

Hathor

The Egyptian Hathor provides an archetypal example of the mother goddess. From time immemorial, she was regarded as the mother of Horus, the Egyptian war-god believed to be incarnate in the pharaoh. The goddesses' very name commemorates this relationship, signifying "House of Horus."¹

Scholars have hitherto been at a loss to explain the fundamental nature of this great goddess, puzzled not only by her name but by her multifarious and seemingly incompatible characteristics. Alison Roberts, in a recent study of Hathor, offered the following complaint: "My initial problem was how to find any coherent pattern in the many representations of the goddess."²

For Roberts, as for other scholars, Hathor personifies the sun:

"To understand her transformational role we must turn to another rhythm of time, the movement of the sun from dawn to dusk, rising in the eastern horizon each morning, crossing the sky at noon, and then sinking each evening into the west. As a solar goddess, the beneficent-destructive Hathor-Sekhmet participates in this daily rhythm which also links her qualities with the biological life-cycle of birth, maturity and death."³

But if Hathor represents the sun, how are we to understand her intimate relationships with Horus or Ra, both of whom are typically identified with the sun by Egyptologists? Budge saw the difficulty here and sought to interpret Hathor as a personification of the house in which the sun god (Horus) lived; i.e., the sky.⁴ Erman offered a similar opinion: "Although this name, House of Horus, abode of the sun god, directly and unequivocally designates her as the sky..."⁵

Yet it can be shown that Hathor has nothing whatsoever to do with the sun. That the Egyptian goddess was originally identified with another celestial body altogether is amply confirmed by a survey of the numerous Coffin Text passages invoking the goddess. There Hathor is clearly distinguished from Re, although she *is* described as shining forth in the sky in the immediate vicinity of Re:

"I indeed have prepared a path to the place where Re is, to the place where Hathor is."⁶

"You have taken my soul and my spirit, my magic and shade with Re and Hathor to the place where Re is every day, to the place where Hathor is every day."⁷

¹ H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), p. 277.

² A. Roberts, *Hathor Rising* (Devon, 1995), p. v.

³ A. Roberts, *op. Cit.*, p. 16.

⁴ E. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1969), pp. 428-429.

⁵ A. Erman, *A Handbook of Egyptian Religion* (London, 1907), p. 12.

⁶ 78e.

⁷ 80f.

“Fair is your rising like the rising of Re, you shine like Hathor.”⁸

Hathor is elsewhere invoked as the “Great Lady who is in the bow of the bark of Re.”⁹

In her role as the fire-spitting uraeus, Hathor is said to have once taken up residence on the forehead of Re: “O Re and Hathor, take my soul, my spirit and my shade with you, may I establish your [i.e., Hathor’s] ornament on the vertex of Re.”¹⁰

But if Hathor must be clearly distinguished from the sun, with which celestial body is she to be identified? A survey of the available evidence, both within Egypt and without, confirms that Hathor is to be identified with the planet Venus. In identifying the Egyptian goddess with their own Aphrodite, whom Plato and Aristotle had identified with Venus¹¹, it would appear that the ancient Greeks knew what they were doing.

Properly understood, Hathor should be viewed as the Egyptian counterpart of the Sumerian Inanna, the latter goddess being explicitly identified with Venus in the earliest written sources. The fundamental identity of the two goddesses is clearly revealed upon consideration of their respective epithets and characteristics. As Inanna/Venus was invoked as the “Lady of the Evening” or as the “Evening Star,” so too is Hathor invoked as “Lady of the Evening.”¹² As Inanna/Venus is said to “rise” from the horizon, so too is it said that “Hathor rises within the horizon.”¹³ As Inanna was depicted “rising” between the two gates of heaven, so too was it said of the Egyptian goddess: “[The gates?] of the horizon [are thrown open(?)] for Hathor.”¹⁴ As Inanna was said to reside on the mountain of heaven, so too does Hathor live upon the “mountain of the west,” the latter described as a celestial mount on which the ancient sun-god was wont to retire at night. Early illustrations of Hathor on the “mountain of the west” from the Book of the Dead show the cow-headed goddess with her familiar menat-symbol (see figure one), the latter of which shows an eight-pointed star set on a disc, a striking analogue to Inanna’s star as depicted in figure two.¹⁵ Like Hathor, Inanna was likened to a cow in early Sumerian literature, one hymn invoking her as “the great cow among the gods of heaven and earth.”¹⁶

As Inanna inspired terror as a fire-spewing dragon¹⁷, so too did Hathor in the form of the uraeus serpent. Thus, a hymn at Philae invokes Hathor as “the Great One shining on the

⁸ 216b.

⁹ 55a.

¹⁰ 82h.

¹¹ Epinomis 987B; Metaph. 1073 B 31-32.

¹² 387a.

¹³ 48d.

¹⁴ 137.

¹⁵ H. Bonnet, op. cit., p. 279. See also plate 37 in Faulkner’s Book of the Dead.

¹⁶ A. Sjöberg, “in-nin sa-gur-ra A Hymn to the Goddess Inanna,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 65 (1976), p. 197.

¹⁷W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), p. 15.

brow of her father, the glorious one who causes fear of her father.”¹⁸ Other hymns describe the Egyptian goddess as a fiery serpent raging in the sky:

“Exalted is your power, O Burning One, O Sated One, O Mighty One, Powerful, Skilful of Flames, Lady of the Sky, Mistress of the Two Lands O Eye of Horus, and his guide...Lady of Eternity, Fiery One, O Red One, whose Flame burns, Serpent Uraeus, who guides the people, O Lady of Fire, O Searing One, O Devourer, O Scorching One...”¹⁹

The mythology surrounding the two goddesses also shares important themes in common. One of the most intriguing myths involving Hathor finds that goddess abandoning Egypt for Nubia whereupon she goes on a rampage of destruction in the form of a raging eye. It is only through the magical craft of Shu that the warrior-goddess is pacified and made to return to Egypt.²⁰ A very similar myth surrounds the Sumerian Inanna, who abandons Eanna to journey to the underworld, where she is raped by the gardener Sukalletuda. It is through the magical devices of Enki, in part, that Inanna eventually succeeds in returning to her heavenly city (Eanna).²¹ Bendt Alster, in an insightful analysis of the Sumerian myth and its analogues, suggested that it originally had reference to the movements of the planet Venus:

“One will have to agree that, in view of the fact that Inanna is known to be Venus, the cycle which is depicted here is likely to be that of the disappearing and returning Venus star. I do by no means wish to deny, of course, that there may have been a terrestrial ritual journey between Eridu and Uruk, but, if such a ritual journey actually took place, it was an earthly representation of the celestial journey of the god, as in fact all rituals are imitations of the divine acts.”²²

Now there’s a learned opinion we can endorse, provided it is understood that the myth has reference to Venus’ movements during the period of its involvement in the polar configuration.

But if Hathor is to be identified with the planet Venus, and Re with the ancient sun-god, with which celestial body is Horus to be equated? As noted earlier, Egyptologists have tended to identify the god with either the sun or the “Morning Star.” Budge’s opinion may be taken as representative here: “The house [i.e., Hathor] was the sky, i.e. the eastern portion of it, and the hawk [Horus] is the sun-god.”²³

¹⁸ A. Roberts, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁹ A. Roberts, op. Cit., p. 8.

²⁰ H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien* (Berlin, 1911).

²¹ B. Alster, “On the Interpretation of the Sumerian Myth ‘Inanna and Enki,’” pp. 30-31.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²³ E. Budge, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1988), p. 228.

Yet as we have elsewhere documented²⁴, in the *Pyramid Texts* Horus is clearly distinguished from Re, being explicitly identified with the “Morning Star” shining in the celestial Duat, the latter being a sort of Elysian Fields intimately associated with Hathor (as Sothis). Horus as the “Morning Star,” in turn, is to be identified with the planet Mars.²⁵ In this sense, the Egyptian traditions surrounding Horus offer a close parallel to the situation prevailing in Skidi Pawnee lore, where the red planet was known as “Morning Star.”²⁶

A recurring theme in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts finds the dead king, as Horus, being implored to travel to the northern reaches of the sky, whereupon he will come to be reunited with Re and Hathor. Spell 769 in the Coffin Texts illustrates this idea:

“I am Horus; give me the ladder which you gave to my father, so that I may ascend on it to the sky and escort [Re]...As for any god who shall oppose [himself] to me, he shall have no bread...he shall have no soul, he shall not go up to Hathor who is in the sky.”

Other passages speak of the dead king as traveling to a “Mansion” associated with Hathor: “He shall ascend to the Mansion of Horus which is in the sky.”²⁷ As Faulkner observed in his commentary upon this passage, the name Hwt-hr “‘Mansion of Horus’ has to be taken here as the name of the goddess.”²⁸

Such passages raise a host of insoluble problems for Egyptologists attempting to force-fit the ancient traditions to the current sky. Where is the “Mansion” of Hathor in today’s circumpolar heavens? How is it that Re, like Horus as the “Morning Star,” is so intimately connected to the northernmost regions of the circumpolar heavens? Not surprisingly, such anomalies typically receive little comment by scholars. Jan Assmann, for example, in a recent study of ancient Egyptian ideas of the afterlife, notes that the Pyramid Texts, “our oldest corpus of funerary literature, locate this eternal abode in the northern sky.”²⁹ Yet the same scholar goes on to speak of the Old Kingdom’s “exclusively cosmic conception of a hereafter ruled by the sun-god Re.”³⁰

Yet if we view these ancient traditions in light of the unique perspective provided by the Saturn theory, Re’s circumpolar location and Hathor’s singular relationship to Horus receive immediate clarification. During the period associated with the polar configuration, the planet Saturn and Earth shared a common axis of rotation with the

²⁴ E. Cochrane, “Sothis and Morning Star in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts,” *Aeon* 3:5 (1994), pp. 77-94.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-93.

²⁶ J. Murie, “Ceremonies of the Pawnee,” *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (1981), pp. 38-39. See also the discussion in E. Cochrane, “The Female Star,” *Aeon* 5:3 (1999), pp. 54-63.

²⁷ 1026-7.

²⁸ R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts: Vol. II Spells 355-787* (Warminster, 1977), p. 300.

²⁹ J. Assmann, “Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt,” in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 143.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

result that the gas giant appeared fixed in the northern circumpolar heavens.³¹ As the ancient sun-god, Saturn/Re presided over a veritable Golden Age. Accompanying Saturn/Re at the time, and also located along the shared polar axis, were the planets Venus and Mars, the latter planet being closer to the Earth. Terrestrial viewers looking to the northern heavens—the region associated with Horus, Hathor, and the Duat by the ancient Egyptians—saw the red planet nestled squarely within the larger Venus (see image three). The Egyptian name Hathor—“House of Horus”—likely commemorates this remarkable celestial situation.

THE EYE GODDESS

In 1937, while excavating at an ancient temple at Tell Brak, Max Mallowan—the archaeologist husband of Agatha Christie—found thousands of figurines distinguished primarily by their prominent eyes (see figure one). On the basis of their stratigraphical position, Mallowan dated the peculiar figurines—which he called “eye-idols”—to the first half of the third millennium B.C. (the Jamdat Nasr period).³² It was Mallowan’s opinion that the idols represented the Sumerian goddess Inanna,³³ although he remained pessimistic that archaeologists would ever discover their original significance:

“The enigma of these unique objects is one that has long exercised the ingenuity of scholars. There is some satisfaction in reflecting that the true answer may never be known.”³⁴

Similar objects have been found all across prehistoric Europe and Asia. At Troy, for example, “Eye-idols” occur continuously from the First Settlement (c. 3000-2500 B.C.) to the end of the Fifth Settlement (c. 1900-1800 B.C.).³⁵ The cult of the “Eye Goddess” was very widespread, occurring as far North as Great Britain and as far East as Mohenjodaro.³⁶ Of the latter examples, Dhavalikar has noted that the images “have a high antiquity in India going back to well into the latter half of the third millennium B.C.”³⁷

Gimbutas would trace the European examples back further still: “The west European Eye Goddess of France, Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain is manifested in the stela, figurines, and amulets of megalithic cultures dating from the 5th to the 3rd millennia B.C.”³⁸ That the Inanna-figurines from Tell Brak are analogous to those from prehistoric Europe is generally accepted. Here Gimbutas observed: “Indeed, the resemblance of

³¹ D. Talbott, *The Saturn Myth* (New York, 1980). See also E. Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (Berlin, 1970), p. 124.

³² M. Mallowan, *Early Mesopotamia and Iran* (London, 1965), pp. 44-48.

³³ See also E. van Buren, “New Evidence Concerning an Eye-Divinity,” *Iraq* 17 (1955), pp. 164-175.

³⁴ M. Mallowan, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

³⁵ H. Frankfort, “Ishtar at Troy,” *JNES*, pp. 194-200. See also M. Dhavalikar, *op. cit.*, p. 537

³⁶ On the evidence from the latter site see M. Dhavalikar, “‘Eye Goddesses’ in India and their West Asian Parallels,” *Anthropos* 60 (1965), pp. 533-540.

³⁷ M. Dhavalikar, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

³⁸ M. Gimbutas, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

figurines from the temple of Tel Brak...to stone idols of Spain and Portugal with the oculi-motif, is quite astonishing.”³⁹

Why ancient peoples around the globe would choose to represent their beloved mother goddess by an eye or by a figurine distinguished by concentric circles or “eyes” remains unexplained to this day. In this instance, as in countless other mysteries surrounding the cult of the mother goddess, it is the goddesses’ celestial identification which provides the key to unlocking the mystery. As is well documented, Inanna was identified with the planet Venus already in prehistoric times.⁴⁰ Venus, in turn, was compared to an “eye” by peoples throughout the ancient world. The Maya, for example, knew Venus as Nohoch Ich, “Great Eye.”⁴¹ Polynesian islanders half way around the world described Venus as Tamata-nui, “Great-Eye.”⁴² Similar ideas are apparent among the Ringa-Ringaroo of Australia, who referred to Venus as Mimungoona, “Big Eye.”⁴³

It was in Mesoamerican iconography, perhaps, that the ocular symbolism of Venus reached its greatest expression. Figure two, for example, is held to signify the planet Venus. Of this sign, which is ubiquitous in Aztec iconography, Miller has observed:

“It has long been recognized that a lidded, circular eye framed by rays and lobes also containing eyes is almost certainly a star or planet and that it sometimes represents the planet Venus. It forms part of sky bands represented in codices of the Mixteca and of the Borgia Group as well as in the murals of Mitla in Oaxaca and of Tulum and Santa Rita. The eye-and-ray motif is also found in association with the sun disc, a motif that is also prominent at Chichen Itza.”⁴⁴

Why an “eye-and-ray” motif should be associated with the sun disc is not obvious given the current solar system. Yet if the polar configuration reconstructed in figure three once prevailed, the origin of the imagery becomes perfectly obvious—Venus *was* the central eye of the ancient sun god.

The greatest strength of the Saturn-theory, in dramatic contrast to other models of ancient myth, is that it leads directly to a seemingly endless series of tests, many of which are immediately obvious given the basic outlines of the model. Consider the example provided by the “Eye of Ra,” one of the most important and enduring symbols in ancient Egyptian tradition. In accordance with our interpretation of the Ra-sign shown in figure three, whereby Venus—the celestial prototype for the mother goddess—forms the central “eye” of the Ra disc, it follows that the eye of Ra must be identified with the mother

³⁹M. Gimbutas, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁰ W. Heimpel, “A Catalog of Near Eastern Venus Deities,” *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4:3 (1982), pp. 9-22.

⁴¹E. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing* (Norman, 1975), p. 218.

⁴²M. Makemson, op. cit., pp. 194, 256. In Polynesian myth Venus appeared as the Eye of Tane, a great god associated with the Creation.

⁴³ E. Curr, *The Australian Race* (1886), as cited by Allan Beggs, “Exploring the Saturn Myth,” (1990), p. 46. The latter monograph was privately distributed.

⁴⁴V. Miller, “Star Warriors at Chichen Itza,” in W. Hanks & D. Rice, *Word and Image in Maya Culture* (Salt Lake City, 1989), pp. 290-291.

goddess. And so it is that nearly every ancient Egyptian goddess is explicitly described as the “Eye of Ra.” Here Rundle Clark observed:

“The Eye is the commonest symbol in Egyptian thought and the strangest to us...One fact does stand out—the Egyptian Eye was always a symbol for the Great Goddess, whatever name she may have had in any particular instance.”⁴⁵

That the “Eye of Ra” was somehow related to the planet Venus has actually been recognized by Egyptologists, although they were at a complete loss to explain the original basis of the connection. Witness the following statement by Rudolf Anthes:

“Only the Eye of Re is identified as a heavenly body in a few sentences of the Pyramid Texts. We used to understand them as though the Eye of Re was identified as the sun, but a careful interpretation of them has unmistakably shown that the Eye of Ra was the morning star.”⁴⁶

But there is more. If the Eye of Ra is to be identified with the planet Venus, and if that planet was only recently involved in a series of spectacular catastrophes, as is readily deducible from the myths surrounding Inanna and her analogues,⁴⁷ it follows that the “Eye of Ra” might be linked with catastrophic events of one sort or the other. And so it is that, already in the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* and *Coffin Texts* from the third millennium BCE, there appear numerous references to the terrifying time when the “Eye” raged across the skies. A passage from the Coffin Texts reads as follows: “I am the fiery Eye of Horus which went forth terrible, Lady of slaughter...I am indeed she who shoots.”⁴⁸

Other passages recount the fire and devastation which accompanied the Eye’s rampage: “The fire will go up, the flame will go up...the fiery one will be against them as the Eye of Ra.”⁴⁹ Yet another passage announces that “Its flame is to the sky.”⁵⁰ Other passages speak of the hair raised from the Eye, a strikingly appropriate image if the reference was to a planet presenting a comet-like apparition, as per the reconstruction offered by the Saturn theory: “I raised up the hair from the Sacred Eye at the time of its wrath.”⁵¹

The wrath of the ancient sun-god’s “Eye,” properly understood, is the wrath of the planet-goddess in her terrible aspect.⁵² A classic example of this theme can be found in an

⁴⁵T.R. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959), p. 218.

⁴⁶R. Anthes, “Mythology in Ancient Egypt,” in S. Kramer ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (New York, 1961), pp. 89-90.

⁴⁷In addition to the numerous articles by Talbott and myself, see the compelling argument of Bernard Newgrosh in “The Case for Catastrophe in Historical Times,” *Kronos* XI:1 (1985), pp. 3-22.

⁴⁸R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster, 1973-1978), Vol. I, p. 238.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 69.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 260. In the *Papyrus of Ani*, similarly, it is written: “I raise up the hair at the time of storms in the sky...It is the right Eye of Ra in its raging against him after he hath made it to depart.” See E. Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London, 1901), pp. 36-37.

⁵² T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959), p. 185.

Egyptian tale known as the *Destruction of Mankind*, where Ra dispatches Hathor to rain fire and destruction upon his enemies:

“Let go forth thine Eye, let it destroy for thee those who blaspheme with wickedness, not an eye can precede it in resistance...when it goeth forth in the form of Hathor. Went forth then this goddess, she slew mankind on the mountain.”⁵³

As the warring Eye, Hathor is also attested in Egyptian ritual. One text invokes Hathor as follows: “The Eye of Re, lady of heaven...daughter of Re, who came forth from his body.”⁵⁴ Yet another passage links the heavenly “Eye” to raging fire: “The eye of Re...the fire-spreading goddess who spreads fire on the enemies.”⁵⁵ Another passage compares the warring “eye” to a fire-spewing dragon: “The cobra-snake of Re...who came forth from him...who burns the enemy of Re with her heat...The Eye of Re...She is the flaming goddess.”⁵⁶

With reference to the myth of Hathor as the warring eye, Erman laments that “we must abandon any hope of understanding the original.”⁵⁷ Yet the mystery disappears if Hathor is approached from the vantage point of the Saturn theory, for Venus was once positioned on the face of the ancient sun-god, whereupon it was viewed as the latter’s “eye”. The same interpretation holds for the aforementioned references whereby Hathor (as the uraeus) is set upon the face or forehead of Ra, needless to say.

Now it can hardly be a coincidence that descriptions of Inanna’s rampage closely mirror that of Hathor. Witness the following passage from the *Exaltation to Inanna*:

“Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the land, When you roar at the earth like Thunder, no vegetation can stand up to you. A flood descending from its mountain, Oh foremost one, you are the Inanna of heaven and earth! Raining the fanned fire down upon the nation...”⁵⁸

Like Hathor, Inanna is described as “dragon-like” and as raining fire from heaven. A better description of a comet-like apparition it would be difficult to imagine.

The logic applied here to the example provided by the “Eye of Ra” might be applied to any one of a hundred sacred symbols associated with the ancient sun-god or Venus, all of which would lead to the same conclusion: Venus only recently moved upon a radically different orbit, one which brought it perilously close to the Earth and into an enigmatically intimate relationship to the ancient sun-god.

⁵³E. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York, 1969), Vol. I, p. 392.

⁵⁴J. Bourghouts, "The Evil Eye of Apopis," *J. of Egyptian Archaeology* 59 (1973), p. 130.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵⁷ A. Erman, op. Cit., p. 28.

⁵⁸W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), p. 15.

