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” legitimation 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.

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”. 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. 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. 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.

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Palabras clave: Shaushka, Amarna, alianzas, matrimonios.