

# Temple Prostitution

## Oral Report

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HLI330 – Classical Mythology

# Definition

## Temple Prostitution (*or Sacred Prostitution*)

- sexual intercourse or other sexual activity performed in the context of religious worship
- acts of prostitution undertaken for a religious purpose
- sexual rite performed or offered under the auspices of a God

# Case Study – Ancient Mesopotamia

Inanna → Ishtar → Astarte → Aphrodite

- **Herodotus**: every Babylonian woman had to attend the temple of Inanna and agree to sex with any devotee that requested it
  - ▶ Not known for his accuracy
- This rite was an offering to ensure fertility

Inanna and Dumuzi



# Case Study – The Bible

## Biblical References

- *zonah* or *qedesha*
- Deuteronomy 23:17-18
  - ▶ None of the daughters of Israel shall be a kadeshah, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a kadesh.  
You shall not bring the hire of a prostitute (*zonah*) or the wages of a dog (*kelev*) into the house of the Lord your God to pay a vow, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.

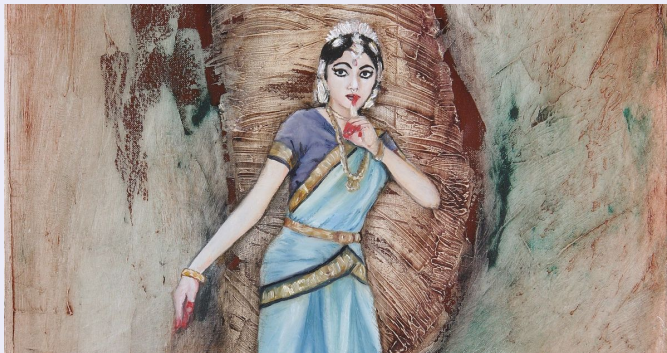
## Quote

“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” 6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” (Revelation 17:4–6 ESV)

# Case Study – Ancient (and Modern) India

## Devadasi

- Origins dated between 9th and 10th centuries, currently one of the most criticized forms of prostitution in India
- Institutionalized sexual exploitation of Dalits
- Originally seen as protectors of music and dance



# Sources

- Temple/Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia Revisited
- The Metaphor of Prostitution in the Identification of Babylon in Revelation 17–18
- THE DEVADASI SYSTEM: Temple Prostitution in India
- The qdesha in Hosea 4:14: Putting the (Myth of the) Sacred Prostitute to Bed