of which is supported by a nude male youth depicted only from the waist up. This male figure is recognised as a personification of Caesarea Maritima’s harbour, an identification bolstered by the presence of a towing harness across his chest. The socio-political dimensions of her iconographic composition are clear: her Amazonian dress, dominant stance and display of the emperor together indicate that her character has been constructed to communicate a strong allegiance to the Roman state and its values.¹⁵² Yet she is also represented as a maritime protectress through the inclusion of the *stylis*, prow and personification of the harbour, details that both tied her specifically to Caesarea Maritima and rendered her as a suitable figure to worship in a city whose daily life was dominated by seafaring. Indeed, as we will explore in more detail in **3.3**, the harbour and its temple were a focal point for the city’s religious activities and it was therefore essential that the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima – a figure who was evoked in such activities – could function convincingly within this setting. The Tyche of Caesarea Maritima therefore demonstrates that the inclusion of environmental aspects could add legitimacy to a god’s character by communicating their presence within the landscape, a concept that will be a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

dress and holding a palm branch in her left hand and the rudder of a ship in her right (*RPC* I: Nos. 4985-4986). The editors of *RPC* identify the object in Tyche’s left hand as a cornucopia but it is clearly visible as palm branch in a better-preserved specimen published by Meshorer (2001: No. 122). The inclusion of the palm branch is noteworthy because it functioned as both a Jewish and Graeco-Roman symbol (Ariel and Fontanille 2012: 112) – might we speculate that this coin type was intended to appeal to both communities?

¹⁵¹ See further *LIMC* *sv.* ‘Roma’. Significantly, the Roma worshipped in Caesarea Maritima’s aforementioned temple was apparently modelled on Hera of Argos (Joseph. *BJ* 1.21.7/414 and *AJ* 15.9.6/339).

¹⁵² This is also the conclusion of Gersht (1984: 111-112), Kropp (2011: 391) and Patrich (2011: 79).

The topic of recognising divine presence within the landscape brings us to the final point of this section: of all the divine figures in the ancient world, *tychai* most explicitly straddled the boundary between person and concept.¹⁵³ By her very name, Τύχη was ‘fortune’ or ‘fate’ personified and she received cult that specifically evoked this quality.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps the clearest expression of this tradition in the Roman Near East are the patterns of worship surrounding the figure of Gad (pl. *gadde*), known almost exclusively from the Aramaic inscriptions of Palmyra, Dura-Europos and Hatra.¹⁵⁵ Although Tyche and Gad were not entirely analogous, there are numerous instances of worshippers recognising some equation between the two¹⁵⁶. In particular, twin reliefs from the so-called ‘Temple of the Gadde’ at Dura-Europos depict the ‘Gad of Dura’ and the ‘Gad of Tadmor’, the latter of which adopts the iconography of Antiochene Tyche almost in its entirety (**Figure 2.1.8**).¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the term *gd* likewise embodies aspects of fate in its meaning due to its derivation from the Aramaic *gdd*, meaning ‘to cut off’ or ‘to assign’.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is most likely that such similarities simply indicate a recognition of the parallels between two modes of religious thinking that otherwise developed independently.¹⁵⁹ For the purposes of our enquiry however, the particular reverence of *gadde* in many cases reveals the capacity for

¹⁵³ Thus, Versnel (2011: 306): “Tyche never lost her ambiguous position on the brink between principle and person.” Cf. Matheson (1994: 19), who prefers an evolutionary process: “...her divine nature was the result of a complex evolution from idea to personification to goddess.” On this topic, in addition to the literature cited above, cf. e.g. *ibid* (18-33), Stafford (2010: 82-83) and Versnel (2011: 277-280).

¹⁵⁴ *LSJ* ‘τύχη’. Though lacking detail on Tyche/Τύχη, for discussion of personification in ancient religion, see Stafford (2000), and Stafford and Herrin (2005). On the role of fortune and fate in antiquity, see Eidinow (2011).

¹⁵⁵ For a compilation of the material and further discussion, see Kaizer (1997: 147-166 and 1998: 33-62).

¹⁵⁶ See, for instance, a bilingual honorific inscription (*PAT* 0273 = *IGLS* XVII.1: No. 306) from the ‘Temple of Bel’ in Palmyra that renders the same toponymic figure as Tyche in Greek and Gad in Aramaic. For further discussion of this text and the relationship between Tyche and Gad more generally, see Kaizer (1998: 47-51) and Dirven (1999: 107-109). However, this situation is complicated by the recent publication of an inscription (*IGLS* XV.1: No. 47) from the Trachonitis, in which Gad is transliterated into Greek letters – see further Ewins and Williams-Reed (forthcoming).

¹⁵⁷ *PAT* 1094: *gd’ dy dwr’*; and *PAT* 1097: *gd’ dy tdmwr*. Both reliefs are now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. Nos. 1938.5314 and 1938.5313). For further discussion of both reliefs and their context, see Downey (1977: Cat. Nos. 4 and 5) and Dirven (1999: 222-260, esp. 245-248). For a comprehensive discussion of the Gad of Dura and the Gad of Tadmor, see Dirven (*ibid*: 99-127).

¹⁵⁸ See further *CAL* (*gdd*) and discussion by Kaizer (1997: 147-148).

¹⁵⁹ For further discussion on the “(supposedly?) mutual influences” between Semitic and Graeco-Roman concepts of ‘fortune’, see Kaizer (1998: 46-53).

worshippers to evoke divine figures who walked the line between person and concept. Focusing solely on environmental examples, we encounter dedications to the ‘Gad of the blessed spring’, for whom we have no visual representation;¹⁶⁰ and the ‘Gad of the gardens’ who, in one instance, is depicted as an armed goddess.¹⁶¹ In both cases, the very names of these figures indicates a clear religious mentality in which worshippers recognised divine presence within specific landscape features; and thus the premise that worshippers could identify their gods as people, concepts and something in between is affirmed.

The nuances surrounding this premise are significant to our study because, as we will see throughout this chapter, many gods both reflected the qualities of associated water bodies in their characterisation and were recognised within the watery landscape itself. Such figures had the capacity to be both a person with an identifiable name, image and mythology – some of which were informed by environmental conditions – and also a concept whose divine presence was augmented by certain landscape features. Thus, throughout this chapter, we will encounter divine figures who were, all at once, characterised with reference to the local environment, regarded as having certain water features under their sphere of influence and recognised as being present within the landscape itself.

Approaching the gods: Atargatis and Mithras

The complexity of the relationship between water and gods in the Roman Near East necessitates that we reflect on how to approach these divine figures and their associated landscapes. One possibility would be to focus on a selection of gods who were well-known

¹⁶⁰ PAT 0322: *gd' dy 'yn' brykt*. The original location of this dedication is unknown.

¹⁶¹ PAT 1621 and 1707: *gd' dy gny*. The former inscription accompanies the image of the armed goddess and was found in the so-called ‘Temple of Bel’ – see further Drijvers (1976: 19, Pl. LII.2). The most well-known garden of Palmyra was the ‘Sacred Garden’ of Aglibol and Malakbel but we have no way of knowing if the Gad of the garden was associated with this sacred garden or another garden altogether – see further Kaizer (2002: 124-143).

for having a significant connection to water and then to chart manifestations of this connection between different localities. Such an approach would instinctively place Atargatis at the heart of discussion due to the centrality of water in her cult at Hierapolis. Another strong candidate might be Mithras, whose mythological origins were claimed to have dictated that his cult sites, *mithraea*, be located in caves with running water. Both figures would also be well-suited to such an enquiry on account of their intrinsic connection to the Roman Near East: Atargatis was recognised in Graeco-Roman culture as *the* Syrian Goddess and Mithras, despite receiving cult throughout the Roman Empire, never really lost his classification as an ‘eastern’ god. Yet, as I aim to demonstrate in this section using these very examples, such an approach is in danger of overvaluing the significance of the relationship between water and these gods because, as we will see, this relationship varied between different localities. Moreover, focusing solely on a narrow selection of well-known gods would consequently exclude many other divine figures who, as this chapter will demonstrate, were being characterised with close reference to local environment and recognised within the landscape.

Atargatis’ relationship with water seems to originate – at least in Lucian’s eyes – from the mythological foundation of her cult centre at Hierapolis and the subsequent rituals undertaken there.¹⁶² According to Lucian, the great flood came to an end when a huge chasm opened at Hierapolis and swallowed all the water, such that Deucalion established a temple there in honour of Atargatis.¹⁶³ In Lucian’s day, this myth was apparently

¹⁶² Various sources suggest that Hierapolis (variously named) was regarded as Atargatis’ cult centre: both Strabo (16.1.27) and Pliny (*HN* 5.19/81) acknowledge her reverence at the site, details indicative of the city’s reputation long before Lucian (*Syr. D.* 13, 49, 55-56) commented on worshippers flocking to the city from across the ancient world – for further discussion, see Kaizer (2017a: 45). We should also note here an inscription (Alpass 2013: 105, No. 23) from the Wadi Siyyagh in Petra that mentions Atargatis Manbigitess (*’tr ’t’ mnbgyt’*), likely a reference to Hierapolis’ Semitic name, Membij, and further testament to sanctuary’s international status. On the variant names of Hierapolis, see Lightfoot (2003: 38-39). The sanctuary’s foundation and its associated rituals are discussed in full at **4.1**.

¹⁶³ *Syr. D.* 12-13.

commemorated twice a year when water was collected from the sea and poured out in the temple so it drained into the chasm – a pattern of worship to which we will return in **4.1**.¹⁶⁴ The sea-water was inspected by a sacred cock, who lived beside the sanctuary's lake.¹⁶⁵ As we will explore in detail in **3.4**, the lake was also home to many bejewelled fish and hosted 'descents to the lake', a festival in which the goddess' cult image was ceremonially borne from her temple to the shore.¹⁶⁶ To all appearances, water played a fundamental role in reverence of Atargatis at Hierapolis and, given the site's status as her cult centre, modern scholars have since sought evidence for comparable practices at other sites.

Significantly, despite its location 1100km west of Hierapolis, Atargatis' sanctuary at Delos offers the best comparison, perhaps on account of its management by several Hierapolitan priests.¹⁶⁷ Archaeological remains include a prominent cistern on the sanctuary's terrace and three large basins in its portico; and a Greek inscription from the site records the dedication of an εἶψαν by a certain Zoilos, an item now widely interpreted as a cultic basin.¹⁶⁸ Another text, also composed in Greek, outlines the cultic regulations for entrance to the temple, including cleansing oneself after eating fish.¹⁶⁹ At Delos, we thus encounter several tantalising testaments to the use of water at her sanctuary but the particular nature

¹⁶⁴ *Syr. D.* 13.

¹⁶⁵ *Syr. D.* 48.

¹⁶⁶ *Syr. D.* 45-47.

¹⁶⁷ The so-called 'Sanctuary of the Syrian Goddess' is part of a larger cluster of religious buildings originally referred to as the 'Sanctuary of the Foreign Gods' and located in the northeast of the city. Atargatis' sanctuary flourished in the second century BC and was managed by both Hierapolitan and Athenian priests, who worshipped her variously as Atargatis, Aphrodite and the 'Pure Goddess' (ἀγνή θεά). For the final excavation report, see Will (1985); and for a summary of the site's parallels with Hierapolis, see Lightfoot (2003: 44-50).

¹⁶⁸ *ID* 2234. Will (1973: 598-600) was the first to propose that the term is probably a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic 'gn, a term that broadly refers to a basin. Will suggested that object of dedication was in fact the sanctuary's central reservoir, whose Semitic name was retained in the text on account of its ritual significance. For further discussion of this term in the context of Palmyra, see Kaizer (2002: 225). An inscription, composed in Nabataean Aramaic, also records the dedication of an 'gn at Petra – see now Alpass (2013: 102, No. 16).

¹⁶⁹ *ID* 2530. The text also prescribes ritual bathing (λούω) after eating pork – Lucian (*Syr. D.* 54) also states that pigs were not sacrificed nor eaten at Hierapolis due to their uncleanness and sacredness.

or significance of these activities remains largely unknown. The situation in the Roman Near East is similarly ambiguous and perhaps even more complicated. For example, although the Temple of Atargatis at Dura-Europos has yielded some of the most detailed archaeological evidence for the goddess' Levantine cult, the role of water at the sanctuary remains unclear.¹⁷⁰ Three basins were installed in the sanctuary's entrance vestibule – presumably to facilitate ritual ablutions before entering the temple proper – and a fourth basin stood in the central courtyard. Susan Downey has since speculated that the courtyard basin might have functioned as a symbolic reconstruction of Hierapolis' lake, or even that the 'descents to the lake' were re-enacted on the banks of the Euphrates.¹⁷¹ Such a proposal is seductive, and certainly plausible, but hypothetical nonetheless;¹⁷² and thus Atargatis' particular relationship with water at Dura-Europos remains indecipherable. More importantly, we are now in danger of exaggerating Atargatis' relationship with water: at both Delos and Dura-Europos our evidence largely pertains to cleansing and to pouring libations, both activities that, as we will discuss in **4.1**, were standard cultic practice regardless of the god to whom they were directed. A study that focused on Atargatis might therefore carelessly frame the goddess' relationship with water as exceptional, a claim that cannot be upheld.

¹⁷⁰ In particular, the famous cult relief of Atargatis, Hadad and the 'standard' (σημῆϊον) – a near-match of Lucian's description (*Syr. D.* 31-33) of the cult images at Hierapolis – was uncovered in the temple. For discussion of the relief, see Downey (1977: 173-177 and Cat. No. 2). The relief is now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No. 1930.319). For a synthesis of the temple's development in light of archaeological excavations, see Downey (1988: 102-105). Once again, Lightfoot (2003: 50-56) provides a discussion of the site's parallels with Hierapolis.

¹⁷¹ 1988: 104. This theory has since been reiterated by other scholars, e.g. Buchmann (2016: 121).

¹⁷² This theory is also problematised by the fact that the neighbouring Temple of Artemis featured a large, shallow pool in its own central courtyard complete with steps to enable a descent into the water, a feature that surely would have been more 'suitable' in the Temple of Atargatis – see further *Rep* (III: 4-8) and Downey (1988: 89-92).

Mithras can also offer a comparative example, albeit for different reasons.¹⁷³ Typically framed as an Indo-Iranian deity, Mithras enjoyed widespread popularity across the Graeco-Roman world and further afield.¹⁷⁴ Similar to Atargatis, Mithras' connection to water seemingly originated from a mythological episode in which he produced a stream by shooting an arrow at a rock, an incident illustrated most beautifully on the panels surrounding the tauroctony uncovered at Dura-Europos (**Figure 2.1.9**).¹⁷⁵ We also have material that appears to draw a direct link between Mithras' characterisation and the presence of water in his *mithraea*. Writing in the third century AD, the Tyrian philosopher Porphyry comments:¹⁷⁶

For Eubulus tells us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honour of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created, and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos. After Zoroaster others adopted the custom of performing their rites of initiation in caves and grottoes which were either natural or artificial.

In Porphyry's opinion, Mithras' creation of the cosmos – an essential part of his character – necessitated that his cult sites reflect the cosmos in both their cave location and inclusion of flowers and springs. For some modern scholars, this text has served as a missive for the

¹⁷³ A focused study of Mithras' relationship with water is still lacking, although the recent monograph of Adrych *et al* (2017) begins to address this topic in its conclusions (160-162), a discussion to which my own exploration of the matter owes much. Lenk's contribution to the volume (*ibid*: 61-80, esp. 73-78) is equally informative in its analysis of *mithraea* and their associated landscapes.

¹⁷⁴ For an introduction to the cult of Mithras from both eastern and classical perspectives, see *DDD* and *OCD*. For a recent discussion of different approaches to Mithras and associated figures, see the varied chapters in Adrych *et al* (2017).

¹⁷⁵ The fresco is now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No. 1935.100). For further discussion of the *mithraeum* at Dura-Europos, see Dirven (1999: 260-272) and Gnoli (2016: 126-143).

¹⁷⁶ *De antr. nymph.* 2-3/5-6: πρώτου μὲν, ὡς ἔφη Εὐβουλος, Ζωροάστρου αὐτοφυῆς σπήλαιον ἐν τοῖς πλησίον ὄρεσι τῆς Περσίδος ἀνθηρὸν καὶ πηγὰς ἔχον ἀνιερώσαντος εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ πάντων ποιητοῦ καὶ πατρὸς Μίθρου, εἰκόνα φέροντος αὐτῷ τοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ κόσμου, ὃν ὁ Μίθρας ἐδημιούργησε, τῶν δ' ἐντὸς κατὰ συμμετρους ἀποστάσεις σύμβολα φερόντων τῶν κοσμικῶν στοιχείων καὶ κλιμάτων· μετὰ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν Ζωροάστρην κρατήσαντος καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις, δι' ἄντρων καὶ σπηλαίων εἴτ' οὖν αὐτοφυῶν εἴτε χειροποιήτων τὰς τελετὰς ἀποδιδόναι (Text: Mylonopoulos 2008: 80, n.136; trans. Adrych *et al* 2017: 74).

ideal Mithraic space;¹⁷⁷ but, once again, the extent to which Mithras' cult sites conformed to this alleged ideal varied remarkably. At Dura-Europos, a basin was installed in the floor at the entrance to the *mithraeum* but, by contrast, no water installations are present in the *mithraeum* at Caesarea Maritima.¹⁷⁸ Further afield, at Bourg-Saint-Andéol in southern France, a tauroctony was carved into a natural rock-face behind the confluence of two springs;¹⁷⁹ and a stream likewise separated the worshipper from a cult image of Sasanian Mihr at Tāq-e Bostān in western Iran.¹⁸⁰ Thus, in parallel with Atargatis, although we can identify a connection to water in some of the localities where he received cult, Mithras' relationship with water manifests with great diversity. Consequently, an approach that adopted Mithras as a subject of enquiry could risk over-estimating the significance of water, or even "creating a false reality in which (...) water becomes somehow intrinsic or peculiar to Mithras."¹⁸¹ Though it is clear that Mithras had a connection to water, it is difficult to maintain that the nature of this relationship was unique to him and consistently informed his characterisation across his cult sites.

Studying the relationship between water and these two figures therefore reveals several problems with such an approach. First and foremost, we risk presenting water as an essential component of the god's characterisation when, in fact, their relationship with water varies between localities. Moreover, this connection to water is often dependent on a set of activities – namely, ablutions and libations – that were common to many gods. In

¹⁷⁷ E.g. Gordon (1976: 122) on a basin in the so-called 'Sette Sfere' *mithraeum* at Ostia: "We may conclude that this basin was conceived as a symbol of that original spring in the mountains of Persia, of which every *mithraeum* at one level is a reproduction." Similarly, Beck (2006: *passim*) refers to Porphyry's account as a 'gateway text' on the form and function of *mithraea*.

¹⁷⁸ The material from Dura-Europos is discussed above; for Caesarea Maritima, see Bull (*et al* 2017). For a selective overview of *mithraea* in the Levant, see Hopfe (1990: 2214-2235) and Sartre (2001: 897-898).

¹⁷⁹ For a discussion of the site, see now Lenk (in Adrych *et al* 2017: 61-80).

¹⁸⁰ For an introduction to this site, its cult of Mihr and its relationship to Roman Mithras, see Wood (in Adrych *et al* 2017: 81-105).

¹⁸¹ Adrych *et al* (2017: 161).

turn therefore, we also encounter the issue of understanding the extent to which a god's connection with water had a bearing on their local characterisation. Although Atargatis' iconic lions were symbols of motherhood and protection, and thus indicative of a fertile dimension in her character, precisely what fertility meant to her worshippers would have varied remarkably between localities. Equally, Mithras' alleged creation of the cosmos predicated an affinity with water but surely we cannot reduce highly individualised notions of the cosmos to a common religious mentality adopted by Mithraic adherents across the ancient world? Rather, the local nuances of both a god's characterisation and their relationship with water firmly dictates that each figure is studied in their local context. Moreover, adopting a thematic approach structured around the different water types will enable us not only to focus on a range of divine figures in their local landscapes but will also readily provide a framework in which we can examine the diversity with which these gods were characterised throughout the Roman Near East.

2.2 Rivers and Gods

We have already encountered rivers at 2.1, in which we commented on personified local rivers as the acolytes of city goddesses across the Roman Near East. That discussion served to establish that the identities of the region's divine figures could be rendered with reference to the local environment. Now, we will move on to examine some more nuanced examples of this phenomenon with regards to some specific rivers. In doing so, we will demonstrate that the varied characterisation of riverine gods could reflect the diverse environments created by the rivers with which they were associated.

Orontes and Asklepios

The Orontes river (Nahr Aasi) provides an appropriate starting point on account of its varied nature. Beginning in the northern Beqaa Valley, the river winds for some 487km through modern-day Lebanon, Syria and Turkey before emptying into the Mediterranean near Jebel Aqra – whose associated storm-gods we will meet in 2.3.¹⁸² According to Strabo, the Arimi once called the Orontes 'Typhon' because, in the form of a dragon, he crafted the river's course whilst fleeing Zeus' lightning bolts.¹⁸³ Apparently, Typhon "not only cut the earth with furrows and formed the bed of the river, but also descended underground and caused the fountain to break forth to the surface".¹⁸⁴ The environmental character of the Orontes neatly concurs with Strabo's account: the river snakes across the landscape and is

¹⁸² For a general discussion of the river's course, see Wagner (2011: 70-71).

¹⁸³ 16.2.7. On the Syrian origin of the Arimi, see *ibid* 13.4.6. Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.6.3) does not mention the Orontes but cites Jebel Aqra (Mount Kasios) as the location of Typhon's final battle with Zeus. For a general discussion of the Typhon myth in various contexts, see Ogden (2013: 69-80).

¹⁸⁴ 16.2.7: τοῖς μὲν οὖν ὄλκοις ἐντεμεῖν τὴν γῆν καὶ ποιῆσαι τὸ ρεῖθρον τοῦ ποταμοῦ, καταδύοντα δ' εἰς γῆν ἀναρρῆξαι τὴν πηγὴν. Strabo (6.2.9) also mentions that the Orontes sunk into a chasm called Charybdis between Apamea and Antioch. Nonnos (*Dion.* 17.261-314) relates an alternative tradition: Oronte was an Indian general who, when mortally wounded by Dionysos, became a river whereupon "his forehead changed to a winding current with the horns for waves" (ἀμειβομένου δὲ μετώπουεις προχοῆν ἐπίκυρτον ἐκυμαίνοντο κεραῖαι – 288-289). Pausanias (8.29.4) also claims that a coffin was found in the river and the oracle at Claros declared the remains within to be those of Orontes. For a full discussion of all mythical traditions, see Chuvin (1991: 170-173), Aliquot (2009: 61-64) and Kaizer (2017a: 37).

transformed by changes in climate and topography.¹⁸⁵ Enriched by snowmelt, the river flows vigorously as it descends steeply from the Beqaa Valley before slackening around the drier plains of central Syria and then finally regaining momentum in the wetter foothills of the Amanos Mountains near Antioch. These qualities meant that the river required careful management in order for local communities to benefit from its resources.¹⁸⁶ As a result, this riverine landscape conferred a certain credibility onto the myth and its divine figures, and, concurrently, the myth structured the environment in the mind of the ancient worshipper.

We might also consider the Nahr Awali and its associated gods along similar lines. From the outflow of the Orontes near Jebel Aqra, one travels south along the coast for some 270km before reaching Sidon's extra-urban healing complex labelled in modern scholarship as the 'Sanctuary of Eshmoun'.¹⁸⁷ Given the healing dimension of the sanctuary, a full discussion of the site is best conducted in **4.3**; but here it is worth briefly commenting on the relationship between the local landscape and the character of the site's divine figures. The sanctuary consists of a large podium overlooking various water installations and cultic buildings that stretch down to the southern bank of the Nahr Awali (**Figure 2.2.1**). Today, the river is considered to be one of the purest and fastest in the region, such that its waters are rarely polluted nor stagnant.¹⁸⁸ Such an environmental situation is desirable for a healing complex because the river offers both access to fresh water and the capacity to convey bacteria away from the site. Thus, just as serpentine

¹⁸⁵ Thus, Aliquot (2009: 62): "Aux yeux des Anciens, le régime contrasté de l'Oronte, ses disparitions soudaines et ses réapparitions fracassantes justifient son assimilation à des dieux ou des personnages dont les noms évoquent autant le fonds culturel ancien du Proche-Orient (Baal, Bélos) que l'apport plus récent de l'hellénisme (Orontès, Dracon, Typhon, Ophitès)." For a general introduction to the topography and hydrography of the Orontes today, see (Al Dbiyat and Geyer 2015).

¹⁸⁶ See further, e.g., Kamash (2012: 65-74). Pausanias (8.29.3) also comments that an additional channel had to be built for boats to sail up the river's course.

¹⁸⁷ For a synthesis of the site's history, see now Bonnet (2015: 311-331).

¹⁸⁸ *ECODIT*: 59, Table 3.7, and 61, Table 3.11.

Typhon was imagined in the mutable Orontes, so too were divine figures of health easily located in a salubrious landscape. Eshmoun himself – attested along the Phoenician coast from the eighth century BC onward – was associated with healing and later equated with Asklepios at the Sidonian sanctuary and beyond.¹⁸⁹ Then, from at least the second century AD onward, Asklepios received cult in his own right at the sanctuary and his traditional retinue, including Hygieia and Panakeia, is similarly well-represented.¹⁹⁰ The connection between landscape and god is further made plain by the fact that the Nahr Awali was, from at least the fourth century AD, known as the River Asklepios.¹⁹¹ Thus, in a similar vein to the Orontes and Typhon, the healthy conditions facilitated by the Nahr Awali underpinned the presence and nature of the gods associated with the site.

In contrast to the divine figures we encountered in the introduction to this chapter (2.1) – where we noted that they could reference the local environment in their character and, in some cases, be deemed responsible for certain water features – this brief discussion of the Orontes and the Nahr Awali reveals that the relationship between landscape and god could be more complex. In both cases, we see a direct equation between river and god: Typhon himself carved the course of the Orontes and the Nahr Awali was identified as the River Asklepios. Moreover, we witness something of a symbiotic relationship, wherein the particular environmental qualities of the river reinforced the location of that god within the landscape, and this perceived presence of figures from the divine realm likewise imbued the environment with religious significance. In acknowledging this symbiosis, we might also start to appreciate the multidimensional reflections of the local environment in the

¹⁸⁹ Sources for the equation of these two gods are given in 4.3.

¹⁹⁰ For Asklepios, see Wachter (2005: 319-331, esp. Gr.6, Gr.7 and Gr.9) and Stucky (1993: 76, Cat Nos. 69-72); Hygieia, Haussoullier and Ingholt (1924: 320-323, Pl. LXI No.3); and Panakeia: Stucky (1993: 76-77, Nos. 73-80).

¹⁹¹ Dionysius Periegetes (*Description* 719) and Antoninus of Placentia (*Itinerary* 2; Stewart and Wilson 1884: 3).

character of its associated gods. Moreover, though we established in 2.1 that divine identities were complex and prone to alteration, the environments within which these figures were embedded were equally in a state of complex fluctuation. As a result, we will now explore how the changing environment could be reflected in the multifaceted characterisation of its associated divine figures through the case of Byblian Adonis and the Nahr Ibrahim.

The Nahr Ibrahim and Byblian Adonis

Although Adonis gave his name to the ancient Adonis river (the modern Nahr Ibrahim), his relationship with its riverine environment extended beyond simple personification. Instead, I propose that the characterisation of Byblian Adonis, as articulated through his mythological death and ‘resurrection’, can be understood as a reflection of the seasonal changes to the Nahr Ibrahim. The river rises at Aphaca in the Lebanon Mountains and flows for 23km before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea 6km south of Byblos. As we observed at the very beginning of this study, Lucian reports that the annual reddening of the river signalled the mythical wounding of Adonis. It is now time to consider Lucian’s narrative – unparalleled in proximity and detail – of Byblian Adonis in full:¹⁹²

¹⁹² *Syr. D.* 6, 8 and 9: (6) Εἶδον δὲ καὶ ἐν Βύβλω μέγα ἱρὸν Ἀφροδίτης Βυβλίας, ἐν τῷ καὶ τὰ ὄργια ἐς Ἄδωνιν ἐπιτελέουσιν· ἐδάην δὲ καὶ τὰ ὄργια. λέγουσι γὰρ διὸν τὸ ἔργον τὸ ἐς Ἄδωνιν ὑπὸ τοῦ συὸς ἐν τῇ χώρῃ τῇ σφετέρῃ γενέσθαι, καὶ μνήμην τοῦ πάθους τύπτονται τε ἐκάστου ἔτους καὶ θρηνέουσι καὶ τὰ ὄργια ἐπιτελέουσι καὶ σφίσι μεγάλα πένθη ἀνὰ τὴν χώραν ἴσταται. ἐπεὰν δὲ ἀποτύψωνται τε καὶ ἀποκλαύσωνται, πρῶτα μὲν καταγίζουσι τῷ Ἀδώνιδι ὄκως ἐόντι νέκυϊ, μετὰ δὲ τῇ ἐτέρῃ ἡμέρῃ ζῶειν τέ μιν μυθολογέουσι καὶ ἐς τὸν ἡέρα πέμπουσι. (...) (8) Ἐνὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο θωῦμα ἐν τῇ χώρῃ τῇ Βυβλίῃ· ποταμὸς ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου τοῦ οὖρεος ἐς τὴν ἄλα ἐκδιδοῖ· οὖνομα τῷ ποταμῷ Ἄδωνις ἐπικέεται. ὁ δὲ ποταμὸς ἐκάστου ἔτους αἰμάσσεται καὶ τὴν χροιάν ὀλέσας ἐσπίπτει ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ φοινίσσει τὸ πολλὸν τοῦ πελάγεος καὶ σημαίνει τοῖς Βυβλίοις τὰ πένθη. μυθεόνται δὲ ὅτι ταύτησι τῆσι ἡμέρησιν ὁ Ἄδωνις ἀνὰ τὸν Λίβανον τιτρώσκειται, καὶ τὸ αἷμα ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ ἐρχόμενον ἀλλάσσει τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ τῷ ῥόφῳ τὴν ἐπωνυμίην διδοῖ. ταῦτα μὲν οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν. ἐμοὶ δὲ τις ἀνὴρ Βύβλιος ἀληθέα δοκέων λέγειν ἐτέραν ἀπηγγέετο τοῦ πάθους αἰτίην. ἔλεγεν δὲ ὧδε· “ὁ Ἄδωνις ὁ ποταμὸς, ὃ ξεῖνε, διὰ τοῦ Λιβάνου ἔρχεται· ὁ δὲ Λίβανος κάρτα ξανθόγεός ἐστιν. ἄνεμοι ὧν τρηχέες ἐκείνησι τῆσιν ἡμέρησιν ἰστάμενοι τὴν γῆν τῷ ποταμῷ ἐπιφέρουσιν ἐοῦσαν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα μιλτώδεα, ἢ δὲ γῆ μιν αἰμώδεα τίθησιν· καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ πάθους οὐ τὸ αἷμα, τὸ λέγουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἡ χώρα αἰτίη.” ὁ μὲν μοι Βύβλιος τοσάδε ἀπηγγέετο· εἰ δὲ ἀτρεκέως ταῦτα ἔλεγεν, ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ κάρτα θεῖη καὶ τοῦ ἀνέμου ἢ συντυχίη. (9) Ἀνέβην δὲ καὶ ἐς τὸν Λίβανον ἐκ Βύβλου, ὁδὸν ἡμέρης, πυθόμενος αὐτόθι ἀρχαῖον ἱρὸν

(6) I also saw in Byblos a large temple of Byblian Aphrodite, in which they perform the rituals to Adonis. I also learnt the rites. They say that the affair of Adonis and the boar took place in their country, and in memory of the sad event they beat their breasts each year and lament and perform the rites, and there is much mourning throughout the country. After they have finished beating their breasts and lamenting, they first make offerings to Adonis as to the dead, and afterwards, on the next day, they claim that he lives and send him into the air.

(...)

(8) There is another marvel in Byblian territory. A river from Mount Lebanon discharges into the sea, and the river's name is Adonis. Each year the river grows bloody and, losing its normal hue, flows into the sea and incarnadines the greater part of it, signalling the rituals of mourning to the Byblians. The story is that on these days Adonis is wounded on Lebanon, and the blood that reaches the water changes the colour of the river and gives the stream its name. This is what most of them say. But a certain Byblian who seemed to be telling the truth gave another explanation. His account was this: "The river Adonis, stranger, passes through Lebanon, and Lebanon has very yellow soil. Strong winds which arise on those days carry the earth, which is red in the highest degree, into the river, and it is the earth that makes it bloody. So, the reason for the phenomenon is not the blood, as they say, but the terrain." So said the man of Byblos; but even if what he said was right, the wind's timing seemed to me to be miraculous indeed.

(9) I also went up from Byblos into Lebanon, a day's journey, having learnt that there was an ancient temple of Aphrodite there, which Cinyras had founded. I saw the temple, and it was ancient.

Lucian's account makes plain the two primary components of Byblian Adonis' mythology: his death and his 'resurrection'. Both aspects probably underpinned the character of Adonis in the mind of the ancient worshipper and concordantly underscored the rites performed in his honour at Byblos. Adonis' death and, in some cases, his 'resurrection' were likewise

Ἀφροδίτης ἔμμεναι, τὸ Κινύρης εἴσατο, καὶ εἶδον τὸ ἱρόν, καὶ ἀρχαῖον ἦν. For full commentary, see Lightfoot (2003: 305-331).

key to his reverence elsewhere in the Levant and further afield.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, as we noted earlier, reconstructing such cultural exchanges – and, specific to Adonis, tracing the ‘dissemination’ and ‘reinterpretation’ of his cult – is not part of our remit here. Moreover, as we discussed in 2.1, gods rendered with the same name and, sometimes, similar characteristics were still liable to be ‘constructed’ differently in different contexts. Consequently, the following discussion will focus on the environmental echoes in the death and ‘resurrection’ of Byblian Adonis and will argue that these elements of his character reflected the local riverine environment of the Nahr Ibrahim. First, however, it is best to contextualise Lucian’s account and thus flesh out the details of the myth and the broader mythic cycle in which this episode sits. Doing so will not only help us to substantiate the essence – if not the details – of Lucian’s account, but also introduce us to broader points of significance that are relevant to our understanding of Byblian Adonis.

Though there are variations, the mythological life and death of Adonis is generally reported as follows.¹⁹⁴ Aphrodite falls in love with Adonis but their joy is cruelly cut short when he is killed whilst hunting wild boar.¹⁹⁵ Aphrodite is subsequently overcome by grief and passionately laments Adonis’ death. In some scenarios, Adonis experiences a ‘resurrection’ of sorts, the particular nature of which we will explore in more detail below. As for the Byblian connection, an appraisal of the ancient literature soon reveals that the city and its

¹⁹³ In the Near East: two inscriptions preserve dedications to Adonis at Dura-Europos (*Rep* VII/VIII: 169-172); Ammianus Marcellinus (19.1.11 and 22.9.15) reports that a festival of Adonis was held in Antioch; and an inscription found in Laodicea possibly refers to the ‘gardens of Adonis’ (Haussollier and Ingholt 1924: 333-336). Adonis’ fight with the boar is represented on the fifth-century AD ‘Yakto mosaic’ from Daphne (now in the Hatay Archaeology Museum, Antakya, Inv. No. 1016).

¹⁹⁴ The so-called ‘canonical’ texts from the Graeco-Roman world are Ovid (*Met.* 10.524-559, 708-739) and Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.14.4). For further discussion on the divine status of Adonis in different parts of the ancient world, see e.g. Mettinger (2001: 113-154).

¹⁹⁵ Most writers say that Adonis was killed by a wild boar (e.g. *Ov. Met.* 10.710-716; *Amm. Marc.* 22.9.15; *Macrob. Sat.* 1.21.4), whereas others state that he was killed by the devices of an angry god whilst hunting boar (*Artemis: Apollod. Bibl.* 3.14.4; *Hephaestus: Meliton* 5). Nonnos (*Dion.* 41.208-211) says that Ares adopted the guise of a boar to kill Adonis. Lucian (*Syr. D.* 6) is comparatively vague, referring only to “the affair of Adonis and the boar” (τὸ ἔργον τὸ ἐς Ἄδωνιν ὑπὸ τοῦ συός).

hinterland were well-known as a setting for the myth of Adonis. Adonis' association with Byblos dates back to at least the late-fourth century BC and is made explicit by Strabo during the reign of Augustus.¹⁹⁶ In the following centuries, the site of Aphaca – the spring of which supplies the Nahr Ibrahim – also became associated with the myth. Lucian alludes to this association when he comments that Cinyras (Adonis' father) built Aphaca's temple to Aphrodite.¹⁹⁷ More detailed, however, is the Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*, which relates how Aphrodite left Cyprus to live with Adonis in Byblos before dying at Aphaca where her lover had been buried.¹⁹⁸ The Syriac text goes on to say that Adonis was killed by Aphrodite's jealous husband, Hephaestus, whilst he was hunting wild boars and that, after Adonis' death, Aphrodite remained in Byblos before dying at Aphaca where her lover was buried. In a similar vein, the fifth-century AD author Macrobius refers to the reverence of Adonis and Venus of Aphaca in Phoenicia where “on Mount Lebanon they fashion an image of Venus with veiled head, sad expression, resting her face on her left hand behind her veil; her tears flow (they believe) when people look upon her.”¹⁹⁹

Both Aphrodite's grief and her reverence in the Byblian milieu are confirmed by the material record. The image described by Macrobius broadly equates to the ‘*Venus lugens*’ type, in which the goddess is visualised as veiled and lifting a hand to her face.²⁰⁰ This type

¹⁹⁶ Writing within the court of Ptolemy I, Clitarchus comments that Adonis' mother, Myrrha, was a Byblian (*BNJ* 137 F3). Strabo (16.2.18) labels Byblos as sacred to Adonis. See further Bonnet (2015: 174).

¹⁹⁷ *Syr. D.* 9.

¹⁹⁸ 5. For further commentary on this passage, see Lightfoot (2007: 86-91) and Nichols (2014: 165-167). Throughout the text, Aphrodite and Adonis are referred to as Belti and Tammuz respectively. Adonis is equated with Tammuz in the Syriac *Apology* of Aristides (16.4), the Greek text of which dates to the second century AD – see further Nichols (2014: 276-286). Both Origen (PG 13.797-800) and Jerome (*Commentary on Ezekiel* 3.8:13-14) – Levantine residents in the fourth century AD – comment that Adonis is known as Tammuz amongst Jews and Syrians. For further discussion, see Mettinger (2001: 129-130). See also, the Syriac text of *Pseudo-Nonnos' Mythological Scholia* 38 (Brock 1971: 152-153) and *DDD*, sv. ‘Tammuz’.

¹⁹⁹ *Sat.* 1.21.5: *simulacrum huius deae in monte Libano fingitur capite obnupto, specie tristi, faciem manu laeva intra amictum sustinens; lacrimae visione conspicientium manare creduntur*. Eusebius (*Vit. Const.* 3.55.5) also mentions that Constantine ordered the closure of Venus' temple and grove at Aphaca.

²⁰⁰ See *LIMC* (III sv ‘Astarte’) and Kropp (2011: 401-401, n.87) for a compilation of the material.

appears on several religious monuments across Phoenicia, including Qassouba and Yannouh in the Byblian hinterland,²⁰¹ and also features on the Severan-era coins of Caesarea ad Libanum and Gabala (**Figure 2.2.2**).²⁰² Regrettably, the archaeological record at both Byblos and Aphaca is less explicit. At Byblos, excavations on the acropolis yielded the remains of two temples dating from the Hellenistic period and the second/third century AD.²⁰³ Though some have been tempted to imagine these structures as the temple(s) of Aphrodite and Adonis, and to locate the rituals described by Lucian at the site, there is no evidence to confirm that either figure was worshipped there.²⁰⁴ The remains at Aphaca are similarly inconclusive.²⁰⁵ Located 23km east of Byblos on the slopes of the Lebanon mountains, this spectacular site centres on a huge rockface that houses a cave and overlooks a natural terrace (**Figure 2.2.3**). Today, the Ain Afqa rises from the mouth of the cave and streams down through the site to feed the Nahr Ibrahim. Centuries of human and environmental destruction prevent us from making much sense of the archaeological remains across the terrace, though surveys in the nineteenth century indicated that a Roman-era temple with subterranean water system once stood there (**Figure 2.2.4**).²⁰⁶ As for overt signs of Aphrodite or Adonis though, none remain.

Nevertheless, in spite of the deficiency of the archaeological material at Byblos and Aphaca, the overall corpus of evidence discussed thus far strongly suggests that Byblos and its hinterland were recognised as the setting of the Adonis myth and that this myth shaped

²⁰¹ E.g. an altar from Qassouba (*LIMC* III sv. 'Astarte' No.2), a relief from Yanouh (Bonnet 2015: 192-193, Fig. 34) and an 8-sided altar from Fikeh (*LIMC* IV sv. 'Heliopolitan Dei' No.4). For further discussion, see Kropp (2011: 401-403) and Bonnet (2015: 190-194).

²⁰² *BMC Phoenicia*, Nos. 6-7 and *BMC Syria*, No.11.

²⁰³ For syntheses of the acropolis' history and interpretation, cf. Soyez (1977: 16-28), Lightfoot (2003: 308-309) and Bonnet (2015: 176-177). The temple pictured on a third-century AD coin (*BMC Phoenicia*, Nos. 37-38) is not matched by the excavated remains.

²⁰⁴ E.g., most vigorously, Soyez (1977: 16-28), and more speculatively, Bonnet (2015: 178-179).

²⁰⁵ For a synthesis of the site's history, see Aliquot (2009: 258-260, No.25) and Bonnet (2015: 188-191).

²⁰⁶ See further Renan (1864-1874: 296-301) and Krencker and Zschietzschmann (1938: 56-64, Pls. 27-30).

certain aspects of religious life. An eastern setting is further confirmed by numerous Graeco-Roman authors, who also reveal important details about Adonis' birth.²⁰⁷ We learn primarily from Ovid, Apollodorus and Antoninus Liberalis that Adonis' mother, Smyrna, offended Aphrodite and the goddess made her fall in love with her father, Cinyras, as punishment.²⁰⁸ Driven mad by desire, Smyrna tricked her father into sleeping with her and consequently conceived Adonis by him. Later realising the truth of the matter, Cinyras tried to attack Smyrna but she fled and the gods transformed her into a myrrh tree, a thorny plant known to Graeco-Roman authors as originating in Arabia and Sabaea.²⁰⁹ Adonis was then born from his arboreal mother and was, on account of his beauty, raised by the gods before later falling in love with Aphrodite. For the purposes of our study, the nature of Adonis' birth indicates that the god had a clear connection to the landscape and, as I will now outline fully, this connection underpinned the nature of his death and subsequent 'resurrection'.

That Adonis' death had an environmental dimension is initially made plain in its circumstances: he is killed whilst hunting wild boars in the countryside.²¹⁰ This environmental link is expounded further at Byblos where, according to Lucian, the reddening of the Nahr Ibrahim signalled the fatal wounding of Adonis in the Lebanon mountains and thus prompted the mourning rituals in the city. As we noted at the very beginning of this study, Lucian also reports a pragmatic explanation of the river's red hue,

²⁰⁷ Settings for the myth include: Assyria (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.4; Hyg. *Fab.* 58; Opp. *Hel.* 3.402-408), Arabia and Sabaea (Ov. *Met.* 10.478-480), and Mount Lebanon (Ant. Lib. *Met.* 34).

²⁰⁸ Ovid (*Met.* 10.298-519), Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.14.4) and Antoninus Liberalis (*Met.* 34). Ovid refers to Smyrna as Myrrha – the names are equivalent, with both *Σμύρρα* and *myrrha* referring to the myrrh tree and its resin. Smyrna's father, Cinyras, is also known as Thias (Apollod. *ibid*; Ant. Lib. *ibid*; Opp. *Hel.* 3.402-408). See also e.g. Hyginus (*Fab.* 58) and Pausanias (6.24.7).

²⁰⁹ E.g. Pliny (*HN* 12.33-36/66-70). Myrrh, the red-coloured resin produced by the tree, was regarded as an 'exotic' ingredient due to its distant origins (see e.g. *ibid* 13.3/4-5). For further discussion on the myrrh trade, see Young (2001: 13-15 and 30-33) and Smith (in Neeley *et al* 2017: 183-203). This resin emanated from the tree as an oozing sap and was regarded as Smyrna's tears (Ov. *Met.* 10.499-502, Ant. Lib. *Met.* 34).

²¹⁰ In particular, Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.21.4) says that the boar represents winter because it lives in damp, muddy places and enjoys snuffling for acorns, the quintessential winter forage. Wild boars are still found snuffling through the undergrowth on Mount Hermon today.

citing that strong winds carried coloured soils into the river and incarnadined the waters. Lucian's narrative concurs, partially, with the modern environmental situation. The soils of the Lebanon mountains are coloured and the Sirocco pattern brings fierce, dust-laden winds into the Levant from North Africa.²¹¹ Nevertheless, a more likely explanation for the phenomenon described by Lucian lies in the river itself.

The Nahr Ibrahim has an exceptionally fast flow due to both the sources of its waters and the topography of its course.²¹² The river originates high in the Lebanon mountains and is supplied by the Afqa and Ar Ruis springs, the discharge rates of which are amongst the highest in the area.²¹³ Carving its course along a narrow valley, the river is supplemented by precipitation run-off from the adjacent hills and gathers speed as it descends over 1000m before emptying into the sea just 23km away (**Figures 2.2.5 and 2.2.6**). The speed of both the river and the winter precipitation run-off, coupled with the naturally porous condition of the landscape, create a high erosion risk in the river valley, such that its red soils habitually haemorrhage into the water during winter and spring when the discharge rate is at its highest.²¹⁴ Thus, just as Lucian describes, the river can indeed routinely turn red as if infused with the blood of Adonis, a spectacle that no doubt inspired and reinforced the myth of Adonis' death and his character more broadly.²¹⁵

²¹¹ On Lebanon's red soils, see Darwish and Zurayk (1997: 191-202). The Sirocco blows strongest in late spring – for an overview, see Morton (2001: 50-51) and *Mediterranean Pilot V* (2005: 25 and 32). Soyez (1977: 47-48 and 53-56) discusses the Sirocco and other wind patterns with regards to the date of Byblian Adonis' festival.

²¹² For an overview of the Nahr Ibrahim, including the sources of its waters and its topography, see Wagner (2011: 69-71 and 107-111).

²¹³ The discharge rates of the Afqa and Ar Ruis are, respectively, 4.62m³ and 3.2m³ per second (Wagner 2011: 102, Table 2.6).

²¹⁴ On soil erosion risk factors in the Lebanon Mountains, including the Nahr Ibrahim valley, see Kheir *et al* (2006: 347-359) and Shaban *et al* (2015: 39-50). Both Maundrell (1703: 34) and Renan (1864: 283) observed the reddening of the waters during their pre-modern explorations of the region. In particular, Renan (*ibid*) witnessed the phenomenon described by Lucian (*Syr. D.* 8) where an expanse of red water discharged from the river into the sea. This phenomenon still occurs today (Mark Woolmer, personal communication).

²¹⁵ Philo (*BNJ* 790 F2: 29) also relates a myth that might be associated with Aphaca's springs and the Nahr Ibrahim: apparently, Kronos cut off Ouranos' genitals near springs and a river before allowing the blood to drip into the water.

The time of year at which this reddening of the water occurred is also significant to our comprehension of Byblian Adonis because, according to Lucian, the sight of the blood prompted the ritualised mourning of his worshippers at Byblos.²¹⁶ Understandably, this matter has piqued scholarly interest.²¹⁷ Central to this curiosity was the supposition that the festivals devoted to Adonis' death elsewhere in the ancient world seemingly took place in the summer, precisely when the Nahr Ibrahim is at its weakest and thus least likely to exhibit a red hue.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, with regards to Byblian Adonis, Brigitte Soyez argued for a date in July on the basis of, amongst other reasons, the Etesian wind patterns being strongest in the summer and the Nile flood traditionally occurring in mid-July.²¹⁹ Thus, Soyez re-read Lucian's comments as reminiscent of "un simulacre de crue" being staged at Byblos to honour the inundation of the Nile. By contrast, I would give more credence to both Lucian's account and the environmental context, and, in harmony with J.L. Lightfoot, propose that Adonis' death most likely occurred in spring.²²⁰ From an environmental perspective, we have already noted that the river valley is most vulnerable to erosion in both winter and spring. This risk is heightened in the winter when seasonal storms are more likely to create flash floods along the entire valley and in the spring when the river is inundated with snowmelt.²²¹ I suggest that a spring date is more probable because the melting of the snow high in the Lebanon mountains is a regular event every spring and thus

²¹⁶ *Syr. D.* 8.

²¹⁷ For convenient synthesis of opinion, see Lightfoot (2003: 316-318).

²¹⁸ Cf. e.g. Plutarch (*Alcib.* 18 and *Nic.* 13), on Athens; and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.9.15), on Antioch. Amongst others, Lightfoot (2003: 316) notes that the Roman month of July was the Syriac 'Tammuz', a figure with whom some authors equated Adonis. Cumont (1935: 46-50) also suggested July date by linking the festival with the rising of Sirius on 19 July. See also Jerome (*Commentary on Ezekiel* 3.8:13-14), who reports that Adonis died in June. It is of course perfectly plausible that the death and 'resurrection' of Adonis varied between localities.

²¹⁹ 1977: 53-60. *Contra* Lightfoot (2003: 317), with whom I agree, "it is difficult to find [Soyez's theory of a 'mock-flood'] persuasive: the reddening of the waters of the Nahr Ibrahim was supposed to be, not a myth, but visible year after year."

²²⁰ 2003: 316-318.

²²¹ A recent survey published by Darwish *et al* (2015: 233-243) established that the river is fed by more snowmelt than previously thought.

more likely to underpin an annual festival. Moreover, we might also consider the transformation that the river valley underwent in spring and how this relates to Adonis' 'resurrection', which was apparently recognised ritually the day after worshippers honoured him as if he were dead.

In addition to his untimely death, Adonis also experienced a 'resurrection' of sorts that was recognised in his cult at some localities – including Byblos, where, according to Lucian, the worshippers “claim that he lives and send him into the air.”²²² This 'resurrection' dimension appears to have developed from a mythological episode involving Persephone: as narrated by Apollodorus, Aphrodite entrusted Adonis to Persephone but, when the chthonic goddess refused to return him, Zeus ordered that Adonis had to divide his time between earth and the underworld each year.²²³ Only Apollodorus explicitly sets this episode when Adonis is still an infant and adds that he was later killed by a boar, presumably ending his ability to return to earth at the apportioned time each year. By contrast, all other narrators of the Persephone episode either make plain that Adonis' bi-location came after his death, or they do not specify the series of events and imply that Adonis followed an annual cycle of rising to earth and then descending back to the underworld.²²⁴ As a result, the nature of Adonis' 'resurrection' as acknowledged in myth and observed in cultic practice is generally interpreted by both ancient and modern

²²² *Syr. D.* 6: ζῶειν τέ μιν μυθολογέουσι καὶ ἐς τὸν ἡέρα πέμπουσι. Adonis' 'resurrection' was recognised in his cult at Alexandria – see further Mettinger (2001: 116-121).

²²³ *Bibl.* 3.14.14. Adonis is also recognised in the Greek Magical Papyri as one who can rise up from Hades (*PGM* IV.2903). Amongst others, Mettinger (2001: 143) highlights the similarity to the Akkadian epic, *The Descent of Ishtar*, in which Dumuzi – an etymological relative of Tammuz and, thus, Adonis – has to spend one half of the year in the underworld. The authoritative translation (in English) is now Dalley (2000: 154-162).

²²⁴ Cf. e.g. Aelian (*NA* 9.36), Pseudo-Hyginus (*Astronom.* 2.7), Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.21.3-4) and Σ Theocritus (*Id.* 3.48d).

commentators as a seasonal return from the underworld to earth.²²⁵ This interpretation seems likely to hold true for Byblian Adonis: Lucian shows awareness of the Persephone episode elsewhere in his writings and his comment that Adonis was sent into the open air could be a wily reference to his ascent back to earth.²²⁶ As far as we can tell, the Byblians recognised Adonis' 'resurrection'.

Accordingly, if we accept that the bloody Nahr Ibrahim validated the mythological death of Byblian Adonis, then I think we can also consider the extent to which the springtime blossoming of the riverine environment was connected to his 'resurrection'. Following the deluge of the river, the surrounding environment is nourished and reawakened with new life. Just like the bleeding river, this physical transformation would have added authority to the myth that Byblian Adonis had indeed returned from the underworld. More generally, there is also abundance of material that associates Adonis with vegetation.²²⁷ With regards to the mythology underpinning these associations, Ovid is perhaps our most insightful source.²²⁸ He narrates that, after Adonis' death, Aphrodite wept over her lover's body and proclaimed that she would subvert his fateful death in two ways. Firstly, that her grief would endure, such that Adonis' death would be memorialised each year with an imitation of her grief; and, secondly, that his blood would be transformed into a flower as a result.²²⁹ To complete this transformation, Aphrodite sprinkled Adonis' blood with her own "fragrant nectar" (*nectare odorato*) and thus a delicate flower blossomed at that spot.²³⁰ In this way,

²²⁵ E.g. Cornutus (*Theol. Graec.* 5; Hays 1983: 102-103), Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.21.3-4), Σ Theocritus (*Id.* 3.48d) and the Syriac text of *Pseudo-Nonnos' Mythological Scholia* 38 (Brock 1971: 152-153) are explicit in this regard. See further e.g. Mettinger (2001: 116-121) and Lightfoot (2003: 321-322).

²²⁶ *Dial. D.* 19.1.

²²⁷ Cf. e.g. Porphyry (in Euseb. *Prep. Evan.* 3.11.9), *Orphic Hymn to Adonis* 56, Ammianus Marcellinus (22.9.15), Origen (PG 13.797-800), Jerome (*Commentary on Ezekiel* 3.8:13-14) and Σ Theoc. (*Id.* 3.48d).

²²⁸ *Met.* 10.717-739. For further commentary on this passage, see Fratantuono (2014: 252-261).

²²⁹ *Met.* 10.725-728. The use of *at* to connect these two thoughts suggests that they are complementary, rather than opposing – see further *Lewis & Short, sv. at*.

²³⁰ *Met.* 10.731-739. The flower is identified as the Anemone, the 'wind flower', on account of its fragility (*ibid* 10.738-739) and many varieties are blood red in colour.

just as his arboreal mother once gave birth to him, Adonis' 'resurrection' is facilitated through the landscape.

As for the extent to which we can recognise these Ovidian aspects at Byblos, it is significant that Aphrodite's grief is prevalent in both contexts – indeed, might we hypothesise that the relative preponderance of *Venus lugens* images in the Byblian hinterland reflects a local tradition in which the goddess' grief not only commemorated Adonis' death but was also central to his 'resurrection'? Was Aphrodite's reviving nectar actually transmitted by her tears?²³¹ The extant material prohibits any firm conclusions but Macrobius does preserve a noteworthy reflection on the relationship between the tears of *Venus lugens* at Aphaca and the environment. He says that the image of the grieving goddess symbolises the earth in winter when its eyes – or rather, its springs – flow more profusely.²³² We are of course reminded that the Nahr Ibrahim has its source at the Afqa spring at Aphaca, where some traditions located Aphrodite's tearful mourning following Adonis' death. Accordingly, we might speculate that the religious community at Byblos came to equate the Afqa's annual revival of the Nahr Ibrahim with Aphrodite's resurrecting tears, as both served to bring Adonis – both river and god – back to life in some capacity. Just as the reddening river signalled Adonis' death, so too did the blooming of the river valley announce the god's return. In this way, the religious community at Byblos characterised Adonis in tune with the river valley's seasonal oscillations and the ever-changing riverine landscape likewise affirmed the god's presence in the landscape. This theme of seasonality will now come into further focus as we turn to discuss storm-gods, whose violent winter rains were often necessary to transform certain environments into fertile landscapes.

²³¹ On the multifaceted aspects of tears in ancient thought, see now the edited volume by Fögen (2009).

²³² *Sat.* 1.21.5.

2.3 Storm-gods

The storm-gods of the Roman Near East – that is, divine figures associated with rainfall, weather and storms – could be characterised with reference to the specific pluvial environments with which they were associated.²³³ As a consequence, such figures manifested with great diversity due to region’s variant rainfall patterns, which range from reliably heavy levels of precipitation along the northern half of the coast through to increasingly erratic and low levels in the east and south. Likewise, different rainfall regimes yielded different environments: consistently high levels of precipitation produced the verdant plains surrounding Antioch, whilst rainfall scarcity resulted in almost semi-arid conditions around Petra. Nevertheless, a common feature to both localities – and indeed much of the region overall – is the concentration of rainfall to the winter months when large volumes of water can discharge in a few short hours. Indeed, as we noted in **1.1**, a tunnel was constructed near Seleucia Pieria to divert a seasonal stream away from the city;²³⁴ and, as we will mention in **2.5**, Petra is vulnerable to winter floods even today. According to Zena Kamash, this dangerous dimension creates an ‘ontological paradox’ whereby, despite being essential to life, water is also a destructive and potentially life-threatening force.²³⁵ When this principle is transferred to the religious sphere, we then encounter some divine

²³³ This topic has only received attention in modern scholarship relatively recently and almost exclusively with regard to the storm-gods of the *ancient* Near East. For instance, Alberto R. W. Green (2003: 11-12) briefly acknowledged that the ecological conditions of different regions “were responsible for the development of different patterns of thought,” such that the religious activities undertaken by different communities revealed varying relationships with local rainfall patterns. Although critical of Green’s approach in general, Daniel Schwemer (2007: 129-130; see also *ibid* 2001 and 2008: 1-44) later built on this proposal to advocate that “the sphere of activities of the individual storm-gods was dependent, among other things, on the climatic conditions in the individual regions.” For further discussion, see also Williams-Reed (forthcoming). The storm-god in the *Roman* Near East remains comparatively understudied, although Bunnens (2015: 107-128) recently examined the Roman-era iconography of such figures in relation to their ancient predecessors. Equally, there is a wealth of scholarship relating to Jupiter Dolichenus, whose cult centre at Doliche lies just beyond the scope of this study some 90km northwest of Hierapolis in the Anatolian Highlands. For a recent discussion of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, see Blömer (2015: 129-141).

²³⁴ Both Millar (1993: 87) and Butcher (2003: 164) stress that the stream was diverted to prevent the harbour silting up but Kamash (2008: 226-227) also highlights that the project protected the city from flooding and notes that an apotropaic symbol was carved into a dam within the tunnel.

²³⁵ 2008: 224-237.

figures – including storm-gods – whose character exhibits this dual-nature: they can be both destructive forces and bringers of life.²³⁶ The interplay between violence and fertility is a theme we will now encounter in our first case study.

The gods at Khirbet Tannur

The gods worshipped in the sanctuary at Khirbet Tannur reflect both the fertility of the local landscape and the ferocity with which this fecundity came into being. Leaving Byblos, one travels almost 250km south along the coast to Iope before bearing southeast towards Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina, where we will encounter a healing sanctuary in **4.3**. Continuing east and crossing the Jordan River one then journeys some 90km south through the Jordanian Highlands before reaching Khirbet Tannur on a small plateau between the Dead Sea in the west and the Badia Desert in the east.²³⁷ Perched atop Jebel Tannur (700m), the sanctuary overlooks the confluence of the Wadis La'ban and Hesa (**Figures 2.3.1 and 2.3.2**).²³⁸ The wadis have extensive flood plains and are fed primarily by rainfall, such that the surrounding land is verdant and can support both agriculture and permanent settlement. However, the rain responsible for this idyllic situation can appear suddenly and dramatically, as observed by Nelson Glueck during his excavations at the sanctuary in 1937:²³⁹

²³⁶ See further Kamash (2010: 158-159).

²³⁷ The plateau was investigated between 1979 and 1983 as part of the Wadi el-Hasa Survey (MacDonald 1988). For a discussion of the landscape during the Roman period, see Roller (1983: 173-182).

²³⁸ That there was a connection between the sanctuary on the hill, the settlements in the valley and the wider landscape is suggested most strongly by a (now-lost) inscription from the site. Dated to 8/7 BC, the text records that building works were undertaken at the sanctuary by a certain Naṭīr'el, head of the La'ban spring – for text, translation and commentary, see now Healey (2013: 47-50, No.1, with No.2). The springhead of the La'ban was located down in the valley at the site of Khirbet Dharih, where its waters emptied into the Wadi La'ban. Khirbet Tannur is now widely regarded as a 'satellite sanctuary' of Khirbet Dharih – see further McKenzie (2013a: 39-45). For a comparative discussion of the two sites, see Alpass (2013: 202-228).

²³⁹ April 9-10, 1937, edited by McKenzie (2013b: 28-29). In light of his excavations, Glueck produced several preliminary reports (e.g. 1937a: 6-16 and 1937b: 361-376) and a study of the site's sculpture (1965; see also critique by Starcky 1968: 206-235). Both Glueck's records and the archaeological material were re-examined extensively between 2001 and 2004 under the direction of Judith McKenzie – see now, McKenzie *et al* (2013a and 2013b).

It blew terribly this morning, the wind coming from west. (...) Then the rain started, and has been coming down in sheets ever since. The mist is around us, and from our eerie point, the scene looks like Scotland must on a stormy afternoon. (...) During the night we could hear the water thundering down the Wadi el-Hesa, and this morning there is a stream of water again in the Wadi el-Aban.

Glueck's account thus bears witness to a landscape of rapid transformation, whereby the fertility of the environment came about through potentially destructive forces. As we will now see, echoes of this environmental duality can also be identified in the characterisation of Khirbet Tannur's gods.

The sanctuary at Khirbet Tannur was constructed and expanded over several phases between the second century BC and the third century AD (**Figure 2.3.3**).²⁴⁰ By the first half of the second century AD, when the site reached its zenith, the sanctuary was organised around a central rectangular courtyard that was lined with columns, exposed to the sky and orientated east-west. Several doorways in the north and south walls led to assortment of rooms that seemingly functioned as *triclinia*, store-rooms and private quarters. A walled enclosure (10.38 x 9.72m) occupied the western half of the courtyard and was entered via a gateway adorned with various divine images and garlanded with vegetative designs (**Figure 2.3.4**). Inside, the space was dominated by a large, multi-story altar (2.1 x 2.0m; 2.61m high) that housed the cult relief of the sanctuary's principal gods (**Figure 2.3.5**).²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ The following reconstruction is based on that established by Judith McKenzie (2013a: 39-177; see also summary by Nehmé 2015). Due to difficulties arising from Glueck's original excavation, McKenzie's study produced a general phasing that recognised three broad building periods. Firstly, the so-called 'Early Phases' comprised several sub-phases between the first centuries BC and AD; secondly, the 'Main Construction Phase (Period 2)', which spanned the first half of the second century AD and probably witnessed multiple overlapping building projects; and, thirdly, 'Period 3' of the late-second/early-third century AD in which the sanctuary was repaired after an earthquake.

²⁴¹ The altar platform was modified in all three phases in the 'Russian doll' style: in Period 2, the simple Altar 1 was completely encased by Altar 2 with a staircase on its west side, before Altar 3 with a southern staircase was added in Period 3 – for a concise overview of these transitions, see McKenzie (2013a: 61). Additional altars were found across the site, including several incense altars and a large (2.45m²) altar in the northeast

The cult relief, framed by an ornamental facade, constituted two separate images rendered in high relief in sandstone, which would have stood in contrast to the limestone used elsewhere in the sanctuary. The iconography of these figures suggests we are dealing with a male storm-god and his female consort.²⁴²

The image of the male figure is almost fully preserved and depicts a bearded god seated on a throne flanked by bull calves (1.15 x c.0.57m; **Figure 2.3.6**).²⁴³ He is dressed in a chiton and himation, and wears a lion-headed torque around his neck. His head is damaged but a bushel may have once crowned his curly hair. In his left hand, he holds a lightning bolt, carved into the relief. In his right hand, he wielded some form of object above his shoulders, possibly the polished limestone sceptre uncovered nearby.²⁴⁴ The character of this figure, as expressed through his visualisation, consequently reflects Khirbet Tannur's pluvial landscape in several respects. Most explicitly, the lightning bolt indicates his ability to bring forth rain. In particular, the delicate prongs of the bolt echo the vegetative decoration elsewhere in the sanctuary, emphasising the link between the god's powerful storms and the subsequent fertility of the landscape.²⁴⁵ The violence with which these storms manifested is perhaps implied in the bull calves, which were well-known emblems of physical strength and sexual potency.²⁴⁶ The character of this god, as communicated by his

corner of the courtyard that would have been suitable for animal sacrifices – for further discussion, see Reyes and McKenzie (2013: 57-72).

²⁴² For a full discussion of the iconography and identity of these figures, see Glueck (1965: 195-209 and 269-285), McKenzie (2013a: 69-74), McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 193-201) and Alpass (2013: 217-223).

²⁴³ The relief is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM No. 1939.224).

²⁴⁴ See further McKenzie (2013a: 69).

²⁴⁵ The same lightning bolt motif was also interspersed with rosette and vine decorations on the architrave above the cult niche and the doorway leading to the enclosure (McKenzie 2013a: Figs. 78 and 166). Most of the architectural decoration is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum – see further McKenzie and Greene (2013: 178-187).

²⁴⁶ On the bull in the ancient Near East, see *DDD* *sv.* 'calf'. Amongst others, Green (2003: 206-208) discusses the use of the bull motif in association with the storm-gods of the ancient Near East.

iconographic composition, is thus in tune with the local landscape: just like the storms, he is ferociously virile.

As for the identity of this figure, certain iconographic details are resonant with those of other gods, such as Hadad (bull calves), Zeus (curly hair and beard) or Sarapis (bushel). Dushara is also a potential candidate given his proclivity for being associated with Zeus and the sanctuary's original location within the Nabataean Kingdom.²⁴⁷ However, perhaps the most convincing interpretation is that our figure was related to Qos, who received cult at Khirbet Tannur in the late first century BC. Qos was the national god of Edom – an Iron Age kingdom whose northern border lay at the Wadi Hesa – and revered as a weather god.²⁴⁸ At Khirbet Tannur, he appears in aniconic form as a small horned stele (0.40m x 0.20m) crafted from local limestone (**Figure 2.3.7**).²⁴⁹ The extant evidence permits us only to guess at the possible 'ancestry' between Qos and the bearded male of the cult relief. The theme of virility is potentially echoed through both the horns of the stele and the bull calves of the relief; and, if we presume that the Qos of Khirbet Tannur was associated with storms like his Iron Age predecessor, then we can connect both gods with the weather. In light of these similarities, we might hypothesise that the aniconic Qos simultaneously found expression in the bearded 'Qos' of the cult relief. In any case, what is most pertinent to our enquiry is the fact that a storm-god with similar characteristics received cult at Khirbet Tannur throughout its history.

²⁴⁷ On Dushara in the Nabataean Kingdom in general, see Healey (2001: 85-107) and Alpass (2013: 234-237).

²⁴⁸ For a summary of Qos in the ancient Near East, see *DDD*; on Edom, see *EJ*.

²⁴⁹ The stele's accompanying inscription records that the object was made by a certain Qōsmalik for "Qos the god of Hōrawā" (...*qs 'lh hwrw*'). For text, translation and commentary, see now Healey (2013: 50-54, No. 3). On the stele's iconography and its parallels, see now McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 192-193). The stele is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM No. 1939.268).

Returning to the cult relief, our information for the consort of ‘Qos’ is comparatively scant. Several sandstone fragments, consisting of a sandaled left foot (0.14 x 0.22m) and a lion throne with a fold of drapery (0.40 x 0.17m), were discovered in a room located off the central courtyard. Given the similarities in material and proportion, it is assumed that these fragments belong to the cult relief that originally accompanied that of ‘Qos’.²⁵⁰ The lion strongly suggests that we are dealing with a goddess whose iconography was modelled on that of Atargatis, Allat or Cybele. Again, the particular name by which this goddess was recognised is of marginal consequence; instead, what is important here is that her lion was a symbol of motherhood and protection, and therefore indicative of a fertile dimension in her character. Thus, the visualisation of both gods together in the cult relief is suggestive of the local landscape. The bearded male signified the power and virility of Khirbet Tannur’s violent storms and the leonine goddess denoted the abundant fertility that arose as a result of his rainfall. In this way, the sanctuary’s leading gods evoked the dual nature of the surrounding landscape, which became fertile through potentially destructive means.

On a final note, more subtle references to Khirbet Tannur’s fertile environment appear elsewhere in the sanctuary’s sculptural programme. A limestone sculpture of Nike holding a bust of Tyche encircled by a zodiac ring was possibly positioned in the back wall of the cult niche between the two cult images (**Figure 2.3.8**).²⁵¹ Moreover, zodiac images were added to the frieze surrounding the cult niche, including Virgo and Pisces depicted as goddesses crowned with grains and fish respectively.²⁵² Though the decoration from

²⁵⁰ On the find spot of these fragments and their identification, see Glueck (1965: 269-270) and McKenzie (2013a: 69-72). The fragments are now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM Nos. 1939.218a-b, 278 and 287).

²⁵¹ On this sculpture and its wider context, see Glueck (1965: 395-451), and McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 206-209 and 213-219). The upper part of the sculpture (Tyche and zodiac) is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM No. 1939.233); the lower part (Nike) is in the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman.

²⁵² Glueck (1965: 315-319) originally interpreted these figures as aspects of Atargatis. They have since been recognised as personifications of the zodiac following the discovery of similar images at Khirbet Dharih –

Khirbet Tannur is unusual in its composition, the zodiac typically symbolises the annual fertility cycle and is a fitting theme within the sanctuary's sculptural programme.²⁵³ However, perhaps the most significant image is that of the so-called 'Vegetation Goddess' (**Figure 2.3.9**).²⁵⁴ Depicted on the upper panel that once crowned the doorway of the enclosure, her face is delicately dressed with foliage and her thick hair appears wet. The space below her shoulders is not well-preserved, but it seems that her body once blended with the vines and leaves carved across the rest of the panel. Although her specific identity is unknown, this composition suggests that she is a personification of the local environment and, thus, an evocation of the abundance brought forth by the rains of Khirbet Tannur's storm-god.²⁵⁵ Her link to the sanctuary's storm-god was also underscored by the eagle sculpture positioned on the *acroterion* above her, which may have represented him. The pluvial fertility of the landscape is once again reflected in the sanctuary's divine figures.

Baalshamin throughout the Jebel Arab massif

Whilst the gods of Khirbet Tannur conveyed gentle fertility and ferocious virility in equal measure, the characterisation of Baalshamin across the basalt lands of the Jebel Arab massif reveals a far more capricious personality. Leaving Khirbet Tannur, one heads northeast – passing the Birketein pools at Gerasa (4.1) – for some 175km before approaching the fringes of the basalt lands. The Jebel Arab massif occupies a broad area between northern Jordan and southwestern Syria, which eventually merges with the Syrian steppe in the east

see now, McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 221). Virgo is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM No. 1939.227); Pieces is in the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman.

²⁵³ The order of the images on the zodiac ring is not chronological but is divided into two halves. For various interpretations of the order and its cultic significance, cf. Glueck (1965: 413-415), Alpass (2013: 220-221) and McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 213-219).

²⁵⁴ For a full discussion of her iconography and identity, see Glueck (1965: 288-292), and McKenzie and Reyes (2013: 204-206). The panel is now in the Jordan Archaeological Museum in Amman.

²⁵⁵ Glueck (1965: 292) suggested that she was the patron goddess of the sanctuary, a proposal not mutually exclusive to my own.

and the Golan Heights in the west.²⁵⁶ However, although the entire massif is dominated by the presence of black basalt, the area actually comprises two very different landscapes. The western zone of the massif is remarkably verdant and fertile, whereas those of the southeast are strikingly barren and desolate (**Figures 2.3.10** and **2.3.11**). This environmental situation is due not only to geological factors, but also rainfall disparity.²⁵⁷ Annual precipitation levels fall from 400mm in the west to less than 100mm in the southeast and are characterised by a high departure from the mean – that is, rainfall averages can vary by up to 50%, a fluctuation felt even more keenly in those areas of lower precipitation.²⁵⁸ In antiquity, this climatic context thus fostered a precarious relationship with the environment, whereby the wellbeing of the massif’s inhabitants was fundamentally bound to this potentially erratic rainfall pattern.

These inconsistencies in precipitation were reflected in the characterisation of the region’s main storm-god, Baalshamin, as communicated through the many Safaitic graffiti inscriptions discovered across the basalt lands and further afield.²⁵⁹ The authors of these texts typically pastured their livestock in the drier southeasterly zones during the winter before moving to the lush west during the summer.²⁶⁰ These texts bear witness to their movement across the landscape and, in some cases, give further details about pastoral activities, the weather and requests for divine assistance. A text recorded in northern Jordan, authored by a certain Qedem, is a typical example: “...and he pastured the camels [on] the side of a mountain whilst migrating and he waited for the rains and so, O

²⁵⁶ For an overview of the region’s topography and climate, see Wagner (2011: 189-192).

²⁵⁷ The massif’s characteristic basalt is in different stages of decay, rendering the soil of some areas more fertile than others – see further Gentelle (1985: 20).

²⁵⁸ *Tübinger A.IV.4*. The Jebel Arab proper (1800m) absorbs most of the moisture borne from the coast – see further Wagner (2011: 192).

²⁵⁹ Annie Sartre-Fauriat and Maurice Sartre also associate Baalshamin with Zeus in two Greek inscriptions from the Trachonitis – see further *IGLS XV.1*: Nos. 7 and 75.

²⁶⁰ On the seasons and seasonal movement in the Safaitic inscriptions, see Macdonald (1992: 1-11) and Al-Jallad (2014: 214-218).

Baalshamin, [grant] relief from adversity and uncertainty and security.”²⁶¹ Rainfall has long been recognised as one of the forms that this ‘relief’ (*rwḥ*) might take.²⁶² Indeed, the entire Safaitic corpus bears witness to an intense relationship with rainfall, with no less than 70 texts recording the author waiting or watching for rain.²⁶³ As demonstrated by Qedem’s invocation, Baalshamin could be called upon to grant relief from the dangers of rainfall scarcity, thus revealing his recognition as a storm-god; and some texts request that Baalshamin provide relief specifically through rain, such as an example carved by a certain Malek in Zalaf, southern Syria: “...and he pastured the goats and watered at *h- Nmrt* and so, O Baalshamin, [grant] relief through rain.”²⁶⁴

That Baalshamin’s rains did bring relief is likewise evidenced in several texts. One particular example from northern Jordan reports that the god granted a return from the inner desert and filled a pond with rain water.²⁶⁵ Various texts also refer to heavy rain and flooding.²⁶⁶ Yet despite recognition of Baalshamin’s pluvial generosity, his dominant temperament appears to have been one of fickleness and, on occasion, neglect. An especially evocative example, recorded at Sanayim al-Gharz, southern Syria, is a case in point (**Figure 2.3.12**):²⁶⁷

By ’’s¹d son of S²‘ son of Ḥg son of S¹wd and he fed the goats on dry fodder [in] the year of misery because Baalshamin withheld it (i.e. the rain); but may he preserve (it – i.e. the text) thereafter; and may he who would read aloud have spoil but may he who would efface this writing go blind.

²⁶¹ *w r ’y h- ’bl h- s²q nwy w tẓr h- s¹my f h b ’ls¹mn rwḥ w s¹lm* (*OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0023202).

²⁶² For a recent discussion of this term in the Safaitic inscriptions, see Al-Jallad (2016: 95-96).

²⁶³ Figure deduced from the *OCIANA Safaitic* corpus of texts.

²⁶⁴ *w r ’y h- m ’zy w wrd h- nmrt f h b ’ls¹mn rwḥ b- mṛ* (*OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0006007). Of the 39 requests to Baalshamin for relief, 13 specifically ask for rain.

²⁶⁵ *OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0031758.

²⁶⁶ Cf. e.g. *OCIANA Safaitic*: Nos. 0015018, 0015323, 0015401 and 0015466.

²⁶⁷ *l ’ ’s¹d bn s²‘ bn ḥg bn s¹wd w ’lf h- m ’zy s¹nt b ’s¹ w ḥgz h b ’ls¹mn ’kd h- dṣn w ḡnmt l- ḡ d ’y w ’wr l- ḡ ’wr h- ḥṭṭ* (*OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0009306). Cf. e.g. *ibid*: No. 0006956.

The significance of this text lies in the fact that Assad recognises the absence of rain as an act of denial by Baalshamin, therefore rendering him as a capricious figure. Moreover, this text is actually one of a larger sub-group that refer to Baalshamin withholding his rains.²⁶⁸ The proposal that Baalshamin's particular characterisation reflected the precarious rainfall conditions of the area is thus reinforced.

The Safaitic corpus also can also offer an insight into the religious mentalities surrounding Baalshamin's characterisation and the precipitation for which he was responsible. The storm-god's main sanctuary in the region was located on the western face of the Jebel Arab proper at Sia.²⁶⁹ The extant material from the sanctuary reveals little about the god's characterisation at the site, although the abundance of architectural remains decorated with sumptuous vegetal motifs alludes to Baalshamin's capacity to bring fertile rains.²⁷⁰ That the religious communities of the Jebel Arab undertook annual pilgrimages to Sia – a pattern in concordance with the return of nomadic pastoralists from the steppe to the wetter plains surrounding the sanctuary – is indicated by an inscription from Rushaydah, 22km southeast of Sia, stating how the author fled “the year the pilgrimage to Sia had no effect.”²⁷¹ Moreover, as suggested by modern commentators, we might infer from this text that sufficient rainfall from Baalshamin was in fact the desired outcome of such a pilgrimage to the god's main sanctuary.²⁷² This interpretation is augmented by another text, found in al-

²⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. *OCIANA Safaitic*: Nos. 0004663, 0009306, 0019385, 0020797, 0026968, 0027093, 0027098, 0028597, 0030547, 0032261, 0035859, 0035878, 0035902 and 0035919. We can only speculate whether this sub-group of texts refer to several drought events over an extended period or particular year of exceptional drought.

²⁶⁹ A Safaitic text (*OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0015351) recorded in northern Jordan also names Baalshamin as “god of Sia” (ʾlh s^lʿ); and an inscription (*Quellen* No. 171) from the site itself, composed in Nabataean Aramaic, confirms that Baalshamin was honoured with a temple there. For a recent discussion of religious life at the site, see Alpass (2013: 181-185) and Dentzer-Feydy (2015: 313-325).

²⁷⁰ For a comparative architectural analysis of Sia's architecture within the wider area, see Mazzili (2014: 137-200).

²⁷¹ *s^lnt b^ll h^g s^lʿ* (*OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0035859). For a discussion of Sia in the Safaitic inscriptions, see Macdonald (2003: 278-280).

²⁷² See further *OCIANA Safaitic*: No. 0035859, with editors' commentary.

‘Isawi, southern Syria: “...and he waited for the rains but {the water} (?) did not come the year the idols left Sia.”²⁷³ As a result, we might therefore hypothesise that the worship of Baalshamin at Sia was motivated by a desire to secure the god’s favour as expressed by his provision of adequate rainfall. We do not know whether these texts refer to a single year of drought or several individual drought events; but we can appreciate that the absence of rain had ramifications for the religious life of the Jebel Arab’s communities.

The landscape of the Hauran thus stands in noticeable contrast to that of Khirbet Tannur and the gods of each place follow suit. The capricious nature of Baalshamin reflects the volatility of the Hauran’s rainfall, whilst the potency of ‘Qos’ is indicative of the abundance witnessed at Khirbet Tannur. Our discussion of Khirbet Tannur also touched on the topic of personification with regards to the so-called ‘Vegetation Goddess’, a female figure rendered in such a way as to evoke the lush natural environment surrounding the sanctuary. As we move now to Seleucia Pieria in the Syrian Tetrapolis, we will explore this topic further with reference to Zeus Keraunios, a storm-god who became so synonymous with the landscape that he was represented as part of the environment itself.

Zeus Keraunios in the Syrian Tetrapolis

The Syrian Tetrapolis lies some 360km northwest of the Jebel Arab. Leaving Sia, one travels almost 160km west – passing close to the hot springs of Emmatha (4.3) – before reaching the coast. Following the coast northwards, one passes many of the cities we will discuss later, such as Tyre and its cult of Melqart (2.4) and the Sanctuary of Eshmoun outside Sidon (4.3), and eventually approaches Jebel Aqra in the Syrian Tetrapolis. The stretch of coastline surrounding the mountain benefits from the highest precipitation levels

²⁷³ *tʒr h- sʿmy w šlf h- {m}l sʿnt brh h- ʿšlm sʿʿ* (OCIANA Safaitic: No. 0026968).

in the region, resulting in a rich agricultural landscape.²⁷⁴ Today, rain is borne by several low pressure systems that converge along the coastline and stimulate cloud formation around Jebel Aqra's peak (**Figure 2.3.13**).²⁷⁵ When these systems reach the mountain's eastern flank, the steep gradient causes orographic uplift: the air is forced to rise, which reduces the temperature and dew-point of the air and thus generates clouds.²⁷⁶ However, because the rising air is still warmer than the surrounding atmosphere it becomes unstable and, consequently, creates the ideal conditions in which a thunderstorm can be triggered.²⁷⁷ It is in the transition period between summer and winter – when these pressure systems are at their most variable – that thunderstorms can erupt most often around Jebel Aqra and thus signal the end of the summer drought and the start of the winter rains. These climatic and topographic factors thus create a distinctive landscape: Jebel Aqra's upper slopes are masked by cloud for several months of the year and the mountain manifests as a focal point for thunderstorms.

These particular landscape conditions – localised thunderstorms around the mountain's summit – were an integral factor in the characterisation of Jebel Aqra's gods.²⁷⁸ Indeed, the tradition of locating a god atop the stormy mountain dated back to the Late Bronze Age, when the religious community of nearby Ugarit considered the summit to be the home of

²⁷⁴ Average annual precipitation ranges from 1000-1500mm across the area with a variability rating of less than 15%, one of the lowest in the Levant (*Tübinger A.IV.4*). Strabo (*Geo.* 16.2.9) notes the productivity of the landscape, commenting that vineyards stretched across the hillsides near Laodicea.

²⁷⁵ Jebel Aqra lies in the path of three low pressure systems: the so-called 'Mediterranean Front', which forms in winter when polar air from the Atlantic warms as it travels eastwards across the Mediterranean basin; the so-called 'Cyprus Lows', a distinctive, localised low-pressure system that forms over Cyprus and then spreads eastwards; and, finally, the southern winds that travel north along coast from Egypt. This final system is characterised by a north-south climate gradient, whereby the winds become increasingly moist as they travel north because their sea 'fetch' is longer – in other words, they have a longer distance to pick up moisture from the sea. For an accessible overview of the Mediterranean's weather systems, see Allen (2014: 25-36).

²⁷⁶ On orographic uplift and cloud formation in general, see Ahrens (2013: 159-160).

²⁷⁷ For an accessible introduction to thunderstorm formation, see Ahrens (2013: 380).

²⁷⁸ The gods of Jebel Aqra have been discussed variously – cf. e.g. Seyrig (1939: 296-301, with 314), Schwemer (2001: 502-546), Smith (2003: 190-198), Lane Fox (2008: 255-272) and, most recently, Parker (2017: 222). For a focused discussion of the characterisation of the mountain's gods, see Williams-Reed (forthcoming).

Baal Saphon after he defeated Yamm, the deified Sea.²⁷⁹ During the Hellenistic and Roman periods however, Zeus was the main figure associated with the mountain and its thunderstorms. This local Zeus was identified with a variety of epithets, of which the most-common were Kasios and Keraunios, referring to the Graeco-Roman name of Jebel Aqra, Mount Kasios, and ‘thunderer’, respectively. Whether Zeus Kasios and Zeus Keraunios were distinct individual gods or two shades of one overall divine figure remains unclear. On the one hand, both figures were visualised differently on the coinage of Seleucia Pieria.²⁸⁰ Yet, on the other hand, the qualities signified by each epithet were identifiable in both gods: a sacrifice to Zeus Kasios on top of Jebel Aqra (Mount Kasios) supposedly resulted in a lightning strike, for example.²⁸¹ Whilst I favour the latter interpretation and would recognise both figures as lying on the same spectrum of one complex god, this matter is not our primary concern here.²⁸² Rather, the following discussion will centre on the figure identified in the extant material as Zeus Keraunios and thus focus on the stormy dimension in the character of Jebel Aqra’s leading god. In doing so, we will see how it was possible for a god to become so synonymous with the landscape with which they were associated that they could be worshipped as an environmental feature in their own right.

²⁷⁹ In particular, the so-called ‘Baal Cycle’ – a mythological epic written down by a scribe known as Ilimalku in the first half of the fourteenth century BC – indicates that Ugarit’s religious community worshipped Baal Saphon as a storm-god who resided on the summit of Jebel Aqra, the Ugaritic Mount Saphon. For a translation of the full text, with some commentary and introduction, see Wyatt (1998: 34-146); for a translation of the first four sections of the text, alongside the original text and with extensive commentary, see Smith (1994), and Smith and Pitard (2009). For a detailed discussion of the epic’s main interpretations, see Smith (1994: 58-114); and, for an updated synthesis, see Smith and Pitard (2009: 4-6). A stele depicting a god striding across the landscape and wielding a lightning bolt is commonly recognised as the cult image of Baal Saphon. The object was uncovered in the Temple of Baal at Ugarit and is now in the Musée du Louvre (Acc. No. AO 15775).

²⁸⁰ Zeus Kasios appears as a mountain-shaped baetyl and Zeus Keraunios as a lightning bolt. The coin legend names these figures as ZEYC KACIOC and ZEYC KEPAYNIOC respectively – cf. e.g. Butcher (2004: Nos. 52-59 and 61-66).

²⁸¹ *SHA Had.* 3. See also: *Anth. Pal.* (6.332), which refers to Kasios and Kelainephos (‘black with clouds’) as the same figure; and Malalas (*Chron.* 8.12/199) on a festival of Zeus Keraunios being held to give thanks for divine assistance from Zeus Kasios.

²⁸² For further discussion on how we might conceptualise the identity of this god, see Seyrig (1939: 296-301) and Williams-Reed (forthcoming).

The majority of our evidence pertaining to Zeus Keraunios is associated with the coastal city of Seleucia Pieria, from which Jebel Aqra and its stormy summit can be clearly seen – as illustrated by **Figure 2.3.13**. Indeed, as we noted in **1.1**, a Greek inscription affirms that Seleucia was responsible for managing the storm-god’s temple close to Jebel Aqra’s summit, as individuals from other localities had to seek permission from Seleucia’s ‘higher council’ (πρόβουλος) if they wanted to dedicate statues at the site.²⁸³ Most important to our present enquiry however, is that the religious community at Seleucia apparently worshipped Zeus Keraunios in the guise of the lightning bolt. According to Appian, this tradition dated back to the city’s foundation by Seleucus I when a portentous sign of thunder meant that he “consecrated thunder as the god of that place, and the inhabitants worship and sing hymns to honour it even today.”²⁸⁴ Other material not only suggests that Appian’s narrative accurately bears witness to Seleucia’s religious traditions, but also demonstrates Zeus Keraunios’ stormy characterisation. A Greek inscription, dated to the reign of Seleucus IV in the early-second century BC, presents a catalogue of the annual priesthoods of Seleucia, including the office of the ‘thunder-bearers’ (κεραυνοφόροι).²⁸⁵ Moreover,

²⁸³ *SEG* 36: No. 1297. For further discussion of this text, see Seyrig (1986: 201-202) and Aliquot (2015: 159-160). The text was inscribed on a limestone block uncovered amidst the ruins of the Monastery of St. Barlaam located below the summit of Jebel Aqra. The monastery was either built on the site of a temple dedicated to Zeus Kasios or constructed using materials looted from an earlier temple located on the summit – for a summary of excavations at the site, see Djobadze (1986: 7-9), with additional discussion by Lane Fox (2008: 160) and Aliquot (2015: 159). Strabo (*Geo.* 16.2.5) refers to the mountain as being located within the neighbourhood of Seleucia.

²⁸⁴ *Syr.* 58: τοῦτο θεὸν αὐτοῖς κεραυνὸν ἔθετο, καὶ θρησκεύουσι καὶ ὕμνοῦσι καὶ νῦν κεραυνόν. This foundation myth is also echoed by John Malalas (*Chron.* 8.12/199), who reports that Seleucus offered a sacrifice to Zeus Kasios on the summit of Jebel Aqra before asking where he should build Seleucia Pieria. An eagle then stole the meat and set it down at the future site of the city. After marking out the city walls, Seleucus then held a thanksgiving festival in honour of Zeus Keraunios. A further point of significance arises from this narrative: after founding Antioch and Laodicea, Seleucus supposedly sacrificed a virgin girl in each place and then set up a bronze statue of Tyche in her image (Malal. *Chron.* 8.13/202, 8.18/203). Aliquot (2015: 161) has drawn attention to the significance of the Laodicean virgin’s name, Agave. Agave is best-known from her appearance in Euripides’ *Bacchae*: Dionysus manipulates Agave to commit infanticide inadvertently as punishment for taunting his mother, Semele, when she unexpectedly became pregnant. Semele had in fact been impregnated by Zeus in the guise of a lightning bolt. I add here a further semantic detail to supplement Aliquot’s original argument: Semele also shares Zeus’ epithet, κεραύνιος (Eur. *Bac.* 6). For a recent discussion of Antioch’s foundation myths, see Grigolin (2018: 29-85).

²⁸⁵ *IGLS* III: No. 1184, B25. All versions of the text, now lost, were originally based on a copy made by Pococke during his tour of the region in 1738 (*IAGL* 4: No. 18); but research by Drew-Bear *et al* (1985: 32-37), on the travel notebook of Arthur Pullinger and the letters of the Levant Company at Aleppo, dated

from at least the first century BC onward, the city regularly issued coins featuring the reverse image of a lightning bolt sat atop a cushioned throne (**Figure 2.3.14**).²⁸⁶ The lightning bolt typically comprises a central handle from which several prongs emanate. During the reigns of Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus and Caracalla, the image was accompanied by the legend ZEYC KEPAYNIOC, leaving no doubt that the lightning bolt was indeed a visual representation of the storm-god himself.²⁸⁷ Moreover, despite small variation between different designs, the consistent appearance of the divine image atop a cushioned throne suggests that the type depicted a real-life shrine in which Zeus Keraunios was worshipped in the form of a lightning-bolt. It would therefore appear that, for the religious community at Seleucia, the local storms around Jebel Aqra were not only regarded as manifestations of the Zeus Keraunios' pluvial powers, but also testament to his presence within the landscape, such that he became synonymous with the environmental realm for which he was responsible. As we move onto the next section of this chapter, we will see that certain religious communities could likewise recognise the divine within maritime environments.

between 1725 and 1755, revealed two new copies that now form the authoritative version of this text. Crucially, these revised versions include the priesthood of Zeus Kasios (B5) that had been overlooked by Pococke (*ibid*). For both versions of the Greek text, see Drew-Bear *et al* (1985: 35-37); for translation, see Austin (2006: 369, No. 207). Significantly, the same priest of Zeus Kasios, Andron son of Philophron, was also responsible for the cult of Ζεύς Κορυφαῖος, 'Zeus of the Mountain Peak' (lit. 'Zeus at the top').

²⁸⁶ See further Butcher (2004: Nos. 1-34, 45-51, 75, 79, 85, 87, 90, 92 and 94) and Houghton *et al* (2008) No. 2447. For further discussion, see Butcher (*ibid*: 229 and 413-414).

²⁸⁷ Butcher 2004: Nos. 61-66, 79a-b and 85.

2.4 Sea Deities and the Deified Sea

The sea was considered a dangerous, unpredictable place in antiquity and the gods invoked by seafarers and maritime communities reflected this view.²⁸⁸ One such god was the Zeus of Jebel Aqra – who we have just encountered in **2.3** under the name Zeus Keraunios – in his particular guise of Zeus Kasios.²⁸⁹ When named as such in the extant material, Zeus Kasios was associated with both storms and the mountain from which his toponym originated: Jebel Aqra, the ancient Mount Kasios.²⁹⁰ Indeed, Zeus Kasios’ connection to the mountain was precisely one of the main reasons why he appealed to seafarers. The coastal location of Jebel Aqra means that the mountain serves as a navigational landmark to those at sea, particularly to those sailing from Cyprus as the mountain is the first landscape feature to become visible on the horizon.²⁹¹ Moreover, seafarers would have been attracted to Zeus Kasios’ meteorological abilities because, as we will shortly explore in more detail, storms were a major hazard to ancient seafaring anywhere in the Mediterranean.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ I apply here a broad definition to the term ‘seafarers’ to include the whole spectrum of people involved in a journey at sea, such as travellers and merchants, and not solely ‘sailors’ for whom seafaring was a profession. Moreover, as I discuss in full at **3.3** below, patterns of worship involving seafarers did not take place exclusively at sea but rather occupied a variety of maritime spaces in both landscapes and seascapes.

²⁸⁹ The nature of the relationship between these two divine figures is discussed above at **2.3**.

²⁹⁰ Zeus Kasios’ association with storms and the mountain is made plain in several Graeco-Roman texts. The god is known to appear in the form of a lightning bolt (*SHA* 14.3 and Dio 69.2.1 (?); cf. *Anth. Pal.* 6.332) and sacrifices to him typically took place on Mount Kasios (Amm. Marc. 22.14.4, Lib. *Or.* 18.172 and Malal. 12.8/199). The location of the god’s temple on the mountain has been discussed in **2.3**. In terms of imagery, a mountain-shaped baetyl appears on the coinage of Seleucia Pieria and is labelled as Zeus Kasios in several instances – see further Butcher (2004: Nos. 52-59, 67-72, 76, 80, 86, 88, 91, 93 and 95). An altar, discovered at Dura-Europos over 450km southeast, bears a short dedication: “To the ancestral god, Zeus Betylos, of those by the Orontes” (*SEG* 7: No. 341: Θεῶ πατρῶῷ Διὶ Βετύλω τῶν πρὸς τῷ Ὀρόντι), which could refer to the worship of Zeus near the Orontes in the form of a *baetyl*; but nothing explicitly connects this text with Zeus Kasios – see further Millar (1993: 1-23) and Lane Fox (2008: 261-262).

²⁹¹ This sailing route, albeit in the opposite direction, is known from *Acts* (27).

²⁹² For further discussion of Zeus Kasios’ reverence by seafarers as a result of his meteorological prowess, see e.g. Brody (1998: 19).

Zeus Kasios' reverence by seafarers is made apparent by a particular collection of votive objects in the form of anchors inscribed with the god's name. Believed to be 'sheet anchors', these anchors were often the heaviest aboard the ship and would be cast into the sea only in the direst of situations, precisely when divine assistance was needed most. Seven examples have been uncovered to date, with find-spots including the waters around Syracuse, Palermo and Cape Porto (southern Spain), known nodal points in ancient shipping routes and difficult stretches of coast.²⁹³ Whether these anchors represent ritual deposition or unfortunate loss remains uncertain; but these objects are nevertheless significant in their demonstration that seafarers could invoke Zeus Kasios – a god who, by his very name, was intimately connected to a specific locality – anywhere in the Mediterranean.²⁹⁴ As Anna Collar has recently suggested, one could interpret these anchors as “glimpses of the connective sinews of belief that followed the sailors and their boats across the seas.”²⁹⁵ We have already commented on the mobility of gods in **2.1** and noted that the aims of this study are best served by examining local environmental contexts and the gods within them, as opposed to tracking the watery dimensions of specific gods across multiple landscapes. Nevertheless, the anchors of Zeus Kasios prompt us to consider a more nuanced approach to this relationship between the sea and its gods precisely because of the transitory nature of seafaring. More so than other bodies of water, we are justified in dealing with not only the local seascapes of the Levant, but also the wider maritime environment encountered by religious communities hailing from the Roman Near East, and even the Sea as a metaphysical concept. As a result, though discussion will remain focused on the Roman Near East, the physical and metaphysical scope of this section will be stretched at times where doing so serves to augment our understanding. I will begin by remarking on the

²⁹³ See further Tito (2012: 81-83) and Collar (2017: 23-36).

²⁹⁴ For further discussion of Zeus Kasios' mobility, see Lane Fox (2008: 264-272).

²⁹⁵ 2017: 31.

general environmental context of the Mediterranean before turning to case-studies from Iope, Berytos and Tyre, and then concluding with a discussion of the deified Sea and so-called ‘Near Eastern Poseidon’.

The maritime environment of the Mediterranean

The risky nature of seafaring was well-known in antiquity, as a variety of environmental factors could make maritime journeys dangerous and unpredictable endeavours.²⁹⁶ Such difficulties were largely created by different weather patterns, with the result that established sailing seasons were recognised across the Mediterranean and further afield.²⁹⁷ The summer months were invariably the best time to sail on account of the strong and stable Etesian winds, coupled with a low chance of storms.²⁹⁸ Late spring and early autumn were also considered suitable, if not ideal, times to traverse the sea in certain areas.²⁹⁹ Even so, seafarers could still encounter difficulties during relatively calm times of the year: for instance, the ship conveying the annual sacred mission from Delos was often delayed by

²⁹⁶ There is a wealth of modern literature on ancient seafaring. In general, see Casson (1971 and 1994), Rougé (1981) and Horden and Purcell (2000: 133-143); studies specific to the Levant include, see Brody (1998), Patai (1998) and Rich (2017). On the role of the environment in ancient seafaring, see Morton (2001). Aspects of risk and seafaring have previously been discussed in the context of so-called ‘maritime loans’ – see further Eidinow (2007: 17-18). In particular, Demosthenes outlines the various legal precedents surrounding maritime finance in classical Athens, including higher interest rates when ships set sail during the winter (Dem. 35.10, cf. 32-35 and 56).

²⁹⁷ Hesiod (*Op.* 663-677) advises that the best time to sail is after the summer solstice and before the wine harvest, i.e. in July and August, though he notes that some sailing is possible in spring (*ibid* 678-680). In Jewish eschatological literature, the ‘paths of the sea’ were judged to be open between the Pentecost and the Feast of the Tabernacles, thus roughly May-October (Genesis Rabbah 6:5). For further discussion of ancient sailing seasons, see Patai (1998: 64-66), Morton (2001: 253-258) and Beresford (2013). Further afield, a sailing season was also recognised for the Red Sea where the Monsoon could be exploited: eastward voyages began at midsummer, whilst the return journey started in December (see, e.g., Plin. *HN* 6.26/101-106 and *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 57). For a recent discussion of ancient seafaring in the Red Sea, see Seland (2009: 179-185).

²⁹⁸ E.g. Apollonius (*Argon.* 2.498-499) says that the stability of the Etesians is due to Zeus’ involvement. On the Etesians, see Morton (2001: 48).

²⁹⁹ E.g. Vegetius, writing in the fourth century AD, delineates the ideal sailing season from 27th May to 14th September but says that voyages might be possible between 14th September and 11th November, and 10th March to 27th May, though he warns that more caution is required (*Epitome of Military Science* 4.39; Milner 2001: 146). On the gradual expansion of the sailing season due to technological advancements, see Rougé (1981: 15).

adverse local winds on its return to Athens in early summer.³⁰⁰ By contrast, sailing during the winter was regarded by some as an obviously foolish enterprise, only to be undertaken in the most desperate of circumstances.³⁰¹ From late September, stormy depressions increasingly roll eastwards across the Mediterranean – where, as we saw in 2.3, they often land along the coast of northern Syria and create thunderstorms around Jebel Aqra. These depressions could cause havoc for ancient seafarers: tumultuous waves could fatally damage their ships and tempestuous winds threatened to blow them off course. Nevertheless, such voyages did take place, though sometimes with disastrous results.³⁰² The calamitous journey of the Apostle Paul, as relayed in *Acts*, is a case in point.³⁰³ After a difficult journey from Sidon to Myra, Paul fails to convince the crew not to continue their voyage in late-September and the ship subsequently encounters a storm along the shores of Crete. The ship is damaged and blown off course, such that the crew allows themselves to be carried by the prevailing wind before abandoning ship some fourteen days later off the coast of Malta. Although the account of Paul’s journey is highly dramatized, the potential perils of seafaring are nevertheless made plain.³⁰⁴

In addition to the winter storms concentrated along the northern half of the Levantine coast, the seascape of the Near East also posed a number of specific difficulties for ancient seafarers. Today, the hot and dusty Sirocco wind pattern absorbs moisture on its journey

³⁰⁰ As described by Plato (*Phd.* 58a-c). On the offending wind patterns, see Morton (2001: 122-123). Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 7.2-4) also encountered a summer storm after sailing from Chios.

³⁰¹ Cf. e.g. Hesiod (*Op.* 684-686), Aratus (*Phaen.* 284-299 and 300-302), Livy (31.47), Juvenal (14.287-302) and Vegetius (*Epitome of Military Science* 4.39; Milner 2001: 146). For similarities in the Jewish tradition, see Patai (1998: 64-65).

³⁰² That certain winter voyages could be successful is evidenced by, e.g., Pindar (*Isthm.* 2.39-42) and Demosthenes (56.30). See further Morton (2001: 258-261), and Horden and Purcell (2000: 142-143).

³⁰³ *Acts* 27.

³⁰⁴ The loss of ships at sea is firmly indicated by the *Shipwrecks Database* (Strauss 2013), which currently lists over 500 known wrecks from the Mediterranean Sea alone.

north and can create hazy conditions along the coast, resulting in poor visibility at sea.³⁰⁵ For ancient seafarers, who often relied upon coastal landmarks (including Jebel Aqra) for navigational purposes, such conditions could prove treacherous in any location but were especially hazardous along the Levantine coast on account of the challenges created by its topography.³⁰⁶ The northern section of the coast – spanning some 300km from Seleucia Pieria down to Mount Carmel – comprises multiple natural headlands around which local currents and winds converge to produce rough sailing conditions.³⁰⁷ By contrast, the southern section of the coast – ranging 150km from Mount Carmel to Gaza – lacks significant indentation, such that waves build up a significant degree of speed and force, causing problems for those voyaging off the coast. Moreover, most tracts of the Near East’s coastline feature reefs and shoals, of which some were particularly hazardous to ancient vessels.³⁰⁸ The reefs at Iope, for example, were known in antiquity for their dangerous nature, with Josephus narrating that many seafarers once perished in a storm after their ships were dashed on the reefs, such that “all the sea was stained with blood and the shore overflowed with corpses.”³⁰⁹ We will return to Iope and its reefs momentarily. For now,

³⁰⁵ Both Theophrastus (*Weather Signs* 2.36) and Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 10.202-207) comment on the powerful and dusty form of the Sirocco. Severe conditions occur on average two or three times per year during April and May when they can last up to three days. On the Sirocco, see Morton (2001: 50-51) and *Mediterranean Pilot V* (2005: 25 and 32).

³⁰⁶ Sailing within sight of the coast is generally judged to have been the preferred strategy of ancient seafarers presumably because doing so was safer, although sailing across open-water has been increasingly acknowledged in recent years – for comparative discussion, see Morton (2001: 143-215), and Horden and Purcell (2000: 137-143). Moreover, as Horden and Purcell convincingly highlight (*ibid.*: 124-127, with Map 9), many stretches of the Mediterranean always remained in sight of land on a clear day, even if one was some distance away.

³⁰⁷ On general environmental conditions encountered at headlands, see Morton (2001: 74-81). Currents could prove problematic around headlands: the more a headland protruded from the main coast, the more likely ships were to encounter deep-sea currents, which could flow against each other to create unnavigable conditions. As for winds, they were likewise often confused at headlands, where multiple local patterns could blow against each other with great force. If prevailing winds struck against promontories, then dangerous squalls could be generated on the leeward side and prevent easy access to a harbour. In some cases, both local currents and winds could be exploited for a swift entry to or exit from the harbour. Safadi (2016: 348-360) has recently used wind and wave modelling to evaluate harbour accessibility in the Levant and revealed each harbour had a different sailing potential on account of its particularly local characteristics. Both Tyre and Berytos will be discussed in light of the survey further below.

³⁰⁸ *Mediterranean Pilot V* 2005: 207.

³⁰⁹ *BJ* 3.9.3/426: αἰμαχθῆναι μὲν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τὸ πέλαγος, πληρωθῆναι δὲ νεκρῶν τὴν παράλιον.

this survey of seafaring conditions in the Levant and the wider Mediterranean has served to establish the dominant mentality of seafarers: though a common occurrence, putting out to sea could be an unpredictable and dangerous experience. As we will now see through several case studies, this mentality underpinned the ways in which maritime gods were characterised and likewise fed into the metaphysical conception of the Sea.

Reefs and sea-monsters at Iope

We have already noted that Iope's reefs were recognised as hazardous in antiquity; now we will explore how this particular environmental context inspired the divine realm associated with the city's local seascape. Iope's local religious life appears to have been dominated by the city's claim to be the setting of the Andromeda myth.³¹⁰ The canonical story of the myth may be summarised as follows.³¹¹ Cassiopeia, wife of Cepheus, boasted that she surpassed the Nereids in beauty, whereupon they asked Poseidon to send a flood and a sea-monster against the land in revenge. However, Ammon prophesied that the realm would be saved if Andromeda, the daughter of Cassiopeia and Cepheus, was offered as a sacrifice to the sea-monster. Andromeda was promptly chained to a rock beside the sea. Yet, upon seeing her, Perseus fell in love with Andromeda and agreed with Cepheus that he would kill the sea-monster if he could marry his daughter. Perseus then defeated the sea-monster and went to collect his bride; but Phineus, Cepheus' brother, challenged Perseus because Andromeda had already been promised to him. In response, Perseus petrified him using Medusa's head.

³¹⁰ The mythological traditions of Iope have been studied at length by Harvey (1994: 1-14) and Kaizer (2011: 323-339). Of particular relevance here is that Iope was also the port from which Jonah set sail before being swallowed by the whale (*Jonah* 1-2, esp. 1:3).

³¹¹ Cf. e.g. Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.4.3) and Ovid (*Met.* 4.663-742). For comprehensive list of literary references, see Ogden (2013: 123, n.30).

Although the Andromeda myth was traditionally located in Ethiopia, Iope's claim to be setting of the myth can be deduced from a relatively large body of literary material.³¹² Starting in the fourth century BC, a *Periplus* attributed to Pseudo-Scylax records: “[Ioppe, a city]. They say Androm[eda] was exposed here [for the monster]”.³¹³ Then, from the first century BC onwards, Iope's claim to the myth was frequently referenced in several works, including those of Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Pliny, Josephus and Pausanias.³¹⁴ In particular, Pliny and Josephus emphasise a clear connection between the natural landscape and the setting of the myth. Pliny describes the city in the following terms:³¹⁵

Iope of the Phoenicians: the people of the city assert that it dates to before the deluge of the earth; it occupies a hill and a rock lies before it, on which the people point out the marks of the chains of Andromeda; legendary Ceto is cherished at that place.

Josephus' description of Iope likewise focuses on the landscape:³¹⁶

³¹² It is also worth briefly mentioning the numismatic evidence here, if only to corroborate the literary record. The numismatic corpus attests to two types minted at Iope that refer to the Andromeda myth. Firstly, one type issued in the first century BC featuring Andromeda chained to a rock (Ecker 2009-10: No.1); and, secondly, four types issued under Caracalla, Julia Domna, Macrinus and Julia Paula depicting Perseus wearing a Phrygian cap, winged-boots and *kisbisis*, and holding Medusa's head and a *harpe* (*ibid*: Nos. 4, 8, 12 and 20). On the coinage of Iope, see Kindler (1985) and Ecker (2009-10: 151-76).

³¹³ 104.93: [Ἰόππη πόλις· ἐκτε]θήναί φασιν ἐνταῦθα τὴν Ἀνδρομ[έδαν τῷ κήτει]. For further discussion of this text, see Shipley (2011).

³¹⁴ See further Strabo (16.2.28), Pomponius Mela (*Chor.* 1.64), Pliny (*HN* 5.14/69), Josephus (*BJ* 3.9.3/419-21) and Pausanias (*Desc.* 4.35.6). See also, Conon (*Diegeseis* 40 = *BNJ* 26 F1) who locates the myth at Iope but 'rationalises' it, with Andromeda being abducted by a ship called 'Ketos'; and Jerome (*Epis.* 108.8), who mentions that Paula visited Iope during her travels across the Levant, where she was told about Andromeda being bound to a rock.

³¹⁵ *HN* 5.14/69: *Iope Phoenicum, antiquior terrarum inundatione, ut ferunt, insidet collem praeiacente saxo in quo vinculorum Andromedae vestigia ostendunt; colitur illic fabulosa Ceto.* The identity of Ceto at Iope has been interpreted variously. Harvey (1994: 7) argued forcefully that Pliny was referring to a cult of the sea-monster, κήτος, but I would disagree on semantic grounds: *Ceto* here is feminine (qualified by *fabulosa*), whereas the Latin *cetus*, 'sea-monster', is masculine and a transliteration of the Greek neuter, κήτος. Furthermore, as far as I can tell, this passage is the only instance of Pliny using *Ceto* in his *Natural History*; when he describes other sea-creatures he employs *cetus* (e.g. 9.40/78) or *belua*, the latter of which he uses when referring to the sea-monster of Iope elsewhere (*HN* 9.4/11). Kaizer (2011: 329) has suggested that the name could allude to Derceto – which was, according to Pliny (*HN* 5.19/81), the Greek name for Atargatis – or perhaps Keto the daughter of Pontos and Ge mentioned by Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.2.6-7). Keto also went on to marry the sea-god Phorkys and gave birth to the gorgons (*ibid* 2.4.2), a link that brings us back to Perseus.

³¹⁶ *BJ* 3.9.3/419-21: Ἀλμίνου δ' οὔσης φύσει τῆς Ἰόππης, αἰγιαλῷ γὰρ ἐπιλήγει τραχεῖ καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄλλο πᾶν ὀρθίῳ, βραχὺ δὲ συννεύοντι κατὰ τὰς κεραίας ἐκατέρωθεν· αἱ δὲ εἰσιν κρημνοὶ βαθεῖς καὶ πρὸυχουσαι σπιλάδες εἰς τὸ πέλαγος, ἔνθα καὶ τῶν Ἀνδρομέδας δεσμῶν ἔτι δεικνύμενοι τύποι πιστοῦνται τὴν ἀρχαιότητα τοῦ μύθου.

Iope does not have a natural harbour. The coast is almost entirely straight before converging down into a horn at each end, terminating at Iope in a jagged shore. The cliffs are high and the reefs jut out of the sea, and at that place the impressions of the chains of Andromeda are still visible and prove the antiquity of the tale.

It therefore becomes apparent from these descriptions that the rock to which Andromeda was bound became the focal point for Iope's religious life, whereby a reciprocal relationship existed between physical environment and mythical topography. Indeed, this aspect has not escaped the attention of modern scholars: Ted Kaizer has previously emphasised that the landscape gave authority to the myth and the myth offered an element of organisation to the landscape.³¹⁷ Josephus' account in particular highlights that the myth was legitimised by the presence of physical remains, including the rock and the impressions of Andromeda's chains.³¹⁸ Paul Harvey has also stressed that visitors to Iope were specifically *shown* these 'relics' of the myth, which alludes to the desire of Iope's residents to explicitly connect the myth with a specific location.³¹⁹ Still, there is another possible connection between myth and landscape that remains unexplored in modern scholarship: the extant bones of the sea-monster and the reefs located just off the coast.

Two authors refer to the remains of the sea-monster defeated by Perseus at Iope: Pomponius Mela mentions that "the people of the city point out the monstrous bones of the sea-monster";³²⁰ and Pliny recounts that the monster's remains had been brought from Iope to Rome by M. Aemilius Scaurus.³²¹ Isidorus offers a slightly different interpretation and, in

³¹⁷ 2011: 326.

³¹⁸ *BJ* 3.9.3/420-1.

³¹⁹ 1994: 8. In particular, note both Mela's and Pliny's use of *ostendo* (*Chor.* 1.64; *HN* 5.14/69).

³²⁰ *Chor.* 1.64: *marinae beluae ossa inmania ostentant*.

³²¹ *HN* 9.4/11. On the various theories that have been proposed to reconcile the obvious tension between these two accounts – namely, how could Mela, writing under Claudius, see the bones when Scaurus had exhibited them in Rome to celebrate his aedileship in 58 BC? – see Kaizer (2011: 327). I would also add a further interpretation. Throughout Book 9 of the *Natural History*, Pliny frequently references figures of authority when describing miraculous incidents involving aquatic creatures: the fleet of Alexander observe gargantuan sea-monsters in the Indian Ocean (9.2/5-6) and distinguished men of equestrian rank report that they saw Tritons near the Gades (9.4/10) – similar techniques are also adopted by Aelian in his account of Tritons (*NA*

his early-seventh-century AD *Etymologies*, says that the rock to which Andromeda was chained had the appearance of a *belua*.³²² In his commentary on Mela's *Concerning Chorography*, Frank E. Romer briefly proposes that the remains of the sea-monster could rather refer to the reefs lying off the coast of the Iope and indeed there is a wealth of evidence that can strengthen this connection between reef and remains, particularly in the context of other narratives on the Ethiopic Andromeda myth.³²³ Several authors give descriptions of the sea-monster that evoke the natural geography of reefs. Ennius envisages a creature "covered in rough rock";³²⁴ Manilius creates a sea-monster whose back covers the entire sea, cresting the waves;³²⁵ and Achilles Tatius describes a painting at Pleusium in which the beast is visualised emerging from the sea-foam with most of its body still hidden beneath the waves.³²⁶ In addition, an explicit connection is made between the Andromeda myth and the creation of coral. According to Ovid, after Perseus had slain the sea-monster, he apparently lay the head of Medusa on a pile of seaweed, which was then turned to stone by the power of the gorgon's head. The poet then uses this story to explain the formation of coral:³²⁷

Even now the same quality has endured in coral, it is made hard when touched by air and what was a pliant twig in the sea becomes rock above the surface of the sea.

13.21, with 15.19). I suggest that Pliny's citation of such authorities is operating as a literary device with two purposes. Firstly, associating a miraculous event with a respected figure adds credibility to both the event itself and Pliny's inclusion of it. Secondly, by verifying an event in this way, Pliny also avoids giving his own judgement on the miraculous and thus maintains his authorial authority. Indeed, Pliny alludes to this strategy in his account of the dolphin that befriended a boy at Baiiae, stating that he would be ashamed to relate such a story had it not been written about by other authors already (*HN* 9.8/25). Therefore, I propose that we read Scaurus' relocation of the bones to Rome not as a report of historical fact but rather a deliberate strategy by Pliny to add credibility to his narrative.

³²² 15.1.19.

³²³ 1998: 53, n.51.

³²⁴ Fr.XLVI: *scrupeo inuestita saxo* (Jocelyn 1967: 264).

³²⁵ *Astronomica* 5.579-85.

³²⁶ 3.7.6-7.

³²⁷ *Met.* 4.750-3: *nunc quoque curaliis eadem natura remansit, / duritiam tacto capiant ut ab aere quodque / vimen in aequore erat, fiat super aequora saxum*. This association also appears to have transcended the mythical tradition: Pliny mentions that the name of coral is 'Gorgon's stone' (*HN* 37.37/164).

Physical geography can also strengthen this connection between reef and remains. The reefs can still be seen protruding out of the water and they appear to be just as menacing today as they apparently were in antiquity (**Figures 2.4.1 and 2.4.2**).³²⁸ Following his comment on the Andromeda myth, Josephus gives a lengthy account on the perils of seafaring at Iope. He asserts that the combination of strong storms and the rocks created “a swell that made the harbour more perilous than the wilderness” and, as noted above, he describes a grim scene in which many sailors perished in a storm after their ships run aground.³²⁹ Considering Josephus’ account alongside the mythical narratives, I think we can certainly follow a line of argument whereby, in the minds of ancient seafarers, the threatening reef became equated with a threatening sea-monster. Indeed, the myth of Skylla provides a persuasive parallel and thus indicates that such mentalities existed elsewhere in the ancient world.³³⁰ The nature of our evidence does not allow us to assess the impact of this mentality on the development of Iope’s religious practices but the development of the Andromeda myth in the city must surely be considered as reflective of the ways in which the religious community engaged with the local maritime environment. The case of Iope therefore demonstrates that the potential dangers posed by certain seascapes could find expression in the mythological sphere, a theme that also emerges at Berytos.

Berytos: Poseidon and Beroë

Leaving Iope, one journeys 215km north up the Levantine coast – past Tyre to which we will return shortly – before reaching the promontory across which Berytos spread. Protruding some 6km from the main coastline, the promontory is encircled by the sea on

³²⁸ Some of the reefs have since been blasted away due to the modern harbour development. For a selection of early-modern photographs, maps and illustrations, which reveal the full extent of the reefs, see Tolkowsky (1924, esp. Fig. 20).

³²⁹ *BJ* 3.9.3/421-246: τὸ κῦμα σφαλερώτερον ἐρημίας τὸν ὄρμον ἀπεργάζεται.

³³⁰ Skylla was apparently later transformed into a rock and still posed a threat to sailors (cf. e.g. Ovid *Met.* 14.72-3; Nonnos *Dion.* 42.409).

its southern, western and northern flanks, though its topography varies on account of the different geological formations at work.³³¹ Approaching from the south, one first encounters sandy beaches along the coastline proper before they give way to harsh limestone formations. The southwestern extent of the promontory is characterised by extensive reefs leading up to steep, formidable cliffs, of which some are pockmarked by small caves. The so-called ‘Raouche Rocks’ – colossal pillar-shaped rocks – also lie close to the promontory’s western shore (**Figure 2.4.3**). Following the curve of the headland round to its northern stretch, the incline of the cliffs soften and a series of small coves emerge before gentle sandy beaches prevail once again. Although modern developments have altered the coastline, one of these coves was previously flanked by two land spurs and once enclosed a small island, the Burg al-Mina. A geoarchaeological and historical survey has since established beyond reasonable doubt that this particular cove was previously the site of Berytos’ main harbour (**Figure 2.4.4**).³³²

Several topographic and oceanographic factors made this northern cove a suitable location for a harbour.³³³ As **Figure 2.4.4** illustrates, the cove’s location on the northern face of the promontory afforded it protection from the prevailing southwesterly winds and the violent swells they created, whilst also enabling seafarers to take advantage of strong local currents when departing.³³⁴ Moreover, the cove’s natural topography offered some protection to vessels within it: the two spurs would have stabilised conditions by limiting the force of

³³¹ On the geomorphological context of Beirut’s promontory and its implications for ancient seafaring, see Marriner *et al* (2008a: 2495-2516, esp.2496-2501).

³³² The survey, led by Nick Marriner, comprised the drilling of 20 cores at sites around downtown Beirut followed by sedimentological and stratigraphic analysis, as well as consultation of early-modern maps. For a full report, see Marriner *et al* (2008a: 2495-2516).

³³³ The southern and western stretches of the promontory were of course poorly suited to disembarkation: the rocky shoals could cause wrecks and the steep cliffs afforded no access to the mainland. The sandy beaches on either side of the promontory could have served as a temporary anchorage for small vessels only during the summer months. The survey conducted by Marriner *et al* (2008a: 2504) indicated that the cove was being used by seafarers from at least the Bronze Age.

³³⁴ E.g. Achilles Tatitus (2.31-32) describes a swift departure from Berytos’ harbour.

local currents and winds within the bay, whilst the Burg al-Mina might have acted as a smaller ‘outer harbour’.³³⁵ Though geoarchaeological and architectural remains are limited, sediment analysis indicates that artificial modifications were made throughout the site’s history to maximise the cove’s natural features and transform it into a harbour.³³⁶ Moreover, the material record demonstrates that the harbour was functioning on a commercial scale from at least the eighth century BC onward.³³⁷ During the Roman period – when Berytos became the first Roman *colonia* of the Near East – engineers seemingly consolidated earlier building works, a process concordant with the literary record.³³⁸ Berytos’ harbour was by no means as established as Tyre’s, nor as technologically advanced as that of Caesarea Maritima;³³⁹ but it did facilitate the city’s maritime endeavours and gradually transform Berytos into a widely used port. Nevertheless, the seas around the promontory were not without their hazards: seafarers still had to negotiate the offshore reefs and tackle strong local winds and currents. Though the harbour had made the sea more accessible, the local seascape still dominated the city, both practically and conceptually. Indeed, as we will now discuss, numerous features of Berytos’ maritime environment influenced the characterisation of its gods.

Various divine figures worshipped at Berytos exhibit a connection to the sea. As we discussed at length in **2.1**, the Tyche of Berytos was visualised with a multitude of maritime attributes that rendered her as a protectress of seafarers. We can also add Leucothea, who

³³⁵ Sidon utilised the offshore island of Zire in a similar fashion – see further Carayon *et al* (2011: 50).

³³⁶ In particular, Marriner *et al* (2008a: 2506-2513) propose that the natural spurs were reinforced, several quays were added and reefs close to the opening of the cove were gradually fortified to create a mole.

³³⁷ On the material finds, see Marriner *et al* (2008a: 2508-2509), with additional bibliography. Pseudo-Scylax (*Periplus* 104) refers to Berytos as a city with a harbour.

³³⁸ Josephus (*BJ* 1.21.11/422-423 and *AJ* 19.7.5/335-337) notes that Herod bestowed Berytos with various recreational buildings, including a hippodrome still visible today; but he does not testify to any building projects at the harbour – cf. his extensive commentary on the works undertaken at Caesarea Maritima (**3.3**). On Berytos’ status as a *colonia*, see Millar (1990: 10-23).

³³⁹ Both sites are discussed at, respectively, **2.4** and **3.3**.

received cult both in the city of Berytos and at sites in its hinterland.³⁴⁰ Her connection to the sea is evident from her mythological background: as a mortal woman called Ino, she flees Hera’s wrath by jumping into the sea with her infant son, Melicertes, before Poseidon adopts the pair and renames them Leucothea and Palaemon.³⁴¹ Both figures were regarded as protectors of seafarers and Leucothea famously aided Odysseus after he was caught in a storm sent by Poseidon.³⁴² Though dedications to Leucothea appear in many guises across the Phoenician coast and its hinterland, we might speculate that her cult gained traction around Berytos in particular on account of the city’s formidable seaside cliffs, a plausible setting for her desperate plunge. In a similar vein, we should also note here a brief comment made by Philo in his *Phoenician History*: “Berytos [was given] to Poseidon, and to the Kabeiroi and Agrotae and Halieis, who also consecrated the remains of Pontos at Berytos.”³⁴³ Within Philo’s narrative, Pontos is the personified sea who is defeated by Ouranos, a mytheme that we will explore more broadly later in this section. For the moment, we will focus on Philo’s locating Pontos’ remains at Berytos as reflective of the local maritime environment. As at Iope, Berytos’ coast is likewise littered with reefs that protrude the sea like the backbone of a great sea-monster. Alternatively, given the

³⁴⁰ Discovered in the city in 2005, a Latin inscription records a dedication to Leucothea alongside the Heliopolitan triad – see further Aliquot (2009: 167). More well-known is a Latin inscription (*CIL* III: No. 6680) from the hillside sanctuary at Deir el-Qalaa in the Berytian hinterland that preserves a dedication to Mater Matuta, a figure commonly identified with Leucothea in antiquity – cf. e.g. Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.28 and *Nat. D.* 3.48), Plutarch (*Quaest. Rom.* 16) and Hyginus (*Fab.* 2, 125 and 224). For further discussion of the text, see e.g. Millar (1993: 280-281) and Kaizer (2005: 199-206). For full discussion of the Levantine cults of Leucothea, see Aliquot (2009: 164-171, including a map of cult sites at Fig. 74) and Bonnet (2015: 349-354).

³⁴¹ Ovid (*Met.* 4.416-542) relates the myth at length. Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.4.3), amongst others, offers a variant in which a maddened Ino boils Melicertes in a pot before leaping into the sea. This version of the myth has understandably been connected to a much-debated Greek inscription from Ain el-Bourj (65km southeast of Berytos) that bears a dedication to Leucothea and relates how a certain Neterios “was ritually drowned/entombed in a cauldron,” (*IGLS* XI: No. 39: τοῦ ἀποθεωθέντος ἐν τῷ λέβητι). On the meaning of ἀποθεωθέντος, see *LSJ sv. ἀποθεόω*; for the various interpretations of the text, see now commentary in *IGLS*. This mytheme is also discussed in 3.4.

³⁴² *Odyssey* 5.333-353. On their patronage of seafarers, cf. e.g. Propertius (2.26 and 2.28), Virgil (*G.* 1.432-437), Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.4.3) and Nonnos (*Dion.* 9.83-91).

³⁴³ *BJ Online* 790 F2: 35: Βηρυτὸν δὲ Ποσειδῶνι καὶ Καβείροις Ἀγρόταις τε καὶ Ἀλιεῦσιν, οἱ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Πόντου λείψανα εἰς τὴν Βηρυτὸν ἀφίερωσαν. The Kabeiroi were twin gods known to come to the aid of seafarers (e.g. Diod. Sic. 4.43.1 and 4.48.6; *OCD sv. ‘Cabiri’*) and later appear on Berytos’ coinage (Sawaya 2009: Série 101).

seemingly gigantic scale of these primordial battles, perhaps the colossal ‘Raouche Rocks’ inspired the carcass of Pontos at Berytos. In any case, the immensity of the maritime landscape would have been a potent stimulus for the appearance of equally awesome gods at that place.

Philo’s comment also indicates the supremacy of Poseidon at Berytos, a detail confirmed by additional material. In fact, Poseidon’s connection to the city was so intrinsic that Berytian expatriates on the island of Delos – over 1000km away in the middle of the Aegean Sea – formed the ‘association of the Berytian Poseidoniasts’.³⁴⁴ Back in Berytos proper, the numismatic record offers an illuminating insight into the characterisation of Berytian Poseidon.³⁴⁵ As early as the second century BC, reverse coin designs featured a male figure standing in a chariot pulled by four *hippocampoi*, a composition commonly associated with Poseidon (**Figure 2.4.5**).³⁴⁶ Across the various coin types, the figure typically holds a trident and wears a low *kalathos* and loose *himation*.³⁴⁷ Though this figure has been labelled by modern scholars as ‘Baal-Berit’ or ‘Baal of Berytos’, this appellation does not appear in the ancient record.³⁴⁸ Whether this figure was recognised as Baal or Poseidon, or some variant of both, it is plain that Berytos wished to emphasise this god’s maritime disposition. We are on safer ground from the first century AD onward when a new coin type was first

³⁴⁴ κοινον Βηρυτιῶν Ποσειδωνιαστῶν. Epigraphic testimonies include *ID* 1520, 1772-1796, 2323-2327, 2611 and 2629. *ID* 1520 comprises an honorary decree that provides the most information about the association’s organisation; *ID* 2325 records the dedication of a statue to Poseidon. For an overview of the association and their activities on Delos, see Bonnet (2015: 490-498).

³⁴⁵ On the coinage of Berytos, see now Sawaya (2009, with catalogue).

³⁴⁶ The *hippocampus* was typically a winged horse with the tail and lower parts of a fish. Poseidon’s horse-drawn chariot is first mentioned in the *Iliad* (13.23-30); though these horses are not described as having any marine body parts, they are capable of traversing the sea and are referred to as κήτε (13.27). The *hippocampus* then appears in material culture as a horse-fish hybrid from at least the sixth century BC onward – see, e.g., an Attic Black Figure cup in the Beazley Archive (No. 302378) – and is described as such by Strabo (8.7.2), amongst others. See also, *LIMC Suppl. sv.* ‘Hippokampos’.

³⁴⁷ Cf. *BMC Phoenicia* (Nos. 1-5, 8-10 and 17-21), *RPC* (I: Nos. 4529-4531) and Sawaya (2009: Séries 2 and 5-6).

³⁴⁸ See designations made in the catalogues of *BMC Phoenicia*, *RPC* I and Sawaya (2009).

issued under Trajan.³⁴⁹ Modelled on the ‘Lateran Poseidon’, this new figure appeared nude, bearded and with thick curly hair, held a trident in his left hand, a dolphin in his right and rested his right foot on the prow of a ship (**Figure 2.4.6**).³⁵⁰ Again, the maritime inclinations of this figure are evident.

Whether or not we interpret this Poseidon of the Roman period as a descendent of the ‘Baal-Berit’ figure, it is clear that Berytos’ maritime environment informed the iconographic composition and, thus, the local character of these two figures.³⁵¹ ‘Baal-Berit’ exhibits a certain dominance over the landscape through his control of the *hippocampoi* – mythical sea creatures commonly seen in the retinues of Tritons and Nereids, and often symbolic of the sea’s chaotic nature.³⁵² This same theme of maritime supremacy is again echoed in the ‘Lateran Poseidon’ type through the god’s dominant stance over the ship and his command of the dolphin.³⁵³ We might hypothesise that a statue of ‘Lateran Poseidon’ adorned the entrance to the harbour, as assumed at Ostia, Antikyra and, possibly, Ancona;³⁵⁴ but, other than three coin types that depict the figure within a temple, the evidence facilitates little more than speculation.³⁵⁵ We should also not fail to acknowledge the political undertones

³⁴⁹ Cf. Sawaya (2009: Séries 42-44, 55, 62 and 66). From the reign of Commodus onward, Poseidon rests his foot on a rock (*ibid*: Séries 71, 73, 84, 87, 91, 109 and 113).

³⁵⁰ For a full discussion of the ‘Lateran Poseidon’, see Bartman (1992: 102-146, with catalogue). Kropp (2011: 393) also compares the stance of the Tyche of Berytos with that of ‘Lateran Poseidon’.

³⁵¹ As discussed in 1.2, the two figures were possibly equated under Caracalla when a new coin type appeared visualising a male figure wearing a *kalathos* and holding a trident and dolphin, standing in a chariot drawn by *hippocampoi* (Sawaya 2009: Série 82).

³⁵² On divine maritime retinues, see Barringer (1995).

³⁵³ Dolphins had a reputation for rescuing seafarers in antiquity, with the story of Arion being the most popular (cf. e.g. Hdt. 1.23-24; Plin. *HN* 9.8/24; Plut. *Conv. Sept. Sap.* 18.161a-162a). For a recent discussion of dolphins in Graeco-Roman mythology and thought, see Beaulieu (2016: 237-253).

³⁵⁴ The original ‘Lateran Poseidon’ was uncovered within the remains of a Trajanic structure surrounding Ostia’s harbour; Pausanias (10.36.8) places a statue conforming to the Lateran type in a temple of Poseidon at Antikyra’s harbour; and a scene from Trajan’s column (LXXIX), believed to depict the harbour at Ancona, includes ‘Lateran Poseidon’ atop a gateway. For further discussion, see Bartman (1992: 125-128).

³⁵⁵ Sawaya 2009: Séries 93 and 107-108. The image is not rendered in a way that suggests the temple was located close to harbour, in contrast to a temple represented on the coinage of Akko-Ptolemais discussed below at 3.3. As for the image of ‘Baal-Berit’ in his chariot, Kropp (2011: 397) has argued that die-cutters had access to a model in-the-round due to the variety of angles in which the image was rendered, which could indicate that a statue group existed at some point in Berytos’ history.

behind both images: dominance over the sea could also be understood as military dominance.³⁵⁶ Yet, just as we saw with the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima in **2.1**, political and ecological readings of such images need not be mutually exclusive and, in the case of Berytos, evidence of a local myth suggests a particular relationship between Poseidon and his local seascape.

The myth of Poseidon and Beroë is known primarily from the epic poetry of Nonnos, who relates their story at length in his *Dionysiaca*.³⁵⁷ Composed in the mid-fifth century AD, the *Dionysiaca* narrates the mythological romps of Dionysos across the ancient east, including Berytos.³⁵⁸ Upon arriving in the city, he falls in love with the nymph Beroë and, as she is yet to be betrothed, a fight ensues between Dionysos and Poseidon for the right to marry her.³⁵⁹ Throughout the Berytian episode, Nonnos casts Beroë as both the patron nymph of the city and the landscape of Berytos itself.³⁶⁰ Thus, to win Beroë's hand in marriage is to claim supremacy over the city. The two gods and their retinues meet in a spectacular battle, from which Poseidon emerges victorious. Poseidon thus marries Beroë in his watery domain and his acolytes bestow many gifts on her and the city itself. In

³⁵⁶ On the military readings of 'Lateran Poseidon', see Bartman (2002: 127-128). For a discussion of Berytos' coinage in its historical and political context, see now Sawaya (2009: 159-277).

³⁵⁷ Despite the *Dionysiaca* being the longest poem to survive from antiquity, Nonnos and his works were largely neglected in modern scholarship until the late-twentieth century – see now, e.g., the essays collected in the edited volumes of Hopkinson (1994 – especially Chuvin's contribution at 167-176), Spanoudakis (2014) and Accorinti (2016). For the purposes of our inquiry, most important is Chuvin's study of mythology and geography in the *Dionysiaca* (1991). Newbold (2001: 169-189) has also examined the character of water in the poem, but does not consider the Beroë episode at length.

³⁵⁸ Dionysos' adventures in Berytos span *Diony.* 41-43. For commentary on this section, see Chuvin (1991: 196-221).

³⁵⁹ Nonnos fittingly equates Beroë with Amymone (*Diony.* 41.153), a woman who was attacked by a rampant satyr whilst searching for water in Argos before Poseidon rescued, and subsequently seduced, her (cf. e.g. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.4 and Lucian *Dial. Marin.* 8). The parallels between these two myths are evident.

³⁶⁰ See, for instance, *Diony.* 41.13-50, a hymn to both city and nymph. Nonnos narrates two versions of Beroë's birth, both of which have a watery dimension. The first, older version claims Beroë was born from the intermingled cosmic waters of Okeanos and Tethys (41.51-154); whilst the second purports she was the daughter of Aphrodite and Adonis (41.155-185). In this latter version, Aphrodite then successfully contrives to have the city of Berytos – and the gift of Law – awarded to Beroë (41.263-427).

totality, the mythological narrative as told by Nonnos serves as an allegory for Poseidon's power over Berytos, a theme borne out by the sea's dominance of the city's landscape.

Although many aspects of this myth find no counterpart elsewhere in the ancient record, its essence – that is, Poseidon's attainment of Beroë – can once again be recognised in Berytos' coinage.³⁶¹ Under Macrinus, a new coin type appeared depicting the Tyche of Berytos inside an elaborate temple, with Poseidon – recognisable by his trident – occupying the building's roof and seizing a female figure, widely assumed to be Beroë (**Figure 2.4.7**).³⁶² Another coin type, issued only during reign of Elagabalus, features this tableau of Poseidon and Beroë in isolation and reveals more details of the scene: Beroë, visibly clothed in a *chiton* and *peplos*, kneels to the left with a water jug whilst Poseidon grasps her arm (**Figure 2.4.8**).³⁶³ The composition and intricate detail of this image implies that the die-cutters were able to base their design on a real-life statue group. As a result, whilst we cannot entirely reconcile the details of Nonnos' mythological narrative, Berytos' numismatic record strongly suggests that the city's religious community recognised a tradition in which Poseidon had asserted his dominance over Beroë, and this tradition would have more than likely underscored his characterisation as the Berytos' forceful maritime patron.

The religious community at Berytos thus took inspiration from the city's tempestuous and potentially hazardous seascape in their local characterisation of Poseidon, as well as other

³⁶¹ Picard (1935: 11-24, pls. VIII and XI) speculated that two sculptures uncovered in the 'clubhouse' of the Poseidoniasts at Delos might have represented Beroë but this theory is largely speculative.

³⁶² Sawaya 2009: Série 92. The temple comprises four columns, a triangular pediment and three steps leading up to it. Winged *genii* holding tridents and riding dolphins flank the steps. Within the temple, Tyche is accompanied by a small Nike to her right – who seems to be crowning her – and is flanked by two winged *genii* presenting her with objects. On the roof, Poseidon is flanked by two Nikai on the temple's *acroteria*. Variations on this type were also issued under Diadumenian, Elagabalus and Gordian III (*ibid* Séries 94, 95 and 117, respectively). For commentary on these coin types, see now Sawaya (2009: 268-269).

³⁶³ Sawaya 2009: Série 97. We should also note the connection between the water jug in this image and Amymone's quest for water in Argos as mentioned above.

divine figures. As we now turn to Tyre, we will witness a continuity of this process, albeit with local nuances that reflected the different environmental conditions encountered. We should also note here a key distinction between Berytian Poseidon and Tyrian Melqart: the former was firmly a ‘sea-god’, whose iconography and mythology fundamentally located him in the maritime realm, whereas the latter was a god of various dimensions whose relationship with the sea derived from his ultimate role as the patron of a maritime city. As will become plain in the following discussion, this distinction does not reduce Melqart’s religious significance amongst maritime communities but it nevertheless attests to the diverse relationships different localities had with the sea and affirms the importance of approaching this topic by focusing on the environments themselves.

Tyre: Melqart

The southward journey from Berytos to Tyre is a short 75km along the coast, passing Sidon and its extra-urban Sanctuary of Eshmoun (4.3) along the way. The environment of Tyre is strikingly different to that of Berytos in many respects but both sites do share some similarities.³⁶⁴ Like Berytos, Tyre’s maritime landscape has been progressively altered throughout the centuries, such that today’s coastline is remarkably different to that of antiquity (**Figure 2.4.9**). Prior to the Hellenistic period, Tyre proper was located on a narrow offshore island surrounded by low-lying sandstone reefs and sandy beaches extended by fluvial sedimentation.³⁶⁵ This topographic situation made Tyre easy to defend, until Alexander successfully invaded the city in 332 BC by building a causeway from the mainland.³⁶⁶ This causeway altered sediment deposition in the landscape and led to the

³⁶⁴ For a comparative discussion of the harbours at Beirut and Tyre, see Marriner (2009: 216-228).

³⁶⁵ On the ancient maritime environment of Tyre, see Marriner (2009: 49-101). Tyre is also depicted as an island on the Balawat Gates, which originally adorned the palace of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III in the mid-ninth century BC. The Gates are now in the British Museum (Inv. No. 124661).

³⁶⁶ Alexander’s siege of Tyre is narrated by Arrian (*Anab.* 2.18.3f), Diodorus Siculus (17.40f), Strabo (16.2.23) and Plutarch (*Alex.* 24.2-25.2). Pliny (*HN* 5.17/76) later mentions the causeway and Chariton

development of a tombolo, such that the island is now entirely incorporated into the mainland.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, geoarchaeological surveys and underwater explorations have enabled scholars to reconstruct Tyre's ancient seascape, including its harbours.³⁶⁸ In antiquity, the city seemingly made use of at least four anchorages: a northern and southern harbour at each end of the island, a series of smaller anchorages in the surrounding sandstone reefs, and an inlet on the coast of the mainland.³⁶⁹ In particular, extensive studies around the northern harbour have revealed it underwent several artificial enhancements during the Graeco-Roman period, including the addition of protective moles and breakwaters.³⁷⁰ Similar to Berytos, this harbour developed from a natural cove, whose northerly outlook naturally sheltered it from the prevailing southwest swell and created relatively calm mooring conditions. However, in contrast to Berytos, Tyre's location within the wider network of wind patterns granted the site a unique advantage over other Levantine ports: Tyre can exploit two significant wind patterns. In a recent study, Crystal Safadi applied wind and wave modelling to evaluate the accessibility of ancient harbours in the Levant and revealed that Tyre lies at the epicentre of directional change, with southerly wind patterns being dominant to the north of the city and northerly patterns prevailing to the south.³⁷¹ In practice, Tyre's exposure to both wind patterns made seafaring in either a

(*Callirhoe* 7.2.9) beautifully describes the island as a ship with its gangplank propped against the land. Achilles Tatius (2.14) describes only an isthmus but marvels at the city's position between land and sea. On the impact of the causeway on the maritime environment, see Marriner (2009: 96-97).

³⁶⁷ Tyre's tombolo spans roughly 1500m in length and 3000m in width where it joins the mainland. The best-known tombolo of antiquity is that which connects the island of Pharos with the mainland at Alexandria. For a comparison of both, see Marriner (2009: 97-101).

³⁶⁸ See further Frost (1971: 103-111), Marriner *et al* (2005: 1302-1327), and Nouredine and Helou (2005: 111-128). For a synthesis of research and interpretation, see Marriner *et al* (2008b:1281-3010).

³⁶⁹ Tyre's dual harbours are indicated in the literary record: Arrian (*Anab.* 2.20.10) refers to one harbour facing Sidon, the other Egypt; and Strabo (16.2.23) mentions one harbour that can be closed, whilst the other can be opened and faces Egypt. See also, Ezek (27:3) and Diodorus Siculus (17.42.4). Small anchorages in the surrounding reefs are alluded to in Achilles Tatius (2.17.3). On the physical evidence for all four harbour complexes, see Marriner *et al* (2008b: 1282-1307).

³⁷⁰ For a recent synthesis of the geoarchaeological evidence, see Marriner (2009: 104-136, esp. 131-132). Sediment analysis has revealed that the cove transitioned from an open to a sheltered harbour during the Graeco-Roman period, whilst the nearby breakwaters exhibit signs of Roman coursing.

³⁷¹ 2016: 348-360, esp. 354-356 with Figs. 4-7.

northerly or southerly direction more feasible throughout the year, thus distinguishing the city from other ports along the coast. Indeed, as I will now demonstrate, both the opportunities afforded by Tyre's exceptional position within the wider wind network and the site's origins as an island stimulated the local characterisation of the city's leading god.

Tyre's leading god is variously referred to in the ancient evidence as Melqart, Herakles or Tyrian Herakles, a detail worthy of further comment on account of its significance to our overall discussion. The apparent equation of Melqart with Herakles is well-evidenced in the ancient material and broadly accepted by modern scholars, albeit with nuanced interpretation.³⁷² Regarding ancient testimonies, most explicit are a second-century BC Greek-Phoenician bilingual inscription from Malta dedicated "to Melqart, lord of Tyre" and "to Herakles, *archégete*";³⁷³ as well as Philo's comment some four hundred years later that 'Melkarthos' was also known as Herakles.³⁷⁴ To add to this, there is large body of implicit evidence in which Herakles is referenced in specifically Tyrian or 'Phoenician' contexts, often as 'Tyrian Herakles'.³⁷⁵ The most pertinent examples in this category of material include at least two Greek dedicatory inscriptions to Herakles discovered in central

³⁷² Studies of the relationship between Melqart and Herakles include Bonnet (1988: 399-415, 1992: 165-198, 1997: 830-834 and 2015: 290-304), Malkin (2005: 238-258 and 2011: 119-141), Nitschke (2013: 253-282) and Quinn (2017: 113-131). See also, *DDD*, sv. 'Melqart'.

³⁷³ *KAI 47: lmlqrt b'l sr | Ἡρακλεῖ Ἀρχηγέτε*. For further commentary on this text, see Bonnet (1988: 244-246).

³⁷⁴ *BJ Online 790 F2* (= Euseb. *Praep. Evan.* 1.10.27): Μέλκαθρος. On Melqart's possible connection to Melicertes (a figure discussed above in this section), see Bonnet (2015: 349-354) and Aliquot (2009: 168-169).

³⁷⁵ In addition to the material discussed below, we note here a lengthy decree from Delos, dated 153/152 BC, that refers to the "association of the Tyrian Herakleistes of merchants and shippers" (*ID 1519*, 35-36: κοινον τῶν Τυρίων Ἡρακλειστῶν | ἐμπόρων καὶ ναυκλήρων). According to the text, this group sent a delegation to Athens and successfully gained permission to build a sanctuary for Herakles, who they refer to as "founder of our homeland" (*ibid.*, 15: ἀρχηγός δὲ τῆς πατρίδος). On the Tyrians at Delos, see Bonnet (1988: 371-375 and 2015: 478-490).

Tyre;³⁷⁶ Heraklean iconography on the city’s coinage;³⁷⁷ and various references in the ancient literature to the worship of Herakles, both at Tyre and by Tyrians in other contexts.³⁷⁸ Amidst these various literary descriptions, it is noteworthy that both Herodotus and Lucian emphasise that the Herakles of Tyre is different to the Herakles worshipped in Greece.³⁷⁹ As Corinne Bonnet has previously stressed, these comments invite us to recognise that Tyre’s leading god was not fully identified as the ‘Greek Herakles’. Rather, Bonnet argued that both figures belong to “la ‘catégorie’ héracléenne” and proposed that we might best comprehend Melqart by first examining the ‘noyau’ or ‘essence’ of Herakles and then considering how we might reconcile this foundation with the Tyrian figure.³⁸⁰ Whilst I do not intend to unpick the various strands of the relationship between Melqart and Herakles, exploring the dynamic between these figures with regards to the sea will be of benefit to this study. Indeed, Aaron Jed Brody has previously argued that Melqart was a “different type of nautical guardian,” precisely because the maritime dimensions in his character are best understood through his association with Herakles, a claim that I will now substantiate further.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ The first text, dated to AD 187/8, records the dedication of an altar by a certain Diodorus to Herakles, the “holy god” (θεός ἅγιος), and was discovered in the Crusader-era basilica near the presumed site of Melqart’s sanctuary. The second, dated to the Severan period, was uncovered around the colonnaded street and bears a dedication to Tyche, Herakles, Leucothea and some sort of oracular deity. Both inscriptions were first published by Chéhab (1962: 11-40) and are discussed further by Bonnet (1988: 61-64), who also notes a third fragmentary inscription reconstructed as a dedication to Herakles and Astronoe.

³⁷⁷ Under Seleucid rule, various coin issues feature reverse images of Herakles’ club – cf. e.g. Houghton and Lorber (2002: Nos. 1082-1083 and II Nos. 1471, 1677, and 1971). During the Roman period, Herakles appears on the obverse of several issues, visualised in profile with a laurel crown and his lion-skin around his neck – cf. e.g. *RPC* I: Nos. 4619-4719; II: Nos. 2057-2066; and III: Nos. 3879 and 3906. The club also continues to feature as a reverse motif (cf. e.g. *RPC* I: Nos. 4619-4719; II: Nos. 257-2066; IV: Nos. 6824-6826; and IX: Nos. 1992-1995) and Herakles appears as a full figure on several later issues (cf. e.g. *RPC* IX: Nos. 2002 and 2040).

³⁷⁸ In addition to the material discussed below, cf. e.g. Theophrastus (*Lap.* 25), *II Maccabees* (4:18-20), Diodorus Siculus (40.2), Chariton (*Callirhoe* 7.2.7-8 and 8.5.2), Strabo (16.2.23), Curtius Rufus (4.2.1-4), Pliny (*HN* 37.19/75) and 37.58/161), Achilles Tatius (2.14-15; 7.14.2; and 8.18.1) Plutarch (*Alex.* 24.3-4), Arrian (*Anab.* 2.16), and Cassius Dio (42.49).

³⁷⁹ Herodotus (2.44) and Lucian (*Syr. D.* 3). For commentaries on these passages, see, respectively, Asheri *et al* (2007: 269-270) and Lightfoot (2003: 294-296).

³⁸⁰ 1988: 399.

³⁸¹ 1998: 33-37.

The ‘essence’ of ‘Greek Herakles’ lies within the mythological cycle of his labours, a variety of dangerous tasks that he is bidden to complete.³⁸² Through this series of activities, Herakles is rendered as “un voyageur par excellence” or, “the paradigm of the intrepid traveller.”³⁸³ This proclivity for adventurous travel thus formed the core of Herakles’ character and this aspect is likewise identifiable in Melqart. In particular, there are several mythological episodes involving ‘Greek Herakles’ that bind this adventurous dimension explicitly to the sea, though we shall focus on just one example here.³⁸⁴ According to various traditions, Herakles visited Troy and offered to help its king, Laomedon, whose lands were being ravaged by a sea-monster sent by Poseidon.³⁸⁵ At the time of Herakles’ visit, Laomedon is about to offer his own daughter, Hesione, to appease the sea-monster but Herakles kills the creature and saves the princess – a mytheme we have already encountered at Iope. Accounts vary on how Herakles kills the sea-monster but some versions of the myth, as well as a selection of pottery images (**Figure 2.4.10**), indicate that he used his bow during the fight.³⁸⁶ Despite these variations, this mythological episode indicates that Herakles was known to be capable of defeating sea-monsters. This particular

³⁸² Most famous are the twelve ‘labours’ issued by Eurystheus but Herakles also undertakes various smaller quests within this mythological cycle. Herakles’ adventures are referenced by numerous ancient authors, with Apollod. (*Bibl.* 2.5.1-12) providing the most detailed chronology. For synopsis and further discussion of the Heraklean myths, see Stafford (2012: 4-7 and 21-78).

³⁸³ See further Bonnet (1988: 405) and Brody (1998: 35). *Contra* Malkin (2005: 239), who defines Herakles as “a quintessentially terrestrial hero.” Similarly, Parker (2017: 75) recently emphasised that Melqart’s identification with Herakles ‘enhanced’ rather than ‘effaced’ his character.

³⁸⁴ Herakles also interacts with the maritime realm through his various encounters with Nereus and his exploits with the Argonauts. For an overview of these adventures, see Stafford (2012: 55f and 72-74).

³⁸⁵ After helping Laomedon, Herakles attacks Troy because the king fails to reward him as promised. The myth is described in full by e.g. Diodorus Siculus (4.42.1), Ovid (*Met.* 11.199-215), Valerius Flaccus (*Argon.* 2.451-578), Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.5.9 and 2.6.4), Hyginus (*Fab.* 89) and Philostratus (*Imag.* 12). The incident is alluded to in the *Iliad* (5.640 and 649-651; 20.144-148) and by Strabo (13.1.32), amongst others. The enduring popularity of the myth is also indicated by its visualisation in a mosaic panel from Piazza Armerina (*LIMC* Hesione No. 19). For further discussion of this mythological episode, see Ogden (2008: 93-99; 2013: 118-123) and Stafford (2012: 70-73).

³⁸⁶ Cf. e.g. Valerius Flaccus (*Argon.* 2.509-511 and 521-522) and Philostratus (*Imag.* 12). A detail from the wider mythological cycle is also significant to our study: following his defeat of the hydra, Herakles dips his arrows in the monster’s poisonous blood – cf. e.g. Diodorus Siculus (4.11.5), Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.5.2) and Pausanias (2.37.4). Although the hydra dwells in a lake, rather than the sea, it is noteworthy that Herakles uses the bloody poison of a watery monster to kill another aquatic creature.

quality, coupled with his generally adventurous nature, thus rendered him as a suitable god to be invoked during hazardous endeavours, including those undertaken at sea.

Returning to Tyre, we can reconcile this adventurous dimension of ‘Greek Herakles’ with Melqart and interpret such aspects of his character with particular reference to the local environment. Firstly, we ought to recall that the natural environment of Tyre would have facilitated and encouraged intrepid travel because, as we discussed above, the city’s unique wind patterns facilitated departures in all directions throughout the year. The Tyrians certainly gained a reputation for adventurous travel throughout the ancient world, such that they established numerous colonies across the Mediterranean and it is therefore fitting that their patron god reflected their proclivity for exploration.³⁸⁷ Indeed, one particular tradition affords Melqart a prominent role in their exploratory voyages and colonial endeavours. According to Strabo, the community at Gades described the foundation of their city as follows: after receiving oracular instructions, a group of Tyrians sailed to the Pillars of Herakles – the southern coast of modern-day Spain – with the aim of establishing a new colony.³⁸⁸ When the Tyrians believed that they had found the right location, they offered sacrifices to Melqart but then abandoned their mission and returned home when the god rejected them. The colony of Gades was then eventually founded on the third attempt after Melqart deemed the choice of location to be appropriate and the Tyrians fittingly established a temple in his honour at the site.³⁸⁹ Melqart’s invocation in such situations

³⁸⁷ For further discussion on Melqart’s association with the foundation of colonies, see e.g. Malkin (2005: 238-257) and Quinn (2017: 116-120 and 127-131).

³⁸⁸ 3.5.5. Other Graeco-Roman authors report similar traditions, cf. e.g. Velleius Paterculus (1.2.3), Pomponius Mela (*Chron.* 3.46) and Justin (*Epit.* 44.5.1-4). A male figure wearing a lion-skin headdress appears on the city’s coinage in the third century BC (*SNG Copenhagen* No. 1) and a gold *aureus* was minted in Rome around AD 119-125 with an image of Herakles holding a club and the Golden Apples of the Hesperides and bearing the legend, HERC GADIT (*RICII*: No. 125). On the foundation of Gades, particularly with regards to Melqart’s role, see e.g. Bonnet (1988: 203-230, esp. 203-207) and Quinn (2017: 116-120).

³⁸⁹ Strabo (3.5.5), Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 5.4-5), Pomponius Mela (*Chron.* 3.46) and Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 3.14-60).

therefore suggests that he was regarded as an adventurous god whose authority extended over uncharted landscapes, characteristics that are also made plain in the iconography of a figure depicted on Tyre's coinage in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Rendered in profile, this bearded male figure is visualised at the moment of drawing his bow whilst riding above the sea on a 'winged seahorse' (**Figure 2.4.11**).³⁹⁰ Although the identity of this figure cannot be verified and remains debated in modern scholarship, I propose that the most likely candidate is Melqart himself, not least because Greek Herakles used a bow to kill the sea-monster when he saved Hesione.³⁹¹ We might therefore interpret this image in parallel with those featured on Berytos' coinage and note that both cities characterised their patron god as a powerful figure who dominated the maritime landscape. Yet the Tyrian version also has an additional layer of significance: the 'winged seahorse' comprises the head and torso of a horse, the wings of a bird and the lower body of a dolphin and thus represents the earthly, atmospheric and maritime realms.³⁹² As a result, we might regard Melqart's command of such a creature as demonstrative of his ability to exert his authority over all spheres of the world and thus interpret this image as indicative of his characterisation as a supreme figure who could manipulate and bring order to the entire landscape.

Finally, we can expand our understanding of Melqart's character with reference to a particular mythological tradition honoured by the religious community at Tyre. The myth is known primarily from Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*: before his defeat in Berytos, Dionysos travels to Tyre where Melqart narrates the foundation of the city to him.³⁹³ According to

³⁹⁰ Elayi and Elayi 2009: Nos. 246-1539. For further discussion of this coin type, see Bonnet (1988: 85), Elayi and Elayi (2009: 265-271) and Nitschke (2013: 261-264).

³⁹¹ Both Elayi and Elayi (2009: 269-271) and Nitschke (2013: 261-262, with n.34) regard the figure as Melqart, stressing that the only plausible candidate for Tyre's leading god in this period is Melqart himself. By contrast, Bonnet (1988: 85) is sceptical due to the figure's iconographic disparity with other representations of Melqart.

³⁹² See further Elayi and Elayi (2009: 262-265), who interpret the 'winged seahorse' as "the divine mount *par excellence*" on account of its mixed composition.

³⁹³ Dionysos' visit to Tyre is narrated in *Diony.* 40. For further discussion, see Bonnet (1988: 72-74).

Melqart, it was he who first gifted the primordial human-race with the knowledge of ship-building and seafaring, before presenting them with instructions for Tyre's foundation.³⁹⁴ He bid them to sail out into the sea and find the 'ambrosial rocks' (πέτραι ἀμβρόσιαι), a pair of rocks floating in the sea and home to a burning olive tree.³⁹⁵ They then had to sacrifice an eagle to Poseidon and Zeus, which would cause the rocks to become fixed in the sea and allow them to establish Tyre at that place.³⁹⁶ Once again, the numismatic record demonstrates that Nonnos probably based his narrative on a pre-existing mythological tradition, as Tyre issued coinage in the third century AD featuring an olive tree flanked by two semi-circular objects with the legend 'AMBPOCIE ΠΙETPE' or 'ΠΙETPAI' (**Figure 2.4.12**).³⁹⁷ Moreover, it is assumed that such coin types depict the cult objects housed in Melqart's sanctuary at Tyre, not only because Herodotus and Achilles Tatius relate that two pillars (στῆλαι) and an olive tree stand within the temple;³⁹⁸ but also because Melqart himself appears as part of this tableau in several issues.³⁹⁹ If indeed these 'ambrosial rocks' once sat in the sanctuary, then they likely represented the city's mythological foundation – a myth that firmly reflected Tyre's natural island environment. We can only begin to imagine the cultic significance attached to these objects but, for the purposes of our present enquiry, the mythological traditions with which the rocks were associated nevertheless reveal important details about Melqart's characterisation. Whilst the god is, of course,

³⁹⁴ Nonnos *Diony.* 40.429-468. Conversely, Philo (*BNJ* 790 F2: 14 and 20) says that the Dioskouroi were the first to build boats and their descendants later sailed away and founded a temple on the shore below Jebel Aqra.

³⁹⁵ Nonnos *Diony.* 40.469-492. Achilles Tatius (2.14) also relates a tradition in which Tyre was founded at the site of a burning olive tree. For further discussion, see Bonnet (1988: 69-72).

³⁹⁶ Nonnos *Diony.* 40.493-534.

³⁹⁷ Cf. e.g. *BMC Phoenicia* (Nos. 429, 430 and 442) and *RPC* (IX: Nos. 2008-2009). The city also struck coins featuring an eagle with its foot on a ship and a palm-branch in its beak; a club is depicted in the background – see further *BMC Phoenicia* (Nos. 213-245). Although Ptolemaic coinage frequently featured eagles in general, the bird's appearance at Tyre may have taken on an additional meaning in light of this local myth.

³⁹⁸ See further Herodotus (2.44) and Achilles Tatius (2.14). For further discussion of Melqart's sanctuary at Tyre in relation to this myth, see Bonnet (1988: 99-104) and Bijovsky (2005: 829-834).

³⁹⁹ Cf. e.g. *BMC Phoenicia* (No. 427) and *RPC* (IX: No. 2040). In another type, Oceanos – adorned with a fabulous crab-claw headdress – reclines next to the rocks (*BMC Phoenicia*, Nos. 464 and 497).

portrayed as a city founder, this function is underscored by his ability to bring order to the landscape: by commanding the nascent Tyrians to stabilise the location of their new city – and, crucially, by giving them the seafaring skills necessary to complete this task – Melqart is creating order within an otherwise chaotic maritime milieu. Moreover, this ability is not independent to his equation with ‘Greek Herakles’ because, as stressed by Corinne Bonnet, he too restored balance to the world through the completion of his labours and tasks.⁴⁰⁰

The religious community at Tyre therefore recognised Melqart to be a multifaceted god that reflected the divergent interests of the city. Nevertheless, certain aspects of his characterisation were stimulated by the city’s seascape and maritime interests: he was an appropriately adventurous patron who was readily invoked by the Tyrians in relation to their exploratory voyages and colonial enterprises. Such qualities likewise found expression through his equation with the equally intrepid ‘Greek Herakles’, who revealed his ability to manipulate the environment by completing his many labours, including the defeat of sea-monsters. Melqart too exerted his control over the various worldly domains, and thus came to be recognised as a figure who might bring order to the chaotic and tumultuous maritime sphere. This dimension of Melqart’s character built on much wider traditions that identified the physically dangerous nature of the sea with the turbulent and aggressive figure of the deified Sea, a matter to which we will now turn.

The Sea and ‘Near Eastern Poseidon’

The dangerous and chaotic nature of the sea also contributed to religious life on a metaphysical level, namely through the mytheme of a divine figure triumphing over the

⁴⁰⁰ 1988: 400-404.

deified Sea.⁴⁰¹ These narratives generally unfold with the violent defeat of a characteristically monstrous and tumultuous Sea by an ascendant storm-god, whose actions then create order and harmony. Such episodes can be traced back to the traditions of numerous Bronze Age communities from across the ancient Near East and are evidenced most compellingly at Ugarit and Hattusa, and in the Babylonian milieu.⁴⁰² At Ugarit, as we noted in **2.3**, Baal Saphon was entitled to build his palace on Jebel Aqra precisely because he had defeated Yamm, the deified Sea. According to the *Baal Cycle*, Baal destroyed Yamm with a special set of weapons before dismembering him and scattering his remains.⁴⁰³ From the Hurrian-Hittite literature of Hattusa in central Anatolia, we learn of the ascension of the storm-god Tarhun (Hurrian: Teshshub) and his subsequent struggles to retain his dominance.⁴⁰⁴ In particular, the *Kumarbi Cycle* outlines not only Tarhun's battle with the Sea himself, but also his encounters with monstrous creatures sent by the Sea, such as Hedammu, a sea serpent, and Ullikummi, a giant rock encircled by the sea.⁴⁰⁵ Further afield in Babylonia, the *Enuma Elish* (often referred to as the Babylonian *Epic of Creation*) relates Marduk's annihilation of Tiamat, the primordial ocean.⁴⁰⁶ Using his

⁴⁰¹ A solid introduction to this vast topic is given, with further literature, in *DDD*, sv. 'Sea'. For a more recent overview, see Schwemer (2008: 24-27). Instances of this mytheme are traditionally considered part of 'cosmogonies' or 'succession myths' – for comparative discussion, see López-Ruiz (2010: 84-129).

⁴⁰² For an introduction to the key texts from each community, see López-Ruiz (2014, sv. 'Ugaritic Epic Poems', 'Hittite Myths' and 'Babylonian Epic of Creation: *Enuma Elish*'). We should also acknowledge here Yahweh's defeat of Yamm as relayed in several passages from the Hebrew Bible (Psalms 29 and 89: 9-10, and Habakkuk 3: 8-15).

⁴⁰³ *KTU* 1.2.IV: 11-31, esp. 23-27. On the *Baal Cycle*, see above **2.3**.

⁴⁰⁴ For a recent summary of the Hurrian-Hittite literature emanating from Hattusa, see Bachvarova (2016: 5-12); and for an introduction to Hurrian-Hittite mythology, see Collins (2007: 147-153).

⁴⁰⁵ The narrative is extant in many lacunose copies, resulting in complicated labelling systems for the different fragments. The most accessible translation is that produced by Mary R. Bachvarova (in López-Ruiz 2014: 139-163). Tarhun's main battle with the Sea is known only from references elsewhere in the *Kumarbi Cycle* and other fragments – see further Rutherford (2001: 598-609). In a separate myth, Tarhun also defeats the sea-snake Illuyanka (López-Ruiz 2014: 136-137). Their battle is also depicted on a Neo-Hittite relief from Malatya, now in the Anatolian Civilisations Museum at Ankara (see Collins 2007: 150, Fig. 3.14).

⁴⁰⁶ For translation and brief commentary, see Dalley (2000: 233-277). The tablets on which the *Enuma Elish* was written date mainly to the first millennium BC but it is now generally accepted that the tradition is far older. Copies of the narrative have been uncovered across Babylonia and Assyria, with Assur taking the role of Marduk in the Assyrian version. On both aspects, see Dalley (2000: 228-230). Tiamat shares her name with the Akkadian noun *tiāmtu*, 'sea' – see further *DDD* and Dirven (1999: 150, n.104). The *Enuma Elish* was also recited as part of the Akitu festival, a celebration held in Babylon from at least the first millennium

flood-weapon and storm-chariot, Marduk destroys Tiamat and her army of monsters before dividing her corpse and ordering her waters into obedient swathes so they cannot escape.⁴⁰⁷ With one half of her body, Marduk creates the sky and its constellations, ordering them into the ritual calendar; with the other half, he forms the earth and manipulates her waters into rivers and springs, and thus brings order to the world.⁴⁰⁸

The parallels between these different traditions and their associated practices are clearly complex and thus too numerous to be discussed here. Rather, it is sufficient to say that the mytheme of the deified Sea was firmly recognised amongst the many Near Eastern religious communities of the Bronze Age and these traditions undoubtedly became intertwined with their later classical parallels. Indeed, as we discussed in **2.2**, Strabo relates a myth that regarded the River Orontes as the site of the final battle between Zeus and Typhon, a chaotic and watery monster. Otherwise, the *Enuma Elish* offers the best example through which we might trace the development of this mytheme in the Near East during the Roman period. The literary tradition strongly suggests that aspects of the myth were in circulation during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Amongst others, the Babylonian writer Berossos related the general narrative of the *Enuma Elish*, with some similarity to the Akkadian ‘original’ of the seventh century BC, in his third-century BC *Babyloniaca*.⁴⁰⁹ Of particular importance to our enquiry is that Berossos relates that the female antagonist of the myth –

BC that comprised various rituals and processions, including the cleansing of the high priest with water from the Euphrates. For further discussion, see Bidmead (2002, esp. 59-70 and 126-127).

⁴⁰⁷ Tablet IV (Dalley 2000: 255).

⁴⁰⁸ Tablet V (Dalley 2000: 255-257).

⁴⁰⁹ The *Babyloniaca* is now lost and its transmission history is complicated. The passages that pertain to the *Epic of Creation* (BNJ 680, F1a-b) are preserved only in Eusebius’s *Chron.*, now known only to us in later translations. Eusebius says (e.g. BNJ 680 F1a) he copied the *Babyloniaca* from the now-lost works of Alexander Polyhistor (BNJ 273). For further discussion of the transmission history, see commentary by De Breucker (2010). Though Berossos ostensibly had access to Babylon’s ancient archives (e.g. BNJ 680 T3), his account of the *Epic of Creation* was most likely based on the version recited in the Akitu festival at the time rather than an older account – see further Dalley (2013: 170-171). For further discussion on Berossos, see Haubold (2013: 142-153).

who is undoubtedly Tiamat of the *Enuma Elish* – was known amongst the Greeks as ‘Thalassa’, the Sea herself.⁴¹⁰ Whatever alterations the myth might have undergone throughout its history, it seems that the figure of Tiamat was still regarded as the embodiment of chaotic waters in the Hellenistic period and beyond.

Indeed, this fundamental aspect of Tiamat’s character seemingly found expression in Palmyra, where a relief – rendered on a peristyle beam within the ‘Temple of Bel’ – has long been recognised as a visualisation of Tiamat’s defeat (**Figures 2.4.13 and 2.4.14**).⁴¹¹ Often referred to as the ‘battle relief’, the scene comprises a male figure wearing military dress, riding a chariot and poised to release an arrow at the monstrous figure before him. The figure has a woman’s body, though her many serpentine legs – as Lucinda Dirven suggests – rather remind us of a “giant octopus”.⁴¹² A snake-filled crater is depicted to the right of her head, followed by a horseman advancing towards her. To the right of this scene, a line of six figures are depicted frontally, some of whom are plausibly identifiable on account of their iconographic features.⁴¹³ One of these figures is dressed in a military outfit with a helmet and cuirass and holds a spear in his left hand. On account of a fish swimming between his legs, we might initially be tempted to recognise this figure as Poseidon but, as Dirven has emphasised, other Palmyrene representations of Poseidon call such an

⁴¹⁰ *BNJ* 680, F1a-b. Thalassa of the *Babyloniaca* was surely derived from Tiamat of the *Enuma Elish*, not least because Berossos describes how Bel divided her body and used each part to create the earth and the sky.

⁴¹¹ Du Mesnil du Buisson (1976: 83-110) was the first to propose this theory and revisions have since been made by Starcky and Gawlikowski (1985: 92), Gawlikowski (1990: 2614-2615), Dirven (1997: 96-116 and 1999: 147-153) and Kaizer (2002: 203-205). The scene was originally preserved across nine fragments and once stood within the ‘Temple of Bel’ – see further Tanabe (1986: Nos. 32-34). One of the fragments was lost before the recent conflict in Syria and I do not know the current status of the rest. The construction of the peristyle reliefs belongs to building activity at the sanctuary in the first century AD – see further Dirven (1997: 99). On the extent to which the relief – and other material – indicates that an Akitu festival was celebrated at Palmyra, see e.g. Dirven (1999: 149-153) and Kaizer (2002: 203-210).

⁴¹² 1997: 101, n.17 and 1999: 150, n.104.

⁴¹³ For further discussion, see Dirven (1999: 148-149). As noted in **4.3**, one of these figures holds a spear encircled by a snake.

interpretation into question.⁴¹⁴ Indeed, if we now turn our attention to additional material from Palmyra, we encounter evidence for a so-called ‘Near Eastern Poseidon’ whose relationship with the sea took on another dimension.

A small body of material indicates that some worshippers at Palmyra and further afield recognised Poseidon as a supreme deity who not only exerted his authority in the maritime realm on a physical level, but also had the capacity to restore balance to the universe on a metaphysical scale. This aspect of Poseidon’s character is first indicated by a bilingual inscription discovered in Palmyra’s agora. Rendered on an altar and dated to AD 39, the text comprises a dedication in Greek “to Poseidon, the god” and, in Palmyrene Aramaic, “to El-Qonera,” or ‘El the creator’.⁴¹⁵ We can shine further light on this equation with reference to a mosaic uncovered elsewhere in the city.⁴¹⁶ Here, we encounter Poseidon in a more recognisable form: he appears as a nude, bearded male holding a trident and adopting the stance of ‘Lateran Poseidon’ (**Figure 2.4.15**). This circular mosaic – with Poseidon at its centre – also features a panel depicting Cassiopeia standing amongst the Nereids and exhibiting her beauty (**Figure 2.4.16**). Initially, we might interpret this scene in accordance with the Andromeda myth and regard it as the moment at which Cassiopeia boasts that she is more beautiful than the Nereids and prompts Poseidon to dispatch a sea-monster in retaliation – the consequences of which we have already explored in our discussion of Iope.⁴¹⁷ However, Jean-Charles Balty challenged this interpretation following the discovery of two mosaics at Apamea and Nea Paphos in Cyprus that showed Cassiopeia

⁴¹⁴ 1997: 101 and 1999: 151.

⁴¹⁵ *IGLS* XVII.1: No. 318 = *PAT* 2779: Ποσειδῶνι θεῷ / [I] ‘lqwnr’ ‘lh’. See now commentary in *IGLS*. The altar was previously in the Palmyra Archaeological Museum (Inv. A 622).

⁴¹⁶ See further Balty (1977: 32-33 and 1995: 291-297). The mosaic has been dated to the end of the third century AD and was last known to be in the National Museum of Damascus.

⁴¹⁷ For a discussion of how this material relates to the myth of Andromeda at Iope, see Kaizer (2011: 333-337).

defeating the Nereids in the beauty contest (**Figures 2.4.17 and 2.4.18**).⁴¹⁸ On both mosaics, the scene is presided over by a male figure who is labelled as ‘Poseidon’ at Apamea and ‘Aion’ at Nea Paphos, the personification of the permanence of the cosmos. As a result, Balty proposed that the Palmyrene mosaic also depicted the victory of Cassiopeia and suggested that the group of mosaics bore witness to an alternative version of the myth being circulated in the Near East.

Returning our focus to Poseidon, Janine Balty has since expanded this interpretation to suggest that the mosaics represented the triumph of beauty (Cassiopeia) over the chaos the maritime realm (the Nereids), and that Poseidon, in his presiding role, was responsible for restoring balance to the cosmic order.⁴¹⁹ This interpretation accords neatly with Poseidon’s equation with El-Qonera, who was a known cosmic figure and often associated with the creation of the universe.⁴²⁰ However, the extent to which this body of evidence designates a distinctly ‘Near Eastern Poseidon’, as advocated by Javier Teixidor, is far harder to maintain.⁴²¹ Whilst the Poseidon we encountered at Berytos exhibited a similar dominance over the sea, our discussion nevertheless highlighted that his characterisation intersected with the local environment. In fact, the character of this ‘Palmyrene Poseidon’ actually finds more points of convergence with that of Melqart at Tyre, who had his own complex and distinctive history of development.⁴²² If anything, this discussion highlights that

⁴¹⁸ 1981: 95-106.

⁴¹⁹ 1996: 407-416. Balty also underscores this proposal with reference to Neo-Platonic theories, which were probably in circulation at Palmyra due to the presence of Longinus in the court of Zenobia – see also, Balty (2005: 45-57). On a related note, the *Suda* lists *κασιόπεια* as ‘Beauty’ (ἡ καλλονή) personified – see further Balty (1996: 410) and Kaizer (2011: 334, with 332).

⁴²⁰ See further *DDD* *sv.* ‘El’.

⁴²¹ 1977: 42-46. Although Teixidor does not discuss the mosaics, he claims that “Poseidon’s personality in the ancient Near East is fully revealed” by the El-Qonera inscription (*ibid.*: 42).

⁴²² Indeed, we cannot even claim that the Poseidon known from the El-Qonera inscription and the Cassiopeia mosaic was a distinctly ‘Palmyrene Poseidon’ as the god also appears on a limestone altar – apparently from Palmyra – as a bearded, fully clothed male holding a trident and patera. The altar was re-discovered in the storage rooms of the Cincinnati Art Museum in 2011 – see now, Dirven and Kaizer (2013: 391-408).

different religious communities were at liberty to characterise their gods in various ways even if they took inspiration from similar reference points. The sea might have been regarded as a chaotic and tumultuous place in general but, just as religious communities characterised their gods with reference to the local environment on a physical scale, this metaphysical concept ultimately found religious expression on a local level. As we turn now to the final section of the chapter, we will likewise see how certain religious communities could characterise their gods with reference to both the physical and perceived qualities of certain springs.

2.5 Springs and Their Gods

The variety of springs in the Roman Near East is reflected in the diverse characters of their associated gods. Naturally, we encounter clusters of gods who were most commonly recognised as having a strong pastoral dimension in their character at several springs. At Caesarea Paneas – a site to which we will soon return in **3.1** – a cult of Pan and the nymphs was established around a striking natural cave from which a spring emerged. Similarly, Apollo, Artemis and Daphne were worshipped alongside a spring within a thick grove of trees at the Antiochene suburb of Daphne – a place that we will explore further in **4.2**. Yet the Near East is also home to pockets of volcanic activity that produce thermal springs with therapeutic waters – the subject of our enquiry in **4.3** – and the gods worshipped at these sites were likewise characterised accordingly. For instance, we encounter a cult of Hygieia at Tiberias, a city on the western shore of Lake Galilee famed for its therapeutic hot springs.⁴²³ The invocation of Hygieia at such a site is fitting: she was both the personification of good health and a goddess commonly worshipped alongside her father, Asklepios.⁴²⁴ Thus, akin to many other divine figures discussed so far, Hygieia also stood on the brink between person and concept and, as we will now see, this pattern was especially prevalent amongst other gods associated with the springs of the Near East.

The gods of the Efqa Spring, Palmyra

In the mid-1930s, a relief depicting a male figure wearing Roman military attire and a radial crown was discovered in nine fragments on the floor of the so-called ‘Temple of the Gadde’

⁴²³ Hygieia appears on several of the city’s coins (e.g. *RPC* III: Nos. 3924 and 3928) and Pliny comments that Tiberias was home to “salubrious hot springs” (*HN* 5.15/72: *aquis calidis salubri*). For an overview of the site’s environment and religious activities, see Dvorjetski (2007: 58-59 and 125-143).

⁴²⁴ For further discussion of Hygieia, see Stafford (2000: 147-171 and 2005: 120-135). The cult of Hygieia and Asklepios at the ‘Sanctuary of Eshmoun’ near Sidon has already been noted in **2.2**.

at Dura-Europos (**Figure 2.5.1**).⁴²⁵ The associated inscription, composed in Palmyrene Aramaic, states that the relief was made by the Bene Mita, the archers, and identifies the figure as “Yarhibol, the good god, the *mšb*’ of the spring.”⁴²⁶ Given that Dura-Europos had been home to a community of Palmyrene expatriates since at least the first century BC, it is unsurprising to encounter the worship of a prominent Palmyrene god in the city.⁴²⁷ For our enquiry though, the most important aspect of the text is one of the epithets given to Yarhibol, ‘the *mšb*’ of the spring’.⁴²⁸ The term, *mšb*’ is most commonly used to refer to the image of a god as a physical object of veneration, such as an ‘idol’, ‘cult statue’, ‘cult relief’ or ‘sacred stone’.⁴²⁹ As a result, this epithet seems somewhat awkward at first glance: how can a god be designated as the “cult image of the spring,” especially when he is rendered in figural form on the very object where this epithet is inscribed? The complexities presented by this epithet have resulted in two different interpretations by modern scholars. On the one hand, Giovanni Garbini understood *mšb*’ as having protective connotations due to its shared etymology with the Hebrew *maššab* (‘garrison’) and thus suggested that the epithet denoted Yarhibol’s role as the spring’s protective deity.⁴³⁰ By contrast, Lucinda

⁴²⁵ On the excavation of the temple and the discovery of the relief, see *Rep* (VII/VIII: 218-283, esp. 264-266). The relief likely dates to the mid-late second century AD – for further discussion and interpretation of the relief, see Downey (1977: 213-214 and Cat. No. 47) and Dirven (1999: 253-254). The relief is now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No. 1938.5301).

⁴²⁶ *PAT* 1099: *yrhbwł 'lh' t̄b' mšb' dy 'yn'*. For commentary and further bibliography, see Dirven (1999: 233-235) and Bertolino (2004: 25-26).

⁴²⁷ For instance, members of the Bene Gaddibol and the Bene Komare made a shrine for Bel and Yarhibol outside the walls of Dura-Europos in 33 BC (*PAT* 1067). On the Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos, see Dirven (1999) and Kaizer (2017b: 63-95). The Bene Mita have been recognised in modern scholarship as one of Palmyra’s so-called ‘four tribes of the city’. However, given that the Dura-Europos relief is undated and the ‘four tribes of the city’ only appear in the epigraphic record at Palmyra from AD 171, we cannot say whether or not the Bene Mita of Dura-Europos identified themselves as one of these ‘four tribes of the city’ when they dedicated their relief of Yarhibol. For further discussion of the ‘four tribes of the city’ and their (problematic) role in the religious life of Palmyra, see Kaizer (2002: 43-51 and 60-66).

⁴²⁸ For further commentary on the various interpretations of *PAT* 1099, see Garbini (1996: 497), Dirven (1999: 233-234) and Kaizer (2002: 145-146). The same phrase appears on only two other inscriptions, of which both refer to “the priest of the *mšb*’ of the spring” (*PAT* 0410-0411: *'pkl' dy mšb' 'yn'*). We will return to this formulation below.

⁴²⁹ *DNWSI*, ‘*mšb*’ and *PAT* ‘*mšb*’. The term is applied elsewhere to denote, for instance, at Dura-Europos, a cult relief dedicated to Baalshamin (*PAT* 1089); at Palmyra, a relief of Shadrafa (*PAT* 0318); and at Petra, an aniconic image of Boşra (Alpass 2013: 95- 96, No. 8).

⁴³⁰ 1996: 497.

Dirven regarded the epithet as a standalone cultic formula, which designated “the manifestation of Iarhibol worshipped at the source.”⁴³¹ For my part, I propose that these two interpretations need not be mutually exclusive and that this particular epithet was intended to reflect Yarhibol’s role as both the tutelary deity of the spring and as the divine force that resided within it. Indeed, as we will now see, Yarhibol was a divine figure who – like many other gods encountered in this chapter – was identified both in association and within the landscape.

The spring to which this inscription refers is most likely the Efqa Spring in Palmyra, an oasis settlement that developed into a major city throughout the first and second centuries AD.⁴³² We will focus on Yarhibol and the Efqa shortly but first, in order to appreciate the spring’s significance, it is necessary to consider the wider environmental context of Palmyra. The city and its hinterland, the Palmyrena, formed part of the Badia region of the Syrian steppe.⁴³³ Today, the region is characterised by low (less than 200mm) annual precipitation and thick rock, resulting in poor soil quality and shallow *wadis* that only retain some of the water from the sparse winter rains.⁴³⁴ The combination of these two factors consequently limits permanent settlement across most of the Badia because the landscape can support little more than nomadic pastoralism. However, the environment changes around Palmyra: to the north of the city, steep ridges create deeper *wadis* from which water could be stored and diverted to support agriculture.⁴³⁵ Most importantly, the city itself sits

⁴³¹ 1999: 234.

⁴³² There is an abundance of modern scholarship on Palmyra and aspects of its religious life – Kaizer (2002) is the essential study but see also Gawlikowski (1973 and 1990: 2605-2658). For a recent synthesis on the future of Palmyrene studies in general, see Kaizer (2016b: 924-931).

⁴³³ For an overview of the Badia, see Wagner (2011: 139-145).

⁴³⁴ On the climate of the Palmyrena, see Wagner (2011: 143-144 and 150-151) and Meyer (2017: 17-23).

⁴³⁵ On water management in the Palmyrena, see Meyer (2017: 24-27). The Palmyrena was remarkably fertile prior to the over-exploitation of the land in the second-half of the twentieth century. It is noteworthy that the famous Tax Law – discussed in detail below – does not levy a tax on foodstuffs brought into the city from nearby villages (Panel ii.c, line 112).

within a depression at the convergence of two mountain ranges where groundwater rises from several springs to create an oasis and enable permanent settlement (**Figure 2.5.2**).⁴³⁶ Palmyra's very existence therefore depended upon the reliable flow of the springs, including the Efqa.⁴³⁷

The essential role of Palmyra's springs was amply recognised in antiquity. Pliny the Elder comments that Palmyra was "renowned for its situation, the richness of its soil and its delightful springs," which were in such contrast to its surroundings that it was as if the city was "removed from the region by nature."⁴³⁸ Indeed, Josephus notes that the springs were the very reason why Palmyra was founded in an otherwise barren landscape.⁴³⁹ The value of the springs is also demonstrated in the so-called 'Tax Law', which stipulated a significant charge of 800 denarii "for use of the two springs of water which are in the city" – by far the highest extant charge recorded.⁴⁴⁰ We do not know the identity of these two particular springs but many modern scholars identify the Efqa as a likely candidate.⁴⁴¹ Whilst the waters of the Efqa almost certainly had a pragmatic function, it is unlikely that the springhead was the point from which water was drawn because, as we will now see, this particular area was used primarily for religious purposes.

⁴³⁶ On the groundwater regime of the Palmyrena, see Wagner (2011: 161 and 166-167). The area sits on a plain within the Palmyrene Fold Belt where the northern and southern Palmyrene mountain chains meet. Palmyra itself is 418m above sea level, whilst the largest peaks within the chain reach over 1000m.

⁴³⁷ The importance of the environment to Palmyra's development is also noted by Millar (1998: 130).

⁴³⁸ *HN* 5.21/88 : *nobilis situ, divitiis soli et aquis amoenis (...) terris exempta a rerum natura.*

⁴³⁹ *AJ* 8.6.1/154 Unsurprisingly, the earliest evidence for human activity at Palmyra was found at the Efqa spring – see further Du Mesnil du Buisson (1966: 160-162).

⁴⁴⁰ *PAT* 0259 (= *CIS* 3913): [*ltš*]/*myš* 'ynn trtn dy m[y] dy bmdyt' (Panel ii.c, line 58). Erected in AD 137, the 'Tax Law' is bilingual inscription, composed in Palmyrene Aramaic and Greek, outlining the various taxes and tariffs of the "portus of Hadriana Tadmor and of the water springs of Aelius Caesar" (*ibid*: *lmn' dy hdyrn' tdmr w'ynt' dy my' [dy 'y]ls qysr* (Panel ii, heading)). For full text, translation and commentary, see now *TSSI* IV.37. We do not know to what time frame the 800 denarii tax applied. For further discussion of the 'Tax Law', see e.g. Matthews (1984: 157-180). The item is now in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Inv. No. ДБ-4187).

⁴⁴¹ For an overview of the potential candidates for the second spring, see Yon (2010: 97-99). On Palmyra's water management strategies in general, see Crouch (1975: 151-186) and Juchniewicz and Żuchowska (2012: 61-73).

The Efqa Spring once rose in the southwest quadrant of Palmyra's urban centre some 1500m west of the so-called 'Temple of Bel' (**Figure 2.5.3**).⁴⁴² In antiquity, its waters emerged from a small cave and flowed east along a route to which various installations were added, such as rock-cut caves, benches, steps leading down to the water and numerous altars.⁴⁴³ There are no extant remains of any building at the spring but, as we will explore in **3.2**, it is possible that the spring itself functioned as a sacred space in its own right. However, of greatest importance to the present enquiry is the fact that the spring water was sulphuric and once emitted the distinctively potent smell of hydrogen sulphide.⁴⁴⁴ In the Graeco-Roman tradition, sulphur and its characteristic smell were regarded as indicative of divine presence.⁴⁴⁵ Although we lack comparable literature from which to deduce similar religious mentalities in Palmyra, I propose that the smell of the Efqa's sulphuric waters also conjured the divine in the mind of the ancient worshipper for reasons that I will shortly outline.

As we have seen, the two key features of the Efqa were its importance to Palmyra's sustained prosperity and the sulphurous properties of its waters. These environmental aspects were not only reflected in the characterisation of the gods associated with the site

⁴⁴² The spring dried up following the construction of a nearby hotel in the 1970s.

⁴⁴³ The altars were inscribed with various dedications and comprise our main evidence for comprehending the gods associated with the Efqa. The majority of these altars were uncovered at the spring itself during archaeological investigations led by Dja'far al-Hassani and Jean Starcky in 1947 and 1948 – for reports, see al-Hassani and Starcky (1953 and 1957).

⁴⁴⁴ For an environmental overview of the area's sulphurous waters, see Wagner (2011: 176-177). The sulphur content of the water made it more suitable for irrigation rather than drinking. The healing properties of sulphurous water are discussed in **4.3**.

⁴⁴⁵ In Graeco-Roman literature, sulphur (Greek: *θειον*, Latin: *sulfur*) is primarily associated with the divine in relation to lightning, e.g. Zeus' lightning emits the smell of sulphur (*Il.* 14.415 and *Od.* 12.417) and the waters of certain places derived their smell from the wounds of thunderstruck giants (e.g. Puteoli: Strabo *Geo.* 5.4.6; and possibly the island of Hiera: Philostr. *Imag.* 2.17). On the sulphuric smell of thunderbolts in general, see e.g. Lucretius (6.221), Seneca (*QNat.* 2.21.2) and Pliny (*HN* 35.50/177); and on the use of sulphur for ritual fumigation, see e.g. Propertius (4.8.86), Ovid (*Fasti* 4.739), and Apuleius (*Met.* 11.16). In Biblical literature, God rains down sulphur (Hebrew: *gophrith*; Greek: *θειον*; more commonly translated as 'brimstone') from Heaven as divine punishment (e.g. Genesis 19:24 and Luke 17:29). For a general discussion of smell and the divine in the classical tradition, see Weddle (2011: 26-28) and Clements (2015: 46-59).

but were also essential to identifying certain divine figures within the landscape of the Efqa. We will divide our enquiry into two parts, beginning with the so-called ‘Anonymous God’ and then turning to Yarhibol. The connection of the ‘Anonymous God’ to the Efqa is affirmed by the numerous altars dedicated to him at the spring itself. Before we turn to these dedications, we must first acknowledge that the appellation ‘Anonymous God’ is a convenient – but rather imprecise – shorthand adopted by many modern scholars to refer to three descriptive formulas that appear in Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions as recipients of cult: most commonly, ‘He whose name is blessed forever’ (*bryk šmh l’lm*), but also ‘Lord of the Universe’ (*mr’lm*) and ‘Merciful’ (*rḥmn*).⁴⁴⁶ When we encounter these formulas, it is not obvious whether we are dealing with one god, several distinct gods, multiple aspects of one divine figure, or something else entirely.⁴⁴⁷ For the purposes of our present enquiry, it is probably safest to approach these divine figures as individual gods and accordingly discard the term ‘Anonymous God’ in favour of a looser designation, such as ‘gods without names’.

To date, archaeological investigations have uncovered at least 17 altars dedicated to ‘He whose name is blessed forever’ either at the springhead of the Efqa or in its immediate vicinity.⁴⁴⁸ In these dedications, his name is followed primarily by the epithets ‘good’ (*tb*)

⁴⁴⁶ E.g. Gawlikowski (1990: 2632-2633) Dirven (1999: 165-170), Kaizer (e.g. 2002: 140-148 and 2004: 177). See now the detailed thesis of Kubiak-Schneider (2016), who proposes that “le terme << dieu anonyme >> se montre donc obsolète et inadapté dans le contexte dédicaces sans théonyme,” (2016: 179). Some scholars (e.g. Teixidor 1976: 115-119) have also sought to determine the ‘real’ god behind these descriptive formulas, a matter that does not concern our study – see further Kubiak-Schneider (2016: 198-231), with additional bibliography.

⁴⁴⁷ Thus, Kaizer (2004: 177): “It is, of course, debatable whether all worshippers had a single and independent deity in mind, and identification can be hazardous.”

⁴⁴⁸ PAT 1556, 1558-1559, 1898-1904, 1907-1911 and 1914-1915. For discussion of all the epithets applied to the gods without names at the Efqa, see now Kubiak-Schneider (2016: 160-170). The majority of the altars were uncovered during the archaeological surveys conducted in 1947-48 – see further al-Hassani and Starcky (1953: 145-164 and 1957: 95-122). The altars were last known to be in the Palmyra Archaeological Museum; specific inventory numbers are given where possible for items discussed in detail below.

and ‘merciful’ (*rḥmn*), and occasionally ‘compassionate’ (*tyr*) and ‘generous’ (*skr*).⁴⁴⁹ We also encounter four dedications to ‘Merciful’ in his own right, of which one is shared with ‘He whose name is blessed’ (*bryk šmh*).⁴⁵⁰ Two altars preserve bilingual dedications to the ‘Lord of the Universe’ and ‘Zeus highest mightiest and listening’ (Ζεύς Ὑψίστος Μέγιστος καὶ Ἐπήκοος);⁴⁵¹ and Zeus also receives a further three dedications in his own right that label him variously, in Greek, as ‘highest and listening’.⁴⁵²

At first glance, the character of these divine figures is entirely appropriate for the Efqa: they are exceptionally benevolent gods who listen to their worshippers at the springs upon which the community’s well-being depends. But we need to interrogate this body of evidence a little harder if we want to substantiate this claim. Firstly, the epithets ‘good’, ‘merciful’ and ‘generous’ were not unique to ‘He whose name is blessed forever,’ but were also applied to many other gods known from Palmyrene Aramaic epigraphy.⁴⁵³ Similarly, the practice of labelling a god as ‘highest’ or ‘listening’ was remarkably widespread in Palmyra and the ancient world in general.⁴⁵⁴ The situation is further complicated by the fact that these particular gods of the Efqa also received cult in many other Palmyrene contexts. In her recent catalogue, Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider listed 169 occurrences of ‘He whose name is blessed forever’ and the latest *IGLS* catalogue for Palmyra, prepared by Jean-Baptiste Yon, lists a possible 29 instances of Zeus with some form of the epithet ‘highest,

⁴⁴⁹ Good: *PAT* 1558-1559, 1900-1904, 1908-1910, 1914. Merciful: *PAT* 1558-1559, 1899-1902, 1904, 1908-1911 and 1914. Compassionate: *PAT* 1911 and 1914. Generous: *PAT* 1903.

⁴⁵⁰ *PAT* 1912-1913 and 1916 (Inv. A 1178, A 1173 and A 1180). The dual dedication is *PAT* 1906 (Inv. A 1204).

⁴⁵¹ *PAT* 1917-1918 = *IGLS* XVII.1: Nos. 343-344 (Inv. A 1168 and A 1167).

⁴⁵² *IGLS* XVII.1: Nos. 346 (highest; Inv. A 2/4) and Nos. 347-348 (highest and listening).

⁴⁵³ For instance, we have already seen above that Yarhibol was addressed as “the good god” at Dura-Europos (*PAT* 1099: *’lh’ ṭb*). We can also add, e.g. Nebu (*PAT* 0009), Baalshamin (*PAT* 0158/1130), Azizu (*PAT* 0320), Arsu, Qismaya and the daughters of El (*PAT* 0992), and Aglibol and Malakbel (*PAT* 2781), all of whom were labelled as ‘good’. For a summary of Palmyrene divine epithets, see Kaizer (2004: 175-180, esp. 175-177).

⁴⁵⁴ On gods labelled as ‘highest’ or ‘listening’, particularly in Palmyrene contexts, see e.g. Kaizer (2004: 177-179) and Kubiak-Schneider (2016: 168-170).

mightiest and listening'.⁴⁵⁵ We therefore struggle to assert that the character of these figures was somehow unique to the Efqa.

Nevertheless, we cannot escape the fact that these are the only divine figures who clearly received cult at the Efqa and indeed that the spring represents a particular focal point within the city for the reverence of these gods. Surely these dedications bear witness to some sort of religious mentality that regarded the Efqa as an appropriate place at which to worship gods with these qualities? Of relevance to this question is that, of the 26 altars dedicated to gods without names at the Efqa, at least 17 were offered “in thanksgiving” (*mwd'*).⁴⁵⁶ Again, whilst offerings of thanksgiving were by no means restricted to the Efqa, their presence at the spring indicates that the site was regarded as an appropriate place for such activities. An especially evocative example is an altar set-up in AD 251.⁴⁵⁷

To he whose name is blessed forever, merciful and compassionate, given in thanks by Narai, son of Moqimu Titus Ioulius, and Adda, his wife, and his sons, and all members of the household, because they called to him [the god] in distress and he answered with relief for them.

Significantly, we have already encountered requests to gods for ‘relief’ (*rwh*) at **2.3** in the form of rain from Baalshamin.⁴⁵⁸ We cannot be certain that the ‘relief’ provided by ‘He whose name is blessed forever’ was the waters of the Efqa; but perhaps this text can prompt us to appreciate the role of the springs in the development of the Efqa as a site of

⁴⁵⁵ See further Kubiak-Schneider (2016: Catalogue) and *IGLS* XVII.1.

⁴⁵⁶ *PAT* 1898-1904, 1906-1914 and 1916. *mwd'* is the active participle of the root *ydy* – see further *PAT* sv. *ydy*. On religious mentalities of gratitude in Palmyra, particularly with reference to gods without names, see Kaizer (2004: 177 and 181).

⁴⁵⁷ *PAT* 1911: *lbryk šmh l'im' rḥmn' wtyr' mwd' n'ry br mqymw tytwylyw w'd' 'tth wbnwh wbn' byth klhwn dy qrw lh b'q' w'nn brwh' ln* (Inv. A 1177).

⁴⁵⁸ Of note here is the more recent discovery of a fragmentary Aramaic inscription, preserved on a stone bench at the springhead, that likely records a dedication to Baalshamin (*IGLS* XVII.1: No. 350: [*lb' l' šmn?*]). The text was last known to be *in situ*. Significantly, Baalshamin has long been regarded as a potential candidate for the ‘real’ god behind ‘He whose name is blessed forever’ and several other of these gods without names – see further Kubiak-Schneider (2016: 211-218). For our present purpose, this line of enquiry does not concern us: we can still appreciate the particular characters of these unnamed gods without identifying the ‘real’ named god behind them.

thanksgiving. In doing so, I think we can conclude more firmly that the physical and conceptual significance of the Efqa to the Palmyrene community is precisely what rendered it an appropriate site at which to express gratitude to certain divine figures who were known for their benevolence. The extent to which the landscape initially motivated this characterisation is unclear, precisely because we encounter similar gods in other parts of the city; but the environmental qualities of the Efqa probably underscored the presence of these divine figures at the site of the spring itself.⁴⁵⁹ Quite simply, the reliable flow of its waters affirmed the benevolence of its associated gods.

Turning now to Yarhibol, we must stress from the outset that, whilst the Efqa's epigraphic corpus has yielded no dedications to him, it does affirm that the god had a particular connection to the springs.⁴⁶⁰ Firstly, we should acknowledge two altars dedicated to 'He whose name is blessed forever' by the "priest of the *mšb*' of the spring," which may have once stood at the springs.⁴⁶¹ In any case, if we accept that this epithet was unique to Yarhibol, then these texts suggest that a priesthood associated with him was operating at a spring in Palmyra – although we can barely speculate as regards the nature of this priesthood nor can we be certain that the spring in question is the Efqa.⁴⁶² More informative

⁴⁵⁹ Significantly, we do not know of any temple dedicated to 'He whose name is blessed forever' or any of the other unnamed gods discussed thus far. Kaizer (2002: 160) has similarly noted that "the cult of this Anonymous God (...) did not take place in his 'own' sanctuary, and the small altars dedicated to this god in large numbers could be set up virtually everywhere." The likely absence of a temple at the Efqa is discussed below at 3.2.

⁴⁶⁰ In addition to his epithet '*mšb*' of the spring' at Dura-Europos, there is an oft-cited inscription from the village of Arak, 33km northwest of Palmyra, that records an altar was dedicated "to Yarhibol, to the irrigator of the earth, to the Gad of the village, to the rewarding god," (*PAT 1622: lyrhbwl lšq' l'rq lgd' dy qrt['] l'lh' škr[']*). The repetition of the preposition, combined with the absence of the conjunctive, creates uncertainty about whether we are dealing with one god (Yarhibol) or four. On the absence of dedications to Yarhibol at the Efqa, see e.g. Gawlikowski (1973: 118-119), Kaizer (2002: 148) and Yon (2010: 100).

⁴⁶¹ *PAT 0410-0411: 'pkl' dy mšb' 'yn'*. Both altars are now in the Palmyra Archaeological Museum (Inv. No. unknown).

⁴⁶² This particular priesthood is not known from anywhere else in Palmyra and the only remnants of their religious activities are the altars on which the testimonies of their office was inscribed. Although '*pkl*' appears in other contexts, *kmr'* is the more common priestly title at Palmyra. What differences, if any, existed between these two priesthoods remain unknown – for further discussion, see Kaizer (2002: 237).

however are four inscriptions, all preserved on altars found at the springhead, that record dedications by individuals who identify themselves as the ‘manager’ (*rb* / ἐπιμελητής) of the Efqa chosen by Yarhibol. Two texts are composed entirely in Palmyrene Aramaic and refer to the dedicator as the manager of the spring “whom Yarhibol the god had chosen”;⁴⁶³ and in two bilingual inscriptions, composed in Greek and Palmyrene Aramaic, the dedicator states they were “chosen as manager of the Efqa spring by Yarhibol the god” in the Greek component.⁴⁶⁴ These texts therefore leave no doubt that the Efqa fell firmly within Yarhibol’s sphere of influence.

We can now follow two lines of interpretation in our analysis of these four texts. On one level, Yarhibol is being presented as a protective figure: by choosing the individual responsible for the Efqa’s management, he is acting as the spring’s guardian. Moreover, given that Palmyra’s springs were fundamental to the city’s prosperity, a god who ensured that the Efqa’s waters were carefully managed was likely regarded as a protector of the community as a whole. Indeed, as noted by several scholars, Yarhibol’s patronage of the Efqa probably underscored his involvement in other communal issues, namely his ‘testifying’ to the deeds of several public figures.⁴⁶⁵ On another level, we ought to consider Yarhibol’s actions at the Efqa in the context of divine communication. Some scholars once

⁴⁶³ *PAT* 1557 and 1919: *dy 'hd yrhbwl 'lh*’.

⁴⁶⁴ *IGLS* XVII.1: Nos. 343 and 344: ἐπιμελητής αἰρεθείς Ἐφκας πηγῆς ὑπὸ Ἰαριβόλου τοῦ θεοῦ. In the Palmyrene Aramaic component of both inscriptions, the dedicator does not specify that he was selected by Yarhibol but identifies himself as the ‘*rb* of the Efqa spring’ (*PAT* 1917 and 1918: *ʾyn 'l 'pq*). Both altars were dedicated by the same person, Bolanos/Bolai.

⁴⁶⁵ See further e.g. Dirven (1999: 49-50) and Smith (2013: 64-66). Yarhibol’s civic ‘testimonials’ appear in several contexts: e.g. in AD 192 or 193, an unknown individual was honoured for fulfilling various duties, such that “a testimonial was given by Yarhibol the ancestral god” (*IGLS* XVII.1: No. 223: ὑπὸ Ἰαριβ[ω]λου [τοῦ π]ατρ[ῶ]ου θε[ε]οῦ μαρτ[υ]ρηθῆναι; the fragmentary counterpart in Palmyrene Aramaic preserves only “gave testimony to him” (*PAT* 1398: *shd lh*)); a certain Aelius Bora was honoured in AD 198 after demonstrating many positive qualities “witnessed by Yarhibol the ancestral god” (*IGLS* XVII.1: No. 307: μαρτυρηθέντα ὑπὸ τε Ἰαριβωλου τοῦ πατρίου θεοῦ; no parallel appears in the equivalent Palmyrene Aramaic text (*PAT* 1063)); and in AD 241/2, Yarhibol and the *praefectus praetorio*, Julius Priscus, “gave testimony” to the notable Zabdila (*IGLS* XVII.1: No. 53: μαρτυρηθῆναι; *PAT* 0278: *shd*).

labelled Yarhibol as an ‘oracular god’, arguing that his selection of the Efqa’s manager was an oracle given to the community.⁴⁶⁶ In particular, this interpretation stressed that the terminology used to denote Yarhibol’s appointment of the Efqa’s manager (*ḥd / αἰρέω*) could convey meanings of ‘to seize’ or ‘to take possession’ and was therefore oracular in nature. Several scholars have since urged caution against this view, highlighting not only that both terms could simply signify ‘to be chosen’ but also that gods were generally regarded as communicating with worshippers in numerous ways, via oracles or other means.⁴⁶⁷ For my part, I reject the view that Yarhibol was an oracular god: in light of the evidence from which we might determine the nature of oracles in the Roman Near East, we cannot identify Yarhibol’s communication specifically as oracular because we simply know so little about what place, if any, oracles occupied in the mind of ancient worshippers at Palmyra or further afield.⁴⁶⁸

Nevertheless, we should remain curious about the religious mentalities surrounding Yarhibol’s communication with his worshippers in association with Efqa and the environmental qualities of the spring itself are particularly relevant for this endeavour. As noted above, the smell of sulphur was commonly associated with divine presence in the Graeco-Roman tradition and, whilst we lack comparable material from Palmyra, might we speculate that the tangible, potent smell of sulphur encouraged the religious community to

⁴⁶⁶ Thus, Teixidor (1977: 112): “Yarhibol exercised his authority over the life of the city by means of oracles”; and Hajjar (1990: 2274): “Yarhibōl est une divinité oraculaire dont l’activité s’exerçait particulièrement à la source Efca...”

⁴⁶⁷ E.g. Dirven (1999: 49, n.38) advocates that the evidence does not suggest Yarhibol’s cult was “of an outspoken oracular nature”; and Kaizer (2002: 148, n.419) emphasises that many gods communicated with their worshippers, such that “describing each of them as ‘oracular’ is rather futile.” See also, Piacentini (2001-2002: 531) and Yon (2010: 101). Despite these convincing revisions, Smith (2013: 64) has since referred to Yarhibol as “a god of oracles.”

⁴⁶⁸ Youssef Hajjar (1990: 2236-2320) compiled an impressive dossier of ‘divinités oraculaires’ and ‘rites et pratiques divinatoires’ in Roman Syria and Phoenicia but much of this material lies on broader scale of divine communication. For a more cautious overview of oracles in the Roman Near East, see Sartre (2001: 893-894) and Lightfoot (2003: 464-466). Oracles and water are further discussed below in **4.2**.

recognise divine presence within the Efqa's landscape more readily?⁴⁶⁹ Perhaps the presence of the water, coupled with its arresting smell, granted a certain legitimacy to Yarhibol's appearance within the landscape and his divine presence might have similarly organised the environment in the mind of the ancient worshipper. At the very least, the fact that Yarhibol's name meant 'Lord of the spring' should prompt us to recognise that his very essence as a divine figure was intimately connected to this part of Palmyra's landscape.⁴⁷⁰ Relatedly, Yarhibol was one of a small number of gods in Palmyra whose Palmyrene name was transliterated into Greek, thus indicating that his very essence was so bound to the Efqa that he could not be equated with a divine figure from the Greek world.⁴⁷¹ Throughout this chapter, we have encountered the identification of environmental features with various divine figures and perhaps Yarhibol followed a similar pattern. Of particular relevance to this proposal is Yarhibol's aforementioned epithet, '*mšb*' of the spring', which could refer to his role as both the tutelary deity of the spring and as the divine force that resided within it. Quite simply, it appears that the Efqa Spring came to be regarded as synonymous with Yarhibol's presence in the landscape. If we now turn to Petra, we will encounter similar processes of recognising the divine within the environment.

The gods of Petra's wadis

In his description of the Levant, Pliny the Elder comments that the Syrian 'wilderness' (*solitudo*) of Palmyra stretches all the way to the city of Petra.⁴⁷² Yet the local environments

⁴⁶⁹ It would be incorrect to make a comparison here with Delphi, where toxic vapours allegedly rose from a chasm to inspire the Pythian oracle (Lucan 5.165-174). As we have already noted above, Yarhibol's communication at the Efqa cannot be recognised as oracular, such that it would be foolish to compare his actions with those of the most famous oracle of the ancient world! Moreover, the vapour tradition is one of many explanations offered by ancient authors on Pythia's oracular stimulation and has proved hard to validate despite modern geological investigations. On Delphi's inspirational vapours, see Scott (2014: 21-24) and Dillon (2017: 368-369).

⁴⁷⁰ For a summary of Yarhibol's etymology, see Dirven (1999: 48).

⁴⁷¹ See further Milik (1972: 44-46).

⁴⁷² *HN* 5.21/87.

of these two cities, and the landscapes between them, differ greatly. Following Pliny's southwesterly route as the crow flies, the Syrian steppe gives way to the Jebel Arab basalt fields – where, as we saw in 2.3, ancient travellers inscribed many dedications to Baalshamin – before reaching the limestone plateau of the northern Arabian Desert and crossing the Shara Mountains.⁴⁷³ Petra lies in a plateau between the foot of the cultivable Shara Mountains in the east (**Figure 2.5.4**) and the truly desolate Wadi Arabah rift valley in the west (**Figure 2.5.5**).⁴⁷⁴ The vast site sprawls across impressive sandstone peaks and the valleys between them. This unique orography will be discussed further in 3.1; for now, we will focus on the relationship between Petra's gods and the site's *wadis*, the ephemeral springs that flow through the site during certain times of the year.

Unlike Palmyra, Petra depends primarily on rainfall and the city's ability to harness this precipitation effectively underscored its prosperity in antiquity.⁴⁷⁵ Rain arrives at the site during the winter months, when it recharges the springs surrounding the city and inundates the *wadi* beds that follow the natural contours of Petra's landscape. This high concentration of rainfall, coupled with the narrow paths of the *wadis*, can create impressive flash floods across the city even today.⁴⁷⁶ This prevalence of water in proximity to an otherwise unforgiving environment was recognised in antiquity, with Strabo describing Petra as follows:⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷³ The region corresponds to the eastern part of the northern Arabian platform, an area made up of numerous geographical units – see further Wagner (2011: 139-188).

⁴⁷⁴ For a survey of the city's relationship with the Jebel Shara, see Tholbecq (2013: 295-311).

⁴⁷⁵ Petra's impressive water management system was acknowledged in antiquity (Diod. Sic. 19.94; Strabo *Geo.* 16.4.21) and has been studied variously by modern scholars – for an overview, see Orloff (2005: 93-109) and Oleson (2007: 217-249).

⁴⁷⁶ See, for instance, images released by Jordan's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via its Twitter page on 22nd February 2016: goo.gl/bLi3a3.

⁴⁷⁷ *Geo.* 16.4.21: μητρόπολις δὲ τῶν Ναβαταίων ἐστὶν ἡ Πέτρα καλουμένη· κεῖται γὰρ ἐπὶ χωρίου τᾶλλα ὀμαλοῦ καὶ ἐπιπέδου, κύκλῳ δὲ πέτρα φρουρουμένου, τὰ μὲν ἐκτὸς ἀποκρήμνου καὶ ἀποτόμου, τὰ δ' ἐντὸς πηγᾶς ἀφθόνους ἔχοντος εἰς τε ὑδρεῖαν καὶ κηπέαν. ἔξω δὲ τοῦ περιβάλλου χώρα ἔρημος ἡ πλείστη... Strabo's account differs in many respects to that of Diodorus Siculus (19.94) who, amongst other things, describes Petra as a wilderness without rivers or springs (19.94.2) and comments that the Nabataeans constructed subterranean

The metropolis of the Nabataeans is Petra, as it is called; for it lies on a site which is otherwise smooth and level, but it is fortified all round by a rock, the outside parts of the site being precipitous and sheer, and the inside parts having springs in abundance, both for domestic purposes and for watering gardens. Outside the circuit of the rock most of the territory is desert...

Thus, in contrast to the small cluster of spring-heads at Palmyra, the *wadis* of Petra are ubiquitous in their presence. Even in early autumn, meandering courses of vegetation reveal the *wadis*' routes through the landscape (**Figure 2.5.6**), such that they are an ever-present feature of Petra's environment. Modern-day surveys have since confirmed that many of the *wadis* were of both practical and religious importance in antiquity.⁴⁷⁸ For instance, as illustrated by **Figure 2.5.7**, various religious installations appear in conjunction with parts of the water management system along the Wadis Ma'aysra East and West.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, as we will now see at two other sites in Petra, the pragmatic significance of the *wadis* also underscored their symbolic importance and the nature of the gods worshipped alongside them.

The Wadi Siyyagh, which curls around the foot of Umm al-Biyara in the west of the city, features a narrow ledge some 15m above the *wadi* bed where five niches are carved into the rock-face.⁴⁸⁰ The first niche is empty; the third and fourth niches feature individual aniconic images; and the fifth includes a basin with a recess upon which a portable idol could have been accommodated. The second niche (0.59 x 0.65 m) houses a seated female figure hewn from the rock (**Figure 2.5.8**). She is poorly preserved but we can determine

reservoirs to hide rainwater from their enemies (19.94.6). For a discussion of the differences between these accounts and their reliability, see Dijkstra (1995: 297-307) and Alpass (2013: 23-28). For an overview of the emergence of the 'Nabataeans' at Petra, see Wenning (2013: 7-22).

⁴⁷⁸ Most of Petra's *wadis* have been studied as part of individual surveys, such as the Wadi Farasa (Schmid 2004: 163-186), the Wadis Ma'aysra East and West (Berenfeld *et al* (2016: 79-107) and the Wadi Silaysil in the city's northern hinterland (Knodell *et al* 2017: 621-683). The *Siq* is examined in full at **3.1**.

⁴⁷⁹ The area's installations have since been surveyed by Berenfeld *et al* (2016: 79-107).

⁴⁸⁰ For the most recent survey of the site and its installations, see Merklein and Wenning (with Gerber 2001: 421-432). The niches are examined in more detail in *ibid* (1998: 162-178, esp. 169-176).

that she wears a draped cloak and is seated on various rocky objects. An accompanying inscription, written in Nabataean Aramaic, identifies her as the “goddess that is Isis”.⁴⁸¹ Significantly, Isis also appears in association with another *wadi*. On the southern outskirts of the city, the road passes close to the Wadi Abu Ulleyqah near the approach to Jebel Haroun – a site we will encounter in 3.2. The cultic site at Wadi Abu Ulleyqah is more complex than that at the Wadi Siyyagh: spread across an upper and lower terrace, the course of the *wadi* splits the site into four quadrants and falls as a waterfall between two terraces (Figure 2.5.9).⁴⁸² The entire space is adorned with niches, graffiti and rock-cut inscriptions, with a large quantity concentrated on the southern bank of the upper terrace. Here, a large (0.93m high) rock-cut niche contains a female figure hewn from the rock (Figure 2.5.10).⁴⁸³ Although she has been heavily defaced, she wears an Isis knot at breast and, akin to the figure from the Wadi Siyyagh, she sits on a throne and wears a long dress.⁴⁸⁴ Her identification as Isis is also encouraged by the discovery of a rock-cut inscription, rendered in Nabataean Aramaic, invoking the “protection of Isis”.⁴⁸⁵

The worship of Isis in Petra has been the subject of much commentary in modern scholarship, with discussion focusing primarily on the genesis of her cult.⁴⁸⁶ In addition to Isis’ presence at the Wadis Siyyagh and Abu Ulleyqah, she is the subject of numerous

⁴⁸¹ Alpass 2013: 89-90, No. 2: *'lht' d' 'sy*.

⁴⁸² For detailed overviews of the site’s archaeological and epigraphic material in light of recent investigations, see Roche (2012: 55-72 and 2013: 543-555).

⁴⁸³ The course of the wadi is also diverted to fill an elongated basin below the relief, which Roche (2012: 65) interprets as a ritual healing bath due to the mention of a physician (*'sy'*) in a graffito nearby (*ibid*: 64-65 and 2013: 548-549).

⁴⁸⁴ The comparable iconography of these two figures has been noted by several scholars, cf. e.g. Zayadine (1991: 283-306) and Alpass (2010: 95-99).

⁴⁸⁵ Roche (2012: 59): *'ydn 'y{s}y*. The inscription is located on the wall of a narrow corridor within the lower terrace (*ibid*: 58-59). On the variant renderings of Isis in Nabataean Aramaic, see *ibid* (61-62).

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. e.g. Healey (2001: 137-141), Alpass (2010: 93-113), Vaelske (2013: 351-361) and Schwentzel (2014: 147-162). Wenning (2016: 519-521) provides the most recent synthesis of all the material from Petra. The cult of Isis in the Roman Near East is also discussed by Belayche (2007: 448-469) and Aliquot (2014: 135-146). Dunand’s three-volume study on her cult in the eastern Mediterranean briefly touches on the evidence from the Levant (1973: III, 122-135).

terracotta figurines and her *basileion* is recognisable amidst some of the city's aniconic images, as well as the famous Khazneh tomb. Whilst her reverence at Petra is thus confirmed, several scholars have interpreted her as a 'foreign' deity, arguing that she was imported by Egyptian merchants and was thus distinct to the 'indigenous' divine occupants of the city.⁴⁸⁷ Peter Alpass has since convincingly revised this standard interpretation by emphasising the ways in which the cult of Isis in Petra was the product of both local religious ideas and religious traditions from elsewhere.⁴⁸⁸ This line of thinking aids us in our own interpretation of Isis' reverence at the *wadis*. Setting aside the myriad complexities of her character, Isis' cult in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt strongly reflected her status as a guarantor of good harvests and fertility in general, as well as a protective figure.⁴⁸⁹ These particular dimensions of Isis' character were underpinned by her association with the annual flooding of the Nile, which is caused by the summer monsoon bringing heavy rains to the highlands of modern-day Ethiopia where the river originates.⁴⁹⁰ In light of Isis' connection to the Nile flood in Egypt, it is therefore significant that her only extant cult centres at Petra are located in association with *wadis*, which were likewise defined by their annual flooding regimes. I am not suggesting that Isis' character was simply transferred from Egypt to Petra in totality; rather, she was regarded as an appropriate divine figure to invoke amongst Petra's *wadis* precisely because of their environmental similarity to the

⁴⁸⁷ E.g. Healey (2001: 137-141) categorises her as a 'foreign goddess' and separates her from Petra's other gods; and Wenning (2016: 519) comments that "she seems to be a foreign goddess and atypical in comparison with other Nabataean deities."

⁴⁸⁸ 2010: 93-113, esp. 107. Woolf (2014: 62-92) also discusses the cult of Isis across the ancient world within the context of religious pluralism.

⁴⁸⁹ In general, see entries in *OCD* and *DDD*. Herodotus (2.59 and 2.156) equates her with Demeter, a detail supported by several sculptural examples (Dunand 1979: Cat. Nos. 40-46). A lengthy invocation, preserved on a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, grants her responsibility for all the world's waters and says that she "brings back the Nile over every country" (*POxy* XI: No.1380, 125-126: τὸν Νῆλον ἐπὶ π[ᾶσ]αν χώραν ἐπανάγουσαν). The same text (*ibid* 91-92) names her 'saviour' (σώτειραν) at Petra. For a summary of Isis' maternal and agrarian functions, see Dunand (1979: 60-67); and for a detailed examination of the changes to her character in the Hellenistic period, including her protective inclinations, see Gasperro (2007: 40-72).

⁴⁹⁰ In Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris* (38), for instance, the Nile appears as the bodily fluids of Osiris that impregnates the lands of Isis. On the role of water in the cult of Isis and Sarapis, see Wild (1981).

Nile. As a result, we might interpret her presence at the Wadis Siyyagh and Abu Ulleyqah as reflective of her role as a protective figure who guaranteed the fertility brought by the *wadis*.

Isis was not the only divine figure to receive cult at the Wadis Siyyagh and Abu Ulleyqah, or indeed the other *wadis* across Petra. However, many of these gods are represented as aniconic forms, such that their character is difficult to determine.⁴⁹¹ Some figures are identified by accompanying inscriptions, such as a rock-cut block with stylised eyes labelled as “Atargatis Manbigitess” but the majority are unnamed and rendered in such a way that the significance of their visualisation is now lost to us.⁴⁹² The site of Sadd al-Maajin located along an unnamed *wadi* at the northern edge of the Khubtha massif offers a case in point.⁴⁹³ The space comprises a very narrow gorge carved by *wadi* – which dramatically surges down the valley every winter – and lined with an abundance of rock-cut niches and aniconic figures (**Figure 2.5.11**). A cluster of niches have been hewn from the rock-face of a natural hollow that may have served as a focal point for cultic activities in the gorge, although the nature of these escapes us (**Figure 2.5.12**).⁴⁹⁴ However, one fragmentary inscription provides an insight into the religious mentalities associated with this space: the text – composed in Nabatean Aramaic and carved alongside a semi-circular niche containing a rectangular aniconic figure – evokes peace “before Dushara and all the gods.”⁴⁹⁵ Whether we ought to identify the rectangular figure in the niche as a

⁴⁹¹ On the varied form of Petra’s aniconic divine figures, see e.g. Patrich (1990: 75-95), Wenning (2001: 85-87) and Gaifman (2008: 60-65).

⁴⁹² Alpass 2013: 105, No. 23: ‘*tr’t’ mnbgyt*’. The text is generally interpreted as referring Manbij (Hierapolis), where Atargatis had her cult centre – see further *ibid*. The block is located in the Wadi Siyyagh, though not in the same place as the cult site for Isis discussed above.

⁴⁹³ For further discussion of the site, see Dalman (1908: 308-314), Roche (1989: 327-414) and Alpass (2013: 74-75).

⁴⁹⁴ See further Alpass (2013: Fig. 22).

⁴⁹⁵ Alpass (2013: 99-100, No. 11): *qdm dwšr’ w’lhy’ klhm*. Elsewhere in the gorge, another text refers to the servant of Al Uzza (*ibid*: 102, No.17).

representation of Dushara is not clear but the text nevertheless indicates that the worshippers who used this space recognised the presence of the divine within the landscape. Indeed, we should also appreciate that the act of carving a divine image into the living rock would have affirmed this act of recognition. The case of Sadd al-Maajin – as well as many of Petra’s other *wadis* – therefore draws attention to the processes by which a landscape might come to be identified as a sacred space, as well as bearing witness to the varied ways in which water-based environments could form part of the spatiality of religious life. As we now turn to Chapter Three, the role of water in the region’s varied sacred spaces will come to the forefront of our discussion.

Chapter Three: Spaces

In 2001, the Socotra Karst Project conducted a speleological survey of the Hoq cave on Socotra, a Yemeni island situated in the Arabian Sea 400km south of the Arabian Peninsula and 320km east of the Horn of Africa. During their survey, the team uncovered 216 legible inscriptions dating between the second century BC and sixth century AD, and written in various languages and scripts from India, Arabia and the Mediterranean.⁴⁹⁶ Given the island's position within the maritime trade route that connected India, Arabia and Africa, it is unsurprising that the epigraphic record represents such a multicultural milieu.⁴⁹⁷ One particular inscription, composed in Palmyrene Aramaic, was preserved on a wooden board (0.5m x 0.2m), shaped like a *tabula ansata*, and found propped up against a stalagmite in the cave (**Figure 3.1.1**):⁴⁹⁸

In the month of Tammuz, the 25th day, of the year 569 [July, AD 258], I, Abgar son of 'Abisamaya, sailor, came here in the pain of my soul. May the god who resides here bless you, the man who reads this tablet and who will bless me and who will leave the tablet in its place.

The environmental context in which this inscription was found enables some inferences to be made about the circumstances in which the text was produced. Firstly, the Hoq cave is located on the island's northern coastline amidst several small bays, which offer some protection to ships when the island is buffeted by the annual monsoons (**Figure 3.1.2**). July, the month in which Abgar made his dedication, is an especially difficult time for seafaring

⁴⁹⁶ For full text, translation and commentary of all the Hoq inscriptions, see now Strauch (2012).

⁴⁹⁷ Socotra was well-known in antiquity, appearing most notably as 'Dioscuri' in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (30-31). For comprehensive summary of allusions to the island in ancient literature, see Bukharin (2012: 501-539); and for a general introduction to the island, see *EI* 'Sukutra'.

⁴⁹⁸ Gorea (2012: 451): *byrh tmwz ywm 25 dy šnt 569 'n' 'bgr br 'bšmy' šmmr 'tt bkr' dy npšy ltnn ybrwk 'lh' dy šrn tnn lk gbr dy yqr' lwh' dnh wybrkn' wy[- -q-h] llwh' bdkth*. Trans. adapted from Kaizer (2004: 171) and Gorea (2012: 451). Variant readings of the text are further discussed below.

around the island when the summer monsoon blows across the region from the southwest.⁴⁹⁹ As a result, Maria Gorea has persuasively proposed that Abgar survived a difficult voyage before reaching Socotra, an interpretation augmented by Abgar’s self-identification as a sailor and his declaration, “I came here in the distress of my soul.”⁵⁰⁰ This particular pattern of worship – that is, expressing gratitude to divine figures following the survival of a maritime journey – has already been noted in **2.4** and will be further discussed in **3.3**.

For our present enquiry however, the second half of the text is most illuminating. By invoking “the god who resides here,” Abgar demonstrates the capacity for worshippers to recognise divine presence within the landscape – a concept with which we are now thoroughly familiar.⁵⁰¹ As we saw in Chapter Two, the relationship between gods and their associated landscapes varied remarkably between localities: at Byblos, Adonis’ death and ‘resurrection’ were recognised in the seasonal changes of the Nahr Ibrahim (**2.2**); Baalshamin withheld the relief of his rains across the Hauran and the Syrian steppe (**2.3**); the dangerous reefs along Iope’s coast inspired the myth of Andromeda (**2.4**); and at Palmyra, Yarhibol was regarded as both the tutelary deity of the Efqa Spring and the divine force that resided within it (**2.5**). Thus, we have encountered divine figures who could be, all at once, characterised with reference to the local environment, regarded as having certain water features under their sphere of influence and recognised as present within the

⁴⁹⁹ Although the *Perip. Erythr.* (39) recommends leaving Africa for India in July to benefit from the added wind afforded by the southwest monsoon, the text still warns that seafaring conditions are dangerous and, indeed, navigation around Socotra is almost impossible between June and August. On the seasonal visitation of Socotra in accordance with the monsoons, see Strauch (2012: 543-544); and on ancient seafaring in the Red Sea, see Seland (2011: 398-409).

⁵⁰⁰ Gorea (2012: 451): *’tt bkr’ dy npšy ltnn*. This phrase was previously read as *’tt bkr’ dy nyšy* (“I came in the land of *nyšy* until here”) by Robin and Gorea (2002: 438-440), and Kaizer (2004: 171); but Gorea (2012: 457) has since convincingly revised this reading on palaeographic grounds.

⁵⁰¹ Gorea (2012: 451): *’lh’ dy šrn tnn* (trans. Kaizer 2004: 171). Gorea (*ibid*: 456-457) interprets this phrase as “the god who installed me here” – although this variant would not undermine our overall interpretation that Abgar was invoking a divine presence specifically associated with the island.

landscape itself. Now, in Chapter Three, we will bring such matters of spatiality to the forefront of our discussion to analyse the relationship between water and sacred space.

To this end, I also want to draw attention to another important aspect of the Hoq inscription: Abgar's invocation demonstrates that gods could be invoked and honoured in spaces and places outside temples or sanctuaries. Indeed, Abgar's inscription is not the only instance of a localised deity being invoked in the cave at Hoq: a Greek inscription etched onto the wall of the cave records, "Septimius Paniskos, the ship-owner, kneeled before the gods and before that/those of the cave."⁵⁰² Although the cave contains no remains of religious architecture that might denote a temple or sanctuary, it was clearly a site of religious significance. As a result, the Hoq inscriptions encourage us to recognise that the cave was an integral component in the spatiality of religious life on Socotra akin to the role of a temple or sanctuary elsewhere. This conclusion thus indicates the centrality of the environment in the conceptualisation of sacred space, a matter to which we will now turn our full attention.

3.1 The Spatiality of Religious Life

In this chapter, I analyse the role of water in sacred space by examining the varied ways in which different bodies of water were integrated into a range of sacred spaces attested across the Roman Near East. In doing so, I propose that worshippers developed some of their sacred spaces in relation to the hydrological environment and also recognised certain bodies of water as sacred places in their own right. In some cases, the purposeful organisation of sacred space around water encouraged worshippers to interact with the environment in a

⁵⁰² Bukharin (2012: No. 11:26): Σεπτί(μιος) Πανίσκος ναύκληρο[ς] τοὺς θεοὺς μετὰ καὶ τοῦ σπηλείου προσεκύνη(σα). For further commentary on this text, see Bukharin (*ibid*: 499-500).

particular way. Once again, I accordingly structure my discussion around the environments themselves and present case studies in relation to springs, the sea and lakes. In this introductory section, I aim firstly to establish that sacred space in the Roman Near East extended beyond the structures that we identify today as sanctuaries and temples. Through a focused discussion on the site of Petra, I hope to demonstrate that the spatiality of religious life in a locality could comprise a variety of spaces, such that we should structure our own study around different bodies of water rather than particular types of buildings. As a result, I then tackle the assumption that certain landscapes were inherently sacred and instead, using the case of the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Paneas, advocate that landscapes became sacred spaces through the various ways in which religious communities engaged with them.

Recognising sacred space: beyond temples and sanctuaries in Petra

The archaeological record of the Roman Near East bears witness to the inclusion of water in a variety of temples and sanctuaries. As we will discuss further in **4.1**, many sanctuaries featured large enclosed pools in their courtyards, including those of the so-called ‘Sanctuary of Bel’ in Palmyra and the Sanctuary of Jupiter at Baalbek/Heliopolis. Natural water features were also incorporated into sanctuary complexes: for instance, as we noted in **1.3**, the springs at Baetocaece were channelled into different areas of the sanctuary. Indeed, many temples and sanctuaries owed their establishment to the landscapes in which they were founded. Amongst others, the likely Temple of Aphrodite and Adonis was, as we saw in **2.2**, located at the source of the Nahr Ibrahim in Aphaca precisely because the river played a fundamental role in the local cult of these divine figures. Yet the spatiality of religious life at these sites often extended beyond temples and sanctuaries to encompass landscape features in their own right, including those associated with water. In Palmyra,

for instance, the Efqa Spring was an essential cult site in the city but, as we will discuss in **3.2**, the space does not appear to have been marked with a temple or sanctuary. A study that focused on the role of water solely in temples and sanctuaries would therefore risk excluding important aspects of the ways in which worshippers developed their sacred spaces in relation to the local environment. Instead, we ought to approach our enquiry with a sensitivity to the diverse spaces that the region's religious communities regarded as sacred.

The site of Petra can help us to expand this line of interpretation even further on account of its varied sacred spaces.⁵⁰³ Excavations in the centre of the city – as we know it – have uncovered at least three temples, including one of the largest structures in Petra: the so-called Qasr al-Bint.⁵⁰⁴ Located south of the Wadi Musa at the western end of the colonnaded street, the Qasr al-Bint comprises a large rectangular courtyard (37 x 180m) containing a stepped altar and an imposing square-shaped temple (32 x 32m) that rises to a height of 23m (**Figure 3.1.3**).⁵⁰⁵ Apart from its proximity to the Wadi Musa, there is nothing to suggest that water played any kind of role in the sanctuary.⁵⁰⁶ The Qasr al-Bint's prominent

⁵⁰³ Indeed, the variety of Petra's sacred spaces has been recognised by scholars in their efforts to organise the material by dividing the city's religious structures and installations into different categories – cf. e.g. Nehmé (1997: 1023-1067), Healey (2001: 39-52) and Alpass (2013: 58-85), who follows Nehmé. For a recent discussion of Petra's 'géographie religieuse', see Tholbecq (2016: 1053-1074).

⁵⁰⁴ The other two temples are the 'Temple of the Winged Lions', so-called due to its lion-headed capitals; and the aptly-named 'Small Temple'. The Qasr al-Bint ('Castle of the daughter') takes its name from Bedouin legend. For a summary of each structure, see now Segal (2013: Nos. 83, 84 and 86); and on Petra's architecture in general, see McKenzie (1990). The so-called 'Great Temple' is not listed here due to doubts concerning its identification as a religious building: Joukowsky (1998; 2007) consistently maintained that the building served as a temple, at least during the Nabataean period; whereas Schluntz (2000) made a strong case for a purely administrative function. The current state of research does not allow us to reach a conclusive verdict.

⁵⁰⁵ Excavations have been ongoing since the 1960s, cf. e.g. Wright (1961: 8-37), Parr (1967-8: 5-19), Zayadine (1985: 207-215) and Zayadine *et al* (2003, with plan). For a recent synthesis of research, including the structure's contested chronology, see Dentzer-Feydy (2017: 127-142). Various gods are mentioned in several dedicatory inscriptions found in the vicinity of the site but none can be definitively connected to the temple – see further Alpass (2013: 106-108, Nos. 24 and 26-28).

⁵⁰⁶ Indeed, the sanctuary's northern wall was purposely built to withstand floods from the *wadi* – see further Segal (2013: 301).

position within the city, coupled with its capacity to host large numbers of worshippers, has led numerous scholars to conclude that it was Petra's most important sanctuary.⁵⁰⁷ Yet the Qasr al-Bint represents a mere fraction of the city's sacred spaces. Indeed, as we noted in 2.5, worshippers erected images of their gods and various cultic installations along many of the city's *wadis*. As a result, a study that centred on the Qasr al-Bint – or similar temple complexes – would not only fail to capture the variety of Petra's sacred spaces, but also marginalise the prominence of water in the city's religious topography. By contrast, if we expand our discussion to encompass a whole range of cultic sites, including those not delineated by religious architecture, then we reveal that water was an essential component in the development of Petra's sacred spaces.

A case in point are the so-called 'high places' found atop many of Petra's mountains, with the Madbah High Place being one of the best-preserved examples.⁵⁰⁸ Located on the Zibb Attuf ridge overlooking the western entrance to the Siq, the Madbah High Place commands a prominent position when observed from Petra's city centre (**Figure 3.1.4**). The religious site proper is situated on the summit (60 x 15m) and comprises a sunken, rock-cut area (14.4 x 6.25m) with a very shallow platform in its centre (0.17m high) and a larger platform (1.87 x 2.78m; 0.9m high) to the west (**Figures 3.1.5, 3.1.6 and 3.1.7**).⁵⁰⁹ The larger

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. e.g. Healey (2001: 39), Alpass (2013: 56), Kropp (2013: 281-290) and Segal (2013: 300).

⁵⁰⁸ 'High places' were a particularly distinctive feature in the Near East and Ball (2016: 399) outlines four potential, but not mutually exclusive, forms: temples with staircases leading to the roof; temples with towers; temples located on a naturally elevated position; and temples with "an open-air sacred area" situated on a natural elevation. Ball (*ibid*: 346) rightly emphasises the Mesopotamian origins of the 'high-place' but the pyramid tradition in Egypt must also be added here. Furthermore, the Greek concept of 'peak sanctuaries' (as described by Burkert 1985: 26-8) and Vitruvius' avowal (*De arch.* 1.8.1) of erecting temples on the highest ground deserve to be acknowledged. For a brief comparison of these traditions, see Wightman (2007: 952-956).

⁵⁰⁹ The Madbah High Place is approached either from the Wadi Farasa East or just north of the theatre, with the latter route taking the visitor past two large obelisks hewn from the rock. The function of these structures has been subject to various interpretations, with one of the more convincing theories being that they acted as some kind of monumental *propylaea* to mark the entrance to the high place proper – for a summary, see Alpass (2013: 69). The high-place and the obelisks have since been catalogued by Laila Nehmé – see now, *PAAE I: Monuments* 85.1, 89 and 90.

platform, reminiscent of an altar, appears to be part of an overall cultic area constructed along the western flank of the space: three steps lead up to the platform, where a small recess may have held a cult object. The cultic activities that took place in this space remain uncertain;⁵¹⁰ but the topography of the site implies that water played an important role (**Figure 3.5.8**). Another platform with three basins lies immediately south of the central platform; at least one drainage channel runs along the southern flank of the sunken area;⁵¹¹ and a larger reservoir is located directly south of the site. In particular, one of the basins has a distinctive circular shape with another circular recess inside. The same form is also witnessed at other religious sites in Petra, including the ‘high-place’ at Jebel en-Nmeir, and they are now regarded by modern scholars as being used to receive libations – a point to which we will return in **4.1**. Regardless of the cultic activities undertaken at the site, its collective topography indicates that the space was purposefully arranged not only to capture the rainfall but also to enhance the presence of this particular body of water.⁵¹² Indeed, a similar pattern is witnessed elsewhere in Petra at Jebel Haroun, where recent excavations revealed that a Roman-era sanctuary was constructed around a remarkable natural fissure used to collect rainwater.⁵¹³ The desire to integrate water and amplify its presence at Petra’s ‘high places’ cannot be denied.

⁵¹⁰ For an overview of the various interpretations on how ancient worshippers used the space, see Alpass (2013: 70).

⁵¹¹ Traces of other shallow channels can be identified around the complex, but it is difficult to determine whether these are the result of deliberate sculpting or natural fissures in the rock. The southern channel, with a rock-cut discharge point through the limits of the sunken area is the only clear man-made example.

⁵¹² Indeed, several localities for which precipitation was essential designed open-air sanctuaries that amplified the presence of water during periods of rainfall. At Sia, for instance, the Temple of Baalshamin – the storm-god who we encountered in **2.3** – was preceded by an open-air courtyard centring on a natural rocky outcrop (0.42m high) that preserved the ‘back-bone’ of the plateau on which the sanctuary was established. Given that Sia was worshipped as a divine figure in her own right – and that her name is derived from the Aramaic *šy’y*, meaning ‘levelled surface’ and thus representative of the landscape feature upon which the sanctuary was founded – we might consider this rock as an aniconic cult image that was deliberately incorporated into the sanctuary in a place where it was exposed to rainfall. On the rocky outcrop, see Dentzer (1985: 71-73); and on religious life at Sia in general, see Alpass (2013: 181-185) and Dentzer-Feydy (2015: 312-325).

⁵¹³ See further Lahelma *et al* (2016: 17-64), with Juntunen (2016: 64-66) and Schmid (2016: 67-73).

A site known as the Lower Qattar ed-Deir also bears witness to the prominence of water in a different sacred space.⁵¹⁴ Situated in a narrow gorge just off the route from the Qasr al-Bint to the Deir plateau, this site comprises a collection of rock-cut divine images and cultic installations along a terrace some 70m in length (**Figure 3.1.9**). Upon entering the gorge, one first encounters the remains of a small triclinium hewn from the rock-face, followed by a series of rock-cut niches and aniconic images. Travelling further along the terrace, the rock-face features a niche containing two aniconic images and accompanied by an inscription naming one of them as the “*mšb*’ of Bosra” (**Figure 3.1.10**).⁵¹⁵ Water drips down the rock-face throughout the year and collects in a series of basins and connecting channels carved into the floor below (**Figure 3.1.11**). Precisely what – if any – cultic activities were undertaken with this water is now lost to us but we might interpret the installation of the basins and channels as a way of incorporating the water into the cult space and amplifying its presence. Moreover, the basins and channels were a useful way to collect and manage this valuable source of water, a function that need not be seen in opposition to potential religious significance of this unusual water feature. Indeed, as we will see particularly in **3.2**, the importance of some sacred spaces was underscored by the pragmatic value of the water sources with which they were associated.

The Siq is another area of Petra that not only exhibits an intertwining of religious and pragmatic spaces, but also demonstrates how the spatiality of religious life in the city extended beyond temples (**Figure 3.1.12**). Located in the east of the city, the Siq is a narrow gorge that stretches over 1km and opens out into the Bab as-Siq in the east and the famous Khazneh Tomb in the west.⁵¹⁶ Various water installations are still visible today and attest

⁵¹⁴ For a description of this site, see Dalman (1908: 252-255) and Alpass (2013: 73-4).

⁵¹⁵ Alpass (2013: 95-96, No. 8): *mšb*’ *dy bšr*’. On the varied interpretation of *mšb*’, see **2.5** above.

⁵¹⁶ An archaeological investigation of the Siq was led by Ueli Bellwald between 1996 and 2001 alongside an engineering survey directed by Ma’an al-Huneidi. The key findings from both projects were subsequently

to the Siq's significance in Petra's wider water management infrastructure.⁵¹⁷ As we noted in 2.5, Petra's water supply derived primarily from the seasonal rainfall that recharged nearby springs and inundated the city's *wadis*. The inhabitants of Petra then harnessed this water through careful capture and storage, and the installations in the Siq contributed to this endeavour in several ways. Two large water channels were constructed at the base of the gorge and followed its natural contours to convey water from the city's eastern limits to its centre (**Figure 3.1.13**).⁵¹⁸ The southern water channel also contained various drinking basins, as well as settling tanks that helped to make the water more palatable. Multiple dams and stilling basins were also constructed along the various fault lines down which water runs from the mountains above.⁵¹⁹ Such structures not only managed the water for use elsewhere, but were also vital for preventing the floods to which the Siq remains especially vulnerable on account of its topography. The water management system in the Siq therefore depended upon the careful harnessing of a potentially volatile water source.

The Siq's status as an area of religious significance was most certainly linked to its key role in Petra's wider water management strategy. Rock-cut aniconic images adorn the walls of the gorge at various points, including a large rectangular block (0.7 x 1.5m, 0.4m) carved directly underneath the northern water channel in sector 21 (**Figure 3.1.14**).⁵²⁰ Indeed, the majority of religious installations in the Siq appear in association with its water system.⁵²¹ In particular, the Wadi Qantara Dam in sector 22 is overlooked by a small cult site: accessed from the ground-level of the gorge by a rock-cut staircase, the site comprises a terrace with

published in a general volume edited by Isabelle Ruben (2003). The Siq's archaeological and epigraphical features have since been comprehensively recorded by Laïla Nehmé (*PAAE I*).

⁵¹⁷ See further Ortloff (2005: 93-109, esp. 95-97, 104 and 106-107).

⁵¹⁸ The channels transported water from the Ain Musa located the foothills of the Jebel Shara. For further discussion of the channels' design and function, see Ruben (2003: 55-68).

⁵¹⁹ For full discussion of the Siq's 'protection system', see Ruben (2003: 69-75).

⁵²⁰ *PAAE I*: Monument S11. The ground in front of the block features a shallow recess containing a pear-shaped pedestal, possibly used to receive offerings – see further Ruben (2003: 43).

⁵²¹ For further examples in addition to those discussed above, see Ruben (2003: 77-84).

several altar-like blocks laid out in front of small niche (0.4 x 0.5m) containing two aniconic images (**Figure 3.1.15**).⁵²² A similar arrangement is also found at the Khubtha Fault 6 Dam on the opposite side of the gorge: here, a rock-cut staircase rises above the height of the dam and crosses several associated water channels before leading to a terrace with two niches hewn from the rock-face.⁵²³ The precise function of these terraces escapes us today but their proximity to – and perhaps even their infringement on – the dams suggests that the cultic activities performed in these spaces were undertaken in relation to the water management system.

However, of particular significance is the fact that the number of spaces such as these terraces are dwarfed by those of standalone cult images carved directly into the rock-face. In sectors 17 and 18, for instance, a cluster of niches housing various divine figures have been carved into the southern rock-face, including one that contains a female figure flanked by two lions (**Figure 3.1.16**).⁵²⁴ The accompanying Greek inscription, presented in a *tabula ansata* below the niche, states, “Sabinos Alexandros, *panegyriarches* of Adraa, piously dedicates [this?].”⁵²⁵ In contrast to the spaces discussed above – which, despite not being free-standing structures akin to traditional temples, were nevertheless identifiable as distinct spaces – many of these cult images that line the Siq’s walls are not clearly located within a perceptible sacred space and instead appear to be isolated representations of the divine. Of course, one particular spatial dimension is inherent within these images: most are framed by niches and the design of some clearly imitate temple facades, such as a niche in sector 11 that comprises two pilasters and an entablature with a Doric frieze (**Figure**

⁵²² PAAE I: Monument 1119. For a description of the site, see Ruben (2003: 81).

⁵²³ PAAE I: Monuments 1176-1177. For a description of the site, see Ruben (2003: 81-82).

⁵²⁴ For full discussion and interpretation of this image, see PAAE I: Monument 60.2. Other niches in this area include PAAE I: Monuments 60.1-60.11, 1151-1153 and 1159-1160.

⁵²⁵ PAAE I: Inscription MP 737-738: Σαβεῖνος Ἀλέξανδρος πανηγυρ[ι]άρχης Ἀδραηνῶν εὐσεβῶν ἀνέθηκεν.

3.1.17), giving the effect of a cult image located in a temple.⁵²⁶ But, ultimately, the areas adjacent to these images are not organised into obvious spaces within which worshippers might interact with their gods. As a result, the presence and ubiquity of these cult images prompts us to contemplate the potential religiosity of the wider environment. Previous scholarship on the Siq's religious function has mainly sought to understand the space as processional route;⁵²⁷ but such a line of enquiry can overlook the possibility that the Siq could function a sacred space in its own right. Even amidst the awesome geological formations of Petra, the Siq still constitutes a distinctive and coherent landscape due to its unique topography. In particular, this topography amplifies the presence of water: the winter rains cascading down from the mountains above might be especially dramatic but the pervasive trickling of water through the gorge's many channels, coupled with the discernible reduction in temperature, is equally remarkable. We can therefore appreciate how, in the mind of the ancient worshipper, the Siq readily lent itself to the recognition of divine presence within the landscape and the subsequent organisation of its features into a variety of intertwining sacred spaces.

Even if we acknowledge that the particular variety of Petra's sacred spaces was due to the city's exceptional topographical situation, our discussion of this site nevertheless encourages us to look beyond temples and sanctuaries in our search to recognise the different sacred spaces of the Roman Near East in general. As we will see at numerous points in this chapter, the spatiality of religious life in any given locality could incorporate not only structures delineated by religious architecture, but also water features in their own right. Indeed, we regularly encounter sacred spaces that owe their very existence to the

⁵²⁶ *PAAE* I: Monument 1146. For further discussion of the niche's architectural details, see McKenzie (1990: 159).

⁵²⁷ See further e.g. Healey (2001: 45-47) and Bedal (2004: 98-99). *Contra* Alpass (2013: 66-68).

environmental settings with which they were associated: for instance, a temple was erected close the summit of Jebel Aqra precisely because the storms around the mountain bore witness to the presence of Zeus Keraunios, whose character we examined in 2.3. As a result, this environmental emphasis encourages us to approach our enquiry via the bodies of water themselves, as opposed to a particular selection of building types. However, in order to adopt such an approach, we must first consider the processes by which such landscape features became recognised and organised as sacred spaces.

Approaching space and landscape: the case of Caesarea Paneas

As we saw throughout Chapter Two, there can be no doubt that certain environmental features attracted the attention of religious communities due to their distinctive nature: the annual reddening of the Nahr Ibrahim was attributed to the death of Adonis (2.2); the prominent peak at Khirbet Tannur became home to the cult of a storm-god (2.3); the reefs at Iope readily inspired the myth of Perseus, Andromeda and the sea-monster (2.4); and the springhead of the sulphurous Efqa Spring became a focal point for the reverence of several gods at Palmyra (2.5). However, a crucial aspect of this religious attention is the subsequent organisation of these landscapes using religious structures or installations: a temple was established at the source of the Nahr Ibrahim, a sanctuary was constructed on the summit of Khirbet Tannur and, as we will discuss in full in 3.2, various installations were added to the Efqa. Even at Iope where the remains of any temple are yet to be discovered, the religious community apparently led visitors to Andromeda's rock and deliberately showed them the virgin's chains as a testament to the myth.⁵²⁸ This latter example in particular highlights how certain environmental features could become focal points of the cultic

⁵²⁸ Cf. e.g. Pomponius Mela (*Chor.* 1.64) and Pliny (*HN* 5.14/69), who both apply *ostendo* – for further discussion, see Harvey (1994: 8) and Kaizer (2011: 326).

landscape through repeated engagement from the religious community. Whilst temples, sanctuaries and other installations organised the landscape into a sacred space, the religiosity of the environment was continuously affirmed through the various ways in which worshippers interacted with the space.

Accordingly, this study maintains that landscapes were not inherently sacred; rather, certain environments became sacred spaces through the varied activities of the religious communities who interacted with them. Indeed, the notional ‘sacred landscape’ is becoming increasingly contested in modern scholarship.⁵²⁹ Joannis Mylonopoulos, for instance, has advocated with regard to the Greek world that, whilst certain features of the landscape have the potential to become sacred spaces, “ist es die menschliche Aktivität an solchen Orten, die sie zu geheiligten Plätzen, zu Kultstätten macht.”⁵³⁰ In a similar vein, Anna-Katharina Rieger has stressed that the distinctiveness of a landscape might trigger religious attention “but then people and their practices sacralise a place – render it sacred through activities and their remains.”⁵³¹ Rieger’s study examines how such processes of sacralisation functioned at Caesarea Paneas, a site situated at the foot of Mount Hermon around the source of the River Jordan. In her analysis of the site, Rieger focuses on the materiality of the rock-face along which most of the sanctuary developed and only touches on its springs briefly. However, as we will now see, the religious community at Caesarea Paneas not only purposefully integrated the springs into the sanctuary, but also organised the sacred space in such a way that encouraged certain forms of interaction with the local environment.

⁵²⁹ The construction of ‘sacred landscapes’ was the topic of a panel, ‘Sacred Nature & Structuring the Sacred: Constructing and Re-Writing Sacred Landscapes in the Ancient Near East,’ held at the annual British Association of Near Eastern Archaeology conference in Lampeter, 2016 – the proceedings will be published by Häussler and Chiai (forthcoming).

⁵³⁰ 2009: 56. See also, Brulé (2012).

⁵³¹ 2016: 181.

The site of Caesarea Paneas is located at the southwest foot of Mount Hermon where its main sanctuary complex developed along a rocky spur at the end of the mountain (**Figure 3.1.18**).⁵³² This spur constitutes a sheer rock-face that rises some 30m high and spans 80m across from northwest to southeast.⁵³³ A large cave – approximately 17m high and 30m wide – occupies the northwest corner of the rock-face. A natural terrace stretches out in front of the rock-face where, as we will discuss shortly, worshippers established numerous structures related to the site’s local cults. Today, the Ain Baniyas bursts out from numerous channels below the terrace around 40m southwest of the cave’s mouth and forms the Nahr Hermon, a tributary of the River Jordan (**Figure 3.1.19**).⁵³⁴ Both the cave and the spring attracted attention in antiquity, when they also seemed to comprise one cohesive unit. Although the floor of the cave today reaches only a few metres below its entrance due to the accumulation of debris over the centuries, archaeological investigations revealed that the cave once contained a chasm plunging some 12m down to the water level below.⁵³⁵ This environmental situation accords neatly with Josephus’ description of the site, who speaks of a dark cave “within which there is a horrible precipice, that descends abruptly to a vast depth; it contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable; and when anybody lets down anything to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it.”⁵³⁶ He also adds that the spring emerged from the ‘roots’ (ρίζας) of

⁵³² Caesarea Paneas was largely under Ituraean control during the first century BC before being added to the territory of Herod the Great around 20 BC. The site then passed between Herodian and Roman rule for several years before permanently being added to *provincia Syria Phoenice* in AD 92/93. For a comprehensive discussion of Caesarea Paneas’ history, see Wilson (2004).

⁵³³ For a summary of the site’s natural topography, see Ma’oz (1993: 136-137).

⁵³⁴ On the tributaries of the River Jordan and their environmental qualities, see Gur *et al* (2003: 155-178). The Ain Baniyas was also recognised as the source of the River Jordan in antiquity – cf. e.g. Pliny (*HN* 5.15/71), Josephus (*BJ* 3.10.7/509-510 and *AJ* 15.10.3/363-365) and Eusebius (*EH* 7.17). On this topic, see also Aliquot (2009: 64-69). The bucolic nature of the area extends beyond the rock-face: the Hermon courses through the landscape where it cascades down small waterfalls surrounded by thick trees and vibrant vegetation

⁵³⁵ Ma’oz (1993: 140). The archaeological excavations conducted at Caesarea Paneas are discussed in further detail below.

⁵³⁶ *BJ* 1.21.3/404-406: δι’ οὗ βαραθρώδης κρημνὸς εἰς ἀμέτρητον ἀπορρῶγα βαθύνεται πλήθει τε ὕδατος ἀσαλεύτου καὶ τοῖς καθιμῶσιν τι πρὸς ἔρευναν γῆς οὐδὲν μήκος ἐξαρκεῖ.

the cave, evoking the multiple points from which the Ain Baniyas bursts below the rock-face.

Josephus, amongst others, also refers to the area around the cave as the ‘Paneion’ (Πάνειον), a name that no doubt came into existence on account of the cult of Pan established at the site as early as the Hellenistic period.⁵³⁷ Although Pan’s cult at Caesarea Paneas is not described in the ancient literature, the reverence of this rustic god and his retinue is confirmed by numerous other bodies of evidence. Most compelling are several inscriptions carved into the rock-face that preserve dedications to the god himself, as well as several nymphs.⁵³⁸ Moreover, the sculptural record has yielded several fragments featuring a *syrinx*, a musical instrument regularly associated with Pan, as well as a statuette of a satyr, one of his common acolytes.⁵³⁹ Similarly, both Pan and motifs related to his cult were regularly included on the coinage of Caesarea Paneas from at least AD 1/2 until AD 221: nude Pan playing the flute next to a tree was one particularly recurrent design.⁵⁴⁰ Although there were likely various reasons behind the establishment and continued success of Pan’s cult at Caesarea Paneas, the natural setting of the cave and its springs probably

⁵³⁷ *BJ* 1.21.3/406. Eusebius (*EH* 7.17) refers to the entire mountain as ‘Paneion’, as does Polybius (*Hist.* 16.18.2) when describing a battle between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties around 200 BC. Josephus later describes the city of Caesarea being founded “in the district of Paneas,” suggesting that the area around the cave was regarded as separate to the urban centre. This theory was ratified by the discovery of an inscribed boundary stone that marked the border between the Paneion and the city – see further *IGLS* XI: No. A20. The stone is now in the Beth Ussishkin Museum, Kibbutz Dan. The site was also referred to by several other names, including Paneas – for a summary, see Meshorer (1984-5: 37-40).

⁵³⁸ E.g. a certain Victor dedicated a statue of Hermes to Pan and the nymphs (*IGLS* XI: No. A14), as well as a statue of a goddess “to the god Pan, lover of Echo” (*ibid.*, A13: Φιλευήχω Διόπανι); a certain Valerios Hispanos claims he was, “priest of the god Pan” (*ibid.* A16: Αίερεύς θεοῦ Πανός); and the *archon* Agrippa also made a dedication to Echo (*ibid.* A17). The sanctuary’s entire epigraphic corpus is also due to be published by Ben Isaac – whose translations are used above – as part of the final excavation report. All texts are still visible on the rock-face today.

⁵³⁹ On the marble sculpture of Caesarea Paneas, see now Friedland (2012, with catalogue). Sculptures featuring the *syrinx* include: a fragment of a tree trunk from which a *syrinx* hangs and a left hand holding a *syrinx*. Both were rendered in marble and their original size is not determinable (*ibid.*: 118-123, Nos. 18 and 19). Only the torso remained of the satyr statuette (*ibid.*: 123-126, No. 20).

⁵⁴⁰ On the coins of Caesarea Paneas in general, see Meshorer (1984-5: 37-58, with catalogue). Coins featuring Pan playing his flute next to a tree include, *ibid.*: Nos. 6, 7, 9, 12, 17, 21, 23, 27, 31-32, 43, 48 and 54.

affirmed the presence of the god and his retinue within the landscape.⁵⁴¹ In particular, the cave and the springs gradually emerge amidst the thick trees and vegetation surrounding the site, such that one can readily imagine Pan and his satyrs spying on the nymphs bathing in the springs. Even so, the site's transformation into a sacred space was the result of numerous adaptations to the very landscape that stimulated the foundation of Pan's cult.

Archaeological excavations undertaken at Caesarea Paneas have revealed numerous buildings and installations that organised the cave and springs, as well as the rock-face and terrace, into the Sanctuary of Pan (**Figure 3.1.20**).⁵⁴² Immediately adjacent to the cave lay the so-called 'Court of Pan and the Nymphs', which constitutes a wide paved court (c. 18 x 15m) centred on an artificial rock-cut grotto surrounded by three niches hewn from the rock (**Figure 3.1.21**). One of the niches is accompanied by a Greek inscription that reveals a certain Victor dedicated a statue of Hermes to Pan and the Nymphs in AD 150, although excavators regard the artificial cave to have been cut before this date.⁵⁴³ Moving southwest along the rock-face, one then encounters the remains of a large (11 x 17m) temple likely dedicated to Zeus no later than the late-first century AD, followed by the so-called 'Court of Nemesis' that comprises a long, narrow court (16.5 x 4.3m) leading to a rock-cut niche flanked by limestone pilasters. A Greek inscription, carved in a *tabula ansata* above the niche, reveals that it was once the shrine of Lady Nemesis that had been constructed in AD 178/179 by "cutting away the rock underneath, with an iron fence." The installations along the rock-face culminate with the remains of a tripartite building of uncertain function and

⁵⁴¹ On Pan's association with caves in Greece, see Borgeaud (1988: 47-52); on caves and the nymphs, see Larson (2001: 226-258).

⁵⁴² Excavations at the site around the springs were conducted between 1988 and 1994 under the direction of Zvi Ma'oz. Although the final excavation report remains unpublished, we can draw upon several preliminary reports to make sense of the sanctuary's general development – see further Ma'oz (1993: 136-143 and 2008: 1587-1590). For a synthesis, see Friedland (2012: 13-16). For a history of the site in light of excavations, see Ma'oz (2009); and for the final report of the excavations in the urban centre, see Tzaferis and Israeli (2008).

⁵⁴³ *IGLS XI*: No. A14. Ma'oz (2008: 1588) advocates that the court was first established in the first century AD.

tentatively dated to the Severan period.⁵⁴⁴ Slightly below the terrace lie the remains of an apsidal court with a semi-circular niche at its centre facing back towards the springhead.⁵⁴⁵ The progressive development of the Sanctuary of Pan therefore highlights that the organisation of a ‘sacred landscape’ into a sacred space could be an ongoing process and the product of the religious community’s continuous engagement with a site.⁵⁴⁶ This process could take the form of building temples – that could equally be modified and expanded over time – or indeed smaller initiatives from individual worshippers, such as the addition of an individual cult niche to an existing cult space. As a result, whilst this study does not aim to narrate the evolution of the sites with which it engages, it does recognise that sacred spaces were dynamic entities whose organisation shaped and informed the experience of the ancient worshipper.⁵⁴⁷

The organisation and experience of sacred spaces could be further underscored by the local environment and it is therefore noteworthy that the earliest phases of construction relating to the Sanctuary of Pan actually focused on the cave and its springs. A temple, likely dated to the late first century BC, was erected in front of the cave and its current remains comprise two parallel walls, some 10.5m apart, running perpendicular to the rock-face.⁵⁴⁸ The western wall – which spans 18m and rises at least 4m in height – preserves five alternating

⁵⁴⁴ See further Ma’oz (2008: 1589).

⁵⁴⁵ This unusual structure is often referred to as the ‘Temple of Pan and the Goats’ on account of its striking similarity to a building depicted on the city’s coinage, which comprises a semi-circular structure enclosing three intertwined goats and a niche holding a statue of Pan playing his flute – see further Meshorer (1984-5: 45-46 and No. 38, cf. Nos. 31-32, 39 and 45).

⁵⁴⁶ This point in particular is stressed by Rieger (2016: 183-189). Similarly, the extent to which landscapes – sacred or otherwise – were determined through social consensus was a key talking point at a recent panel, ‘Approaching landscape in the classical tradition,’ held at the Celtic Conference in St. Andrews in July 2018 – for a panel report, see Bray (2018).

⁵⁴⁷ This proposal builds on the work of Kevin Butcher, who has previously stressed that a sanctuary’s development was “the product of multiple voices and interests” and “part of an ongoing process of identification with it by its patrons,” (2011: 456 and 2017: 73).

⁵⁴⁸ The walls were rendered in *opus quadratum*, a technique distinctively associated with Herodian-era buildings in the Levant – see further Kropp (2013: 326-329).

semi-circular and rectangular niches, and we might assume that the eastern wall once bore a similar arrangement (**Figure 3.1.22**). There are no significant remains of the building's façade, although some have sought to identify the structure with a tetrastyle temple depicted on the city's coinage in the early first century AD.⁵⁴⁹ Of particular significance to our discussion, however, is the purposeful omission of a rear wall, such that the temple appears to have looked directly onto the mouth of the cave. This arrangement led excavators to suggest that the cave functioned as the temple's *adyton*, although there is nothing to indicate precisely how worshippers interacted with the space.⁵⁵⁰ Perhaps a cult statue was housed dramatically at the edge of the cave or worshippers cast offerings into the waters at the bottom of the cave's chasm? Whatever the case may be, the design of the building nevertheless reveals the desire of Caesarea Paneas' religious community to incorporate the cave into the temple, a general practice we will encounter again in this chapter. Moreover, whilst worshippers almost certainly performed cultic activities at the mouth of the cave before the installation of the temple, the building's presence would have undoubtedly ratified and organised the area into a clear area of religious significance and amplified the experience of engaging with the cave and its springs.

A similar situation is also apparent below the cave where the springs burst out at the foot of the terrace. According to the site's excavators, architectural fragments around the springhead indicate that the waters of the Ain Baniyas once flowed into a large artificial pool that might have been colonnaded.⁵⁵¹ As we will discuss further in **4.1**, the pool's location at the foot of the terrace implies that worshippers used its waters for ritual cleansing before

⁵⁴⁹ Meshorer (1984-5: No. A). Most scholars assume that this temple was the Augusteum allegedly built by Herod in the late first century BC (Joseph. *BJ* 1.21.3/404 and *AJ* 15.10.3/363-364) – see further Ma'oz (1993: 140), Wilson (2004: 11-16) and Friedland (2012: 13). *Contra* Kropp (2009: 109-110), who is right to highlight that the evidence is inconclusive.

⁵⁵⁰ See further Ma'oz (1993: 140).

⁵⁵¹ See further Ma'oz (1993: 137 and 2008: 1588).

ascending to the various religious installations on the terrace. Here, we should simply stress that the purposeful arrangement and delineation of the springhead was probably key to its integration into the sanctuary, as well as compelling worshippers to engage with its waters in a particular manner. Akin to the cave, the religious community at Caesarea Paneas most probably interacted with this body of water before its architectural manipulation, but the creation of the pool would have left no doubt that the spring was part of the sanctuary and that its waters were an essential part of how worshippers interacted with the space. Indeed, the continuous flow of worshippers pausing to cleanse themselves at the pool would have integrated the springs into the daily rhythm of religious life at the sanctuary. The case of Caesarea Paneas therefore demonstrates that, whilst some landscapes certainly piqued the interest of worshippers through their very nature, such environmental features only became sacred spaces and part of the spatiality of religious life through the religious community's purposeful engagement. As we will now see, a variety of water sources could be integrated into a range of sacred spaces and the local environment often underscored the nature of this integration.

3.2 Springs

Several springs in the Roman Near East were associated with temples, sanctuaries or religious installations and some springs even functioned as sacred spaces in their own right. As we saw in 2.5, the environmental variety of the region's springs was reflected in the diverse characterisation of their associated gods; and the local significance of each spring likewise underpinned their unique function in the spatiality of religious life. For instance, the sanctuary at Baetocaece – a site we encountered briefly in 1.3 – was purposely constructed around a local spring. Its waters were channelled into different areas of the cultic complex, where they were utilised for therapeutic rituals. Thus, whilst the spring clearly had a cultic function, the benefits afforded by its waters also rendered it as a source of income for the sanctuary. The interplay between the pragmatic and religious significance of certain bodies of water is a theme we will encounter again in this section. Conversely, the spring at Caesarea Paneas and the cave from which its waters originated not only formed part of the cult site itself but also – as we saw in 3.1 – prompted the establishment of various temples and other religious structures within the landscape. However, as we also noted, the assumption that springs and other bodies of water were inherently sacred can be problematic: whilst springs could function as an extension of sacred space and as sacred spaces in their own right, their sanctity was nevertheless ratified and amplified by their associated cultic installations. This matter will now come to the forefront in the discussion that follows.

The sanctuary at Fijeh

Leaving Caesarea Paneas, one would ascend Mount Hermon and then follow the Anti-Lebanon mountain chain for some 60km before descending into the river valley of the Nahr Barada in which Fijeh nestles. The ancient site at Fijeh, as we know it, was organised

around a perennial freshwater spring, the Ain el-Fijeh, the significance of which is best-appreciated by situating the spring in its wider environmental context. The Ain el-Fijeh emerges on the southeastern slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, some 15km northwest of Damascus.⁵⁵² Prior to the rapid environmental changes witnessed in recent years, the spring was nourished by consistently high levels of annual precipitation and had an average discharge rate of 7.7m³ per second, the highest in the Anti-Lebanon area.⁵⁵³ The spring is the largest supplier of the Nahr Barada, which is the main source of water for Damascus. Indeed, the city depends almost exclusively on the waters of the Barada due to its location in the semi-arid plains at the foot of the Anti-Lebanon, where rainfall levels sharply decline to an average of 250mm per annum. Nevertheless, in antiquity, Damascus successfully harnessed the Barada's waters to create a rich agricultural hinterland renowned for its fecundity.⁵⁵⁴ Consequently, the importance of the Barada to Damascus was reflected in the city's coinage: several issues, ranging from the reigns of Marcus Aurelius to Philip

⁵⁵² For an overview of the climate and groundwater regime of the Anti-Lebanon mountains, see Wagner (2011: 66-67 and 111-112).

⁵⁵³ The effects of climate change have been keenly felt in the Anti-Lebanon mountains: rising global temperatures have led to a decrease not only in rainfall levels but also snow coverage, which is essential to restoring the region's main aquifer every winter – for a recent assessment of the damage, see Zakhem and Kattaa (2016: 1-17).

⁵⁵⁴ For a summary of Damascus' geographical setting in antiquity, see Burns (2005: xv-xvii). Gertrude Bell (1907: 159) also noted various fruit trees of the Barada Valley when she journeyed from Damascus to Baalbek/Heliopolis. Ancient Damascus was known for its viticulture (e.g. Posidonius *BNJ* 87, F68) and vines seemingly played a significant role in the city's religious life. In the third century AD, the city issued a coin type featuring a nude female figure surrounded by vegetation: her legs are merged with bushy leaves and she holds a vine – heavy with grapes – in each hand. The coinage of Damascus has been published disparately but specimens of the type are listed by Kevin Butcher (2010: 85-91, with plates), who has convincingly identified the figure as Ambrosia and drawn attention to several allusions to her local mythology. In Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* (21.24-32), Ambrosia transforms into a vine in order to ensnare Lycurgus and facilitate Dionysos' attack. Whilst the location of this conflict is not specified in the *Dionysiaca*, other authors place the battle in Damascus. According to Damascius (*Philosophical History* 136; Athanassiadi 1999: 304-307), the city earned its name after Dionysos defeated the armies of Lycurgus by sprinkling wine from a wineskin (*askos*); whilst Stephanus of Byzantium (*Ethnika* sv. Damaskos) narrates a story in which Lycurgus and his giant, Askos, throw Dionysos into a river. Moreover, the metamorphosis of Ambrosia was seemingly rendered on a relief in the so-called 'Temple of Bacchus' at Baalbek/Heliopolis, suggesting that knowledge of the myth spread from the Damascene into the Beqaa. On Ambrosia in the *Dionysiaca*, see Chuvin (1991: 256-258); and on her possible presence at Baalbek/Heliopolis, see Aliquot (2009: 191-192). Finally, we should also mention the *Letter to Sarapion* – allegedly composed by the Emperor Julian in the fourth century AD – which contains a eulogy to Damascus praising the city's natural environment (Letter 80, 392C-D).

I, feature a reverse design of a recumbent male figure holding an amphora from which water flows and labelled as Chrysorrhoas, the ancient name of the Barada (**Figure 3.2.1**).⁵⁵⁵

More pertinent to our present enquiry, however, are a sub-group of coin types issued in the third century AD onward featuring a temple above a water outlet, with a male figure swimming in its waters.⁵⁵⁶ The male figure is most likely Chrysorrhoas himself and we can assume that the entire structure depicted on the coins is his sanctuary. One particular type, issued during the reign of Philip I, adds a Greek legend that labels the site as ‘*Pegai*’ (**Figure 3.2.2**).⁵⁵⁷ Whilst *pegai* was commonly used to refer to springs or running water, several scholars have also suggested that ‘*Pegai*’ was in fact the ancient name of Fijeh, with this modern name being a derivative of the original Greek.⁵⁵⁸ As a result, the religious complex depicted on these coins is now commonly recognised as Fijeh and, as will soon become apparent, this interpretation is supported by the structural remains at the site itself. For now, we will simply emphasise that the inclusion of Fijeh on the coins of Damascus alludes to the importance of Ain el-Fijeh in the city and its hinterland on account of the spring’s fundamental relationship with the Nahr Barada. As we will now see, the spring’s wider environmental significance underpinned the spatiality of religious life at the site.

Although the ancient site that once stood at Fijeh has since been obscured by a modern-day water pumping station, several scholars have made sense of the extant architectural remains

⁵⁵⁵ Specimens of this type have not been published comprehensively but examples are collated in *LIMC* (sv. ‘Chrysorrhoas I; b) Gelagerter Flußgott’). An issue from the reign of Marcus Aurelius is a representative example (De Saulcy 1874: 38, No.2; *RPC IV*: No. 6967 [temp]): a bearded, semi-nude male figure reclines, resting his left arm across an upturned amphora and holding a cornucopia and ears of corn. The accompanying legend labels him as ‘XPVCOPO’.

⁵⁵⁶ Once again, specimens of these types have not been comprehensively published but examples are collated in Aliquot (2009: 328-329), with further images and references. Individual coin types are discussed in more detail below.

⁵⁵⁷ De Saulcy (1874: 47-48, No. 9): ΠΗΓΑΙ.

⁵⁵⁸ *LSJ*: πηγῆ. See further Dentzer-Feydy (1999: 543), Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet (2008: 95) and Aliquot (2009: 329).

by utilising the descriptions and drawings of the early-modern European travellers, including Richard Pococke and William John Bankes (**Figures 3.2.3** and **3.2.4**).⁵⁵⁹ Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy was the first to use these descriptions to propose a convincing reconstruction of the site's layout, which was later ratified by Julian Aliquot and Pauline Piraud-Fournet following their survey of the structural remains *in situ* in 2007 (**Figure 3.2.5**).⁵⁶⁰ The site seemingly spanned two levels, comprising a temple atop a platform and several structures clustered around the springhead below. The upper temple (structure *a* on **Figure 3.2.5**) – observed by both Pococke and Bankes, and still partially visible outside the pumping station (**Figure 3.2.6**) – once comprised a simple *pronaos* and a *cella* with a central niche in its back wall, presumably to hold a cult statue. The temple faced the structures below and its doorway shared the same alignment with a vaulted passage (*b*) from which the Ain el-Fijeh emerged. A curved wall connects this passage to two architectural features, both of which were noticed by Pococke and Bankes and later observed within the pumping station by Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet (**Figures 3.2.7** and **3.2.8**). Following the wall to the left of the vaulted passage, one first encounters a semi-circular niche (*d*) before arriving at a rectangular building (*c*) with multiple niches set into its back and longitudinal walls. The longitudinal walls also each have an opening and the building's façade once contained two narrow niches. Whilst no structural remains have been uncovered to the right of the vaulted passage, it is widely assumed that a similar niche

⁵⁵⁹ Pococke visited the site in 1737 and later published a description of the structural remains alongside illustrations and plans as part of his study of the wider region (1745: 135-156, Pl. 22 K-N). Bankes visited the Levant on several occasions in the early-nineteenth century but never published his observations; his notes and drawings are now in the Dorset County Archives – for an introduction to the Bankes archive, see Lewis *et al* (1996: 57-100, esp. 57-64). The archive includes a 'Plan of the antient Buildings about the fountain called Ain el Feegy 5 hours from Damascus', which has since been published by Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy (1999: 527-568). For a succinct overview of the site and its history of research, see Aliquot (2009: 324-329). The pumping station has since been damaged in the Syrian Civil War and the condition of the ancient site is currently unknown.

⁵⁶⁰ See further Dentzer-Feydy (1999: 542-544), and Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet (2008: 87-98).

and rectangular building were once installed there to preserve the overall symmetry of the site.⁵⁶¹

The installations on the lower terrace have been interpreted variously. Although Pococke identified the rectangular building as a temple, modern commentators regard the entire space to be a monumental water installation comprising various basins and niches, a hypothesis supported by several factors. First and foremost, numerous architectural fragments – including ornamental basins, monumental channels and column bases – could still be seen throughout the surrounding area in 2007.⁵⁶² More speculatively, Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet drew attention to the structural parallels between the lower terrace at Fijeh and the so-called ‘nymphaeum’ at Canatha, some 100km southeast of Fijeh and close to the sanctuary at Sia, whose associated storm-god we encountered in 2.3.⁵⁶³ The structure at Canatha is positioned below two temples and comprises a lower level in which water was stored and an upper level where statuary was probably displayed in its niches. Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet suggest that the rectangular building at Fijeh once had a similar water storage level, which has since been filled and paved over.⁵⁶⁴ The structures visible inside the pumping station today were thus once the upper level where both water and statues were displayed. Whilst I am more hesitant to reconstruct the layout of Fijeh in direct correlation to that of Canatha, it certainly seems likely that water had a ubiquitous presence in the lower terrace where, in keeping with the spring’s pragmatic importance, it was both displayed and stored. This interpretation is also bolstered by the discovery of a fragmentary

⁵⁶¹ This assumption is shared by Pococke (1745: 135), Dentzer-Feydy (1999: 544), and Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet (2008: 90-91).

⁵⁶² As observed by Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet (2008: 94, Fig. 12), who called for more fieldwork at the site – it is unknown whether any of these architectural elements have survived recent events.

⁵⁶³ 2008: 93-94. La Torre (2002: 205-226) identified the structure at Canatha as a ‘nymphaeum’, whereas Breitner (2002: 227-243) recognised the area as a ‘Quellheiligtum’. For a recent discussion of water and religious life in Canatha, see Freyberger (2017: 143-154, esp.148), who describes the structure as a ‘monumental cistern’.

⁵⁶⁴ 2008: 94.

Greek inscription inside the rectangular building that states, “For the health of Heliodoros and Theodoros, managers (...)”.⁵⁶⁵ As we have already seen at both Khirbet Tannur (2.3) and Palmyra (2.5), a ‘manager’ (ἐπιμελητής / *rb*) of this type could be involved in the religious activities associated with the spring, as well as being responsible for overseeing the proper management of its waters. On balance then, we can suggest that the water installations on Fijeh’s lower terrace once served both a practical and religious function – a proposal in keeping with the spring’s regional importance.

However, the current state of the remains at the site reveal little about the relationship between the upper and lower terraces or indeed how the space was once used. To address these matters, we need to return to the coinage mentioned earlier in this section. Four separate coin types appear in the third century AD, all of which seemingly depict the same structure from different perspectives.⁵⁶⁶ The most detailed type was issued during the reign of Macrinus (**Figure 3.2.9**) and features a religious complex that is remarkably reminiscent of Fijeh as reconstructed from the structural remains.⁵⁶⁷ A temple sits atop a platform and opens onto a staircase leading down to the waterside, where a river-god swims in front of a vaulted passage. Although this spatial organisation does not seem possible at Fijeh – after all, any steps leading from the front of temple on the upper terrace would obscure the tunnel from which the spring emerged – the coin images are most likely capturing the essence of how the space was used and are simply indicating that worshippers moved from the temple

⁵⁶⁵ Διὰ Ἡλιοδώρου καὶ Θεοδώρ[ο]υ ἐπιμελητ[ῶν]... For further discussion, see Aliquot (2006-2007: 123-126).

⁵⁶⁶ The first type was issued under Macrinus (AD 217-218) and is fully described in the main text. The second type (*LIMC* sv. ‘Chrysorroas I; b) Gelagerter Flußgott’, No. 11), from the reign of Elagabalus (AD 218-222), shows the temple from a frontal perspective and places it above a cave within which a river-god swims with a cornucopia. The third type (De Saulcy 1874: 47-48, No. 9), struck under Philip I, is remarkably similar to the second type but depicts Tyche – in her Antiochene form – within the cave and a Greek legend labels the site as ΠΗΓΑΙ. Finally, the fourth type (Aliquot 2009: 329, Fig. 213), probably from the reign of Gallienus, is similar to the first type but visualises the site from a different angle.

⁵⁶⁷ De Saulcy (1874: 42, No. 2).

to the waterside. To add to this, the type issued under Macrinus also features an altar located at the foot of the staircase at the water's edge, an image that invites us to imagine worshippers descending from the temple to make a dedication at the spring.

Combining both the numismatic and archaeological evidence, I think we can offer two tentative observations about the relationship between water and space at Fijeh. Firstly, similar to other sites we have already encountered, the spring was purposefully integrated into the religious complex. As at Caesarea Paneas, the water was an extension of the sanctuary itself. Secondly, we might also regard the construction of the sanctuary at the springhead of Ain el-Fijeh as a way of both identifying and amplifying the religious significance of the landscape. If Chrysorrhoas, the local river-god, was revered at Fijeh, then can we speculate that he was recognised by worshippers as being present within the spring's waters? It is tempting to propose that the religious complex at Fijeh was constructed to accommodate the water through which Chrysorrhoas manifested but the nature of the evidence prevents us from affirming this interpretation. However, if we turn to the Efqa Spring at Palmyra, we find ourselves on firmer ground.

The Efqa Spring, Palmyra

Leaving Fijeh, one descends from the lush valleys of the Anti-Lebanon mountains into the Plain of Damascus, which soon gives way to the Syrian steppe. From Damascus, one travels over 200km northeast across the Badia before reaching Palmyra. As we saw in 2.5, the ancient city owed its very existence to the presence of several springs, including the Efqa.⁵⁶⁸ The spring, located in the southwest corner of the city (as we know it), was a focal point

⁵⁶⁸ It is significant that Christine Delplace omits the Efqa in her recent discussion of Palmyra's religious topography and the spring only appears briefly in a discussion about the city's water supplies (2017: 130-131).

for cultic activity from at least the second century AD onward on account of its essential contribution to the city's sustained survival, as well as its potent sulphurous smell. At the springhead itself, numerous worshippers erected altars to several unnamed gods and Yarhibol was recognised as responsible for appointing the spring's 'manager' (*rb* / ἐπιμελητής). The site's religious significance is clearly palpable but spatial studies of the Efqa have remained speculative due to the absence of a readily identifiable temple and the ambiguity of the epigraphic record.⁵⁶⁹ Most tantalising is an altar discovered at the springhead itself that records the various buildings erected by one of Yarhibol's 'managers':⁵⁷⁰

During the term as manager of the spring, this one, Bolha, son of Hairan son of Ate'aqab Humal, whom Yarhibol the god had chosen, built this building of the spring, and the wall in front of the cistern house and the exterior wall and he built the wall of bricks (?), in the month of Nisan, the year 516 (April, AD 205)...

The precise meaning of this text has been widely debated,⁵⁷¹ but, for our present enquiry, it is noteworthy that one of these structures might have had a religious function. By applying the demonstrative pronoun, the altar's text invites the reader to recognise "this building of the spring," as the one in which they were standing or another proximate

⁵⁶⁹ In addition to the studies discussed below, it should be noted here that an archaeological survey, led by Cynthia Finlayson, of the area between the Efqa Spring and the so-called 'Temple of Bel' was in progress when the conflict in Syria began in 2011. Preliminary results from the project are yet to be published. I do not know the current status of the archaeological remains at the Efqa and its surroundings.

⁵⁷⁰ *PAT* 1919: [*b*]r**bnwt** 'yn' dy bwlh' br h^{yrn} br // 't'qb h^{wml} dy 'hd yr**hbw**l 'lh' // bn' bn^{yn} dnh dy 'yn, wkl' dy qd[m] // (bi) gb' wkl' dy br' w'bd ktl' dy // [l]bn' byrh nysn šnt 516... Trans. adapted from Kaizer (2002: 144). Cf. Milik (1972: 257), who reconstructed 1.4-5 as *ktl' dy [k]bn*, 'the wall of the enclosure', an interpretation favoured by Gawlikowski (1973: 115-116). The text is preserved on a small altar (0.90m x 0.60m) – see further al-Hassani and Starcky (1957: 111-114). Also relevant here is a fragmentary inscription uncovered in the Hellenistic foundations of the 'Temple of Bel' that refers to "the enclosed space of Yarhibol" (*PAT* 2774, 11: *dwr' dy yrhbw*l), which some scholars have tentatively equated to a religious structure at the Efqa – see further Gawlikowski (1973: 56-58) and Kaizer (2002: 144-145). Both items were last known to be in the Palmyra Archaeological Museum (Inv. A 1169 and A 304).

⁵⁷¹ Cf. e.g. al-Hassani and Starcky (1957: 111-114), Gawlikowski (1973: 115-116), Piacentini (2001-2002: 532-533), Kaizer (2002: 144-145) and Yon (2010: 97-106).

structure.⁵⁷² As a result, we can speculate that Bolha built at least one building in which it was appropriate to dedicate an altar, although we cannot assume that this structure was a temple. After all, as we have seen throughout this chapter, altars could be erected in a whole range of spaces, such that the presence of an altar does not necessarily equate to the presence of a temple or sanctuary. Indeed, I would stress that efforts to find a temple associated with the Efqa have in fact undermined attempts to recognise the springhead as a sacred space in its own right.⁵⁷³ Nevertheless, before we turn our attention to the spatial organisation of the spring, it is worthwhile for us to examine briefly two structures in the vicinity of the Efqa that are thought to be associated cultic buildings.

Firstly, a site some 30m west of the springhead set against the slopes of the Jebel Muntar has yielded several structural features. Archaeological excavations in the 1940s and 1960s revealed a large altar and the fragmentary remains of small building that Robert du Mesnil du Buisson recognised as a *cella*.⁵⁷⁴ The discovery of five altar bases – whose measurements were similar to several altars uncovered closer to the Efqa – prompted excavators to propose that the building was in fact the one built by Bolha and a temple dedicated to the so-called ‘Anonymous God’, a figure we encountered at the spring in **2.5**.⁵⁷⁵ Michał Gawlikowski later reviewed the material more cautiously and concluded that, although this earlier theory was not disproven, the identification of the building as a

⁵⁷² We can confidently attribute the masculine demonstrative *dhn* (cf. feminine *dh*) to the masculine noun *bnyn* (building) as opposed to the feminine *yn* (spring) – see further *PAT Glossary: bnyn*, *dhn* and *yn*.

⁵⁷³ Modern discussions of the site are marked by an inherent assumption that a sanctuary once existed at the Efqa, e.g. Drijvers (1976: 15), Teixidor (1979: 32), Kaizer (2002: 43) and Smith (2013: 63-64).

⁵⁷⁴ Dja'far al-Hassani and Jean Starcky briefly visited the site and noted the altar during their survey of the Efqa proper in 1947–1948 before du Mesnil du Buisson uncovered the small building in 1965 – see further respectively, al-Hassani and Starcky (1957: 118-120) and du Mesnil du Buisson (1966: 162-165). Neither study provides a plan of the site, although du Mesnil du Buisson (*ibid*: 164) records the façade of the *cella* as 6.67m in width.

⁵⁷⁵ Three altars bases were seen by al-Hassani and Starcky (1957: 118-120) and du Mesnil du Buisson (1966: 163-165) later uncovered two more.

temple associated with the Efqa could not be upheld by the extant evidence.⁵⁷⁶ For my part, I am in agreement with Gawlikowski and advocate that the available material does not permit us to draw firm conclusions about this building's relationship with the nearby spring.

A second candidate also came to light in the 1970s when, during the construction of a nearby hotel, a cluster of buildings with many fragments of stucco was uncovered to the east of the springhead.⁵⁷⁷ Although only preliminary sketches were made at the time of discovery, the architectural plan of the area has since been reconstructed by several scholars, who suggested that two buildings were associated with the Efqa.⁵⁷⁸ As marked on **Figure 3.2.10**, Building I lay 10m east from the Efqa and was orientated towards the staircase leading into the water. Building II, some 60m east of the springhead, comprised a series of rooms, including one with a niche set into its southern wall (Room C on **Figure 3.2.10**). As for the extant stucco fragments, the majority are decorative architectural elements commonly seen in Palmyrene domestic dwellings.⁵⁷⁹ However, one pilaster is decorated with the image of a crescent surmounted by the torso of a male figure (**Figure 3.2.11**), who Claudine Allag and Nicole Blanc have convincingly identified as Aglibol and proposed that the pilaster once flanked the niche in Building II.⁵⁸⁰ In light of the combined evidence, Allag and Blanc concluded that these buildings were likely part of a larger religious complex and individually constituted a temple or living quarters for cult personnel.

⁵⁷⁶ 1973: 117-119. In particular, Gawlikowski (*ibid*: 118) emphasises that “le caractère même du culte du dieu non nommé rend plutôt improbable l’existence d’un temple qui lui aurait été consacré en propre.” The absence of temples for Palmyra’s various unnamed gods has already been noted at **2.5**.

⁵⁷⁷ For comprehensive discussion of the site’s archaeological material, see Allag *et al* (2010: 191-227) with further bibliography.

⁵⁷⁸ A plan of the site has been produced by Claudine Allag, Nicole Blanc and Klaus Parlasca (2010: 197, Fig. 3a-b) based on sketches made by A. Taha during the original excavations, and in consultation with J. Seigne and T. Lepaon. For a discussion of the site’s architectural layout, see Allag *et al* (2010: 223-225).

⁵⁷⁹ For further discussion and images, see Allag *et al* (2010: 200-222).

⁵⁸⁰ Allag *et al* (2010: 214-217 and 224).

Nevertheless, we find ourselves in similar situation to that encountered with the structure west of the spring: although this interpretation cannot be disproved, the extant evidence does not allow us to reach firm conclusions. In particular, we lack an understanding of the wider landscape within which these buildings once operated, such that we truly cannot comprehend whether we dealing with part of a religious or domestic complex. Moreover, even if we were more confident in confirming the religious function of the buildings, we would still be unaware precisely what relationship – if any – they had with the Efqa. Building I may have been orientated towards the spring but there is nothing on the architectural plan to suggest that the building opened out towards its waters. As tempting as it may be, the existence of a standalone temple complex in association with the Efqa cannot be confirmed. Instead, we must return to the spring itself in order to appreciate the spatiality of religious life at the Efqa.

The site of the springhead was surveyed in 1947–1948 by Dja‘far al-Hassani and Jean Starcky and has not been subject to archaeological excavation since.⁵⁸¹ Although many structural features were still visible in the twenty-first century, the report produced by al-Hassani and Starcky is nevertheless invaluable to our reconstruction of the site in antiquity due to the environmental changes wrought by the diversion of the Efqa’s waters in the 1970s.⁵⁸² At the time of the original survey, the site centred upon the course of the spring itself, which emerged from an underground tunnel in the southwest corner of the site and

⁵⁸¹ For the results of the survey, see al-Hassani and Starcky (1953: 145-164 and 1957: 95-122, esp. 115-116). The site has since been discussed in light of these excavations by e.g. Gawlikowski (1973: 112-116), Kaizer (2002: 143-144) and Yon (2010: 97-106).

⁵⁸² During their survey, al-Hassani and Starcky observed that the spring was high enough to submerge some structural features, which could suggest that the water level was regularly lower in antiquity, the space was used seasonally or certain structures were purposely designed to lie in the water. Traditionally, the structures could not be dated with any certainty but their attribution to the second or third century AD was encouraged by the discovery of several altars at the site, some which were discussed in 2.5. However, Jean-Baptiste Yon has since published an inscription that likely records the dedication of a stone bench in April AD 122 – for further commentary, see *IJLS* XVII.1 No. 350.

flowed northeast (**Figures 3.2.12** and **3.2.13**). A wide (c.20m) staircase of 13 steps on the site's eastern flank provided access into the spring's waters and the various installations nearby. Crossing the spring bed, one encountered four grottoes carved into the rockface of the site's western flank. One particular grotto (Grotte 4 on **Figure 3.2.14**) was larger and more elevated than the others, and featured a niche carved into its back wall and a basin that opened onto the spring bed. At the southern end of the site from which the spring emerged, the remains of a pillar rose from the water and suggested that an artificial vault previously adorned the space. Beyond the vault lay another rock-cut grotto and a shallow recess recognised as a bench (Grotte 5 and the 'banquette' on **Figure 3.2.14**).⁵⁸³ At the northern end of the site, three stone slabs were set into the floor against the eastern flank to create a platform (d on **Figure 3.2.14**) and an inscribed statue base was uncovered nearby.⁵⁸⁴ The remains of two column bases on either side of the platform led al-Hassani and Starcky to suggest that a more complex structure, such as a portico, previously occupied the space.⁵⁸⁵ North of the platform, another pillar probably once formed a vault that joined with a natural curve in the western rockface to mark the end of the space (g on **Figure 3.2.14**).

Unlike the structures within the vicinity of the Efqa, we can make some confident observations about the spatiality of religious life at the springhead itself and conclude that the spring functioned as a sacred space in its own right on account of the religious significance of its waters. First and foremost, the structural organisation of the space testifies to the practice of crossing the water in order to engage in proximate cultic activities

⁵⁸³ Jean-Baptiste Yon (*JGLS* XVII.1 No. 350) has since recognised another bench at the site, rendered in a U-shape and located "quelques mètres après sa sortie du canal souterrain, rive est."

⁵⁸⁴ This very lacunose Greek text was probably once an honorific inscription – see further al-Hassani and Stracky (1957: 116), who reconstructed the text as "ses frais, en l'honneur de..." ([εξ]ιδίων εις τει[μῆγ...]).

⁵⁸⁵ 1957: 116.

– a theme we will encounter again in **3.3**. We can readily envisage worshippers descending the staircase and crossing the spring bed to reach the niches along the western rockface, where we can assume that altars were placed and libations poured. Thus, we might contemplate a religious mentality in which the activities conducted at the spring were intimately connected to acknowledging the prosperity afforded by its waters. This hypothesis is further supported by the nature of the gods associated with the Efqa: as we saw in **2.5**, the spring became a site of thanksgiving to various gods without names and was recognised as a place in which Yarhibol manifested before his worshippers. Whilst further investigations around the springhead might one day reveal a temple – or, as we saw at Caesarea Paneas, affirm that the spring was part of a larger sanctuary – I would conclude that the current evidence indicates a rather different situation. It was never deemed necessary to construct a temple at the Efqa because the gods associated with the site were already present at the spring itself. Worshippers did not need to construct a temple in order to communicate with these gods, they simply modified the ‘sacred landscape’ within which these divine figures manifested. In this way, the Efqa functioned as sacred space in its own right. If we turn now to the maritime landscapes of the Roman Near East, we will encounter a similar process of integrating the local environment into sacred spaces.

3.3 Coastal Sanctuaries: the Case of Caesarea Maritima

The coastal localities of the Roman Near East were home to many temples, sanctuaries and other sacred spaces but the relationship between these spaces and the sea is not necessarily clear. The site of Akko-Ptolemais – located on the coast some 50km south of Tyre – provides an illustrative example of the difficulties we can encounter when attempting to determine this relationship. Whilst we know remarkably little about religious life in Akko-Ptolemais, the numismatic record alludes to a significant sanctuary that may have been located close to the coast.⁵⁸⁶ A rare bronze coin issued in AD 220/221 features a reverse design of a magnificent vista centred on two temples. **(Figure 3.3.1).**⁵⁸⁷ A tetrastyle temple dominates the upper section of the scene and features a city-goddess under its central arch, flanked by Perseus holding Medusa’s head and armed Athena in the left and right niches respectively. A smaller, hexastyle temple lies beneath, containing Zeus in its central arch and several smaller, unidentifiable figures in the intercolumniations. A row of arches supports this hexastyle temple and the very bottom of the scene features a hatched pattern that might be interpreted as waves.

The possible depiction of waves, coupled with the presence of Perseus who had links to the marine sphere, could suggest that the coin portrays a sanctuary located close to the coast.⁵⁸⁸

At first glance, we could therefore interpret this coin as evidence for a connection between

⁵⁸⁶ On the history of Akko-Ptolemais, see *HJP* II: 121-125. The *Mishnah* (*Abodah Zarah* 3.4) records a noteworthy debate between Rabban Gamliel and Proklos on whether the baths at Akko-Ptolemais were an idolatrous space because they were adorned with a statue of Aphrodite. For text and translation, see Blackman (1954: 462-463); and for further discussion of this passage, Millar (1993: 267-269). Another religious tradition associated with the site’s river is briefly discussed in 4.3.

⁵⁸⁷ For discussion, see Kadman (1961: No. 178) and Syon (2010: 66, Fig. 72).

⁵⁸⁸ The stacked appearance of the temples also evokes the steep topography of Akko-Ptolemais, with several structures built up from the coast – see also a coin depicting the city’s acropolis issued under Elagabalus (Price and Trell 1977: No. 720, Fig. 515).

sacred space and the sea at Akko-Ptolemais: after all, the sanctuary might have been close to the sea and one of the gods who was seemingly worshipped there had nautical dimensions in their characterisation. Yet – even if we set aside the question of whether or not the hatched pattern does indeed depict waves – it is difficult to identify an explicit connection between sacred space and the sea on these grounds alone. Whilst coastal localities were home to a multitude of temples and sanctuaries, the simple proximity of such spaces to the sea does not solely predetermine nor evidence a firm relationship between these two zones. In a similar vein to our discussion in **2.4**, there is a distinction to be made here between sanctuaries located in coastal localities and coastal sanctuaries that actively incorporated the maritime realm into their sacred space. It is therefore worthwhile to consider, in brief, the spatial dynamics that underpinned patterns of worship conducted in relation to seafaring.

Identifying ‘coastal sanctuaries’

A significant proportion of the worshippers who interacted with coastal sanctuaries can be defined as seafarers who performed particular patterns of worship as a result of their maritime endeavours.⁵⁸⁹ We can divide these patterns of worship into two broad categories: ‘regular’ and ‘responsive’.⁵⁹⁰ The former encompasses regular rituals (including annual festivals) that were performed on both the ship and the shore at the time of embarkation and disembarkation, as well as throughout the journey. The latter pattern includes cultic activities performed in response to particular circumstances, including emergency

⁵⁸⁹ As noted in **2.4**, I apply here a broad definition to the term ‘seafarers’ to include the whole spectrum of people involved in a journey at sea, such as passengers, and not solely ‘sailors’ for whom seafaring was a profession.

⁵⁹⁰ There is a wide-range of scholarship on this topic, including: on Canaanite and Phoenician seafarers, Brody (1998); Jewish traditions, Patai (1988); and on ships as living entities and the subsequent demarcation of sacred space and the performance of religious activities at sea, Woolmer (2012: 238-252) and Rich (2012: 19-34 and 2017).

invocations during crises at sea and dedications made on land in gratitude for surviving a difficult journey. Regular rituals typically involved the invocation of divine protection by means of a libation, sacrifice or other religious celebration; and these same activities would also be undertaken in thanks following the completion of a voyage. For instance, Heliodorus recounts that Tyrian sailors held feast in honour of Tyrian Herakles both to thank the god for his erstwhile protection and to obtain a blessing for their forthcoming voyage.⁵⁹¹ Seafarers would also regularly make offerings at seaside shrines, which were typically situated on prominent, accessible headlands with freshwater sources and were thus practical stopping points.⁵⁹² As we have already seen in **3.1**, the cave at Hoq on the island of Socotra was probably such a stopping point, although Abgar's dedication was likely in response to his surviving a difficult voyage.

As for responsive patterns of worship, a dedication set-up at 'Sarapeion C' in Delos provides an extraordinary example.⁵⁹³ Inscribed on a marble plaque dating from c.130 BC, the brief but insightful text records, "On account of his deliverance, Demetrios of Sidon, son of Dionysios, dedicates a ship-deck to Anubis".⁵⁹⁴ Given that Delos was known for its seafaring difficulties in antiquity, it is entirely plausible that Demetrios was involved in a shipwreck nearby and thus dedicated some of the vessel's wreckage in gratitude for his

⁵⁹¹ *Aethiopica* 4.16. Also: Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.191-196), Thucydides (6.32.1-2), Diodoros Siculus (13.3.2), Strabo (3.5.5), Apoll. Rhod. (1.402-439), Valerius Flaccus (*Argon.* 1.188-191), Virgil (*Aen.* 3.548-9 and 5.768-778), and Arrian (*An.* 6.3.1-2).

⁵⁹² For an overview of such sites along the Levantine coast, see Brody (1998: 55-58). Also: Homer (*Il.* 8.238-240), Strabo (3.1.4) and Silius Italicus (*Punica* 2.580-583).

⁵⁹³ Aspects of religious life in Delos have already been discussed in **2.1** and **2.4**. For further discussion of Delos' maritime trade, see Rauh (1993).

⁵⁹⁴ *ID* 2100: Δημήτριος Διον[υσίου] Σιδώνι[ος] τὸ κατάστρωμα Ἀνούβιδι κατ[ὰ] πρόσταγ[μα]. The term *κατάστρωμα* has been interpreted primarily as 'pavement' (e.g. Grainger 1997: 315; *contra* Rouse 1902: 230); but I think a stronger case can be made for 'ship-deck'. Not only is *κατάστρωμα* used most frequently in nautical contexts (e.g. Hdt. 8.118; Thuc. 1.49 Pl. *Lach.* 184a), but the practice of dedicating ships was not without precedent in Delos. In the early-third century BC, a Neorion was constructed in the Sanctuary of Apollo to house a trireme (Wescoat 2005: 153-172).

survival.⁵⁹⁵ Such responsive practices were common-place across the Mediterranean.⁵⁹⁶ In particular, ships carried emergency ‘sheet-anchors’ designed to secure vessels when caught in storms and would later be dedicated to the god deemed responsible for the crew’s protection.⁵⁹⁷ This practice is well-evidenced in both Levantine sites and diaspora communities: multiple religious sites in Byblos contain votive anchors and, as we saw in **2.4**, at least six anchors have been discovered at sites across the Mediterranean inscribed with the name of Zeus Kasios.⁵⁹⁸ Moreover, several literary texts bear witness to the verbal invocation of gods during emergencies at sea.⁵⁹⁹

The above outline indicates that seafarers engaged in religious activities both on land and at sea, and alludes to a spatial dynamic in their patterns of worship, whereby certain spaces facilitated the performance of certain cultic activities. In light of this, we can begin to make confident reconstructions of how these worshippers potentially interacted with different spaces in order to assess the relationship between the sea and certain sacred spaces, including coastal sanctuaries. In particular, we can examine how spaces facilitated and encouraged the performance of cultic activities at the time of embarkation and disembarkation, and as part of maritime religious festivals. To this end, although there are various examples of temples in cities located along the Levantine coast, we shall focus our discussion on the Temple of Roma and Augustus at Caesarea Maritima and its associated religious installations because this space is not only the best-documented, but also the most-

⁵⁹⁵ As noted above in **2.4**, localised sea breezes converge unexpectedly around the headlands of the Cycladic islands during the summer – see further Morton (2001: 122-123).

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. e.g. Jonah 1.16, *Od.* 12.345-347, Appoll. *Argon.* 1.955-960, Plut. *Them.* 15.2, and Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.27.

⁵⁹⁷ On nautical votive offerings at Phoenician and Canaanite sites, including anchors, see Brody (1998: 39-54).

⁵⁹⁸ On the anchors found at Byblos, see Frost (1969: 425-424).

⁵⁹⁹ E.g. Silius Italica (*Punica* 14.458-461 and 14.436-440) and Jonah 1.5.

convincing example of a ‘coastal sanctuary’ that actively incorporated the maritime realm into its sacred space.

The Temple of Roma and Augustus, Caesarea Maritima

The site of Caesarea Maritima is located on the Carmel Plain of the Israeli coast, some 65km south of Akko-Ptolemais and 50km north of Iope. As we noted in 2.4, this particular stretch of coast is characterised by its remarkably straight topography and lack of natural harbours, such that seafaring conditions were especially challenging in antiquity. The absence of coastal indentations increases the speed and force of wave formations which, when coupled with the strong Sirocco wind pattern from the southwest, create rough seas that pose a considerable risk to vessels sailing off the coast.⁶⁰⁰ It appears that such seafaring difficulties were encountered in antiquity, as Josephus relates:⁶⁰¹

Caesarea Maritima lay at the mid-point between Dora and Iope, and all of these places along the coast were harbourless. As a result, all the ships sailing to Egypt along the Phoenician coast had to hold out whilst they were tossed in the sea by the southwest wind, because even a moderate, trifling breeze would rouse the waves towards the cliffs, causing a tumult of waves that made the sea the wildest of places.

However, in spite of these difficult seafaring conditions, Caesarea Maritima went on to become one of the most important ports in the eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁰² Although the site was occupied from at least the Hellenistic period, Herod the Great instigated a huge urban development programme in the late-first century BC, which included the construction of a

⁶⁰⁰ On wave formation and wave refraction, and ancient seafaring, see Morton (2001: 30-31).

⁶⁰¹ *BJ* 1.21.5/409-410: μεταξὺ γὰρ Δώρων καὶ Ἰόππης, ὧν ἡ πόλις μέση κεῖται, πᾶσαν εἶναι συμβέβηκεν τὴν παράλιον ἀλίμενον, ὡς πάντα τὸν τὴν Φοινίκην ἐπ’ Αἰγύπτου παραπλέοντα σαλεύειν ἐν πελάγει διὰ τὴν ἐκ λιβὸς ἀπειλὴν, ἧ καὶ μετρίως ἐπαυρίζοντι τηλικούτον ἐπεγείρεται κῦμα πρὸς ταῖς πέτραις, ὥστε τὴν ὑποστροφὴν τοῦ κύματος ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐξαγριοῦν τὴν θάλασσαν. See also, *AJ* 15.9.6/333-334.

⁶⁰² For a recent summary of Caesarea Maritima’s history, see *CIIP* II: 17-35.

grand temple overlooking a new harbour.⁶⁰³ Both archaeological and literary evidence suggests that the harbour was an especially innovative structure (**Figure 3.3.2** and **3.3.3**).⁶⁰⁴ Extensive breakwaters were installed on a northwest-southeast axis before curving up to run parallel to the coast and terminating at the harbour's entrance flanked by towers. The position of the breakwaters reduced the effects of the southwest wind by acting as a giant windbreak, creating a protective enclosure in which fleets of ships could lie at anchor close to the shore. Moreover, the northern position of the harbour's entrance meant that ships could enter or exit protected from the southwest wind by the harbour itself. All in all, the ingenious design of the harbour created a much-needed safe-haven for ships travelling along the coast of the Carmel Plain.

Alongside the harbour, Herod also apparently commissioned a large temple dedicated to Roma and Augustus. In particular, Josephus emphasises that the temple was situated on an artificial hill overlooking the harbour and that the structure was renowned for its grand proportions, which made the temple visible from the sea.⁶⁰⁵ The archaeological record neatly corroborates Josephus' testimony about the temple's size and location and adds several further details (**Figure 3.3.4** and **3.3.5**).⁶⁰⁶ Excavators surveyed a natural platform

⁶⁰³ Straton's Tower, the original name of Caesarea Maritima, first appears in a papyrus dated to 259 BC (*P. Cairo Zenon* 59004); although Josephus (*BJ* 1.21.5/408) says the site was dilapidated before Herod renovated it. The archaeological evidence seemingly supports this image: the only structures of Hellenistic date are small dwellings and graves (*CIIP* II: Nos. 18-19). On the building projects of Herod, see Roller (1998) and Kropp (2013: 315-341 and 344-357).

⁶⁰⁴ For final reports, see Oleson *et al* (1989 and 1994); and on the harbour in context, see Raban *et al* (2009). Josephus gives lengthy descriptions of the harbour (*AJ* 15.9.6/334-341 and *BJ* 1.21.6-7/411-414). Geoarchaeological surveys in the 1990s also concluded that the construction of the harbour transformed the local coastal environment into a low energy zone within a decade – see further Reinhardt *et al* 1994 (37-48).

⁶⁰⁵ *AJ* 15.9.6/338-339 and *BJ* 1.21.7/414.

⁶⁰⁶ Excavations were carried out at the site between 1989 and 2002 under the direction of Kenneth G. Holum. Although a definitive final report is still awaited, helpful syntheses of the site's development in light of the excavations include, Kahn (1996: 130-145), Holum (2004: 184-199, 2004: 184-199 and 2008a: 1666-1668), Richardson (2002: 11-34) and Patrich (2011: 19-21). The northwest façade of the temple platform, where it adjoins the harbour, is also discussed by Raban *et al* (2009: 145-150). Whilst the gods honoured in the temple are discussed in more detail below, it is worth noting here that no statuary was found at the site of the temple

overlooking the harbour and identified that it had been expanded and remodelled with large quantities of fill-soil before being encased with thick retaining walls. The platform took the shape of a slightly irregular square (c.90 x 100m) with two rectangular wings protruding northwest towards the harbour. Significantly, this platform was organised on an entirely different alignment to the grid-plan followed by the rest of the city and was instead aligned exclusively to the harbour. On top of the platform, excavators revealed the foundation layers of a large rectangular building (46.2 x 28.5m) with the remains of a colonnade that indicated a peripteral-prostyle temple once stood there. Nearby architectural fragments also suggested that the temple was constructed in the Corinthian order and rose to a height of 22m. Combined with the height of the platform on which the temple rested, the entire structure rose almost 34m above sea-level. The temple faced northwest towards the harbour and was presumably accessed by a grand staircase that swept up from the quayside. Moreover, excavators also uncovered the foundation layers of a significant (9.4 x 21m) Herodian-period structure at the quayside that lay on the temple's centreline and equidistant to the two wings of the podium. This structure was interpreted, convincingly, as an altar.

Several archaeological details are testament to the integration of the temple and the harbour, and suggest that we should approach this area as a single, coherent space not unlike a sanctuary.⁶⁰⁷ Firstly, the alignment of the temple and its platform to the harbour created a

itself. On the statuary of Caesarea Maritima, including statues discovered in the fountain built into the southwest side of the temple platform, see Gersht (2008: 509-538).

⁶⁰⁷ Thus, Holum (2004: 190): "Overall, the architecture emphasized a bond between temple and harbour that surpassed the links between temple and city. This was an unusual type of holy place, poised between land and sea." Significantly, other material indicates that the harbour area – and thus, the temple – was initially regarded as distinct from the rest of the city. Two individual series of bronze coins were issued in AD 42/43 (*RPC* I: No. 4985) and AD 69 (*RPC* I: Nos. 4862-4864) bearing the legend "Caesarea which is near the port of Sebastos" (ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙΑ Η ΠΙΡΟΣ [ΤΩ] ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩ ΛΙΜΕΝΙ) – see also, Barag (1996: 609-614). Josephus (*BJ* 1.21.7/414) also comments that Herod dedicated the city to the province and the harbour to the navigators of the open-sea. The later discontinuation of the coin legend suggests that the harbour and the city ceased to be distinct zones by the end of the first century AD. Also relevant here is an inscription erected in the second century AD by a certain Varius Seleucus, who referred to himself as the "curator of the ships of the colony

visible association between these two areas that was further augmented by their deviation from the grid-plan followed by the rest of the city. Moreover, this alignment indicates that the temple was designed to be viewed and accessed primarily from the sea and the harbour, rather than other locations in the city, and the internal organisation of the entire area also encouraged worshippers to interact with the space in a particular way. Although the temple platform could also be accessed by a small staircase on its southwest flank, the main access route was probably from the quayside itself. As a result, seafarers arriving at the harbour would have been prompted to approach the temple platform, or at least the altar located in front of it on the quayside. In particular, the location of the altar made it ideal for seafarers to perform cultic activities in thanksgiving for a successful voyage – a pattern of worship thoroughly evidenced across the ancient world. The performance of such activities would thus have served to consolidate the connection between the harbour and the temple and aided the fusion of these two areas into one distinctive space.

As well as contributing to the daily rhythm of religious life in Caesarea Maritima, the spatial organisation of the harbour and its temple would have facilitated the performance of a particular maritime festival that was possibly held in the city. The so-called ‘Isis Navigation Feast’ (*Navigium Isidis*) or ‘Launching of the Ships’ (τὰ πλοιαφέσια) was widely attested across the Mediterranean from the first century AD onwards and traditionally celebrated on 5th March to mark the start of the sailing season.⁶⁰⁸ Before we

of Caesarea” (*CIIP* II: No. 1266: κουράτορ πλοί[ω]ν κολ(ωνίας) Καισαρείας); Eck (2012: 242) associates this title with the Latin *curator navium* also seen at Ostia (e.g. *CIL* XIV 363-364, 409 and 4142). Whilst it is unclear whether this text firmly demonstrates that the harbour and the city were integrated by the second century AD, the harbour’s original conception as an individual entity for several decades after its construction remains noteworthy in the context of our discussion. According to Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.3.6-9), Maiuma, the harbour of Gaza, was also recognised as a separate entity in the fourth century AD.

⁶⁰⁸ The festival is called the *Navigium Isidis* in several Latin calendars, including: the early-first century AD *Menologium Rusticum Colotianum* and *Menologium Rusticum Vallense* (*CIS* I² p.358), and the so-called ‘Calendar of Philocalus’ produced in AD 354 (*CIS* I² p.338). The latter specifies that the festival was held on the 5th March, whereas the *Menologia Rustica* places it in March overall. The term τὰ πλοιαφέσια is applied

consider the extent to which such a festival was celebrated at Caesarea Maritima, we will examine Apuleius' lengthy description of the festival's performance at Corinth in order to get a sense of what activities this event might have included.⁶⁰⁹ Although Apuleius does not specify the date on which the Corinthian festival takes place, he stresses its springtime setting and indicates that seafaring was once again possible.⁶¹⁰

The mighty roar of the tempests was stilled and the boisterous swelling of waves subdued; the sea, now calm, lapped quietly against the shore. The sky too, its cloudy darkness dispersed, shone bare and clear with the brilliance of its own true light.

The festival then began with a sacred procession of priests and worshippers, who paraded through the city carrying images of gods (*deum simulacris*), offerings, instruments and torches down to the harbour.⁶¹¹ Upon arriving at the shore, the chief priest turned his attention to a life-size ship that had been constructed solely for the occasion.⁶¹² He purified the ship with sulphur, uttered prayers and dedicated the vessel to Isis before the worshippers loaded the ship with offerings and poured libations of milk mixed with grains into the waves. The ship was then untied and offered to sea. After watching the ship disappear over the horizon, the sacred procession reassembled and paraded to the nearby Temple of Isis, where a lector (*grammatea*) summoned the temple personnel. Standing atop a platform, the lector read several prayers from a book for the prosperity "of the great Emperor, the Senate,

by both Apuleius (*Met.* 11.17) and Lydus (*Mens.* 4.45), of whom the latter specifies 5th March as the date of the festival. For further discussion, see Bricault (2006: 134-150).

⁶⁰⁹ *Met.* 11.16-17, with 7-11. For a full discussion of Apuleius' description of the festival, see Griffiths (1975: 31-47), who proposes that the term πλοιαφέσια was a later amendment to the text.

⁶¹⁰ *Met.* 11.7: *Magnoque procellarum sedato fragore ac turbido fluctuum tumore posito, mare quietas alluvies temperabat. Caelum autem, nubilosa caligine disiecta, nudo sudoque luminis proprii splendore candebat.*

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.* 11.8-11.

⁶¹² *Ibid.* 11.16.

the knights, and the entire Roman people, for the sailors and ships under the rule of our world-wide empire,” before declaring the that sailing season was thus opened.⁶¹³

Several scholars have proposed that an ‘Isis Navigation Feast’ was also performed at Caesarea Maritima largely on the basis of a small detail in Eusebius’ *Palestinian Martyrs*.⁶¹⁴ The text, composed in the fourth century AD, recounts the earlier persecutions of Caesarea Maritima’s Christian community, including a certain Adrianus who was thrown to a lion on the 5th March, “which was regarded as the birthday of the Tyche of Caesarea.”⁶¹⁵ The act of feeding Christians to the lions was not a daily affair and the execution likely formed part of a wider celebration – possibly even the ‘sacred games’ held in honour of the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima as referenced on the so-called ‘Caesarea Cup’.⁶¹⁶ The celebration of Caesarean Tyche’s birthday on a day of maritime importance is entirely fitting: as we discussed in **2.1**, she was characterised as a protector of the seafaring community. Of course, we should acknowledge the not-unlikely possibility that the religious community at Caesarea Maritima honoured Tyche’s birthday with no reference to the ‘Isis Navigation Feast’, or indeed that their own celebrations to mark the re-opening of the sailing routes bore no resemblance to the Corinthian festivities as described by Apuleius. In fact, in light of our discussion in **2.4**, it would be entirely fitting that different localities celebrated the start of the sailing season in their own distinctive

⁶¹³ *Ibid* 11.17: *principi magno senatuique et equiti totoque Romano populo, nauticis, navibusque, quae sub imperio mundi nostratis reguntur.*

⁶¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Gersht (1996: 305-324), Belayche (2001: 183, n.108) and Patrich (2011: 83-88).

⁶¹⁵ *Mart. Pal.* 11.30: ...γενεθλίων τῆς κατὰ Καισάρειαν νομιζομένης Τύχης ἡμέρα. Joseph Patrich (2011: 84) also draws attention to the description of Isis at Caesarea Maritima – according to a papyrus that invokes Isis under her various guises at different localities (*P. Oxy.* 1380, esp.94-95) – as ‘Greek’ (Ἕλλας) and ‘good’ (Ἀγαθή), which he interprets as reflecting her equation with Tyche.

⁶¹⁶ This commemorative vessel depicts various religious scenes, including one in which several figures offer libations to a female figure who is labelled as ‘genius coloniae’ but visualised as the Tyche of Caesarea Maritima. The words ‘*agones ieroi*’ are inscribed above the scene in Latin letters – see further *CIIP* II: No. 1138. The cup was rendered in bronze and dated to the fourth century AD on stylistic grounds; it is now in the Musée du Louvre (Inv. No. Br 4391). For further discussion of the cup, see Will (1983: 1-24).

ways. But we might also balance this hesitation if we recall the design of Caesarea Maritima's temple and harbour, and thus take inspiration from Apuleius' description in our own reconstruction of how the religious community might have engaged with this space. We can readily envisage a sacred procession descending to the harbour and then making offerings in honour of the city's maritime protectress before a priest declared from the nearby temple that the sailing season was once again open. Whilst the evidence for a celebration of the 'Isis Navigation Feast' at Caesarea Maritima is fundamentally circumstantial, there is no doubt that its temple and harbour were ideally placed to facilitate the performance of such a festival. Whatever the case may be, we should appreciate that the Temple of Roma and Augustus and its associated harbour was intentionally designed to facilitate cultic activities associated with seafaring and, consequently, to integrate the maritime realm into the spatiality of religious life in the city. As we turn to the final section of this chapter, we will discover that the lakes of the Roman Near East could likewise inspire similar patterns of integration.

3.4 Lakes

The Roman Near East was home to a variety of lakes and marshy environments, of which some were associated with temples, sanctuaries or other sacred spaces. A Greek inscription uncovered at Gerasa – located in the Judaeen Highlands just under 100km east of Caesarea Maritima – provides a helpful starting point from which to discuss this topic. The text, preserved on a stone block of indeterminable function, records that a group of worshippers paid for the construction of a portico and a *λάκκος* – some sort of water feature – in honour of the goddess Artemis.⁶¹⁷ As the inscription was found in a secondary context, the original location of this structure is unknown and archaeological excavations across the city are yet to discover the remains of a likely candidate.⁶¹⁸ Consequently, the ways in which worshippers might have interacted with this *λάκκος* remain subject to speculation, although some scholars have interpreted this text in relation to the lake at Hierapolis as described by Lucian.⁶¹⁹ Whilst our own study must of course deal with the lake at Hierapolis, we will still see that different religious communities could interact with lakes and their environments in distinctive ways. Returning to the inscription from Gerasa, the terminology applied here is also significant to our enquiry. The term *λάκκος* carries various meanings, ranging from natural bodies of water such as lakes or ponds, through to artificial water features such as pools and cisterns.⁶²⁰ The text therefore draws attention to the difficulty of identifying such water features as natural or artificial, such that previous

⁶¹⁷ Welles (1938: No. 28).

⁶¹⁸ The text was dedicated in AD 79/80 and therefore pre-dates the main construction phase of the Sanctuary of Artemis during the Antonine period. It is uncertain whether a cultic complex – with or without a lake – existed before the construction of the sanctuary – for a summary of the debate, see Raja (2012: 176).

⁶¹⁹ E.g. Lichtenberger (2003: 207), and Lichtenberger and Raja (2016: 106-107). Indeed, Lucian's narrative often features in examinations of the region's lakes or pools, sometimes in cases when Atargatis' cult cannot necessarily be linked to the site under discussion – cf. e.g. Stucky (1997: 920) and Lichtenberger (2003: 218).

⁶²⁰ See further *LSJ*: *λάκκος*. By contrast, Lucian (*Syr. D.* 45-47) applies the term *λίμνη* in his discussion of the water feature at Hierapolis, which can refer to both natural and artificial pools of water. Also relevant here is the Latin term *lacus*, which can denote natural lakes, artificial pools, basins or marshy depressions, such as the Lacus Curtius in Rome – see further *Lewis&Short*, *sv. lacus*.

research has often simply focused on artificial pools located in sanctuaries rather than considering the environments themselves.⁶²¹ The Roman Near East was certainly home to several sanctuaries that featured prominent artificial pools: as we will touch on in **4.3**, the Sanctuary of Eshmoun incorporated a pool overlooked by an empty throne and a shallow rectangular pool (8.4 x 4.35m; 0.5m deep) once lay in the centre of the courtyard in the Temple of Artemis at Dura-Europos.⁶²² Yet, instead of focusing on such examples, this section hopes to demonstrate that the diverse lakes and marshy landscapes of the Roman Near East inspired a variety of responses from different religious communities, many of whom then purposefully organised their sacred space in relation to the local environment.

Myth and landscape at Ascalon

Leaving Caesarea Maritima and travelling 115km southwards along the coast, past Andromeda's Rock at Iope (**2.4**), one eventually reaches Ascalon. Yet, despite being located on the coast, the spatiality of religious life at Ascalon was influenced far more by its freshwater sources. The site is not situated close to any permanent rivers, nor are its annual precipitation levels especially high; instead, Ascalon's inhabitants took advantage of the high water-table that characterises the Pleshet Plain of the Levantine coast (**Figure 3.4.1**).⁶²³ In antiquity, wells were used to extract clear water throughout the year and, during the winter, rainwater filtered down from the Judaeen Mountains along ephemeral underground channels and permeated the surface of the plain around Ascalon.⁶²⁴ Additionally, the site's ridged topography was responsible for creating localised lakes as the rising water became concentrated in the valleys and an archaeobotanical survey has also

⁶²¹ E.g. Kamash (2010: 159-166). Lightfoot (2003: 489-490) discusses the lake at Hierapolis almost exclusively in relation to artificial pools.

⁶²² See further *Rep* (III: 4-8) and Downey (1988: 89-92).

⁶²³ On Ascalon's topography and annual rainfall levels, see Koucky (2008: 11-12).

⁶²⁴ On Ascalon's wells, see Lass (2008: 107-126) and Nir (2008: 105-106).

confirmed that the site was once home to various wetland species.⁶²⁵ Although modern water diversion has effectively drained the site of natural lakes, various early travellers to Ascalon attest to a lush site scattered with wells, cisterns and reservoirs.⁶²⁶ As a result, the ancient landscape of Ascalon can be reconstructed as a wetland environment with the capacity for lake formation and, as we will now see, this natural setting had a clear influence on the spatiality of religious life in the city.

Our extant material on Ascalon's religious life is indicative of the city's long history and multicultural milieu;⁶²⁷ but we will focus in particular on a myth that likely arose in response to the local environment and how the city's main sanctuary complex seemingly incorporated this feature into its sacred space. Writing in the first century BC, Diodorus Siculus cites a description of Ascalon purportedly attributed to Ctesias, a physician from Cnidus who was later based in the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, in the late-fifth century BC.⁶²⁸ He recounts that "not far from Ascalon is a great and deep lake, filled with fish. Next to the lake is the precinct of the famous goddess, whom the Syrians call

⁶²⁵ See further Koucky (2008: 13) and Weiss *et al* (2011: 591-613).

⁶²⁶ In particular, see Conder and Kitchener's account (1883) of their surveys in the area, with plans, and their responses to earlier Crusader-era descriptions. For an overview of early exploration at Ascalon, see Schloen (2008a: 143-152). On post-Byzantine changes to Ascalon's environment, see Koucky (2008: 11-15); and Weiss *et al* (2011: 605).

⁶²⁷ Herodotus (1.105) places the oldest temple of Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon, whilst Pausanias (1.14.7) says the Phoenicians of Ascalon established her cult after the Assyrians and the Paphians. Ascalon's extant religious inscriptions are minimal (*CIIP* III: Nos. 2321-2331); more illuminating is a second-century BC altar dedicated in Delos by an Ascalonite banker to "Astarte, the Palestinian Aphrodite Ourania" (*ID* 1719: Αστάρτη Παλαιστινῆι Ἀφροδίτῃ Οὐρανία.). Archaeological missions have provided some insight (cf. e.g. Garstang 1924: 24-35; and Fischer *et al* 1995: 121-150); but ongoing excavations, though confirming the site's long occupation, are yet to uncover a temple (Stager *et al* 2008) – for a succinct overview of previous excavations, see Schloen (2008b: 153-163). Coins feature figures identified as Aphrodite, "Phanebal", an unknown "Egyptianising" deity and a city goddess ("Derketo?") accompanied by doves and a triton (cf. e.g. *BMC Palestine*, Nos.1-4; 74-80; 201-205; 192-201); a reverse design of a sanctuary, discussed in more detail below, appeared on coins issued under Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus and Elagabalus (*ibid* Nos.191, 230-231 and 245).

⁶²⁸ For a recent discussion of Ctesias' life and works, including a full translation of his fragments (with commentary), see now Nichols (2008).

Derceto”.⁶²⁹ Apparently, this goddess had the head of a woman and the body of a fish. Ctesias’ gives the following reason for her form: Aphrodite had punished Derceto by making her fall in love with a Syrian youth and, following a shameful pregnancy, Derceto flung herself into Ascalon’s lake where she transformed into a fish. Before immersing herself in the lake, Derceto had abandoned her unwanted daughter; but Ctesias goes on to narrate that the infant was rescued by doves and later became the Assyrian queen Semiramis. The author concludes that Syrians purportedly honour doves and fish as a result of this myth.

Ctesias’ account, via Diodorus, is a potentially rich source for various aspects of religious life at Ascalon and the Roman Near East overall;⁶³⁰ but we will concentrate on the spatial dimensions of the myth, namely the lake and the lakeside precinct. First and foremost, the Derceto myth must be appreciated as a conscious and direct response to Ascalon’s marshy environment, and the significance of this interpretation is underlined further if we situate this local episode within its wider mythological context. Various scholars have quite rightly drawn attention to the parallels between Derceto’s plunge into the lake at Ascalon and Ino-

⁶²⁹ Diod. Sic. 2.4.2-6 (=BNJ 688 F1b): Κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν τοίνυν ἔστι πόλις Ἀσκάλων, καὶ ταύτης οὐκ ἄπωθεν λίμνη μεγάλη καὶ βαθεῖα πλήρης ἰχθύων. παρὰ δὲ ταύτην ὑπάρχει τέμενος θεᾶς ἐπιφανοῦς, ἣν ὀνομάζουσιν οἱ Σύροι Δερκετοῦν. Other sources also corroborate the location of this myth at Ascalon: a dove motif features on Ascalon’s coins issued between at least the second century BC and the early-third century AD (cf. e.g. *BMC Palestine*, Nos.1 and 237); and Xanthus of Lydia relates that a goddess – this time, Atargatis – “was captured by Mopsus of Lydia and was plunged, in front of her son, Ichthys, into the lake near Ascalon because of her wantonness, and she was devoured by the fish” (in Ath. 346e (=BNJ 765 F17a): ...ὑπὸ Μόψου τοῦ Λυδοῦ ἀλοῦσα κατεποντίσθη μετὰ Ἰχθύος τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐν τῇ περὶ Ἀσκάλωνα λίμνῃ διὰ τὴν ὕβριν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἰχθύων κατεβρόθη). Eratosthenes (*Catast.* 38) tells a similar story: Derceto is saved by the fish when she falls into the lake at Hierapolis, where she is called the Syrian Goddess. The interchangeability of the names ‘Derceto’ and ‘Atargatis’ attracted attention in antiquity: Strabo (*Geo.* 16.4.27), describing Atargatis, says Ctesias calls her Derceto; and Pliny (*HN* 5.19/81) says that the Atargatis worshipped at Hierapolis is called Derceto by the Greeks. Cf. Lucian (*Syr. D.* 14), who says that the image of Derceto in Phoenicia is half-woman, half-fish, whereas that of Atargatis in Hierapolis is all woman. For the purposes of our present enquiry, we ought to accept that the figures described by Ctesias and Xanthus are ultimately the same goddess due to their shared involvement in a specific and localised myth. For further discussion on the various links between Derceto, Atargatis and other goddesses, see Lightfoot (2003: 351-357).

⁶³⁰ For the passage’s significance on e.g. sacred fish ponds, see above 1.2 and Lightfoot (2003: 65-72); and Semiramis and doves, see *ibid* (351-355).

Leucothea's jump into the sea at Corinth but we should also recognise a further dimension here.⁶³¹ As we noted in 2.4, the Ino-Leucothea myth sits within a broader category of mythemes about women who, usually in association with a shameful pregnancy, either jump or are pushed into the sea.⁶³² Often, the women (and their children) are saved by divine intervention and/or undergo a life-saving transformation. In particular, Esther Eidinow has convincingly highlighted that the sea plays several important roles in this mytheme: the sea is an appropriate place to cast out 'fallen women' because it is a place of no-return; its waters cleanse the pollution of illegitimate and transgressive acts; and, conceptually, it functions as a liminal space that facilitates transitions between life stages.⁶³³ Immersion into the sea is clearly an essential component of this mytheme.

As a consequence, placing the Derceto myth within this context rather prompts us to wonder, why did Derceto throw herself into the lake instead of the sea? After all, Ascalon was a coastal city so a marine plunge was perfectly plausible. Given that the theme of immersion persists between these myths, and following Eidinow's emphasis on the particularly cleansing properties of sea water, perhaps Ascalon's lake was deemed to have similarly purifying qualities – but our evidence enables little more than speculation. Instead, it seems that the lake setting of the Derceto myth arose primarily from Ascalon's local environment, such that the myth developed from and became attached to a specific location at the site. We have already observed similar patterns of development and

⁶³¹ Cf. e.g. Fontenrose (1951: 125-148); Lightfoot (2003: 70-72); and Finkelberg (2006: 105-121). The Corinthian myth is narrated by Pausanias (1.44.7).

⁶³² E.g. Bolina cast herself into the sea to escape an amorous Apollo (Paus. 7.23.4); Rhoeo was thrown by her father into the sea in a chest after conceiving Apollo's child, but the chest washed up at Delos (Diod. Sic. 5.62); Asteria rejected Zeus' advances, so he turned her into a quail and flung her into the sea (Hyg. *Fab.* 53); and Auge was condemned by her father to be drowned after she was raped (Paus. 8.47.4 and 8.48.7).

⁶³³ This topic was examined by Eidinow in a research paper, 'Did She Jump or Was She Pushed? An Exploration of Greek Mythemes,' held in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University on 12th February 2015. This research is due to be published as part of wider research project in the future. See also, Lindenlauf (2003: 416-433) and Patton (2007: 55-78).

attachment between myth and place at various sites in Chapter Two – particularly at Iope (2.4) – and we should reiterate here that these patterns attest to the importance of the myth giving organisation to the landscape and the landscape giving authority to the myth.

According to Ctesias, the religious community commemorated this myth by establishing a sanctuary alongside the lake. Although Ctesias' account is the only explicit reference to Derceto's lakeside precinct, a particular coin design struck during the reigns of Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus and Elagabalus might provide some further insight.⁶³⁴ The design depicts a series of four gateways – suggesting that they lead one beyond the other – and thus evokes a temple set within a significant sanctuary complex (**Figure 3.4.2**). A sanctuary of this scale might certainly have the capacity to accommodate the lake as described by Ctesias but such a proposal is purely speculative: not only are we unable to attribute the building on the coins to Derceto but also one wonders why the lake was omitted from the design if it was an essential component of the goddess' local cult. Even so, whilst the nature of our evidence prevents us from determining precisely how the city's religious community might have organised the lake into a distinct sacred space, the mythological traditions inspired by Ascalon's marshy landscape bear witness to the incorporation of the local environment into the spatiality of religious life. However, as we stressed in 3.1, such landscapes were not inherently sacred: certain features of the environment might readily be associated with particular mythological traditions and regarded by worshippers as indicative of divine presence within the landscape, but the transformation of such environments into a sacred space required a certain degree of intervention from the

⁶³⁴ Cf. *BMC Palestine* (Nos.191, 230-231 and 245). Additionally, Auguste de Forbin (1819: 141-142) visited Ascalon during his tour of the Levant in 1817-1818 and observed the ruins of a building he labelled as the temple of Venus. Apparently, he saw the remnants of capitals, marble friezes and forty columns hewn from rose granite, all of which rose above a large open vault within which a lake might be plausibly located.

religious community. Indeed, if we turn to Yammoune, we will see how a religious community might construct sacred spaces in such a way that purposely integrated features of the local environment.

The lakeside temple at Yammoune

Leaving Ascalon and travelling some 350km northwards along the Mediterranean coast, past Andromeda's Rock at Iope and beyond Berytos with its cult of Poseidon (2.4), one eventually reaches Byblos and the outlet of the Nahr Ibrahim (2.2). Turning east, one then treks 50km through the Lebanon Mountains – past the river's source at Aphaca – before reaching the site of Yammoune in the northern Beqa. Yammoune sits in a fertile valley between Jebel Mnaitra and Jebel al-Qalaa on the eastern flanks of Mount Lebanon and, until the early-twentieth century, its entire southern quadrant was home to a seasonal lake (Figure 3.4.3).⁶³⁵ Previously, the lake formed every year when snow-melt from Jebel Mnaitra poured down the mountainside to merge with water from the Ain Arbain on its lower slopes. Consequently, the lake would begin to take shape in March, swell to a depth of up to 10m and then be fully dry again by the autumn. Another wondrous feature also contributed to its annual aeration: a giant sinkhole. Located in the lake's southeast corner, local residents previously witnessed large quantities of water being swallowed by the sinkhole each year;⁶³⁶ and more recent scientific research has revealed that the entire valley rests on a karstic network characterised by extensive underground drainage systems.⁶³⁷ As we will see, both of the lake's peculiar characteristics – its seasonality and its sinkhole –

⁶³⁵ Underground ducts were installed in the early 1930s to transport water to the Beqaa plain and thus reduced the size of the lake. For an overview of the environmental context at Yammoune and the history of the lake, see Develle *et al* (2010: 868-869). It is also noteworthy that Yammoune takes its name from the classical Arabic 'little sea' – see further *ibid*, Vikentiev (1949: 78) and Pope (1955: 72-77).

⁶³⁶ The sinkhole was first reported by Burton and Drake, who visited the site in 1871 (1872: 136-137).

⁶³⁷ See further Develle *et al* (2010: 865-886).

have captured the imaginations of visitors to Yammoune throughout history. The significance of the sinkhole will be dealt with shortly; for now, our focus will be on the seasonality of the lake.

We know very little about ancient Yammoune: a milestone indicates that the site was under the jurisdiction of Baalbek/Heliopolis from at least AD 213 but nothing is otherwise known about its socio-political composition.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, we can deduce from archaeological evidence that the lake was a contributing factor in the development of Yammoune's religious life. The fragmentary remains of a temple on the western side of the valley at the base of Jebel Mnaitra caught the attention of several early European travellers before being surveyed briefly in 1903 by Daniel Krencker and Willy Zschietzschmann (**Figure 3.4.4**).⁶³⁹ The temple is situated within a large rectangular enclosure, some 60-80m in length, and faces eastwards towards the lake. The exact internal organisation of the temple could not be deduced, but at least one part of the building was 2.31m above the ground level of the enclosure and was therefore accessed by steps. A block belonging to a staircase was later discovered at the site.⁶⁴⁰ In 1936, Vladimir Vikentiev visited Yammoune on his way to Baalbek/Heliopolis and noted the significant height of the ruins, such that the structure was known to locals as the 'fortified-castle' (**Figure 3.4.5**).⁶⁴¹ Subsequent clearances of the site have not been comprehensive, although some ventures have uncovered architectural and sculptural details, including a statue of a seated goddess recognised as Heliopolitan Venus on the basis of her iconography.⁶⁴² Instead, based on the current state of the excavations,

⁶³⁸ *IGLS* VI: No. 2918.

⁶³⁹ E.g. Renan (1864-1874: 303ff) and Burton and Drake (1872: 136ff). For brief discussion and a sketched plan of the remains, see Krencker and Zschietzschmann (1938: 38-39).

⁶⁴⁰ See further Aliquot (2009: 281).

⁶⁴¹ 1949: 76.

⁶⁴² The temple was partially cleared again by M.H. Kalayan in 1966, during which a double horseshoe-shaped vault was uncovered; but no further comment is made on the overall layout of the site – for a summary, see Saidah (1967: 158). The statue of Heliopolitan Venus was seemingly found *in situ* in a niche by local residents before being removed in 1995 – for further discussion, see Fiex (2008: 255-270) and Kropp (2010: 241-243).

we must utilise earlier travel accounts to understand better the function of the temple within the landscape.

In 1860, Ernest Renan visited Yammoune and observed both the remains of the temple and the annual inundation of the lake.⁶⁴³ Significantly, when the torrent was pouring down the mountainside, he saw “une petite île artificielle...au milieu de sources dont les eaux vives l’entourent de toutes parts” on which the ruins of the temple were situated.⁶⁴⁴ A similar situation was also witnessed by G. Blanche in the 1890s, when the temple apparently became “comme un îlot isolé dans ce lac à une petite distance de la rive.”⁶⁴⁵ Finally, based on visits in the 1930s, Vladimir Vikentiev also reports that the temple was liable to be surrounded periodically by the seasonal deluge created by the snow-melt and the Arbain spring.⁶⁴⁶ Although we cannot ascertain whether these accounts fully mirror the ancient situation at Yammoune, the observations of Renan, Blanche and Vikentiev certainly suggest that the temple temporarily became part of the lake. Even if these three accounts are dismissed as cases of extreme years when water levels were unusually high, the lakeside position of the temple and its proximity to the water sources that filled the lake still alludes to the structure’s deliberate integration into the hydrological environment.

A limestone statuette of a male figure with a sheep-symbol on his cloak was also discovered at the site and has since been recognised as Heliopolitan Mercury on iconographic grounds (Doumet-Serhal *et al* 1998: No.45). An undated dedicatory inscription to the god ‘Heresem’, preserved on an altar with two headless busts, was also purportedly discovered at Yammoune but the original find-spot is unknown (*JGLS* IV: No. 2916). For a recent synthesis of research at the site, see Aliquot (2009: 281), with further bibliography.

⁶⁴³ 1864-1874: 303-309.

⁶⁴⁴ 1864-1874: 305-306.

⁶⁴⁵ Cited in Vikentiev (1949: 76).

⁶⁴⁶ 1949: 76-77. Vikentiev’s original visit to Yammoune took place at the end of August, when the lake had almost dried up; he then persuaded Paul Bobrovsky to return in March 1937, whereupon he photographed the inundation of the site – *ibid*: Plates III-V. The temple cannot be confidently identified in these images.

Then again, it might be overly cautious to reject these accounts outright. Whilst we cannot reconstruct fully the temple's architectural form and layout, the details we do possess are suggestive. Firstly, the height of the ruins, as observed by Krencker and Zschietzschmann, and Vikentiev, indicates that the temple had the physical capacity to be surrounded – but not overwhelmed – by the annual inundation. Moreover, the staircase could facilitate two access routes: it provided access to the temple from the ground level during the dry phase, whilst also enabling immersion into the water during the wet phase. The lack of extensive excavations prohibits a scrupulous reconstruction of the cultic activities undertaken here; but, in light of the architectural details discussed thus far, it is tempting to suggest that the lake could act as an extension of the temple's sacred space and thus played a role in the structure's associated rites. As we will soon see in the case of Hierapolis, the architectural organisation of the lake necessitated that worshippers interacted with the space in a particular way, whereby they had to enter the water in order to reach the altar situated in the middle of the lake. If the temple at Yammoune was indeed surrounded by water, then worshippers would likewise be required to enter the lake in order to interact with the space. Moreover, the absence of an altar amongst the ruins of the temple could suggest that the lake itself functioned as the 'surface' on which ritual offerings were presented; and one particular text, Zosimus' *New History*, could indeed refer to such a practice.

As we outlined at the beginning of this section, another feature of Yammoune's lake was its giant sinkhole and I believe that this distinctive environmental feature encourages us to examine Zosimus' description of a particular lakeside festival in light of the local landscape. In doing so, this evidence can offer us a potential, albeit conjectural, insight into the relationship between the lake and sacred space at Yammoune. Writing in the sixth century AD, the historian Zosimus describes a temple located c.15km southwest of

Yammoune on the other side of Jebel Mnaitra at Aphaca, that was located “near a lake that resembled an artificial tank.”⁶⁴⁷ According to Zosimus, the account of whom is our only source for this particular festival, people would gather every year to deposit gifts in honour of the local goddess. If the goddess accepted the gifts, and thus showed favour to the worshipper, then the items would sink to the bottom of the lake; if she rejected the items, the gifts would float on the surface of the lake.⁶⁴⁸ Several scholars have previously proposed that Zosimus’ account would be located more convincingly at Yammoune as opposed to Aphaca;⁶⁴⁹ but we can further augment this argument with reference to lake’s distinctive geology rather than its mere presence. Zosimus’ comment that this honorific deposition took the form of an annual festival lends itself to the yearly inundation of Yammoune’s lake and we also know that the lake’s sinkhole was capable of sucking in large quantities of water and that the lake would dry out every year. Therefore, Yammoune has the geological composition for offerings to either disappear down a sinkhole or reappear when the lake dries out. Considering Zosimus’ description in light of Yammoune’s architectural remains, the location of the temple within the lake itself would have amplified the performance of such an activity precisely because the lake could function as an extension of the temple’s sacred space. In turn, the cultic act of casting offerings into the lake would have underpinned this interconnectivity by augmenting the lake as a site of worship.

⁶⁴⁷ *New History* 1.58 (Paschoud 2000/Budé: 50, with 174-175): πλησίον λίμνη τις ἔστιν εὐκοῦια χειροποιήτω δεξαμενῇ. As we noted in 2.2, a temple was apparently erected in honour of Aphrodite and Adonis close to Aphaca’s springs.

⁶⁴⁸ Damascius (*Philosophical History* 135; Athanassiadi 1999: 302-303) describes a similar practice of votive deposition at a watery chasm near the Decapolis city of Dion – see further Kropp and Mohammad (2006: 125-144, esp. 129 and Fig. 5).

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. Renan (1864-1874: 306), Vikentiev (1949: 78-9), Pope (1955: 76-81) and Butcher (2003: 460). *Contra* Rouvier (1900: 172) and Soyez (1977: 6, n.10).

The case of Yammoune therefore expands on two themes that were alluded to at Ascalon. Firstly, we can detect a clear process of integration between lake and sacred space: whilst the precise nature of the lakeside sanctuary at Ascalon was indeterminable, the temple at Yammoune was constructed in such a way that it ostensibly became part of the seasonal lake. Secondly, the process of immersion appears in association with both sites: Derceto's plunge into the lake was a key component of the Ascalonite myth and, at Yammoune, the design of the temple seemingly necessitated that worshippers swam out to it where they then cast votive offerings into the water as part of an annual festival. Both of these themes – the integration of lakes into sacred spaces and the necessity of immersion – will now come into even more focus when we turn to the sacred lake at Hierapolis.

The sacred lake at Hierapolis

The starting point for any discussion of Hierapolis' sacred lake ought to be Lucian's description of the space and the cultic activities undertaken there:⁶⁵⁰

There is also a lake in the courtyard of the sanctuary, not very far from the temple, in which many kinds of sacred fish are reared. Some of the fish are very big: these ones have names and come when they are called. In my time, one of these many fish was wearing golden ornaments. A golden device was fastened on its fin – truly, the fish really did wear this because I beheld it many times. (46) The depth of the lake is great. I did not test it for myself, but they say that it is more than two hundred fathoms. In the middle stands a stone altar. If you saw it, you might suddenly

⁶⁵⁰ *Syr. D.* 45-47: Ἔστι δὲ καὶ λίμνη αὐτόθι, οὐ πολλὸν ἐκάς τοῦ ἱεροῦ, ἐν τῇ ἰχθύες ἱεροὶ τρέφονται πολλοὶ καὶ πολυειδέες. γίνονται δὲ αὐτῶν ἔνιοι κάρτα μεγάλοι· οὗτοι δὲ καὶ οὐνόματα ἔχουσιν καὶ ἔρχονται καλεόμενοι· ἐπ' ἐμέο δὲ τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖσι χρυσοφορέων. ἐν τῇ πτέρυγι ποίημα χρύσειον αὐτέφ' ἀνακέατο, καὶ μιν ἐγὼ πολλάκις ἐθεησάμην, καὶ εἶχεν τὸ ποίημα. (46) Βάθος δὲ τῆς λίμνης πολλόν. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἐπειρήθην, λέγουσι δ' ὅτι καὶ διηκοσίων ὀργυρίων πλέον ἔμμεναι. κατὰ μέσον δὲ αὐτῆς βωμὸς λίθου ἀνέστηκεν. δοκέοις ἂν ἄφνω ἰδὼν πλώειν τέ μιν καὶ τῶ ὕδατι ἐποχέεσθαι, καὶ πολλοὶ ὧδε νομίζουσιν· ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ στυλὸς ὑφειστέως μέγας ἀνέχειν τὸν βωμόν. ἔστεπται δὲ αἰεὶ καὶ θυώματα ἔχει, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐκάστης ἡμέρης κατ' εὐχὴν ἐς αὐτὸν νηχόμενοι στεφανηφορέουσιν. (47) Γίνονται δὲ αὐτόθι καὶ πανηγυρίες τε μέγισται, καλέονται δὲ ἐς τὴν λίμνην καταβάσεις, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῇσι ἐς τὴν λίμνην τὰ ἱρὰ πάντα κατέρχεται. ἐν τοῖσιν ἡ Ἥρη πρώτη ἀπικνέεται, τῶν ἰχθύων εἵνεκα, μὴ σφέας ὁ Ζεὺς πρῶτος ἴδηται· ἦν γὰρ τότε γένηται, λέγουσιν ὅτι πάντες ἀπόλλυνται. καὶ δῆτα ὁ μὲν ἔρχεται ὀνόμομος, ἡ δὲ πρόσω ἰσταμένη ἀπειργεῖ τέ μιν καὶ πολλὰ λιπαρέουσα ἀποπέμπει.

presume that it was floating and was carried by the water, and indeed many believe it to be; but I rather suppose that a big pillar supports the altar from below. The altar is always garlanded and burns incense. Every day, many people wearing wreaths swim out to it in accordance with a vow. (47) Magnificent festivals take place there and these are known as ‘descents to the lake’ because, in them, all the holies themselves go down to the lake. During these festivals, Hera arrives first for the sake of the fish, lest Zeus see them first; because, if he ever did see them, they say that all the fish would be killed. And he certainly does go to see the fish, but Hera sets herself in front of him and sends him away with many rebuffs.

As we noted in **1.2**, this notoriously complex text necessitates that we carefully assess its evidential value and we will begin by placing Lucian’s description of the lake itself within Hierapolis’ environmental and archaeological context.⁶⁵¹ Hierapolis lies some 400km northeast of Yammoune: leaving the temple and its ephemeral lake, one ascends north past Baalbek/Heliopolis before following the path of the Orontes River, whose course we discussed in **2.2**. Continuing north through the ancient Syrian Tetrapolis, but not as far as Cyrrus and its beautiful bridges, one bears east and passes Aleppo before reaching Hierapolis just over 20km west of the Euphrates. Today, the northerly position of the site grants it just enough rainfall to undertake rain-fed agriculture, but reasonably high levels of annual variability probably prompted the ancient construction of the site’s numerous aqueducts, which will be discussed in more detail shortly.⁶⁵² However, although we can assume that ancient Hierapolis had adequate water resources to sustain the kind of lake described by Lucian, the precise form of this lake and its associated religious installations is somewhat harder to fathom.

⁶⁵¹ We should also mention here the sanctuary at Amrith – just south of Arados on the Phoenician coast – that was founded in the sixth-century BC and featured a monumental altar at the centre of an artificial lake – see further Dunand and Saliby (1985). For a comparison of the site with Hierapolis, see Lightfoot (2003: 491).

⁶⁵² Hierapolis is located on the cusp between the 200-300mm and 300-400mm ranges of annual precipitation and rainfall variability is 25-50% in both zones – see further *Tübinger* A.IV.4. On Hierapolis’ aqueducts see, Vivancos (2002-2003: 275-283 and 2006: 249-253).

The site of Hierapolis in the modern town of Mambij has never been fully excavated (**Figure 3.4.6**). Nevertheless, the cumulative results of previous archaeological investigations, primarily concentrated around Mambij's civic park, allude to the existence of a religious space with an associated body of water. Lucian's description of Hierapolis' lake is one of the most evocative sections of his *On the Syrian Goddess* and the passage has thus fuelled the imaginations of those various travellers who have since searched for the great water feature at the modern town of Mambij. Several such travellers purportedly found the sanctuary and its lake, but these accounts often diverge on the finer details. Henry Maundrell visited the site in 1697 and observed a deep hole, c.90m wide, fed by subterranean channels and surrounded by the ruins of large buildings.⁶⁵³ Richard Pococke seemingly saw a smaller pool and ruins when he travelled there in 1737.⁶⁵⁴ Sometime later, in 1907, Franz Cumont observed a pool, c.100m wide, and what he believed to be a temple due to the architectural and sculptural fragments found nearby (**Figure 3.4.7**).⁶⁵⁵ David George Hogarth recorded several noteworthy features at the site during his expedition in the spring of 1908: he recalls a large pool of over 12,000m² that, according to the locals, was perennial and particularly deep in its centre (**Figure 3.4.8**).⁶⁵⁶ The pool was surrounded by steps leading into it and Hogarth also noted several sculptural fragments, including a lion statue and terracotta figurines. Finally, Gertrude Bell, visiting just a few years later, noted a large pool with traces of steps.⁶⁵⁷

Whilst we should certainly remain sensitive to the possibility that Hierapolis' ruins were viewed through a 'Lucianic lens' and thus, consciously or otherwise, exaggerated, a more

⁶⁵³ 1823: 131-132 (reprinted; originally published in 1703).

⁶⁵⁴ 1743: 166-167. Pococke also notes various aqueducts across the city (*ibid*).

⁶⁵⁵ 1917: 36-38, Fig. 9.

⁶⁵⁶ 1907/1908: 186-189.

⁶⁵⁷ 1911: 21. Bell also notes several underground canals that brought water to the city (*ibid*: 20).

recent archaeological survey convincingly corroborates the existence of the lake. Between 1989 and 2000, the Spanish Archaeological Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic carried out numerous surveys in and around Mambij.⁶⁵⁸ The results demonstrated that Hierapolis was fed by two major aqueducts and that the water was then dispersed via underground channels to different locations across the city, including the civic park. In addition, various hydro-architectural fragments were documented at the civic park and a 22.2m long wall made of limestone ashlar was recorded and subsequently interpreted as the remains of a pool (**Figure 3.4.9**). Thus, we must acknowledge that the architectural fragments documented from 1697 through to 2000 attest to the remains of a religious structure alongside a significant water feature. Taking everything into consideration, we are encouraged to conclude that a sanctuary with an accompanying water feature existed at Hierapolis on the site of Mambij's civic park. More specifically, the evidence firmly suggests the site was originally home to a perennial lake – as the travellers' accounts imply – and, following the urban development of Hierapolis, the natural lake was delineated by walls and supplemented with water supplied by the aqueducts. Now, we can turn once again to Lucian's narrative to consider how Hierapolis' religious community interacted with this space and place these traditions within their wider context.

We shall focus our attention on two particular sections of Lucian's account: the daily swim out to the altar in the middle of the lake and the festivals in which the cult statues were paraded down to the lakeside. As we have already seen at Yammoune, certain architectural compositions could stipulate that the worshipper engaged with a sacred space in a particular way. So, in the case of Hierapolis, placing the altar at the centre of the lake entirely

⁶⁵⁸ For full results, see Vivancos (2003 and, in brief, 2006: 249-253). On the relationship between water and religious life at Hierapolis in light of these surveys, see *ibid* (2007: 383-400 and 2015: 199-211).

predetermined that accessing the altar necessitated entering the water, and the steps allegedly observed by Hogarth and Bell would of course aid this entry. Thus, this essential act of immersion would have been deemed an integral component of the act of worship. Lucian's comments – that the altar is *always* garlanded and burning incense, and that many people swim out to it *every day* – also underscore the constancy of this interaction between worshipper and space: the consistent flow of worshippers entering the water and swimming out to the altar contributed to the daily rhythm of religious life at the sanctuary. A further spatial dimension would also contribute to this rhythm. The lake's location within the sanctuary courtyard would have demonstrated unequivocally that the lake was fully incorporated into the sacred limits of the sanctuary.⁶⁵⁹ Moreover, the physical performance of the 'descents to the lake' festivals, in which the cult statues were carried from the temple to the lakeside, would reinforce this connection between two sacred spaces. Thus, the lake, its architectural installations and its position within the sanctuary wholly stipulated how worshippers interacted with the space.

Whilst the act of swimming out to the lake was a daily occurrence, the 'descents to the lake' were more intermittent. According to Lucian, such festivals involved Hera and Zeus – or, rather, Atargatis and Hadad – themselves travelling down to the lakeside where, as J.L. Lightfoot has since persuasively proposed, they were likely washed in its waters.⁶⁶⁰ This proposal hinges on two bodies of evidence. Firstly, the tradition of carrying a cult statue down to a local waterside to be washed was not without great precedent.⁶⁶¹ Perhaps the most important example of this practice, in relation to Hierapolis, is the purported washing

⁶⁵⁹ Lucian uses the locative *αὐτόθι* to describe the lake's location, which arguably refers to the sanctuary's courtyard that he was describing prior to the lake (*Syr. D.* 41). See also *ibid* (52-53) on the spatial regulations applied to Hierapolis' sanctuary, reinforcing its conceptualisation as a distinct space.

⁶⁶⁰ 2003: 491-494.

⁶⁶¹ For overviews of statue washing in myth and cult, see Dillon (2002: 132-136) and Weddle (2010: 45-73).

of Roman Cybele's cult statue in the Almo, a tributary of the Tiber.⁶⁶² Given Cybele's Phrygian origins, various scholars have advocated a link between Hierapolis and this particular cleansing rite, implying that both traditions are affirmed by their emergence from a similar milieu.⁶⁶³

More convincing, however, is the second body of evidence, also emphasised by Lightfoot: both Pliny and Aelian relate a myth about a goddess bathing in the sweet-smelling spring at the source of the ancient River Aborras, the modern Nahr Khabur and a tributary of the Euphrates.⁶⁶⁴ Aelian also specifies that tame fish swim there and that the goddess, named as Hera, took her bath after she married Zeus. Lightfoot has subsequently postulated that a statue-washing ritual at Hierapolis could have developed from this myth.⁶⁶⁵ We can further underscore this proposal with reference to Lucian's comment about Hera repelling Zeus' advances in relation to the mythical trope of a man witnessing a nude goddess bathing and being punished as a result.⁶⁶⁶ Such myths were often cited alongside descriptions of statue-washing festivals by way of explaining how and why different localities performed these acts. For instance, Callimachus' fifth hymn evokes the elaborate statue-washing ceremony of Athena Pallas at Argos, including the stipulation that only women may conduct the ritual because men will be blinded if they see the naked goddess.⁶⁶⁷ This warning is then justified with reference to a local myth about Tiresias, in which he is blinded because he accidentally

⁶⁶² See further Ovid (*Fasti* 4.337-340), Arrian (*Tactica* 33.4) and Arnobius (*Adv. Nat.* 7.32). *Contra* Cassius Dio (48.43.5), who says she was cleansed in the sea.

⁶⁶³ E.g. Hörig (1984: 1547); and Lightfoot (2003: 492-3, n.22).

⁶⁶⁴ *HN* 31.22/37 and *NA* 12.30. Pliny calls the goddess Juno.

⁶⁶⁵ Lightfoot (2003: 493-494).

⁶⁶⁶ E.g. Diana and Actaeon (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.4; Diod. Sic. 4.81.3-5; Ovid *Met.* 3.177f; Paus. 9.2.3; Hyg. *Fab.* 180 and 181).

⁶⁶⁷ *Bath of Pallas* 78. The equation of unclothed cult-statues with naked goddesses, and the subsequent necessity for such washing to be carried out by women alone, is well-attested in the Graeco-Roman world – cf. e.g. Euripides (*IT* 1029-51 and 1157-1233), *LSCG* (154b 17-32 and 39, with Paus. 1.22.3) Ovid (*Fasti* 4.133-144) and Plutarch (*Vit. Alc.* 34.1-2). See also, Tacitus (*Germ.* 40) on the washing of Nerthus in a lake that then engulfed the goddess' slaves.

sees Athena Pallas bathing.⁶⁶⁸ As her husband, Zeus should of course be able to view Hera's bath unpunished; but perhaps Lucian's narrative is an enticing insight into a Hierapolitan tradition, borne from local myth and grounded in mythical trope, that prohibited men from gazing upon the naked goddess of Hierapolis.

Nevertheless, our sources for statue-washing at Hierapolis and Hera's bath in the Aborras draws attention to a further facet of the lake's spatial significance. If a statue-washing ritual did take place during these festivals, and if these rituals were stimulated by a local myth in which the goddess bathed at a local river, then we have to consider the lake at Hierapolis as a recreation of that mythological environment. Aelian identifies two particular qualities about the place where Hera took her bath and both of these are mirrored in Lucian's description of Hierapolis. Firstly, tame fish swam in both the Aborras and the lake. And, secondly, the beautiful and, crucially, pervasive scents that surrounded the Aborras were mirrored at Hierapolis: the sanctuary exhaled an "ambrosial odour" that struck you from a distance and lingered on your clothing long afterwards, such that the smell remained with you forever.⁶⁶⁹ Taken together, both aspects suggest strongly that the lake at Hierapolis and its surroundings were devised to evoke the original setting of the myth. The 'descents to the lake' and the ritualised washing of Atargatis' statue would serve to augment this evocation of the landscape and, in turn, the lakeside setting would have granted legitimacy

⁶⁶⁸ *Bath of Pallas* 57-133.

⁶⁶⁹ *Syr. D.* 30: ὀδμὴ ἀμβροσίη. Pliny too emphasises the Aborras' sweet smell (*HN* 31.22/37). Lightfoot (2003: 432-433) briefly notes the correlation between the three accounts to demonstrate that fragrance was considered a divine attribute – on smell, gods and cult in the wider ancient context, see Weddle (2011: 25-71) and Clements (2014: 46-59). Whilst Hierapolis is certainly not the only instance of a sanctuary possessing a distinctive scent, other evidence implies that Atargatis' cult had a particular association with smell. As noted by Lightfoot (*ibid*), an inscription uncovered at Mambij refers to a Hierapolitan λιβανόμεντις, an incense diviner (Seyrig 1939: 303-4); and a dedication of θυμιαματήριον and λιβανωτίς was made in Delos at the sanctuary of the Syrian gods (*ID* 2225). All in all, the cumulative evidence cautions us against dismissing Lucian's sensory comments as mere literary trope.

to the performance of the cultic act due to its evocation of the myth from which the act was derived.

If indeed the sanctuary at Hierapolis purposefully evoked the natural environment in which Atargatis' mythical bath was set, then we must, finally, recognise the significance of the water itself. Deliberately taking Atargatis to be washed by the lakeside emphasises that that particular act can only be undertaken with that specific body of water. This emphasis is also witnessed in other narratives on statue-washing in the ancient world: Roman Cybele is specifically taken to the Almo and, elsewhere, Samian Hera is purposely cleansed in the sea during the Tonaia festival.⁶⁷⁰ Indeed a similar emphasis is witnessed at Yammoune where the religious community was obliged to cast their offerings into the lake if they wanted to communicate with the goddess. The activities at Hierapolis and Yammoune therefore attest to the importance of using designated bodies of water to perform specific patterns of worship, which, as we will now see in Chapter Four, constitutes the final component of the relationship between water and religious life in the Roman Near East.

⁶⁷⁰ Athen. *Deip.* 672e (=BNJ 541 F1).

Chapter Four: Patterns of Worship

In addition to the ‘descent to the lake’, Lucian describes another water-based festival at Hierapolis and equates its performance with a particular mythological tradition. As we touched upon in 2.1, one of the foundation myths in circulation at Hierapolis maintained that Deucalion established a temple there at the end of the great flood.⁶⁷¹ According to Lucian, the Hierapolitans claimed “that a great chasm appeared in their country and swallowed all the water,” such that Deucalion erected altars and a temple over the chasm in honour of Hera.⁶⁷² Lucian then adds that the Hierapolitans commemorated this myth by celebrating a bi-annual water-pouring festival.⁶⁷³ Both the sanctuary’s priests and worshippers from across the region would travel to the coast and fill vessels with sea-water.⁶⁷⁴ They would then return to Hierapolis, have their vessels inspected by the sacred cock and finally pour out the sea-water inside the temple where it drained into the chasm.⁶⁷⁵ For the Hierapolitans, Deucalion had been the first to establish this tradition in order to commemorate both the flood and the goddess; by Lucian’s time, it seems that they celebrated the festival as a means by which to re-enact and honour the mythological foundation of their sanctuary.

⁶⁷¹ *Syr. D.* 13. Lucian also describes “the story that the Greeks tell” (λόγον ἐν Ἑλλησιν ἤκουσα) of Deucalion and the deluge: the earth produced a great flood in order to punish an earlier race of men but Deucalion, a pious man, survived by building an ark for his family and many animals (*ibid* 12). For further commentary on these passages, see Lightfoot (2003: 335-351). Both traditions clearly sit within the wider flood mytheme – for a summary of the variants of this mytheme in the ancient Mediterranean, see *DDD* and *EJ* ‘Noah’, and *OCD* ‘Deucalion’. The most pertinent literary passages relating to this mytheme are collated by López-Ruiz (2014: 63-108).

⁶⁷² *Syr. D.* 13: ὅτι ἐν τῇ σφετέρῃ χώρῃ χάσμα μέγα ἐγένετο καὶ τὸ σύμπαν ὕδωρ κατεδέξατο.

⁶⁷³ *Syr. D.* 13. As we will see in 4.2, Lucian also mentions that Apollo ordained when these festivals took place (*ibid* 36).

⁶⁷⁴ *Syr. D.* 13. Lucian adds that the ‘standard’ (σημήϊον) also made the bi-annual journey to the sea (*ibid* 33). Similarly, Pseudo-Meliton narrates that a certain Simi, daughter of Hadad, was ordered to collect water from the sea and cast it into the well at Hierapolis (*Oratio* 9). For further discussion of the possible links between these two passages, see Drijvers (1980: 93-95) and Lightfoot (2003: 335-337 and 2007: 98-99).

⁶⁷⁵ *Syr. D.* 13 and 48.

Following our discussions in Chapter Three, we can now readily recognise several connections between water and sacred space within Lucian's narrative. The watery chasm stood as testament to the events of Hierapolis' mythological past and worshippers consequently took inspiration from this environmental feature in their comprehension of the sacred landscape – a practice that we noted at, for instance, Ascalon in 3.4. Accordingly, much like the crevice at Jebel Haroun in Petra (3.1), the Hierapolitans also incorporated the chasm into the sanctuary and thus amplified the religious significance of the local environment. The bi-annual water-pouring festival therefore served to bring myth, environment and sanctuary into alignment: as Lucian specifies, the Hierapolitans performed this festival to commemorate the mythological events that culminated at the chasm and led to the foundation of the sanctuary. Moreover, as indicated by the prescribed journey to the sea, the use of sea-water was essential to the faithful commemoration of the myth and we might reasonably assume that the Hierapolitans regarded this water as representative of the flood waters that once drained away into the chasm. Thus, Lucian's narrative also introduces us to the foundational premise of Chapter Four, namely: that both the physical and metaphysical qualities of certain water sources informed the patterns of worship with which they were associated.

4.1 The Physicality of Cult

In this chapter, I analyse the use of water in patterns of worship by examining the significance of the local environment in the performance of certain cultic activities. In doing so, I propose that worshippers developed certain patterns of worship in accordance with the physical and metaphysical qualities of the water sources with which they conducted these activities. In this introductory section, I aim to indicate the ubiquity of water-based patterns of worship across the Roman Near East and highlight their religious

significance in light of particular environmental conditions. I will then present a focused case-study on the Maioumas Festival at the Birketein in Gerasa to demonstrate how we might approach the often problematic material relating to patterns of worship in the Roman Near East and also to justify why this chapter is best organised around patterns of worship rather than water types. Throughout this introduction, I hope to show an awareness of the challenges we face when attempting to understand patterns of worship in this region, particularly with regard to comprehending the religious mentalities that informed these traditions and activities.

Cleansing and pouring

Patterns of worship – that is, a series of cultic activities undertaken as means of engaging with the divine realm for a particular purpose – involving water were performed across the Roman Near East with remarkable prevalence and variety. Water could be consumed during ritual banquets at which worshippers gathered to honour the gods or the dead through ceremonial feasting.⁶⁷⁶ Although this tradition is attested across the region, our richest evidence is found in Palmyra and Petra where multiple banqueting halls and their associated inscriptions bear witness to a variety of practices.⁶⁷⁷ Elsewhere, water played a role in votive deposition when worshippers chose to make offerings to the gods by casting

⁶⁷⁶ Although ritual banquets were often associated with the (excessive) consumption of wine, it seems entirely plausible that water was also drunk either on its own or mixed with wine. Also relevant to this discussion is an inscription – composed in Palmyrene Aramaic and erected in Palmyra by a self-declared ‘Nabataean’ (*nbty*) – that refers to god who does not drink wine (*PAT* 0319). In light of both this text and the claim of Diodorus Siculus (19.94) that the Nabataeans of Petra did not drink wine, several scholars have speculated whether some communities in the Nabataean Kingdom abstained from alcohol – cf. e.g. Teixidor (1979: 86), Dijkstra (1995: 109) and Alpass (2013: 232-233). For a summary of ritual banqueting across the Levant, see Dvorjetski (2016: 17-39).

⁶⁷⁷ For a detailed discussion of the most pertinent material from Palmyra, see Kaizer (2002: 220-234); for a more recent study of this topic in light of the tesserae, see Raja (2015: 181-199). For syntheses of this much-studied phenomenon at Petra, see Healey (2001: 165-169) and Alpass (2013: 232-233), with further references.

them into certain bodies of water.⁶⁷⁸ As we saw at Yammoune in 3.4, the local environment could inform the development of such practices: the lake's giant sinkhole could cause votive offerings to disappear, an action purportedly indicative of the goddess' approval. Finally, water could also feature in extraordinary cultic acts. For instance, an unparalleled Greek inscription, preserved on a marble block, from the site of Ain el-Bourj on the eastern slopes of Mount Hermon records that a certain Neteiros "was entombed in a cauldron."⁶⁷⁹ Given that this much-debated text also comprises a dedication to Leucothea, most scholars have interpreted Neteiros' internment as somehow connected to the goddess' fabled boiling of her son, Melicertes – although precisely what religious mentalities were at work here remain indeterminable.⁶⁸⁰ In any case, these brief examples highlight that water could appear throughout the cultic landscape in various ways.

However, the use of water in cultic activities was most ubiquitous in two particular patterns of worship: cleansing oneself prior to engaging with the divine sphere and pouring libations. As for the first category, facilities suited to cleansing are represented widely in the archaeological record of sanctuary complexes throughout the Roman Near East. For instance, large pools were discovered in the temple courtyards of the Sanctuary of Bel at Palmyra and the Sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus at Baalbek/Heliopolis;⁶⁸¹ and smaller

⁶⁷⁸ For a summary of votive deposition in the Roman Near East, see Kamash (2010: 174-175). On a related note, Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.4) comments that worshippers cast various offerings into the well next to the sacred oak at Mamre – see further Belayche (2001: 96).

⁶⁷⁹ *IGLS* XI: No. 39: ἀποθεωθέντος ἐν τῷ λέβητι. The term ἀποθεώω is more commonly used to describe the ritual drowning of an animal for sacrificial purposes, although such a meaning seems unlikely here. Rather, its application in this instance probably refers to a burial. For an overview of the various interpretations of this peculiar text, see accompanying commentary in *IGLS* and Bonnet (2015: 351-354). The block is now in the Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, Brussels (Inv. A 1622).

⁶⁸⁰ For a summary of the debate, see accompanying commentary in *IGLS*.

⁶⁸¹ At in Palmyra, a pool was once preserved in the southwest corner of the temenos; and in Baalbek/Heliopolis, two large (6 x 19.8m) pools were located on the north and south sides of the temple courtyard. For a summary of the architectural layouts of both sanctuaries, see Segal (2013: Nos. 13 and 20). I do not know what damage might have been done to the pools when the 'Temple of Bel' was destroyed in August 2015.

basins have also been found within temple enclosures at Petra and Eshmoun, amongst others.⁶⁸² Fountains also appear close to or as part of religious complexes at Caesarea Maritima, Gerasa, Palmyra and Sia, although the religious function of such structures is uncertain.⁶⁸³ The spatial arrangement of these water features suggests that worshippers were required to cleanse themselves prior to entering the temple proper and participating in cultic activities, but we can only speculate what religious mentalities underpinned these practices.

The practice of cleansing is well-attested in the Graeco-Roman world, where it is intimately connected to notions of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’.⁶⁸⁴ Worshippers were expected to engage with their gods in a ‘pure’ state, such that they were required to remove particular sources of ‘pollution’ by following certain regulations, including cleansing. We encounter several allusions to similar traditions in the Roman Near East. For instance, Lucian comments that if a Hierapolitan worshipper sees a corpse they may re-enter the temple only after ‘purifying’ themselves.⁶⁸⁵ Contact with the dead was a well-documented source of

⁶⁸² Basins are found in association with numerous cultic complexes at Petra, including several ‘high-places’ (3.1). A Nabataean Aramaic inscription inscribed alongside a tomb located on the el-Meisrah records that a basin was dedicated to the god Ilah al-Gai (Alpass 2013: 102, No. 16). The water installations at Eshmoun are discussed in 4.3.

⁶⁸³ At Caesarea Maritima, a fountain was built into the western flank of the platform on which the Temple of Augustus and Roma stood (Patrich 2011: 110-111). The fountain at Gerasa forms part of the city’s central colonnaded street and is located next to the entrance of the Sanctuary of Artemis (Raja 2012: 162 and 176-177). At Palmyra, a fountain was established at the eastern end of the colonnaded street, such that worshippers passed it before approaching the ‘Temple of Bel’ (Richard 2012: 273). A fountain formed part of the first courtyard at Sia (Dentzer-Feydy 2015: 316-317, Fig. 23.8). On the region’s fountains in general, see Richard (2012).

⁶⁸⁴ Scholarship on the subject of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ is vast. In general, Douglas (1966) is yet to be surpassed. For the Greek world, Robert Parker’s *Miasma* (1983) remains the essential study and significant contributions have been made more recently by Chaniotis (2012: 123-139), Robertson (2013: 195-244), and Petrovic and Petrovic (2016). Studies of the Roman world are comparatively limited: see now, Lennon (2014), with Hume (2015). Discussion of the Jewish tradition is immense and summarised effectively in *EJ* ‘Ritual Purity and Impurity’. Bradley (2012: 11-40), and Frevel and Nihan (2013: 1-46) also provide general overviews of developments across disciplines.

⁶⁸⁵ *Syr. De.* 53. Similarly, Malalas (*Chron.* 11.9/275) purports that, following an earthquake in Antioch, Trajan sacrificed a virgin girl “for atonement and purification of the city” (ὕπερ λύτρου καὶ ἀποκαθαρισμοῦ τῆς πόλεως) and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.12.8; cf. Sozomen *Church History* 5.19) mentions that the emperor Julian relocated the bodies buried around the springs at Daphne and performed the same rites as those used by the Athenians to purify Delos.

pollution in the Graeco-Roman world, where the term applied by Lucian, καθαίρω, also encapsulated both spiritual purification and physical cleansing.⁶⁸⁶ Similarly, as we noted in 2.1, a Greek inscription discovered in the ‘Sanctuary of the Syrian Goddess’ at Delos dictates multiple entry conditions: worshippers had to cleanse themselves before entering the temple and those who had eaten pork were required “to ritually bathe” (λούω).⁶⁸⁷ The text also declares that worshippers could not enter the temple for a particular number of days after they had been engaged in certain activities, such as sexual intercourse, menstruation or eating fish. However, despite their appearance at a sanctuary devoted to *the* Syrian goddess, cultic regulations of this nature are otherwise unattested across the Roman Near East. Indeed, an inscription from Palmyra provides the closest parallel: the text, composed in Palmyrene Aramaic, was uncovered in the Temple of Allat and commands, “May A[llat] bless anyone who will not shed blood in the sanctuary!”⁶⁸⁸ The inscription was carved on the paw of a beautiful lion sculpture that once formed part of the sanctuary’s walls (**Figure 4.1.1**). Whilst we have no reason not to accept this epigraphic command at face-value and assume that bloodshed was a prohibited within the sanctuary enclosure, we cannot necessarily deduce that blood was regarded as a source of pollution like it was in the Graeco-Roman tradition.⁶⁸⁹ Moreover, the inscription does not indicate what, if anything, worshippers ought to do before entering the temple if they had indeed come into contact with some form of blood. Thus, whilst the scant evidence does reveal some allusions to Graeco-Roman traditions of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’, we can only

⁶⁸⁶ The Graeco-Roman evidence is discussed at length by Parker (1983: 32-73) and Lennon (2014: 136-166). *LSJ*: καθαίρω.

⁶⁸⁷ *ID* 2530.

⁶⁸⁸ *PAT* 1122: *tbrk* '[lt] mn dy l' yšd dm 'l hgb'.

⁶⁸⁹ On the interpretation of this text and sculpture, cf. e.g. Drijvers (1982: 69-70), Gawlikowski (1990: 2641), and Kaizer (2002: 169-170). The sculpture once stood at the entrance to the garden of the Palmyra Archaeological Museum. On blood as a pollutant in the Graeco-Roman tradition, see Parker (1983: 104-143) and Lennon (2013: 90-135).

speculate what it meant for worshippers in the Roman Near East to interact with the gods in a cleansed state.

Nevertheless, the archaeological record demonstrates that cleansing was a key part of religious life in the Roman Near East and, in one particular case, we can explore the role of the natural environment in the religious experience of cleansing and thus contemplate the physicality of the water in this pattern of worship. As we saw in **3.1**, archaeological excavations at Caesarea Paneas indicated that the springhead of the Ain Baniyas was architecturally manipulated to form a pool below the sanctuary terrace. This architectural arrangement suggests that worshippers cleansed themselves at the pool before entering the sanctuary proper. Whether this cleansing act involved hand washing, anointing or even full-body immersion, several features of the local environment would have probably influenced the experience of such an activity. The Hula Valley, which was covered with stagnant marshlands in antiquity, is just 5km south of Caesarea Paneas.⁶⁹⁰ Moreover, both the sanctuary and the valley lie in the rain shadow of Mount Hermon, such that heat hovers over the area and creates an airless atmosphere. As a result, cleansing oneself in the waters of the Ain Baniyas would have been an invigorating experience, particularly due to the oppressive heat of the surrounding environment. This activity would have been all the more refreshing because the spring was fed by snow-melt, resulting in cool, clear and refreshing waters.⁶⁹¹ Consequently, it is possible that both the particular environmental setting and the physical qualities of the water amplified the effectiveness of the cleansing act and thus

⁶⁹⁰ Josephus (*BJ* 3.10.7/515 and 4.1.1/3) refers to the area as Lake Semechonitis and notes its marshy disposition. The area was ineffectively drained in the 1950s in an attempt to increase agricultural productivity and reduce malarial conditions in nearby villages. Since 1993, the Hula Restoration Project has gradually re-flooded the area to create sustainable wetlands. See further *EJ* 'Huleh Valley' and Tsipris and Meron (1998: 91-101).

⁶⁹¹ On the source and composition of the Ain Baniyas, see Gur *et al* (2003: 155-178). It is also noteworthy that the waters of the Ain Baniyas were regarded as suitable for Jewish purification (*Mishnah Parah* 8:8-11).

underscored the religious significance of the experience. Quite simply, the process of physical cleansing would have precipitated the sensation of spiritual purification, whereby the worshipper would have felt physically and mentally prepared to engage with the divine realm.⁶⁹²

As for the second major water-based pattern of worship, a range of material attests to the practice of pouring libations across the region. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, worshippers at Hierapolis offered libations of seawater as part of a bi-annual festival to commemorate the foundation of the temple by Deucalion. In this instance, worshippers poured out the seawater inside the temple so that it would drain into the chasm; but it was otherwise customary to pour libations directly onto altars using a variety of vessels and, in fact, a basalt relief from Hierapolis depicts a priest doing just this (**Figure 4.1.2**).⁶⁹³ The act of libation in this form is frequently encountered in the visual evidence of the Roman Near East.⁶⁹⁴ At Palmyra, the side panel of a sarcophagus is decorated with a libation scene centring on two men who are pouring liquid from small jugs onto an altar (**Figure 4.1.3**).⁶⁹⁵ Likewise, a relief that once adorned the podium of the large temple at Niha in the Lebanon Mountains depicts a priest pouring a libation onto a small altar (**Figure 4.1.4**).⁶⁹⁶ Similar compositions are also visualised on the coins of several cities, although the figure engaged

⁶⁹² The recent work of Petrovic and Petrovic (2016) also draws attention to an abundance of material from the Greek world that indicates worshippers were concerned with their inner state before interacting with the gods.

⁶⁹³ The priest wears a full-length robe and a conical hat topped with a crescent tiara, an ensemble remarkably similar to that described by Lucian (*Syr. D.* 42) – for further discussion, see Stucky (1976: 127-140, Pl. V) and Millar (1993: 245). The relief is now in the National Museum of Damascus (Inv. No. 1687). The inscription that accompanies the relief is discussed in more detail below.

⁶⁹⁴ For a detailed analysis of the visual evidence for libations in classical Athens, see now Gaifman (2018).

⁶⁹⁵ For further discussion, see Kaizer (2002: 180), and Schmidt-Colinet and al-As'ad (2007: 271-278, with plates). The sarcophagus once stood in the garden of the Palmyra Archaeological Museum (Inv. No. 2723B/9160).

⁶⁹⁶ See further Aliquot (2009: 117-118, Fig. 50); and Stucky (1976: 134-137), who compares this relief with the one from Hierapolis. Another relief was discovered in the temple's *adyton* and appears to depict a priest offering a libation to two divine figures – see further Aliquot (2009: 228, Fig. 111).

in the act is often a god. For instance, on a type issued by Tyre under Gordian III, Tyrian Herakles pours a libation over a burning altar and a similar scene is rendered on a coin type issued in AD 131/2 by Gaza, where the god in question is recognised as Apollo.⁶⁹⁷ Most importantly, we should also acknowledge the immeasurable quantity of altars uncovered across the region that incorporated a depression on which to receive offerings, liquid or otherwise.

However, in a similar vein to cleansing, we are generally at loss when it comes to determining the religious mentalities surrounding the pouring of libations. In Graeco-Roman literature, distinctions were made between different types of libations and particular vessels and liquids were specifically used to suit the circumstances under which the libations were offered.⁶⁹⁸ By contrast, only Lucian provides a rare description of the circumstances and motivations of libation pouring in the Roman Near East, when he specifies that the Hierapolitans performed their water-pouring festival as a way of commemorating the temple's foundation. Yet Lucian's description is hardly representative of the role played by libations in the daily rhythm of religious life because, as the visual evidence indicates, libations were first and foremost an offering to the gods and thus an act most likely determined by the immediate concerns of the worshipper. Indeed, the aforementioned basalt relief from Hierapolis is accompanied by an inscription specifying that the priest is "making a libation while he prays to the blessed gods that they may preserve his native city in good order."⁶⁹⁹ This text grants us a rare insight into the particular thought process of an individual worshipper at the precise moment of offering a libation

⁶⁹⁷ See further e.g. *BMC Phoenicia*, No. 427 and *BMC Palestine*, No. 92.

⁶⁹⁸ For an overview, see Burkert (1985: 70-73). As we saw in 3.3, celebrants of the *Ploiafesía* at Corinth poured milk mixed with grain into the sea.

⁶⁹⁹ *SEG* 26: No. 1634: σπένδων ὄφρα θεοῖσιν ἐπεύχηται μακάρεσσιν πατρίδ' ὅπως σωζωσῖα[ι]εν ἐν εὐνομίᾳ (trans. Millar 1993: 245, with further commentary).

but it also highlights the futility of searching for similar testimonies elsewhere in the ancient record: the religious significance of libation pouring ultimately lay within the mind of ancient worshipper and the ancient evidence rarely yields testimonies of such thought processes. Indeed, this is a matter we will encounter again in **4.3**.

To some extent, we can overcome this challenge by focusing on the water itself because, as Walter Burkert highlighted with regard to the Greek tradition, the act of libation pouring belies its significance: in offering a libation the worshipper “surrenders himself to a higher will in the act of serene wastefulness,” precisely because “what is spilled cannot be brought back.”⁷⁰⁰ The act of willingly surrendering water – or indeed other life-giving liquids – to honour the gods would therefore have taken on a further layer of significance in the Levant where many communities contended with water scarcity on a regular basis. It is perhaps unsurprising then that we encounter a range of archaeological evidence for libation pouring at Petra, a site that depended entirely on the successful capture and management of its limited water sources. The so-called ‘Obodas Chapel’ offers a representative example of the libation facilities preserved in the archaeological record.⁷⁰¹ The site is located behind the Jebel Nmeir around 1km south of the theatre and comprises several rock-cut chambers and cultic installations around a central triclinium. One of the cultic installations consists of an open-air platform (3.4 x 3.2m; 1.8m high) that incorporates a circular rock-cut depression (1m diameter, 0.48m deep) with an integrated channel (**Figure 4.1.5**). The rock-face overlooking the platform also features two niches housing rock-cut *baetyls* and we might assume that these were representations of the gods to whom any offerings were made.

⁷⁰⁰ 1985: 72.

⁷⁰¹ The ‘Obodas Chapel’ was excavated over three seasons between 2005 and 2007 under the direction of Laurent Tholbecq – for a synthesis of results, see Tholbecq (2011: 31-44). The site’s name is derived from an inscription that mentions the now-lost ‘statue of Obodat the god’ (*šlm’ dy ‘bdt ‘lh’*) – for further discussion, see Alpass (2013: 92-93, No. 5).

The design of the depression indicates that it was intended to receive libations and indeed this same cultic installation is found at various cult sites across Petra, such that we can appreciate the prevalence of libation pouring throughout Petra's sacred landscape.⁷⁰²

These brief examples indicate how we might better appreciate the cultic significance of cleansing and pouring if we situate these patterns of worship in their local environmental contexts. The religious experience of cleansing would have been heightened at Caesarea Paneas by the freshness of the springs in contrast to the muggy surroundings within which they were located. Similarly, the act of willingly wasting water to honour the gods would have taken on an additional layer of significance at Petra due to the city's precarious relationship with water. These cases therefore draw attention to the ability for both the physical and metaphysical qualities of certain water sources to underscore the patterns of worship with which they were associated, a proposal that will be explored further throughout this chapter. Beforehand, we will consider how best to approach this topic through a focused case-study on the Maioumas Festival at the Birketein, Gerasa.

Approaching patterns of worship: the Maioumas Festival at the Birketein, Gerasa

The Birketein site lies in a particularly picturesque valley approximately 1.2km north of Gerasa's North Gate.⁷⁰³ Today, the site includes a heavily restored rectangular pool to the east and the remains of a theatre built into the hillside to the west (**Figures 4.1.6 and 4.1.7**).

The pool, orientated almost north-south and lined with steps on all sides, measures 43.5 x 88.5m and is divided horizontally 18m from the pool's southern edge by a thick barrier

⁷⁰² This particular rock-cut feature was originally labelled 'Stibadium' by Dalman (1908: *passim*) and the name has been retained by modern scholars. On the 'Stibadium' at the 'Obodas Chapel', see Tholbecq (2011: 33-35); and for a recent discussion of Petra's 'Stibadia' and their cultic function, see Vergnaud and Tholbecq (2015: 38-42)

⁷⁰³ The most detailed description of the site is provided in McCown (1938:159-167), though more recent overviews are given by Segal (1997: 71) and Raja (2012: 168-169). See also Schumacher (1902: 165-171).

wall. The barrier wall contains a sluice gate, which regulates the flow of water from the northern pool to the southern pool. A spring emerges in the northern pool and two channels in the corners of the southern pool drain water away from the structure. A road running north-south separates the pool from the theatre, which overlooks the southern pool from the west some 8m above street level. Two doorways were located at each side of the stage (25.8 x 4.6m; 1.6m high) but there are no traces of a pathway leading to the road. The *orchestra* measures 12m in diameter and fourteen extant rows of seats rise up the hillside. Only the foundations of the *scaena frons* remain, although we can discern that the terrain would not easily support a tall design. Nevertheless, most spectators would not have had a clear view of the pool. Whilst the pool and theatre were likely constructed at some point between the second-half of the second century AD and the early-third century AD, they were not built as a cohesive unit and both structures are architecturally independent.

The Birketein site was surveyed in the nineteenth century by various European travellers before being excavated under a joint-expedition led by Yale University and the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.⁷⁰⁴ These earlier reports attest to additional structures that have since been lost. Fragments of column drums uncovered across the site indicate that the road separating the pool and theatre was originally colonnaded, as was the pool itself, such that any view of the pool from the theatre would have been obscured. The colonnaded road was also connected to a large gateway near the pool's southwest corner, where the road continued south toward the city of Gerasa. Given that this arrangement of colonnaded road and elaborate gateway evoked the monumental entrances of sanctuaries, many scholars have interpreted the Birketein site as a cultic complex.⁷⁰⁵ This supposition

⁷⁰⁴ For a final report, see McCown (1938: 159-167).

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. e.g. Schumacher (1902: 165-171), McCown (1938:159-167), Segal (1997: 11) and Raja (2012: 168).

was underscored by the discovery of an inscription recording the establishment of the Temple of Zeus Epikarpos (Fruit-Bearer), which was ostensibly located nearby.⁷⁰⁶ However, the cultic nature of the Birketein site was affirmed primarily by an inscription preserved in the western pier of the gateway: dated to November AD 535, the text records that a certain Paullos was responsible for inaugurating the ‘Maioumas’, an infamous religious festival.⁷⁰⁷

Both the inscription and the Birketein’s structures have been deemed sufficient to propose that a Maioumas Festival was held at the site.⁷⁰⁸ That such a festival was celebrated throughout the Mediterranean is implied in the epigraphic record from at least the third century AD and affirmed most notably in the *Codex Theodosianus*.⁷⁰⁹ According to this legal document, promulgated in AD 438, the emperors Arcadius and Honorius issued an edict in AD 396 permitting the celebration of the Maioumas, before revoking their policy in AD 399 on the grounds that the festival was a “filthy and shameful spectacle.”⁷¹⁰ Other sources allege that the Maioumas encouraged debauchery and describe the festival’s activities in more detail. John Malalas reports that the Antiochene Maioumas was a night-

⁷⁰⁶ Welles 1938: No. 42.

⁷⁰⁷ Welles 1938: No. 279: [M]αειουμᾶς. For translation and further commentary, see McCown (1936: 78) and Greatrex and Watt (1999: 11-12). The variant spellings are discussed by Mentzu-Meimare (1996: 58-73).

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. e.g. McCown (1938:159-167), Segal (1997: 11), Retzleff (2001: 216-218) and Raja (2012: 168). Due to the fragmentary state of the inscription, there has been some debate about whether the text is referring to the Maioumas festival or a Maioumas building – see further Mentzu-Meimare (1996: 58-73) and *L’année Epigraphique* (1996/1999: 561-2, No. 1596). Several studies have considered the nature and dissemination of the Maioumas Festival across the ancient world, cf. e.g. Greatrex and Watt (1999: 1-21), Belayche (2004a: 5-22 and 2004b: 401-415) and Dvorjetski (2012: 89-125). Graf (2015: 66-86) does not include the Maioumas in his study of the region’s Roman festivals.

⁷⁰⁹ Epigraphic testimonies include examples from Nicaea (Robert 1936: No.11; third-century AD), Emmatha (Di Segni 1997: 194-105, No.7; undated, likely fifth-century AD), Aphrodisias (Roueché 1998: No. 40; undated, possibly mid-fifth-century AD) and Tyre (Rey-Coquais 1977: No. 151; undated, likely ‘late antique’). For a summary of the material, see Greatrex and Watt (1999: 8-12). ‘Maioumas’, in its variant forms, also appears as a toponym for several sites in the eastern Mediterranean, including Shuni 6km northeast of Caesarea Maritima, which features a theatre and a pool in a cultic complex – see further Dvorjetski (2012: 89-125). In Tyre, a rectangular ‘arena’ surrounded by cisterns and pipes might have been flooded for use in festivals akin to the Maioumas – see further Chéhab (1962: 16, with Pl. III.2) and Butcher (2003: 257).

⁷¹⁰ *Codex Theod.* (16.6.1-2): *foedum adque indecorum spectaculum*.

time, candlelit festival celebrated triennially for thirty days in May to honour Dionysos and Aphrodite and considers it equivalent to the Dionysian ‘Orgies’ (ὄργια) celebrated on Mount Kitharon.⁷¹¹ In a similar vein, John Lydus, writing in Constantinople in the early-sixth century AD, recalls that the elite of Rome formerly romped through the sea near Ostia in celebration of the Maioumas every May.⁷¹² A May-time festival reminiscent of the Maioumas was also observed in Edessa. According to Pseudo-Joshua Stylite, an Edessan of the early-sixth century AD, many lamps were arranged along the riverbank from the eastern theatre across to the other side of the city.⁷¹³ To the author’s distaste, scantily-clad participants then ascended to the theatre where they burned incense, sang religious songs and danced throughout the night.

Many details from these sources are easily situated at the Birketein. We can readily visualise participants travelling out of Gerasa along a ceremonial, candlelit pathway, watching spectacles in both the theatre and the pool, and honouring the fittingly-fecund Zeus Epikarpos in his now-lost temple. Nevertheless, the literary record from which we are reconstructing the Maioumas Festival is problematic: despite their similarities, these accounts are clearly describing different sets of activities. This situation therefore cautions us against transplanting the cultic traditions of one locality to another, especially when we

⁷¹¹ 12.3/284-285. The context in which Malalas recalls the festival is also noteworthy. Apparently, the citizens of Antioch petitioned the emperor Commodus to release the funding allocated for the Maioumas and other public events from corrupt officials in the city. On orgies and the term ‘ὄργια’, see Burkert (1985: 276f). Julian also complains that the Antiochene elite spend all their money on elaborate meals during the ‘May festival’ (*Misopog.* 35/362d). We might regard the comments of Libanius (*Or.* 41.16) and Severus of Antioch (*Homily* 95 (Brière 1935: 93-4)) as allusions to the Maioumas. On the Maioumas at Antioch, see Belayche (2004b: 401-415). Some scholars, most notably Traversari (1960: 48-51), have deemed John Chrysostom’s description (*Homily on Matthew 7.7*) of naked women performing aquatic spectacles at Antioch’s theatre as reminiscent of the Maioumas; although Retzleff (2003: 195-207) has convincingly argued that the account is largely metaphorical.

⁷¹² *De Mensibus* 4.80 (= *Suda* ‘Maioumas’). On the possible connections between the Maiouma of Ostia and Gaza, see Belayche (2004a: 17-18).

⁷¹³ *Chronicle* 27, 30, 33 and 46 (Trombley and Watt 2011: 24f). On the possible Maioumas at Edessa, see Greatrex and Watt (1999: 4-8).

notice that each community engaged with a different body of water in their alleged performance of the same festival. Indeed, as we noted with regards to cleansing and pouring, a variety of religious mentalities could surround an otherwise homogeneous pattern of worship, such that we can only begin to appreciate the significance of these activities if we study the material in its local context. Thus, returning to the Maioumas, we should regard this festival first and foremost as a springtime celebration and therefore recognise that different communities commemorated it according to their own circumstances. As a result, we might associate the seaside frolics at Ostia with the seasonal appearance of better sailing conditions and the extensive celebrations at Antioch with the agricultural focus of the city's hinterland. At the Birketein, we can appreciate how the site was well-suited to a springtime festival because the sanctuary was dedicated to Zeus Epikarpos. The Birketein's natural setting, with its verdant valley and natural spring, would have also made the site a suitable place to celebrate a festival associated with fertility. We might also link the creation of the pool to the celebration of the festival – whereby a large body of water was required for the performance of associated cultic activities – but this proposal is ultimately speculative. Thus, whilst we can only imagine how the Maioumas was celebrated at the Birketein, we can appreciate the site's suitability for a festival that was fundamentally a springtime celebration.

The case of the Maioumas Festival and its apparent performance at the Birketein thus reveals several factors that are important for how we approach this chapter. Firstly, our summary of the ways in which various localities celebrated the Maioumas indicates that different bodies of water could seemingly feature in the same pattern of worship. As a result, this chapter will depart from the previous model applied in Chapters Two and Three and will instead be sub-divided into patterns of worship, rather than water types. Secondly,

and relatedly, our analysis of the Maioumas Festival demonstrates that studying patterns of worship in their local contexts enables a better appreciation of their importance to the ancient worshipper. Structuring the following discussion around patterns of worship will therefore more readily highlight the diverse traditions observed in different localities and also facilitate our exploration of the role played by the local environment in the development of certain cultic activities. Finally, our discussion of the Maioumas Festival at the Birketein suggests how we might overcome the limitations of the evidence by drawing on material related to divine identity and sacred space, as both the character of Zeus Epikarpos and the integration of the pool help us to recognise the Birketein as a suitable place in which to celebrate a springtime festival. Indeed, as we will see in **4.2** and **4.3**, both the recognition of the divine within the landscape and the organisation of sacred space within the natural environment often underpinned the development of certain patterns of worship. Consequently, I hope that the remainder of this chapter will serve as a capstone for the study as a whole.

4.2 Water and Oracles: the Case of Daphne

Through a focused case-study on the site of Daphne, this section examines the role of water in oracular consultation and proposes that water could function as a conduit for divine communication in this particular pattern of worship. Before we turn to the site, we must acknowledge the challenges we face when attempting to determine the role of oracles in the religious life of the Roman Near East. As we noted in 2.5, there were a variety of ways in which worshippers might receive and interpret communication from their gods, yet such interactions were not necessarily oracular in nature. Indeed, Youssef Hajjar's comprehensive study of the region's 'divinités oraculaires et rites divinatoires' has been critiqued for its insensitivity to the subtle nuances between different forms of divine communication.⁷¹⁴ It is not the intention of this study to explore these nuances in detail but our forthcoming discussion does necessitate that we summarise the most compelling evidence for oracles in the Roman Near East and consequently ascertain what distinguishes these activities as being particularly oracular. We will then contextualise this material alongside the oracular traditions known from the Graeco-Roman world and briefly examine the role of the watery environment in these activities.

Oracles in the Roman Near East

As we will see, the oracular traditions of the Graeco-Roman world are narrated by a wide-range of ancient authors and attested in numerous inscriptions, many of which functioned as formal records of oracular responses received from the gods. Conversely, the evidence for oracular activities in the Roman Near East is comparatively limited.⁷¹⁵ Whilst we

⁷¹⁴ Hajjar (1990: 2236-2320). E.g. Sartre (2001: 894) and Kaizer (2002: 148, n.419). For further discussion of the region's oracular traditions, see Lightfoot (2003: 462-466).

⁷¹⁵ In addition to the material discussed below we should also acknowledge the oracle of Zeus Belos at Apamea mentioned by Cassius Dio (79.8.5 and 79.40.4) and attested in a Greek inscription from Vaison in

encounter some epigraphic testaments to the recognition of oracular traditions, they offer little insight into the execution of these patterns of worship.⁷¹⁶ For instance, at Deir el-Qalaa in the hinterland of Berytos, a Latin inscription records that a certain Flavia made a dedication to Mater Matuta “according to the oracular response of the goddess Juno” but the text does not indicate the nature of this divine consultation.⁷¹⁷ A Greek inscription carved on the rock-face at Caesarea Paneas is slightly more detailed, stating that the author “having received oracular instructions in a dream, dedicated a statue of the goddess Echo,” but we do not know what activities, if any, preceded this divine communication.⁷¹⁸ In fact, one of our best witnesses to the nature of oracular consultation in the Roman Near East is Lucian, who claims to describe the various commands issued by the statue of Apollo at Hierapolis. As we noted in **4.1**, the statue apparently ordained the timing of the bi-annual procession to the sea and also delivered oracles spontaneously.⁷¹⁹ According to Lucian, the statue began to shake when it wished to communicate, such that the sanctuary’s priests lifted the statue onto their backs and carried it as directed. Apparently, if they did not elevate the statue, then it would shake even more and begin to sweat. A priest would then present various questions to the statue and it would move forward to express agreement and backward in disagreement. A similar tradition is narrated by Macrobius at Baalbek/Heliopolis, where the statue of the ‘Heliopolitan god’ also impulsively propelled its bearers at the moment of oracular consultation.⁷²⁰ Macrobius then goes on to say that

France (*SEG* 31: No. 889 = *CIL* XII: No. 1277). However, we know nothing about how this oracle was consulted – for further discussion, see Hajjar (1990: 2255-2257) and Balty (1997: 791-799).

⁷¹⁶ For a summary of oracular terminology encountered in the region’s inscriptions, see Aliquot (2009: 136).

⁷¹⁷ *CIL* III: No. 6680: *ex responso deae Iunonis*. The phrase *ex responso* is commonly found in relation to oracles – see further *Lewis&Short*, *sv. respondeo*. This inscription has already been discussed in **2.4**.

⁷¹⁸ *IGLS* XI: No. A/17: ὄνιρφ χρησμοδο[τη]θεῖς τὴν κ[υ]ρ[ί]ων Ἥχῳ ἀνέθηκεν. The term χρησμός is specifically used to denote oracular responses – see further *LSJ*. Relatedly, a Hatrean Aramaic inscription (H281) from Hatra seemingly refers to the god Bar Maren revealing his orders in a dream, although – in contrast to the text from Caesarea Paneas – there is nothing to suggest that this dream was regarded as oracular – for further discussion, see Kaizer (2006: 141-142).

⁷¹⁹ *Syr. D.* 13 and 36-37.

⁷²⁰ *Saturnalia* 1.21.13. For a comparative discussion of these oracles, see Lightfoot (2003: 464-465). Further evidence for the oracle at Baalbek/Heliopolis, including epigraphic testimonies, is discussed by Aliquot

worshippers posed questions by sending sealed tablets to the god, which he would answer by commanding his priests to issue cryptic responses.⁷²¹

The descriptions by both Lucian and Macrobius therefore share several details that formed the basis of oracular consultation. Firstly, despite the spontaneity with which the god articulated his willingness for oracular consultation, it is clear that the priests anticipated this willingness precisely because they knew that, in order to consult the oracle, they had to bear the god aloft. Secondly, worshippers expected a response to the questions they posed to these gods and the priests accordingly performed certain activities to facilitate this consultation. These oracular traditions thus stand distinct from divine communication in general due to their explicit sense of expectation. Worshippers might undertake various acts of worship with the hope that the gods would respond but, as we saw with regards to Baalshamin in **2.3**, divine intervention was by no means guaranteed. Equally, the gods could ostensibly interfere in the human realm and thus suddenly compel their worshippers to perform certain activities in response, as Abgar did at Socotra (**3.1**), for instance. By contrast, worshippers expected a response when they consulted an oracle and were seemingly aware of the prescribed activities they – or the priests – needed to perform in order to obtain an answer. Indeed, as we will now see, the Roman Near East shared these features with the oracles of the Graeco-Roman world, where the environment also played a significant role in oracular consultation.

(2009: 200-207). As we noted in **1.1**, Jupiter Heliopolitanus apparently issued an oracle threatening to punish Berytian Poseidon if he failed to return the columns lost at sea which were intended for Baalbek/Heliopolis (*Greek Anthology* 14.75).

⁷²¹ *Saturnalia* 1.21-14-16.

The Graeco-Roman tradition offers a rich insight into oracular activities.⁷²² The means by which an oracle was consulted varied between different cult centres, although it is significant that certain environmental features could function as a conduit for oracular communication. At Delphi, the most illustrious oracular sanctuary in the ancient world, consultation of the oracle was preceded by cleansing in the Castalian Spring, after which the priestess of Apollo (the Pythia) would return to the temple where, seated on a tripod, she entered a trance and became possessed by Apollo.⁷²³ An older tradition also claimed that Apollo gave his oracular responses through his laurel tree located within the temple.⁷²⁴ Similarly, at Dodona in northwest Greece, Zeus Naios issued oracular responses from his sacred oak tree either through the rustling of its leaves or the doves seated on its branches.⁷²⁵ By contrast, the priests of Apollo at Claros in Ionia would utter the god's answers only after drinking from the spring underneath the temple.⁷²⁶ At Didyma near Miletus, questions were posed to the priestess of Apollo whilst she sat above the spring in the *adyton* of the temple, dipping her foot in the water or inhaling its vapours.⁷²⁷ Therefore, despite these local variations, it appears that the oracular traditions of the Graeco-Roman world shared a proclivity for recognising local environmental features as a conduit for divine

⁷²² There is an abundance of modern literature on oracles and divination in the Graeco-Roman world. In general, cf. e.g. Busine (2005), Eidinow (2007), Johnston (2008) and Dillon (2017). Site-specific studies are given below.

⁷²³ Washing in the Castalian Spring is noted by Euripides (*Ion*. 94; and Schol. Vet. On *Phoen.* 224). For full discussion of the Castalia in the ancient literature, see Parke (1978: 199-219). The variety of modern literature on Delphi is reflective of the site's reputation in antiquity. In general, see Parke (1956), Fontenrose (1978) and Scott (2014).

⁷²⁴ *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (393-396).

⁷²⁵ The tradition is mentioned by Homer (*Ody.* 14.327-328), Hesiod (*Fr.* 181/240 and 270/319) and Herodotus (2.55.2); the sanctuary's priestesses were later called 'the Doves' (Paus. 10.12.10). Hundreds of inscribed oracular enquiries have been uncovered at the site – see further Lhôte (2006). On Dodona, see Parke (1967: 1-163) and Eidinow (2007: 56-138).

⁷²⁶ The process of oracular consultation at Claros is narrated by Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.54) and Iamblichus (*Myst.* 3.11). For a discussion of the inscribed oracular responses uncovered at the site, see Merkelbach and Stauber (1996: 1-54). On Claros, see Parke (1985) and Lane Fox (1986: 171-180, especially 175 on the spring).

⁷²⁷ This tradition is narrated by Iamblichus (*Myst.* 3.11). Excavations at the site uncovered a spring in the *adyton*, as well as a series of epigrams that comment upon the oracular significance of its waters – see further Fontenrose (1988: 23-24 and 40). On Didyma, see Fontenrose (1988, esp. 77-105 on the consultation of the oracle).

communication, a pattern that we can also identify at the site of Daphne in the Roman Near East.

Daphne, Antioch

The religious significance of Daphne can be traced to the site's exceptional position within Antioch's hinterland. As we noted in 2.1, Antioch's hinterland was a remarkably abundant landscape that owed its fertility to reliable rainfall and arable soil. To the south of the city, the foothills of Jebel Aqra – whose associated storm-god we encountered in 2.3 – rise up from the Orontes river valley in which Antioch sits. In contrast to the surrounding area, these foothills were poorly suited to many ancient agricultural activities: they received less rainfall due to their position on the leeward side of the mountain and were densely covered in various trees.⁷²⁸ However, at Daphne, the landscape changes to form a broad plateau that overlooks the valley below and benefits from a refreshing breeze.⁷²⁹ Located around 6km southwest of Antioch, the plateau is also home to several groves of trees and a powerful cluster of springs that emerge dramatically from the rock-face bordering the southeast corner of the site.⁷³⁰ As will become apparent throughout the following discussion, both the trees and the springs played a key role in the development of religious life at Daphne not only by affirming the presence of certain divine figures in the landscape, but also by seemingly acting as a conduit through which worshippers communicated with their gods, including oracular consultation.

⁷²⁸ The Amuq Valley Regional Project concluded that the foothills were sporadically occupied by small farms and households whose economic activities were focused on the cultivation of olive trees – see further Gerritsen *et al* (2008: 258-259).

⁷²⁹ For a recent summary of Daphne's environmental setting, see De Giorgi (2016: 151). Daphne was also recognised as a place of outstanding nature beauty by several ancient authors, cf. e.g. Strabo (16.2.6), Philostratus, (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.16.1-2), Libanius (*Oratio* 11.234-243), Philostorgius (*Church History* 7.49) and Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.19.5). On the significance of Daphne's trees in the ancient literature, see Hunt (2016: 290-291).

⁷³⁰ For a full discussion of Daphne's springs and the water installations associated with them, see Wilber (1938a: 49-56).

A wealth of textual and material evidence indicates that the religious life of Daphne primarily centred on the cult of Apollo and his retinue.⁷³¹ This focus was grounded in the site's claim to be the place at which the nymph Daphne transformed into a laurel tree in order to escape Apollo's amorous pursuits.⁷³² In some traditions, Daphne was a water nymph and the daughter of the river-god Ladon;⁷³³ in others, she served as a priestess of the Delphic oracle, a point to which we will return later.⁷³⁴ For now, it appears that the environmental dimensions of the myth stimulated its implementation at Daphne, as the site's beautiful springs and verdant trees could be readily identified as both the nymph's original dwelling and her final resting place. Significantly, several ancient authors attribute the presence of the divine in Daphne's landscape to the myth: Philostratus mentions that the site was home to a tree whose very beauty confirmed the nymph's transformation and Sozomen writes that Apollo remained at that place in order to be closer to Daphne herself.⁷³⁵ Libanius later expanded this tradition to claim that Seleucus I founded the sanctuary after finding a relic of Apollo's pursuit.⁷³⁶ Apparently Seleucus uncovered an arrow-head inscribed with 'Phoebus', which Libanius claims Apollo had purposely left so Seleucus would recognise the place as the rightful site of the god's temple. A snake then

⁷³¹ For a summary of Apollo's cult at Daphne in the Seleucid and Roman periods, see Downey (1961: 82-86 and 221-223).

⁷³² Cf. e.g. Pausanias (8.20.2), Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.16.1), Philostorgius (*Church History* 7.51), Libanius (*Oration* 11.94-95), Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.19) and Nonnos (*Diony.* 33.211-215). Daphne herself also appears on Antioch's coinage on a single type issued during the reign of Antoninus Pius. She is depicted at the moment of her transformation into a tree – see further Butcher (2004: Nos. 343-353). Apollo's pursuit of Daphne was also featured on a mosaic pavement in the so-called 'House of Menander' at Daphne. The mosaic is now in the Princeton University Art Museum (Inv. No. y1965.219). For an overview of the mosaic in its original setting, see Kondoleon (2001: 74-76); and for further discussion of the cultural and historical significance of the mosaics found in Antioch and its hinterland, see Huskinson (2004: 134-152, esp. 143). Another mosaic of Apollo and Daphne is on display at the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Antakya (Inv. No. 845) – see further Cimok (1995: 64).

⁷³³ Cf. e.g. Ovid (*Meta.* 1.452), Pausanias (10.7.8), Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.16.1) and Nonnos (*Diony.* 42.387-390). Ladon was also the subject of another mosaic uncovered in the 'House of Menander'. The mosaic is currently in the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Antakya (Inv. No. 1015) – for further discussion, see Kondoleon (2001: 74-76).

⁷³⁴ Diodorus Siculus (4.66.5) and Pausanias (10.5.5).

⁷³⁵ Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.16.1) and Sozomen (*EH* 5.19.6).

⁷³⁶ *Oration* 11.94-99. For further discussion of Seleucus' foundation of Daphne, see Ogden (2017: 138-151); and for a recent discussion of Seleucus' foundation of Antioch, see Grigolin (2018: 29-85).

also appeared before Seleucus, convincing him further that the temple should be founded upon that spot – a significant detail given that Apollo famously defeated the great snake Python when he founded Delphi.⁷³⁷ Seleucus then marked out the enclosure, filling it with trees and temples, and soon after the grove flourished. Malalas also associates Seleucus with the sanctuary, albeit under different circumstances: Seleucus recognised Apollo’s presence in the landscape by planting more trees in his honour.⁷³⁸ In spite of these variants, it appears that the foundation of the sanctuary was firmly rooted in the perceived presence of Apollo and Daphne within the landscape, an important concept to which we will return later.

Although the archaeological excavations of the 1930s did not confirm the existence of a sanctuary at site, other material demonstrates that Apollo’s cult and his sanctuary did indeed flourish under the Seleucids.⁷³⁹ Under Seleucus I, Antioch issued several coin types featuring a laureate Apollo on the obverse and both the cithara and the tripod also appeared as reverse designs.⁷⁴⁰ The tripod was a common cultic instrument in the ancient world but was particularly famous for its role in the consultation of the Delphic oracle: as we noted above, the Pythia apparently sat on a tripod at the moment of oracular consultation. At Antioch, a new coin type appeared under Antiochus I depicting Apollo seated on the *omphalos* and holding a bow and arrow. Akin to the tripod, the most renowned *omphalos* in the ancient world was the one located within Apollo’s temple at Delphi where the Pythia pronounced her oracles. Although this coin type was issued by various cities across the

⁷³⁷ For a summary of the various mythological traditions on Python, Delphi and Apollo, see Ogden (2013: 40-48), with full bibliography.

⁷³⁸ *Chron.* 8.20/204.

⁷³⁹ For a summary of Antioch and Daphne in the Seleucid era, see Cohen (2006: 81-93).

⁷⁴⁰ Houghton and Lorber (2002: Nos. 15-20). The issue of these coin types in association with the foundation of Apollo’s cult at Daphne is suggested by the relative absence of Apollo on the coinage issued elsewhere during Seleucus’ reign – cf. *ibid* (Nos. 112-113, 148-150 and 257).

Seleucid Kingdom, might we speculate that it appeared in response to the foundation of an oracular cult at Daphne?⁷⁴¹ We find ourselves on firmer ground in the reign of Antiochus III, as an inscription records that the ruler appointed an unnamed individual to the high priesthood “of Apollo and Artemis Daittai and of the other sanctuaries whose precincts are at Daphne.”⁷⁴² The text then states that Daphne and its gods were particularly important to the dynasty, thus affirming the Seleucid connection to the site. Finally, Antiochus IV held a magnificent festival at Daphne around 166 BC and commemorated the event by issuing a special coin type featuring Apollo.⁷⁴³ The god appears fully clothed and holds a phiale and a cithara in each hand, a form that corresponds to his cult statue at Daphne as narrated by later sources.⁷⁴⁴ This body of evidence therefore confirms the consolidation of Apollo’s cult at Daphne under the Seleucids and encourages us to recognise the narratives of Libanius and Malalas as reliable testaments to Daphne’s Seleucid foundation.

Both the sanctuary and its cult continued to flourish during the Roman period, when we encounter further allusions to the oracular nature of Apollo’s cult and indications of the primacy of the site’s environment. Once again, Antioch visualised Apollo on its coinage,

⁷⁴¹ For a summary of the debate surrounding the introduction of the *omphalos* type, see Erickson (2009: 94-102). However, it is noteworthy that both Antiochus I and many of his successors consistently utilised this particular image to establish Apollo as the patron god of the Seleucid dynasty and, as we will see, that Apollo’s sanctuary at Daphne played a part in this confirmation process. We could tentatively suggest that the *omphalos* type represented the Seleucids’ desire to associate themselves with an oracular Apollo and thus informed the religious traditions of the god’s cult sites, including Daphne; but the extant evidence truly facilitates little more than speculation on this matter. For further discussion of the distribution of the *omphalos* type, see Houghton and Lorber (2002: 115) and Houghton *et al* (2008: 48), with related catalogue entries.

⁷⁴² *IGLS* III.2: No. 992, 21-24: τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος [καὶ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος τῶν Δαιττῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἱερῶν ὧν τὰ τεμένη ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς Δάφνης. Apollo and Artemis Daittai are also attested at Susa in an inscription (*IEstrOriente* 190) dated to 183/82 BC, indicating that the cult was known outside Daphne. The meaning of the term ‘Daittai’ remains unknown. Franz Cumont (1931: 283) explored the possibility that it was a variant of the Macedonian month Δαῖσιος but was unconvinced by the proposal.

⁷⁴³ The festival is narrated by Polybius (30.25-26) and an inscription (*IvP* 1.160, B50-55) set up in Pergamon also refers to Antiochus IV celebrating a festival in honour of Apollo at Daphne. Strootman (2014: 251) interprets the festival as a response to the loss of access to the oracle at Didyma following the Roman-Seleucid conflict between 191 and 188 BC.

⁷⁴⁴ Houghton *et al* (2008: No. 1401). Philostorgius (*Church History* 7.52) and Libanius (*Oration* 60.9-11) both describe the statue, which was apparently made by the fourth-century BC sculptor Bryaxis (Cedrenus 536B).

most commonly in the form of a laureate bust.⁷⁴⁵ Two types also appeared during the reigns of Philip and Trebonianus Gallus that featured Apollo's cult statue at Daphne, with the latter adding a snake at its base.⁷⁴⁶ We are thus reminded of both Apollo's defeat of Python at Delphi and the snake encountered by Seleucus when he founded the temple at Daphne. On a related note, we also encounter one remarkable type issued in AD 145/6 that features Daphne herself at the moment of her metamorphosis, as well as the regular appearance of the laurel branch motif throughout the Roman period.⁷⁴⁷ Clearly Daphne's laurel trees had become synonymous with the site itself. However, of particular importance to this study are two especially detailed coin types from the second century AD that feature a tripod. One type, issued in AD 158/9, shows a tripod decorated with two faces and flanked by a laurel branch and a caduceus (**Figures 4.2.1**), whilst the other, issued in AD 163/4, features the tripod alone but with a snake curled around it.⁷⁴⁸ The detailed execution of these designs encourages us, in my opinion, to regard these numismatic images as faithful depictions of a real-life tripod at Daphne and to suggest that they reflect the existence of an oracular cult at the site.

In addition to these oracular allusions, the site of Daphne is also commented upon by several Graeco-Roman authors, whose environmental focus indicates that Apollo's cult and the landscape within which it was situated were known beyond the confines of the Antiochene. In his survey of the region, Strabo briefly mentions that Daphne was home to a temple of Apollo and Artemis within a grove.⁷⁴⁹ Sometime later, Philostratus described Apollonius' alleged visit to the site, which he described as: "Cypresses of enormous height

⁷⁴⁵ E.g. Butcher (2004: Nos. 129, 142-143, 251 and 275-280a). Several types are also issued featuring Artemis, e.g. *ibid* (Nos. 138, 365 and 390).

⁷⁴⁶ Butcher 2004: Nos. 494, 499 and 505.

⁷⁴⁷ Daphne: Butcher (2004: Nos. 343-353). Laurel: e.g. *ibid* (Nos. 119, 137, 161, 278-280a, 365 and 444).

⁷⁴⁸ Butcher 2004: Nos. 389 and 445.

⁷⁴⁹ 16.2.6.

surround the sanctuary, and the place produces plentiful, gentle springs, in which Apollo is said to dip.”⁷⁵⁰ The springs also retained their importance during the apparent expansion of the cult site under Hadrian. According to John Malalas, Hadrian was responsible for building an aqueduct to convey water from Daphne’s springs to Antioch, as well as both a temple and a theatre in honour of the springs themselves.⁷⁵¹ Significantly, what little archaeological evidence we have from Daphne does indeed attest to a complex water management system across the plateau. Archaeological surveys conducted by Donald N. Wilber between 1933 and 1936 revealed that the springs provided water for the plateau’s various buildings via a complex network of pipes and also supplied an aqueduct leading to Antioch.⁷⁵² Wilber also excavated the remains of a theatre located some 1800m northeast of the springs, within which he uncovered traces of a water system capable of flooding the orchestra.⁷⁵³ As for the alleged ‘Temple of the Nymphs’, the remains of such a structure have never been found but one particular source of evidence corroborates the existence of these water installations and their association with Daphne’s nymphs. The so-called ‘Megalopsychia’ mosaic, uncovered on the Daphne plateau and dated to the mid-fifth century AD, is decorated with a border featuring various structures from Antioch and its

⁷⁵⁰ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (1.16.1): κυπαρίττων τε ὕψη ἀμήχανα περιέστηκε κύκλω τὸ ἱερόν, καὶ πηγὰς ἐκδίδωσιν ὁ χῶρος ἀφθόνους τε καὶ ἡρεμούσας, αἷς τὸν Απόλλω φασὶ ῥαίνεσθαι. For further commentary on Apollonius’ alleged visit to Daphne, see Aliquot (2009: 68) and Andrade (2013: 251-253).

⁷⁵¹ *Chron.* 11.14/277-278. See also Thomas (2007: 48), who notes that Malalas potentially exaggerated imperial involvement in the construction of the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbek/Heliopolis. For further discussion of Hadrian’s water-management activities at Daphne, see Longfellow (2011: 141-147).

⁷⁵² For a full report of his findings, see Wilber (1938a: 49-56). Water from the springs was collected in a pool below before being dispersed across the plateau via a subterranean network comprising one large (h: 2.0m) channel and numerous small conduits. As for the aqueduct, remnants of such a system are still visible in the landscape between Daphne and Antioch. Regrettably, Wilber did not publish a plan of the water system, nor did he fully discuss its chronological development in light of the archaeological remains.

⁷⁵³ For a full report of the building’s excavation, see Wilber (1938b: 57-94, with Plates V-VII). Although Wilber (*ibid.*: 60-61) concluded that the building was originally intended to be used as a *naumachia*, Alexander G. Retzleff has since offered a more balanced assessment of the material and proposed that a water feature was installed in the orchestra only later in the building’s history – see further Retzleff (2001: 163-167).

hinterland, including Daphne.⁷⁵⁴ Significantly, the section depicting Daphne includes two structures: a vaulted semi-circular structure that resembles a theatre and a large basin within which a naked female figure, labelled ‘Pallas’, is swimming (**Figure 4.2.2**).⁷⁵⁵ A clothed woman sits above the two structures and appears to be channelling water from several springs into both areas. She is labelled ‘Castalia’ and thus shares her name with the main spring at Delphi, a detail to which we will soon return. For now, we must simply conclude that Daphne’s cultic installations were evidently expanded at some stage during the site’s history and that the environment remained integral to this development.

The enduring importance of Daphne’s natural setting continued into the later Roman period when we encounter our main evidence for Daphne’s oracular practices.⁷⁵⁶ Several ancient authors recognise Daphne as the site of an oracle, some of whom place the springs at the heart of its consultation.⁷⁵⁷ Writing in the second-half of the fourth century AD, Ammianus Marcellinus refers to the ‘prophetic springs’ (*cogitans fontis*) of the Castalia at Daphne and claims that Hadrian had previously blocked the springs with stones in order to prevent others from accessing its ‘prophetic waters’ (*praecinentibus aquis*).⁷⁵⁸ Sozomen, writing in the mid-fifth century AD, narrates the same tradition but also adds that Hadrian had received his prophecy by dipping a laurel leaf into the springs.⁷⁵⁹ Sozomen further notes that the Castalia at Daphne was similar in both name and power to the Castalia spring at

⁷⁵⁴ The mosaic was first published by Lassus (1934: 114-156) and is currently in the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Antakya (Inv. No. 1016). For further discussion of the mosaic’s representation of Antiochene structures, see Lassus (1969: 137-146). Janine Balty (1995) does not discuss the mosaic’s border.

⁷⁵⁵ The significance of ‘Pallas’ in this context largely escapes us; however, given the oracular nature of the cult at Daphne, it is noteworthy that one of the youths who lost his sight after beholding Athena Pallas bathing in Argos was the acclaimed seer Tiresias – see further 3.4.

⁷⁵⁶ For a full examination of the oracle at Daphne, see Cabouret (1994: 95-104).

⁷⁵⁷ Daphne’s oracle is also mentioned in passing by John Chrysostom (*On St. Babylas* 2), Philostorgius (*Church History* 7.49) and Theodoret (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.6).

⁷⁵⁸ *Roman History* 22.12.8.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ecclesiastical History* 5.19.11.

Delphi, thus making an explicit connection between the two springs.⁷⁶⁰ Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus, a contemporary of Ammianus Marcellinus, narrates that the Castalia at Daphne was no longer a “stream of prophecy” (ὕδωρ μαντευόμενον) but an object of ridicule.⁷⁶¹ These accounts therefore concur that the springs were essential to the consultation of Daphne’s oracle and suggest that the water functioned as a conduit for divine communication in this particular pattern of worship. However, before we consider the significance of these literary descriptions, we should assess their reliability. These accounts were composed not only in the sanctuary’s later history, but also with a distinctive agenda: the comments of Gregory, Ammianus Marcellinus and Sozomen form part of a wider condemnation of the Emperor Julian, who controversially removed the bones of St. Babylas from Daphne in AD 362 before apparently reviving Apollo’s cult at the site.⁷⁶² As a result, we should not discount the possibility that these authors exaggerated local religious traditions in order to serve their own purposes. Yet two factors encourage us to engage with these accounts more candidly.

Firstly, throughout the site’s long history, Apollo’s cult at Daphne seems to have been consistently positioned in relation to the god’s sanctuary at Delphi, especially with regards to its oracular dimensions. As we have noted above, we might recognise the repeated inclusion of the tripod on Antioch’s coinage as a reference to the famous tripod at Delphi from which the Pythia pronounced her oracles. Likewise, we could identify allusions to Apollo’s defeat of Python in the inclusion of a snake both on Antioch’s coinage and as part of Seleucus’ mythological foundation of the sanctuary. Even Daphne herself had a link to

⁷⁶⁰ *Ecclesiastical History* 5.19.10.

⁷⁶¹ *Oration* 5.32. He then adds that Apollo is now voiceless and Daphne just a shrub, implying that he is discussing Daphne rather than Delphi. An anonymous sixth-century AD commentator on this text later specified that the Castalia was a spring in Antioch haunted by Apollo where the water would stir at the moment of oracular consultation – see further Nimmo Smith (2001: 79-81).

⁷⁶² For a compilation of the evidence relating to this episode, see Downey (1961: 387-388).

Delphi: as we noted above, some traditions maintain that she served as a Delphic priestess. Above all, the fact that one of Daphne's springs came to be known as the Castalia is testament to an explicit identification between the two sites and the appearance of this nymph on the so-called 'Megalopsychia' mosaic demonstrates that this identification was not confined to the literary sphere. Secondly, we should also appreciate that the nature of the oracle described by these three authors seems plausible. If the springs were indeed the site of oracular consultation, then it is likely that their waters were organised into a pool where such activities took place. The possibility that such a pool was constructed at the springs is firmly suggested by a range of material including archaeological evidence for a water management system across the plateau, the descriptions by Libanius and Malalas, and structures visualised on the 'Megalopsychia' mosaic. Moreover, as we discussed at the beginning of this section, various localities across the ancient world recognised environmental features as a conduit for oracular consultation, such that the activities described at Daphne are not without precedent. Gregory, Ammianus and Sozomen could certainly be building on a wider tradition in order to deride Daphne's religious community; but their descriptions might actually gain greater credibility if we consider the significance of their content.

The descriptions of Daphne's oracle indicate that the spring was essential to its consultation, not least because Hadrian apparently terminated it by ordering the springs to be blocked up. It seems then that Daphne's religious community regarded the springs as a conduit for divine communication, whereby the gods made their will known through the springs themselves. Only Ammianus Marcellinus specifies the particular form of this consultation, describing how Hadrian dipped a laurel leaf into the water and then saw his destiny written upon it. This mentality that Daphne's gods communicated with their

worshippers through the site's environmental features was probably underscored by the very traditions that advocated the presence of these gods within the landscape – a theme that we encountered elsewhere in Chapter Two. The religious community readily engaged with Daphne's springs and trees precisely because these features were regarded as testament to the presence of Apollo and the nymph within the landscape. In particular, we are reminded of Philostratus' description of Apollo immersing himself in the springs, as well as the many descriptions of Daphne's transformation into a tree. This particular myth not only became synonymous with the site, but also irrevocably rooted the divine within the landscape – even Sozomen stresses that Apollo remained at Daphne precisely because he wanted to be close to the nymph.⁷⁶³ As the result, Daphne's springs readily became a conduit for oracular consultation precisely because they became synonymous with the very gods with whom the religious community desired to converse.

⁷⁶³ *Ecclesiastical History* 5.19.5.

4.3 Water and Healing

A variety of material indicates that healing intersected with the religious sphere in numerous ways, including some involving water.⁷⁶⁴ Klaudios Iolaos relates a tradition in which Herakles travelled to Akko-Ptolemais in search of a plant that grew alongside the Nahr Na’aman (the ancient Belos) that would purportedly heal the wounds inflicted upon him by the Hydra.⁷⁶⁵ As we noted in 1.3, therapeutic care was offered at Baetocaece where a local spring was channelled into various pools within the sanctuary,⁷⁶⁶ and the hot springs at Tiberias seemingly became associated with a local cult of Hygieia (2.5).⁷⁶⁷ At the Efqa Spring in Palmyra, a bilingual inscription, composed in Greek and Palmyrene Aramaic, records a dedication by a certain Kassianos to Zeus highest and listening “for health.”⁷⁶⁸ Elsewhere in the city, excavators discovered a limestone stela depicting the upper body of a male, bearded god, clad in Roman military dress and holding, in his right hand, a spear encircled by a snake (**Figure 4.3.1**).⁷⁶⁹ The accompanying inscription, written in Palmyrene Aramaic, states that the stela was dedicated in AD 55 by a certain Atenaten and identifies the figure as the god Shadrafa.⁷⁷⁰ On account of the iconographic parallels with Asklepios and the fact that the god’s name incorporates the Aramaic root *rp*, meaning ‘to heal’,

⁷⁶⁴ Modern scholarship on health, healing and medicine in the ancient world is extensive – in general, see King (2001), Nutton (2013), Ferngren (2014), and Thumiger and Singer (2018). Aliquot (2009: 155-158) offers a helpful synthesis of ‘les dieux guérisseurs’ in the Near East; and Petridou (2016: 434-449) also provides a useful summary of ‘healing shrines’ in the Graeco-Roman world. Dvorjetski (2007) is particularly relevant to the following discussion.

⁷⁶⁵ *BNJ* 788 F1.

⁷⁶⁶ On a related note, the topic of ‘medical tourism’, wherein the sick journeyed to acclaimed healing sanctuaries, is discussed by e.g. Horden (2005: 179-199) and Israelowich (2015).

⁷⁶⁷ For a general discussion of healing cults associated with the region’s thermal springs, see Weber (1999: 433-451).

⁷⁶⁸ *IGLS* XVII.1: No. 345: ὑπερ ὑγείας. The Aramaic section of the text makes no reference to health (*PAT* 0349). On the extent to which the Efqa might have been used for healing, see Yon (2010: 103).

⁷⁶⁹ The object was found during excavations of the Agora at the so-called ‘temple des banquets’ and is now the British Museum (Inv. No. BM 125206) – see further Starcky (1949: 43-85). Shadrafa also appears on the so-called ‘battle relief’ from the ‘Temple of Bel’ (2.4). Divine figures bearing similar iconography have also been found in southern Syria and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean – see *LIMC* sv. ‘Shadrapha, Satrapes’. For a succinct discussion of Shadrafa, see Gawlikowski (1990: 2646-2647).

⁷⁷⁰ *PAT* 0318. A mosaic depicting Asklepios was also found at the House of Achilles in Palmyra – see further Balty (2014: 44, Pl. VII b).

Shadrafa is consequently recognised as a god of healing in modern scholarship.⁷⁷¹ Despite having no known connection to water, the figure of Shadrafa prompts us consider the extent to which we might be able to transfer aspects of Asklepios’ cult in the Greek world – where water undoubtedly played a clear role – to those sites with which he was associated within the Near East. The Sanctuary of Eshmoun near Sidon, which later became home to a cult of Asklepios, will serve to explore this matter further.

The Sanctuary of Eshmoun and Asklepios in context

In his description of the Phoenician Coast, Strabo briefly mentions that “the sacred grove of Asklepios” lies between Sidon and Berytos.⁷⁷² The site Strabo is describing is now commonly recognised as the Sanctuary of Eshmoun, which was located some 3km north Sidon and became one of the biggest healing sanctuaries in the eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁷³ As we noted in 2.2, Eshmoun was worshipped along the Phoenician Coast as early as the eighth century BC before becoming equated with Asklepios, who also received cult at the Sidonian sanctuary from at least the second century AD onward.⁷⁷⁴ The nuanced relationship between these two figures does not concern us here, although we will examine both of them in more detail later in this section. First however, we will explore the other detail preserved in Strabo’s brief comment about the sanctuary: the importance of the site’s natural environment.

⁷⁷¹ *DNWSI sv. rp’i*. Cf. e.g. Starcky (1949: 43-85), Caquot (1952: 74-88) Gawlikowski (1990: 2646-2647) and Kaizer (2002: 98).

⁷⁷² 16.2.22: τὸ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ ἄλσος.

⁷⁷³ For a recent synthesis of religious life at the site, see Bonnet (2015: 211-231).

⁷⁷⁴ For a summary of Eshmoun’s cult, see *DDD sv. ‘Eshmun’*. Eshmoun’s equation with Asklepios is demonstrated by a trilingual inscription from Sardinia (*KAI* 66), as well as a passage in Damascius (*Life of Isidorus* 302). See also, Pausanias (7.23.7-8) and Philo of Byblos (*BNJ* 790 F2). As discussed below, inscribed dedications to both gods were uncovered at the sanctuary.

As we saw throughout Chapter Three, various bodies of water and other features of the natural environment could be integrated into different sacred spaces, or even constitute sacred spaces in their own right. In light of Strabo's account, we are seemingly witnessing a similar integration process at the Sanctuary of Eshmoun but with an additional dimension. We should appreciate the site within the wider tradition of locating healing sanctuaries in identifiably healthy environments. Vitruvius gives the most-explicit description of this tradition: he recommends that, whilst all temples should be located amidst the "healthiest places and sources of water," such a setting is most important for the temples of Asklepios, Salus and "those gods by whose healing powers many afflicted appear to be cured."⁷⁷⁵ He reasons that "when the diseased are transferred from a pestilent to a healthy place and the healthy springs are supplied by appropriate water, the patients will recover more quickly. As a result, due to the nature of the site, the divinity will gain greater and wider esteem and authority."⁷⁷⁶ Thus, Vitruvius' comments bear witness to the religious mentality of locating cultic complexes associated with healing in healthy places, particularly those with a salubrious water supply. This latter aspect will be a recurring theme throughout **4.3**.

The Sanctuary of Eshmoun would have met Vitruvius' criteria for a healthy location. Situated outside the ancient city of Sidon, the site is enclosed by a dense orchard and bordered to the north by the Awali River (see again, **Figure 2.2.1**).⁷⁷⁷ The sanctuary's extra-urban setting is both logical and widely paralleled: many healing sanctuaries were located outside the city limits, presumably to minimise the spread of disease amongst the populace,

⁷⁷⁵ *De Arch.* 1.2.7: *saluberrimae regiones aquarumque fontes (...) eorum deorum quorum plurimi medicinis aegri curari videntur.* Also relevant here is the discussion in the Hippocratic corpus on the impact of different environments on one's health, including the consumption of water (*Airs, Waters, Places* esp. 7-9). For an introduction to the Hippocratic corpus, see Nutton (2013: 53-103).

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid:* *Cum (...) ex pestilenti in salubrem locum corpora aegra translata fuerint et e fontibus salubribus aquarum usus subministrabuntur, celerius convalescent. Ita efficietur, uti ex natura loci maiores auctasque cum dignitate divinitas excipiat opiniones.*

⁷⁷⁷ For an introduction to the site's topography, see Stucky (2005: 11-17).

to avoid the dirt of urban life and to benefit from more hygienic natural resources.⁷⁷⁸ Indeed, the Sanctuary of Eshmoun was clearly intended to capitalise upon the natural setting, as its location along the banks of the Awali River facilitated easy-access to fresh water. Today, the river has a high discharge rate, such that the water rarely becomes stagnant and polluted, and the Lebanese Ministry of Environment considers its bacterial composition safe for bathing.⁷⁷⁹ Therefore, we might assume that, in antiquity, the river provided a clean place to bathe, a means of quickly conveying bacteria away from the site due to its fast flow and a safe source of drinking water.

The site's healthy setting derived not only from its proximity to the river but also its incorporation of water into the site overall. Due to the area's turbulent history in recent years, it is difficult to reconstruct the overall layout and development of the sanctuary in detail.⁷⁸⁰ The extant archaeological remains attest to a large cultic complex (190 x 150m) that was expanded across a terraced hillside from the late-sixth century BC onward (**Figure 4.3.2**). The site can be divided into two halves: to the north, a series of buildings and water installations, and the large rectangular platform (now 60 x 40.6m, 25m high) that overlooked them from the south. Nothing remains of the structures that once crowned the platform but architectural material uncovered in proximate secondary contexts suggests

⁷⁷⁸ Compare, for instance, the extra-urban Asklepieia of Kos, Epidauros, Pergamon, Corinth and Tiber Island. On urban hygiene in the ancient world, cf. e.g. Morley (2005: 192-204), Bradley (2012: 11-40) and van Tilburg (2015).

⁷⁷⁹ *ECODIT*: 59, Table 3.7, and 61, Table 3.11.

⁷⁸⁰ Maurice Dunand began excavations at the site in 1963 before the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991) forced an abrupt end to the project in 1978. Following Dunand's death in 1987, Rolf A. Stucky began the difficult task of compiling a final report from Dunand's records and preliminary publications (e.g. 1966, 1967, 1969 and 1973), as well as archaeological material that had survived the war either *in situ* or in storage. Stucky's efforts culminated in three monographs, each focusing respectively on the 'Tribune of Eshmoun' (1984), the sculpture (1993), and the architecture and remains (2005). Although Stucky has commendably brought to light an otherwise neglected site, Jessica Nitschke (2007: 104-114) has justifiably challenged elements of his architectural reconstruction. Quite simply, there are certain areas of Eshmoun for which we have no secure information. As a result, the following discussion of the site's layout will remain sensitive to these limitations and not attempt to provide a definitive reconstruction of the sanctuary's archaeological evolution. For an overview of the history of research at the site, see Stucky (2005: 11-12).

that it featured at least one temple from the late-sixth century BC onward.⁷⁸¹ However, our interests lie below the platform where the archaeological remains of several structures are still *in situ*. Soundings across the site revealed an extensive underground canal system that was installed around the sixth century BC and periodically adapted through to the second century AD.⁷⁸² Water was conveyed to the sanctuary from the river and further afield before being channelled under the platform and emerging at numerous installations across the site, including pools, basins and fountains. The system was designed to flow continuously, thus preventing stagnation and offering a clean supply of water, as well as creating a pleasant auditory effect throughout the sanctuary. Collectively, the design and quantity of these water features would have underscored the salubrious nature of the site in the mind of the ancient worshipper.

Various installations across the site strongly suggest that water played a key role in the religious life of the sanctuary throughout its history.⁷⁸³ In particular, an empty throne flanked by sphinxes and lions overlooks a large pool (10 x 10.5m, 1.45m deep) enclosed by three walls decorated with several reliefs showing children hunting animals (**Figures 4.3.3 and 4.3.4**).⁷⁸⁴ It appears that worshippers interacted with the space by depositing

⁷⁸¹ A first temple, dated to the late-sixth or early-fifth century BC, was apparently rendered in local limestone and incorporated several architectural details comparable to other contemporaneous temples in the region. Then, in the fourth century BC, the platform was supposedly remodelled to include at least one temple that mixed Greek and Assyrian architectural traditions. See further Stucky (2005: 44-49 and 122-142), with associated reconstructions (Abbs. 17-21 and 74-83). Nitschke (2007: 111) and Fischer-Genz (2008: 622-623) both give succinct overviews of this complex reconstruction.

⁷⁸² See further Stucky (2005: 51-53).

⁷⁸³ E.g. in the far-west of the site, Dunand (1973: Fig. 1) and Stucky (2005: Abb 1) both recorded a series of pools (on **Figure 4.3.2**: IX, XII, XIV, XVI) next to an altar (XXV) and a Roman-era staircase (XV) leading to the platform. We might assume that these pools were used for cleansing before ascending to the platform and/or formed part of the cultic activities undertaken in this area – although the lack of archaeological evidence prevents a firmer conclusion.

⁷⁸⁴ This installation, commonly referred to as the ‘Pool of the Throne of Astarte’, is located along the northern foot of the podium. The throne and the friezes remain *in situ* at the site – see further Stucky (1993: 73, Cat. No. 48 and 107, Cat. No. 239; and 2005: 170-172). The area was likely constructed in the fourth century BC and the pool seems to have gone out of use in first century BC or AD, when it was then used as a *favissa*. Dunand (1971: 22-25) was the first to associate the throne with Astarte on account of its accompanying animals – a conclusion that does not concern us here. On ‘Astarte Thrones’ in general, see Delcor (1983).

offerings into the pool in honour of the divine figure presiding over the water.⁷⁸⁵ However, the most important structure for our present enquiry lies directly east of the pool and its throne. Referred to as the ‘Building of the Infant Friezes’, this pentagonal building (approx. 30 x 21m) comprises some twelve rooms of varying size and elevation organised around a central courtyard (**Figures 4.3.5 and 4.3.6**).⁷⁸⁶ The courtyard is accessed by three separate entrances, including one connected to the main temple platform above, and the space also features a rectangular niche (4 x 2m) that may have once held a statue or votive relief. Three basins occupy the southwest quadrant of the building and a large basin (6.2 x 5.58m; 2.2m deep) is located just outside where it adjoins the building’s southeast wall.⁷⁸⁷ Various scholars have speculated that this building served as a therapeutic space, where the sick gathered to be cleansed and soothed with water from the basins before retiring to one of the small rooms to convalesce.⁷⁸⁸

Such an interpretation of the ‘Building of the Infant Friezes’ is both compelling and plausible but it nevertheless takes inspiration from the cult of Asklepios in the Greek world, which we should now briefly consider.⁷⁸⁹ There can be no doubt that water played a significant role in the Greek healing sanctuaries of Asklepios.⁷⁹⁰ Not only do water installations appear in abundance at the god’s sanctuaries, but also the varied uses of water

⁷⁸⁵ See further Dunand (1971: 19-25), Stucky (2005: 147-159, esp. 158-159) and Bonnet (2015: 220).

⁷⁸⁶ For a detailed description of this building, see Stucky (1997: 915-927), who proposes that it was first constructed in the third century BC.

⁷⁸⁷ See further Stucky (2005: 51-52).

⁷⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. Stucky (1997: 921-924) and Bonnet (2015: 221-222). Stucky (*ibid*) speculates that the building might also have functioned as accommodation for temple personnel and/or another area for votive deposition.

⁷⁸⁹ Modern scholarship on aspects of Asklepios’ cult across the ancient Mediterranean is vast. Both Riethmüller (2005) and Steger (2016) offer detailed studies of the history of Asklepios’ cult and sanctuaries; and, though focusing primarily on incubation, Renberg (2016: 115-270) provides a detailed synthesis of the cult’s main features in the Greek world. The corpus of material collated by Edelstein and Edelstein (1945) remains essential.

⁷⁹⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of the varied use of water at Asklepieia, see Renberg (2016: 239-249), who stresses the diverse patterns of use between different localities.

at such Asklepieia are detailed in several epigraphic testimonies.⁷⁹¹ In particular, material associated with the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Pergamon offers a detailed insight into the ways in which water might function in the healing process.⁷⁹² Located outside the city, the sanctuary was probably established in the fifth century BC and was renovated throughout its history to incorporate multiple cultic and healing facilities. By the second century AD, the sanctuary included several bathing areas and contained an elaborate drawing well in the centre of its courtyard (**Figure 4.3.7**). This well has since been recognised as the Sacred Well (φρέαρ ιερόν) described by Aelius Aristides, a Greek orator of the second century AD who wrote extensively on his efforts to overcome his chronic illnesses by visiting Pergamon and following Asklepios' divine guidance transmitted via dreams.⁷⁹³ His works include an oration to the Sacred Well, in which he praises the ability of its waters to cure various ailments through either drinking or bathing and claims that “for many it takes the place of medicine.”⁷⁹⁴ He also relates a local tradition in which the water takes its source from Asklepios' temple and thus originates from the god himself.⁷⁹⁵ Moreover, in his *Sacred Tales*, Aristides describes how Asklepios – appearing before him in his dreams – prescribes treatments involving water on numerous occasions, including bathing in Pergamon's river and anointing oneself with mud near the Sacred Well before running around sanctuary and then finally bathing.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹¹ E.g. water installations, including ones suitable for bathing, are preserved in the archaeological records of the Asklepieia at Epidaurus, Athens, Kos and Corinth, amongst others – for summaries of each site, see Renberg (2016: 115-167); at Epidaurus, two inscriptions record that Asklepios ordered a certain Echedoros to wash his face and Kleimenes of Argos to drink water from a pond – see further LiDonnici (1995: A7 and B17); and an inscription from Teos dictates that the sanctuary's water could only be used for libations, sacrifices on behalf of the city and bridal baths (*SEG* 14: No. 1003, ii.77-83).

⁷⁹² For a summary of the site's development, see Petsalis-Diomidis (2010: 167-220) and Renberg (2016: 138-146).

⁷⁹³ On identifying Aristides' Sacred Well in the archaeological record, see Renberg (2016: 142). Valuable studies on the life and works of Aelius Aristides include Behr (1968) and Petsalis-Diomidis (2010).

⁷⁹⁴ *Oration* 39.14: γίνεται πολλοῖς ἀντὶ φαρμάκου.

⁷⁹⁵ *Oration* 39.6. Aristides also alludes to the perceived divine properties of the water when he remarks that it is comparable only to nectar (*ibid* 39.16) and stresses that its sacredness derives precisely from its capacity to heal (*ibid* 39.17).

⁷⁹⁶ *Sacred Tales* 2.51-53 and 2.74-76. Aristides even implies that so many strange baths were recommended by Asklepios that he could not hope to compile all of them (*ibid* 2.24)!

It seems then that interacting with water was regarded as an essential part of the healing process, whereby illnesses could be alleviated through particular patterns of bathing or drinking. Likewise, Asklepios appearing in the dreams of his worshippers to prescribe certain treatments, water-related or otherwise, also formed an integral part of his cult in other localities, such that many Asklepieia seemingly constructed incubation chambers to facilitate the god's nocturnal visits – although we will only examine this aspect at the very end of this section.⁷⁹⁷ Crucially, this corpus of material suggests that the water-based activities undertaken by worshippers at Asklepieia were not simply pragmatic but fundamental to participating in the religious life of the sanctuary, precisely because the performance of such activities was in response to divine instructions. Accordingly, we should regard such activities as essential patterns of worship that were undertaken with the aim of recovering from illness through divine intervention.

Returning to the Sanctuary of Eshmoun, we can readily envisage aspects of Greek Asklepios' cult at the Sidonian sanctuary. The river, purposely integrated into the site, could have facilitated a refreshing bathing experience and water could have been drawn from the sites many basins to be used for washing. Moreover, the 'Building of the Infant Friezes' could have provided a space in which to consume or anointed oneself with water, before retiring to an individual chamber for rest. Nevertheless, such a reconstruction is purely speculative: as we have seen throughout this study, many sacred spaces incorporated natural water sources for reasons other than healing and the 'Building of the Infant Friezes' could also be convincingly interpreted as lodgings for temple personnel or a space with a different cultic function. Even so, aspects of the local character of Eshmoun and Asklepios indicate a firm connection to the site's water sources. Firstly, Eshmoun has a particular

⁷⁹⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of incubation in the ancient world, see Renberg (2016).

connection to the local landscape: several inscriptions uncovered at the site preserve dedications “to Eshmoun, at the *ydl* spring” and the water channelled through the sanctuary is assumed to have once originated from this particular spring, as well as the nearby Nahr Awali.⁷⁹⁸ Moreover, Eshmoun’s name is commonly connected with the Semitic root *šmn*, which denotes both fatness and health.⁷⁹⁹ Bringing both of these aspects together, might we speculate that worshippers purposely cleansed themselves with the sanctuary’s waters because they regarded them to be imbued with the therapeutic powers of Eshmoun himself? This is a mentality that we certainly encountered at Pergamon. Likewise, it is significant that Asklepios also appears to have developed a strong connection to the sanctuary’s landscape, as the Nahr Awali was known as the River Asklepios.⁸⁰⁰ If worshippers cleansed themselves with the sanctuary’s waters, or indeed immersed themselves in the river itself, did they attribute any subsequent recovery to divine intervention facilitated by the performance of such activities? Regardless of the complex and possibly impenetrable religious mentalities at work here, we should also appreciate any cleansing or bathing undertaken at the site would have been an invigorating experience that probably precipitated feelings of good health. This is a theme we will encounter throughout **4.3**; but here we should stress in particular that the salubrious setting afforded to the sanctuary by the clean waters of the Nahr Awali probably legitimised the therapeutic abilities of its gods. The Sanctuary of Eshmoun therefore demonstrates that both the physical and metaphysical properties of water could underscore its use in patterns of worship associated with healing, and accordingly emphasises the importance of studying healing sanctuaries in their local

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. Mathys (2005, Ph 2, Ph 4 and Ph 6). An inscription, dated to the sixth century BC and preserved on the sarcophagus of the Sidonian king, Eshmounazor II, mentions that Eshmoun’s sanctuary was located the *ydl* spring (*KAI* 14). For further discussion on the relationship between the sanctuary and the spring, see Dunand (1984: 149-154).

⁷⁹⁹ See further *DNWSI sv. šmn*₂.

⁸⁰⁰ Dionysius Periegetes (*Description* 719) and Antoninus of Placentia (*Itinerary* 2; Stewart and Wilson 1884: 3).

environments. Indeed, as we will now see in Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina, aspects of the local environment could grant legitimacy to the success of certain healing cults.

The site of St. Anne's, Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina

In 1865, Ch. Mauss was charged with renovating the Church of St. Anne in the northeast corner of Jerusalem's Old City.⁸⁰¹ Mauss began by clearing the debris in the church's vaults and, in 1866, uncovered a fragmentary, sandaled foot rendered in white marble and inscribed with a brief, Greek statement: "Pompeia Lucilia dedicated [this]," (**Figure 4.3.8**).⁸⁰² Given that votive body parts were most commonly found in the sanctuaries of Asklepios, Sarapis and other gods associated with healing, Mauss recognised Pompeia's foot as a dedication to a so-called 'healing god' and confirmation that St. Anne's was indeed previously home to such a sanctuary.⁸⁰³ Mauss' pedial discovery thus initiated over one hundred years of archaeological excavation that sought to establish the remains in the grounds of St. Anne's as those of an ancient healing complex. Such investigations were largely driven by the belief that St. Anne's was in fact the curative pools of Bethesda where, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus miraculously healed a paralysed man. Then, after Jerusalem was re-founded as the Roman *colonia* of Aelia Capitolina in AD 135, the pools were maintained and the rest of the site was, as we will see, converted into a healing sanctuary of Sarapis to whom Pompeia Lucilia likely dedicated her votive foot. Whilst Christianity is not a major concern of this study, the significance of Bethesda emanates from the adoption of its waters for healing by multiple religious traditions. As a result, I will evaluate the complex ancient history of the site in its entirety and, in doing so,

⁸⁰¹ For results, see Mauss (1888).

⁸⁰² Πονπηία Λουκίλια ἀνέθηκεν. See now, *CIIP* I.2: No. 709. The item is now in the Musée du Louvre (Acc. No. AO 5061).

⁸⁰³ Whilst anatomical votives were not dedicated exclusively to gods associated with healing or biological well-being, this pattern is nonetheless prevalent – see van Straten's indispensable catalogue (1981:105-151). For a general introduction and recent synthesis of previous research, see Schörner (2015: 397-411).

emphasise that the physical properties of its waters precipitated the consistent development of St. Anne's as a place of healing.

Excavations in the grounds of St. Anne's have revealed a large archaeological site that witnessed multiple phases of occupation and renovation from at least the first century BC through to the thirteenth century AD.⁸⁰⁴ The site seemingly consisted of two main areas divided west and east (**Figure 4.3.9**). To the west, the bedrock was hollowed, then structured with well-dressed, 'header-and-stretcher' ashlar and finished with water-proof plaster to create trapezoidal twin pools (**Figure 4.3.10**). The twin pools were connected by a dam spanning east to west, within which a sluice-gate could be opened to channel water from the north pool into the south pool. The south pool also incorporated steps across its western wall, with evenly spaced landings, and drainage channels along its southern wall, thus allowing this pool to be drained and then refilled by transferring water from the north pool via the sluice-gate (**Figure 4.3.11**). Conversely, the north pool was probably fed entirely by rainwater because no further supply channels have been uncovered. On account of the building materials employed, the twin pools have been dated most convincingly to the first century BC at the time of Herod the Great's ambitious building programme across Jerusalem.⁸⁰⁵ The pools apparently remained in use, albeit in varying states of disrepair, until the Umayyad era; although the particular nature of this use, and whether it changed over time, is uncertain.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁴ Archaeological investigations were conducted at St. Anne's at various intervals between 1865 and 1967, but the results were never comprehensively published as final excavation reports – cf. Mauss (1888), Vincent and Abel (1926) and Duprez (1970), with reappraisal by Pierre and Rousée (1981: 23-42). A full survey and review of the site and its finds was conducted in 1994-1999 as part of the Bethesda Project and the final report is awaiting publication. For preliminary reports, see Dauphin (2005: 263-269) and Gibson (2011: 17-44); and for discussion, see Gibson (2005: 270-293) and von Wahlde (2009: 111-136 and 2011: 40-47, with figures).

⁸⁰⁵ For further discussion, see Gibson (2011: 22-25). Earlier dates were proposed by Duprez (1970: 36-37), and Pierre and Rousée (1981: 25-26) largely in light of Biblical texts. Von Wahlde (2009: 120-123) suggests that the south pool was built after the north pool.

⁸⁰⁶ Gibson (2011: 37); cf. Duprez (1970: 36).

In contrast to the twin pools, the eastern area of the site witnessed multiple, complex building phases (**Figure 4.3.12** and see again, **Figure 4.3.9**). The centrepiece of the area was a large cistern, around which multiple installations were carved into the rock. These installations seemingly formed grottoes comprising several steps leading down to a small rock-cut chamber with a basin or person-sized pool. The complex was probably the result of one building phase: the same grey, ash plaster was applied to both the cistern and the water installations, and some of the grottoes were connected to the cistern. Coinage places the initial construction and use of the grottoes between the first century BC and AD 68, after which they were filled in and the area was levelled.⁸⁰⁷ It is assumed that this change occurred in response to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 but there is no evidence to indicate this connection securely.⁸⁰⁸ Fragmentary wall foundations demonstrate that a structure was subsequently built in place of the grottoes, but the poor state of preservation limits firm conclusions about the date or function of this building. A mosaic pavement, stylistically and stratigraphically dated to the third century AD, was added in the northeast zone of the site but, again, there is no evidence to identify the nature of the building in which the mosaic was located.⁸⁰⁹ Consequently, the later function and development of this eastern area remains unclear, although it is plain that it underwent a major change at some point between the first and third centuries AD.

Thus, although there is a general consensus amongst scholars that the site had two main phases of occupation – firstly between the Herodian and early Roman periods and secondly after the foundation of Aelia Capitolina – there is little agreement on the purpose of its different installations. The particular liveliness of this debate stems from the Gospel

⁸⁰⁷ Duprez (1970: 43). Pottery also places the use of the grottoes in the first centuries BC and AD.

⁸⁰⁸ Duprez (1970: 43). Cf. von Wahlde (2009: 128).

⁸⁰⁹ Duprez (1970: 43-44).

narrative of Jesus' healing miracle: according to the Gospel of John, Jesus travelled to Jerusalem during one of the Jewish festivals and visited a pool near the Sheep Gate called Bethesda, where the sick congregated in its five porticoes and wait for the waters to stir.⁸¹⁰ One of the invalids informed Jesus that he has been waiting there for many years because, when the waters stirred, he could not enter the pool quickly enough due to his illness, thus implying that only the first patient to immerse themselves in the water was cured.⁸¹¹ Jesus then healed the man by bidding him to pick up his mat and leave. Unsurprisingly, later Christian authors also express an interest in Bethesda, commenting on the site's form and, significantly, the wondrous qualities of its waters. Eusebius of Caesarea describes the site as a 'reservoir' (κολυμβήθρα) with five porticoes that later became twin pools, of which one is rain-fed and the other red in colour;⁸¹² and subsequent authors also refer to the site's pool(s) and five porticoes, with the so-called 'Pilgrim of Bordeaux' likewise noting the tumultuous, red-coloured waters.⁸¹³

Both past and present excavators have used these ecclesiastical narratives to identify the archaeological remains at St. Anne's as the site of Bethesda. Central to this identification is the five porticoes, with excavators asserting that the twin pools of St. Anne's were previously colonnaded around its four sides and across the central dam.⁸¹⁴ As a result, the

⁸¹⁰ 5:1-15. This healing miracle has also been identified as the subject of a scene painted on the north wall of the baptistery in a house-church at Dura-Europos. The building and its wall paintings likely date to around AD 232. The wall painting is now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No. 1932.1202); for further discussion, see now Peppard (2016: 93-99).

⁸¹¹ Some manuscripts include a gloss specifying that an angel stirred the waters and only the first person to enter the pool was healed – see further Lincoln (2005: 191).

⁸¹² *Onomasticon* 'Bethzatha' (Notley and Safrai 2005: 59-60).

⁸¹³ *Itinerarium Burdigalense* 5-8 (Geyer *et al* 1965: 21). Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Homily on the Paralytic by the Pool* 2; Yarnold 2000: 71) and Antoninus of Placentia (*Itinerary* 27; Stewart and Wilson 1884: 22-23).

⁸¹⁴ Early surveys of the site apparently yielded fragments of columns, bases and capitals (Vincent and Abel 1926: 694); but these features remain unpublished. Josephus also refers to 'Bezetha' as a northern neighbourhood of Jerusalem (e.g. *BJ* 2.15.4/328). For further discussion, see Jeremias (1966: 9-18). This configuration of five porticoes has also been used to explain why literary sources differ on the number of pools at the site, as the whole complex could have been regarded as one pool even though it was divided into two. See further von Wahlde (2009: 123-125).

Gospel narrative has come to dominate reconstructions of the site's first phase during the Herodian and early Roman periods. On the one hand, André Duprez, and Marie-Joseph Pierre and Jourdain-Marie Rousée argued that the western twin pools were used for Jewish ritual purification prior to visiting the Temple, whilst the eastern grottoes served as the healing site visited by Jesus.⁸¹⁵ More specifically, Duprez proposed that the grottoes formed a bathing complex where 'unofficial' healing rituals were performed by the Jewish community.⁸¹⁶ On the other hand, Shimon Gibson and Urban van Wahlde advocated that the twin pools were used for Jewish purification rituals and also functioned as a place of healing.⁸¹⁷ In particular, they suggest that the staircase in the south pool was purposely built to facilitate easy entry for the sick and that invalids would use its landings to rest near the curative waters. Moreover, both parties stress that the design of the pools could have engineered the intermittent stirring of the waters described in the Gospel of John: the sluice gate connecting the twin pools would have created a bubbling effect as the water passed from the north pool into the south pool.

In my opinion, both the miraculous qualities of Bethesda's waters, as described in the biblical and ecclesiastical literature, and the design of the twin pools, as attested by the archaeological record, are central to the credible identification of the remains at St. Anne's as those of Bethesda. The literary material presents Bethesda's waters as miraculous by emphasising their intermittent, inexplicable stirring and their power to heal.⁸¹⁸ Moreover, given that the pool only becomes therapeutic when its waters begin to stir, the text evokes a particular interplay between the physicality and function of the water. The tangible

⁸¹⁵ 1970: 38-43; 1981: 23-42.

⁸¹⁶ 1970: 117-119.

⁸¹⁷ See further Gibson (2005: 270-293 and 2011: 25-27) and von Wahlde (2009: 132-136).

⁸¹⁸ Although the curative pool plays no role in Jesus' healing act according to the Gospel narrative, the fact that later Christian authors stress the unusual characteristics of Bethesda's pools suggests that the waters continued to be integral for maintaining the site's status as a place of healing.

physicality of the water, the explicit stirring, serves to validate its intangible function, the implicit healing. Creating and maintaining this physicality was therefore vital to the legitimacy of Bethesda as a place of healing and the design of the twin pools at St. Anne's would have served this purpose. As previous scholars have noted, the sluice gate separating the twin pools would have created a bubbling effect as the water rushed into the south pool, thus mimicking the intermittent stirring described in the ecclesiastical texts. Additionally, I emphasise that the act of immersing oneself in cool, frothing water would have been a restorative experience because the effervescent water would stimulate the skin and boost the body's blood flow. This bodily experience, coupled with the belief that they were actively being healed, would have had a strong placebo-effect on the afflicted and probably prompted them to feel cured. However, even if the sick felt better when they departed, the prolonged legitimacy and success of the site actually depended upon some degree of therapeutic competence. The fact that Bethesda retained its status as a healing complex into the later centuries suggests that it possessed a genuine capacity to heal the sick. Both the archaeological material from St. Anne's and the wider environmental context of the city support this claim.

As I have already outlined above, the site at St. Anne's underwent some sort of change between the first and second centuries AD but the structural remains from this period are too fragmentary to reconstruct the form or function of these new buildings. Nevertheless, we can be confident that the twin pools remained unchanged and in use, and several pieces of material evidence imply that a pagan healing complex was established at the site during the first half of the second century AD. Indeed, on account of this material, modern commentators have consistently maintained that the site hosted a therapeutic cult of

Sarapis.⁸¹⁹ In addition to Pompeia Lucilia's votive foot, other votive offerings were uncovered at the site, of which the most significant was a relief found in two fragments.⁸²⁰ The uppermost part depicts a tetrastyle façade with Syrian gable, supported by columns and enclosing a shell-headed semi-circular niche, below which are ears of wheat; the lowermost section features the bases of two spiral columns and the voluptuous coils of a snake (**Figures 4.3.13** and **4.3.14**). Given that the god Sarapis was frequently represented alongside snakes and with ears of wheat emanating from his trademark *kalathos*, scholars have long reconstructed the relief as bearing an image of Sarapis with a human head atop a serpentine body.⁸²¹ More specifically, Caroline Arnould-Béhar has argued convincingly that this is Sarapis rendered with iconographic elements of Agathodaimon, a figure commonly seen on the coinage of Alexandria in his serpentine form from the reign of Nerva, before also appearing with the head of Sarapis in AD 133/4 (**Figure 4.3.15**).⁸²²

Other material discovered elsewhere in Jerusalem also demonstrates that Sarapis was honoured in the city during the second century AD. Firstly, an inscription, discovered in a secondary context within the Zion Gate along the southern wall of the Old City, records a dedication made to Sarapis by the *vexillatio* of the *legio III Cyrenaica* between spring AD 116 and August AD 117.⁸²³ Though most likely originating from Cyrene in modern-day Libya, the Cyrenaica was based in Alexandria before being drafted to the Levant on several occasions during the first-half of the second century AD.⁸²⁴ The dedication offers two

⁸¹⁹ See further Jeremais (1966: 34), Duprez (1970: 43f), Belayche (2001: 157-166), Eliav (2003: 250-263), von Wahle (2009: 128) and Gibson (2011: 29-31).

⁸²⁰ For discussion, see now Arnould-Béhar (2011: 45-56). Other finds of potentially religious significance include a marble plaque depicting a naked woman and two small boats rendered in limestone – for detailed discussion, see Duprez (1970: 46, Pl. XVII 1 and 50-51, Pls. XXI 1 and XXII 1-3).

⁸²¹ E.g. Duprez (1970: 48-54) and Belayche (2001: 164); cf. Vincent and Abel (1926: 695-696). On the iconography of Sarapis, see *LIMC*.

⁸²² 2011: 45-56, esp. 52-54. Cf. e.g. *RPC* III: Nos. 4119 and 5907.

⁸²³ *CIIP* I.2: No. 705. The item was purportedly moved to a museum in Istanbul but is now missing.

⁸²⁴ See further *OCD* *sv.* 'legion'.

possibilities: either the legion's presence in Jerusalem led to their introducing – or at least encouraging – the Alexandrian cult of Sarapis in the city; or the *vexillatio* made a dedication to a god with an established cult. In any case, from AD 138 onward, the city – now a *colonia* – frequently issued coinage depicting Sarapis, bearded and wearing a *kalathos*, thus suggesting that he had become one of the leading gods in Aelia Capitolina (**Figure 4.3.16**).⁸²⁵

Furthermore, the changes to the city's urban orientation as reconstructed by Yaron Z. Eliav also endorse the transformation of the site at St. Anne's into a pagan healing complex (**Figure 4.3.17**).⁸²⁶ Eliav proposes that the urban focus of Aelia Capitolina shifted northward after it became a *colonia*: new temples and public buildings were erected in the northwest quadrant and the so-called 'Ecce Homo Arch' marked the new city limits, thus placing St. Anne's outside the civic boundary much like other healing sanctuaries of the Graeco-Roman world.⁸²⁷ Moreover, Eliav suggests that remnants of a pavement near the arch could denote a large plaza spanning the distance between the Arch in the west and St. Anne's in the east and serving as a commercial space within which votive offerings could be purchased.⁸²⁸ I posit that the space may have served a more pragmatic purpose: according to Cassius Dio, the Bar Kokhba Revolt resulted in mass displacement and poverty throughout the Judaeian countryside, such that refugees of all faiths may have been driven to Aelia Capitolina in the aftermath.⁸²⁹ As a result, a plaza at the city's border could serve as a vetting area where the healthy were granted access into the city and the unhealthy

⁸²⁵ Meshorer 1989: Nos. 13, 13a, 28, 45, 56-57, 62, 104, 107-108, 134-136, 147, 154, 161 and 167. A brief series of coins issued in AD 251 and depicting Hygieia seated on a rock and tending to a snake may also allude to a pagan healing sanctuary – see, *ibid.*: Nos. 175 and 178.

⁸²⁶ 2003: 241-278, Map 2. Eliav proposes (*ibid.*: 261) that the twin pools were not in use during this period, but archaeological investigation has since suggested otherwise (Gibson 2011: 29).

⁸²⁷ 2003: 254-264.

⁸²⁸ 2003: 263.

⁸²⁹ *Epit.* 69.13-14.

were directed back to the healing pools. Indeed, if we place the site within its wider environmental and social context, pragmatism emerges as a driving factor in the establishment of the city's new therapeutic sanctuary at St. Anne's, whereby the site emerged as a hygienic site amidst an otherwise polluted urban sprawl.

Jerusalem had two main sources of water: rainfall, on account of the city's location at the centre of the Judaeen Mountains; and the Gihon Spring, a perennial, karstic spring situated at the lower half of the Kidron Valley just south of the Temple Mount (see again **Figure 4.3.17**).⁸³⁰ Accordingly, the city managed its water capture and storage around these two sources, using pools, cisterns and channels to maximise rainfall retention and numerous conduits to redistribute the waters of the Gihon Spring.⁸³¹ One such area to which the spring water was distributed was the Siloam Pool located almost 400m southwest. Excavations conducted in 2004 revealed a trapezoidal pool built in the first century BC and still in use up to at least the late first century AD (**Figure 4.3.18**).⁸³² The pool was designed with rock-cut steps and landings around multiple sides, thus indicating that it was used for water drawing and immersion. Such usages are also reflected in the literary tradition. According to the *Mishnah*, the waters of the Siloam Pool were used in the Jewish festival of Sukkot;⁸³³ and the Gospel of John relates that Jesus healed a blind man by commanding the invalid to wash himself in the Siloam Pool.⁸³⁴ The precise purpose of the pool has been debated: the site's excavators, Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, propose that it was a ritual purification pool for Jews on their way to the Temple Mount, whereas Yoel Eliztur suggests it was a

⁸³⁰ For an accessible introduction to Jerusalem's environment, see *EJ* 'Jerusalem'.

⁸³¹ The spring emerges from a vertical crack in the bedrock and, by the first century BC, various water management installations thoroughly obscured the mouth of the spring. For a summary of the spring's different historical phases, see Reich and Shukron (2004: 211–223).

⁸³² For a preliminary excavation report, see Reich and Shukron (2005: 91–96), with Shanks (2005: 16–23).

⁸³³ *Sukkot* 4.9. Cf. *Zavim* 1.5, *Parah* 3.2 and, *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Taanivot* 2.65.

⁸³⁴ 9:7–11.

secular swimming pool.⁸³⁵ Neither party satisfactorily addresses the healing narrative from the Gospel of John, which implies that the pool acquired a significance within the Christian tradition as a healing site. In any case, on account of the pool's proximity to the Temple Mount, its appearance in the rabbinic literature and the Christian significance attributed to it as the site of a healing miracle by Jesus, it seems more likely than not that the pool had some religious dimension to its purpose.

Nevertheless, more important to this study is the fact that people were most certainly immersing themselves in the waters of the Siloam Pool during the same period in which the site at St. Anne's was hosting similar activities. As Jerusalem's population expanded, the water management system came under increasing pressure due to both the growing demand for water and increasing levels of anthropogenic waste, such that an aqueduct was built during the first century AD.⁸³⁶ In particular, polluted water from the city's urban centre naturally drained southward into the Kidron Valley, contaminating the Gihon Spring and converting its pools into a breeding ground for infections. In 2004-2005, chemical analysis revealed high concentrations of nitrates associated with human activity as well as stable levels of fecal coliform bacteria – that is, human faeces.⁸³⁷ The study also established that the Gihon Spring had been vulnerable to contamination throughout its history as a result of Jerusalem's rainfall patterns. The city's position in a topographical saddle within the Judaeen Mountains means that two-thirds of Jerusalem's annual precipitation arrives in heavy rainfall events. Such events discharge large quantities of water over a short period of time, the force of which causes the water to drain through enlarged fissures with minimal

⁸³⁵ See further Reich and Shukron (2005: 91-96) and Elitzur (2008: 17-25).

⁸³⁶ Josephus (*BJ* 2.9.4/175-177 and *AJ* 18.3.2/60-62) refers to the construction of an aqueduct under Pontius Pilate and this building project has been confirmed by archaeological investigations – see further Amit and Gibson (2014: 9-42).

⁸³⁷ Amiel *et al* 2010: 1465-1479.

filtration. Simply put, this process enables polluted rain water to percolate the karstic system and to contaminate the spring, and this process would have been at work in antiquity too.

As a result, I propose that bathing in the Siloam Pool – or indeed using water from any of the other installations attached to the Gihon Spring - would have carried a significant risk of infection and illness, and, by the late first century AD, this risk was known to the population. By contrast, the waters of the pools at St. Anne’s would have been palpably cleaner and healthier. The site occupied an elevated position that protected it from pollution; the pools were supplied by direct rainfall; and the south pool could be drained, cleaned and re-filled with fresh rainwater from the north pool. The existing installations at St. Anne’s therefore offered an obvious site on which to establish a new healing sanctuary that could make use of its hygienic waters. Even before a pagan cult occupied the site, the comparative sanitation of the pools at St. Anne’s would have afforded legitimacy to the site’s status as a place of healing, whereby patients could be treated using the city’s cleanest water. Indeed, the Gospel narrative could bear witness to an appreciation for hygienic practice at the site: by suggesting that only the first person who enters the pool is cured, the invalid implies that only one person may enter the water when it is stirred.⁸³⁸ Might this detail imply that efforts were made to prevent cross-contamination, whereby just one patient immersed themselves before the pool was emptied and cleaned? Whatever the case may be, the design of the pools certainly suggests that maintaining hygiene standards was a concern and we might assume that this extended to the site’s proscribed patterns of use. The pools at St. Anne’s thus provide a clear example of a site that could offer genuine therapeutic care via the properties of its water. Immersing oneself in the cool, bubbling

⁸³⁸ John 5:7.

waters offered a cognitive healing experience, wherein the patient *felt* healed; but, more importantly, washing in clean, hygienic water provided a physical healing process with a tangible medicinal outcome.

Emmatha, Gadara

Emmatha, modern Hammat-Gader (Israel), lies in the verdant Yarmouk River Valley some 100km northeast of Jerusalem. Travelling east through the Judaeen Mountains before descending down to the shores of the River Jordan, one retraces the river's course northward until reaching the Yarmouk River just 6.5km south of the Sea of Galilee. Emmatha, a small settlement assembled around a group of thermal springs on a flat plain, lies 25km upstream on the Yarmouk's northern bank. The Decapolis city of Gadara, modern Umm al-Qais (Jordan), is located just 3km south across the river.⁸³⁹ Emmatha and Gadara were closely linked both physically and conceptually, with many ancient authors presenting the thermal springs as a suburb of the Decapolis city – somewhat similar to the relationship between Eshmoun and Sidon, and Daphne and Anitoch as discussed above.⁸⁴⁰ Emmatha's thermal springs not only piqued the interest of ancient authors but they were also integral to the site's development as healing complex as, in contrast to water sources available at Eshmoun and St. Anne's, the thermal springs at Emmatha possess verifiable medicinal properties.

Encircled by the Yarmouk to the east, south and west, the remains of Emmatha stretch primarily across a flat plain at the base of the river valley and feature a constellation of five

⁸³⁹ The site of Gadara is located on a plateau with a natural acropolis overlooking the Yarmouk Valley and was predominantly classical in character throughout its turbulent history. For an overview of Gadara's historical development in light of both the literary and archaeological material, see Fitzgerald (2004: 343-397). On the religious life of the city, see Lichtenberger (2003: 83-86).

⁸⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Strabo (16.2.45), Origen (*Comm.* 6.41), Eusebius (*Ono.* 65 and 362), Eunapius (*VS* 459) and Antoninus of Placentia (*Itin.* 7). These accounts of the site are discussed in full below.

springs (**Figure 4.3.19**).⁸⁴¹ The most potent of the springs is the Ain Maqleh, the waters of which are hot (50°C), sulphurous and rich in nitrates and sulphates. These properties thus make the waters suitable for the hydrotherapeutic treatment of certain medical conditions.⁸⁴² In contemporary hydrotherapy, hot sulphurous water is used to treat rheumatic and respiratory complaints, and nitrous waters can improve heart and dermatological conditions. Moreover, waters containing sulphates can have a bactericidal effect on certain skin conditions and may also reduce the symptoms of urinary, gynaecological and digestive problems. Multiple Graeco-Roman authors recognised the various medicinal properties of thermal springs, often in notable scientific detail. For instance, Vitruvius notes that hot sulphurous water reduces muscular weakness on account of the water maturing in abnormal soils and Pliny comments that water enriched with *nitrum* – Potassium Nitrate, most-likely – can treat a plethora of conditions because it can draw out adverse humours.⁸⁴³ Many localities across the ancient Mediterranean harnessed the therapeutic properties of such thermal springs by installing bathing complexes through which patients could experience the water, of which the most well-known were those at Baiae on the Gulf of Naples.⁸⁴⁴ Emmatha's waters could likewise alleviate the symptoms of certain illnesses and the processes by which this was achieved are illuminated by the site's archaeological remains.

⁸⁴¹ The Ain Sakhneh, in the far corner of the northeast quadrant, is a cool (28°C) freshwater spring. The Ain Bulos and the Ain Jarab are both in the northwest quadrant: the Bulos is cool (25°C) and the Jarab is hot (42°C) and sulphurous. The Ain Rih's waters are warm (34°C) and sulphurous, and emerge in the southeast quadrant close to the riverbank. The Ain Maqleh, c.100m northwest of the riverbank, is discussed above. For further discussion, see Starinsky *et al* (1979: 233-244).

⁸⁴² For an introduction to hydrotherapy in modern medical research, see Bender *et al* (2004: 220-224) and Albu *et al* (2012: 23-33). For further discussion of hydrotherapy in both its ancient and modern context, see Guérin-Beauvois (2015: 49-80, with Tables 1-3).

⁸⁴³ See further *De. Arch.* (8.3.1) and *Natural History* (31.46/106-122, especially 115-122). On the capacity for water to absorb qualities of certain soils as acknowledged in antiquity, see Guérin-Beauvois (2015: 55-57). *Nitrum* has been translated variously as 'alkaline', 'soda' or 'nitrate' – for a review of the debate, see *ibid* (2015: 57-59). Conversely, the Hippocratic corpus warns against the consumption of hot mineral waters due to their causing constipation – *Hippoc. Aer.* 7.50-58.

⁸⁴⁴ For a detailed introduction to the thermal baths at Baiae, see Yegül (1992: 93-110).

Emmatha has a long and varied history of archaeological enquiry. Several European travellers visited the site during the nineteenth century and noted a cluster of ruins resembling a bath complex around the Ain Maqleh in the southeast quadrant of the site. Visiting in 1816, J.S. Buckingham recorded a multi-level structure in his sketchbook and Victor Guérin likewise reported several halls roofed with semi-domes.⁸⁴⁵ Sporadic archaeological surveys were also undertaken in the wider area during the early and mid-twentieth century, revealing additional structures around the valley that have not been further investigated since (see again **Figure 4.3.19**).⁸⁴⁶ A theatre, tentatively dated to the Roman period, was built into a hill overlooking the baths from the northeast. A 6m-wide colonnaded street runs from the theatre in the north to the banks of the Yarmouk River in the south. Along the street are the remnants of a Byzantine-era church constructed with some Roman architectural fragments, prompting some scholars to suggest that a pagan temple once stood in its place.⁸⁴⁷ A second colonnaded street, 12m in width, runs west–east from the baths to the theatre, where it intersects with the narrower colonnaded street mentioned above. Finally, remains of residential dwellings have been uncovered in the areas north and west of the baths. These discoveries indicate that the bath complex was part of a wider site that incorporated domestic, public and religious buildings. As a result, we might plausibly regard the baths as one part of a wider site devoted primarily to healing, not unlike the enormous Asklepieia encountered in the Greek world.

Nevertheless, the particular nature and design of the bath complex was unknown until a thorough archaeological excavation was conducted between 1979 and 1982 under the

⁸⁴⁵ See further Buckingham (1821: 441) and Guérin (1880: 295-296).

⁸⁴⁶ For an overview, see Hirschfeld (1987: 101-116).

⁸⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. Hirschfeld (1987: 113) and Belayche (2001: 271). *Contra* Renberg (2016: 812, n.7), who suggests that the building could be an unrelated cult site.

direction of Yizhar Hirschfeld and Giora Solar.⁸⁴⁸ In this short space of time, excavators cleared an area of 5500m² and exposed a complex, multi-phase building that was remodelled on numerous occasions over several centuries. In light of the speed with which the excavations were conducted, the final excavation report has attracted some criticism regarding the determination of the site's chronological development.⁸⁴⁹ In particular, Henri Broise has rightly stressed that the complex stratigraphy of this site should prompt us to interpret this building as one in a frequent state of expansion, modification and repair.⁸⁵⁰ Whilst I remain sensitive to Broise's recommendations and share his concerns that "l'ouvrage ne permet pas une relecture de l'édifice sur la base de données objectives et exhaustives," the aim of this section is not to provide a thorough breakdown of the site's chronological development.⁸⁵¹ Rather we will unpick the main details of the final report in order to demonstrate that the thermal waters of the Ain Maqleh were crucial to Emmatha's development as a place of healing.

Over its long history, Emmatha's bath complex included six large, multi-occupancy pools, 18 smaller 'bath-tubs' and at least 34 fountains (**Figures 4.3.20, 4.3.21 and 4.3.22**).⁸⁵² All areas were connected to an intricate water system that both supplied and drained the various water installations, with waste-water conveyed directly into the Yarmouk River to the southeast (**Figure 4.3.23**). Thus, as we have already seen at St. Anne's, hygiene appears to be an important factor in the design of the bath complex – a point to which we will return later. The water supply system comprised two courses: a hot-water system fed by the thermal waters (50°C) of the Ain Maqleh that emerged in the southwest corner of the site

⁸⁴⁸ For the final report, see Hirschfeld *et al* (1997).

⁸⁴⁹ Cf., most vehemently, Broise (2003: 217-235) and, in general, Stieglitz (1999: 56), Berlin (1999: 85-86) and Patrich (2000: 134-139).

⁸⁵⁰ 2003: 217-235.

⁸⁵¹ 2003: 222.

⁸⁵² On the site's water systems, see Hirschfeld (1997a: 46-54, especially Fig. 39).

(Area G); and a cold-water system (estimated 25°C) that was stored in a water tower to the west of the baths (Area F).⁸⁵³ Although the cold-water system supplied some installations in their entirety, the archaeological remains indicate that the thermal waters of the Ain Maqleh were essential to the design and function of the bathing complex from its earliest phases.

The first phase of construction at the baths most likely began in the second century AD and focused on utilising the thermal water of the site's spring (**Figures 4.3.24 and 4.3.25**).⁸⁵⁴ Occupying the southwest corner of the extant building, the spring-head was enclosed by a large rectangular 'elevating pool' (Area G) with a sluice-gate along its western wall.⁸⁵⁵ When the sluice-gate was closed, the spring's thermal waters filled the pool and entered a pipe in the eastern wall. The water flowed eastwards into the 'Hot Spring Hall' (also Area G) via a basalt pipe where it filled a rectangular pool (6.8x14.2m, 1.2m deep) accessed by three steps around the pool's perimeter. Several cold-water fountains seemingly reduced the hot waters of the Ain Maqleh to a comfortable bathing temperature.⁸⁵⁶ From the 'Hot Spring Hall', the thermal water was channelled into at least two more pools via a

⁸⁵³ Hirschfeld (1997a: 46) suggests that the cold-water system was fed by an aqueduct assigned to the Ain Sakhneh (28°C) 3km northeast. The three huge foundation walls, designed to withstand water pressure, that constitute Area F are indicative of a water tower (*ibid*: 50).

⁸⁵⁴ In support of a second-century AD date, Hirschfeld (1997b: 11) only refers to the (vague) mention of Antoninus Pius in a much-later inscription – see Di Segni (1997: No.49). However, the site's material assemblage provides a firmer evidence base, yielding coinage, oil lamps, pottery and statuary dating from at least the second century AD onward – cf., respectively, Barkay (1997: Table II), Coen Uzzielli (1997: 320) and Ben-Arieh (1997a: 347-381 and 1997b: 456-462). Literary material, to be discussed in further detail below, also places the site's early history in the second century AD. To add to this, a Latin inscription – still not formally published – is cited by Eck (2014: 212-214) that refers to the construction of a building by the VI Ferrata under the command of a certain Sextus Cornelius Repentinus. Frustratingly, all that is said about the findspot of the text is that it was discovered "in a pool of hot water," (*ibid*: 213, n.24).

⁸⁵⁵ Hirschfeld 1997c: 94-102. The thickness of the room's walls (5m and 3.2m where preserved) indicates that the space was designed to withstand water pressure (*ibid*: 100-101).

⁸⁵⁶ Hirschfeld states that three (1997c: 99) or five (*ibid*: 134) fountains were uncovered in the alluvial fill of the pool, as well as a small section of lead piping near Wall 12, but there are no further remains of a cold-water system (see *ibid*: Fig. 122; cf. Hirschfeld 1997b: Fig. 39, which implies piping was found). Water above 44°C carries a risk of scalding especially to those with vulnerable skin, such as children and the elderly (HSE 2018).

subterranean pipe in the northern border of the rectangular pool. The pipe conveyed the water northward toward Area A before splitting into two routes. The first route channelled the hot water into an oval pool (8.4x20m, 1.2m deep) in the ‘Oval Hall’ (Area A) (**Figures 4.3.26 and 4.3.27**).⁸⁵⁷ The oval pool was accessed by four steps around its perimeter and was cooled by six fountains connected to the cold-water system. The room’s corners featured rounded alcoves containing bath-tubs and funnel-shaped windows lined the western wall to provide ventilation. The second route conveyed water underneath the ‘Oval Hall’ and emptied into a third pool (8x14.4m, 1.1m deep) in the ‘Central Hall’ (Area E) (see again **Figures 4.3.20 and 4.3.23**).⁸⁵⁸ Rectangular in shape, the pool occupied the southern two-thirds of the hall and was probably entered via steps along its northern rim. The room’s eastern wall held two windows that overlooked the pool and the western wall contained a large bath-tub supplied by the cool-water system.

Whilst we can see the hot-water system’s clear route through the ‘Hot Spring Hall’ (Area G), the ‘Oval Hall’ (Area A) and the ‘Central Hall’ (Area E), the poor preservation of the main pool in the ‘Central Hall’ means that we lose the trail here and thus we do not know whether the complex’s other pools were also supplied with water from the thermal spring. Two further pools were constructed during this first building phase. Firstly, located west of the ‘Central Hall’, the ‘Hall of Piers’ (Area C) featured three large bathtubs along its western wall and a central rectangular pool (7.7x16m, 1.4m deep) surrounded by four steps on all sides (see again **Figures 4.3.20 and 4.3.23**).⁸⁵⁹ Hydraulic remains indicate that the bathtubs were connected solely to the cold-water system and the discovery of an altar-shaped fountain and a lead pipe suggest that the central pool was supplied – at least in part,

⁸⁵⁷ Hirschfeld 1997c: 83-94.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 73-79.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 62-73. The room’s southern wall also featured three statue niches in its upper range.

if not in its entirety – by the cold-water system too. Secondly, a vestibule (Area B) situated between the ‘Hall of Piers’ and the ‘Oval Hall’ included a small pool (9x5m) accessed by three steps on its eastern edge and overlooked by a window from the west (see again **Figures 4.3.20** and **4.3.23**).⁸⁶⁰ No water supply system was uncovered during the excavation but a lead drain pipe, connected to the main drainage channel west of the entire complex, was preserved underneath the pool.

Without relaying the minutiae of the site’s stratigraphy, the building materials and techniques, as well as the interconnectivity of the water system, indicate that these rooms and installations belong to one original building phase commencing in the second century AD.⁸⁶¹ Then, at a later stage, the bath complex was expanded eastward to include a vast space known as the ‘Hall of Fountains’ (**Figure 4.3.28** and, see again **Figures 4.3.20** and **4.3.23**).⁸⁶² The area was most likely built after the initial second-century AD construction phase of the main bath complex and before the onset of a long-term drought in the mid-fourth century AD, but there is otherwise little material with which to determine a narrower construction date.⁸⁶³ In its initial phase, the ‘Hall of Fountains’ featured a large central pool

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 79-83.

⁸⁶¹ Regarding building materials, the walls of Areas A, B, C, E, G and H are all rendered in basalt and the floors of the pools in Areas A, B, C and G all comprised bituminous stone slabs. The wall seams of the ‘Oval Hall’ (as presented at Hirschfeld 1997a: Fig. 11) suggest that the complex was built over at least two sub-stages within this first phase, whereby the ‘Hot Spring Hall’ was built first and then the ‘Oval Hall’ was added soon after. Broise (2003: 222) likewise comments that the evolution of the bath complex was one of ‘agrandissement progressif’ rather than isolated, all-inclusive projects; but the nature of the final excavation report prevents the reader from fully grasping such nuances.

⁸⁶² That Area D was a later addition is suggested by the room’s alignment to the rest of the complex; the design of the water drainage system, which operated in the opposite direction and independent to the system used in Areas A, B, C, E and G; and the use of limestone in almost all of the area’s walls, in contrast to predominance of basalt in the rest of the complex. On the excavation of Area D, see Hirschfeld (1997c: 102-116).

⁸⁶³ A case could be made for the mid-third century AD: Iamblichus (b. AD 240) purportedly visited the baths during his formative years when they rivalled only those at Baiae, implying that he saw the impressive ‘Hall of Fountains’ already *in situ* – but this account is related by Eunapius (*VS* 459), writing in the late-fourth century AD, and may simply reflect the splendour of the complex during the author’s own lifetime. It is very unlikely that a hydraulic project on the scale of the ‘Hall of Fountains’ was initiated after AD 350 because a long-term climatic shift resulted in increasingly dry conditions and, thus, water-saving efforts across the Levant’s urban localities – see further Izdebski (*et al* 2016: 189-208).

(8.9x42.7m, 1.4m deep) that was, akin to the hall itself, rectangular in shape and tapered to rectangular wings in the north and south. The pool was accessed by steps along its corners and northern and southern edges, and the remaining space along the eastern and western edges was occupied by 28 marble fountains. The eastern and western walls of the hall each incorporated a central, semi-circular alcove and four rectangular alcoves containing bathtubs. The bathtubs and fountains along the central pool were all seemingly supplied by the cold-water system, although the remains of a pipe running eastwards from the 'Hot Spring Hall' could constitute a partial supply from the Ain Maqleh.⁸⁶⁴

To summarise thus far: between the second and mid-fourth centuries AD, the bath complex at Emmatha utilised the thermal waters of the Ain Maqleh to create numerous pools and bathtubs of varying temperatures. These water features and the rooms that housed them were constructed over two main building phases, which we might possibly divide into further sub-stages of construction if the archaeological data were more comprehensible. Nevertheless, it is plain that the complex was designed to offer a range of hygienic, curative bathing facilities, including full-immersion in the hot waters of the Ain Maqleh. This intention is made clear in the both the quantity and accessibility of the pools and bathtubs, as well as the sophistication of the water supply and drainage systems.

The literary record also bears witness to Emmatha's thermal bath complex and provides an insight into daily life at the site. The *Midrash Rabbah* preserves a dialogue, dating from the second century AD, between Rabbi Meir and a Samaritan in which Emmatha is described as a seasonal bathing site where many crowds gather, often bringing foodstuffs to buy and

⁸⁶⁴ Hirschfeld 1997c: 95, Fig.122.

sell.⁸⁶⁵ Similarly, in his *Commentary on John*, Origen mentions that Gadara is close to, “famous hot baths,” and Eusebius likewise positions Gadara near “baths of thermal waters,” as well as referring to Emmatha as the site of “thermal baths of thermal waters.”⁸⁶⁶ The earliest explicit reference to healing is found in Epiphanius’ *Panarion* composed during the 370s AD. Fulfilling his ambition to condemn as many heresies as possible, Epiphanius relates a story about a licentious Jewish man who rubs himself against a Christian woman during a visit to the thermal waters near Gadara.⁸⁶⁷ Of the site itself, Epiphanius records the following details:⁸⁶⁸

A festival is held there every year. Persons who wish to bathe for a certain number of days arrive from every quarter supposedly to get rid of their diseases, though this is a trick of the devil.

Despite his condemnation of the situation, Epiphanius affirms that it was customary at Emmatha to bathe, at a specially appointed time of the year, in order to cure oneself of a medical problem. Given the large quantity of bathing installations preserved in the archaeological record and the therapeutic properties of the Ain Maqleh, we have no reason to doubt Epiphanius’ description.

However, the religious life of Emmatha is somewhat challenging to reconstruct, as the majority of our evidence is largely ancillary. We can, at most, connect the site with a small collection of divine figures: Herakles, the Three Graces, Eros and Anteros.⁸⁶⁹ Beginning

⁸⁶⁵ Ecclesiastes 5.10.1 (Cohen 1951: 147). See further *EJ sv.* ‘R. Meir’.

⁸⁶⁶ 6.210: διαβόητα θερμά (Heine 1989: 226). *Onomasticon* 362: θερμῶν ὑδάτων λουτρά and 65: θερμῶν ὑδάτων θερμά λουτρά.

⁸⁶⁷ *Pan.* 30.7.5-7.

⁸⁶⁸ *Pan.* 30.7.5: ἀπέρχονται γὰρ πανταχόθεν οἱ βουλόμενοι λούσασθαι ἡμέρας τινάς, νοσημάτων δῆθεν ἀποβολῆς ἕνεκεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ διαβολικὸν στρατήγημα. Trans. adapted from Williams (2009: 136).

⁸⁶⁹ Reference should also be made the so-called ‘Philinna Papyrus’ (*PGM* XX 4-11). Dated to the first century BC, the text preserves a medicinal incantation attributed to an unnamed ‘Syrian woman of Gadara’. There is no specific mention of a healing complex, hydrological or otherwise, but the spell does evoke seven springs consumed by fire, which could potentially be an allusion to Emmatha’s thermal springs. For further commentary, see Maas (1942: 33-38) and *PGM* 258-259.

with Herakles, excavations at the bathing complex uncovered the torso of an under-life-size statue of a nude male rendered in yellow-white marble.⁸⁷⁰ The front of the statue was badly eroded, but excavators recognised traces of a lion skin across the left side of the chest and tentatively identified the figure as Herakles. Given that Herakles was associated with healing sites and hot springs elsewhere in the ancient world, his presence at Emmatha is fitting.⁸⁷¹ Moreover, the material assemblage from nearby Gadara is suggestive of Herakles' reverence in the vicinity. Images of the god appeared on the city's coinage briefly during the first century BC and then frequently during the second and third centuries AD;⁸⁷² and a Herakles figure was also depicted on a basalt altar alongside the well-known 'healing gods' Asklepios and Apollo.⁸⁷³ However, whilst this small body of evidence affirms that an image of Herakles was displayed at Emmatha and suggests that Herakles, Asklepios and Apollo received cult in Gadara, there is nothing from which we might deduce any firm details about the nature of such a cult.

Regarding the Three Graces, in spite of Estée Dvorjetski's resolute claims that Emmatha's bathing complex was named after these divine figures and that their cult was practiced at the site, the evidence-base is equally circumstantial.⁸⁷⁴ The *Jerusalem Talmud* preserves a third-century AD dialogue between Rabbis Aha bar Isaac and Abba bar Memel whilst they

⁸⁷⁰ Ben-Arieh (1997b: 459-460) proposes a mid-second century AD date on stylistic grounds. The find spot of the statue is not made immediately obvious in the report. The item is now in the storehouse at Hammat Gader.

⁸⁷¹ Cf. e.g. Herodas (7.176.3), Strabo (9.4.13) and Pausanias (9.24.3). For a summary, see Stafford (2012: 185).

⁸⁷² Cf. e.g. Meshorer (1984: No. 226) and Spijkerman (1978: Nos. 1, 32, 37, 41, 53, 62, 68, 72 and 80).

⁸⁷³ The altar, viewed and recorded at an undisclosed location in Gadara, by Jalabert (1906: 159-160, Pl. II.3-5) in the early-twentieth century has since been lost. Jalabert (*ibid*) identified the figure as Herakles due to the presence of a lion but the original (and only) image does not facilitate independent judgement. See further Lichtenberger (2003: 102-103).

⁸⁷⁴ Cf. e.g. 1993: 387-403; 1997: 463-476; and 2007: 154, 288, 345-346 and 355. Friedheim (2006: 223-227, esp. 225) correctly emphasises that Dvorjetski too often presents this hypothesis as a factual statement.

bath together at the “[bath of the] Three Graces.”⁸⁷⁵ Although the text does not specify the location of these baths, Dvorjetski has asserted that Emmatha is the most likely candidate because, from AD 211, Gadara issued coinage featuring the Three Graces as a mintmark and, during the reign of Elagabalus, as a standalone obverse image.⁸⁷⁶ The trio also appear on several small finds from the city.⁸⁷⁷ Thus, whilst images of the Graces are found elsewhere in the Roman Near East, Gadara certainly has a distinctly high concentration.⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, the Graces are certainly suitable dedicatees for a therapeutic bathing complex: in the Greek literary tradition, they are clearly associated water and cleansing, and are presented as figures of well-being in general.⁸⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in the absence of any material relating to the Graces at Emmatha itself, a claim that the site was home to their cult is tenuous.⁸⁸⁰

Finally, concerning Eros and Anteros, our evidence is more tangible but limited. Around AD 396, Eunapius, a Greek sophist and would-be historian, published his *Lives of the Sophists* detailing the alleged visit of Iamblichus, a Neoplatonist philosopher, to Gadara’s “hot baths” (θερμὰ) in the mid-third century AD. The incident was supposedly reported to

⁸⁷⁵ *Shabbat* 3.4 (=6a): בטריס כריטס. This is a convincing emendation to MS Leiden Or. 4720 first proposed by Epstein (1930: 126) in light of the Cairo *Genizah* fragments – for an accessible overview to the textual tradition, see Friedheim (2006: 223-224).

⁸⁷⁶ See further Dvorjetski (1997: 463-476 and 2007: 358-359), Meshorer (1984: Nos. 222 and 225) and Spijkerman (1978: Nos. 82-83, 91-92 and 97-98).

⁸⁷⁷ A ring bears an image of the Three Graces standing in a temple (Meshorer 1984: 82-84) and an engraved jasper gem features the trio wearing Roman military helmets (Henig and Whiting 1987: 28, No. 272).

⁸⁷⁸ E.g. a first/second-century AD terracotta medallion discovered in Gerasa (*LIMC* ‘Eros’ 89) features three female figures alongside an Eros-figure and a coin issued at Aelia Capitolina under Antoninus Pius depicts three female figures (*RPC* IV: 5754). None of these items render the Graces in their typical iconographic form, as seen at Gadara.

⁸⁷⁹ E.g. Hesiod (*Theog.* 907), *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (58-63) and Pindar (*Ol.* 14.1). A votive relief, now in the Vatican Museum (Inv. No. 244), depicts the Three Graces alongside Asklepios (*LIMC* sv. ‘Asklepios’ No. 317) but there is no further extant evidence that explicitly associates them with healing. For an overview of the Graces, see Breitenberger (2007: 105-115). Reference should also be made to a series of anonymous epigrams on the Graces and bathing preserved in the *Anth. Pal.* (9. 607, 609-609a, 616, 623, 634 and 638-639); though tempting, there is no way that these entries can be definitively attributed to the *Garland of Meleager*, a native of Gadara.

⁸⁸⁰ We might posit that the three statue niches in the southern wall of the ‘Hall of Piers’ were designed specifically to hold statues of the Three Graces but this seems unlikely given that the trio was commonly rendered as a single, integrated statue group.

Eunapius by the followers of Iamblichus and the text preserves several details that accord with our other sources on Emmatha. Similar to the accounts in the *Midrash Rabbah* and the *Panarion*, Iamblichus and his followers ventured to the baths during the “annual season.”⁸⁸¹ Eunapius describes the baths as being rivalled only by Baiae and having “two hot pools” that are close to each other and smaller but prettier than the others, details concordant with Emmatha’s archaeological remains.⁸⁸² During the visit, Iamblichus’ followers request a demonstration of his affinity with the gods and the sophist bids them to ask the local residents by what ancient names the two hot pools are known. The followers report that the waters are known as Eros and Anteros, and then, having already been sat “on the pool-ledge downstream of the overflow,” Iamblichus touches the water and evokes a white-skinned boy with golden hair from the depths of the pool.⁸⁸³ Iamblichus then moves to the other pool where he “performs the same mystical rite” and summons “the other of the two Erotes,” this time in the form of a dark-haired boy.⁸⁸⁴ Once more, Erotes are viable associates of water sources – not least due to their role as acolytes of Aphrodite and the Three Graces – but, yet again, the extant material yields no information about any related cultic activities undertaken at Emmatha in their honour. At most, we might deduce that a tradition existed wherein Emmatha’s waters were inhabited by a divine force, a pattern that we encountered most recently at the Sanctuary of Eshmoun. Even so, the religious traditions and practices honoured at Emmatha during its earlier phases of occupation largely escape us.

⁸⁸¹ VS 459: τὴν ὄραν τοῦ ἔτους.

⁸⁸² VS 459: θερμαὶ κρηναὶ δύο. Hirschfeld (1987: 104) recognises these water features with the Ain Maqleh and the Ain Bulos; but I would identify them with the pools in the ‘Hot Spring Hall’ and the ‘Oval Hall’ due to the comments about their proximity and relative size and beauty.

⁸⁸³ VS 459: ἐπὶ τῆς κρηπίδος κατὰ τὴν ὑπέρκλυσιν. I posit that this detail refers to the western rim of the pool in the ‘Hot Spring Hall’ where the thermal waters entered.

⁸⁸⁴ VS 459: τὰ αὐτὰ δράσας; ἕτερον Ἴρωτα. Geiger (1986: 375-376) links Eunapius’ story with an epigram (*Anth. Pal.* 12.165) attributed to Meleager of Gadara, in which the Erotes are similarly described as white and black, and argues that this link is indicative of the enduring circulation of a local tradition. There is no further evidence to substantiate this proposal.

In fact, our most informative evidence for religious life at Emmatha appears in association with the site's later Christian community. A series of droughts and earthquakes in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries AD prompted extensive changes throughout the entire building.⁸⁸⁵ All of the small bathtubs were filled-in, the pools in Areas B, C and E were blocked and paved over, and structural repairs were carried out throughout the site.⁸⁸⁶ Significantly, the thermal waters remained integral to the site throughout this turbulent period: the pool in the 'Hot Spring Hall' (Area G) was renovated and further passages were added to create access routes between the 'Hall of Fountains' and both the 'Hot Spring Hall' and the 'Oval Hall' (see again **Figures 4.3.20** and **4.3.28**).⁸⁸⁷ Thus, while much of the bath complex's hydraulic infrastructure was rendered obsolete, the thermal waters of the Ain Maqleh and the pools supplied by them endured. The epigraphic corpus from this period also confirms the ongoing importance of the hot spring to the daily life of the bath complex.⁸⁸⁸ Most notably, a poem attributed to Aelia Eudocia Augusta, empress of the eastern Roman Empire between AD 421 and AD 443, extolled the spring's fecundity and conjured the layout of the site.⁸⁸⁹ The text personifies the *klibanos* – the fountainhead of the hot spring – and evokes him as “fiery ocean, Paeon and life source, provider of sweet streams,” who pours his beauty into many groups of waters, including “watery Galatea and

⁸⁸⁵ As noted above, water economising strategies are attested across the Near East from the mid-fourth century AD onward due to ongoing drought. The region was also beset by an unprecedented concentration of earthquakes – see further Amiran *et al* (1994: 260-305) and Ward (2016: 131-171). The spring of Gader is amongst the damaged localities listed in a letter by Cyril of Jerusalem (MS Harvard Syriac 99.11; Brock 1977: 267-286).

⁸⁸⁶ Hirschfeld (1997c: 123-143) identifies these changes as belonging to one broad phase of renovation (Phase II, 'Byzantine period'); but, as stressed by Broise (2003: 217-235), these alterations most likely reflect an ongoing process of renovation rather than one or two clearly defined phases of repair. An undated inscription, installed at the centre of Area C on the site of the earlier pool, also records that an earthquake caused damage to the baths and killed many people in the process – see Di Segni (1997: No. 1).

⁸⁸⁷ Hirschfeld 1997c: 134-135 and 103, Fig. 135.

⁸⁸⁸ See now, Di Segni (1997: 185-266).

⁸⁸⁹ See further Green and Tsafirir (1982: 77-96) and Di Segni (1997: 228-233, No. 49). Di Segni (*ibid*: 232-233) suggests that the poem was composed when Eudocia visited the site either during her first visit to Palestine in AD 438-9 or between AD 443 and AD 460 when she was in exile – though the poem may have been inscribed and laid at a later date. The inscription, engraved into a marble slab, was found inserted into the pavement where the new passageway from the 'Oval Hall' opened into the 'Hall of Fountains' (Hirschfeld 1997c: 135-139). The item is now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Hygieia herself, the large lukewarm [pool] and the small lukewarm [pool].”⁸⁹⁰ We cannot know whether this text preserves any aspects of the site’s earlier religious traditions but it does capture the Ain Maqleh’s physicality and resulting importance: through its heat and potency, the spring provides life-giving, curative waters to the bath complex’s many water features. In addition, the epigraphic corpus attests to the sanctity of the bath complex in this period, as the majority of extant inscriptions comprise requests for a loved one to be remembered “in this holy place.”⁸⁹¹ The religious importance of Emmatha and its waters during the Christian period is thus confirmed.

As for the activities undertaken at the baths, we have one potentially illuminating account from this period that claims to describe the healing process. The text – often attributed to Antoninus of Placentia – recounts a pilgrimage through the Holy Land around AD 560 in which the author apparently visited a bathing complex located at hot springs outside Gadara that treated people suffering from leprosy:⁸⁹²

In the evening the baths are cleansed. Before the *clibanus* itself is a large basin for water, and when it has been filled all the gates are closed, and through a back entrance they [the sick] are sent inside with lamps and incense and they sit in that basin the whole night. And when they have fallen asleep, the one who is to be cured sees some sort of vision, and when he has

⁸⁹⁰ ὠκεανὸν πυρόεντα (...) Παιάνα καὶ γενέτιν γλυκερῶν δοτῆρα ῥεέθρων (...) δρσερὰ Γαλατία· καὶ αὐτὴ Ὑγεία· καὶ χλιαρὰ μεγάλα· χλιαρὰ δὲ τὰ μικρά... Translation adapted from Di Segni (1997: No. 49 11-12). Significantly, Eck (2014: 212-214) has highlighted that the poem also labels one of the other springs ‘Repentinus’, a name shared with the commander of the legion who possibly built the baths.

⁸⁹¹ Ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ τόπῳ. Cf. Di Segni (1997: Nos. 2-5, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22, 24, 27, 29, 34-35, 39, 42, 46, 56, 58-61). Several inscriptions (*ibid.*: Nos. 7, 10, 13, 30, 37 and 43) employ ἱερός and one (No. 6) asks for remembrance “in the sacred and harmonious place of the *klibanos*” (Ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ μουσικῷ τόπῳ τοῦ κλιβανοῦ). I am aware that a topographical analysis of these inscriptions has since been conducted by Nicole Belayche after the time of writing – see now, Belayche (2017: 655-668).

⁸⁹² *Itinerary 7: Hora vespertina mundantur terme; ante ipsum clibanum aquae est solius grandis, qui dum impletus fuerit; clauduntur omnia ostia, et per posticum mittuntur intus cum luminaria et incensum et sedent in illo solio tota nocte. Et dum soporati fuerint, videt ille, qui curandus est, aliqua visione, et dum eam recitarit, abstinentur ipsae termae septem diebus et intra septem die mundantur.* Trans. adapted from Renberg (2016: 810-811). For a summary of the text’s authorship and transmission, see *ibid.*

shared it these baths are avoided for seven days, and within seven days they [the sick who received the dream] are cleansed.

This alleged description of the healing process at Emmatha raises many questions, namely: to what extent does it accurately bear witness to the activities conducted at the baths in the sixth century AD and does it preserve any details of the traditions honoured by the site's earlier religious community? The available evidence does not allow us to answer these questions conclusively but we can nevertheless set this passage against the corpus of material discussed above and make several suggestions.

Firstly, the activities described by the pilgrim accord neatly with Emmatha's archaeological record.⁸⁹³ The large basin near the *clibanus* evokes the 'Hot Spring Hall' in particular, where the steps around the pool would have enabled the sick to rest in its waters throughout the night; the 'Oval Hall' is another viable location for these activities for the same reasons. Equally, the sophisticated water management system would have allowed both pools to be drained and cleaned. We should also remember that, during the earlier phases of the site's history, the 'Oval Hall' featured six individual bath-tubs, which could have provided a more comfortable and secluded bathing experience. Secondly, we cannot deny that this description echoes the incubation process undertaken at the Asklepieia of the Greek world, wherein Asklepios would appear in the dreams of the sick and reveal how they might become well again.⁸⁹⁴ A key distinction is that, at Emmatha, the purpose of the dream is to confirm successful healing of an illness rather than to prescribe a course of treatment. Moreover, the extent of divine intervention at Emmatha is not made explicit: the pilgrim refers only to 'some sort of vision' (*aliqua visione*), a far vaguer description than the reports of Asklepios' alleged night-time communications at other healing sanctuaries.

⁸⁹³ A point also stressed by Hirschfeld (1997b: 5-6), Belayche (2001: 272), Dvorjetski (2007: 156-157).

⁸⁹⁴ On this text in relation to incubation, see Renberg (2016: 808-814).

Nevertheless, both traditions share an emphasis on the cerebral nature of the healing process: the act of washing oneself with certain types of water would have probably precipitated feelings of good health, but it was the perception of divine intervention that affirmed the recovery. Above all, though, we should appreciate that the therapeutic properties of Ain Maqleh had the capacity to relieve the symptoms of leprosy, as well as a whole host of other ailments. As we noted above, waters containing sulphates can have a bactericidal effect on certain skin conditions – including leprosy – and, although such hydrotherapeutic treatment will not necessarily rid a patient of such an affliction, it can noticeably reduce certain symptoms and grant them with respite from their illness. Thus, whilst we might not precisely comprehend the religious mentalities that underscored these bathing practices, we cannot doubt the therapeutic potential of the waters and indeed this aspect most probably prompted numerous religious communities to engage with this site. Emmatha therefore demonstrates how the physical properties of water might influence the development of certain patterns of worship across otherwise divergent religious traditions, an apt point to consider now as part of our final conclusion.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The case of Emmatha demonstrates that worshippers from different belief systems could take inspiration from the same environment in the development of their religious traditions and practices. Indeed, although we have not focused on this aspect in the course of our discussion, we have occasionally noted that some sites were in fact valued throughout their history by multiple religious communities, many of whom engaged with the local hydrological environment. This multiplicity came to light particularly at the site of St. Anne's in Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina (4.3) but we might also recall that, in addition to being the site of Perseus' defeat of the sea-monster, Iope was equally recognised as the port from which Jonah set sail before being swallowed by the whale (2.4). A site that is especially worthy of further comment here is the cultic complex on Jebel Haroun in Petra where, as we noted in 3.1, a sanctuary was constructed around a distinctive natural fissure within which rainwater was collected. The site later became a place of religious significance for both Christian and Islamic communities because the mountain was identified as the location where Aaron died and Moses produced water from a rock, a religious tradition surely inspired by the unusual fissure.⁸⁹⁵ As a result, the original sanctuary was transformed into a monastery around the fifth century AD and the peak of Jebel Haroun was later topped with an Islamic *weli* in honour of Aaron during the

⁸⁹⁵ The death of Aaron at Jebel Haroun is related in Numbers (20:22-29, here known as Mount Hor) and is also mentioned by Josephus (*AJ* 4.4.7/82-84), who states that the mountain is at Petra. In the Biblical tradition, the rock from which Moses produced water was located in the Desert of Zin (Number 20:1-13) through which the Israelites travelled before Aaron's death. Eusebius (*Onom.* 'Mount Hor'; Notley and Safrai 2005: 165) later specifies that Mount Hor is in Petra and is the place where "the rock that flowed for Moses is now pointed out" (ἔτι νῦν δείκνυται ἡ ἐπὶ Μωϋσέως ῥεύσασα πέτρα), implying that Petra's Christian community had relocated this tradition from the desert to Jebel Haroun – a practice strikingly similar to that witnessed with the Andromeda myth at Iope. For a detailed discussion of the Graeco-Roman, Jewish, Christian and Quranic sources on Aaron's life and death, see Frösén and Miettunen (2008: 5-25).

fourteenth century.⁸⁹⁶ The *weli* – which can be seen from afar (**Figure 5.1**) – remains a site of pilgrimage today and Petra’s inhabitants perform a *mawsim* every autumn at the mountain to mark the beginning of the rainy season.⁸⁹⁷ The site at Jebel Haroun therefore illustrates how some landscapes, on account of their distinctive nature, could attract attention from otherwise disparate groups of worshippers and attests to the enduring religious significance of water throughout the Near East’s long history.

Nevertheless, as we stressed particularly in **3.1**, the creation of such ‘sacred landscapes’ occurred through the varied activities of the worshippers who engaged with them; likewise, we should not assume that distinctive environments automatically remained part of the cultic landscape during times of religious transition.⁸⁹⁸ Thus, whilst water might be significant to all belief systems – both ancient and modern – the nature of this significance is still manifested with extraordinary diversity precisely because such traditions stem from divergent communities and environments. Therefore, to conclude here simply by drawing attention to the ubiquity of water in religious traditions and practices would be to undermine the complexity with which this fundamental relationship developed. The relationship between water and religious life derives its significance not from its universality but rather its diversity in light of its apparent commonality. Accordingly, this final chapter does not intend to synthesise the results of this study into a definitive narrative; as we stressed from

⁸⁹⁶ For final reports on all phases of the site’s history in light of excavations, see Fiema and Frösén (2008) and Fiema *et al* (2016). A *weli* is a particular type of shrine associated with an Islamic saint and is derived from *wali*, meaning ‘saint’ or ‘one who is close to god’ – see further *EI* ‘Walī’.

⁸⁹⁷ On the modern religious traditions associated with Jebel Haroun, see Miettunen (2008: 27-49). A *mawsim* is an annual feast in which various groups gather to visit a particular holy site – see further *EI* ‘Mawsim’. At Jebel Haroun, the celebration usually lasts for two days and can include goat sacrifices on the plateau near the site of the ancient sanctuary. Additionally, if the winter rains are light or do not come at all, women may undertake a particular ritual in which they invoke the ‘Mother of Rain’, by chanting towards the mountain or within the *weli* itself.

⁸⁹⁸ Horden and Purcell (2000: 410) reach a similar conclusion: “It does not, however, follow that the landscape may be said to have determined cultic continuity. Prevailing physical conditions no doubt inform the practice of religion in such cases but they do no more than that.”

the outset, such an outcome is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, our aim here is to summarise the various means by which the religious communities of the Roman Near East engaged with water and to highlight some of the ways in which we have furthered our understanding of religious life in the region by elevating the environment to the forefront of our discussion.

In Chapter Two, we examined how worshippers characterised some of their gods with particular reference to the hydrological environment and, in some cases, recognised divine figures within the landscape itself. From the outset, we established that the character of a divine figure could be constructed with reference to numerous contextual factors, including those related to water and the local environment. Turning first to rivers, we explored the ways in which the environmental qualities of certain riverine landscapes found expression in the divine figures with which they were associated: the twisting Orontes River became equated with serpentine Typhon and the hygienic Nahr Awali came to be regarded as the healing god Asklepios. However, turning to Byblian Adonis, we demonstrated that the relationship between river and god was not solely based on personification, as we analysed the ways in which the seasonal transformation of the Nahr Ibrahim inspired and affirmed the god's mythological death and 'resurrection'. Seasonality was likewise present in our discussion of storm-gods, whose violent winter rains were often vital to the annual creation of productive landscapes. In particular, we stressed that, although rainfall was essential to many of the region's communities, patterns of precipitation varied between localities, such that the storm-gods associated with them were similarly divergent in their characterisation. Accordingly, the religious community at the well-watered site of Khirbet Tannur honoured a group of virile and fertile gods, whereas worshippers across the comparatively barren Jebel Arab massif rendered Baalshamin as a fickle figure who capriciously withheld his

rains. We then encountered Zeus Keraunios, whose affinity with the storms that erupted around the peak of Jebel Aqra prompted the religious community at Seleucia Pieria to worship him in the guise of a lightning bolt. By studying these figures in their local environmental context, we can now appreciate that the storm-gods of the Roman Near East were not simply homogenous harbingers of rain but were diverse characters responsible for the particular pluvial conditions of different localities.

Similarly, despite their shared connection to the maritime sphere in general, divine figures associated with the sea likewise manifested with diversity between individual localities. The pagan religious community at Iope took inspiration from the city's offshore reefs in their claim to be the site of Perseus' defeat of the sea-monster and the dominant, tumultuous nature of the sea similarly stimulated the Berytians in their characterisation of Poseidon, both through his iconography and local mythology. The local landscape and its impact on seafaring also found expression in the characterisation of Melqart at Tyre, where the city's ability to exploit multiple wind patterns and thus facilitate sailing throughout the year affirmed the god's intrepid nature. Similarly, Tyre's original status as an island underpinned its mythological past and Melqart's role in the city's foundation also rendered him as a figure who might bring order to the chaotic maritime realm. We then briefly examined the mytheme in which a divine figure restores order through the defeat of the deified Sea and established that even general metaphysical notions of the sea could still find religious expression on a local level. This appreciation for the metaphysical qualities of certain bodies of water also resurfaced in our discussion of the region's springs and their associated gods, some of whom were both the protector of a spring and the divine force that resided within it. In particular, we highlighted how the reliable flow of the Efqa Spring at Palmyra stimulated the benevolent, receptive nature of several 'gods without names'

worshipped at the springhead and we drew attention to the possibility that the Efqa's sulphurous properties affirmed the presence of Yarhibol amidst its waters. Our discussion of the region's gods then concluded at Petra, where a variety of divine figures received cult alongside the site's *wadis*. One such figure was Isis, who was seemingly revered as guarantor and protectress of the fertility afforded to the landscape by the *wadis*' annual inundation. Turning finally to the rock-cut aniconic figures of the Sadd al-Maajin, we recognised that the act of carving a divine image into the living rock would have served both to affirm the presence of the divine within the landscape and also to delineate certain environments as sacred spaces. To summarise, the chapter drew attention to the various ways in which aspects of the local hydrological environment found expression in the characterisation of certain gods.

In Chapter Three, we examined the ways in which worshippers organised some sacred spaces around certain bodies of water and, on some occasions, recognised particular water sources as sacred spaces in their own right. To begin with, we stressed that certain bodies of water were integrated into a variety of sacred spaces that extended beyond temples and sanctuaries, and also advocated that landscapes – including those centred on water – were not inherently sacred but rather became sites of cultic importance through the activities of religious communities. Moving then to springs, we explored the ways in which certain religious communities created sacred spaces at the sites of two particular springheads. At Fijeh, we demonstrated that the pragmatic importance of the springs prompted the religious community to construct both a temple and some sort of monumental water installation that served not only to incorporate the waters of the Ain Fijeh into the sacred space, but also to amplify their presence in the landscape. Similarly, our discussion of Palmyra revealed that the Efqa Spring most likely functioned as a sacred space in its own right, an interpretation

that had not previously received full attention due to scholars focusing on identifying a temple amongst the remains of several structures within the vicinity of the spring. By contrast, our discussion highlighted that Palmyra's religious community organised the springhead into a sacred space by adding various cultic installations that precipitated religious interaction with the water and its landscape. In a similar vein, our exploration of sacred spaces along the coast addressed another assumption often inherent in modern scholarship, namely that all temples or sanctuaries located in maritime cities were recognised as 'coastal sanctuaries'. Instead, we adopted a refined approach that focused on the site of Caesarea Maritima and its exceptional synthesis of the harbour and the Temple of Roma and Augustus. In doing so, we drew attention to how the sanctuary's design facilitated cultic activities related to seafaring and thus integrated the maritime realm into the spatiality of religious life in the city. Turning finally to lakes, we explored the ways in which the region's various lakes and marshy environments inspired different religious communities to develop sacred spaces in association with such landscapes. At Ascalon, we encountered a marshy environment that inspired myths centred on a lake and seemingly prompted the establishment of an associated sanctuary. At Yammoune, we outlined how a temple was established close to a seasonal lake and considered whether the structure came to be surrounded by its waters at certain times of the year. Moreover, we contemplated the extent to which the presence of a giant sinkhole might have underscored certain forms of interaction with the lake. Finally, turning to Hierapolis, we affirmed the existence of a lake as described by Lucian with reference to the site's environmental and archaeological context, before drawing attention to the various ways in which the Hierapolitans engaged with its waters. In particular, we proposed that the lake at Hierapolis was a recreation of the mythological environment in which Atargatis once took her postnuptial bath and accordingly noted the importance of using certain bodies of water to conduct specific

patterns of worship. As a whole, the chapter highlighted how particular water sources might be integrated into the region's varied sacred spaces.

In Chapter Four, we examined the ways in which worshippers developed certain patterns of worship in accordance with the physical and metaphysical qualities of the water sources with which they conducted such activities. We began by emphasising how we might better appreciate the use of water in cleansing and pouring by considering how local environmental conditions potentially underscored their religious significance. Then, beginning with oracles, we demonstrated that water could function as a conduit for divine communication and that, at Daphne in particular, this mentality was underscored by the ostensible presence of the divine within the local environment, including its springs. Likewise, our discussion of the role of water in patterns of worship associated with healing touched on the gods' involvement in such activities. Turning first to the Sanctuary of Eshmoun and Asklepios near Sidon, we demonstrated that the hygienic properties of the Nahr Ibrahim rendered the site suitable for cults related to healing, before speculating whether the religious community cleansed themselves with the site's waters because they regarded them to be imbued with therapeutic powers of the divine. Similarly, our discussion of the cult site at St. Anne's in Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina emphasised that the environment could underpin the success of certain healing cults, as we demonstrated that the site's waters were likely the healthiest in the city. Moreover, we drew attention to the fact that immersing oneself in the cool frothing waters of the site's pools would have provided a restorative experience for members of the religious community. To conclude, we expanded our discussion of the therapeutic capacity of certain bodies of water with reference to the thermal springs at Emmatha. Through a detailed examination of the site, we highlighted that the religious significance of the site's springs would have been affirmed by its

sulphurous properties, which had the potential to alleviate the symptoms of particular ailments. In sum, the chapter shone light on the ways in which the physical and metaphysical properties of particular bodies of water informed certain patterns of worship.

Finally, we might contemplate here the extent to which certain features of the relationship between water and religious life were distinctive to the Roman Near East. As we outlined in **1.1**, the Roman Near East can be identified as a distinct temporal and geographical entity and it is through this latter category that we might most helpfully approach this topic by considering what was particularly distinctive about the region's environment. Within the context of the Mediterranean world, the Near East instinctively stands out as a region in which water scarcity impacted upon the daily life of many communities. Unsurprisingly, such precarious relationships with water informed the activities of worshippers especially at Palmyra, Petra, Fijeh/Damascus and across the Jebel Arab massif. Yet the localities that experienced this precarity were by no means representative of the Near East as a whole, nor was the region the only area of the ancient Mediterranean to struggle with water availability. Alternatively, we might draw attention to particularly acute patterns of seasonality experienced in certain localities due to the high concentration of precipitation during the winter months. Seasonality certainly underscored the religious traditions we encountered at Byblos and its hinterland, Khirbet Tannur and Jebel Aqra, as well as coastal localities that adhered to the sailing season. But, once again, these sites and their religious traditions do not encompass those of the overall region, nor were the religious communities of the Near East unique in their capacity to take inspiration from the changing seasons. We might highlight the region's thermal springs, which certainly underpinned religious life at Emmatha; but this environmental situation is confined to the Rift Valley and likewise finds expression elsewhere in the ancient world. Similarly, the impressive karstic springheads of

Aphaca and Caesarea Paneas find counterparts across the ancient Mediterranean, as do the shallow reefs at Iope, the steep cliffs of Berytos and the offshore island of Tyre. It is therefore apparent that the environment of the Roman Near East, much like its religious communities, defies simple synthesis. Rather, if we are to identify a defining characteristic of the Near East's environment, then it is surely the particularly striking juxtaposition of distinctive local landscapes. As a result, it is only fitting that the relationship between water and religious life in the Roman Near East emerges as one that is fundamentally grounded in local variety and, consequently, the results of this study find consensus with the recent emphasis in modern scholarship on approaching religious life from a local perspective. Accordingly, this study has demonstrated that one of the most illuminating conduits through which we might hope to appreciate the diversity of the Roman Near East's religious communities is the region's varied water-based environments.

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