

# Shaushka, the Traveling Goddess

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Traveling gods and goddesses between courts was a well-known motif in the ancient Near East. Statues of gods and goddesses served as symbols of life, fertility, healing, prosperity, change, alliances and sometimes represented the “geographical” integration or the “ideological” legitimization of a territory. The Amarna Letters reveal the journey of the goddess Shaushka to the Egyptian court of Amenhotep III. Akkadian, Hurrian, Hittite, and Ugaritic texts reveal the role played by this goddess in local pantheons, as well as in various foreign courts during the second millennium BCE. She was known as the goddess of war, fertility and healing and statues of the goddess were used in rituals performed before military actions, to heal diseases, to bless marriage alliances and assist births. This paper analyses the role of this traveling goddess in the Egyptian court of Amenhotep III.

El viaje de estatuas de dioses y diosas entre cortes de grandes reyes fue un recurso conocido en el Cercano Oriente antiguo. En la Antigüedad, las estatuas de ciertos dioses y diosas fueron símbolos de vida, fertilidad, curación, prosperidad, cambio, alianzas y, en algunos casos, representaron la integración “geográfica” o la legitimación “ideológica” de un territorio. Las Cartas de El Amarna revelan el viaje de la estatua de la diosa Shaushka hacia la corte egipcia durante el reinado de Amenhotep III. Textos acadios, hurritas, hititas y ugaríticos indican el rol cumplido por esta diosa en panteones locales, así como en diversas cortes extranjeras durante el II milenio a.e. Fue reconocida como la diosa de la guerra, fertilidad y curación. Estatuas de esta diosa son empleadas en rituales realizados ante acciones bélicas, enfermedades, alianzas de matrimonio y nacimientos. El presente trabajo se propone analizar el rol de esta diosa en la corte egipcia durante el reinado de Amenhotep III.

**Keywords:** Shaushka, Amarna, alliances, marriages.

**Palabras clave:** Shaushka, Amarna, alianzas, matrimonios.

In accordance with the spirit of “brotherhood”, great kings sent specialists, such as physicians, exorcists, architects, and craftsmen, among others, to the courts of their “brothers”<sup>1</sup>. But on special occasions they sent statues of gods and goddesses in order to heal or protect royal peers, as well as blessing their new wives. In general, these foreign specialists were well received according to the rules of “hospitality” between kings of the same rank, and entertained with banquets as well as compensated with gifts<sup>2</sup>. The king and the court that provided the specialist earned prestige, but in many cases risked losing the expert to the hands of his colleague in a remote court<sup>3</sup>. In some cases, even the best specialist was not enough to alleviate the pain of a king or save a queen

1 Zaccagnini, 1983: 249-256.

2 Beckman, 2013: 207.

3 Liverani, 1990: 228.

in childbirth<sup>4</sup>, in cases such as these, when medicine failed, kings turned to prayers and divine statues.

The delivery of statues of gods and goddesses between the courts of the great kings was known in the ancient Near East. In antiquity, statues of certain gods and goddesses were symbols of life, fertility, healing, prosperity, change, alliances and, in some cases, represented the “geographic” integration or “ideological” legitimation of a territory to a particular worldview. Akkadian, Hurrian, Hittite, and Ugaritic texts indicate the important role played by the goddess Shaushka in local pantheons, as well as in various foreign courts during the second millennium BCE. The Amarna Letters mentioned the journey of the statue of the goddess Shaushka to the Egyptian court during the reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1388-1351 BCE). The present paper intends to analyse the role of this goddess in the Egyptian court.

## 1 | The Goddess Shaushka

The goddess Shaushka (var. Shaushga, Shausha, Shawushka) was a Hurrian goddess. The earliest mention of the goddess is in a text dated to the forty-sixth year of the reign of Shulgi, and records the offerings of lamb that the goddess Shausha of Nineveh was receiving in her temple<sup>5</sup>. She would later be called Shaushka and identified with

Ishtar. Shaushka was the name of the Hurrian Ishtar and her name is derived from the Hurrian root for “The Great/Magnificent One”<sup>6</sup>. During the Sargonic reign, she was a very important deity and was worshiped in her manifestation of Ishtar-Annunitum. The influence of this goddess was probably due to the Hurrian presence in the North of Syria during the Sargonic Empire.

Three main cults related to Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Assur, and Ishtar of Arbela are known (after ca. 1100 BCE) to have existed in Assyria. Lambert<sup>7</sup> studied Late Assyrian religious texts, in order to determine if they were three different goddesses or different manifestations of the same deity. For example, two different deities are mentioned in the “Hymn to Assurbanipal”: the “Queen of Nineveh, who put me on the throne of my father,” and the “Lady of Arbela, who regularly granted me acts of favours during my reign”; the text indicates the distinctiveness and specific functions fulfilled by each of these goddesses<sup>8</sup>. Also, during the reign of Shamshi-Adad I, the goddess Ishtar of Nineveh would have had a small temple or shrine in Assur<sup>9</sup>. Representations of this goddess highlighted her warrior appearance, standing on a lioness. The list of Babylonian deities referred only to Ishtar of Nineveh. During the reign of Assurbanipal, this goddess would have had a small temple or shrine for special rituals in the city of Assur<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, Assyrian texts reveal that

4 For the sister of Hattusili, see Bo 652: Vs. 8-Rs. 1.

5 “Text from Drehem”, in Beckman, 1998: 1.

6 Wegner, 1981: 24-25; 1995; Beckman, 1998: 2, n. 14; Bellucci, 2012: 46.

7 Lambert, 2004: 35.

8 Porter, 2004: 41-44.

9 Lambert, 2004: 36.

10 Library of Assurbanipal, 80-7-19, 152 + 81-2-4, 188, in von Soden, 1974-1977: 37-45.

Ishtar of Assur, in Assur, received the booty captured in the city of Nuzi. Ultimately, the patron goddess of the city was Ishtar and not the god Assur. It was only, during the second millennium BCE that the Kingdom of Assyria flourished under the protection of the god Assur.

At the Hurrian pantheon, the goddess is found together with other main gods, such as the god of storms Teshub, the solar god Shimige, the lunar god Kusuh, and Kumarbi. Her centre of worship was Shamukha, probably located in the northern area of the Euphrates. Usually, this deity was identified with the Akkadian-Babylonian goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. In Hurrian, Akkadian and Assyrian texts she is mentioned as Shaushka of Nineveh, who was worshipped in that city for more than fifteen centuries<sup>11</sup>.

In Mitanni, Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh was the main goddess during the reign of Tushratta. Associated with the goddess Ishtar, she was worshipped as the goddess of love, fertility, marriage, and war. Her multi-faceted and paradoxical appearance is reminiscent of the ancient Sumerian goddess Inanna, who was associated with Ishtar, and who according to the “Epic of Gilgamesh” met opposite characteristics, being a maternal and compassionate goddess before the destruction of humanity by the flood. She was also a lust-

ful, aggressive, vengeful goddess who was rejected by a hero<sup>12</sup>. Her symbol was a lioness, an animal that was generally associated with fertility, and war<sup>13</sup>. This goddess embodies contradictions, since she represents order and chaos, love and war, while at the same time transcending them<sup>14</sup>. In the Babylonian pantheon, she was the divine personification of Venus, in its two aspects, as the Morning Star, providing love, and as the Star of the Night, causing war. She was also associated with rituals related to sexuality and her cult included sacred prostitution in the city of Uruk. As well as the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Akkadian-Babylonian Ishtar, and the Syrian Astarte, Hurro-Assyrian Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh, was worshipped as the Lady of Heaven<sup>15</sup>.

According to Hurrian mythology, Shaushka was the daughter of Anu, the god of the sky, or of Sin, the god of the moon. In some Hittite texts, Teshub, the god of storms appears as her brother or her husband<sup>16</sup>. In Hattusa, Shaushka of Nineveh was a hypostases of the goddess Ishtar of Hatti, associated with magic, as opposed to the traditional Akkadian goddess Ishtar, who was rarely related to incantations. In Hatti, Shaushka was associated with the goddess Anzili (Enzili)<sup>17</sup>, and in general was accompanied by two Hurrian attendants or musicians, Ninatta and Kulitta<sup>18</sup>. In general, she

11 Beckman, 1998: 8.

12 Harris, 1991: 263-264.

13 For the Hittite ivory from Megiddo (thirteenth BCE), see Alexander, 1991: 163, fig. 2. In Hatti, Shaushka was associated with a creature called awiti, a kind of sphinx (both male and female) or a winged lion/lioness, as is shown in several Anatolian seals (Bellucci, 2012: 55-56).

14 Vanstiphout, 1984: 232-233.

15 Black-Green, 1992: 108-109; Frymer-Kensky, 1997: 102-103; Lambert, 2004: 35.

16 Stuckey, 2008: n. 3; Bachvarova, 2013: 24.

17 Wilhem, 2002: 342-351; Bachvarova, 2013: 24-25.

18 Singer, 1995: 127-128.

was an ambiguous and controversial goddess, since she could unite and guarantee harmony and eternal love to a new couple, and also cause the breakdown of their marriage and the misfortune of both.

Shaushka was also venerated in Nuzi, Alalakh, and Ugarit. At Nuzi, an ivory statue of the goddess was found (fifteenth century BCE), with male and female elements depicted on her clothing, and carrying a weapon<sup>19</sup>. In Alalakh, she was a main goddess and was worshipped as the Lady of Alalakh (Level IV)<sup>20</sup>. In a terracotta plaque, found at Alalakh (Level III, fourteenth century BCE), Shaushka is depicted with two birds (perhaps doves)<sup>21</sup>. However, she was more commonly associated with local cult, receiving bird offerings (in her Hurrian aspect) and with typical properties of the local Hurrian Ishtar.<sup>22</sup> Towards the second half of the second millennium BCE, Ishtar of Nineveh was very popular at the court of Ugarit, and was associated with the goddess Astarte.<sup>23</sup> On occasions, she was accompanied by the attendants Ninatta and Kulitta.<sup>24</sup>

The Hittites spread her cult throughout their empire. Shausha or Shaushka was venerated in the Hittite pantheon as the goddess of love, war, fertility, and healing. Her centre of worship was located in Lawazantiya, in Kizzuwatna (KUB 41.102). At the end of the fifteenth century BCE, a statue

of the goddess was moved from Kizzuwatna and replaced in the southeastern city of Shamukha in Hittite territory (CTH 481). During the reign of Arnuwanda I, the goddess is mentioned in a treaty with the Kaška people (Northern area of Anatolia, near the Black Sea) (CTH 139 ii 10). Boğazköy texts refer to twenty-five variants of Ishtar/Shauska. In most cases, this goddess is related to cities or regions in the North of Syria or in Southeastern Anatolia, and not with Hattusa (the Hittite capital), Ankuwa, Nerik and Zippalanda or other early Hittite centres<sup>25</sup>. Obviously, the epithet “All the Ishtars of the Hurri land” (KUB 56.31 IV 21) indicates that they were hypostases of a single divine archetype. All manifestations of the goddess Ishtar share a common essence, but it must be emphasized that on several occasions, the offerings are different (KUB 45.41 ii, iii). Late manifestations of Ishtar are — according to Beckman—<sup>26</sup> essentially avatars or hypostases of the first Ishtar of Nineveh. Harris<sup>27</sup> argues that since her beginnings in Sumer and Akkad the goddess Inanna/Ish-tar has had a multi-faceted character, due to the constant struggle to maintain her power and domain over time, as well as the fact that this goddess was in constant movement (due to travels and pilgrimages). In short, this deity has become true “all women (goddesses) and was of an infinite variety”.

19 Alexander, 1991: 171.

20 Na'aman, 1980: 209-214.

21 Albenda, 2005: 187.

22 Oliva, 1999: 18-19.

23 *Ugaritica V*: 220-221, N° 149a.

24 Cf. “Ritual of Attartu” (KTU 1.116 = RS 24.261, in Bachvarova, 2013: 27).

25 Beckman, 1998: 4; Wegner, 1981: 157-195.

26 Beckman, 1998: 4.

27 Harris, 1991: 261-263.

It was during the Hittite Empire that Shaushka became the personal goddess of King Hattusili III (thirteenth century BCE) through his marriage with Pudukhepa, the daughter of the High Priest of this goddess. She was venerated in the Hittite capital as Ishtar of Nineveh and perhaps had a temple or shrine dedicated in her honour<sup>28</sup>. She was also worshipped in Kizzuwatna (KUB 41.102), and in Halab joined the exclusive circle of the goddess Hebat (CTH 698).

In a Hurro-Hittite ritual text, Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh is presented as an inter-state goddess, who has resided in various places outside the boundaries of the Hittite Empire, and on certain occasions was invoked in a place called *āpi*<sup>29</sup>. Her inter-regional fame was acquired slowly after the Ur III Period, when Nineveh was a Hurrian city, and after having crossed various regions and kingdoms as a goddess of magic and healing<sup>30</sup>.

The Hittite texts record several of her epithets, such as the “Queen of Nineveh (Ninu-wawi)” and the “Woman of that which is repeatedly spoken” (as the goddess of magic)<sup>31</sup>. In certain cases, this goddess is associated with Anzili in rituals of incantations, purification, and birth<sup>32</sup>. Also, monthly festivals (CTH 714) and rituals during the

seasons of winter (CTH 715), spring and autumn (CTH 510) were performed in honour to this goddess. A text indicates that the Queen performed one of these monthly festivals: “The Queen herself performs the monthly Festival for Ishtar of Nineveh on the road/path”, probably an allusion to the pilgrimage of the statue of the goddess through the streets of the Hittite capital<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the Hittite Queen participated in the “Ritual of Itkalzi” performed at the House of the Ancestors, during the annual festival of the goddess Shaushka in the city of Shamukha<sup>34</sup>. This festival, as well as the “Ritual of the Šarrena,”<sup>35</sup> both of Hurro-Hittite character, would be related with the invocation of ancestors or deified ancestral kings and legendary heroes, in order to legitimise the royalty.

During these festivals, they sang hymns and songs called *zinzabuššiya*, a Hurrian genre called after a type of bird (CTH 276), probably a dove. Libations with a special type of rhyton, known as *zinzabuššiya* (CTH 567) were used in rituals. Some texts mention the hypostases of the goddess Ishtar *zin-in-za-a-bu-wa-ze-e-na* (CTH 713), whose incantations were pronounced in Hurrian (CTH 715).

However, Beckman<sup>36</sup> argues that Ishtar of Nineveh was not a main deity in the Hit-

28 Cf. “Prayer of Muwattalli II” (KUB 6.45 i 53 = CTH 381), in Singer, 1996: 11, 33.

29 See CTH 716, 1 = KBo 2.9 IV 11-12, 31, in Bachvarova, 2013: 27.

30 Haas, 1979: 399.

31 KUB 45.53; KUB 47.17. For the texts of incantations, see CTH 345.1.A = KUB 36.7 a + KUB 17.7 iii 34', in Beckman, 1998: 5.

32 For example, in “The song of Ullikummi,” in Bachvarova, 2013: 27.

33 KUB 10.27 = CTH 714. For the Queen as the chief officiant in “The Song of the Sea,” see CTH 785 = KUB 44.7 + i.

34 CTH 777.2.A, in Bachvarova, 2013: 42.

35 KUB 27.38, in Bachvarova, 2013: 40.

36 Beckman, 1998: 6.

tite pantheon, since she was not mentioned in the list of gods and goddess witnesses in the Hittite treaties. Additionally she did not have the astral or warrior character of Ishtar of Shamukha, nor did she have a close relationship with the ruling house in Hatti<sup>37</sup>.

In Hatti, Shaushka's importance would have resided in her magical and healing powers. According to Hittite texts and reliefs, this goddess was depicted as a god and a goddess, using male and female garments<sup>38</sup>. In the thirteenth century BCE, in the Hittite religious centre in Yazilikaya, the goddess Shaushka participated in two processions, one of gods and other of goddesses. She was also known as the goddess who, through special rituals, could change the sex of a person<sup>39</sup>. For example, this goddess could turn a man into a woman, depriving him of his virility, changing his bow and arrows to distaffs and spindles, as well as his garments<sup>40</sup>. She could also affect motherhood and the love of women. Finally, she was known for her curative powers, especially in matters of impotence and sexuality: "When a man is sterile or possesses no desire for women"<sup>41</sup>. In a Hittite text, this goddess is mentioned in the perfor-

mance of rituals related to the purification of newborns<sup>42</sup>. In magical incantations, she was invoked in order to remove curses<sup>43</sup> and combat the plague<sup>44</sup>. For example, King Assurnasirpal I of Assyria asked for the delivery of a statue of Ishtar of Nineveh to relieve and/or cure his physical and psychological illnesses<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, in Egypt, her counterparts would have been Isis and Hathor. Isis was the quintessential mother goddess, the goddess of love, health and marriage, and was invoked as the Great Magician, the Great Mother Goddess, and the Lady of Heaven. Hathor was the goddess of royalty, motherhood, fertility, love, and was invoked as the Goddess of Heaven.

## 2 | Shaushka in Egypt

The goddess Shaushka/Ishtar was known in the Egyptian court before the reign of Amenhotep III. Nevertheless, the only mention of this goddess is as Astarte, the Syrian Ishtar, known since the Hyksos Period, and in a context that emphasises her warrior character. The Sphinx Stela of Amenhotep II refers to the abilities of the king as a horse

37 Lebrun, 1976: 17, 20-24.

38 Also, in Mesopotamia, hymns to Ishtar reflect that this goddess was man and woman, according to her will: "Though I am a woman, I am a noble young man", "The boy-friend of a man, the girl-friend of a woman" (Akkadian Hymns and Incantations, in Harris, 1991: 269, nn. 37, 39).

39 Alexander, 1991: 172-173; Harris, 1991: 268-270; van der Toorn et al., 1999: 758-759.

40 For example, the rituals of Saltu, the travesty of Ishtar, in the "Akkadian Hymn to Ishtar," in Harris, 1991: 266.

41 "Ritual of Paskuwatti" (CTH 406). See also the "Ritual and Prayer to Ishtar of Nineveh" (KBo 2.9 + i 25-30 = CTH 716), in Miller, 2010: 83-84; Bachvarova, 2013: 29, n. 28.

42 CTH 390, in Bachvarova, 2013: 26.

43 KUB 48.112. See also the "Ritual of Allaiturahhi" (KBo 12.85), in Bachvarova, 2013: 33-37.

44 KUB 15.35 + KBo 2.9 i 63-65.

45 Beckman, 1998: 6-7.

trainer, a fact that would have fully satisfied deities, such as Reshep and Astarte:

The King said to those at his side: ‘Let him be given the very best horses from the stable of my Majesty in Memphis, and tell him: Look after them, master them, trot them, and manage them if they resist you’. Then, it was requested from the King’s son to look after the horses from the stable of the King. Reshep and Astarte rejoiced, as he did all according to his desire<sup>46</sup>.

An inscription on one of the panels of Thutmose IV chariot, refers to the King as “One who appeared mighty on the chariot like Astarte”<sup>47</sup>.

However, only five Amarna Letters, sent by Tushratta of Mitanni to Amenhotep III, mentions the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar and, in general, in the context of political alliances and inter-dynastic marriages<sup>48</sup>. In EA 19, Tushratta affirms:

When my brother sent Mane, his messenger, saying: ‘Send your daughter here to be my wife and the mistress of Egypt’, I (...) said: ‘Of course!’ (...) When he (Mane) saw her, he praised her greatly. I will lead her in safety to my brother’s country. May Shaushka and Amun make her the image of my brother’s desire. (ll. 17-24)

The letter continues with a description of the good relations established during the reigns of their ancestors and the fluid exchange of gifts between both courts. The king of Mitanni asks once again “Send me gold in very

great quantities”, since “in my brother’s country, gold is as plentiful as dust” (ll. 59-61).

In the last case, two main gods are invoked as a guarantee of the alliance and exchange of gifts: “I will give you ten times more than my brother asks for. This country is my brother’s country, and this house is my brother’s house. (...) May Teshub, my Lord, and Amun grant that these words that we shall be constantly writing achieve their purpose” (ll. 70-79). Then (ll. 80-85) the list of “greeting-gifts” (akk. *šulmānu*) is provided. Tushratta sent to Amenhotep III, as part of the “dowry” of the Mitannian princess, Gilukhepa/Kelu-Heba (hurr. *Kilu-Khepa*; eg. *Kirgipa*)<sup>49</sup>, given in marriage to the Pharaoh in the tenth year of his reign, gifts such as jewelry of gold and precious stones, horses, chariots and servants, including: “a *maninnu* necklace with 42 genuine *khulalu* stones, and 40 pieces of gold shaped like *arzallu* stones”<sup>50</sup> or “shaped like the ‘bed of Shaushka’ plant (*sukhši Ištar*)” (EA 19: 82-83)<sup>51</sup>. Probably it is the *huluppu* tree (perhaps a type of willow), with which the throne and the bed of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar were made and used in the ritual of the “sacred marriage”, according to the poem “Inanna and the *huluppu* tree”<sup>52</sup>.

In this letter, the goddess Shaushka is mentioned without epithets and in the context of an inter-dynastic marriage already concluded between both courts. Nevertheless, the letter concentrates on the order of “gold in very large quantities” for the construction

46 *Urk.*, IV, 1282: 13-15; PM III, 1: 39-40.

47 Pritchard, 1969: 250; Calvert, 2013: 49, fig. 4; 50.

48 EA19: 24; EA 20: 25; EA 21: 15, 18; EA 23: 13, 26, 31; EA 24 I: 76; EA 24 III: 98. Cf. Schulman, 1979.

49 *Urk.*, IV, 1738: 234; EA 17: 5-6, 41-45; EA 19, 6; Blankenberg-van Delden, 1969: plate 29, D 4.

50 Translation according to Moran, 1992: 45.

51 Translation according to Cochavi-Rainey, 1999: 52-53.

52 Frayne, 2001: 129-143.

of a mausoleum for the grandfather of the Mitannian king, and as part of the “bride price” or “dowry” (akk. *terkhātu*). Teshub and Amun bless and guarantee the alliance between the two parties, closely united by bonds of brotherhood: “This country is my brother’s country, and this house is my brother’s house. Letter EA 20 records:

Within six months, I will send Keliya, my messenger, and Mane my brother’s mes[senger]. I will deli[ver] my brother’s wife and they will bring her to my brother. May Shaushka, my mistress, the mi[stress of all lands and of m]y [brother], and Amun, the god of my brother, make her the ima[ge] of [my brother’s desire]. (ll. 23-27)<sup>53</sup>

The following describes the disappointment of Tushratta because of the delivery of Egyptian gold, not pure, but of low quality.

[And with regard to the gold] that my brother sent [...], I gathered together all my [foreign-gu]ests. [My] brother, before all of them, the gold [that he sent] has now been cut open (...). The gold sent was sealed, but the gold [received] was full of [wood or the statues were not of massive gold]. Then, they (the foreign guests) wept very much, saying: ‘Are all of these gold? They do not look like gold’. They said: ‘In Egypt, gold is more plent[iful] than dust’ (...). ‘Then, he would not give such things to him’ (...). May my brother send me much gold that has not been worked (...). May Teshub and Amun grant that my brother show his love for me! May my brother greatly glorify me before my country and before my foreign guests (...). May the gods grant us love, so we maintain love [in] our [he]arts forever! (EA 20: ll. 46-59, 71-79)

In this letter, the goddess is invoked as Shaushka, although it stands out that she is

“the mistress of all lands” and of both kings, revealing her universality and the alliance between the two kingdoms. Through this we know that the Mitannian princess was escorted by messengers to the Egyptian court under the protection of this goddess and the Egyptian god Amun. According to this text, Tushratta of Mitanni would have lost prestige before his audience “the men of my country (the local elite) and all the foreign guests (the delegation of messengers, akk. *ubārūtu*)” (EA 20: 73-74), seeing that the statues sent by Pharaoh were of wood and coated with a thin layer of gold, rather than made of solid gold<sup>54</sup>. Again, the importance of the delivery of Egyptian gold can be seen in the framework of inter-dynastic marriages. In this letter, it is simply “the gods” who are mentioned, without making any distinction of countries, to designate those who participate and guarantee the relations between both kingdoms (EA 20: 79).

In EA 21, the goddess Shaushka is again mentioned without any epithet, and in the company of the god Shimige. They are sent to Egypt in order to bless the new royal couple and grant them eternal happiness. The letter records:

I have given him my daughter to be the wife of my brother, whom I love. May Shimige and Shaushka go before her (the princess). May they ma[ke he]r the image of my brother’s desire. May my brother rejoice on that day! May Shimige and Shau[shka] grant my brother a gre[at] blessing, and exquisite joy! May [they bless him] and may you, my brother, live forever. (...) [This is followed by a list of greeting gifts, with one particular piece being highlighted:] A *maninnu* collar of genuine lapis lazuli and gold as the greeting-gift of my brother. May it rest on the neck of my brother for 100,000 years. (ll. 13-23 and 33-41)

53 Moran, 1992: 47.

54 Na’aman, 2005: 2.



In the last three aforementioned letters, expressions such as: “May Shaushka and Amun make her the image of my brother’s desire” (EA 19:24; EA 20: 25-27); “May Shimige and Shaushka (...) make her the image of my brother’s desire, and (...) grant my brother a great blessing and exquisite joy” (EA 21: 16-23), reflect the wishes of blessings and joy related to the benefits that the sacred marriage with Inanna reported to the Mesopotamian kings<sup>55</sup>.

In EA 23, entitled by Moran, “A goddess travels to Egypt”, Tushratta informs Amenhotep III:

Thus Shaushka of Nineveh, mistress of all lands (said): ‘I wish to go to Egypt, a country that I love, and then return’. Also, in the time of my father (...) (she) went to this country, and just as earlier she dwelt there and they honored her, may my brother now honor her 10 times more than before. May my brother honor her, (then) at (his) pleasure let her go, so that she may come back. May Shaushka, the mistress of heaven, protect us, my brother and me, 100,000 years, and may our mistress grant both of us great joy. And let us act as friends. Only for me, Shaushka is my goddess, but for my brother she is not his goddess? (ll. 13-32)

In this letter, the goddess is invoked as Shaushka of Nineveh, although it stands out, as in EA 20, that she is “the mistress of all lands”.

Bachvarova<sup>56</sup> suggests that the two visits of this goddess to the Egyptian court would be related to the exercise of its magical and healing powers. The Amarna Letters ana-

lysed do not provide sufficient information to confirm this hypothesis. On the contrary, the context of the four letters, in which the visit of this goddess is mentioned, is related to the well-being and joy of the new couple, the friendship between both kings, and the guarantee of the alliance established between the two ruling houses.

The desire of a goddess to return immediately to her land of origin is mentioned in later texts, such as the “Bentresh stela” and the story of Assurbanipal and the statue of Nana recovered from Elam. The free desire of a goddess must be opposed to cases of forced deportation of a divine statue for political and strategic reasons, as was the case with the capture of the statues of Marduk, after successive conquests of Babylonia by the kings of Hatti, Assyria and Elam<sup>57</sup>. However, in these cases, the forced deportation of the statues of the god Marduk was reinterpreted by the defeated kings as the free will of their god of pilgrimage spreading their prophetic power around the world: “I am one who goes through the mountains, who moves over the countries, who goes all over the lands from sunrise to sunset. I said: ‘I will go to the land of Hatti’ (...)”<sup>58</sup>.

Finally, in EA 24, is reported to Pharaoh:

As now my brother loves me, as now I love my brother, so may Teshub, Shaushka, Amun, Shimige, Ea-Sharri, and all the gods love us in their hearts very, very much (...). We, the Hurrian land (Mitanni) and the land of Egypt, we are one. I am the k[ing] of the land of Egypt, and my brother is the king of the Hurrian land (...). I shall speak

55 Kramer, 1963: 493-510; Frymer-Kensky, 1997: 102-103; Oliva, 1999: 101-102.

56 Bachvarova, 2013: 25, n. 7. Cf. Beckman, 1998: 3.

57 Liverani, 1990: 229.

58 Borger, 1971: 5.

to my goddess, Shaushka of Nineveh, that a gold image for me might [be done]. So shall it be. Before earth (and) before heaven are the words spoken: ‘This molten gold image is Tadu-Khepa, the daughter of Tushratta, the lord of Mitanni, whom he gave her as wife of Immureya (Amenhotep III), the lord of Egypt. And, Immureya (Amenhotep III) made a molten gold image, and full of love dispatched it to Tushratta (...)’<sup>59</sup>.

In this letter the expression “all the gods” is used without making a distinction between the Hurrian gods and the Egyptian gods. It also states that these gods will give lots of love to the hearts of both kings. Love is not only an expression of affection, but also a term that communicates the good political relations between both parts, united by ties of brotherhood, love and friendship, materialised in the expression: “As now my brother loves me, as now I love my brother.” Expressions, such as: “We, the Hurrian land (Mitanni) and the land of Egypt, we are one”, and “I am the k[ing] in the land of Egypt, and my brother is the king in the land of Hurri”, reaffirm the idea of “uniqueness” of both parts. This “uniqueness” would not only be agreed by an alliance of marriage or an inter-state treaty between “brothers”, but also by the blessing of the gods of the two states, which act as a collectivity or single entity (“all the gods”) and on behalf of both lands or countries, Mitanni and Egypt, which are “One” (“We are one”)<sup>60</sup>.

EA 24 is unique among the rest of the letters sent by the king of Mitanni, reflecting

at least three different levels of discourse of religious expression: a) a form of basic communication, through the “blessings of the gods”; b) theological reflections, in the form of statements, as the “uniqueness of the lands on both sides”, and c) examples of “praxis”, as the delivery of statues of the goddess. Ultimately, good relations between the two countries are not only preserved on a rhetorical level, but also in practice. The kings are called “brothers” and act, in a broad sense, in inter-state families, being protected by their gods or a “family” of gods: “May my gods and the gods of my brother protect them!” (EA 21: 32). The presence of the same goddess, materialised in a statue, symbolises the “union” between the two parts.

The letters sent by Tushratta, mentioned above, referenced three forms of invocation of this goddess, Shaushka/Ishtar, Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh and Shaushka/Ishtar, the Mistress of Heaven.

Oliva says that “perhaps the name of just Ishtar expresses a local form of Shaushka; while the ‘Ishtar of Nineveh’ would not be entirely Hurrian or entirely Assyrian, but rather a combination of both”<sup>61</sup>. Likewise, he affirms that EA 24 could prove the existence of a temple of the goddess Shaushka-Ishtar in Nineveh under the Mitannian domain. Meanwhile, Haas<sup>62</sup> has argued the identification of both goddesses as a single deity. Finally, the mention of the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar as the Mistress of Heaven would make allusion to her Semitic astral character, which the Hurrian goddess had

59 EA 24 I: 74-78; II: 68-72; III: 98-107.

60 Smith, 2010: 63-65.

61 Oliva, 1999: 54 and 56.

62 Haas, 1979: 400.

not possessed<sup>63</sup>. The invocation of this goddess as the Mistress of Heaven made this deity the personification of the planet Venus, or simply the realm of the gods in the sky<sup>64</sup>.

According to Weber<sup>65</sup>, the old Pharaoh was very sick and he would have requested a statue of the Hurrian goddess, known for its healing properties. Analyses carried out on the mummy of the Pharaoh would indicate the discomforts suffered by Amenhotep III (dead at about age fifty), due to diseases in his bones (such as arthritis, erosion and severe decalcification) and infections in teeth (such as caries, dental granuloma, and abscesses), as well as certain malformations (such as clubfoot -congenital or due to polio, and spondylo-arthritis, degenerative and chronic, with autoimmune inflammation of spine and joints)<sup>66</sup>. However, there is no indication of such diseases or cures performed by this goddess in any of these letters. His emaciated appearance and a king of advanced age for the time, is known from reliefs in the Temple of Soleb in Nubia, and the tomb of Kheruef (TT 192), the Steward of the Great Royal Wife, Tiye, in Thebes<sup>67</sup>.

For his part, Moran<sup>68</sup> argues that the arrival of the goddess to the Egyptian court (EA 23) would be associated with the recent wedding of the Mitannian princess, Taduk-

hepa, and the Pharaoh (EA 19) around the thirty-sixth year of his reign. According to this author, the same event happened years earlier, during the tenth year of the reign of Amenhotep III, when Shuttarna, the father of Tushratta, sent Gilukhepa (Kelu-Heba) as the future wife of Amenhotep III<sup>69</sup>. EA 19 and 20 mention the Hurrian goddess Shaushka and the Egyptian god Amun, and refer to the marriage with the Mitannian princess. However, Oliva<sup>70</sup> claims that in the first case (EA 23) the association could be rejected, since the marriage had already been made (probably in the thirty-fifth year) prior to the arrival of this letter in the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Amenhotep III<sup>71</sup>. In addition, on this special occasion statues of the goddess Shaushka and Shimige, the solar Hurrian god were sent, where she is mentioned without epithets (EA 21:15, 18).

Perhaps, the goddess Shaushka, who is mentioned without epithets, a fact that emphasises her healing properties, was sent, with her enchantments to protect the Mitannian princess at the time of the birthing of the future heir. A Hittite text relates to this goddess with rituals of purification of newborns (CTH 390). However, in the Egyptian case, we cannot confirm this hypothesis.

63 Oliva, 1999: 55.

64 Lambert, 2004: 35.

65 Weber, 1915, II: 1050; Wegner, 1981: 65; Ranke, 1932: 412-418; Kühne, 1973: 37; Zaccagnini, 1983: 254-255.

66 Hayes, 1973: 346; Hawass et al., 2010: 645.

67 Grimal, 1992: 225.

68 Moran, 1992: 62, n. 2; Kühne, 1973: 37; O'Connor and Cline, 1998: 22.

69 EA 17; EA 19: 6; Urk. IV, 1738: 234.

70 1999: 55.

71 According to the hieratic inscription added in black ink in the tablet: "Year 36, 4th month of winter, day 1. One (the king) was in the southern villa (of) the House of Rejoicing" (Moran, 1992: 62, n. 6).

In addition to this, Hittite texts mention the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh in rituals which would have involved the same Queen Tadukhepa<sup>72</sup>. Obviously, in the Amarna Letters, it can be inferred that there was a close relationship between the goddess and the Mitannian royal family. It is possible that the new wife of Amenhotep III would have requested the presence of her personal goddess (and that of their ancestors) at her new residence at Thebes (Egypt). The textual evidence analysed, allows us to confirm this hypothesis, indicating the close relationship between the temporary visit of this goddess, the arrival of the Mitannian princess, the cult of the ancestors and/or former kings, and the eternal friendship agreed between both kings and countries.

However, in Egypt, the goddess was worshipped on a temporary basis and her cult was related to the stay of Mitannian princesses in the court of Amenhotep III. This goddess was never integrated completely into the Egyptian pantheon, as were the goddesses Astarte and Anat.

Ultimately, according to the references in the Amarna Letters, we can establish that the mention of the goddess as Shaushka without epithet, refers to a Hurrian local goddess, probably worshipped in the Mitannian capital<sup>73</sup>.

On the other hand, the mention of Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh refers to the Hurro-Assyrian goddess<sup>74</sup>, associated with the Hurrian past of local cults of the area of Nineveh, whose cult spread throughout the Levant

and was probably associated with royalty, inter-state alliances, and inter-dynastic marriages. This goddess consisted of contradictions and at the same time transcended them, achieving the necessary balance between order and chaos, love and war.

Finally, the mention of the goddess Shaushka, as the Mistress of Heaven would make allusion to her astral character (as Venus, the morning and the evening star) (not known in association of the Hurrian goddess, but in the Syrian Ishtar)<sup>75</sup>, a necessary aspect in the Egyptian court during her temporary stay. As the personification of the planet Venus, this goddess was “the realm of the gods”.

## Conclusions

Statues of goddesses, such as Shaushka/Ishtar, and gods such as Shimige and Amun, traveled between courts and achieved inter-state prestige due to their special qualities in rituals of birth, healing, exorcism, and before war and peace treaties. Nevertheless, great kings, such as Tushratta had a privileged position due to the presence of a main goddess of their own pantheon sent over before the completion of inter-state alliances. Finally, the only requirement of the delivery would have been to secure the free desire of the deity in question, and of immediately returning him/her to their own land. The goddess Shaushka would have secured the friendship and alliance between both ruling houses for all eternity; i.e. while “a *maninnu*

72 KUB 36.18 = CTH 364; KBo 10.45 = CTH 446; KBo 16.97 = CTH 571.

73 EA 19: 24; EA 20: 25; EA 21: 15, 18; EA 24 I: 76; Oliva, 1999: 53.

74 EA 23: 13, 31; EA 24 III: 98.

75 EA 23: 26; Oliva, 1999: 88, 90.



Figure 1.

necklace of genuine lapis lazuli and gold (...) rests on the neck of my brother for 100,000 years" (EA 21:41). In the iconography of this goddess, the main attributes are arrows, an axe, a sceptre/mace/mirror/spindle, the cylindrical crown, and a necklace with beads of lapis lazuli and gold (as in the Temple of Aleppo in Syria; see fig. 1)<sup>76</sup>.

Shaushka was a deity of dynastic character, probably sent to Egypt to protect the future lineage of Tushratta and Amenhotep III and to ensure the perpetuity of the alliance between the two states. References to this goddess are found predominantly in formulas of protocol of political character and theological content. In Hatti and Mitanni, Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh was associated with rituals related to the royal ancestors, in her role as provider of the legitimation of kingship. In these rituals, the royal ancestors/former kings are invoked to leave the Underworld, with opposite direction to the "Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld," in order to approve and intercede in the fusion of alliances, without the sexual connotation found in the Akkadian mythology, but with a renewed Hurro-Hittite theological content<sup>77</sup>. In the Amarna Letters, the mention of the ancestors of the Mitannian king, invoked by the goddess, is required to ensure the new alliance and the future lineage of both kings; in short, to legitimise the future of royalty.

In conclusion, Shaushka was a local Hurrian goddess with healing properties, who was elevated to the position of main goddess in the personal pantheon of the Mitannian royalty, with a mixed Hurro-Assyrian character, and was associated with regal power; finally entering the Egyptian court with an

astral aspect, a typical appearance of Semitic and Egyptian deities.

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76 Cf. Drawing of S. Beaulieu, after Gonnella et al., 2005: 102.

77 Bachvarova, 2013: 36-37.

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