

BEYOND AMARNA: EXORCISTS WITHOUT BORDERS IN THE LEVANT

PARA LÁ DE AMARNA: EXORCISTAS SEM FRONTEIRAS NO LEVANTE

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The Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean formed a special sphere of activity for diverse specialists who navigated from one side to the other through extensive networks of interconnections in the Late Bronze Age. During the Amarna Period (fourteenth century BCE), Akkadian and Hittite texts attest a lethal epidemic that originated in Egypt and later spread to Canaan, Syria, Alashiya (Cyprus), and the land of Hatti. References to pestilence, plague, epidemic, and death, as well as metaphoric expressions alluding to the crisis, such as the “hand of Nergal,” are widespread in diplomatic correspondence, prayers, magic spells, and medical texts as well. Specialists (such as physicians, exorcists, and omen experts) traveled between courts (such as Egypt, Babylonia, and Hatti) to perform acts of healing and to practice divination. Also, statues of gods and goddesses were commonly sent between courts of Great Kings as symbols of fertility, healing, and alliances. This essay analyzes the role of exorcists traveling between courts in the framework of the cross-cultural discourse of alterity in the Amarna Age.

Keywords: Amarna Period. Levant Epidemics. Exorcists. Interconnections.

O Levante e o Mediterrâneo Oriental formaram uma especial esfera de atividade para diversos especialistas que navegavam de um lado para o outro por meio de extensas redes de interconexões durante a Idade do Bronze Tardia. Durante o Período de Amarna (século XIV a.C.), textos acadianos e hititas atestam uma epidemia letal que teve origem no Egito e posteriormente se propagou a Canaã, Síria, Alácia (Chipre) e a terra de Hatti. Referências a pestilência, peste, epidemia e morte, bem como expressões metafóricas alusivas à crise, como a *mão de Nergal*, são disseminadas em correspondências diplomáticas, orações, feitiços mágicos e textos médicos. Especialistas, como médicos, exorcistas e especialistas em profecias, viajavam entre cortes, como a do Egito, da Babilônia e de Hatti, para realizar atos de cura e praticar adivinhação. Além disso, estátuas de deuses e deusas eram comumente enviadas entre as cortes dos Grandes Reis como símbolos de fertilidade, cura e alianças. Este ensaio analisa o papel dos exorcistas que viajavam entre cortes no âmbito do discurso transcultural da alteridade na Era de Amarna.

Palavras-chave: Período de Amarna. Levante. Epidemias. Exorcistas. Interconexões.

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1. Mobility of Specialists in the Late Bronze Age

The circulation of traveling specialists (such as craftsmen, physicians, exorcists, and omen experts) (Caramello, 2018, pp. 275–285; Zucconi 2007, pp. 26–37), as well as statues of gods (such as Amun and Shimige) and goddesses (such as Shaushka/Ishtar), between the courts of the Great Kings was a well-known phenomenon in the ancient Near East (Gestoso Singer, 2016, pp. 50–56). In accordance with the spirit of brotherhood, Great Kings sent specialists to the courts of their brothers (Zaccagnini, 1983, pp. 249–256). But on special occasions, they sent statues of gods and goddesses in order to heal or protect royal peers, or to bless their new wives. In general, these foreign specialists were well received according to the rules of hospitality¹ observed by kings of the same rank, and they were entertained with banquets as well as compensated with gifts (Beckman, 2013, p. 207). The king and the court that provided the specialist earned prestige, but in many cases risked losing the expert to his colleague in a remote court (Liverani, 1990, p. 228). The specialists became involved in a kind of *temporary* prestige gift-exchange network, as they were expected to return home sooner or later. Thus, not only raw materials and luxury goods were sent to foreign courts, but also *prestigious* or *specialized* persons (Caramello, 2018, pp. 276–277). The specialists “who were sent from one court to another were viewed as prestige goods, and their transfers are inserted into the dynamics and formal apparatus of the practice of gift-exchange” (Zaccagnini, 1983, p. 250). According to Pfoh (2019, p. 261):

The welcoming and especially the permanent presence of foreign specialists at the court helped to gain prestige, to be duly displayed to the inside of the community – in this case, the royal court, but also the general public – reinforcing in that manner the royal authority.

Thus, both sides – the king that provided the specialist and the king that received him at his court – earned prestige in a network of exchange, based on patterns of reciprocity, between the royal courts.

For example, craftsmen or artisans² traveled to foreign courts and learned new techniques and styles, or copied objects and motifs from the beautiful gifts that were sent between kings. For example, a Hittite text (KBo I 10 + rev. 58–61) communicates a request for a new Babylonian sculptor and mentions other specialists previously sent to Hatti. In another text (KUB III 67 obv. 3’–4’), the Pharaoh requests sculptors from Anatolia; according to Zaccagnini (1983, p. 252), this is an exceptional request, because in most cases specialists were sent from Egypt or Babylon to Hatti. At the foreign court

¹ According to Graeber (2014, p. 118), “The law of hospitality in the ancient world, for instance, insisted that any traveler must be fed, given shelter, and treated as an honored guest – but only for a certain length of time. If a guest did not go away, he would eventually become a mere subordinate.” *cf.* Pfoh (2022, p. 8) for the handling of foreigners through hospitality.

² Lit. *mârû ummênî*, who were palace dependents. Zaccagnini (1983, p. 246) uses “the terms craftsmen, artisans, and the like to designate those specialists who perform activities other than those strictly connected with primary production or those activities based upon rudimentary technological know-how, such as that of self-sustaining domestic economies of the villages of the pre-classical Near East.”

they were treated well and provided with gifts, and they were supposed to be sent back home (Moorey, 2001, pp. 1–14; Podany, 2010, p. 245).

Traveling physicians came not only from Egypt but from other countries as well (especially Babylonia). They belonged to one of the most frequently requested categories of specialist, and the gift of a visiting physician was hard to match in return; in general, it was very difficult to assign a value to their knowledge outside the rules of reciprocity, friendship, and brotherhood. Exceptionally, these skillful experts were exchanged for quantities of metals (such as copper, gold, or silver) (Zaccagnini, 1983, pp. 250–252).

In an Amarna Letter (EA 49, ll. 22–26, in Moran, 1992, p. 120), Niqmadu II, king of Ugarit, requests that the Pharaoh send him a physician because they have no doctor at the Palace: “Give me, too, a palace attendant that is a physician (LÚ.A.ZU = *asû/ašû*).”³ Assyriologists have identified the *asû*⁴ as a physician (and sometimes a pharmacist or even a nurse) who practices healing through the use of plant- and mineral-based remedies, and the *āšipu*⁵ as a conjurer, enchanter, exorcist, or magician who specializes in magic (incantations and ritual performances, as well as medical divination) (Couto-Ferreira, 2013, p. 406). According to Kammenhuber (1976, pp. 137–138), the A.ZU/*asû* would have treated bodily injuries as well as various diseases, including epidemic illnesses. When writing in Akkadian, Egyptians employed both terms, *asû* and *āšipu*, to refer to their own practitioners when their political partners asked them to send professional healers. The term most frequently found in the Egyptian medical papyri is *swnw*, which is translated as *doctor* or *physician* – an expert who cures through the three-stage process of examining the patient, diagnosing the disease, and prescribing a course of treatment (Couto-Ferreira, 2013, p. 410; Zucconi, 2007, pp. 33–36). Ghalioungui (1973, p. 63) states that priest-physicians (the *wab* or *pure priest*) would have been the most highly ranked healers, close in status and function to the *āšipu* (the *magician* or *exorcist*). Nevertheless, the Ebers Papyrus (ca. 1536/1534 BCE)⁶ tells us of three types of medical professionals: the doctor (*swnw*), who is a physician; the pure-priest (*wab*), who is a healer; and the ‘magician’ (*s3w*)⁷ or ‘amulet-man,’ who should more correctly be called

³ Moran 1992, p. 120. The translation from the Akkadian version of the Amarna Letters is mine. In several cases, alternative translations by other authors will be mentioned in the text or footnotes. Here, note the following alternative translation: “And give to me a palace retainer, a physician. There is no physician here,” in Rainey 2015, pp. 380–381, 1277, 1310 (for *ašû*), 1392 (for *asû*). Cf. Caramello (2018, p. 278).

⁴ CAD A/1, II, pp. 344–347 (for *asû*, fem. *asātu*, ‘physician’).

⁵ CAD A/1, II, pp. 431–435 (for *āšipu*, fem. *āšiptu* ‘exorcist’; var. *ašīpu*, ‘exorcist, priest of enchantments’).

⁶ Dated on its verso to the 9th year of the reign of Amenhotep I (ca. 1536 BCE, in Ghalioungui, 1987, p. 1; and ca. 1534 BCE, in Ritner, 2000, p. 107).

⁷ For the Egyptian terms *s3* (‘amulet’) and *s3w* (‘magician, guardian, and protector’), *vd.* Faulkner 1991, p. 207. The Egyptian word usually translated as ‘magic’ is *heka*. Quirke (1992, p. 113) avoids the term ‘magic’ because it arouses a modern European prejudice that associates what we would call magic with the closed margins of society, whereas the creative word *heka* in ancient Egypt is neutral in itself and can be used in both positive and negative contexts. Baines (2006, pp. 1–2), on the other hand, prefers to accept magic as a valid and legitimate category, and considers the term to be not pejorative but rather integral to Egyptian thought as a basic force (Johanson, 2019, p. 8). In ancient Egypt, magic and religion enjoyed an extensively symbiotic relationship since they were part of the same belief system (Pinch, 1994, pp. 12–17). Finally, according to Ritner (1993, pp. 3–14) the boundaries between ancient Egyptian magic, religion, and medicine were not as strictly observed as modern commentators believe.

the ‘protector.’⁸ Ancient Egyptians did not see a strict dichotomy between medicine and religion.⁹ Frequently, the three types of healers used the same treatments and had strong connections to religious institutions. For example, the Ebers Papyrus (§ 854a) claims: “If any *swnw*, any *wab* priest of Sekhmet, any *s3w* give both his hands (...),” indicating that the three types of healers used the same practices in treating internal disorders (Ghalioungui, 1987, p. 217). Also, one individual is known to have served as an “Overseer of Magicians” and an “Overseer of Sekhmet priests” as well as being “Chief of the King’s Physicians” (Pinch, 1994, p. 54). Zucconi (2007, p. 36) affirms:

The presence of three distinct titles for healers and their association with the religious structure of ancient Egypt brings up the question as to what, if any, difference existed between the *swnw*, *wab* priest, and *s3w*. Perhaps the difference does not lie in the separate categories of religion and medicine, but rather in how each type of healer used the two in combination to help the patient.

Thus, the *wab* priest and *s3w*, who typically acted on behalf of a god/goddess, appear to have focused on the divine aspect of the illness, whereas the *swnw* may have concentrated on the physical manifestation or symptoms.

The title *swnw* was used in the epithets of gods, who give their knowledge to the physicians: “Thot gives to the *swnw* (...) skill to cure” (Papyrus Ebers 1). For example, Amun is called the “*swnw* who removes trouble and suffering” (Papyrus Leiden); Horus is called the “Great *swnw*” (Papyrus Turin), and Min is the “Good *swnw*” (*Urk.* II, p. 65; Zucconi, 2007, p. 35).

Finally, Egyptian texts attest the use of the two titles ‘scribe’ (*sš*) and ‘physician’ (*swnw*) by the same person, such as Nebamun (TT 17),¹⁰ the “scribe, chief physician of the king (Amenhotep II) in Thebes” (Ghalioungui, 1973, p. 71; Shirley, 2007, p. 383); also attested is a title that combines both professions, namely ‘scribe physician’ (*sš3w swnw*), used by Paraemhat, who was sent more than once to Hatti and Tarkhuntašša by Ramesses II (KUB III 67; Edel, 1976, pp. 67–70). Although mostly affiliated with the administration of the state, scribal activity also occurred at the ‘House of Life’ (*per ankh*), a place associated with the temple; scribes kept records for the temple and recorded medical knowledge as well (Zucconi, 2007, p. 35).

The Hittite king required Egyptian medical help more than once. The letter of Ramesses II (ca. 1279-1213 BCE) to Ḫattušili III (ca. 1275/67-1245/37 BCE) attests to the adoption of Egyptian medicine by the Hittite king, and the importation of Egyptian physicians and remedies (Ú.MEŠ *epēšu*; ‘to make drugs’) to the Anatolian court.¹¹ According to a tablet from the Bogazköy Archive, the Pharaoh sent not a physician, but

⁸ Ebers Papyrus §854, col 99/2–3, in Wreszinski (1913, p. 205); cf. Ghalioungui (1987, p. 217); Nunn (2002, pp. 134–135); Zucconi (2007, p. 28).

⁹ This coincides with a phrase in incantation no. 3 in the Ebers papyrus: “Strong is magic bound to a medicine and vice-versa” (Johanson, 2019, p. 23).

¹⁰ Shirley (2007, pp. 394; 389–390, figs. 7b, 8, respectively). cf. Wachsmann (1998, pp. 45–47).

¹¹ Letter Bo 652/f + 28/n + 127/r, in Edel (1994, pp. 178–181); Ritner (2000, p. 111, n. 27). Abbreviations used follow the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. cf. CAD E/4, pp. 191–192 (for *epēšu*, ‘to treat a person, to do evil magic, to use/make (plants/remedies), to perform a ritual’).

an herbal medicament to be used by the Hittite king on his eyes (KUB III 51 rev. 2–11). On another occasion, the Pharaoh affirms that he has sent an Egyptian physician (*sš3w swnw*, a ‘scribe physician’) called *Pariamakhu* (Eg. *Paraemhat; Paraemheb*) to Kurunta of Tarkhuntašša, in order to treat him with some medical herbs:

He has been allowed to go in order to produce drugs for the king of the land of Tarkhuntašša (whose name is) Kurunta, and he will allot all, all the drugs corresponding to what you have written about (...). And send the two *asûs* who are with him (Kurunta) there and allow them to go (back) to the land of Egypt (KUB III 67 obv. 12 - rev. 9).

According to Caramello (2018, pp. 278–279), a parallel letter contains also a request for the return of two other physicians previously dispatched and never sent back (KUB III 66). These two letters confirm that the Pharaoh had sent two physicians to Kurunta, probably in order to cure him. Following Kurunta’s new request through the Hittite king Ḫattušili, Ramesses agrees to send another physician, but he insists also on the return of the two he had previously sent (Zaccagnini, 1983, pp. 251–252).

Sometimes, physicians were detained and even murdered abroad. A letter from the Hittite king Ḫattušili III (1275/67–1245/37 BCE) to Kadašman-Enlil II, king of Babylonia (ca. 1263–1255 BCE) (KBo I 10 + KUB III 72 + KUB 4, p. 49b, 50a), confirms both the dispatch of a physician and his death. Also, Ḫattušili affirms that his brother Muwatalli had detained a physician and a conjuror from Babylonia, confirming that the detention of physicians was not a rare practice. In the same letter is mentioned another Babylonian physician, called Rabâ-ša-Marduk, who had lived in Hatti for a long time and married a woman of the Hittite royal family (Caramello, 2018, p. 279; Heeßel, 2009; Zaccagnini, 1983, p. 251).

Medicaments could also be sent in the framework of gift-exchange, such as perfumes (EA 269, myrrh to Gezer), ointments (EA 48, from Ugarit), and drugs (Couto-Ferreira, 2013, p. 405). References to vessels containing medicines for the eyes can be found in Hittite texts (KUB III 63 rev. 8’).

In some cases, even the best specialist was not skilled enough to alleviate the pain of a king or save a queen in childbirth; in cases such as these, when medicine failed, kings turned to prayers and divine statues. King Ramesses II refused to send an expert to the Hittite king Ḫattušili III, suggesting instead that he invoke the gods Shamash and Adad; the Egyptian ruler implied that no physician would be able to successfully help Ḫattušili’s sister Matanazi to give birth at the age of 50 or 60 (Bo¹² 652: Vs. 8 – Rs. 1; Caramello, 2018, p. 281). A document, compiled centuries later, called the “Bentresh Stela” (Louvre C 284) confirms the Late Bronze Age practice of sending physicians and divine statues to foreign courts – in this case, to cure the princess Bentresh, a supposed sister-in-law (Edel, 1976, pp. 59–63) of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 BCE). She was possessed by a spirit but the specialist could not cure her. Thus, the statue of “Khons-the-Provider, the great god who expels disease demons” was sent and the princess was successfully cured. According to Caramello (2018, p. 282), “this propagandistic text was meant to appear as

¹² Bo – Tablet siglum of (unpublished) texts from Bogazköy.

an official document of Ramesses II in order to solve probably a conflict of interest between two different priesthoods of the god Khons” (*cf.* Meier, 2007, pp. 191–192).

2. Traveling Gods and Goddesses in the Amarna Age

During the Amarna Period (fourteenth century BCE), statues of goddesses and gods traveled between courts and achieved inter-state prestige due to their special efficacy in rituals of birth, healing, and exorcism, as well as rituals conducted before war and peace treaties (Gestoso Singer, 2016, p. 54). These statues served as symbols of life, fertility, healing, prosperity, change, and alliances, and sometimes represented the *geographic* integration or the *ideological* legitimization of a territory.

The Amarna Letters reveal the journey of the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar¹³ to the Egyptian court of Amenhotep III (ca. 1388–1351 BCE), probably to heal the ill Pharaoh or to cement the friendship and alliance between Mitanni and Egypt.¹⁴ Five Amarna Letters, sent by Tushratta of Mitanni to Amenhotep III, mention the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar, generally in the context of political alliances and inter-dynastic marriages.¹⁵ In EA 21, the goddess Shaushka is mentioned in the company of the solar Hurrian god, Shimige. The two deities are sent to Egypt in order to bless the new royal couple and grant them eternal happiness:

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! (...) (EA 21, ll. 13–23, in Moran, 1992, p. 50).

This paragraph is followed by a list of greeting-gifts in which one particular piece is 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!” (EA 21, ll. 35–41, in Moran, 1992, p. 50).

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.

¹³ Shaushka was the name of the Hurrian Ishtar and her name is derived from the Hurrian root for the “Great/Magnificent One” (Wegner 1981, pp. 24–25).

¹⁴ EA 21 (ll. 13–23, 33–41); EA 23 (ll. 13–32), in Rainey (2015, pp. 157–159, 185–187, respectively). *cf.* Caramello (2018, pp. 280–281); Gestoso Singer (2016, pp. 48–54).

¹⁵ EA 19 (l. 24); EA 20 (l. 25); EA 21 (l. 15, 18); EA 23 (l. 13, 26, 31); EA 24 I (l. 76); EA 24 III (l. 98), in Rainey (2015, pp. 141, 151, 157, 185–187, 195, 223, respectively).

Only for me, Shaushka is my goddess, but for my brother she is not his goddess? (EA 23, ll. 13–32, in Moran, 1992, pp. 61–62).

In this letter, Shaushka express her wish to visit Egypt and then return, reflecting that the statue of a goddess became involved in a kind of *temporary* prestige gift-exchange network between courts.

Bachvarova (2013, p. 25, n. 7; Beckman, 1998, p. 3) suggests that the two visits of the statue of this goddess to the Egyptian court were related to the exercise of its magical and healing powers. Also, according to Weber et al. (1915, II, p. 1050; cf. Wegner 1981, p. 65; Zaccagnini 1983, pp. 254–255), the old Pharaoh was very sick¹⁶ and thus he would have requested a statue of the Hurrian goddess, known for its healing properties.¹⁷

For his part, Moran (1992, p. 62, n. 2) argues that the arrival of the goddess at the Egyptian court (in EA 23) would have been associated with the recent wedding of the Mitannian princess, Tadukhepa, and the Pharaoh (in 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 (EA 17; EA 19, l. 6; *Urk.* IV, p. 1738). Also, 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 (1999, p. 55) claims that in the first case (in 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.¹⁸

Hittite texts mention the goddess Shaushka/Ishtar of Nineveh in rituals that would have involved the same Queen Tadukhepa.¹⁹ In the Amarna Letters, it can clearly 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 her ancestors) at her new residence at Thebes (Egypt). Tushratta enjoyed a privileged position due to the presence of a main goddess of her own pantheon who had been sent over before the completion of inter-state alliances. The purpose of the delivery would have been to secure the good will of the deity in question, and the only requirement was that she must immediately be returned to her own land. The goddess Shaushka would have secured the friendship and alliance between both ruling houses for all eternity, i.e., while “a *maninnu* necklace of genuine lapis lazuli and gold (...) rests on the neck of my brother for 100,000 years” (EA 21, l. 41,

¹⁶ Forensic examination of his mummy (CG 61074) confirms that he suffered from acute arthritis, cavity-pitted teeth and severe pain (Smith, 2000, p. 50).

¹⁷ We know that more than seven hundred granodiorite statues (weighing nearly one ton each) of the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, the goddess of pestilence and healing, once stood in the Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hetan, on the Theban West Bank, and at the Temple of Mut at Karnak, on the east bank at Thebes (Kozloff, 2006, pp. 36–46; 2012, pp. 112, 138).

¹⁸ According to the hieratic inscription added in black ink on 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, p. 62, n. 6). Cf. Abrahami & Coulon, 2008, p. 14, nn. 56–57 (for an alternative translation: “On (= le roi) était dans la résidence méridionale (= le palais royal de Thèbes), la maison-de-la-jubilation (= appartements liés à la cérémonie jubilaire)”).

¹⁹ KUB 36.18 = CTH 364; KBo 10.45 = CTH 446; KBo 16.97 = CTH 571.

in Moran, 1992, p. 50). Thus, Shaushka was probably sent to Egypt to protect the future lineage of Tushratta and Amenhotep III and to ensure the alliance between the two states in perpetuity. Nevertheless, Shaushka was a local Hurrian goddess with healing properties who had been elevated to the position of main goddess in the personal pantheon of the Mitannian royal family, with a mixed Hurro-Assyrian character, and was associated with regal power prior to visiting the Egyptian court (Gestoso Singer, 2016, pp. 44–45, 56).

In Hatti, Shaushka's importance would have resided in her magical and healing powers. In a Hittite text, this goddess is mentioned in the performance of rituals related to the purification of newborns (CTH 390; Bachvarova, 2013, p. 26). In magical incantations, she was invoked in order to remove curses (KUB 48.112)²⁰ and to combat the plague (KUB 15.35 + KBo 2.9 i 63–65). Also, King Assurnasirpal I of Assyria asked that a statue of Ishtar be delivered to Nineveh to relieve and/or cure his physical and psychological illnesses (Beckman, 1998, pp. 6–7).

In sum, Shaushka, associated with the goddess Ishtar, was worshipped as the goddess of war, fertility, and healing, and statues of the goddess were used in rituals performed to ensure the success of military actions, to heal disease, and to bless marriage alliances and assist births.

As we mentioned before, a late compiled text called the “Bentresh Stela” confirms the continued practice of sending divine statues (such as “Khons the Provider”) from Egypt to a foreign court, e.g., to cure a possessed princess during the reign of Ramesses II (Caramello, 2018, p. 282).

Finally, the texts reflect that various rituals involving statues of gods and goddesses were performed to guarantee a safe journey. In Egypt, amulets, figurines, and divine statues were carried by travelers and messengers. Protective amulets and figurines of Sekhmet, the lioness goddess; Wepwawet, a wolf-jackal and the ‘opener of ways’; and Thoth, the ‘Messenger (*wꜥꜣꜣꜣ*) of the gods,’ were used by envoys. Some travelers – such as Wenamun – carried with them a statue of Amun (“Amun of the roads”) as a magical protector.²¹ Amun was the god of the ‘less fortunate,’ upholding the rights of justice for travelers and the poor (as in Deir el-Medina) (Lichtheim, 1976, pp. 105–107, 225, 228). Also, merchants took their gods with them when they traveled (as in *Papyrus Lansing*).²² In Ein Besor (Israel) was found a little faience figurine of Thoth in baboon form, which perhaps served to protect messengers and merchants on the road. In Mesopotamia, Nergal the ‘valiant messenger, quick of knees,’ was the patron deity to whom the messenger would turn for protection on the road (Nougayrol, 1947, p. 41).

3. Itinerant Exorcists during Epidemics

²⁰ cf. “Ritual of Allaiturahhi” (KBo 12.85), in Bachvarova (2013, pp. 33–37).

²¹ Ben-Dor Evian (2017, p. 61, n. 44) (for an image of “Amun of the roads” carried by an Amun trader-priest in Wenamun).

²² “The merchants are busy (...), carrying goods [from] one town to another (...) (5.1) They may depart from Egypt to *Djahy*. Each man's god (statue) is with him. Not one of them (dares) to say: ‘We shall see Egypt again’ (...)” (P. Lansing I, 4.8–5.1, in Gardiner, 1937, p. 103; cf. Caminos, 1954, p. 384). I am grateful to Deborah Sweeney for the references.

In ancient Mesopotamia, in order to fight against particular demonic or supernatural threats a powerful set of apotropaic countermeasures and curatives was required. The specialist fighting against these threats was the *āšipu*,²³ whose title can be equated with the term *exorcist*. The *āšipu* was also referred to by the Akkadian noun *mašmaššu* (Sumerogram MAŠ.MAŠ) (Geller, 2010). The Sumerian term *maš-maš* is also seen in a number of literary texts, particularly dating to the early second millennium BCE, and seems to similarly denote a ritual specialist, or at least someone capable of performing magical practices (Konstantopoulos, 2020, p. 8). The craft of the exorcist himself, known collectively as *āšipūtu*,²⁴ could be attributed to the gods: “The spell is not my own, it is a spell of Ea (...).”²⁵ In addition to reciting incantations, this specialist could summon helpers in his work, such as benevolent monstrous or demonic figures. Apotropaic figurines of such creatures were found buried in strategic locations of a house (Nakamura, 2004, pp. 11–25).

Analysis of the term *āšipu* in an international context yields more complex results. There are a few uses of this term in Hittite texts in ritual contexts and in conjunction with Akkadian incantations (Kammenhuber, 1976, pp. 143–145). A letter from Kadašman-Turgu of Babylonia to Ḫattušili III reports the arrival of one such professional “to perform rituals” for the Hittite court (KUB III 71: 7–11). A letter from the Hittite king Ḫattušili III to the king of Babylonia Kadašman-Enlil II (KBo I 10 + rev. 42–48) confirms that Muwatalli had detained a physician and a conjuror previously sent from Babylonia (Zaccagnini, 1983, p. 251). Finally, in another letter the Pharaoh responds to the request of the Hittite king by sending both an *asû* (physician) and an *āšipu* (exorcist) to aid his sister in giving birth at an advanced age (50 or 60 years old). The Hittite king asks for “a man to prepare a medicine so that she may bear children!”, and the Pharaoh, who initially argued that “One can’t produce medicine to enable her to bear children!”, finally decides to “send a competent *āšipu* and a competent *a[sû]* to assist her to produce children” (Bo 652: Vs. 8–Rs. 1; Caramello, 2018, p. 281). According to Pinch (1994, p. 123), “divisions between religion, magic and medicine which seem obvious to us would not necessarily have been meaningful to ancient Egyptians. It was not essential to choose only one of these options. Many Egyptians will have utilized the resources of religion, magic and medicine.”

During the Amarna Age, Akkadian and Hittite texts attest a lethal epidemic that originated in Egypt and later spread to Canaan, Syria, Alashiya (Cyprus), and the land of Hatti. References to pestilence/plague/epidemic (*mūtānu*) (Rainey, 2015, p. 1290), as well as the metaphoric expression the “hand of Nergal,” occur in the Amarna Letters (EA 11; EA 35; EA 96; EA 244; EA 362), the Egyptian Medical Papyri (*idw*; *i3dt*; *i3dt rnpt*),²⁶

²³ *cf.* note 5 of the present article (for all the references).

²⁴ CAD A/1, II, p. 435 (for *āšipūtu*, ‘exorcism, craft, practice of the exorcist, corpus of texts of the exorcist’).

²⁵ Incantation series against Lamaštu, a female demon (Farber, 2014, pp. 152–153).

²⁶ Faulkner (1991, pp. 9–10, 35, 150). For *idw*, ‘pestilence’ *vd. Urk.* (IV, p. 1547); and for *i3dt*, ‘pestilence’ *vd. Papyrus Edwin Smith XVIII*, 16–17, in Breasted (1930, pp. 502, 512); and Papyrus Ebers § 19, col. 6/9; §614, col. 77/21, in Wreszinski (1913, pp. 7, 154). The Egyptian Medical Papyri do not employ the terms *idw* and *i3dt*, suggested for ‘pestilence,’ as medical terms at all. Pestilence was believed to be inflicted by supernatural powers of destruction that were exercised by the goddess Sekhmet, her messengers, and

and the Hittite Prayers (*henkan*).²⁷ Also, in a letter from Tyre, found at Ugarit, pestilence is associated with the *libu* disease (an infectious skin disease): “This is the *libu* disease (...). So, I sent him (the writer’ son) from Tyre to escape the plague/pestilence/death. I entrusted him to his father-in-law, [at?] Cape of Tyre.”²⁸ According to these texts, pestilence affected several states and regions, such as Egypt, Megiddo, Tyre, Byblos, Sumur, Alashiya (Cyprus), and the land of Hatti, in various periods. The Hittite Prayers register that the plague lasted at least twenty years: “People kept dying in the time of my father, in the time of my brother, and since I have become priest of the gods, they keep on dying in my time. For twenty years now people have been dying in Hatti” (Mursili’s Plague Prayer n.° 11, CTH 378.2, § 1; Singer, 2002, p. 57). The deaths of two Hittite kings (Suppiluliuma I and Arnuwanda II) were attributed to this epidemic (Cline, 2014, p. 70), and the string of early deaths in the royal family at Amarna suggests a similar lack of immunity among royalty, if indeed these fatalities were caused by the same disease agent (Smith, 2015, p. 11). Given the scale of this epidemic, it is very possible that the sudden deaths of several members of the Egyptian royal family could have been linked to the plague or other diseases.²⁹ The cause of the early death of Tutankhamun has long been the subject of intense debate, and malaria has recently been implicated through ancient DNA evidence (Hawass et al., 2010). A study found positive genetic markers for two different strains of tropical malaria (*Plasmodium falciparum*) in Tutankhamun’s mummified tissue, suggesting that he was doubly infected with malaria at the time of his death. Two other members of the royal family (Thuya and Yuya) also tested positive for malaria (Smith, 2015, p. 11). According to Smith (2015, pp. 100–103), non-elite members of the city were likewise affected: the skeletal evidence at Amarna’s South Tombs Cemetery (STC) revealed a high frequency of lesions associated with malaria, which occurred on around half of the population (Shanks et al., 2008). Nevertheless, recent studies affirm that the lesions correspond to heavy workloads, and that there is not direct archaeological evidence of epidemic diseases at Amarna.³⁰ Also, recent studies³¹ conducted on skeletons found in the Northern Tombs Cemetery (NTC) reveal a combination of lesions (such as *cribra orbitalia* and spinal porosity), due to heavy labor,

disease demons. The Medical Papyri mention the expression *i3dt rmpt*, the ‘Plague/Pestilence of the Year,’ probably describing the annual pestilence after the inundation of the Nile. The *i3dt rmpt* does not necessarily refer to a single disease; rather, it is likely that the term encompassed a number of contagions that occurred simultaneously as the result of the Nile flood (Sass, 2014, pp. 67, 72, 74). Leitz (1994, pp. 205–207) has suggested that one of the primary contagions of the *i3dt rmpt* was bubonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*).

²⁷ In Hittite, the expression *henkan* (like its Akkadian counterpart *mūtānu*) has diverse meanings, such as ‘death’, ‘death sentence’, ‘epidemic’, and ‘pestilence’ (Archi, 1978, p. 81; Singer, 2002, p. 47).

²⁸ Ls. 13-16, RS 34.167 + 175 (Malbran-Labat, 1991, p. 59, n. 62).

²⁹ Between Years 12 and 17 (ca. 1337–1332 BCE) of Akhenaten’s reign, the Queen Mother Tiye, Akhenaten, and the princesses Meketaten, Meritaten, Setepenra, and Neferneferura all died. According to Dodson (2009, p. 17; 2012, p. 2), it is possible that the festival of Year 12 was the occasion for the outbreak of plague in Amarna. For the chronology of Akhenaten’s reign (17 years, ca. 1349–1332 BCE), *vd.* Kemp et. al., 2013, p. 64.

³⁰ Dabbs et al. (2022, pp. 3–5); Habicht et al. (2021, pp. 217–219); Stevens (2021, pp. 150–167). For example, nutritional stress is reflected in the skeletal lesions of *cribra orbitalia*, porotic hyperostosis, and scurvy. Workload stress in adults is manifest in the frequency of spinal trauma, and degenerative joint disease (Dabbs et al., 2015, p. 31) (for STC).

³¹ Stevens & Dabbs (2017, p. 146) (for NTC). This population seems to have been a workforce of children and teenagers, who were required to perform frequent heavy labor (*corvée*) at the new city.

that have been previously identified as indicators of malarial infection. Finally, paleo-entomological finds at Amarna demonstrated that at the Workmen's Village there were potentially all the conditions and vectors (such as humans, rats, and cat and human fleas), in which the bacteria that causes the bubonic plague could have been present in the city (Panagiotakopulu, 2004; *cf.* Kozloff, 2006). Nevertheless, according to recent studies,³² there is not direct archaeological evidence that the bubonic plague affected the inhabitants of the Workmen's Village. The hard work, the poor living conditions and the presence of different diseases, all widespread as a consequence of the poor living conditions of the tomb workers, may explain the short period of activity at the new capital city (ca. 1350–1330 BCE).

Diplomatic correspondence, prayers, magic spells, and medical texts show that even the best physicians and the healing powers of a god/goddess were not enough to cure or save a king and his family in times of epidemics; in cases such as these, when doctors and gods failed, kings turned to an *āšipu* (a conjurer, enchanter, exorcist, or magician).

Nergal, the god of pestilence, is probably mentioned in EA 35 (BM 29788),³³ a clay-tablet letter sent from the king of Alashiya (Cyprus) to the Pharaoh. The letter concerns: (a) an epidemic – the “hand of Nergal” – afflicting the country; (b) the exchange of copper and timber (from Cyprus) for silver, sweet oil, and a diviner or expert in vulture augury (from Egypt); and (c) the exchange of messengers between both courts. According to this letter, the king of Alashiya sent to the Pharaoh a small amount of copper, explaining that the greeting-gift (*šulmānu*) (Rainey, 2015, p. 341, 1299) was modest because pestilence had reduced the number of mineworkers in his country:

Now, I have sent to you five hundred (talents/shekels/ingots)³⁴ of copper. As my brother's greeting-gift (*šulmānu*), I have sent it to you. My brother, that the amount of copper is small, may you not take it to heart, because the ‘hand of Nergal’ (ŠU-ti^dMAŠ-MAŠ)³⁵, my lord, is in my land. He has slain all the men of my land, and there is not a (single) copper-worker (EA 35, ll. 10–15, in Rainey, 2015, p. 341).

³² *cf.* notes 30–31 (for the new studies and references).

³³ Moran (1992, pp. 107–109); Rainey (2015, pp. 340–343); *cf.* Gestoso Singer (2017, pp. 224–226; 2019, pp. 171–175).

³⁴ Each talent would weigh ca. 28.2 kg. *Cf.* Moran (1992, p. 107); Pulak (1997, p. 248; 2000, p. 140); Rainey (2015, pp. 340–341, 1278) (for ‘five hundred talents’; ca. 14.1 tons); Jones (2007, p. 21, n. 80); Liverani (1990, pp. 249–251); Papadopoulou (2018, p. 65); Zaccagnini (1986, p. 414) (for ‘five hundred shekels’; ca. 4.75 kg, based on the Ugaritic shekel of ca. 9.5 g); Moran (1992, p. 105, n. 5) (for talents, bars, or ingots).

³⁵ In the Akkadian texts of Ugarit, the sumerogram ^dMAŠ-MAŠ is used to designate the god Resheph (Hellbing, 1979, pp. 21, 23, 83; Lipiński, 2009, pp. 117–118; Ulanowski, 2013, pp. 158, 160; Van Soldt, 1991, p. 30), who was associated with the god Nergal (Rainey, 2015, p. 1380; Teixidor, 1976, p. 65). This spelling is also used for the Akkadian term *ašipu* (in this case, the *mašmaššu* reading would be more correct) (CAD M/10, I, p. 381), ‘enchanter,’ ‘exorcist,’ and ‘priest of enchantments’ (for *āšipu*, ‘exorcist,’ in CAD A/1, II, p. 431). This suggestion allows us to confirm the association of the gods Resheph and Nergal in their capacity as ‘enchanters’ or ‘exorcists’ – gods who acted, for example, against disease and snakebite (Gestoso Singer, 2019, p. 172, n. 60). Muhly (1980, p. 42) suggests that the “hand of Nergal” is an Akkadian expression for a particular disease and has no connection with the worship of this god in Cyprus.

It has been suggested that the reference to an epidemic may indicate that the letter (EA 35) was sent during the last years of Akhenaten's reign (Hellbing, 1979, pp. 14–16).

It remains uncertain whether EA 35 (l. 13, in Moran, 1992, p. 107) contains the name of Nergal, of Rašpu/ Resheph, or of a local Cypriote god of pestilence (Resheph-Mikal).³⁶ According to this letter, Nergal has killed many of his subjects and there is no one left to mine copper. The king's reference to Nergal is taken to mean that people were dying of an unspecified sickness, perhaps pestilence or another disease (Georgiou, 1979, p. 96). The “hand of ... (+ the name of a god or goddess)” is an expression used to signal the power and activity of a god and generally refers to the punishment of a people, a king, or a kingdom. Similarly, during the Old Babylonian period, incantation texts mention the “hand of a god,” “of a demon,” or “of a ghost,” or the “tongue of a human” (generally a witch), as maleficent forces threatening an individual or a people with illness.³⁷ For example, a bird omen text specifies, “If an eagle takes a dove in the window of a house, that house, a hand (a disease) will reach it (obv. i 4).”³⁸ According to Smith (2013, p. 59, n. 25), “hand” here may be the hand of an enemy, or it may be short for “hand of a ghost,” referring to a ghost-induced disease. Finally, these examples have a parallel in the Biblical expressions *yad Yahweh*, “the hand of Yahweh,” used in Exodus 9: 3 to refer to the fifth plague (*deber*) that struck Egypt, killing all the livestock (*cf.* Exodus 9: 15). The First Book of Samuel describes what was perhaps an outbreak of pestilence (*deber*) in Philistia, emphasizing the metaphoric expression “the hand of Yahweh,” and notes one of the symptoms of an epidemic, the development of tumors/sores: “The hand of Yahweh was heavy on them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and struck them with sores/tumors; even Ashdod and its borders” (Samuel I, 5: 6).³⁹

Messengers were occasionally delayed or detained in other courts for various reasons. In this case, the epidemic may have caused an Egyptian messenger to linger in Cyprus for three years: “My brother, do not be concerned that your messenger has stayed three years in my country, because the “hand of Nergal” is in my land, and in my own house, there was a young wife of mine that now, my brother, is dead” (EA 35, ll. 35–39, in Rainey, 2015, p. 343). His wife had died because of the epidemic (the “hand of Nergal”), which affected not only the copper miners but also his own family.

A man from Alashiya who died in Egypt may also have been a victim of the epidemic: “Here is the situation: a man of the land of A[lashiya] has died in the land of Egypt (...). So, my brother, take in charge the belongings of the men of Alashiya and hand them over, my brother, to my messenger” (EA 35, ll. 30–34, in Rainey, 2015, p. 343).

³⁶ Moran (1992, p. 108, n. 3); Rainey (2015, p. 340); Teixidor (1976, p. 65). In Kition (Cyprus), the god Resheph-Mikal uses an epithet interpreted as ‘arrow,’ because he strikes his victims with arrows. In Egyptian medical texts (such as the Smith and Ebers Papyri), symptoms suffered by patients afflicted with a disease similar to the bubonic plague were described as painful stitches caused by the impact of an arrow and attributed to a demon, a vengeful goddess, or the ‘disease bringers’ (Sass, 2014, pp. 72, 74).

³⁷ An incantation, charm, or spell is a magical formula created to trigger a magical effect on a person. *cf.* Sefati & Klein (2002, p. 573).

³⁸ A fragment from Tablets 61–65 of the Akkadian Omen Series *Šumma Ālu* (Moren & Foster, 1988, pp. 279–280).

³⁹ The Septuagint and Vulgate versions attributed the disease to a ravaging of mice: “mice multiplied in their land, and the terror of death was throughout the entire city” (Freemon, 2005, p. 436).

Helck (1962, pp. 186–187) connects this sickness in the land of Alashiya with a more widespread “plague” that he believes began in Egypt at the end of Akhenaten’s rule and reached the Hittites as they were fighting against Egypt in Syria. According to the Second Plague Prayer, the king of Hatti violated the Kuruštama Treaty (CTH 134) with Egypt by twice attacking Amqa, located on the frontier of Egyptian-controlled territory in Syria. Then, the Egyptian soldiers who were carried off by Suppiluliuma I from the battlefield of Amqa as captives brought the plague into the land of Hatti:

(...) when the prisoners of war who had been captured were led back to the land of Hatti, a plague broke out among the prisoners and they began to die. When the prisoners of war were carried off to the land of Hatti, the prisoners of war brought the plague into the Hatti land. From that day on people have been dying in the Hatti land.⁴⁰

The Egyptian prisoners captured by Suppiluliuma I must not have shown any obvious symptoms before entering the Hittite capital, suggesting a long incubation period (Smith, 2015, pp. 9–10). The plague may have spread along the main routes, and it lasted for at least twenty years, as we mentioned before.

Finally, in EA 35, the ruler of Alashiya requested silver in great quantities as pre-payments for future deliveries of copper: “You are my brother. May he send me a very great amount of silver! My brother, give me the finest silver! As for me, then I will send you, my brother, whatever you should request” (EA 35, ll. 19–22, in Rainey, 2015, p. 341). According to the ties of brotherhood and friendship between kings, he asked for other special “greeting-gifts,” including an augury expert:

Moreover, my brother, give me the ox (or an ox-shaped figurine) that my messenger has requested, and send me, my brother, two *kukkubu*-containers of ‘sweet oil,’ and send me, my brother, one of the experts (1 LÚ.MEŠ *ša-i-li*) in vulture (Á.MUŠEN = *erû*) divination (a diviner skilled in Egyptian vulture augury).⁴¹

In this letter, the Egyptian augury expert⁴² is requested along with an ox (or a statuette of an ox) and two *kukkubu*-containers of aromatic oils – all prestige goods, given as “greeting-gifts”. If the reading of Rainey – “statuette of an ox” – is correct, we could be dealing with a ritual in which such statuettes were used to combat an epidemic. According to the Hittite “ritual of Dandanku” (CTH 425.2), a donkey, or in the case of a poor person a clay statuette in the shape of this animal, was used to eradicate the disease from a city and deflect it into enemy territory.⁴³ As for the two containers, known as the

⁴⁰ KUB 14.8, and its duplicates in KUB 14.10 + KUB 26.86, and KUB 14.11 + 650/u; CTH 378.2, §§ 4–5, obv. 20’ – 30’, in Singer (2002, p. 58).

⁴¹ EA 35 (ll. 23–26). For *ša’ilu* as ‘a dream interpreter,’ *vd.* CAD Š/17, I, p. 111; as ‘a diviner,’ *vd.* Rainey (2015, pp. 342, 1297); and for Á.MUŠEN = *erû* as ‘vulture; eagle,’ *vd.* Rainey (2015, pp. 1281, 1306). *cf.* Smith (2013, p. 63, n. 40), for Akkadian *bārû* as ‘diviner’ (CAD B/2, pp. 121–125); and *dāgil iššūrē* as ‘bird watchers’ (CAD D/3, p. 25).

⁴² One class of augurs specialized in reading the *auspices* (from the Latin *auspicium*; *cf.* *auspex*, ‘one who looks at birds’), that is, interpreting the flight patterns of certain species of birds. *Cf.* Goldhahn (2019, pp. 53–54) (for birds in the Bronze Age); Sakuma (2013, pp. 219–238) (for terms of ornithomancy in Hatti).

⁴³ KUB II 7 iii 11–18, in Moyer (1983, p. 34). *cf.* Gestoso Singer (2017, p. 234); Gurney (1977, p. 49).

kukkubu type, they would have contained “the best oil” or “sweet oil”, probably very refined and aromatic, that was reserved for personal use or for certain rituals.⁴⁴ The ruler of Alashiya’s request that the Pharaoh send him an Egyptian expert in auguries who can interpret the flight of vultures is very unusual, although not unique.

In ancient Egypt, vultures were symbols of protection from the forces of evil. The letter of the Alashiyan ruler discovered at El Amarna (EA 35) refers to the Egyptian vulture, the animal consecrated to Mut, the goddess of nature and motherhood. Nekhbet, the goddess who protected the royalty of Upper Egypt in childbirth and in wars, is frequently depicted as a vulture wearing the white crown. Although this bird has often been confused with the *Buteo ferox* (Eg. *tyw*), we believe that in this case the Amarna letter, which records the Akkadian expression *erû*, refers to the *Neophron percnopterus* (Eg. 3) (Faulkner, 1991, p. 1; Gardiner, 1973, p. 467), the typical Egyptian vulture, which during the winter migrated from Europe to Sub-Saharan Africa. McEwan (1981, p. 62, n. 29)⁴⁵ suggests that *erû* refers to the Egyptian vulture, a bird that migrates across Cyprus. But according to Smith (2013, p. 68, n. 56), “Aside from this single reference, evidence for bird-divination in Egypt is lacking. It is likely, as McEwan suggests, that the king of Alashiya based his request on the cosmopolitan nature of the Egyptian court rather than any native Egyptian bird-divination tradition.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Borrego Gallardo (2022, p. 60) affirms that “Letter 35 suggests the existence of experts in the interpretation of animal *omina* especially bird divination, in Late Bronze Egypt.”

In this case, the ruler of Alashiya may have learned of the existence in Egypt of an itinerant bird-diviner, or a group of them, before making his request (Smith, 2013, p. 68). A similar situation is documented at Ugarit, where a Hittite functionary (*uriyannu*) was summoned to practice divination in order to establish the boundary between Ugarit and Siyannu.⁴⁷ As Smith (2013, p. 78, n. 96) suggested, “while the nature of the bird-divination that the king of Cyprus sought is unclear, it is clear that at about the same time as the texts from Ugarit and Emar some form of bird-divination was known as far west as Cyprus.”

In ancient Egypt, rituals to protect individuals from harm and to expel the “evil disease” (the pestilence) included recitations over vulture feathers, which were then spread over a man; and recitations spoken by a man holding a stick/club of *ds*-wood as

⁴⁴ For the alternative translation “of the best oil,” *vd.* Rainey (2015, p. 343); and for “sweet oil,” *vd.* Moran (1992, p. 107).

⁴⁵ See Moran (1992, p. 107) (for vulture-augury) and Moran (1992, p. 109, n. 6) (for eagle-augury)). *Cf.* Borrego Gallardo (2022, pp. 50–54, 60) (for the Griffon vultures in Cyprus and Egypt).

⁴⁶ *cf.* Moran (1992, p. 109, n. 6). On the absence of indigenous bird-divination in Egypt, *vd.* Brunner (1977, pp. 45–46). *Contra* Borrego Gallardo (2022, pp. 55–58) (for the existence of ornithomancy in ancient Egypt).

⁴⁷ RS 17.364 = KTU 6.29, in Van Soldt (1990, p. 380) (for the alphabetic label: “Document concerning the borderlines which the *uriyannu* established for the king of Ugarit”); RS 17.368 = PRU IV, 76–77, in Van Soldt (1990, p. 385) (for the Akkadian report: “And the *uriyannu* fully executed these verdicts, and he checked the borderlines between the king of Ugarit and the king of Siyannu (and) placed (boundary) stones on the border between them”). The Hittite *uriyanniš* and therefore the Akkadian and Ugaritic *uriyannu* was, among other things, a diviner who studied avian flight patterns (Singer, 1999, p. 685, nn. 270–271). On Hittite bird-divination, *vd.* Bawanypeck (2005); and for Mesopotamian and Syrian bird-divination, *vd.* De Zorzi (2009, pp. 85–91).

he circled his house.⁴⁸ Papyrus Ebers mentions the use of a vulture feather as an eyedropper to apply a remedy to cure “cloudiness from the eyes (cataract).”⁴⁹ The same papyrus records the use of a *ds*-knife⁵⁰ to remove a kind of swelling or tumor⁵¹, probably the buboes (lit. “swollen glands”) that characterize bubonic plague.⁵²

4. Conclusions

In the Late Bronze Age, the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean formed a special sphere of activity for migrating specialists, who navigated from one side to the other through extensive networks of interconnections. They became involved in a kind of *temporary* prestige gift-exchange network, because they were expected to return home sooner or later. In fact, not only luxury raw materials and manufactured goods were sent to foreign courts, but also *prestigious* or *specialized* persons.

In accordance with the ties of brotherhood and friendship, Great Kings sent specialists and statues of gods and goddesses between courts in the Levant. Some specialists (such as physicians, exorcists, and omen experts) traveled to perform acts of healing and to practice divination. Some palaces (such as the one at Ugarit) had no physician who could heal the specific illness of the king and thus requested a specialist from Egypt (EA 49). The Hittite king required Egyptian physicians and remedies more than once. In some cases, when the medicine failed to alleviate the pain of a king or queen, kings turned to prayers, exorcists, and divine statues. On special occasions, they sent statues of gods and goddesses in order to heal or protect royal peers, as well as to bless their new wives and alliances.

At the end of the Amarna Period, Akkadian and Hittite texts confirm that the pestilence that originated in Egypt afterwards reached Canaan, Syria, Alashiya (Cyprus), and the land of Hatti. References to pestilence, plague, epidemic, and death, as well as metaphoric expressions such as the “hand of Nergal,” are widespread in diplomatic correspondence, prayers, magic spells, and medical texts. At the end of Akhenaten’s reign, an Amarna letter (EA 35) confirms that the people of Alashiya could not work at the copper mines because of the pestilence, which affected economic transactions and the diplomatic relationship between Alashiya and Egypt. The ruler of Alashiya requested a vulture augury expert from Egypt, probably to expel the “evil disease”.

⁴⁸ Papyrus Edwin Smith, Spell 1, verso, col. 1/1–10; Spell 2, verso, col. 1/1–16 (“Spells against Pestilential Air”), in Allen (2005, p. 107).

⁴⁹ Papyrus Ebers, § 339, col. 55/11–15, in Wreszinski (1913, p. 98); cf. Ghalioungui (1987, p. 103); Ritner (2000, p. 109, n. 8).

⁵⁰ The hippopotamus goddess Taweret, the “Great One,” often holds a similar knife and touches a hieroglyphic sign that signifies ‘protection,’ particularly when she appears on magical wands and rods. These items were emblems of the control that a magician hoped to exercise over demons (Pinch, 1994, p. 41, fig. 20).

⁵¹ Papyrus Ebers, § 875, col. 109/2–11, in Wreszinski (1913, pp. 225–226); cf. Ghalioungui (1987, pp. 251–252); Nunn (2002, p. 166).

⁵² Papyrus Ebers, § 857, col. 103/19–104/6, in Wreszinski (1913, p. 215); cf. Gestoso Singer (2019, pp. 197–198); Ghalioungui (1987, pp. 232–233); Sass (2014, p. 70).

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Abbreviations

- CAD *The Chicago Assyrian dictionary*. (1956–2010). The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- CTH Laroche, E. (1971). *Catalogue des textes hittites*. Editions Klincksieck.
- KBo *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi, 1–71*. (1921–2023). Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur.
- KTU Dietrich, M., Loretz, O., & Sanmartín, J. (Eds.). (1995). *The cuneiform alphabetic texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other places* (2nd ed.). Ugarit-Verlag.
- KUB *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, 1–60*. (1921–1990). Akademie Verlag.
- PRU Nougayrol, J. (1956). *Le palais royal d'Ugarit* (Vol. 4). Imprimerie Nationale.
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