

Sherua

I. Introduction. Mesopotamian goddess. Sh. is the consort of the Assyrian national god →Assur, often paired with →Mullissu (previously read Ninlil), mother of →Nabu. Her name means “dawn” or “early morning light”; she is also known as →Ishtar, the goddess of dawn. Sh. is attested in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods; her worship continued in Assyria under Parthian rule. A gate in the city of Assur was named after her. She may have played a role secondary to that of Mullissu as consort of Assur from the late 8th cent., when Mullissu had her own cella within his temple in the city of Assur and Sh. shared a cella with other deities (MENZEL 1981: 63f). Sh. was worshipped in Nineveh during the Neo-Assyrian period. In a ritual, which took place in Assur and was recorded in 650, singers proclaimed that she has given birth. As the dawn personified she may be referred to as the mother of the Assyrian king, almost certainly Sargon II (721-705), in Isaiah 14:12. She may also have been Venus as the morning star, but there is no clear evidence for this. The Assyrian goddess has a name cognate with the (male) Ugaritic god of the dawn ŠHR, who is paired with dusk ŠLM. The birth of Dawn-and-Dusk is the subject of an Ugaritic myth in which they are voracious devourers of birds and →fish and may reflect the sacred marriage rite at Ugarit (PARDEE 1997: 274-283). PARDEE rejects a link between Dawn-and-Dusk with the morning star and the evening star.

II. Iconographic discussion. Sh. is probably shown as a goddess in a nimbus on seals, but her iconography has not yet been recognized in Assyrian glyptic or sculpture, and the nimbus may mark celestial aspects of other goddesses (COLLON 2001: 138). Since the color red is important for distinguishing the dawn in Egyptian art, lack of color in Assyrian sculpture and glyptic art may account for the difficulty in identification. ŠHR has likewise not yet been identified in Ugaritic iconography.

Stephanie Dalley

Bibliography

- MENZEL B., 1981, *Assyrische Tempel* (Studia Pohl: Series Maior 10/1), Rome.
- COLLON D., 2001, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals V. Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods*, London.
- ConScr = HALLO W.W., ed., 1997-2002, *The Context of Scripture*. 3 vols., Leiden.
- PARDEE D., 1997, Dawn and Dusk, in: *ConScr I*, 274-283.