

## **Rhizomatic Mother Goddesses in North Africa: The Great Mother's Resurrection in Sophie El Goulli's *Hashtart: À la Naissance de Carthage***

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### **Abstract**

*With reference to Sophie El Goulli's Hashtart: A la Naissance de Carthage, the present paper will examine the Goddess religion of North Africans, mainly Numidians and Carthaginians, focusing on the rhizomatic model of the Great Mother archetype: Tritonis, Neith, Tanit, and 'Hashtart.' The Tunisian writer, Sophie El Goulli celebrates the Punic culture founded by Elissa and inspired by the transformation of Hashtart and the renaissance of the Goddess 'Tanit' to unite Numidians and Phoenicians. The rhizomatic character of these pagan goddesses facilitates religious syncretism and allows for building inclusive communities. In an attempt to defend their cultural heritage and resist appropriation, native people cross religious borders and recreate religious symbols, deities, myths, and traditions. Moreover, since religion has been employed to condemn women as inferior to men and, thus, keep them subjugated to the rules of their patriarchal societies, Goddess worship reemerges to defy this 'patriarchal masculinity' and spread the Feminine principle to heal both men and women.*

**Keywords:** Goddess Archetype, the Feminine, Great Mother, Tanit

The return of the 'Feminine' is not a new theme because ancient cultures had witnessed 'waves' of this resurrection of the "primordial creatrix of self-replication" (Rigoglioso 23). The recurring revival of this "consciousness of the Goddess," as Merlin Stone argues, coincides with an individual's or a group's need for a "sense of unity" beyond the bounds of "us and others" (20). It is a reunion with the Feminine, a return to the beginning, to a "consciousness of wholeness" (Bruteau 73). Then, the multifaceted aspect of the Feminine appears when "we develop differentiations within this wholeness, we learn to analyse and categorize, to contrast and separate. We fragment our experience and concentrate on specializing in some chosen aspect of it. But eventually we begin to feel out of balance and to crave a reintegration of our lives, the finding of our original unity . . ." (Bruteau 73).

This paper studies Tanit, as a rhizomatic archetype of the Goddess, a multiplying deity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome "may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (9). As a rhizome, the Mother Goddess has gone through "transformational multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari 11), taking different shapes and expanding her territories beyond the boundaries of cultures, place, and time. As Neumann says:

The Great Goddess . . . is the incarnation of the Feminine Self that unfolds the history of mankind as in the history of every individual woman, its reality determines individual as well as collective life. This archetypal psychological world which is encompassed in the multiple forms of the Great Goddess is the underlying power that even today\_ partly with the same symbols and in the same order of unfolding\_ determines the psychic history of modern man and of modern woman. (336)

The revival of the Goddess worship in North Africa after the Phoenician settlement and the rise of Carthage was essential for the continuity of life and the promotion of peace because a Goddess's 'motherhood' is "widely associated with community and 'mystical nationalism'" (Preston 333). Indeed, Tanit and Hashtart were acknowledged as a result of a "subjective factor, the soul of the culture" (Tillich 258). As Dolores Deluise affirms, "[a]ncient cultures often borrowed the gods of neighboring cultures renaming them and refashioning their functions to fit their needs" (99).

However, Neumann claims in his book that almost in every culture, the Goddess as an archetype goes through metamorphoses: from the uroboros to the Archetypal Feminine to the Great Mother and other differentiations. The uroboros is the "Great Round," a snake devouring its tail, and a "symbol of the origin and of the opposites contained in it" (Neumann 18). The beginning is with an androgynous understanding of a deity with indivisible positive/negative, female/male elements. Out of the uroboros, the 'Archetypal Feminine' and the 'Archetypal Masculine' develop. Though the Archetypal Feminine includes the positive and negative male elements, it is predominantly Feminine with its assertive positive and negative determinants (Neumann 21). A more developed perception of the Goddess comes with the 'Great Mother' who usually takes three forms: the Good Mother, the Terrible Mother, and the Good/Terrible Mother. While the Good Mother contains the positive female and male elements, the Terrible Mother is left with negative determinants. Then, a unity of the Good and the Terrible leads to the birth of the uroboric Great Mother (Neumann 21).

## Neith

Tanit is the Mother of 'Cart Hadasht,' 'Carthage.' Punic remnants in Carthage, Kerkouane, Dougga, Carthage, and Sicily prove that She was a favourite Goddess from the beginning of the sixth century BC till the fall of the Lybian pantheon with the advent of Christianity in North Africa. According to Deluise, She is a travelling deity who reached the North African coast with the Phoenician queen Elyssa; a reborn Ashtarte, Tanit is the descendant of Middle-Eastern goddesses namely Atirat, Asherah, Inanna, and Ishtar (95). However, Neumann argues that the Mother Goddess as an archetype of the Feminine travels through the human psyche and is related to its unconscious and conscious experiences (3). Indeed, Neuman identifies Tanit with the primordial goddess Neith who was worshipped in North Africa (311) and, thus, she is the result of a process of the differentiation or fragmentation of the Mother Goddess archetype.

There is no archaeological record of the 'Great Round' form in North Africa yet, but it is usually linked to a nocturnal image and a deep darkness of the waters or the ocean and in Egypt the "unity of primordial waters [as] male-female" is represented by Nun and Naunet" (Neumann 216). Their Libyan equivalents are mentioned in Herodotus's *Histories* as Triton and Tritonis in the chapter that deals with the peoples of Libya:

Next to the Makhlyes are the Auseans; these and the Makhlyes, separated by the Triton, live on the shores of Lake Tritonis. The Makhlyes wear their hair long behind, the Auseans in front. They celebrate a yearly festival of Athena, where their maidens are separated into two bands and fight each other with stones and sticks, thus, they say, honoring in the way of their ancestors that native goddess whom we call Athena. Maidens who die of their wounds are called false virgins. Before the girls are set fighting, the whole people choose the fairest maid, and arm her with a Korinthian helmet and Greek panoply, to be then mounted on a chariot and drawn all along the lake shore. With what armor they equipped their maidens before Greeks came to live near them, I cannot say; but I suppose the armor was Egyptian; for I maintain that the Greeks took their shield and helmet from Egypt. (4.180)

Tritonis refers to Lake Tritonis, what we call nowadays 'Chott Djerid,' a salty aquatic entry to the deep 'womb' usually symbolized by the triangle. Triton is the serpentine water of the river. Neith, known also as Nut, Nit, Net, or simply 'NT,' rose from Lake Tritonis as an "autogene, or self-created Virgin Mother" (Rigoglioso 26) and was worshipped by North Africans, including Egyptians who identified her as "the Lady of the West" (Budge 450). She was the leading Goddess of the pre-Dynastic Egypt and honored by Aha, the first recognized Egyptian king of the First Dynasty (c. 2920–2770 B.C.E.) who offered her a temple in Saïs (Rigoglioso 26).

She is, then, a fragmentation of Triton/Tritonis (Nun/Naunet). Budge suggests that her name is derived from "netet," the Egyptian word for 'to knit' or 'to weave' (Budge 451); hence, in addition to being the heiress of Tritonis as the Goddess of the primordial waters "the opener of the way,' holding the key of the fertility goddesses, the key to the gates of the womb and the underworld, the gates of death and rebirth" (Neumann 221); she is also the goddess of weaving and, hence, the "creatix of the world" (Neumann 218) who is identified with the heaven goddess Nut (Neumann 221). She has all the attributes that make her a perfect example of the Good Mother.

However, it is relevant to note that Neith had a half-sister, Pallas, the daughter of Poseidon and Tritonis. As Rigoglioso explains, “*Pallas* comes from *pallein*, ‘to brandish,’” and “‘was once the name for robust maidens and implied the meaning of the masculine word *pallas* . . . ‘robust young man.’ Thus, the name *Pallas* itself connoted a robust, masculine fighting woman” (38). *Pallas* seems to be the Terrible Mother of War and Death in this myth. The archetype of the ‘Devouring Father’ is prominent in myths and stories, as Reis argues (46). The myth shows how patriarchal cultures reproduce the ‘Patriarch’ and succeed in resurrecting this archetype each time a revolutionary awakening of the ‘Mother’ or the ‘Feminine’ surfaces on the margins of these cultures. Indeed, a “patriarchal culture ensures that women will be separated from each other” (Reis 119); for this reason, the Father in these myths tries to divest the Mother Goddess of her powers and to assure that these powers remain divided by creating his own phallocratic offspring from the Goddess.

These offspring are meant to inherit the Mother Goddess and are usually in constant conflict with each other. Thus, instead of an encompassing Great Mother, minor goddesses appear, each ruling over a domain, but none of them has the power to defy the Fathers. In Greece, for example, where the pantheon is dominated by the Devouring Father Saturn and, later on, his son Zeus, an indivisible Great Mother, one that embraces the dualities, is not allowed to rule with the Father. Gaia and Rhea are overthrown and their powers are distributed between Zeus’s sisters, Saturn’s daughters: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, and Aphrodite who are always battling against each other. This conflict between the powers of the ‘Father’ and the ‘Mother’ occurs also inside each individual by repressing the ‘Feminine.’

*Pallas* is supposed to be her Daddy’s daughter, she is a disfigured face of Tritonis, an aspect of her. But the Mother Goddess manages to initiate the “autogenetic” Neith, a fatherless Goddess who affirms her supremacy saying, as Proclus tells of the inscription in her sanctuary in Egypt, “I am the things that are, that will be, and that have been. No one has ever laid open the garment by which I am concealed. The fruit which I brought forth was the sun” (qtd. in Rigoglioso 29). And as Rigoglioso further clarifies, she presents herself to her Egyptian followers as “*athena*,” which signifies “I have come from myself” (29). Moreover, she rises as a virgin goddess for ‘no one has ever lifted her garment,’ and this time she does not need Triton or Poseidon because she comes with the ‘sun/son’ inside her, Raa/Hammon and since she was never “engaged in any kind of sexual union, . . . she was eternally a virgin. Yet, as the primordial Being, she was also generative. Thus, in Neith we have one of the earliest appearances of the archetype of the Virgin Mother, the Holy Parthenos, in her original, unadulterated form” (Rigoglioso 30).

Eventually, Neith kills her half-sister *Pallas* in a battle to become *Pallas Neith*, or *Pallas Athena* as she was known in Greece. She absorbs *Pallas* and becomes the Good/Terrible Mother or the uroboric Great Mother; hence, the archetype of the Great Mother is resurrected with Neith as “a deity of totality” (Rigoglioso 30). When Neith ascends to the pantheon, she is an androgynous Mother figure that represents both the masculine and feminine principles:

she often holds a sceptre in one hand, and the symbol of life in the other, but sometimes the hand which holds the sceptre also grasps a bow and two arrows,

which are her characteristic symbols. She once appears in the form of a cow with eighteen stars on one side, and a collar round her neck from which hangs on her back is a ram-headed lion with horns and plumes upon his head. The cow stands in a boat, the prow of which terminates in a lion's head with a disk upon it, and is provided with wings; the stern of the boat terminates in a ram's head, and by the fore feet of the cow, which is described as "Net, the Cow, which gave birth to Ra". In one scene she is represented with a crocodile sucking at each breast. In late dynastic times there is no doubt that Net or Neith was regarded as nothing but a form of Hathor, but at an earlier period she was certainly a personification of a form of the great, inert, primeval watery mass out of which sprang the Sun-god Ra. (Budge 450-51)

With the rise of a male patriarchal god, in this case Poseidon who tries to ascend by becoming a 'Father,' the Goddess multiplies and, following the model of the rhizome, she goes through "movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization:" with deterritorialization, lines of flight are created to facilitate the movements without tracing and results in multiple entryways; with these lines of flight, reterritorialization becomes possible and opens for other possibilities of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 10). Thanks to these lines of flight, the Goddess flees tracing and is able to be reborn again and to multiply.

### **Elyssa's Self-Sacrifice**

How did Neith escape tracing to multiply and become Tanit? *In Hashtart: A la Naissance de Carthage*, the Tunisian writer Sophie El Goulli tries to follow the rhizomatic movement of the Goddess from Phoenicia, to Carthage, to present day Tunisia. Though the novel focuses on Punic Tunisia, the archetype of the Great Mother is still influencing the psychical world of the modern era because She is rooted deep in the unconscious. In fact, she never disappeared even with the advance of monotheistic religions. The Virgin Mary and her Mother Saint Anne inherited the "identity" of the Mother Goddess and many rituals and religious symbols are related to the goddess worship (Deluise 95). With Islam, Tanit's symbols have been appropriated and the symbol of the 'Hand,' for example, has been associated with Fatima, the prophet's daughter. Indeed, as Jean-Loic Le Quellec explains, though North Africans use terms like 'Khomsa' or 'Khamasa,' Europeans and French settlers, who had problems with the pronunciation of the word, identified the symbol as 'the hand of Fatima' not to refer to the prophet's daughter, but back then settlers used to name any 'Arab' woman 'Fatima' since women tended to conceal their names (257-59).

In *Hashtart*, Elyssa recognizes that her dream to found a community beyond the boundaries of geography, gender, race, and class depends on the revival of the Mother Goddess in her new kingdom. After leaving Ba'al's kingdom, Tyre, escaping her brother's oppression, the queen looks for a 'Motherland,' a land where she can 'nurture' Ashtarte, the goddess whose name means literally "the womb" (Preston 330). But Ba'al followed her to North Africa and merged with the Devouring god Ammon/Hammon. In the novel, Ba'al is depicted as an arrogant and merciless male god. Unlike Tanit, he is distant and tyrannical, "un maitre du ciel au plus haut de sa force, trop occupé à diriger sa course rituelle" (17); "son orgueil illimité, inhumain exige pour preuve de sa toute puissance face à sa rivale, la Douce et Féconde et Pitoyable Tanit" (18).

Carthaginians feared Ba'al and tried to bribe him with oblations, offering their own children as scapegoats to attain his blessings. The Topheth of Carthage has been a controversial topic because archaeologists cannot agree on whether the cremated infants in the small urns were sacrificed to the gods, the Sun-god Ba'al-Hammon and Tanit as the markers within the Topheth indicate, before burial or not. The novel revisits the theme of Carthaginian human sacrifice. The narrator takes us back in time to help us understand the context in which these sacrifices occur. Elyssa is offered a space to revise 'his/tory' and voice 'Her/story.' She did not commit suicide, but she sacrificed herself to save her people and, thus, she is the first human sacrifice at Carthage. Elyssa recognizes that the "task of releasing the feminine from the tyrannical power of the driven, crazed masculine is long and arduous" (Woodman 2).

Prior to Elyssa's self-sacrifice, Ba'al Hammon was the Supreme God. Neith seemed to be forgotten as a Native Goddess and Carthaginians, though brought with them the Phoenician Ashtarte, were favouring Ba'al as a furious and angry God who will grant them victory in case of war with the locals while Numidians were expecting the Devouring Father to side with them. Enmity and envy between Numidians and Carthaginians were feeding Ba'al-Hammon rendering him bloodthirstier and more ferocious. With this male god, people are 'crazed' by a "masculine principle gone wild" (Engelsman 107). Tanit's ascendancy requires the sacrifice of Elyssa to satisfy Ba'al's thirst and unite Numidians and Carthaginians once the Goddess is resurrected. Elyssa tells her adopted daughter Hashtart:

Mon enfant, il faut que je parte. Moi aussi, je souffre de vous quitter. De tout quitter. Mais je le dois. Pour obéir à une volonté supérieure, à des lois plus forte que celles qui régissent la vie des mortels. Mais (tu t'en rendras compte plus tard) notre séparation n'est pas définitive. En réalité je serais toujours présente en toi et encore plus que vivante. (26)

Elyssa assures Hashtart, a Numidian girl adopted by the Carthaginian queen who named her for the Phoenician goddess, that she will be eternally present through self-sacrifice. The vessel as a primordial symbol related to the Goddess has also the "transformative aspect of the oven" (Neumann 285) and "this transformation, which is viewed as magical, can only be effected by the woman because she herself, in her body that corresponds to the Great Goddess, is the caldron of incarnation, birth, and rebirth. And that is why the magical caldron or pot is always in the hand of the female mana figure, the priestess or, later, the witch" (Neumann 287-88).

Elyssa offers her 'flesh' to the sacred fire, but she knows that Numidians revere the dead because as Herodotus reports: "As for their manner of swearing and divination they lay their hands on the graves of the men reputed most just and good among them, and by these men they swear; their practice of divination is to go to the tombs of their ancestors, where after making prayers they lie down to sleep, and take whatever dreams come to them for oracles" (4.172). According to Numidian customs, a wise and courageous person like Elyssa joins the realm of ancestral spirits who become appreciated by people as part of the divine world and as Deluise further explains, in some grave markers, the sign of Tanit "with hands crossed over the chest in the Egyptian position" indicates the interment of "a hero of the people who made the ultimate sacrifice for the good of all" (101). As Iarbas orders his people in the novel, "nous lui élevons un monument funéraire dans notre nécropole. Une sepulture

où lui seront rendus les devoirs que, selon nos croyances, nous rendons à nos morts” (47). Thanks to her act of self-sacrifice, Elyssa becomes a ‘rb khnm,’ or ‘rab kohanim’ (kahina), and as Hoyos tells of the religious traditions of Libyans and Numidians, ‘rab kohanim’ is a title that refers to an “awakener of the god [sometimes ‘of the dead god’]” (99); therefore, Elyssa becomes the awakener of Neith, and the medium between the Goddess and human beings.

Tanit is worshiped as a Great Mother of life and death and during the sacrificial cult, people address Tanit as a chthonic deity, one that has the ability to traffic with the spirits and mediate between the celestial realm of the dead and the world of the living:

The Great Goddess is the flowing unity of subterranean and celestial primordial water, the sea of heaven on which sail the barks of the gods of light, the circular life-generating ocean above and below the earth. To her belong all waters, streams, fountains, ponds, and springs, as well as the rain. She is the ocean of life with its life-and-death-bringing seasons, and life is her child, a fish eternally swimming inside her, like the stars in the celestial ocean. . . . (Neuman 222)

People hope that the Great Goddess will guard and mother their cherished ‘victims’ in the afterlife and teach them how to communicate with their relatives when needed. Indeed, the scapegoat is supposed to be a sacred one, a queen for example and, as Neumann points out, this “queen’s ritual, in which a woman had to sacrifice herself” was common in the past (318).

### **Hashtart/Tanit**

Unlike the Greek tragedy of Persephone and Demeter, Elyssa granted her daughter a life: to become the Mother of both Numidians and Carthaginians. Hashtart will enter Numidian temples and become another major symbol of the Mother Goddess. One of the main characteristic of the religious symbol is its innate power, “a power inherent within it” and this power depends on the symbol’s acceptability inasmuch as symbols should be “socially rooted and socially supported” (Tillich 254). In order for Hashtart to merge with Tanit, she must become accepted by Numidians. Hashtart’s metamorphosis starts when she decides to leave Carthage. In her journey, Hashtart is going to know the Great Goddess through a close relationship with her and an interaction with the Goddess’s elementary and transformative characters because a Goddess usually demonstrates “the qualities of rootedness and wandering” (Engelsman 105). As Neumann elucidates, the corporeal elementary character is associated with the Goddess as a ‘vessel,’ a nourishing and protecting Mother and the symbol associated with this function is usually the genital triangle (95). The vessel may refer to the positive elementary character and the Goddess takes a maternal aspect as the one who “contains and protects, nourishes and gives birth” (Neumann 120). This genital triangle is related to the womb, urn, cave, temple, and house (Neumann 137). It also stresses the negative elementary character: the womb of the earth as “the devouring maw of the underworld” (Neumann 149) and the “house urn as a container of ashes” (Neumann 163) because she is the Good/Terrible Mother of life and death. The Terrible aspect is usually symbolized by snakes and monsters.

The transformative character, on the other hand, refers to the virginal character of the Goddess as ruler over the world of spirits and is symbolized in some figures by tiny (or absent) breasts, an accentuated posture of upraised arms (Neumann 104-14), and, sometimes, by “the dominating eyes, which together with the arch of the eyebrows and nose contribute strongly to the birdlike character of these figures” (Neumann 123). With the transformative character, an individual is no longer dependent on the maternal Feminine but is invited to experience change and independence (Neumann 211). As a Goddess of Fate, she weaves and spins to shake the “male principle of consciousness, which desires permanence and not change, eternity and not transformation, law and not creative spontaneity” (Neumann 233). She appears, thus, as the Goddess of vegetation and symbolized by plants, flowers, or trees to emphasize the seasonal metamorphoses.

Punic stelae highlight the symbol of the genital triangle in the sign of Tanit. The triangle stands for the womb of the Mother that offers life and the earth’s womb that takes it. Tanit is a replication of Ashtarte (womb), Neith, and Tritonis. She is a ‘wandering’ Great Mother of ‘rootedness.’ In a stela that goes back to the 4th century BC, exhibited at the Museum of Carthage, the triangular pediment includes seven wheat stalks, their heads take the form of snakes. Under the pediment, there are four birds and at the bottom, there is a huge vessel. A 3rd century BC votive monument from the collection of the Tunisian National Heritage Institute portrays a worshiper, Adonba’al son of Hanniba’al as the inscription indicates, standing in front of a temple’s door with two doves on top of it. In the right side, there is the sign of Tanit with the genital triangle, the upraised arms, and the disc as her head. The upper triangular pediment of the stele contains the symbol of the ‘Khomsa’ between two doves. Under them there are serpentine waves that refer to the water realm from which the Goddess rises.

A 1st century AD limestone stela found in the Tophet of Carthage is displayed in the website of the British Museum. The stela contains a detailed presentation of Tanit in her female and symbolic forms: a lotus flower with her five petals, the Goddess in her virginal state, is blossoming from the triangle, Lake Tritonis, and on each side of the triangle, a flower plant is blooming. As Neumann clarifies, “birth from the female blossom is an archetypal form of divine birth” and, thus, flowers like lotus, lily, and rose are symbols of the Goddess in her spiritual or virginal character (262). In the right side of the same stela and near the flower plant, a naked female figure who resembles the Goddess is sitting. As Neumann remarks, “[o]ften the priestesses of the Great Mother resembled her in physical type, this being regarded as necessary if they were to ‘represent’ her adequately” (116-17). From the lotus flower, two serpentine lines of leaves rise and take the shape of two palm trees and hold the ‘Mother’ Goddess in her female form: the genital triangle, the tiny breasts and the outstretched arms holding cornucopias. From the left cornucopia, grapes are overflowing; the other one pours forth a pomegranate. She has two big owl eyes and above her head there is a crescent holding the sun, reference to Ba’al, with two stars that take the shape of flowers on each side.

These stelae are usually with triangular pediments that allude to the temple, the cave, and the womb, all of them represent the positive elementary character of the nurturing protecting Mother to provide the initiate with “the sense of being inside, of being sheltered, protected, and warmed” (Neumann 137). In tattoos as in the decoration of votive monuments,



a palm tree is usually depicted as rising from the triangle (Gobert 99). This is a reference to Neith's birth from Lake Tritonis. Women in North Africa use the symbol in tattoos because it is related to fertility and good luck. In fact, the "tree goddess who gives birth to the sun" while "its roots in the depths" (Neumann 244) is a frequent symbol of the Great Mother (Neumann 242). Grapes and pomegranates refer also to fertility and "the abundance of seeds" (Neumann 308). Since springs and lakes are perceived as the portals to the Underworld, the snake may refer to the goddess's "ability to travel to the Underworld and return and to communicate with the heavens with equal ease" (Deluise 103).

In the novel, Hashtart's 'wandering' will result in her 'rootedness' and as one begins the journey back to the eternal Feminine, one must suffer and "our suffering opens up to the wounds of the world and the love that can heal (Woodman 1). The Goddess guides Hashtart away to the savage realm of nature since "the Feminine, the giver of nourishment, becomes everywhere a revered principle of nature" (Neumann 131). : "L'air avait changé. Nouveau. Inconnu. Odeurs d'arbres et de buissons jamais vus. Odeurs de terre sauvage, en friche qui se mêlent - et Hashtart les reconnaît - à celles qui frappaient ses narines quand passaient - non loin de la plage - des animaux" (34). There, for the first time in her life, she forgets about Ba'al, she is no longer willing to worship him, she does not fear him, she feels protected by a higher power: "pour la première fois - elle n'avait pas assisté à sa lente progression. Elle ne le regrette pas. Elle n'a pas envie de lui adresser sa prière quotidienne ni de le remercier de ces bienfaits ni de renouveler la déclaration de sa fidèle adoration" (37-8).

Hashtart is surrounded by trees, waters, and animals. Nature is the cradle, the realm of the Great Mother because She is "The Lady of the Plants" and the "tree goddess" (Neumann 240-42); She is also "The Lady of the Beasts" (Neumann 268). In the Nabeul Museum, there is a sculpture of the goddess with a head of lioness which shows her as the Terrible Mother. Indeed, Punic Stelae highlight Tanit as the Terrible/Good Mother. In this "hostile" (43) nature, Hashtart enters the nocturnal womb of Mother Nature and dives deep into unconsciousness, where she will fully embrace the Feminine because "transformation is possible only when what is to be transformed enters wholly into the Feminine" (Neumann 291) and "rebirth can occur through . . . a stupor induced by whatever means" (Neumann 292). Hashtart "n'entend rien, ne sent rien. Depuis combien de temps est-elle plongée dans ce sommeil sans rêve, plus proche de la mort que du repos réparateur inventé par la nature bienveillante?" (48).

Hashtart 'penetrates' deep into the chaotic darkness of the Nocturnal Mother where she will receive the divine breath of Tanit, "le monde dans lequel elle avait plongé était vide, sans odeurs, sans couleurs, insonore. Monde ténébreux sans ciel, sans mer, sans terre. Monde du Noir. Absolu. Ni vie ni mort. Elle avait plongé profond" (51). This 'penetration' emphasizes the 'autogenetic' character of the Goddess, a 'Virgin' Mother born from within an a 'Virgin' Mother. During her journey to the Underworld, two Numidian peasants passed by and carried the little body of the girl to the Numidian prince's house. There, she is nursed by the healing priestess Chemnible. Hashtart's rite of reawakening takes place in Tanit's aqueous realm. Unlike Ba'al who devours his victims through his furious fire, Tanit recreates life from the waters. Hashtart offers herself to the Goddess to become Tanit-incarnated. "Mais ce n'est pas sur un bûcher, au feu exterminateur, purificateur qu'elle allait s'offrir. C'est à la mer, dans son sein doux et accueillant, frais et odorant qu'elle allait trouver refuge.

Elle sent la mer, toute proche, elle la voit, fraîche, belle, douce, pure comme la main, la voix, la tendresse de la reine aimée” (59).

When she wakes up, she feels free and regenerated, “Elle était libre. D’une liberté qu’elle n’avait jamais connue” (76). The Carthaginian Hashtart starts to learn the language and customs of Numidians and, at the same time, she teaches them the Carthaginian language and traditions. Women come to her to listen to her stories and men, including the Prince Iarbas, ask for her advices. “Il faut ajouter que la fillette s’était - en si peu de temps et grâce à une vie de liberté, dans la nature - transformée en une presque jeune fille” (80). Everything surrounding Hashtart reminds her of the Great Goddess who takes care of her. Numidians revere nature and appreciate the maternal. Maternal art plays a role in disseminating the Cult of the Mother Goddess.

Hashtart admires the feminine approach to design in Numidian houses that reflects the artistry of the Mother, the Goddess. Tom Turner calls a ‘nester design’ of a house, a feminine approach that emphasizes “detailed decisions contributing to a wider set of objectives” (132). The opposite is the ‘hunter design,’ a masculine approach, because “hunters think of their reputations and of their prowess” (Turner 133). Indeed, one main characteristic of North African houses, and other Mediterranean cities where the Goddess reigned, is the “circulation space . . . where one should allow variants to exist within the groups. Another criterion could be the relationship of the house to the world outside and the way of controlling space” (Tang 159) and this is because each house has an entrance room that “communicates both with the street and the interior of the house” (Tang 103). Thus, women are able to move with ease in this space, “les femmes ne s’arrêtent jamais. Actives, habiles aussi bien chez elles que dehors, elles menaient une vie assez semblable à celle des hommes avec en plus les travaux domestiques” (78-9).

The circulation space with rooms arranged around the open courtyard, and sometimes the corridor, recalls the shape of the ‘womb.’ “Toutes les pièces donnaient sur une cour carrée. Les murs étaient blanchis à la chaux et le sol recouvert de carreaux à motifs géométriques ou végétaux, de tapis aux couleurs foncées et de nattes finement tressées” (76). Below the courtyard or the corridor there exists a cistern for water supply. Therefore, houses show an “abstract representation of the womb [Tritonis] and the vulva” with designs that connote birth and regeneration (Vassel 39). Since Tanit is a goddess “set in liquid and humid elements” (Bernstein 105), springs, lakes, wells, and cisterns were perceived as the portals to the Goddess’s realm. The fertility colours red and green of the ‘henna’ are usually used to decorate the walls of the courtyard or the objects surrounding it in addition to vegetation symbols like depictions of pomegranate (red) and grapes (green) or drawings of snakes and birds such as cuckoos or doves or marine animals like the fish, the octopus, or the dolphin (Vassel 39).

After three years spent with Iarbas and Numidians, Hashtart decides to return to Carthage. When she reaches the place by the sea where she once fell asleep, she meets a strange old man, a fool, who introduces himself as a Greek fisherman. He tells Hashtart that he is called a ‘fool’ because he dreams a lot, that he met her in his dreams, and that he has a message for her:

Le Dieu Implacable qui empêcha que s'accomplisse l'alliance entre la cité punique et la terre où elle a trouvé asile n'est pas satisfait. Le sacrifice de la reine carthaginoise n'a pas apaisé sa colère. Tu dois craindre pour toi si tu vas plus avant. Saches cependant que d'autres divinités veillent sur toi, sur Carthage et sur cette terre. Grâce à Tanit la Féconde et la Bienveillante, Tanit qui enveloppe de lumière et de bonté la terre et les océans, le ciel et les mers, ce qui n'a pas été sera. Tu ne dois plus pleurer mais te réjouir. Souviens-toi des paroles de la reine. Souviens-toi. Tu comprendras bientôt. Ta fuite, ton installation dans le village du prince Iarbas et les raisons pour lesquelles tu devais aujourd'hui retourner jusqu'au lieu de tes origines. Il m'est interdit de t'en dire plus. Une dernière fois, souviens-toi. (115)

Indeed, acquiring more knowledge and wisdom, Hashtart becomes the perfect archetype of a Mother since she 'appropriated' the symbols of Neith and Tanit. She impregnated the symbols of the Mother goddess with 'authenticity.' Now, all that she has in mind is Elyssa's last words. She tries to grasp the meaning of the fool's speech when suddenly a soft sea breeze gently touches her face and Hashtart hears the call of the Goddess:

Elle s'approcha, à l'écoute du chant familier enfoui profond en elle et qui avait bercé son enfance. . . . Puissant à pleines mains dans la mer, elle s'aspergea le visage, la tête, les bras, les jambes. Des lèvres et de la langue, elle aspirait les gouttes salées. Insatiable, elle ouvrait la bouche avalant l'odeur iodée comme si les narines ne suffisaient pas. Qu'il fallait qu'elle s'en emplisse le corps, le couer. Ce coeur et ce corps qui battaient au rythme des vagues. Des chants de sa vie enfin raccordée. (117)

In Carthage, servants are still looking for Hashtart because she is to inherit the throne of Elyssa. Hashtart realizes that her destiny is to marry Iarbas and to become the Great Mother of both Carthaginians and Numidians. She returns to Iarbas's Numidia to fulfill her task before going back to Carthage. One night, she is visited by the Mother to be blessed by her magical 'hand,' "sur don front elle sentit une main se poser, douce, apaisante, parfumée" (127). Indeed, in this scene, Hashtart is symbolically enthroned by the deity to take the place of Elyssa against the will of the male god, "de l'Astre de Feu, de Baal l'Impitoyable" (127). Thanks to Tanit, the 'inner power' of the Mother is transferred to Hashtart who is able, now, to influence Iarbas.

Iarbas's spiritual transformation will save him from the domination of Hammon and the influence of the 'wild' Masculine principle. Iarbas has been obsessed with revenge. As a Great Mother of the earth, heavens, and the underworld that masters both the negative/positive Feminine and Masculine principles and as the Queen of Fate, and the Lady of the Beasts and the Plants, Tanit symbolizes the "longing for a return to primordial unity, for escape from the unbearable tension of the opposites, for a mode of humanity no longer divided in halves" (Roscoe 203). She has the ability to transform Iarbas and, with the help of Hashtart, she guides him to discover his 'feminine masculinity:'

Elle lui avait apporté la joie, avait introduit dans sa vie la fantaisie, l'espièglerie, choses qu'il n'avait jamais connues. Il avait, avec le temps, oublié Carthage, l'unique source de sa douleur et de son orgueil blessé. Hashtart, c'était l'autre visage de la cité orgueilleuse et puissante, celle dont il avait rêvé avant le sacrifice d'Elyssa. C'était Carthage sans être Carthage. Sans remparts.

Sans separation. C'était le voyage dans un autre monde, la découverte d'un autre monde. La quête du trésor et le trésor conquis. (103)

Iarbas's metamorphosis is also accomplished when he receives the blessings of the Mother in his dreams. She offers him a Mother to his people and to Carthaginians, "sur une terre unique, habitée par un peuple enfin uni" (129). She changes Iarbas who starts to recognize his feminine side. Thanks to Hashtart, the Numidian prince cultivates his kindness, generosity, and docility as a man and a king. He is no longer a prototype of a "heroic masculinity" (Gruss 157), "Le guerrier et le souverain qu'il était n'avaient pas eu l'occasion de se trouver confrontés à une telle situation" (131). The alternative of a 'feminine masculinity' is an appeal to "examine and break the simplistic equation of 'masculine' and 'patriarchy'" (Gruss 151) and to revise the "myths of masculinity" (Gruss 157).

### Conclusion

Goddess Worship has been influencing patriarchal religions through its dominating Feminine principles of connection and heterogeneity. The return of the Goddesses Archetype translates a longing for a sense of unity and wholeness that can be attained by embracing the Feminine. In Sophie El Goulli's *Hashtart: À la Naissance de Carthage*, the empowerment of the Goddess facilitated religious syncretism between Numidians and Carthaginians and, hence, resulted in the ascendancy of Hashtart to the Numidian 'throne.' Tanit is a North African archetype of the primordial Mother Goddess, the 'Throne,' Tritonis, and a Neith multiplying the 'Feminine' with the Tamazight (Berber language) addition of a 'T' (symbolized as '+' in tattoos) at the beginning of the name. The Goddess is a 'wandering' Feminine principle that determines the cultures, myths, and histories of people.

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