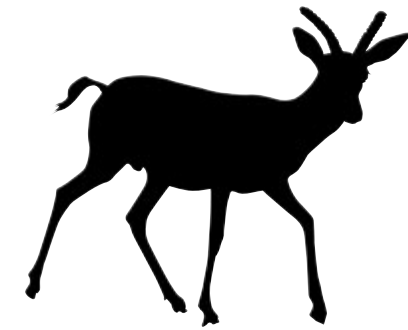


ŞANLIURFA

THE CITY OF CIVILIZATIONS WHERE PROPHETS MET

EDITED BY
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Istanbul
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(Baths, public fountains and street taps, bridges, aqueducts,

a *maqsam* system, reservoirs and cisterns)

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(Walls and gates, interior tower)

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(Markets and bazaars, covered markets, trading centers and caravanserais)

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GODS AND GODDESSES

ABDULLAH EKINCI

Christine Schnusenberg says the following about Urfa:

Edessa was founded by the Seleucid king Seleucos I Nicator in 303 or 302 BC. There is no trace of evidence in cuneiform from the earlier indigenous settlement, but given the favorable geographic and commercial situation of Edessa, there seems to have been a population before the Seleucid settlement; in fact, the autochthonous designation of the pre-Seleucid place was Orhai, which survives in the modern Turkish name of *Urfa*. After the collapse of the Seleucid dynasty in 130-29 BC, the rulers of Edessa were of Nabatean stock.

Edessa was a great center of learning and was considered to be the “Athens of the East”. It was a very complex city and was acclaimed to be the first Christian kingdom in the world, a cradle from which an extraordinary artistic and literary activity flourished and where, for a long time, various pagan traditions with Judaism and Christianity existed side by side. Its population was a conglomeration of Arabs, Aramaens, Greeks, Parthians, Jews, Romans, and to a certain extent Iranians. For instance, Eusebius reports that

the (apocryphal) correspondence between the King Abgar and Jesus was kept in the civic record office, the archives, which housed the earliest records of Edessa history side by side with the literature about the conversion of King Abgar to Christianity and other acts of Christians. This record office was located at the center of the city, where the pagan festivities around the great altar were held at their appointed times. And during the visit of Egeria to the Near East in the fifth century, a bishop showed her the Temple of Venus of Atargatis in Edessa. [Atargatis is a Goddess of Syrian origin whose worship spread to Greece and Rome (and further). She is a Great Mother and Fertility Goddess of the Earth and Water, considered the main Goddess worshipped in Syria. Doves and fish are sacred to Her: doves as an emblem of the Love-Goddess, and fish as symbolic of the fertility and life of the waters. She is so closely identified with the fish that sometimes she was represented in the form of a mermaid--Her upper half that of a human female, her lower a fish-tail. Taken from <http://www.thaliatook.com/OGOD/atargatis.php>]. The temple is located at the citadel adjacent to the fish pool (Balıklı Göl).

The Mythological Traditions of Liturgical Drama: The Eucharist as Theater (New York: Paulist, 2010), 116.

Balıklı Göl, Fishpond, where the fish are still considered sacred



Temple of Venus of Atargatis in Urfa, Soğmatar

HARRAN

Throughout history, Harran has been ruled by the Assyrians, the Kingdom of Alexander, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, local dynasties, various Turkic dynasties, the Mongols and the Ottomans. In recent years, findings in the mounds of Göbekli, Karahan, Sefer, Çöplük, Soğmatar, Nevalı Çori, Tell Idris and Balıklıgöl have revealed the importance of the region as a center for religious cults. The history of Harran dates back to 7000 BC, while its reputation as a religious center began around 3500 BC. The religious traditions of its people undoubtedly helped Harran become a commercial center in the region. From the oldest known date until the Mongol occupation in the 13th century AD, Harran had a reputation as a center for pagan culture. This culture was based on the principle of deified planetary existence and was the center of the faith of the Sabeans.

In Urfa, Shamash was the divine presence of the sun. As an indication of this, the name of one of the city's gates was Beth Shamash.¹ There is no concrete literary

tradition of the ancient beliefs in Harran during this period. As in the case of Nabu, even though the name of the goddess Atargatis appears over an extended area, it cannot be generalized that the implementation of the sect was the same in every region because in the traditional popular beliefs of antiquity the power and expression of a god depended on both the group and the place.

Gods worshiped in the region have been described as male and female. In the system of gods worshiped in Harran, the male gods were the Moon and the Sun, the Lord with his Dogs (Nergal), Baalshamin and Bar-Nemre. The goddesses were



Shamash

Bath Nikkal (Ningal), Atargatis (Ishtar), Gadlat and perhaps Uzza. In addition, the *Doctrine of Addai* confirms the existence of planetary and stellar gods. The mother goddess had various forms, cults and festivals, each appealing to a certain local section of followers, as did Ba'al. Except for Apollo, there are no names of Greek gods. This indicates that despite the nickname of Hellenopolis, traditional Harran belief was little affected by the faith of the Greek Seleucids.²

In some periods during which there was religious persecution, the people of Harran had to maintain their faith in secret, causing them to use different names throughout history. One faith group identified with Harran was the Harranis. Historians such as Abdulqâhir al-Baghdadî and Shahrîstani saw these people as practicing a branch of *Sabia*, the religion of the Sabeans. Due to their idolatrous religious traditions, they have also been referred to as Chaldeans, Nabataeans and even pagans.³ The faith groups in the region were concentrated in three centers: Edessa (Urfa), Harran, and Soğmatar.

In sources from Harran dating from the 2nd century BC, the gods of the

The Temple of Shamash now in Hatra, which was probably built in the 3rd or 2nd century BC by the Seleucids. This ancient city used to be on the lower Tigris banks near Baghdad. It was perhaps the center of sun worship and had a close relationship with Urfa and Harran



sun and moon are seen as masters of the city. Among the gods and goddesses of Harran, there were some Mesopotamian and Syrian gods and goddesses: Ba'al, Belit, Tammuz, the Moon (Sin), the Sun (Shamash), Bath Nikkal, Baalshamin, Bar Nemre, Tar'atha, Gadlat and others. Mentioned in the same sources are the

gods Nebo, Bel (in Edessa/Urfa) and Uzza (in Beth Hur), who were also worshiped in the region. These deities had a significant impact upon the religious culture of the area, before Islam, as a new religion, dominated these regions after the 7th century AD. Let us look at some of these gods and goddesses worshiped in the area of Urfa and its vicinity.

Enlil

Enlil was one of the most important gods in the pantheon of Mesopotamia. Among the children of Enlil were Inana, Iskur, Sin, Nergal, Ninurta, Pabilsag, Nusku, Shamash, Uras, Zababa and Ennugi. Enlil was often called "the Imposing Mountain" and "the King of the Other Earth," and so there is a link between impressive high mountains and Enlil. Other iconic names representing Enlil are "the King", "the Lord, Father and Creator", "the Angry Storm", "the Wild Bull" and, interestingly, "the Merchant". In astrology, Enlil is associated with the constellation of Boötes.⁴

The Seven Gods

The most important number in ancient Mesopotamia was seven, and a group referred to as the Seven Gods corresponded to the Pleiades. Prayers had to be repeated seven times while magic rituals were being performed. Seven demons were removed from the body. Rites were repeated seven or seventy times. Seven cylinders were

hung around the neck of a sick person. It was believed that there were seven gates which opened to the underworld.⁵ The theistic beliefs associated with the number seven manifested themselves in Harran both in the Feast of Gods and in the Cult of the Seven Planets.

At the left corner, sun, moon and star symbols can be seen in the details of a Nabonid stele.

In one account, the Harranians were going to a village named Sabta on April 28th in order to sacrifice a bull to Hermes along with nine lambs, seven for the seven gods, one for the devil and one for the "Master of the Hours."⁶ Since the number seven was used with special reference to the planetary gods, more evidence is needed to arrive at the conclusion that the seven gods were manifested in heavenly bodies. For example, bulls were sacrificed in April for "the god Saturn (Kronos), the god Mars (Ares), and the god of the moon (Sin). In this ceremony, of the nine sacrifices, seven were for the seven gods, one for the god of the jinn and one for the "Lord of Time."⁷ The idea of seven gods has an important place in the Star/Planet Cult. The number of structures located on the sacred hill in Soğmatar is seven, a feature that could be a reference to seven gods. The sites of the seven temple buildings in the area are all extant today. These are the temples of Saturn, Shamash (the sun), Jupiter, Sin (the moon), Venus, Mercury and Mars. These structures were representative of the diversity of early Hermetic tradition. Moreover, Soğmatar, a small town 46 km from Harran, was the center of pagan belief. Its main god was Mar Alahe, the "Lord of Gods". In Soğmatar there were seven hills in the west representing the gods Shamash, Sin, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury, and one to the northwest, "The Sacred Hill," representing Mar Alahe.

EDESSA (ANCIENT URFA) AND BABYLON



The great gate of Babylon: Ishtar Gate

The Star/Planet Cult

Astronomy began with examination of the movements of celestial bodies in relation to the rising and setting of the sun and the moon and the seasonal changes in nature. Though the sun dominated the daytime sky, the master of the evening sky, the moon, ruled to a wider heaven. From the known period of history, the communities of Mesopotamia surveyed the changes of the evening sky instead of that of the daytime. The Sumerians, and later the Assyrians and Babylonians, built structures in the form of ziggurats in order to reflect their belief in the unity of the universe. Neugebauer and others claim that the foundations of the Chaldean faith,



Various small idols discovered in Urfa

wisdom and knowledge were the results of Hellenic ideology having spread in the Near East. The Seleucids developed astronomy as a science using mathematics to form the basis of Hellenistic astrology, but the Zodiac was determined during a relatively late period.⁸ The importance of the moon deity developed at an early age in Mesopotamia, and meteorological events were calculated according to the phases of the moon.

Augury was also popular during Babylonian and Assyrian times. Nabonidus (556–539 BC), the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, was tasked with the restoration of the temple in Harran. In the 7th century BC, the use of heavenly prophecy focused on the planets and stars was connected with the Babylonian beliefs in astrology recorded in the *Enuma Anu Enlil* tablets. A quarter of the prophecies were related to drought.⁹ Astronomical calendars of the sun and moon on cuneiform plates dating prior to 523 BC demonstrated that the merger of the moon with other planets and solar eclipses could be calculated. The solar-lunar calendar necessary for the development of astronomy was not developed until the 5th century BC. The conquest of the Near East by the Persians was the main reason for an increasing interest in gods related to the heavens and prophecy. On the eve of the Islamic conquests there were groups of pagans in Harran, around the north of Syria, and possibly in Heliopolis (Baalbek in Lebanon). Folkloric pagan culture lived on for a long time in Harran.¹⁰ The Harranians had temples named according to the basic shapes and the heavenly bodies, which included the temples of Saturn (hexagon), Jupiter (triangle), Mercury (rectangle) and the Moon (octagonal). The Sabians kept their mysteries and symbols in these temples.¹¹ The fact that Muslim ritual prayers are performed according to the rising and setting and celestial positions of the sun and moon should be accepted as a reflection of this cult.



The god over the countryside resides in this statue on a deer



NINLIL (MUSLISSU)

The goddess Ninlil was in the pantheon of Harranian gods. She was the wife of Enlil and was referred to as the compassionate mother. In Assyria, she was worshiped as Muslissu, and accepted as the wife of Assur, a god in Assyrian beliefs who was the same as the Babylonian Enlil. The lion was her animal symbol. In the picture above, we see Enlil with a plow, Haia (barley god) and spouse Nisaba (grain goddess), Ninlil and an unidentified figure. When the gods did their work, Nisaba and spouse Haia brought down seeds to depelop grain on the earth, and Enlil brought farming to Eden.

Nabu and the Cult of Bel

Nabu (Nabium, and according to the Bible, Nebo) was the scribe-god of Mesopotamia considered to be the writer of divine destiny. Because information at that time was transmitted via text, Nabu joined Ea (Enki) and Marduk as the gods of wisdom. In some traditions, he took on the properties of Ninurta, the god of farming, floods and wind, and thus became associated with irrigation and agriculture. He was also linked to the planet Mercury. His wife was the goddess Tasmetu. At the beginning of the 2nd century BC, the Nabuan belief spread, probably with the nomadic Amorites from Babylonia, to what is today Anatolia.¹² Borsippa, near Babylon, was one of the cultural centers of this god.

Nabu was adopted during the Neo-Assyrian period and was a god of the Assyrians during the reigns of both Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC). During the 4th century BC, Nabuan belief spread among communities speaking the language of Aram in Anatolia and Egypt. Nabu was included in the Mesopotamian pantheon of gods and was worshiped in central and northern Syria in Palmyra, Dura-Europis and Edessa

in the 4th century BC during the period of the Roman ruler Augustus (27 BC–14 AD). The Nabuan cult was associated with Apollo by the Greeks.¹³

Edessa (Urfa) was a religious and political center of the Star/Planet Cult until the 3rd century AD.¹⁴ Sufficient information is lacking on the beliefs of the Harranians during this period. However, knowledge of these beliefs is strengthened by texts and icons representing the literary tradition of the ancient beliefs in Harran, along with its history, which was parallel to that of Edessa. As for Nabu, though the name of the god appears over an extended area, the implementation of religious practices was not the same in every location. In the popular beliefs, the power and expression of a god varied by group and place. Bel was the god of the city of Urfa, while Ba'al was a god worshipped further south. There are similar origins of the regional variants with similar roots. Bel and Nebo appear as gods in the writings of Jacob of Suruç and in the anonymous 4th century *Doctrine of Addai* (Aday, the Apostle Thaddeus). In the latter, Addai asked the people of Edessa: “Who is Nebo? Is it a god worshiped by you? And honored Bel? Among you, some worship Bath Nikkal. Like your neighbors the Harranians and Tar’atha, the people of Mabbuğ (Hierapolis) and the Arabian Eagle, there are some who worship the sun and the moon. You cannot escape the enslavement of the light and the shining stars—everyone who worships lifeless objects is already cursed by God.”¹⁵

Jacob of Suruç claimed that demons were the cause of Nebo and Bel being introduced in Edessa. His explanation gives clues about the pagan culture in Edessa. Though the main culture was the same, it differed from Harran in that Jupiter symbolized Bel and Mercury symbolized Nabu, the son of Bel, in the pantheon of Urfa. With this information, it is understood that Nabu and Bel represent the

pantheon of Edessa as being dualistic. Furthermore, Nabu was linked to the singer Orpheus in Hellenic culture. This identification is represented in the mosaic of Orpheus which depicts animals with winged angels. In the early period of Ur, there was a belief amongst the Sumerians that the bad conditions of death could be eased by music. As a result, this cult had an important effect on Urfa as well. When the kingdom of Urfa chose Christianity, it banned the sacrificing to Nabu and Bel, and both the king and his people tore down the sacrificial altars, whose existence was further evidence of the importance of this cult.¹⁶ In the graveyard of the kingdom, there are depictions of Orpheus playing a lyre and animals dancing with their musicians. Vestiges of the Nabu cult are represented in the names of historical characters like Nabonassar, Nabonid, Nabopolassar, Naburimanni and Nebuchadnezzar.

Atargatis (Tar’atha/Ishtar/Astarte)

Another important cult in the region was that of Atargatis, who was a fertility goddess that had a significant role among the deities of Edessa. A pool in the city filled with sacred fish symbolized this cult. In this period, there was no serious threat to the survival of the pagan culture of Harran in Edessa. Although there were gods other than Sin at the summit of the pantheon, the cult of Urfa/Edessa was no different from the paganism that worshiped the stars and planets, of which Harran was a chief representative.¹⁷ The people of ancient Urfa believed in a form of worship requiring men to castrate themselves, and eunuchs served as priests of the Atargatis cult. This information can be inferred from the orders of Abgar, who, after his conversion to Christianity, noted that this practice had been abolished.¹⁸

Ningal and Atargatis were the oldest goddesses in Mesopotamia.¹⁹ Ningal was the spouse of the moon god, Sin. Their daughter was Ishtar/Atargatis, who is known as Venus in Roman-Greek mythology. The origin of Atargatis is hidden in the mass of ancient local traditions. This goddess was worshiped in a wide variety of forms in many different places and it is impossible to ascertain details of her worship in Harran in this period. Among the Arabian goddesses, it was Uzza who became known as Astarte/Venus. We learn from Bardasian through the *Doctrine of Addai* that the people of Edessa also worshipped Atargatis. Addai associated this belief with the Tar’atha cult in the neighboring city of Hierapolis.²⁰ Drijvers reported that the goddess in Hierapolis was described as a “sister of Harran” in the writings of Jacob of Suruç, who stated that both “Harran and Hierapolis like spring [as a season].” This refers to the ceremonies in Harran held in honor of the gods, when water, as a life-giving force, was sprinkled everywhere, although there is no information as to whether Harran had a sacred lake like Edessa and Hierapolis. Sacred fountains were under the divine protection of the gods.²¹

The representation of the goddess is found in different forms in different places. She may be depicted as the symbol of a city (Edessa), as the wife of the Syrian storm god Haddad (Edessa, Hierapolis and Dura-Europis), as the wife of Nergal (Hatra), or as Cybele enthroned between two lions (Hierapolis). Coins found in Harran indicate that, as in Edessa, the goddess was worshiped in Harran



Bust of a priest of Atargatis, 3rd century AD, Capitoline Museums

as a symbol of the city. The beliefs and traditions of Edessa were compatible with the influence of the Atargatis cult in Hierapolis. Within this period it is difficult to determine the difference between the Arab goddess Uzza and Atargatis in terms of their functions.

Cybele (Kybele)

Cybele was the Phrygian/Hittite mother goddess. Excavations revealed a Kybele goddess figure in Anatolia dating back to 7000-6500 BC. This goddess symbolized maternity, reproduction, femininity, fertility and continuity of life. The goddess was depicted as standing, seated or lying and is also seen in sculptures as a figure in childbirth. Two lion figures are included in some statues depicting a seated goddess or one giving birth. The sacred animal of the mother goddess was the lion, which is seen as being the queen of all animals and having unlimited sovereignty over nature. Sometimes Cybele is shown holding the figure of Attis in her arms. Attis was at the same time both the child and lover of the goddess. The way in which Cybele was worshiped in the cult of Hierapolis was compatible with the faith and tradition of Atargatis in Edessa,²² one notable similarity being the eunuch tradition of her priests.

Haddad (Ba'al)

Haddad was another god worshiped in this region. His title is generally given as "El Toro" (El the Bull) and he was supposed to be present at the beginning of river heads, sitting in the farmland, as the father of gods. He was known as "El", "Rider of the Clouds," and the god of lightning and thunder, as well as representing Ba'al the god of fertility.²³ This god was later named the god of the seas and rivers with the name of Yam-Nahar. As seen in the Atargatis icons found in Syrian cities, Haddad as the weather god had been merged with several other gods, among them Zeus and Ba'al. However, it is not known if a male god was assigned as a weather god in Harran.²⁴

Nusku

During the reign of the Neo-Assyrians, Nusku, the god of light and fire, was also included among the gods worshiped in Harran. He was accepted as the son of Sin (Nanna-Suen), the main god of the region. A large Aramaic-Semitic community worshiped these gods, although Nusku might not be the same god as the Neo-Assyrian "Nasuh" or in the Aramaic inscription "Nsk". These cults continued to exist until the 1st century AD and beyond. Kudurrus found in the region depict light/fire figures representing Nusku.²⁵ A kudurru is an old Mesopotamian stone document recording royal land grants and decorated with sculptured reliefs. They may chronicle sales, grants of fields or writings about the ruler. These stones are often made of black basalt, although some rarer ones are smaller and made from baked clay.

Ningal (Nikkal/ Bath Nikkal)

The goddess Ningal was the wife of Sin and the mother of Shamash. Ningal was worshiped both in Ur and in the temple of Sin in Harran. This cult evolved separately in other places during the 2nd century BC. In Syria she was converted to Nikkal, which was the spelling used in Babylon. It seems that the Nikkal cult continued until the middle of the 1st millennium AD.²⁶

Nergal (Erra)

Nergal and Erra were later identified with each other despite the fact that they began as different gods. Nergal was worshiped at the temple of Meslam in the city of Kutha in Babylonia, and he was associated with the underworld. The queen of the underworld, Ereshkigal, was considered to be his wife. Nergal was the son of Enlil and Ninlil and was associated with forest fires and plague. Nergal in particular was responsible for the plague and was a fierce god of war. One of the most important symbols of Nergal was the warrior. As Erra, he was worshiped with his consort, Mami (perhaps one of the mother goddesses/ goddess of childbirth), in the city of Kutha. In Babylonian art, Nergal is usually pictured draped in a long cloth open in front with one leg forward, his foot either standing on a pedestal or trampling on the figure of a man.

Nergal was accepted as the ruler of death, but also as the son of Enlil, and thus the sibling of Sin or perhaps even his twin.²⁷ One description of Nergal²⁸ represents him as "the Lord with Three Dogs," and another as the brother of Sin and ruler of the underworld. There are different examples of both versions in local forms. He is depicted in the iconography of Hatra with three dogs.²⁹ The guard duty of the dogs, as with Cerberus, likely represents the guard duty of the god. Evidence of this interpretation was also found in Harran. The dog reliefs located on the castle walls of the southeast gate next to the buttresses had the function of protection against evil spirits.³⁰ In this period, the godhood of Nergal had a place in the traditions of the Mesopotamian pantheon. References to the gods Nergal and Sin show that this duality in old Mesopotamia had an effect on the mystery religion of Mithra/ Ahriman, Zoroastrianism, and even Gnosticism.³¹

Generally, as the symbol of an independent god, Nergal was depicted carrying a sword or a one- or two-headed lion scepter. From the Old Babylonian time until the Achaemenid period, according to Kassite-Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions, ram-headed sculptures were considered as a symbol of the god of wisdom Ea (Enki). In a Neo-Assyrian seal, Ea carries a baton which might be a ram-headed scepter, while the goat-fish and turtle were considered as two other symbols of Ea.³² An eagle-headed scepter is only seen in the kudurrus of the Kassites and was adopted as the symbol of the god Zababa. From the Akkadian to the Neo-Babylonian period the lion-headed scepter or sword were seen as symbols of Nergal, god of the underworld. Furthermore, the Anzu bird, killed by Ninurta as the god of hunting (as well as farming) and the light/fire of Nusku were also associated with Nergal.



Clay tablet depicting Nergal



Ereshkigal

Gula, the goddess of healing



Gula

The dog was the sacred animal of Gula, the goddess of healing. The seated dog as a divine symbol first appeared in the Old Babylonian period and continued until the Neo-Babylonian period. Writings on a kudurru with a goddess and a seated dog are the sign of the advancement of this symbol. A small dog figure found in Girsu (Telloh) in southern Iraq, southeast of Sumer, was dedicated to Gula. In addition, the many small dog figures in the temple of Gula in Isin, also in southern Iraq, prove the history of this relationship. It is stated in the records of King Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC) that small dog sculptures were left at the door of the Gula temple in Babylon. In the seal designs of this period, a dog sits next to a goddess, perhaps Gula, seated on a throne and sometimes carrying a hook. During the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods a sitting or standing dog was used as a magical protective figure unconnected to any god. Putting small dog figures on both sides of a door represented magical protection and prevented entry of evil spirits.³³

Traces of the goddess Gula, including the dog reliefs located on the walls at the southeast gate of the Harran Citadel, still exist today. Though these reliefs date from the 11th century, they are rooted in ancient times. These figures were considered to function as guardians.³⁴ In the previous period, according to this belief, Assyrians placed dog figures at doorways. Today if one visits the Urfa Museum, one can find statues of dog idols. The dog spirits were placed on each side of the threshold of the door to ward off evil spirits attempting to enter the house.³⁵ The linking of the cult of a deity with dogs showed that the god or goddess functioned as a protector. This can be inferred in the depiction of “the Lord with Three Dogs” in Harran, perceived as the local form of Nergal, the ruler of the underworld and sibling of Sin. Moreover, in Hatra, Nergal was pictured with a scorpion, a snake, and three dogs.³⁶

For Mesopotamian societies, the dog family not only included wolves, hyenas,

jackals and dogs, but also lions.³⁷ This is why there are many lion figures in the Urfa region. The places having such motifs used them for protection from evil spirits and for guarding the home. In addition to the Urfa Citadel and the inns, lion motifs can be found on many buildings in and around Harran, and there are even some figures carved in stone and black basalt rock in the fields in the area.

Rabies was an important issue in connection with the dog cults of Mesopotamian communities. Rabies is thought to have originated in Mesopotamia before the beginning of the second millennium BC. Moreover, it is believed that the transmission of rabies from animals to humans first occurred in this region and consequently, by the 1st century BC the disease began to spread further.

Sin/Nanna/Suen (the moon)

The Sabeans mentioned in the Qur'an as followers of one of the divine religions and the pagan Sabeans cited in medieval sources are often confused with each other. By the 11th century AD, the Sabeans who entertained the monotheistic belief (*tawhid*) had disappeared in this region and in their place appeared Harranians of the same name who embraced the Moon culture. Indeed, historians such as Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Shaddad, al-Biruni, Dimashqî, Yaqut, Ibn Mas'ud, Shahrastani, Ibn al-Nadim and Bar Hebraeus mention the moon temples of Harran.³⁸ The cult of Sin had brought advantages to Harran from the early periods. The famous E-khulkhula and in particular, the majestic temple of Sin in Harran later became the pilgrimage sites of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Roman emperors, in addition to becoming the sites of peace treaties.³⁹

In addition to the Sin temple in Harran, the moon god had various influences in the region. One of Harran's key features was holding the authority of both Sin and Ningal. Sin, one of the oldest gods, was later adopted by the Assyrians and occupied a prominent place in the religious life of Mesopotamia throughout ancient times. In ancient Mesopotamia, both the sun and the moon were among the male gods. In the Sumerian culture, the moon was a male god called Suen or Nanna. In the Akkadian language, Suen was later pronounced Sin. Asimbabbar, Namrashit (outward shining person) and Inbu were among his other names. His name was also written as the number 30 corresponding to the moon calendar.

Sin/Nanna was the son of Enlil and Ninlil. The most important temple of Nanna in the region was E-kisnugal in the city of Ur. During the Neo-Babylonian era, another temple in Harran gained importance as a different cult center. In this temple, Sin was worshiped together with Nusku, who was recognized as his son. The temple in Harran gained great popularity during the time of the Babylonian King Nabonid, whose mother was a priestess at this temple. Nabonid appointed his daughter as a high priestess of Sin in the city of Ur. The symbol of Sin was a crescent moon and his animal symbol was a bull or a lion-dragon.⁴⁰ Due to this, bulls were sacrificed in the temple. Tamara Green states that the different names used for Sin indicated the phases of the moon.

The Sumerian-Babylonian creation epic of *Enuma Elish* was found among the ruins of the Nineveh library in that ancient city, now located in Mosul in Iraq. It is

also known as *The Seven Tablets of Creation* and consists of approximately 1000 lines recorded on seven clay tablets in the Akkadian language. This saga emphasized the superiority of the god of wisdom Marduk over other gods. These tablets were the primary sources dealing with the worldview and lifestyle of the people of Babylonia, and they also revealed that, although it had an important place in Mesopotamian cosmology, the sun came second to the moon. The moon, according to the *Enuma Elish* was created before the sun, and in the belief of the Sumerians, the evening star (Ishtar/Atargatis) and the sun (Shamash) were the children of the moon.⁴¹

Shamash (the sun)

In the early Babylonian-Assyrian tradition, Shamash (the sun) played a relatively minor role in the political pantheon. He was one of three children of the moon god and had the power of light. Therefore, he was the enemy of darkness. In the social sphere, he represented the power of justice and honor. At night, in the underworld, he solved conflicts among the dead and also meted out justice. Although Shamash oversaw everything as the keeper of justice, his power was limited. Extant texts show that the sun played a secondary role when compared to that of the moon. Only in the Hellenistic period did the sun gain primary importance in Mesopotamia. Shamash figures in the sacred hill of Soğmatar have shed some light on this period. It remains an unresolved question as to whether any form of sun worship was implemented in the traditions of Syria and Mesopotamia before contact with the Arabs.



The tablet of Shamash, the sun god. Dating from the 800s B.C., this relief from Sippar depicts the Babylonian sun god Shamash viewing a display of respect from the three smaller figures on the left

The growing interests in the philosophers, especially the new Platonists, also impacted the beliefs in the gods and the sun in Harran.⁴² In the *Doctrine of Addai*, Bath Nikkal/Ningal, Ishtar/Atargatis, and the sun and moon gods were mentioned as being the gods of Harran. Finally, the sun motifs seen at the sacred hill in Soğmatar and in the city of Urfa and its cemeteries demonstrate the development of the importance of the sun cult in the area.



A view from Harran castle