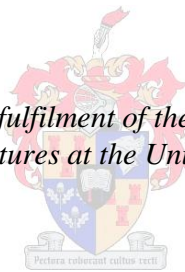


The Goddess Hathor and the Women of Ancient Egypt

by
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MPhil in Ancient Cultures at the University of Stellenbosch*



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Declaration

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Abstract

In studying ancient Egypt researchers have a great advantage, in that there is a multitude of recorded material to draw from. Unfortunately for anyone interested in studying ancient Egyptian women, the recorded material was most often recorded by, commissioned by, and concerned with, men; royal or high-ranking men to be precise (Robins, 1993: 11-12). Thus, we must look into non-textual artefacts and offerings which may have a symbolic meaning. Though, the textual sources should not be neglected, since these may hold clues to the position and perception of women in society: perceptions held by men. This thesis has drawn largely on art and artefacts to investigate the relationship between women in ancient Egypt and the goddess Hathor.

Women are traditionally the mothers, caretakers and homemakers of society. But they are not only that. Women are also individuals, capable of individual thought, feelings, anxieties, hopes and dreams; and like their male counterparts, women also experience religion. But, as was clearly displayed in the thesis, Egyptian women not only experienced religion, they lived religion. In the ancient Egyptian context there was no escaping religion. It must also be understood that the ancient Egyptians thought that the man was the seat of creation and that semen was the essence of creation (according to the cosmogony of Heliopolis, cf. Cooney, 2008: 2). A failure to conceive would be placed directly upon the shoulders of the woman, and could be grounds enough for divorce (Robins, 1993: 63). Women in ancient societies served the main function of child-rearing. This may seem backward, but it was an essential function, without which society would cease to function. When a woman failed to conceive, she in essence failed her function as a woman; many women (and men) in this situation turned to religion.

This is where this thesis topic comes into play, since Hathor was a goddess of sexuality and fertility, but also had aspects of safeguarding and caretaking. Women were naturally drawn to her and she developed a large cult following, with cult centres scattered throughout Egypt. Not only were many of her followers female, but her priests were also female (Gillam, 1995: 211-212). Hathor might have been the most relatable of the goddesses because of her dual-nature; she is a caretaker and sexual being, but she can

also become fierce and even bloodthirsty. Devotion to Hathor was widespread, with cult centres at Deir el-Bahari, Faras, Mirgissa, Serabit el-Khadim, Timna, Gebel Zeit and elsewhere, each with its own large deposit of votive offerings (Pinch, 1993). Hathor is also referenced in letters between females in a family, as one daughter writes to her mother: “May Hathor gladden you for my sake” (Wente, 1990: 63). It is because of this that this thesis investigated to what an extent ancient Egyptian women had a relationship with her.

Opsomming

In die ondersoek van ou Egipte, het navorsers 'n groot voordeel, deurdat daar 'n groot verskeidenheid bronne beskikbaar is om mee te werk. Ongelukkig, vir enigeen wat daarin geïnteresseerd is om die antieke Egiptiese vrou na te vors, is die meerderheid van die bronne deur mans opgeteken, of in opdrag van hulle, en het ook betrekking op mans; koninklike of hooggeplaaste mans, om meer spesifiek te wees (Robins, 1993: 11-12). Daarom, moet ons ook ongeskrewe artefakte en offerandes bestudeer, wat moontlik simboliese betekenis kan inhou. Dit beteken egter nie dat ons wel geskrewe bronne moet ignoreer nie, aangesien dit tog leidrade oor die posisie van vroue in die samelewing en hoe hulle deur mans beskou is, kan verskaf. Hierdie tesis het grootliks gebruik maak van kuns en artefakte om die verhouding tussen die vroue van antieke Egipte en die godin Hathor na te vors.

Volgens tradisie, is vrouens die moeders, oppassers en tuisteskeppers van 'n gemeenskap, maar hulle is nie net dit nie. Vroue is ook individue, in staat tot hul eie gedagtes, gevoelens, vrese, hoop en drome; en nes hul manlike eweknieë, kan vroue ook geloof ervaar. Maar, soos duidelik in die tesis uiteengesit is, het Egiptiese vroue nie net geloof ervaar nie, maar geloof geleef. In die antieke Egiptiese konteks was geloof onontkombaar. Die leser moet ook verstaan dat die antieke Egiptenare geglo het dat die man die skeppingsbron was and dat semen die kern van die skepping was (volgens die Heliopolis Kosmogonie, vgl. Cooney, 2008: 2). Indien 'n egpaar probleme ondervind het om swanger te raak, het die blaam direk op die vrou se skouers gerus en was ook 'n aanvaarde rede vir egskeiding (Robins, 1993: 63). Vroue in antieke gemeenskappe het hoofsaaklik gedien om kinders groot te maak. Dit mag dalk "agterlik" voorkom, maar dit was 'n essensiële rol, waarsonder die gemeenskap nie sou kon funksioneer nie. Indien 'n vrou nie kon swanger word nie, het sy in essensie in haar doel as 'n vrou misluk; daarom het baie vroue (en mans) in hierdie situasie hulle na godsdiens gekeer.

Dit is hier waar hierdie tesis aansluit, aangesien Hathor 'n godin van seksualiteit en vrugbaarheid was, maar ook aspekte van beskerming en versorging gehad het. Vroue was natuurlik tot haar aangetrokke, 'n groot gevolg het om haar kultus versamel en kultus-

sentrums het deur Egipte versprei. Nie net was haar navolgers vroulik nie, maar ook haar priesters was vroulik (Gillam, 1995: 211-212). Hathor was moontlik die godin waarmee die mense die maklikste kon identifiseer, omdat sy `n tweeledige natuur gehad het; sy was `n versorger en `n seksuele wese, maar sy kon ook kwaai en bloeddorstig raak. Die aanbidding van Hathor was wydverspreid, met kultus-sentrums by Deir el-Bahari, Faras, Mirgissa, Serabit el-Khadim, Timna, Gebel Zeit en elders, elk met sy eie groot versameling artefakte (Pinch, 1993). Hathor word ook benoem in briewe tussen vroulike familieledede, soos een dogter aan haar moeder skryf: “Mag Hathor jou bly maak vir my onthalwe” (Wente, 1990: 63). Dit is hoekom hierdie tesis nagevors het tot wat `n mate daar `n verhouding tussen antieke Egiptiese vroue en Hathor bestaan het.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the women of ancient Egypt with regards to their relationship with the goddess Hathor. Hathor is one of the most popular Egyptian deities, and arguably (until she was assimilated by Isis during later Egyptian history) the most popular deity among the women of Egypt. It would like to investigate the problem why Hathor was so popular among ancient Egyptian women and what kind of relationship existed with her. This will be done by means of a historical and religio-historical approach. Primary sources shall be analysed, like the votive offerings and cloths presented in Pinch (1993). Scenes from the tomb of queen Nefertari QV66 (McDonald, 1996), as well as the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri will be studied. In addition relevant texts (such as letters dealing with religious matters) in translation will be studied. Thus, the thesis has tried to draw on sources which were written, or created for, or by women, in order to perhaps more accurately gauge the extent and significance of the relationship. Such a study may enable us to gain insight into the Egyptian women's views on fertility, sexuality and the dual-nature that this goddess embodied. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to establish to what an extent the women of Ancient Egypt had a relationship with the goddess Hathor and what the nature of this relationship was, also perhaps why this goddess above others was so revered.

There are several problems with this: firstly, Egyptian art was the art of elite men (mostly) and therefore concerned elite men (Robins, 2008: 18); secondly, because of this, it is extremely difficult to delve into the lives of the ancient Egyptian woman, since this has been mostly forgotten by history and destroyed by time; lastly, in studying the women of ancient Egypt, there are very few scholarly sources to draw from. The thesis topic is relevant to the current interest in researching the everyday lives of ancient Egyptian women (Graves-Brown, 2008: x-xi), especially from a religious standpoint with regards to the goddess Hathor. There are some studies on Egyptian women (their social status, roles and occupations), but not on their religion as such and in the opinion of this thesis, a contribution is sorely needed. Not to say that no volumes exist that touch on the subject, just that few deal with it as a main theme. There are only a handful of people who specialise in the field, and this thesis will have to exhaust them, in particular

Geraldine Pinch's volume: *Votive Offerings to Hathor* (1993), since it is a comprehensive compilation of primary source material. This being said, this thesis does not wish to rewrite the works of the scholars who came before, but would rather like to add to it, by perhaps providing a fresh perspective on a few issues.

The thesis will start by investigating who exactly Hathor was in the minds of the ancient Egyptians, her mythologies, iconography, cult and role within the religious construct. Then the Egyptian women will be discussed by looking at their daily lives and how they encountered religion within them, separate life stages will be discussed and a distinction will be drawn between non-royal and royal women. Then, finally, the two previous sections will be combined in a final section which will clearly illustrate the relationship between the women of ancient Egypt and Hathor by looking at the various life stages and seeing Hathor's role therein. Special attention will also be given to votive offerings, which would have been offered by (mostly) female Hathor worshippers, as well as depictions of Hathor in art interacting with the women of Egypt. Unfortunately the art, for the most part, will have been commissioned and executed by men, though through this, we may perhaps also see the way that men perceived the relationship between women and Hathor. Written texts in translation will also be made use of, which would have been (for the most part) also executed by men, though this thesis has sought out examples which depict the relationship between women and Hathor. In this manner, primary evidence will serve as the greatest source for the argument, though secondary sources shall be made use of too.

The introduction to this thesis will also contain some key concepts about the ancient Egyptians' religion, culture and art, as well as the symbiosis which exists between them, in order that the reader may understand certain important ideas which form the basis of the Egyptian civilization. This introduction will be an extremely cursory overview, simply highlighting the most important concepts, since the aspects (as pertaining to Hathor and the women of ancient Egypt) shall be discussed at length in latter sections.

i Egyptian Religion

Egyptian religion was not something one practised, it was something one lived. It permeated every sphere of society and was inescapable, because society was based on religious principles. Religion had a constant influence on the lives of the ancient Egyptians, from the moment of birth until death, and even beyond. It is a tool by which peoples can explain the inexplicable, such as: why people die, why the sun sets, etc. The ancient Egyptians integrated religion so successfully into their lives, that a civilization spanning 3000 years was able to be built and maintained, remaining more-or-less unchanged for the vast majority of that time.

This is because of the one key ideological concept upon which everything in Egyptian society was based: *maat*. *Maat* literally means “truth” or “order” and it was the “divine order” as set forth by the gods. *Maat* determined the true nature and order in the world; which was key for ancient Egyptians, because order symbolised everything good, in contrast to chaos, which symbolised everything bad (Assmann, 1990: 20-21 and Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 98).

Furthermore, it is extremely important to realise that the ancient Egyptians’ belief system was built in cyclical themes of birth, death and rebirth (Pinch, 2002: 90-91). The ancient Egyptians used this theme in order to rationalise why the sun rose and set and the changing of seasons, which they linked to the birth and death of humans. It is of great importance to understand that death, to the ancient Egyptian, was not the end of life, but rather a new stage of life. Death was a new beginning, so to speak. It symbolised a rebirth into the afterlife, which (through magic) would be like life on earth, but better (Taylor, 2001: 31-32).

Magic, in ancient Egypt, was not viewed as we view magic today. It was not something separate from religion. Magic was religion (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 68). Everything the ancient Egyptians did in a religious capacity was inextricably linked to magic. Magic insured that when one dies, one would gain access to the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians were also able to heal, create and will things through magic.

Maat, in particular, was incredibly powerful magically, since it ordered the known world, separated light from dark and male from female. It also created the laws of ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians had no codified laws (for the most of its history), but they believed in the principles of order (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 83). These principles were so ingrained in society, that they were not necessary to be codified. Religion was life.

ii Egyptian Culture

Egyptian culture is based on Egyptian religion. In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh was the absolute monarch, reigning as the god Horus incarnate, and he could potentially change Egyptian society if he so chose (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 40). For the most part, the pharaoh did not, because he too was governed by *maat*. The pharaoh ruled as god on earth, and thus was law, but he was still subservient to *maat*. It is interesting to note that pharaohs who did disturb this order (like Amenophis IV aka Akhenaten and Hatshepsut; Akhenaten, for being a heretic and Hatshepsut, for being a woman) were stricken from the record and thus (through magic) erased from history. The maintenance of order was all-important in ancient Egyptian society. This divine order placed the pharaoh at the top of society, creating a social stratification along power (and thus economic) lines. The pharaoh had the most money, and thus also the most power, as is in accordance with *maat*, since he is the living Horus on earth (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 40).

The ancient Egyptian, thus lived in this religious construct, from the moment she was born, waking up in it every day, until the day she died (and beyond, to her thinking). Religion was culture.

iii Egyptian Art

Religious principles are more evident in the art of ancient Egypt, than in any other sphere of society. We can see this by the way the Egyptian art remained relatively unchanged during the 3000 years of the Egyptian civilization, and even when deviations did occur, the art remains distinctly “Egyptian”. This is because the art was governed by the “divine

order”. Everything was depicted in its true form, as is in accordance with *maat* (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 199-200).

The art of ancient Egypt is mostly funerary and, therefore, we may rightly surmise that its intention was not for public display, but rather ritual and magical. Scenes from the daily lives of the deceased adorn tomb walls, alongside scenes from the so called “Books of the Dead”. Richly decorated tombs were most often the property of the elite, and therefore the elite perhaps had greater access to the magic that the art could provide, providing entry into the afterlife. Religion was art.

iv The Symbiosis

Thus, through this extremely cursory look at these three aspects of Egyptian society, one can see that religious principles not only permeated the different aspects, but were synonymous with them. There exists a distinct symbiosis between the different spheres of ancient Egyptian society, whereby, if one area is affected so are all the others. This may easily be seen by looking at the art of the intermediate periods, or the Amarna-period. The art, religion and society reflected one another in a way that makes the ancient Egyptian civilization unique.

Therefore, this thesis will approach the discussion of Hathor and the women of Egypt, bearing in mind the great influence religion had on the ancient Egyptian way of life. Hathor shall be discussed as a religious figure, and how she existed within a religious capacity for the ancient Egyptian women, bearing in mind the inter-woven nature of the Egyptian socio-religious construct with which we are dealing. The hypothesis of this thesis is that Ancient Egyptian women had a close relationship with the goddess Hathor, because of the nature of the goddess and what she embodied and represented.

1. Hathor

Of all the goddesses of ancient Egypt, none so fully embodied women's sexuality and femininity, than Hathor. She was the goddess that women (and men) go to when they are in need of advice (or aid) of a sexual nature (Graves-Brown, 2010: 167). This was not her sole function however. Hathor was a complex deity, one in desperate need of discussion. She played a significant role in various aspects of the lives of the ancient Egyptian people; from pre-conception and into the afterlife. Her reach rivalled that of many other deities, and perhaps this is why she was so revered by the ancient Egyptians, with numerous cult centres littered throughout Egypt. Hathor is not a goddess to be simply glossed over; she is a goddess who needs thorough investigation. By investigating her multi-faceted character, we might begin to grasp why she was so popular in ancient Egypt, among many spheres of society. We shall firstly investigate her "personality" (as it was perceived by the ancient Egyptians), as illustrated through

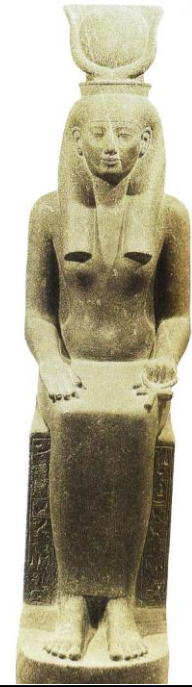


Figure 1: Anthropomorphic Statue of Hathor

mythology, then her functions, then how she was portrayed in art and finally her cult. In this way we may begin to grasp who she was perceived to be and what she stood for, in the ancient Egyptian context.

1.1 *The Goddess*

1.1.1 *In Myth*

This section will not yet discuss any specific myths, but rather discuss Hathor in a mythological context, in order that specific myths may be dealt with in more detail in later sections. Her position in the pantheon will be discussed, but a rather cursory treatment will be given to it as well as a cursory treatment of her representations (by way of making inroads into whom she was perceived to be – mythologically speaking).

Hathor is a goddess of sexuality and fertility, of life and sometimes, of death. She is a most perplexing figure, simply because of the multitude of roles she fulfilled. She is not

one of the Ennead (a group of nine principal gods), but is not to be seen as a lesser goddess (Wilkinson, 2003: 79). One might assume that Isis is a part of the Ennead, because of what she represents: the Egyptian throne (as can be seen from her iconography). Isis' importance only really gains strength in the New Kingdom and her cult only truly flourishes from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods on, when she was equated with the great goddesses in Roman and Greek Religion, because of her mystery cults and magical properties (Bleeker, 1983: 35-36). Hathor's position outside the Ennead is slightly troubling though, since there exists a dispute as to her importance. Some feel that she was important, but not more so than the other goddesses, like Isis. But others, such as Bleeker (1973: 160), feel that she was the most important of the goddesses. Bleeker's opinion is not of critical importance to this thesis, but Hathor's level of esteem among ancient Egyptians is, and this shall be gauged throughout the thesis.



Figure 2: Theriomorphic Statue of Hathor

Hathor was iconographically represented in four forms: anthropomorphic, theriomorphic, mixed-morphic, and lastly (and she shares this trait uniquely with but one other god, Bes) with a full front-facing face (appearing on mirror-handles and column-capitals, among others) (Bleeker, 1973: 30). In her anthropomorphic form she is a woman, with a sun-disk resting between two horns atop her head, in her theriomorphic form she is a cow which, again, has a sun-disk resting between its horns. She was also depicted in mixed form, thus having

the head and horns of a cow with the body of a human. But when her face is displayed forward-facing, she does not have the cow horns, or the sun-disk. These are replaced with cow ears, a wig (a wig specific to Hathor, with a definite "tripartite" shape) and a uraeus (Roberts, 1995: 40). The way this goddess was represented is somewhat telling, but at the same time it creates vast room for speculation with regards to her religious origins.

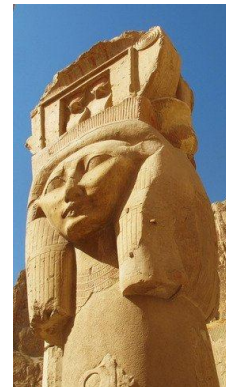


Figure 3: Hathor as a Capital



Figure 4: Narmer Palette with bovine figures of goddess Bat top left and right

The religious origins of Hathor are uncertain among Egyptologists. There are indications that she may have originated in pre-dynastic times, but there are also signs that seem to indicate that she merely enveloped these pre-dynastic deities (Pinch, 2002: 125). These speculations were given voice mainly because of Hathor's theriomorphic cow-form. Cow-worship is not a unique phenomenon, but the fact that cow-figures are depicted from pre-dynastic times and on early dynastic palettes, such as the Narmer palette and the Gerza palette, prompts one to question whether a link

does exist. But in both these cases, the bovine goddess that is believed to be represented is the early dynastic goddess, Bat (Atiya, *et al.*, 2005: 19, 23).



Figure 5: Gerza Palette depicting Bat

This being said, there is no concrete evidence to argue that these images did not give rise to the adoption of Hathor as a principal deity. The cow as a figure of fertility, nurturing and sometimes destruction, is an enduring one, which may simply have been adapted from this early deity (in fact it seems a likely argument that Hathor is simply a later manifestation of Bat, since they both also share a link with the *sistrum*, Pinch, 2002: 117, – an instrument which shall be discussed in the section pertaining to music). The only definite contra-indication is the absence of Hathor's name in hieroglyphs. Furthermore, Hathor does have ties to the kingship and she definitely has strong ties to the solar mythologies, as can be seen in her iconography, therefore it would not be unreasonable to look at these palettes and immediately jump to Hathor. Hathor (in all her forms, except her front-facing form) usually has a solar disk atop her head, resting in between cow's horns. So it is clear that she must have a tie to the solar religion; specifically to the sun-god Ra. Her ties to the solar religion shall be discussed in a later section at length, since it is a rather important aspect of this goddess, and for the understanding of her, and of Egyptian religion and religious principles.

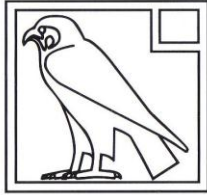


Figure 6: Hieroglyphic rendering of Hathor

Hathor's name is usually taken to mean "House of Horus" and is hieroglyphically illustrated by the symbol for house containing a falcon (the icon of Horus). This usually is taken to mean that Hathor is either the mother of Horus, or his consort (Görg, 2004: 437). It could also again refer to the solar-link, because the house could signify the sky, thus the house of the falcon (Horus).

The Egyptians bestowed Hathor with a multitude of epithets, but especially the epithet "Lady of the West" is telling, as the West was generally considered to be the land of the dead (since this is where the sun set). Another identifies her as "Lady of the Sycamore", a tree-goddess. Both of these epithets refer to Hathor's life-giving, or rather, life-sustaining powers, by providing food and drink for the deceased in the afterlife (Ikram, 2003: 187); though these epithets and their meanings may be clarified through the mythologies attached to them.

As previously stated, Hathor (as the house of Horus) has been taken to be both his consort and mother, depending on the source. The "house" could be understood to be a metaphorical term for the womb, thus Hathor houses the Horus-child. But in another myth she is portrayed as his consort. It must be understood that in the Egyptian mind-set there were multiple Horuses. The one was the faithful son, who sought to avenge his father and another was the god-king who ruled in the kingdom of the living (Hornung, 1996: 154). They were not viewed as separate entities, but rather separate manifestations of the same deity. The Egyptians were not ignorant to the inconsistencies of their myths, though, to them, they were not considered inconsistencies. They had a very fluid approach to their religion, in that a single deity could fulfil various functions and assume various guises, but still in essence remain the same deity. The morph-nature of Egyptian religion had a specific function; especially where the celestial deities are concerned. The mythologies linked together in such a way as to compensate for seeming inconsistencies.

This should be kept in mind when reading about Hathor, since she appears in many myths, fulfilling various functions. One might even say that there are as many myths in

which Hathor features as there are functions she fulfils. She is an ambiguous character because of the multitude of roles (sometimes roles which seem opposing), though we should endeavour in this study to view Hathor (and her various mythologies and functions) as a “big picture” and not fixate on a single function. Only in this way we might be able to view her in her entirety and thus, perhaps as the ancient Egyptians did.

1.1.2 Connections to other Divinities

Hathor is directly connected to both Ra and Horus; specifically to their eyes. She is said to have been born as a tear from the eye of Ra (Darnell, 1997: 43). Thus, she is his daughter. But a different myth tells that she is his mother and yet another that she is his consort. At the same time, she fulfils these roles for another god, Horus. For this to make any sense, one must first understand the Egyptians’ view of the sun (as both these gods were manifestations of the sun). The sun-cycle was viewed as a life-cycle. In the morning the sun was born, and was as a child. At midday the sun would be a full-grown adult and at night the sun would reach old age and die at sunset. The sun would then journey through the netherworld, in order to be reborn the next morning, and so the cycle is continued (Hornung, 1996: 153). As Egyptian religion (and the Egyptian understanding of life) is cyclical; the sun itself having a life-cycle (as all living things) is central.

Thus, it can be easily understood why Hathor could be the wife, mother and daughter of the same god, because the god went through different stages of his life, and she aided in all of those. As a mother, Hathor gives birth to the solar disk and then nourishes it with her milk. As a wife she is a worthy consort, delighting her husband. As a daughter she amuses and pleases her father. Then finally, when her father dies, she joins him in the afterlife to aid his restoration and well-being until he can again be reborn through her (Pinch, 2002: 137-139). Thus, the life-cycle of the ancient Egyptians continues and is even emphatically set in motion by the second generation. Thus the importance of the continuation of life is emphasized as well (Traunecker, 2001: 42).

Her connection to the eyes of both these gods is extremely interesting. Both Ra and Horus have individual mythologies surrounding their eyes. The left eye of Horus, is the lunar eye and the right eye of Ra is the solar eye. This solar eye may also be the “wandering daughter of Ra”, as well as the womb of the mother from which the sun is born (Hornung, 1996: 113). These eyes were mirror-images, in order that they may be merged and flipped to represent the different features, or features of both; as Hathor states in Coffin Text IV, 99g (Darnell, 1997: 40) “I have become the eye of Horus, and *vice versa*”.

As a goddess of the netherworld and the night sky, and because of her fertile and life-giving features, Hathor is also depicted as one of the principal tree-goddesses, whose role it is to provide the deceased with nourishment and shade in the afterlife (Hermsen, 1981: 62). This has significant meaning, because in ancient Egypt trees were scarce and a tree was considered to be a symbol of power and stability (Hermsen, 1981: 72). Furthermore texts mention that the sun god rose between two trees (as he was born from Hathor) (Pinch, 2002: 180). Thus, the fact that this goddess is connected to the tree-goddesses of the netherworld is perhaps not at all surprising.

1.1.3 Dual Nature

In this section specific myths will be touched upon, because of the way they illustrate the dual nature which is inherent in Hathor. It becomes most apparent when one investigates her role in the myth of the cataclysm. This myth is one that has multiple versions, but the one which is directly related to Hathor will be discussed.



Figure 7: Statue of the goddess Sekhmet

Ra, at a time in the undefined mythological past, rules mankind, but becomes displeased when he learns of a plot by the human race against him. Ra’s eye becomes a separate entity (the “wandering daughter”) and is sent forth as Hathor to destroy mankind (Lichtheim, 1976: 198-199). But as her lust for blood and destruction grows, she transforms into the lioness-goddess (Sekhmet). Her rage and lust for massacre grew too great

and as she rested to prepare for the next day's savagery, Ra discovered his mistake and in order to abate her, tricks her into drinking beer that was dyed with red ochre to look like blood. Intoxicated, her lust for blood meets its end (Lichtheim, 1976: 199). She turns back into the docile bovine Hathor, also causing "beautiful women [to come] into being in the town of Imu" (Lichtheim, 1976: 199). The eye, in turn, manifests itself as the uraeus atop Ra's head (Assmann, 2001: 115).



Figure 8: A uraeus

This myth is extremely important in understanding Hathor's nature. She became destructive at the bidding of her father, but could not stop once she started, save for when she was made drunk (this drunkenness shall later be connected with a metaphorical intoxication/ trance which music can induce). This hints at the idea that Hathor is docile on the outside, but that the beast which can wreak havoc is still lying dormant just beneath the surface. The fact that it was the eye of Ra which transformed is also important, because this eye was the eye that would protect Ra from his enemies by seeing all things, good and bad (Roberts, 1995: 22). This eye should have been the one to destroy, because it knew the evils of the world. Furthermore, it manifested as the uraeus (symbol of pharaonic power) which is the embodiment of protection, as this cobra was meant to spew venom into the eyes of the enemies of the god (and the pharaoh) (Roberts, 1995: 22). The fact that Hathor is associated with these aspects alludes to her perception as a formidable goddess, not only a goddess of fertility and sexuality, though we will get to those aspects in due course, as she causes "beautiful women [to come] into being" (Lichtheim, 1976: 199).

Hathor was by no means accidentally associated by the Greeks with their goddess of procreative love, Aphrodite (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 180). Indeed, Hathor was said to be the most beautiful of the goddesses, having the epithets "Golden One" and "Turquoise Lady" bestowed upon her. But she was by no means a demure beauty. Like Aphrodite, she was aware of her sexuality and sexual-appeal and could make light of it.

There is a myth (“The Contendings of Horus and Seth”) which tells of Ra becoming irritated and sulking at the tribunal of gods (during the trial between Horus and Seth), after having his might called into question by a minor god, Baba (Lichtheim, 1976: 216). Hathor then decides to lighten the situation by going to her father, lifting her dress and showing him her vagina. This is done with the intention of amusing him and she succeeds. He immediately bursts into peals of laughter and can return to the courtroom to continue the trial (Hart, 1990: 35). This rather bizarre display at once illustrates two very important things about Hathor. Firstly, she is not ashamed of being a woman. Instead she delights in it and uses her femininity to delight others. Her sexuality is used as a tool. Secondly, she is resourceful, knowing exactly what would lighten the mood in order that her father may return to his duties.

The myths discussed in this section serve to illustrate the vast range of roles which Hathor fulfils. There is the caring mother, daughter and wife; but there is also the sexually confident goddess. And perhaps most importantly: there exists the apotropaic goddess; the fierce figure, who will stop at nothing to protect a loved one. Thus, it could be said that Hathor is quite unlike any other Egyptian goddess, in that she embodies roles which would not stereotypically befit a goddess, though she so fully assumes the roles which she is assigned that she transfigures herself into something perhaps a little bit elevated. Her functions were not restricted to the realm of the mythological, but to the practical as well. As previously stated, for every myth Hathor features in, there is a certain function she fulfils, and these shall be discussed presently.

1.2 Functions

1.2.1 Sex and Sexuality

Hathor’s most important function as a goddess was arguably the function she fulfilled in her role as sex-goddess. To say that Hathor was the embodiment of feminine sexuality would not be far off the mark, as she carries the epithet “Mistress of the Vulva” (Roberts, 1995: 138). This single epithet alludes to Hathor’s function. She could aid both men and women, who needed her help in their sexual conquests. There are countless examples of

carved phalli offered to the goddess, not only for the purpose of fertility, but also for virility (Pinch, 1993: 245). Hathor was called upon for every type of love pursuit, but most often she was invoked when a lover's advances were not returned in kind (Wilkinson, 2003: 141). Her presence in love spells is not at all surprising as she was the incarnation of feminine sexual-awareness.

Sex, especially with regards to Egyptian women, was not something liberal; even though Hathor is the goddess of sexuality, she is still portrayed very much clothed (like the other goddesses) (Robins, 1997a: 18). Sexual-awareness in Egypt was more subtle than that. Sex was viewed as an act of pleasure, but the Egyptians also understood the connection between sex and procreation and this is why the act of sex was so important to ancient Egyptians, because bearing children was important to the Egyptians (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 112).

Hathor is an extremely sexually confident character. She is aware of her sexual desirability, and has no qualms about revealing her naked body to her father, Ra; or on another occasion to a cowherd, who was so alarmed at the sight of the naked-goddess that he immediately urged his herd to return home (Bleeker, 1973: 39). It is unclear how common this type of sexual confidence was in Egyptian women, but since Egypt was a patriarchal society, we may assume that it was not too common amongst married/marriageable women. Perhaps it would have been (and understandably so) more common amongst prostitutes or professional entertainers (who were more scantily clad than the average Egyptian woman) (Anderson, 1995: 2565).

It is mentioned above that Hathor was not portrayed naked in the art, but this seems to stand in direct opposition to the claim that she was a sexually confident goddess who appeared naked simply for her own entertainment (it seems). However, Egyptian art is not art in the modern sense, and it was meant to serve a specific function, rather than simply appear aesthetically pleasing. It carried iconographic connotations, and in Egyptian art nakedness is most often employed to illustrate innocence, as most often only children are portrayed fully naked (Robins, 2008: 148). Egyptian goddesses were not

portrayed naked, since this would imply that the goddess was a child; furthermore, if we suppose that nakedness in art could be equated with childlike innocence, it would most definitely not be something one would want to associate with the goddess of sex and sexuality. Later in this thesis, examples of young girls, dancers and entertainers in Hathor's cult, who were depicted as naked except for a hip-girdle, shall be discussed. Though these images were perhaps sexualised, they were restricted to a certain trade, and not employed by women in general. Thus, the question arises as to how feminine sexuality was represented in art, if the naked female form could not be used in this capacity.

The answer is rather simple, but slightly bizarre at the same time: through Hathor's iconography. It was mentioned elsewhere (and will be mentioned again where relevant) that Hathor wore a distinct wig. This wig is the signifier of feminine sexuality. Posener (1983: 111) equates Hathor's wig to Horus' eye or Seth's testicles, as the seat of their essence, their basic qualities are signified by this one feature. Seth and Horus both lose their characteristic feature during "The Contendings of Horus and Seth", emphasizing the magical nature of the feature. Hathor does not lose her wig, though a separate myth "The Tale of the Two Brothers" tells of a lock of Bata's wife's hair caught by the sea and transported to Egypt, where the King smells the perfume of it and entreats to meet and marry the woman whose hair smells so wonderfully (Lichtheim, 1976: 208). Through a series of events (which are of no real relevance to this thesis) the woman marries the king and then proceeds to betray Bata several times, by using her feminine charms on the king. The association being that the Egyptians favoured beautiful hair and viewed it as a tool for sexual allure (Watterson, 1991: 111). Posener's argument (1983: 116-117) then follows that this woman's hair is used in conjunction with her other feminine charms to bend situations to her will. Hathor too possesses this quality through the wig she wears.

Wigs were also used in offerings on fertility dolls and the Egyptians were renowned for their wig-making skill (Watterson, 1991: 102-104). An essentiality for both men and women as most Egyptians' hair was cut short to ward off head lice and for practicality in the climate. Especially women enjoyed wearing wigs, as they were an indispensable

fashion accessory and throughout the 3000-odd year Egyptian civilization, many different styles were made and worn, though the Hathor-wig (or tripartite wig) never changed style, because it was part of an iconographic canon (Wattersson, 1991: 102).

It is rather unusual in any mythology for a god or goddess of sex to have a consort, though it is clear that Hathor did have either Horus or Ra; but these were not her only consorts (Bleeker, 1973: 38). Hathor was associated with several consorts, depending on the cult centre. She was never tied purely to one, as Isis was to Osiris, or Nut was to Geb. Rather Hathor has a multitude of consorts, whom she serves; these are Horus, Ra, Shu and Amun. Bleeker (1973: 64) maintains that this was because the Egyptians could not let her be tied down to a consort, because of her wandering nature. It would perhaps not have been true to her character for her to have just one consort.

1.2.2 Fertility

As can be deduced from Hathor's association with sex, and the obvious association between sex and procreation, the natural next step would be an association with fertility; fertility in this sense not only referring to the ability to produce life, but also sustain it (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 112). Herein lays the importance of Hathor as a goddess of sex, because there was no function more important than procreation. It was the single most important act in any Egyptian's life, especially since essential funerary rites needed to be conducted by a male heir (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115). Thus Egyptian people were not merely focused on living, but also the sustainment of life itself. In this capacity Hathor plays very significant roles. She is the cow-goddess, she nurtures through suckling, and as a tree goddess, she further sustains life in the afterlife. Furthermore, she is the very womb from which the sun is born each morning. She is also the mother of two gods, who do not have fathers. Thus their conceptions would appear to be immaculate (Bleeker, 1973: 64).

Cows in ancient Egypt were not merely a good source of protein; they were also the embodiment of Hathor, as well as pre-dynastic deities, such as Bat. This shows that the

cow already enjoyed a certain amount of esteem among the Egyptian populace from early on (Pinch, 2002: 123). The reasons for this are rather simple to explain. Cows are able to lactate throughout the year, regardless of whether they are pregnant or not. This specific feature is near-unique to the cow. The Egyptians consumed the milk and used it in their daily lives and naturally the connection was made between cow-milk and breast-milk as a life-sustaining force and symbol of fertility (Pinch, 2002: 125).

The cow is shown suckling pharaohs on temple walls to nourish them with the milk of a goddess. This is done to emphasize the filial relationship of the pharaoh to the gods. Suckling was an important act in the transition between one state of being and the next. Firstly, when one is born one is suckled in order to grow up quickly and healthily. When one dies, the goddess again nourishes him in the afterlife in order to aid the transition. In Egypt suckling children carried its own level of importance in that all children were suckled, either by its own mother or a wet-nurse (Robins, 1993: 88-89). The recommended period of suckling was three years. This might be because the Egyptians realised early on that there are many advantages to suckling children for longer, they are at a developmental advantage (with regards to their immune systems) and the mother is also less likely to fall pregnant while suckling, thus enabling the child to enjoy the undivided attentions of the mother (Robins, 1993: 89). Hathor fulfils this very important function for both the god Horus and the pharaoh (the physical manifestation of Horus on earth).

As a tree goddess this was an essential function Hathor fulfilled in the afterlife. Hathor was known as the “Lady of the Sycamore”, alluding to this very function. Hermsen (1981: 72-73) attests to the fact that the sycamore was probably the most widespread tree in ancient Egypt, and that it would bring forth fruit during the year. This fruit was extremely popular amongst ancient Egyptians, because of its sweetness and was often offered at temples to the gods, or the dead in the afterlife. The sap of the sycamore was also called the “milk” of the sycamore and was often used in medicinal spells (Manniche, 1999: 105). This all makes perfect sense once we view it in conjunction with the myths about the sycamore in the afterlife. It would provide shade and nourishment; and with

these two, life everlasting. The sycamore was important because of the function it played in the daily lives of the Egyptians, which then was translated into a mythological concept and related to the life-giving and life-sustaining properties which exist in breast-milk; thus linking both inextricably with Hathor.

As has been explained in an earlier section, Hathor was seen to be the womb from which the sun was born each morning. This was not fully explained though, the key to the myth lies in that the setting sun impregnates the sky, the pregnancy lasts the night, and in the morning the sun is reborn (Assmann, 2001: 44). Thus, the sun is both the son and consort of the goddess; and the goddess in turn, his mother and wife. This was in order to emphasize the self-perpetuating cycle of life, death and rebirth. Thus, Hathor facilitated both the birth into life and the rebirth into the afterlife.

The sun was not Hathor's only son though. She is also said to have two more sons, Ihy and Harsomtus, but they were not born in the conventional manner. They were not conceived through the sex-act. Rather they were immaculately conceived (Bleeker, 1973: 64). They are not associated with any male deities and Hathor is not said to share parentage of either with any other deity. Furthermore, their births were spontaneous. Bleeker (1973: 64) calls this a "symbolic expression of the triumphant power of divine life". This event in itself attests to Hathor's spectacular fertility, in that she conceived and gave birth to two sons, without the aid of a male consort. This is quite unusual, as in ancient Egyptian thought, the man's semen was the life-giving force, and the woman was merely the vessel in which it was allowed to germinate (Cooney, 2008: 2). Perhaps an exception was made in the case of Hathor because of her life-giving and sustaining attributes. Though Bleeker (1973: 64) posits that the term "son" is used in relation to Ihy and Harsomtus in a capacity to establish kinship, but not be literally related in the familial sense.

Rather he argues (1973: 64) that they formed part of a triad and that the relationships put forth serve to relate them to one another, since ancient Egyptians only had words to describe the nuclear family: mother, father, brother, sister, daughter, son. To describe

distant relatives they would make use of a combination of these. A mother-in-law would be “the mother of my wife”. An aunt would be “the sister of my mother” and so on. In either case it still stands that they are related to Hathor through parentage (literal or figurative) and this parentage came about spontaneously and without a male consort.

1.2.3 Healing and Safeguarding

As has been illustrated, Hathor had certain life-sustaining powers; and she could also become apotropaic when the occasion deemed it necessary. Ancient Egyptian life was perhaps not as harrowing as life was elsewhere in the ancient Near East, but it was still fraught with challenges; challenges which the Egyptians sought to evade through their religion. One of these challenges, and perhaps it was the most feared of all challenges, was eternal death. This death was not the death of the body from the realm of the living, but the eternal death of the “soul” in the netherworld (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 166). Another challenge quite keenly feared, and because of the primitive knowledge of medicine, was rather widespread until quite recently, was infant mortality and mortality caused by the complications of childbirth (Robins, 1993: 83).

Quite often the joy of a pregnancy (since as has been shown, pregnancy was a great cause for celebration), was dampened by the thought that neither the mother, nor the infant would perhaps survive the birth. And in the event that both mother and infant survived the birth, there remained a great many things that the child could still suddenly die from. In this capacity Hathor again appears a saviour, or at least a sympathetic symbol to cling to (Roberts, 1995: 92).

It was mentioned earlier that Horus, during “The Contendings of Horus and Seth” lost his eye. Hathor came to him and mended it through magic (Roberts, 1995: 106). Here we see her in a healing capacity and for this reason she was one of the main goddesses consulted during and after childbirth. She would also aid the birth-process, perhaps because she herself had no pain during the spontaneous birth of her sons, and perhaps also because of her healing properties.

Hathor was not only consulted before and during the birth. She was also consulted after the birth. But she was consulted in a different form: the form of the Seven Hathors, which was a sort of “college” (Bleeker, 1973: 71) of Hathors, who acted as her servants. This “college” could prophesy the fate of each child upon its birth. They would prophesy its destiny, thus they would know if he would die within the hour, week, month, year, or live until ripe old age; though the prophecy does not imply predetermined fate (Bleeker, 1973: 72). It is only one of several possible eventualities that the child might meet. If the fate is an unfavourable one it could perhaps be avoided through certain righteous actions. They serve mainly as an exhortative voice to prompt man to submit to the will of the gods, in this case the god being Hathor.

The Seven Hathors are often invoked by expectant mothers in order to beg a favourable future, or in order to tell the goddess that they have acted morally and therefore their child’s destiny should be favourable. They could also be invoked in love charms in order that a beloved might figure into ones destiny. The Seven Hathors should not be equated with the prophets of Greek myth though, since they foretold unchangeable destinies, which the Seven Hathors did not (Evslin, 2007: 70).

As has been stated, Hathor’s milk was meant to nourish, but her milk was also meant to heal. This does not necessarily come to the fore in the myth about Horus’ eye, but it can be backwards-related through spells in which the breast milk of mothers who had born sons was used (Graves-Brown, 2010: 67). Furthermore, the milk of Hathor, either in her cow form, or in her tree form, both aid the dead. It must be understood that the Egyptians realised that the corpses of the dead would start to decay as soon as they died. For this reason they devised a complex set of spells, which the deceased is meant to recite in the afterlife (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 170). Among these are spells to keep her body from decaying. The nourishment Hathor provides to the deceased in the afterlife, not only nourishes her, but also sort of heals her from the “ailment” of death.



Figure 9: Pectoral of Tutankhamun of the Left Eye

The apotropaic properties of the Eye (of the sun god) and the uraeus have already been explained through the myth of the cataclysm. But it is again relevant to make mention of these symbols, because they figured into the magical symbolism of Egyptian jewellery. Egyptian jewellery should, in a sense, also be viewed as a distinct form of Egyptian art. Egyptian jewellery also had quite a keen hieroglyphic base and could be read, like their art (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 193-194). Many pieces of jewellery were actually spells designed to ward off evil spirits, danger and

chaos. Two key features in a lot of Egyptian jewellery, specifically pharaonic jewellery is the Eye of Horus and the uraeus: the uraeus being a key symbol of pharaonic power, and protection against the enemies of the pharaoh, and the Eye fulfilling much the same function (Darnell, 1997: 39). As Hathor is directly related to both of these symbols through the solar mythology, it stands to reason that she is also protecting the individual in this capacity, as these symbols are simply her in another form. Hathor as Sekhmet (the fearsome lioness-goddess) should remain constantly in the back of the mind of the reader, in conjunction with all her life-giving and sustaining properties. It must never be forgotten that Hathor could turn into a fiercely vengeful goddess if the occasion prompted her to.

Hathor then, serves to protect and safeguard expectant mothers, new-borns and the pharaoh alike. One must bear in mind the keen association she has with each of these mythologically. She herself has been the expectant mother and the mother of a new-born. She suckles this new-born and protects him in order that she may ensure a great future for him. This new-born is the sun god, Horus; or his earthly manifestation: the pharaoh. Thus, Hathor's role as a goddess of vengeance and protection (fulfilled through her transfiguration into other mythological symbols) translates into the Egyptian society in an apotropaic capacity as well as a healing capacity.

1.2.4 Music, dance and indulgence

Hathor was the patroness goddess of music, dance and other indulgences. She was so closely associated with music and dance that many musical instruments are directly associated with her, rather than any other god; and her son, Ihy, is also a patron of music (Pinch, 2002: 148). Dance has long been thought to be the oldest form of religious expression and this perhaps alludes to Hathor's pre-dynastic heritage. Perhaps the tradition of dance stems from the worship of a different deity which amalgamated into Hathor. Either way, Hathor and music are inextricably linked. Dance and music was an essential part of her cult, because of the state of euphoria it can produce (Bleeker, 1973: 53). This state of being is associated with a sort of drunkenness (the state Hathor was in after imbibing the dyed beer) and the Egyptians understood that one could become "drunk" from music (as well as other pleasures). Herein lays a possible motive for the perpetuation of dance in order to please Hathor: perhaps it was also (to a certain extent) to keep her pleased and intoxicated (through the joy of music) (Bleeker, 1973: 57).



Figure 10: Sistrum with Hathor's face

Several musical instruments were extremely important to Hathor-worship. The sistrum, clappers and hymns (allowing that a hymn be viewed as a musical instrument). The sistrum (Figure 10) had a Hathor head represented above the handle. It was employed to attract the attention of the god and to ward off evil (Anderson, 1995: 2557). It was often used in temple ritual and was usually played by royal princesses. The sistrum became an important offering symbol and

many fake-sistra/ model-sistra were offered as a means to ward off evil.

Clappers (Figure 11) were a sort of percussion instrument also important to Hathor. It seems quite obvious that these were played in honour of the goddess, as her head appears on a number of examples

Figure 11: Ivory Clappers with Hathor's face



(Anderson, 1995: 2557). It is possible that these were also played in order to ward off evil, or perhaps they were used in conjunction with the sistra in a musical ritual. It is difficult to say, since there are no examples of written Egyptian music.

We do however have hymns. These hymns attest to the popularity of Hathor and the reverence her worshippers held for her. These hymns would probably have been performed at celebrations in her honour and might have been accompanied by the instruments mentioned above (Anderson, 1995: 2557). One such song (sung by the Seven Hathors) attests to how they “laud(ed) (her) with delightful songs”, calling her the “mistress of music” and the “lady of the dance” (Bleeker, 1973: 54).

As can be seen from the above-mentioned epithet, dance also played a large role in the worship of Hathor. Dances were performed at several festivals throughout the year in honour of Hathor (Graves-Brown, 2010: 167). These dances were sometimes performed by the pharaoh himself, but more often by groups of trained dancers. These dancers were often scantily clad (as can be seen from their portrayal in formal art) and there is also evidence to suggest that they were tattooed* with symbols of fertility, to show their affinity with the goddess of the dance (Graves-Brown, 2010: 114). There is also evidence which seems to indicate that dance was not confined to entertainers, but also to random members of the public, who felt a certain compulsion to partake at that moment (Bleeker, 1973: 56). Dance, in Hathor-worship, was not something fixed and rigid; rather it was a free expression of adoration, in order to placate a goddess who “personifies effervescent divine life and passion”, as Bleeker (1973: 57) so eloquently puts it.

The intoxication brought about by music is undeniably a key feature in the worship and mythology of Hathor, but the intoxication brought about by imbibing alcohol is also a key feature. Generally intoxication was not approved of, as it did not suit the morally conscious Egyptian social construct, “holy intoxication” on the other hand was a different matter (Graves-Brown, 2010: 168). Holy intoxication served to transport the intoxicated to a different state of being and thus, in a sense, bring them closer to their god; the god in

* The tattoos mentioned here are discussed in latter sections, with supporting evidence provided on page 51.

this instance being Hathor. There was a “Festival of Drunkenness” each year, held in the “Place of Drunkenness” in honour of the “Lady of Drunkenness” (Hathor) (Graves-Brown, 2010: 168). It does not seem at all far-fetched that during the intoxicating dancing and music, actual intoxication would be popular as well. It seems to have simply strengthened Hathor’s bond with her worshippers, who (through the effects of intoxication) felt closer to her at the same time. This again served the purpose of placating the goddess, whose fury threatened just beneath the surface.

Hathor’s final, and perhaps most important pleasurable function, was her function as sex-goddess. Though this function has been examined in an earlier section, it should be made mention of again, in conjunction with the other “indulgences”. As such, we may draw an instant connection, through Hathor, between all her separate functions. She is a goddess of sex and sexuality (and other intoxicating endeavours, such as: music, dance and drunkenness), which leads to an association with fertility, which leads to an association with protection and safe-guarding of individuals and children. In this way, the goddess comes to the fore: a startling combination of benevolence, coquettishness and intimidation.

1.3 In Art and Iconography

Earlier in this section on Hathor, certain iconographical features were discussed. This section will attempt to expand on that and delve into the mind of the ancient Egyptian, by looking at her art. Hathor’s complex iconography shall be discussed in greater detail and an attempt will be made to explain why certain iconographical features were given precedent or not. The forms she appears in, as well as certain distinctly Hathoric features will be discussed, from the perspective of the art and thus the artistic portrayal of this goddess. We will perhaps start to see certain of her functions come to the fore by the way she is portrayed through the art.

1.3.1 *Symbolic Elements*

Religious iconography in the Egyptian context, perhaps more so than in the context of any other ancient Near Eastern civilization, held a particular significance, because of the way the Egyptians approached their art. Their art was in itself a religious experience, as it was meant to serve a certain magical purpose (Robins, 1997b: 19). Each and every line drawn, or carved, was plotted with extreme care and attention to detail. No mistakes were made, because no mistakes could be afforded to be made. The art in question served the purpose of a magical spell (a spell which should protect the deceased in the netherworld), thus it needed to be flawless, or the spell would fail (Hornung, 1995: 1711). Therefore, any and all canonical iconography was adhered to with a specific purpose.

Aside from this necessitated flawlessness, we also have the concept of *maat*, which (as explained in the introduction) was the single most important governing and moralising force in the ancient Egyptian socio-religious construct (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 102). It dictated the perfection of all things and therefore the way they were to be represented. This is the real reason for the necessitated flawlessness. Without *maat* there would be only chaos and nothing would have meaning anymore (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 102). So to speak of iconography is perhaps not as simple as the word makes it out to be. Iconography in this sense attempts to grasp at the truth/ essence of the thing that is being represented.

As has been discussed, Hathor appeared mainly in three forms: as the theriomorphic cow, the anthropomorphic goddess with the cow horns and sun disk atop her head and lastly simply as a face with cow ears and a distinctive wig. Though Hathor is not only signified through her cow-form/ features. Hathor's different forms shall be discussed and then certain specific features.

In ancient Egypt, the gods often had more than one form, or manifestation. But very few possessed more than two designated forms. Hathor had three. The reason for this might be because of early dynastic influence and that she was an amalgamation, or adaptation of earlier deities, thus her different forms came about in a sort of "cut and paste" fashion

(Pinch, 2002: 125). The essential cow-form can almost certainly be said to be pre-dynastic, since the other cow-deities, were only cow-deities. They had no anthropomorphic form, and were worshipped and depicted in their theriomorphic forms (Pinch, 2002: 125).

The anthropomorphic form perhaps came about later, but we cannot be certain, as she starts appearing in all her forms in conjunction with her name in hieroglyphics at roughly the same time in history; though one still cannot discount that some cow-formed depictions might designate her (Pinch, 2002: 125). Speculation aside, there is no clear indication that the one form appeared earlier than the other as far as Hathor is concerned.



Figure 12: Mirror with Hathor's face

Her third form, and perhaps her most important form for the purpose of this thesis, is her front-facing form. As it is only she and Bes who appear in this particular fashion, and bearing in mind what she represents, this indicates that the Egyptian people held a specific affinity for Hathor (Wilkinson, 2003: 144). She appears on mirror-handles, column-capitals, the handles of sistra and other musical instruments. It is not unusual that she appears on these objects, because of the specific associations she has with them, but the face on

column-capitals is unique (Wilkinson, 2003: 144). There is no clear indication of why exactly her face would be used as a capital, but scholars, such as Derchain (1972: 11) call it the *Quadrifrons*, referring to the fact that the face would appear four times on the capital. It is well known that columns in temples were meant to symbolize tall plants, thus fertility (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 159). Perhaps this is why specifically Hathor's head was chosen to top these columns, though it could be her association with beauty as well, since the columns could also be capped with the lotus-blossom (which also sometimes appeared on sistra). Speculation as to what the capital-head of Hathor symbolises aside, the fact remains that her figure is uniquely used in this capacity and this attests to a certain level of reverence held by the ancient Egyptians, regardless of what the meaning behind the reverence might have been in this context.

As has been mentioned, the presence of the sun disk atop Hathor's head (in between her horns) is extremely important to the iconography of this goddess. A number of deities all share the presence of the sun disk in their iconography and it serves to indicate a direct link to the sun god. It ties them to the realm of the solar and also to a number of principal deities. The sun disk itself was a symbol of renewal and strength (Wilkinson, 2003: 207). The sun was a vital life-giving force in the Egyptian mind-set and understanding of life. The sun was thought to be a sort of golden orb, even an eye; an eye that could see all and know all, while it travelled throughout the lands of the living and the dead (Wilkinson, 2003: 206). The sun was so important that one pharaoh, Akhenaten (a heretic), led a religious revolution (Gore, 2001: 40). He denounced the entire Egyptian pantheon in favour of the sun disk, the Aten. His revolution was short lived however, and only lasted as long as his reign did, but this still attests to the vast influence and importance the sun held in the minds of the ancient Egyptians, especially during the Eighteenth Dynasty in the New Kingdom.

The idea of the sun as a golden orb is also quite significant; since it was also understood that the flesh of the gods was gold (Laite, 2002). It is unclear whether the sun was first understood to be golden, and therefore all the gods must be golden; or whether all gods' flesh was thought to be golden and therefore the sun must also be a god. Though the obvious answer is that the sun worship came first, and therefore all gods' flesh would be golden. Whichever speculation seems more likely is of no real consequence, what is, however, is that Hathor has the epithet "the Golden One" (Graves-Brown, 2010: 96). Now this may perhaps be easily explained by making a connection between Hathor and beauty, since gold was undoubtedly thought to be valuable and beautiful; but there is an alternative viewing as well. Hathor might have been given this epithet simply because she is a goddess and therefore her flesh was golden; or it might be because she is the daughter of the sun. If we believe that she was born from a tear of the sun-eye, then it would be an easy connection to make between the father and daughter sharing the same flesh. This epithet could thus either symbolise her connection to beauty; or it could emphasize her familial connection to the solar deity.



Figure 13: Pectoral of princess Sit-Hathor-yunet with turquoise accents

One epithet that was undoubtedly associated with Hathor because of her beauty was “the Lady of the Turquoise”. She was worshipped in the regions of Sinai by turquoise miners, who equated the beautiful mineral with the goddess (Roberts, 1995: 9-10). Many shrines to Hathor were built there and Spell 486 of the “Coffin

Texts” attests that Hathor’s beauty is seen when the “rock is split open” and the “caverns of Hathor are broken open” (Roberts, 1995: 10). Turquoise was a rare mineral and miners had to travel far in order to obtain it. It was sought after mainly for its blue colour. Blue in Egyptian art symbolised the sky and elements of creation (Laite, 2002). Hathor was a celestial deity and definitely had associations with creative elements, so it is rather obvious why the ancient Egyptians would make this association. Especially since turquoise is a rather beautiful and rare mineral. Turquoise could be used for a multitude of purposes, but it was most often used in the manufacture of jewellery, or receptacles for makeup or other cosmetics. Lesko (1999: 112) also states that there are examples of beer jugs (though unfortunately they are no longer intact) which had blue heads of Hathor as lids and that perhaps this was an allusion to her epithets as “Lady of the Turquoise” and “Lady of the Drunkenness”.

Hathor’s headdress was not purely and exclusively the horns and sun disk. She would often be depicted wearing a headdress with double-feathers or the crown of upper and lower Egypt (Wilkinson, 2003: 143). Both of these crowns referred to Hathor’s reach. She was present in both upper and lower Egypt and she was also present in the land of the living and the land of the dead. Furthermore, Hathor was also depicted wearing a uraeus, symbol of the pharaoh’s might. Bleeker (1973: 58) argues that “the double crown reveals the influence of the royal ideology [and that] it characterises Hathor as queen of the two

parts of Egypt ruled by the pharaoh”. In a sense this institutes her as a ruler of gods and men and she was also called “the queen of the gods”.

Aside from her illustrious headgear, she also had other paraphernalia, which was completely and entirely her own. These were: her wig, the sistrum and the *menat* necklace. These were not only canonical and iconographical paraphernalia, but they were also used in Hathor worship (Graves-Brown, 2010: 96-97). The Hathor wig



Figure 15: Hathor holding a sistrum

could be worn by royalty during religious rites, as well as the *menat*



Figure 14: Menat Necklace

necklace. The *menat* was a necklace consisting of several strings of beads which tied together in the back with a counterweighted knot. It was worn by royalty and priestesses and Hathor is often depicted adorned with a *menat* necklace (Bleeker, 1973: 59). The sistrum as a cultic object is rather important because of its use in religious rites and because Hathor is depicted holding it on several occasions, as well as worshippers of the goddess holding it. As if the depictions of

Hathor upon the sistra were not enough to solidify the tie between Hathor and the sistra, she is also depicted holding them (Bleeker, 1973: 60). These iconographic features were often used in conjunction with one another, or interchangeably. There was not necessarily a set occasion where Hathor would rather be depicted wearing a *menat* necklace, but not holding a sistrum; though these features definitely varied in popularity in the artistic sphere through the long Egyptian history. Though whether the art directly shadowed the natural world, would be hard to say.

The last image of Hathor to be discussed is the image of Hathor suckling the pharaoh or the god Horus. By this point the reader should be familiar with the function of the image, but the image itself has not yet been examined from an artistic vantage point. The image of a mother suckling her child is not unique to Hathor and



Figure 16: Hathor suckling the pharaoh

Horus/ the pharaoh; there are numerous images which display Isis suckling Horus as well (since she plays the role of his mother in the triad in which she, Osiris and Horus feature) (Wilkinson, 2003: 146-147). It is quite difficult to separate Isis from Hathor iconographically when the depiction is not accompanied by their names. In these cases it is oftentimes impossible to say for certain which deity it is, leaving room for speculation. It is also interesting to note that this image endured through the centuries into modern-day Christianity as the *Maria Lactans* (Mary suckling the baby Jesus), though the significance of this will not be speculated upon.

The reason this image was so popular in ancient Egypt was because it emphasized the relationship between the divine mother and child and the divine nourishment and protection the mother provided (Graves-Brown, 2010: 83). The divine milk which is given from the mother to the child signifies a bond which the ancient Egyptians must have viewed to be sacred; especially bearing in mind the importance of procreation in ancient Egypt. The mother lovingly embracing her divine son serves to translate a specific message to the worshippers: that there exists a divine order to life and that this order is perpetuated through certain life-cycles; life-cycles which are set in motion by a mother and are put forth by her son.

Hathor embodied a number of epithets and guises throughout her reign as one of Egypt's most principal goddesses. The way she was portrayed in art, through her iconography, shows us key aspects which cognisance should be taken of, in order that we may translate the perception of the goddess and the practical worship of the goddess into a workable theory about the way the goddess was received by the general populace. The practical aspect of Hathor worship shall now be embarked upon, as we approach the discussion of the Hathor-cult.

1.4 Cult of Hathor

The worship and level of reverence for Hathor grew quite large and in Egypt, when a god/goddess reached a certain level of veneration, they became cultified. This was not a

conscious act on the part of the Egyptian people, but rather a natural concentration of worship that occurred at certain places (most often, places directly associated with the god), and times (during the vast history of Egypt) (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 66). The cult would be situated around a temple, and this temple would be the link between the devotees and the goddess. The temple functioned in a certain way, like an organism (Szpakowska, 2010: 512). It had its own “culture” and “order”, there were certain essential functions that needed to be fulfilled on a daily basis, and these would be performed from within the temple itself, the priesthood (Szpakowska, 2010: 513). Different religious cults had different priesthoods who cared for the temple and facilitated the worship and adoration of the masses.

The daily ritual consisted of firstly attending the cultic statue (the earthly manifestation of the god in the temple). This entailed, as detailed by David (1981: 162), the purification of the cult statue, which entailed bathing the statue, then clothing it, and then presenting it its specific cultic/ sacred objects. After this the deity would be brought food and water, and an offering will be introduced, which would have been purified and consecrated. Daily service at the sanctuary (the inner sanctum of the temple where the statue was housed, which had limited access), which in itself entailed rituals, would then commence, paying homage to the god. Then, lastly, purification rituals would be performed, in order to restore the sanctity of the inner sanctum to the state it was in before the priest had entered. While these inner sanctum rituals were being performed, another priest led a religious service and finally the offerings would be brought outside.

What makes Hathor’s priesthood so unique is that they mainly consisted of women (Graves-Brown, 2010: 26). This is rather unusual in Egypt, since most of the clergy, and certainly the upper echelons of the clergy, were male (Graves-Brown, 2010: 26). And since temples were not places meant for mass public worship (like modern-day churches or mosques) it might not be too farfetched to deduce that a large number of women followers of Hathor sought to serve her through priesthood, because they wanted to be closer to the goddess with which they shared such a great affinity.

1.4.1 Main Cult centres

As mentioned, there were a number of important cult centres, the main ones (considered main because of the amount of evidence that can be collected from it) being: Memphis, Dendara, in the vicinity of Abu Simbel, near the Sinai mountains, Deir el-Bahari and, perhaps unsurprisingly (when considering Hathor's association with the dead), the necropolis of Thebes.

At these cult centres large concentrations of Hathor worshippers dwelled. Certain festivals were performed at the temples of Hathor, and these festivals seem to be largely localized. Though, the festival of plucking the papyrus for Hathor was a national event in which everyone who dwelled in the Nile Delta partook (Bleeker, 1973: 88). Memphis is important to mention, because she had been worshipped there in cult-form since early in the Old Kingdom.

Certain cult centres became more popular than others as temples were abandoned, or broken down and "recycled", as the populace of Egypt migrated and fluctuated (as societies do). The cult stayed operational for as long as there were priests to tend the temple.

1.4.2 Priestesses

The priestesses of Hathor were, during the Old Kingdom, women who held high-status, with the title "Servant of the Gods" (Graves-Brown, 2010: 25). The importance of this title when applied to women began to wane just before the Middle Kingdom and continued its decline (Graves-Brown, 2010: 25). This does not mean that the title was less desirable.

The priestesses of Hathor were generally women from elite-classes (though the levels of the elite varied greatly) (Te Velde, 1995: 1732). The priestesses were not paid much and thus, this was not a means by which one could live comfortably. The office of Priestess of Hathor would often be held by a princess, especially during the Fourth Dynasty. Those

who were not princesses generally also came from the royal court circle, since they were known as “Royal Acquaintances”.

The priestesses of Hathor were intended to perform all the general rituals of temple life. It is quite interesting to note, that given Hathor’s association with music, the priestesses of Hathor never acted in this capacity. In artistic depictions of women dancing and playing music, they are rarely identified as “priestesses” (Graves-Brown, 2010: 26).

Though the priesthood of Hathor was largely female, it must be stated that the overseers of these priestesses (head priests, if you will) were always male (Graves-Brown, 2010: 26). Only male priests could perform the sacred rituals and speak the sacred rites. There are examples of women who held the title of funerary priest; though Graves-Brown (2010: 26) attests, these were in name only. Gillam (212: 1995) however states that these titles could not have been in name only, since there is evidence of shift-rosters, indicating that women did do the same work as men. It must also be stated that in the general clergy, both men and women (working at the same temple) received the same amount of pay; which indicates that the women were not considered to be of lesser status. This did change toward the Middle Kingdom however.

The priestesses and the cult of Hathor shall be discussed in later sections again, where it will be relevant to the topic at hand. This section served to illustrate their general function, with regards to the goddess Hathor, and the worship of her.

1.5 Conclusions

This section has illustrated who and what the goddess Hathor represented in very general terms. It has also reviewed some key iconographic features which are unique to Hathor, such as the *menat* necklace and her *Quadrifrons*. Her role in the lives of the ancient Egyptians was discussed with regards to her role in fertility, safeguarding and death. It was found that her role in these stages of life was quite significant, though what the significance was is yet to be determined. It is clear that Hathor is an important deity for the ancient Egyptian people, but her role with regards to women in ancient Egyptian society must still be defined. The following chapter will investigate the lives of ancient Egyptian women, thereby paving the way for an investigation into Hathor's role therein.

2. Women in ancient Egypt

Women in ancient Egypt were among the more fortunate women in the ancient Near East. They had property rights, were their own legal entities and could conduct business amongst men (Johnson, 1996: 175). On paper they were treated equally to men in many respects, but this does not mean that they were treated equally to men in all respects, or some respects, in practice. The ancient Egyptian woman still had one main purpose, a purpose valued above all others, and valued throughout the ancient Near East; that is: childbearing and –rearing (Tyldesley, 1994: 46). Ancient Egyptian women were valued because they were the vessels from which children were born. Even though the ancient Egyptians thought that the man alone possessed the life-giving force, they understood that the woman was necessary to complete the act of creating life and nurturing life (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 113).

The woman's principal task then, was to facilitate the continuation of life. And though it was not uncommon to find women working outside of the home, it was still where most of her work would be centred with the tasks of rearing children and maintaining a household, which entailed, among other activities, weaving clothes and cooking food for the household.

As the ancient Egyptian household was centred on the nuclear family, homes were not particularly large and had just enough space to accommodate the typical Egyptian family, which usually consisted of a man, woman and their children (Pinch, 1995: 370-371). Family groups had no ideal number, but naturally a bigger household had greater economic demands, so these were not as common as one might think; though in seeming contrast to this, fathers of many children were held in esteem by their peers for their virility, especially if the children were boys, rather than girls (Casson, 2001: 18). Monogamy seems to have been practiced since quite early in Egyptian history, but this did not prohibit men from committing adultery (Robins, 1993: 67). Polygamy was practiced by the royalty, but this seems to have been for practicality's sake only, in that

the pharaoh, more so than a common man, needed a son as an heir. In the event that his principal wife could not produce him an heir, perhaps a lesser wife could.

Though it is not explicitly stated anywhere that girls were less desirable than boys, one might assume that they were, because of the role male heirs played in funerary rites; though children of any sex could inherit property (Johnson, 1996: 183).

In light of this, this section will investigate the lives of ancient Egyptian women, separating the royal women from non-royal women, as these two groups would have had vastly different experiences of womanhood in a patriarchal society. Their daily lives will be investigated, as well as the priesthood and finally, the way they were portrayed in art.

2.1 *Non-Royal Women*

Non-royal women in ancient Egypt's lives were focused on being a good wife and mother. The woman was meant to be an attractive and sensual being, but at the same time, she should be modest and focused on her husband and family (Graves-Brown, 2010: 101). Though the marriage was largely considered to be a partnership, and a failed marriage would not necessarily be the woman's fault (Feucht, 1990: 320).

2.1.1 *Daily Lives*

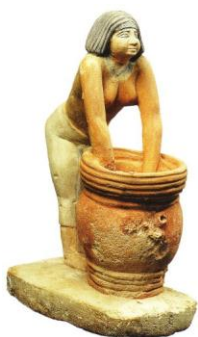


Figure 17: Female Beer Brewer

When a girl was born, she was not necessarily of less value than a male child. They would be brought up in largely the same way, though girls would be given dolls to play with, and boys would play with spinning tops. In general, education was reserved for the elite, and a large portion of the population was illiterate (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 91). And of the literate few, very little were women. Schooling for girls was generally

taken up by the mother, as she would teach her daughter everything that she needed to know about being an ancient Egyptian woman (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115). The mother would teach essential skills, such as weaving and cooking; and other skills such as child-rearing would be passed on

subconsciously, by watching a mother tend younger siblings; or if she were old enough, lending a hand with younger siblings.

The average ancient Egyptian was married off around the age of 14, as was normal in most parts of the ancient Near East (Tyldesley, 1994: 51). Her husband would be a young man of about 20. There is no known record of anything resembling a “marriage ceremony” and for the most part, it is assumed that once a man and a woman started cohabitating, they were then officially married (Toivari-Viitala, 2001: 49). Once the new couple was married, they would then get to the all-important task at hand: starting their own family. As is stated in the “Instructions of Ani”:

*Take a wife while you are young,
That she may make a son for you;
She should bear for you while you are youthful.
It is proper to make people.
Happy is the man whose people are many,
He is saluted on account of his progeny.*

(Lichtheim, 1976: 136).

2.1.1.1 Fertility and Sexuality

As has been stated elsewhere, fertility and the cyclical nature (thus continuation) of life was a central aspect of Egyptian life, religion and culture. They understood the perpetuation of life as their reason for life. Marriage being the means to this end, the Egyptian men may have taken great measures to ensure the fertility of their wives. Infertility was not conceived to be any direct (physical) fault of the man, and so if a child was not conceived or if the woman continually miscarried, the blame often would land upon the wife (Strouhal, 1992: 61). Infertility was even legitimate grounds for divorce.

The ancient Egyptians had certain tests for fertility, as stipulated in magico-medical papyri (entitled “to tell a woman who will give birth from one who will not”) (Robins,

1993: 75). Modern scholars believe that these tests were largely unreliable, since they have no grounded scientific basis, but they were nonetheless believed reliable by the ancient Egyptians. Though no evidence exists of a woman becoming unmarriageable because of the outcome of such a test, it would not be inconceivable that a woman might have been.

Fertility was seen as a sexually desirable trait, and was even perceived to be a mark of success for a woman (Landgráfová, 2008: 71). Women in ancient Egypt formed part of the lowest spheres of society, and it was very hard, if not impossible, to break out of this sphere. The vast majority of women lived and died as part of the nameless masses, and we have very little recorded evidence of them, because of their low societal standing. One way a woman could perhaps achieve some measure of notability, would have been by bearing many children and thus being a good wife (Graves-Brown, 2010: 68).



Figure 18: Late Period erotic representation, presumably for personal amusement

Women were not seen to be demure beauties, wives were to be idealised as such, but women in the male-mind, in general, not. The feminine body was held as something beautiful in the male-mind and women were viewed (at least to some extent) as sex-objects. This does not mean to say that women were only viewed as sex-objects, or that sex was seen to be their only purpose. However, it does seem (from informal art and poetry) that the female form was objectified and that women

had an idealised form or shape in the male ancient Egyptian mind. As in Schott (1950: 39) (as translated in Feucht 1990: 315-316):

*Radiant, white of skin with clear shining eyes,
with lips that speak sweetly;
she does not say one word too many;
with high neck and white breast,
her hair genuine lapis lazuli,
Her arms surpass gold,*

*her fingers resemble lotus blossoms,
Her hips full, her waist supple,
she whose thighs compete for her beauty,
with noble gait when she treads the earth.*

Clearly there was such a thing as the “ideal” woman, and this ideal was to be aspired to, whether it was men aspiring to obtain such a woman; or a woman aspiring to be such a woman. The question of the objectification of women aside, there is ample evidence that female sexuality was of interest to men; but this might just as easily be put down to natural curiosity.

In any event, female promiscuity was not condoned for reputable women; though it should be noted that pre-marital sex was not considered promiscuous behaviour (Goodnick Westenholz, 1995: 2481). There seems to be enough evidence from romantic poetry from the Ramesside-era which points to the acceptability of pre-marital sex. Though, one might argue that it might have occurred infrequently, simply because of the young age of marriage.

Sexual promiscuity in the form of adultery was absolutely forbidden for women (Casson, 2001: 32). Men who committed adultery were free to do so, but any resulting offspring would be his “property” (since it was his essence which caused the life) (Tyldesley, 1994: 69). Egyptian women could make use of certain contraceptive methods, though these seem to largely be reliant on the fact that they form a sperm-barrier (Robins, 1993: 80). Certain tonics could also be taken, though largely ineffective compared to modern contraceptives, these do seem to have made the female body less susceptible to pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancies did occur however, and the ancient Egyptians had primitive abortion methods, or the unwanted child would simply be abandoned (Tyldesley, 1994: 69). Abandonment and/ or termination were completely up to the father, and the mother had no legal say (Tyldesley, 1994: 69). It was up to him whether or not he wanted to have the child, because its existence was believed to have been solely caused by him.



Figure 19: Pottery figure with face of Hathor

Infertility might have been perceived as a weakness of the woman, but both men and women gave votive offerings in the hopes that the gods would grant them a child (Pinch, 1993: 358). These were most often in the form of carved wooden fertility dolls, or phalli. Though infertility was grounds for divorce, it did not always necessitate divorce and even though ancient Egyptian marriages were arranged, it does seem that some couples did form strong emotional bonds. Some men stayed with their wives and remained childless; though this was not their only option (Robins, 1993: 77). Couples who were childless could adopt abandoned or orphaned children. Obviously these children did not carry the prestige

that they would have had they been the couple's own children, but they could legally inherit their adoptive parents' property and perform the necessary funerary rites, as is stated by Nebnefer and his wife Rennefer in *P. Ashmolean Museum 1945.96* (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115 and Eyre, 1992: 208).

2.1.1.2 *Pregnancy*

Pregnancy, as can be expected from a society focused on procreation, was a time of great happiness. Brides would start looking for signs of pregnancy shortly after their marriages and the correlation between a missed period and pregnancy was understood (Robins, 1993: 78). Many women could accurately determine their date of conception, as well as the projected due date without the aid of a "doctor" (doctor here put in quotation marks, to emphasize that this was not what we would call a doctor, but rather something akin to a healer; who practised a combination of primitive* medicine and magic), but a "doctor"

* It must perhaps be stated at this juncture, that even though this study refers to the Egyptians' medical knowledge as "primitive", or "lacking"; it was still (at this stage) quite a bit ahead of its time, compared to other ancient Near Eastern civilizations, and that one could refer to medical practices up until the 19th or 20th

could be consulted for a small fee (Tyldesley, 1994: 69). “Doctors” could also be consulted about the sex of the baby and there were also spells in order to determine the sex, involving the expectant mother urinating on crops for several days and the crop which sprung up, determined the sex of the child (emmer for a girl and barley for a boy) (Graves-Brown, 2010: 61). These methods were based in superstitions and contemporary scholars believe them to be totally ineffective (as Graves-Brown 2010: 61 cites tests which were conducted); as the variation of crop growing, is completely unaffected by the urine.

An expectant mother, though this was an exciting time, was also very conscious of the dangers that pregnancy can bring; as infant mortality and deaths related to a pregnancy or complications from childbirth were (and still are) among the leading causes of death in women (Robins, 1993: 85). Expectant mothers would pray to the god(esse)s and give offerings frequently in order that they might survive the birth and give birth to a healthy child.



Figure 20: Woman giving birth (assisted by Hathor)

The birth itself was probably conducted in a quite ritualistic manner; though we have very little recorded data, it seems that a midwife facilitated the birth and that the birth occurred in an out-of-the-way section of the house; or separate birth-house; where the mother could give birth in relative peace (Tyldesley, 1994: 72-73). It would also appear that a sort of birthing-stool (or bricks upon which the mother would crouch) was used during the delivery, which is thought to have aided the birth, while still allowing the midwife, or assistants to see what was happening (Tyldesley, 1994: 74).

Sadly, many babies, even after complication-free births, died within days, weeks or months, because of primitive medical knowledge (Graves-Brown, 2010: 65). Stillbirths

century as primitive; since our major medical breakthroughs and deeper understanding of medicine truly only occurred in the last few centuries.

and deceased infants seem to have been buried inside the floor of the house; indicating that the family did mourn the loss of these children (Graves-Brown, 2010: 65). This indicates that in as much as children were a means to achieve public esteem, they were not viewed as commodities only. Their worth also had an intrinsic aspect.

2.1.1.3 *Childrearing*

As has been mentioned in a previous section, babies were nursed until the age of three. The nursing was done by the mother and we assume that nursing a child for this long period of time (by western standards) had several advantageous results. It has been shown that nursing women seem to have more difficulty falling pregnant (Robins, 1993: 89). This means that there is a longer period wherein the baby is given the mother's undivided attention. Developmentally this is advantageous for the child. Breast milk is also essential in transferring immunities and antibodies from the mother to the child, making it less susceptible to diseases. Breast milk is also highly nutritious for the infant's mental and physical development; thus nursing for prolonged periods resulted in healthier children (Robins, 1993: 89).

The mother and her child would have a tight bond, as in any society, as she is its primary teacher for the first few years of its life. It will learn by observing her going about her daily business until he (in the case of a boy) is old enough to learn what his father does (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115). A girl will stay with her mother, learning all the skills necessary to effectively run a home: making clothes, providing food, keeping the home in order and minding the children (Hawass, 2000: 95). Little children would need more care and supervision than older children, but older children often helped around the house, and in this way also passively learned the skills of homemaking.

School was not something compulsory and the vast majority of the population did not attend school (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115). Mostly, only the elite classes could send their children to school and there they would learn to read and write and perhaps do the basic arithmetic necessary for conducting business. School, in effect, trained the upper

male echelons to be businessmen, or officiates of the state (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 116). They could also become scribes. A scribe was the most elite of the skilled craftsmen and arguably required the most training (Casson, 2001: 54). There are almost no records of female scribes, though they did exist, as is attested by the female equivalent title of 'scribe' (Hawass, 2000: 95).

A mother's task was essentially finished when her child reached puberty (Robins, 1993: 110). For boys, this meant becoming men and going out to work until finding a suitable wife. For girls this did not mean becoming women. The transition from girlhood to womanhood only truly occurred when she was in charge of her own household, thus married (Graves-Brown, 2010: 53 & 57). This meant that unmarried women were essentially regarded as inferior, since they were not regarded as full adults. This seems unfair by modern standards, but in the Egyptian mind-set an unmarried woman had failed to complete the rites of passage.

Circumcision occurred for boys around the age of puberty. It was not a prescribed tradition and no dogmatic code dictated it. Therefore, the practice thereof fluctuated throughout Egyptian history, sometimes not being practised at all (Toivari-Viitala, 2001: 193-194). There is some evidence to indicate female circumcision, but no female mummy has ever been found to be circumcised, therefore we cannot definitely say that female circumcision was practiced in ancient Egypt, or how widespread it was (if it indeed existed) (Filer, 2001). It is unclear whether this practice was adopted from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, whether it developed independently, or whether it has connections to the Osiris-cult - as one might assume, because of how Osiris' phallus had been removed. In any event, circumcision was definitely used to mark the passage from boyhood to manhood (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 115). It is unclear whether it served the same function for women, since marriage largely filled this role. Perhaps it was used to indicate that a girl was of the appropriate age for marriage, but this is based purely upon assumption.

In any event, once a woman left the home and started a new family, this became her primary home and family. She became mistress of that household and sought to fulfil the role society had bestowed upon her.

2.1.1.4 *Death and Burial*

Women in ancient Egypt enjoyed the same funerary customs as men, and were buried in much the same fashion, though men always had more illustrious tombs (Robins, 2001: 513). The body would be mummified in the same fashion and the same rituals would have been performed. The non-royal women of ancient Egypt among the higher classes would be buried in a burial shaft, which (depending on the wealth of the individual) could have been attached to a funerary chapel for the purpose of the funerary cult. This chapel could contain statues of the deceased, or stelae (Robins, 1993: 164). Men and women of the lower social classes are presumed to have been simply buried in the ground.

Women were also buried in sarcophagi, and their tombs could be just as illustriously painted as those of men. They could also be buried with the “Book of the Dead” (Robins, 1993: 168). The only notable difference between the tombs of men and women is that in the tombs of men, we have many scenes in which the husband’s wife is depicted; whereas in tombs of women, their husbands are omitted (Roth, 1999: 45). There is an example which Roth (1999, 45) mentions which is the exception to the rule, the tomb of Nefermaat, which depicts her husband catching birds. No other female tomb depicts or mentions a husband. One might suppose that the omission has to do with the status of men versus the status of women, as depicted through art. In the tombs of the men, the women would have been depicted as smaller (thus of lesser status), as is in accordance with *maat*, and also emphasizing the husband’s importance as the tomb-owner (Robins, 1993: 165). Thus, if the man were to be depicted in the tomb of his wife, he would have had to have been depicted as the larger figure, so perhaps in order to sidestep the convention; the ancient Egyptians simply omitted the more powerful individual from the depiction. Thus the tomb-owner was still the most important figure in the tomb.

Roth (1999: 51) refutes this theory, by stating that if this were the case, we would assume mothers and fathers to be omitted from the tombs of children, though they are not. Rather she proposes (1999: 51) that the assimilation with Osiris is the reason for the omission. Women, like men, were assimilated with Osiris for the purpose of rebirth. The assimilation did not change their sex (since this was part of the individual's essence), but it did, according to Roth (1999: 51) make the presence of the husband unnecessary, since the woman fulfilled the male sexual role as Osiris, by begetting her own rebirth. Thus making any sexual relationship she had with a man while alive irrelevant and perhaps even a hindrance to her rebirth. She supports her theory (Roth, 1999: 51) by mentioning that chapels created for the wife during her lifetime (i.e. their intention was not funerary), like that of Nefertari at Abu Simbel, often depicted the husband and wife together.

The fact that both men and women assimilated themselves with Osiris is quite interesting, but easily explained, because Osiris has no female equivalent. As Robins (1993: 175) states, this act seems to speak for the funerary rituals of women in general, since it seems that all funerary rights were originally intended for the burial of men. We can deduce this by the fact that women seem to have had to “feminise” male nouns in texts, funerary equipment and monuments (Robins, 1993: 175). There are no specific nouns or figures specially developed for women. This being said, both men and women were thought to enjoy the same afterlife, and have equal access to it.

Women also had an added role in the funerary process as professional mourners. These women would attend funerals, during which they would mourn the deceased by wailing and covering the heads with ash, while the priest (who was always male) conducted the funerary ritual (Robins, 2001: 513).

2.1.1.5 *Function in Society*

As has been reiterated, the ancient Egyptian woman's primary function was that of wife and mother. In this role, the Egyptian woman “manned” the home and thereby facilitated the most important aspect of Egyptian society: procreation. By modern standards this role

is perhaps understated, seen as oppressive, and a myriad of anti-feminist taglines could be applied to it. But in the ancient Egyptian context, this was an important role. Females were undoubtedly seen as the weaker sex, but their role in society was nevertheless an important one. They perpetuated the all-important cycle of life; which was indisputably the main theme of the Egyptian religion, and because of the inter-woven nature of the Egyptian societal spheres it must be assumed that the Egyptians themselves understood cycles to be a feature of their daily lives, even the uneducated “man-on-the-ground” Egyptian should have at least had a basic understanding of this.

The mothers in Egyptian society functioned as the primary role-models, teachers (of skills and values), religious leaders, etc. for their children; and many more titles could be added to these, depending on the social standing of the woman. Mothers were important in the lives of their children, as they were there every step of the way in their journey toward adulthood. This cannot be over-emphasized, because in our modern lifestyles we live with our parents for a longer period of time, but we also start to do “our own thing” much earlier; because we are not as tied to the home. We are socialised much earlier away from the home, through schools and after-school activities. An identity that is uniquely your own and separate from your household is in some cases even encouraged, because our society is much more focused on the individual and individual success. In the Egyptian context, especially in the lower social classes, the success of one family member, meant the success of the others, because they functioned as a unit (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 110). The home was an organism, not unlike a business, and needed to be directed as such; with each family member playing their part to make the business work. Without this family structure, and emphasis on close-knit family ties, the Egyptian way of life might have been completely different. It is proposed that this family structure was directly inherited from their religion. The Egyptians’ main religious groupings were families and triads of nuclear families: a mother, a father and a child. They had a specific function within the triad. Whether the religious idea came about first, and society followed suit; or whether society was already formed in this way, and religion was used to justify the status quo, is unclear. But it is strongly advocated that a link between the two does exist.

In the role of mother, women also fulfilled the role of primary caregiver. This meant that if someone became sick, or needed help, the mother would fill this role. She would either try her own remedies to heal the sick family member; or if the case was more serious, contact a “doctor” (Tyldesley, 1994: 31). Unfortunately, even after the mother and the “doctor’s” best efforts, most people who contracted diseases died, as a direct result of the lack of medical knowledge.

The role of caregiver can also be translated into the role of protector; as the wife effectively protected her home and children in the very same capacity. She would watch over them and her home, while her husband was working outside the home (Casson, 2001: 36). The protection in this sense was very much a mother-hen type of protection; where she would not be generally violent or angry, but if threatened she would not hesitate to act.

The woman, ultimately, was “Mistress of the Home” (*nebet per*). This was her title, and it was not shared, or accompanied by caveats. She was the ruler of the household (Hawass, 2000: 98). As Ptahhotep instructs during the Old Kingdom in Lichtheim (1973: 69):

*When you prosper and found your house,
and love your wife with ardour,
fill her belly, clothe her back,
ointment soothes her body.
Gladden her heart as long as you live;
she is a fertile field for her lord.
Do not contend with her in court,
keep her from power, restrain her-
her eye is her storm when she gazes-
thus you will make her stay in your house.*

Even though this extract seems to condemn the idea of giving a woman power, it does so because it warns about her anger, or the sway she may have (depending on how the second last line is interpreted). One could interpret it as a warning against crossing/angering her, bearing in mind the Egyptians' mythologies surrounding the eyes. By leaving her to tend the homestead, she is free to exert her power there; and the husband will placate her by doing certain "nice" things for her. The moral of this extract is that if the husband treats his wife well, then she will be a good wife and mistress of their home. Furthermore, there were certain safeguards in place for women whose husbands did not treat them well. Women could take legal action against their husbands, if they beat them, or treated them in a way that they deemed unjust (Graves-Brown, 2010: 40).

As mistress of the home, widows were allowed to conduct business, property deals, and even negotiate marriages for their daughters (Tyldesley, 1994: 50). They were not stripped of their rights, nor were they made to be a burden for their children. Furthermore, they could bequeath their possessions legally unto whom they chose (Graves-Brown, 2010: 71). If some of their children treated them badly, and others did not; they could bequeath their possessions to the children they deemed deserving of inheritance; and not the others (regardless of their gender). This is the case with the woman, Nau-nakht from Deir el-Medina, who disinherited four of her children who were treating her badly (Johnson, 1996: 183).

2.1.1.6 *Status in Society*

Nevertheless, the woman's status in society was still in the lowest societal rung and in that rung, they were placed only above children and slaves (Robins, 2001: 510). Be that as it may, (male) peasants are ranked just above women; and general workers just above them. This means that the men (of these social standings) were perhaps also socially looked down upon. The social standings of these people do seem to be ranked according to the importance of their assigned role in society. This makes sense, because these people were the masses upon which the economy was built, but they were of little

political importance. They were not politically integral to the running of the country, but as an organism, they functioned behind the scenes to keep it going.

Thus, if viewed in this way, we may have been unnecessarily understating the role of Egyptian women. Undoubtedly their role was not viewed as important as that of the men (since they ploughed the fields, etc.), but to think that their role was of no importance is perhaps overstepping. This thesis proposes that the role of Egyptian women was just beneath the importance of the general male peasantry, because their role was just as essential to the streamlined running of the economy and thus the politics of Egypt. In our modern context it may be too easy to overlook the essential role that Egyptian women played, but we must remember that the running and maintaining of a household is no easy feat. Especially when taking into account that everything in the house needed to be made “from scratch”. This was a fulltime occupation, which needed to work cohesively with the husband’s job outside of the home, in order to make the nuclear household run smoothly and thus, the country run smoothly. Egypt was built upon the foundations of a strong workforce, tapering and focusing the strength through the rungs of society; focusing upon the centre and seat of Egyptian power: the pharaoh (Casson, 2001: 11-12).

One does not wish to over-emphasize the role of the women of ancient Egypt, but the evidence put forth and discussed, points to a different way of emphasizing, without over-emphasizing. Women in ancient Egypt were not treated equally to men; and though they did know some freedom, it is nowhere near comparable to modern feminism, or liberalism. It is simply proposed that the Egyptians’ view of womanhood (and the importance of women in society) was more complex than is sometimes put forth.

2.1.2 Priestesses

As cursorily discussed in a previous section on the cult of Hathor, female priests did exist in ancient Egypt; and they were quite prominent in the cult of Hathor. This section would like to focus specifically on the roles of non-royal priestesses and would like to note that

the priestesses discussed were not confined to the cult of Hathor, but also that of Neith, and the male god Ptah (among others) (Gosline, 1996: 34).

2.1.2.1 *Functions*

It appears that, for the most part, priestesses of lower social classes did general tasks in the temple. There is little evidence that women from low social classes held any prestigious titles, and therefore there is little to suggest that their roles stretched further than that of general upkeep. They possibly helped with temple-tasks that were not ritualized and were most probably only there to help facilitate the tasks of the priests of higher ranking (Robins, 1993: 142). It appears most likely that these women aided the ritual process, without actually forming a central part of it; possibly by making clothes, or food, for the priesthood. The rituals and rites were conducted by the priests of rank and title (Graves-Brown, 2010: 86).

2.1.2.2 *Titles and Epithets*

Gosline (1996: 27) proposes that our approach towards titles and epithets of priestesses in ancient Egypt is flawed by our use of language. He states that because our language imposes a distinction between priest and priestess (to signify male or female), we are unconsciously designating a ranking distinction as well as a gender distinction; which does not exist in the original language.

According to Gosline (1996: 27) the title most priestesses (and priests) held was “servant of the god” (as mentioned in a previous section); but that in the original Egyptian the term “servant” would be transliterated with a feminine word-ending: -t. The feminine ending of the word disappeared toward the Middle Kingdom, but both male and female “servants” continued to carry the title. This would necessarily indicate (and is fervently argued by Gosline 1996: 27-28) that there existed no distinction in the eyes of the ancient Egyptian between a male and female priest; and that their function, and importance, (at the level of “servant of the god”) was essentially equal. One is inclined to agree with Gosline’s assertion, but there is no way to determine whether it is true, or false, or to

what a degree it may be true, or false. Though the evidence put forth by Gosline would sway one to argue that, because it is evident that the Egyptians placed no gender distinction between male and female “servants of the god” it could be assumed that their statuses were more equal than previously thought. This thesis would however, still be cautious to say definitely one way, or the other, because in ancient Egypt (as in a lot of modern countries) what is written on paper, is not necessarily what is put into practice and also because of the abundance of theories which has resulted from this anomaly. For example, Graves-Brown (2010: 86) proposes that the male “servants” were placed in charge of the female “servants”, but once again, there is very little to support, or disprove this theory.

Apart from “servant of the god”, lower ranked women could also become temple songstresses (Robins, 1993: 145). They were not necessarily a part of the priesthood, but there is no definite evidence to point either way. They are made mention of here, because they did play a role in rituals and processions; especially in the cult of the goddess Hathor, and therefore had some measure of religious significance (Robins, 1993: 145).

2.1.2.3 *Status*

The priesthood was perhaps an easy way for a woman to obtain a measure of status and title; as there were very few other ways to do this. Priests are not explicitly ranked in the social pyramid, but they were undoubtedly ranked above the general populace. It would thus be fair to assume that a priestess would be ranked above a woman from the general populace. It would also be fair to assume, in light of Gosline’s assertions (1996: 27), that these women (at least in the construct of the temple) were near-to, or equal, in status to men of the same ranking. This is important to note, as this could perhaps have been a motivating factor for a woman of low social standing to join the priesthood.

The priesthood in general was a way for the seemingly distant world of the gods to become tangible to the lowest economic class of Egyptian; and the importance of this can perhaps not be stressed enough. Because of the interwoven nature of Egyptian society, if

one societal feature fails, they all will inevitably suffer. The Egyptian religion largely justified their way of life, and because of this was extremely important to the peasantry; upon whose backs the entire Egyptian civilization could maintain its steady function.

2.1.3 Portrayal in Art

As Egyptian art is steeped in symbolism, it is perhaps of integral importance to discuss



Figure 21: Rahotep and Nofret depicting the colour-differentiation

the symbolism surrounding the portrayal of general women in Egyptian art. The most important and most obvious symbolic distinction, that is uniquely female, is their colouring; which was generally a lot lighter than that of males. The lighter colouring of women, and by contrast the darker colouring of men, was to indicate the difference in gender, but also to emphasize the difference between the gender roles. Men worked outside the home, and as such, were exposed to a lot more direct sunlight: causing their skin to darken. In contrast to this, women worked inside the home, and

thus were exposed to very little sunlight; causing their skin to stay light (Robins, 1989: 108). This colouring based on gender is a key symbol in ancient Egyptian art, as it alludes to the keen distinction between the genders, as well as the underlying gender roles.

Women were not overtly sexualized in formal art, and though the breast was shown, this was merely to indicate the essence of “woman”, as an idea in accordance with *maat* (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 200). It was not meant to indicate actual nakedness, nor was it meant to inspire any sexually charged

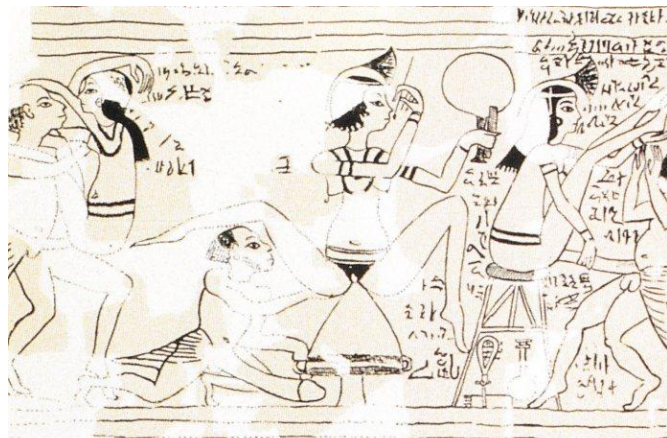


Figure 22: Illustration from the Turin Papyrus

thoughts. It was merely the portrayal of a woman. In contrast to this is the informal art, such as the *Turin-papyrus* which was kept secret for a long time, because of the “pornographic” nature of its contents (Graves-Brown, 2010: 108-109). It is a collection of sex acts, depicting men and women with comically large sex-organs, which has (because of its content) been dubbed the “Satirical Papyrus”. Along with this, we have figurines of couples involved in sex-acts. These examples should not be mistaken to signify more than they do. They are perhaps the closest thing we have to “artistic expression” from ancient Egypt, but they were for private amusement, and were definitely deviations from the norm. They are studied because they are anomalies.



Figure 23: Lady May with her arm around the shoulder of her husband, Amenhotep

In formal art, sex-acts have been disguised with clever word-play and allegories. Scenes depicting a couple in a bedroom allude to sex, or if the wife is on the bed playing music, it is an allusion to sex. The act is never depicted in formal art, but even the act of pouring oil/ water between the husband and wife, or shooting arrows is thought to indicate the act of sex; as a hieroglyphic play on the words: “ejaculate” and “pour”, which are both transliterated as *sti* (Graves-Brown, 2010: 111).

Women in ancient Egyptian art are most often depicted as the loving wife. The pose is very formal: the husband and wife are depicted next to each other, while the wife puts one arm around her husband (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 204). This rigidity (along with many other rigid canons) became freer during the Amarna period; where the royal couple were often depicted kissing, or embracing (Freed, 2004: 336 & 340). As royal art generally trickled down into the art of the general Egyptian, we must assume that the people of the Amarna period followed suit.



Figure 24: Akhenaten and Nefertiti beneath the Aten



Figure 25: Female dancer

Dancers and musicians have often been thought to be overtly sexualized, because of their lack of clothes, whether this reflects reality or not is difficult to say, as Egyptian art, by definition, is an art of symbols. Some scholars have thought that these dancers, or musicians, were perhaps prostitutes, because of how they were depicted. But most modern scholars now agree that this was probably not the case (Graves-Brown, 2010: 82).

2.2 *Royal Women*

This thesis has decided to make a distinction between royal and non-royal women and it will become increasingly clear why, as this section continues. The experiences of these two groups of women were vastly different, from their contact with religion, their daily lives and stretching into their function in society. Not only were royal women more elevated than women from the peasantry; but some of them were also incredibly ambitious, greatly adored and revered (Hawass, 2000: 38).

Royal women were not just women who happened to have been born, or married, into royalty. As the pharaoh essentially reigned as god on earth, the wife and mother of the pharaoh became the wife and mother of a god respectively (Robins, 1993: 44). And with that title, came privilege and status. The daily lives of Egyptian royalty will be discussed in the following section, as well as their status and function in society. Their roles in the priesthood will also be discussed, as well as how they were portrayed in art.

2.2.1 *Daily Lives*

Egyptian royal women held a certain amount of status; this status was displayed through the titles they were known by: “God’s Wife” and “God’s Mother”. The Egyptians did not use a word, which would mean “queen” in our language. Rather they employed these titles; which at the same time mean more, and less, than the word “queen”. On the one hand, the word “queen”, in modernity, could refer to a woman of equal position to a king and it can also mean a woman ruling as king. In essence “queen” means: female regent.

To the Egyptians, this is not what the pharaoh's wife was. The pharaoh was regent, and reigned supreme (Hawass, 2000: 29-30). His wife was called "God's Wife" and also held (from the 12th Dynasty onward) the title "Principal wife of the King" (or if she were a lesser wife, simply "Wife of the King"). This title places her at a station beneath what our modern understanding of "queen" would be. The title "God's Mother", however, was an elevated position. It was only given to a woman once her son had ascended the throne; thus a woman who had previously held no standing, could be elevated to this position. "God's Mother" held higher status than "God's Wife" (principal or lesser) and Graves-Brown (2010: 130) suggests that this is because of the general status of mothers in Egyptian society, rather than women, or wives, in Egyptian society.

There were, however, some female rulers. The most notable being Hatshepsut, though being female, she necessarily had to adapt to ruling "as a man". Not to mean that she necessarily dressed like a man, or conducted business in a supposed "manly" way; but that she had to be depicted in royal monuments as a man, and that she had to justify her reign and ascent to the throne (Hawass, 2000: 33-34). She will be discussed again later.

In essence the Egyptians had no female idea of ruler; rather they had a duality in mind: a man and woman as a couple, as this is how a lot of their mythology is structured; to incorporate dualities, and through the duality, order would be maintained (Tyldesley, 1994: 209). This is what Egyptian pharaohs symbolized: the maintenance of order, *maat*.

2.2.1.1 Fertility, Sexuality, Pregnancy, Childrearing, Death and Burial

The wives of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh, perhaps more so than the general population, needed to be fertile. Their fertility and ability to produce an heir was incredibly important; as a ruler without an heir had effectively failed in maintaining the cosmic, and social, order (Robins, 1993: 37-38). The heir of an Egyptian pharaoh was extremely important; because he was symbolic of the cosmic order the Egyptians based their entire world order on (Robins, 1993: 21). Their sense of justice (in a certain sense) was tied into the royal family as a canon: the pharaoh, his wife, and their son.

Infertility in royal families, or the inability to produce a male heir, was therefore a substantially larger problem for Egyptian royalty, than for the Egyptian peasantry. Although the pharaoh had a collection of lesser wives and, in some instances, a harem, the children that resulted from these unions (it would seem) did not have the exact same status as children from with the pharaoh's principal wife (Robins, 1993: 38). If the pharaoh's principal wife could not conceive, or they could not have a son, the pharaoh could name a child by a lesser wife his heir. There was a certain amount of danger in doing so, since the legitimacy of the heir's reign could then be disputed; and all-powerful status of the pharaoh could then be called into question as well (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 80). In order to minimize the cause for dispute about legitimacy, some pharaohs, like Thutmose I, married legitimate daughters to illegitimate sons, in order to counter any disputes concerning legitimacy; though as this example proves, the legitimate daughter in question (Hatshepsut) later used her status as legitimate daughter, and to her meaning heir, to springboard her claim to the Egyptian throne (Hawass, 2000: 33).

It is clear that some pharaohs had harems, especially during the Ramesside-era; where it



Figure 26: The abdomen of Amunet

is understood that Ramses II fathered more than 100 children during his lifetime (Robins, 1993: 36). The famous harem-plot, where there was a conspiracy to assassinate Ramses III and place a usurper on the throne, points to the existence and popularity of harems during this time-period (Tyldesley, 1994: 190). Another harem which is of special interest to this thesis, is that of Mentuhotep II; as it is to his "harem" that a woman bearing the fertility tattoos (as a

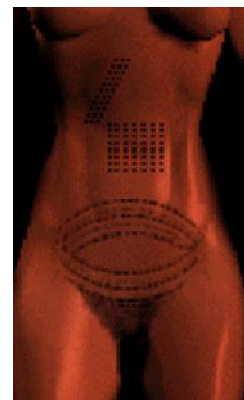


Figure 27: A three dimensional rendering of Amunet's abdomen

priestess of Hathor) belonged. Amunet's mummy has a series of dotted patterns (as seen on the fertility dolls, cf. Figure 19 page 35) on its abdomen as can be seen in figures 26 and 27. She was buried in the temple precinct of Deir el-Bahari (Bart, 2011). In this instance Graves-Brown (2010: 136) posits

that Mentuhotep II may have used this connection with the goddess to legitimize his claim to the throne and this theory is discussed again later. Thus it appears that not only the offspring of lesser wives, but also the women themselves, could serve a legitimizing function (if used within the right context).

Though Tyldesley (1994: 180) rightly states that what we translate to mean “harem” may just as easily be translated to Women’s Apartments, as we are not completely certain what the Egyptians meant by the term. It was customary for large groups of women, who were related to the pharaoh, or affiliated with the royal court, to stay in these quarters; but there is no direct evidence which would necessitate an association to sexual bondage (Tyldesley, 1994: 180). Though it is clear that the pharaoh had more than one wife, we cannot discount that some women, with whom the pharaoh had no sexual relationship, resided there as well (Graves-Brown, 2010: 137-138). This calls into question our definition of the word “harem” in the Egyptian context. To use a different word would perhaps be prudent, but this thesis does not think it necessary, as this might result in further misnomers; as scholars still disagree on what the Egyptians meant (Graves-Brown, 2010: 136). Therefore the word “harem” will be used, but the reader is urged to take cognisance of what has been stated with regard to the term.

Sexuality in Egypt was not something to be ashamed of, nor was it something to be advertised. Egyptian female sexuality, as far as royalty was concerned, was not something to be publicly flaunted. Though, to be fair, it is quite clear that some queens used their feminine sexuality to their advantage. Perhaps it would be unfair to say that they used it as a tool to get ahead, but it is clear that they did achieve great status with the men in their lives, based, to some extent, upon their physical beauty. The queens that exemplify this, better than others, would be Nefertari and Cleopatra. Nefertari was the principal wife of pharaoh Ramses II and he had temples built in her honour (Hawass, 2000: 53). Her tomb in the Valley of the Queens is also one of the most aesthetically beautiful tombs in the valley, even rivalling some in the Valley of the Kings. She is sometimes depicted wearing seemingly sheer garments (Figure 36, page 62). This may have been to emphasize her femininity and perhaps allude to the sway her femininity had

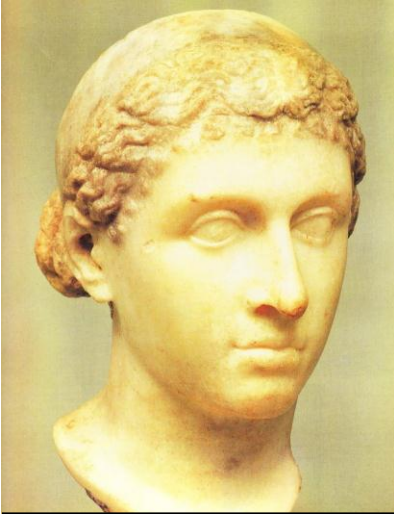


Figure 28: Cleopatra VII

over her husband (Kampp-Seyfried, 2004: 245). She did not hold any exceptional titles, but it is clear that her husband held her in great esteem. Cleopatra VII, perhaps the most famous of seductresses (and perhaps unfairly portrayed by biased historians as such) definitely could get what she wanted from men, famously elevating Egypt's position during the reign of Julius Caesar; and further playing Marc Antony against the new Caesar Octavian (later Caesar Augustus) (Kessler, 2004a: 294).

It is doubtful that she was as beautiful as it is fabled, but in all fairness, she was able to manipulate her high-profile romantic relationships to the advantage of herself and her country, for quite a period of time.

It is unclear to what extent these women relied solely upon their sexuality to further their goals, but it is clear that Egypt, even in our popular imagination, still sparks images of beauty and feminine sexuality. It is perhaps because of the exotic tales told by ancient historians about Egypt, which have persisted into modernity, but on the other hand, the Egyptians themselves placed a lot of value on physical beauty (Hawass, 2000: 123). They were among the first civilizations to enhance their physical beauty cosmetically, with make-up and perfumes. All Egyptians, but especially the more affluent classes, used make-up and perfumes, and though it was not restricted to the female sex, women who smelled nice enjoyed greater attention from men, than women who did not (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 129-130). Perfumes were put on garments, hair and bodies and were made from different scented oils. They were extremely popular throughout Egypt and are mentioned quite often in love poetry (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 132-133).

Though royal Egyptian women perhaps led a life of luxury, certain experiences held equal discomfort and risk, regardless of one's personal status. Such an experience was pregnancy and childbirth. Even though the elite perhaps had better access to "doctors"

and more comfortable birthing quarters, the procedures were still the same and the risks were just as great.

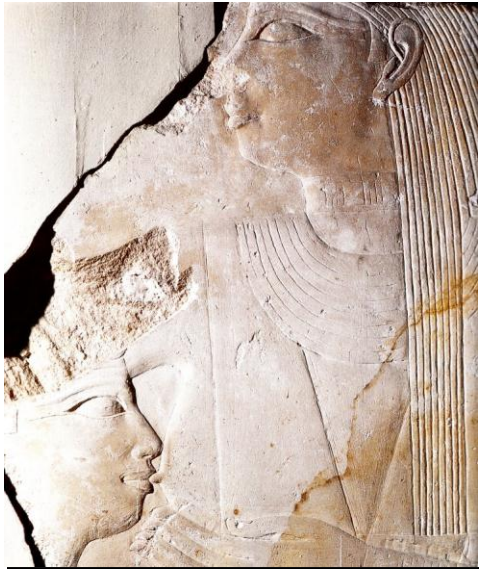


Figure 29: Goddess nursing Pharaoh Wenis

Though, once the child was born, its life was completely different from the life of the average Egyptian (Robins, 1993: 37). Most evidence points to the fact that Egyptian royalty did not nurse their children (Robins, 1993: 89). Wet-nurses were generally employed for this purpose, and one reason why this might have been, is so that the mother could become pregnant again as soon as possible; as nursing prolonged the period of time between pregnancies; and because the pharaoh, above all other Egyptians, needed a large family (though none had families quite as large as

Ramses II) (Graves-Brown, 2010: 140). In this case it would seem that the Egyptian religious notions were set aside in favour of practicality, as in the mythology the goddess nurses her son from her own breast (Robins, 1993: 91). One could speculate that it might have been irrelevant to the Egyptians whose breast milk was being used, in favour of possibly having more children. As more children would emphasize the pharaohs virility, and thus also act to solidify his reign and stature in the mind of the Egyptian populace, as well as the minds of Egypt's foreign enemies and allies alike.

Male children of the elite attended school from a relatively young age, but there was no formal schooling for girls, though it would appear that some did have some form of education. There is enough evidence of female literacy and female mathematic ability, not to discount female schooling entirely, but it is unclear in what form this would have occurred. Most evidence suggests that these girls were taught by a trained family member, or perhaps a tutor (Graves-Brown, 2010: 53). Especially in the case of royalty, this would seem the most apparent, as Hatshepsut's daughter Neferure, was tutored by her trusted architect Senenmut (who is rumoured to have also been Hatshepsut's lover,

thus, potentially, Neferure's father) (Tyldesley, 1994: 228). Though, Hatshepsut's daughter as an example might be a little imprudent, as Tyldesley (1994: 228) suggests that she might have been groomed to take over the throne after Hatshepsut's death; though there is little, to no evidence (aside from her education) to support this claim.

Royal women matured in much the same way other Egyptian women did, by reaching puberty and getting married. Royal women could be used in diplomatic marriages as well as legitimizing marriages (Graves-Brown, 2010: 142). It is unclear whether there were restrictions placed upon whom a royal woman could, or could not marry; though diplomatic marriages (as well as marriages in general) may have been discouraged, as we have very few examples thereof. This may be because this perhaps gave rise to ambitious men using their wives' position as a claim to the Egyptian throne (Graves-Brown, 2010: 142). Women who did not marry stayed at court, or often joined the priesthood (Tyldesley, 1994: 181). It is unclear whether they were judged in the same way as non-royal unmarried women, and one would not like to claim either way, as there is little evidence to support either claim. It will rather be stated that, as a royal woman, her royal status might have afforded her better status, regardless of her married/ unmarried status. As in the non-royal Egyptian household, once the woman, or man, left their childhood home, they started a new one and were now the leader of this new home.

Death is another experience which was inescapable, regardless of class, though the handling thereof for royalty was a little different. Royal women were buried in tombs which could rival that of men from lower social classes, their tombs were decorated and they were afforded all the luxuries in death, which they were afforded in life (Robins, 1993: 164). Royal women, like royal men, were also assimilated with Osiris in order to facilitate their rebirth. The husbands of royal women too were omitted from their tombs (Roth, 1999: 45). The only direct difference between the tombs of royal women, versus that of non-royal women, is that the royal women's tombs were more opulent.

2.2.1.2 *Function in Society*

Royal women in ancient Egypt had certain specific functions; the main and most important function being, to provide the pharaoh with a suitable heir. The queen also needed to fulfil certain roles within the mind of the society. She was the wife of a god, and also the mother (or future mother) of a god. Thus, she needed to conduct herself in a certain way. The queen's role is one that is heavily laden with mythological connections, as she was perhaps seen to be the physical embodiment of a goddess, though this shall be discussed at length in later chapters.

It would seem that, in general, royal women perhaps had less freedom than women in the general populace. They perhaps had greater access to education and status, but they had less freedom of choice and personal determination; as their lives seemed to have been mapped for them. Whether they agreed or disagreed with the status quo would be very difficult to ascertain, but one might argue, as they knew no other way of life, that they thought it was right and agreed with it. Though, the example of Hatshepsut might argue the opposite.

The queen perhaps mainly functioned as a figurehead. She was needed to legitimize the reign of the pharaoh, to provide him an heir, and to maintain the cosmic order that needed to exist in the minds and lives of all Egyptians. Perhaps her role, even if mostly cosmetic, served just as great a function as the pharaoh's; since both were relatively distant from the general populace. Though this thesis would not argue that the Egyptians viewed their queen as equal to the pharaoh, merely that she filled the same cosmetic function in their daily lives.

2.2.1.3 *Status in Society*

Royal women in Egypt enjoyed some amount of status, especially the mother of the pharaoh, but in some rare instances the queen herself became elevated in status, as well as prominent women in the priesthood and in a few instances, women ruled Egypt as pharaohs.

There are several queens who enjoyed elevated status in Egyptian history, the two most notable being, Nefertiti and Nefertari (the wives of Akhenaten/ Amenophis IV and Ramses II respectively). Nefertiti is probably the more famous of the two, and her face is

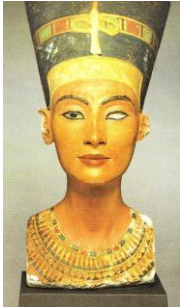


Figure 30: Nefertiti

one of the most famous Egyptian faces (Paglia, 1991: 67). She was the wife of Amenophis IV (Akhenaten) the heretic king. During his reign everything changed in Egyptian society. He rearranged the cosmic order to elevate the sun-disk (Aten) to the position of the only god, thus turning the polytheistic Egyptian religion monotheistic overnight (Robins, 2008:

149). During this religious (and because of the interwoven nature of Egyptian society) and social upheaval, Nefertiti gained a massive status enhancement. She is depicted alongside Akhenaten during key religious ceremonies, and she is even depicted performing some rites absent the king (Robins, 2008: 148).

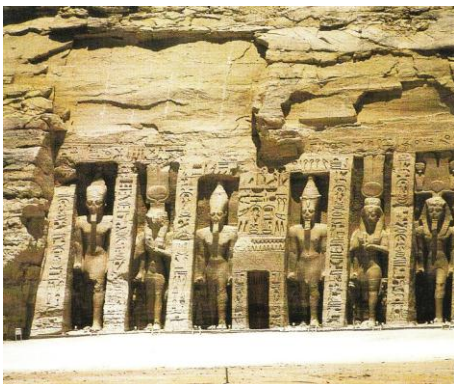


Figure 31: Nefertari's temple at Abu Simbel

Nefertari's status-advancement was not due to a social-upheaval, but rather due to her husband's high regard of her (Hawass, 2000: 53). She was elevated based solely upon the great affinity he felt for her, and built temples in her honour. She was not depicted performing rites in the same way as Nefertiti (which is not surprising), but the fact that her husband had temples built in her honour is rather telling, as this is quite rare (especially

considering Ramses II's great love of building monuments to honour himself and his great conquests).

As was stated, some women achieved the seemingly impossible and ruled in their own right as pharaoh. These occurrences were incredibly rare, and generally occurred during times of great social, or economic upheaval. They were generally short-lived and chaotic (Hawass, 2000: 29). There is one that stands out, since it does not subscribe to any of the

above-mentioned. This is the reign of Hatshepsut. Her ascent to the throne started when she was appointed co-regent to her nephew Thutmose III. She started ruling in her own right about seven years into her co-regency and ruled for about 22 years (Tyldesley, 1994: 212-214). Her rule was stable and prosperous, but it must be stated that there must have been disputes about its legitimacy. She commissioned monuments depicting fabricated scenes where her father (a greatly respected and admired pharaoh, Thutmose I) names her his heir, or alternately, an oracle proclaims her the heir (Tyldesley, 1996: 103 & 108). She ruled without a male consort, in her own right as pharaoh, and depicted herself as pharaoh (a man donning the royal insignia) in official depictions of her (Hawass, 2000: 33-34). She also took up a title (which was traditionally reserved for men): the “Lord of Doing Things” (Graves-Brown, 2010: 129). Her reign was wiped from the records after her death and it is thought that this was done in order to set right the all-important cosmic order (Tyldesley, 1994: 225). But what is of special interest is that her reign was undisputed and prosperous for a prolonged period of time, which shows that the Egyptian people did not oppose a female ruler in practice, but rather in principle.

Two examples of stations of power within the priesthood were the titles of “God’s Wife of Amun” and “Divine Adoratrice”. The “God’s wife of Amun” was generally a title occupied by the queen (though Hatshepsut passed it on to her daughter Neferure, when she took on the titles of the pharaoh) and was elevated during the reign of Ahmose I, when he also elevated the city of Thebes (Amun being the most important Theban deity) (Graves-Brown, 2010: 87). This title had more status than merely “Principal Wife of the Pharaoh” and held a rather large amount of power, as the priests of Amun were situated rather highly on the social pyramid.



The “Divine Adoratrice” is a title associated with the “God’s Wife of Amun”, but had its own domain, which functioned as a main administrative centre which had its own property. This position was generally held by women who already had some measure of status, or

Figure 32: Karomama as “Divine Adoratrice” of Amun

were well-connected, like the daughter of

the “High Priest of Amun” (Graves-Brown, 2010: 87). As an administrative office it put a woman in a position of relative power, and as such this office held a lot of status, especially when it became associated with the station of “God’s Wife of Amun” (Robins, 1993: 152). Both of these titles were finally done away with and one motive for this might be the amount of power the women who held them could potentially wield.

2.2.2 Priestesses

It is obvious that Egyptian queens held certain specific offices and fulfilled certain specific functions within the priesthood. It was a relatively easy way to achieve status and it held responsibilities which royal women probably had very little experience of (Robins, 1993: 151). As a priestess, especially a head priestess (such as the titles mentioned above), the queen would need to perform certain rites and ceremonies; which were usually reserved to be performed by the head male priest (Graves-Brown, 2010: 26). We must thus imagine that a woman performing these tasks probably knew that she was surpassing the status of the women beneath her, as well as those at the same level as herself.

Even though some of these titles and stations seem to have been passed on or inherited; these seem to be in the minority. For the most part senior titles within the priesthood (at least in the cult of Hathor) were obtained independently, though we have little evidence to point out exactly how one would go about obtaining such a title (Galvin, 1984: 46). In most cases however, the title-holders were affluent or at least prominent individuals, who were directly, or indirectly associated with the royal family; which points to some form of connectedness playing a role in the acquisition (perhaps in the literal sense of the word) of such a title.

The means by which a woman would acquire this status (since it can only be speculated upon) is not the main concern for this thesis. What is interesting to note, is that the titles were not (for the most part) inherited and thus were in fact acquired independently. This

means that some women had a measure of ambition or drive to hold an independent title, which could potentially elevate her status above that of her husband (Gosline, 1996: 26).

2.2.3 *Portrayal in Art*

Royal women were not portrayed in a vastly different way from women in general, except for a few key (and telling) aspects: the most important aspect being size. In Egyptian art size is not meant to be taken as a literal depiction of someone's height, rather size was meant to literally translate to the person's status. The greater the person, the bigger she was; and the more insignificant, the smaller she was. Following this model, the gods were the biggest, followed by the pharaoh, and interestingly, then his wife (Brewer & Teeter, 2007: 197). This is interesting because women (in general) are regarded as far below men on the status-schema,

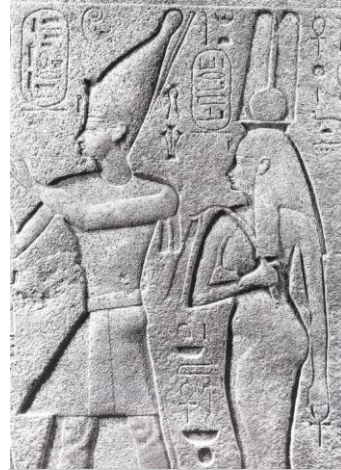


Figure 33: Osorkon II and his wife Karomama, notice the difference in height

but in art they are just below. This is true for general women in Egyptian art as well. When a woman is depicted next to, or close to her husband, she would be slightly shorter than he was. Perhaps this was an echo from the natural world, but this may also perhaps have been a reason for the perceived superiority of men. Perhaps if, in the Egyptian mind, height equalled stature, then women were inferior, based solely on the fact that they were shorter; although this is merely a theory as to one of the justifications of Egyptian social order. Royal women would thus be depicted as bigger than non-royal women. The queen would also naturally be depicted in all her regalia, wearing all the symbols of queen-ship. These were a lavish headdress, which often had either the uraeus, or the vulture on top, or both, and when it had the vulture on top, it often also had the wings of the vulture spread over the 'hair'-part of the headdress (Graves-Brown, 2010: 131).

Several Egyptian women were not depicted in the "normal" canonised Egyptian way. These were Nefertiti (and the princesses), Hatshepsut and Nefertari. Nefertiti, as previously mentioned, formed part of the heretic-period, known as the Amarna-period

(named after the new Egyptian capital, located near the modern town of Amarna). During the Amarna-period, Egyptian art underwent substantial change (Robins, 1994: 121-123). It became, for lack of a better word, un-Egyptian. Where there previously was a lack of realism and fluidity, there was now movement and perhaps even hints of realism. The royal family and royal couple were depicted embracing and sharing intimate family moments; but most important are the depictions of Nefertiti. She is often depicted performing religious rites on her own, rites which generally would have been depicted as



Figure 34: Nefertiti and Akhenaten offering to the god, Aten

performed by only the pharaoh, or if she were included, her role would have been that of companion. It seems also that features which were emulated by the Egyptians were exaggerated in the art of the Amarna-period, such as elongated heads and necks and feminine bodies (prevalent on both Akhenaten and Nefertiti) (Robins, 2008: 148). It is unclear why these features specifically were chosen during this period, but they were not restricted to

Akhenaten, or even to Nefertiti, as their children also display these features (Robins, 2008: 148).



Figure 35: Hatshepsut wearing the crown and false-beard of the pharaoh.

Hatshepsut, as previously stated, was a woman who ruled as pharaoh and she appears in official depictions of her dressed accordingly; donning the false beard of the pharaoh and having the form of a man. She appeared as a man in these depictions because of the way Egyptian art functioned in the socio-religious Egyptian construct. There is some argument amongst Egyptologists as to whether the art is merely symbolic, or whether she wore the royal regalia in reality (Tyldesley, 1994: 223). One cannot say

for certain, but could propose, because of how Egyptian art functioned, that she did not dress as a man in reality. Perhaps being depicted wearing the pharaonic regalia resulted in her not needing to wear it in reality.



Figure 36: Nefertari, wearing a sheer dress playing senet

Hathor tripartite wig coupled with the other insignia of the queen.

These three women were chosen as examples because they were exceptions to the rule. Their reigns (as queen, or king) were exceptional and serve as great studies to scholars who like to study anomalies in canonized civilizations; but for the purpose of this thesis, it must be understood that they are used as examples to illustrate the way that Egyptian art could be used to further the personal propaganda of the pharaoh. For Hatshepsut it served a legitimizing function, for Akhenaten (via Nefertiti) it was a way to illustrate his new religious order and for Ramses II (via Nefertari) it was a way to emphasize her physical beauty and the great affection he held for her.

2.3 Conclusions

This section has illustrated the lives of the women of ancient Egypt, from birth to death. Every important life stage has been examined and a distinction was made between the royal women and the non-royal women. It was found that religion played a distinct role in every sphere of the ancient Egyptian women's lives, and that there was a difference between how royal women and non-royal women experienced different stages in their lives. It was also found that there were certain important ways that the women of ancient Egypt could attain more power in their lives. They also had access to a certain measure of freedom. The following section will investigate to what an extent Hathor played a role in these different spheres and what her influence was in the lives of the ancient Egyptian woman.

3. *Women and Hathor*

As has been illustrated in the previous section; the lives of the ancient Egyptian women were dictated to a large extent by society, and its expectations. They lived and died according to religious dogma, because religion was a way of life, not something they just practised. This understanding will help the reader navigate this section of the thesis as the previous two sections largely dealt with our two main themes independently. Therefore, this section will bring these two together, in order to illustrate the nature of the relationship, as well as the extent of the relationship. Hathor has been discussed with regards to her mythology and symbolism, but now she will be discussed as a key goddess in the lives of ancient Egyptian women. The discussion will take place against the background of what has been discussed about the lives of ancient Egyptian women, both royal and non-royal, and in this way, it will become clear what the role was that Hathor played in the lives of the ancient Egyptian women. This section will rely largely on source material to substantiate arguments, as the original artefacts are possibly our most reliable evidence. The discussion will focus on the ancient Egyptian woman's everyday life, her personal relationship with Hathor, the priestesses of Hathor and the portrayals of women and Hathor in art. This section does not aim to simply reiterate what has already been discussed, but rather to discuss it in a new light; a "Hathoric" light.

3.1 *Everyday Lives*

It is evident that the ancient Egyptian women's lives were multi-faceted, with different life-stages and socio-religious expectations connected to each specific stage. Here these stages will be discussed in the same format as before. Firstly the most important aspect of an ancient Egyptian woman's life shall be discussed: fertility; followed by birth, healing and safeguarding, music and finally death, and (as with every social aspect in ancient Egypt) there will be areas which overlap, though in these instances the reader is urged to view the section as a whole, rather than focus on the smaller sub-sections.

3.1.1. Fertility

As has been stated, fertility was a central (if not the central) aspect of an ancient Egyptian woman's life. Procreation was extremely important and this often prompted couples to seek out the intervention/ help of the gods. The goddess Hathor was extremely helpful in this capacity. As the goddess of sex and fertility, she was thought to aid the ancient Egyptians with all their problems concerning infertility and sex. She is mentioned quite frequently in love poems and many fertility offerings were made to her, by both men and women. These offerings were mainly in the form of phalli and fertility dolls. It is thought that the phalli were offerings by men and the dolls offerings by women (Pinch, 1993: 225 & 245).

The fertility doll/ fertility idol has been a point of contention for Egyptologists, as there is some disagreement over whether these idols in fact have connections to fertility. Pinch (1993: 211-221) has chronicled these theories, largely debunking the most of them; leaving only the fertility theory intact. This thesis must necessarily agree with Pinch's logic, as her argument follows that this is the only logical option. Thus, if we agree that these figurines are in fact fertility idols, we may begin to see how they figure into the worship of Hathor.

The figures are usually of nude women, with slim waists, small breasts and full thighs (cf. Figure 19 page 35) and Pinch (1993: 198-209) divides these figures into different "types" based on superficial differences, such as the material, workmanship and dimensions of the figures. These superficial differences are not of integral importance to this thesis, as the figures shall be discussed as a whole and it would be unnecessary to differentiate between them for the purpose of this discussion. What is important, however, is to note that these did not have just one fixed "look and feel". The figurines could be made out of many different materials and were not made to look identical. Some figurines were accompanied by beds, or children (Waraksa, 2008: 1-2).

These figurines could be placed in tombs, temples or houses. By placing a fertility figure inside a tomb, it is thought that the Egyptians thought this would enable their rebirth,

while the figurines in the temples and houses would serve to promote fertility in the lives of the ancient Egyptian women (Pinch, 1993: 225). These figurines may have been modelled on the goddess Hathor herself, or in the image of the ideal Egyptian woman (as was discussed previously).

Phalli functioned in much the same way, though the obvious difference would be its focus on promoting the potency of the male, not the female. Phalli, as with the figurines, could be made out of varying materials and could differ in size. The phallus was the symbol of male sexual potency, from its connection to the Osiris myth, and was largely connected to his worship; which is why there are so few examples of phalli offered to Hathor specifically. Pinch (1993: 241) states that there is only one phallus dedicated to Hathor, which was offered to her by the scribe Ramose, though the inscriptions are rather obscure. Pinch (1993: 241) translates the first as: “Grant that I receive revenues of your temple”; and the second as: “Cause to be established in your temple with me”. These are out of place on a phallus, and their meaning may only be speculated upon.

As the male was not thought to be capable of sterility, it would be rare for a man to admit that he was sterile and the phalli probably were meant to combat impotence, as this was probably not as inconceivable an idea as sterility would have been. The connection to Hathor may have been through her connection with the ithyphallic god Bes, or to her connection with sex, in general. Though, to say that phalli (which were found in Hathor shrines) were not dedicated to her, because her name was not explicitly stated on them, would be too presumptuous; rather we should take cognisance of the fact that these phalli were found at her shrines, and that it would appear that they were offered to her, but that we only have one example, which explicitly states that it is (and the inscription on that example is too obscure to make sense of, or guess at its purpose).

It must be stated that, although it would appear that the vast majority of figurines would have been offered by females, and that the phalli would have been offered by males, there is no way to be definitely certain that no male ever offered a figurine, or that no woman ever offered a phallus. The nature of the artefacts is such that we may only guess at their

purpose and their donors, by bringing what we know about Egyptian society and religion into account.

We do not have a lot of evidence on exactly how an offering was made at a temple, except for the offerings themselves. Since the general public was not allowed into the temple, we may assume that the offerings (possibly through a ritual, or prayer) were taken by a priest into the inner sanctuary of the temple and there possibly presented to the cult statue (and thus earthly embodiment) of Hathor (Gillam, 1995: 213 - 214).

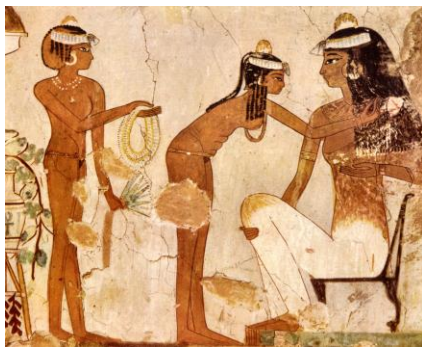


Figure 37: A woman having her hair styled

The importance and popularity of wigs in ancient Egypt has already been stated and the wig was one of the main iconographic features of Hathor. Hair and hair-fashion in ancient Egypt was extremely popular. We have many scenes depicting elite women's hair being styled and we have many examples of wigs from tombs. The hairstyles ranged from being rather simple, to being quite elaborate, and this thesis

proposes (as Graves-Brown 2010: 111 proposes) that the wig was a sexual signifier in ancient Egypt. This is especially prevalent in the "Tale of the two Brothers" (mentioned previously). Not only did the scent of her hair attract the pharaoh to the woman, but she also uses the sentence, which Graves-Brown (2010: 111) translates as, "Don your wig for a happy hour", which she (the woman in the story) says was uttered by a man who she falsely accuses of trying to seduce her.

This one sentence is extremely important, as firstly, it was almost certainly written by a man (since most scribes were male, and this text was written by a trained scribe); secondly, it is uttered by a female character and lastly, it is meant to have been said by a male character. This alludes to the fact that both men and women knew the connotations of a wig, and that both sexes knew what response a wig would illicit from a man. It alludes to the idea of the wig as a tool to illicit sexual excitement, probably from the male

perspective. Thus, it becomes clear why Hathor would be connected to wigs, and why her wig would be an iconographic feature.

Hathor was also a prominent feature in love spells, as she could evoke desire. In this example she is addressed in her form of Seven Hathors, which (in the magical sense) contained elements of destiny/ fate as well as an element of added potency. The unrequited lover would recite the spell (possibly accompanying it with an offering) and the spell reads:

*... Hear me, you seven Hathors
Who weave fate with a scarlet thread! ...
Grant ...
That this girl, true child of her mother,
Pursue me with undying passion,
Follow close on my heels
Like a cow seeking pasture,
Like a nursemaid minding her charge,
Like a guardian after his herd! ...*

(Foster, 2001: 90)

Firstly the reciter invokes the multi-fold goddess(es) and then he states what he demands from her (them). What is interesting is the use of language and the imagery that is used in the spell. He wants the object of his affection to “follow close on [his] heels/ *like a cow seeking pasture*”. This statement on its own could perhaps have been dismissed as simple metaphor, or wordplay, but because of the following two sentences, it is proposed that the meaning goes a little deeper. Perhaps he is invoking Hathor, not only to realise the spell, but also to instil elements of herself in the girl. The cow was undoubtedly the symbol of Hathor; Hathor nursed the pharaoh, as well as the gods; and Hathor was a guardian *par excellence*. Bearing in mind her connection to suckling, childcare, healing and safeguarding, It is proposed that this spell was meant to invoke Hathor in order to realise the spell, but also to manifest the spell.

This spell could indeed perhaps just be steeped in metaphor, or perhaps it alludes to something more. This author proposes the latter, but does so cautiously, as there is no way to definitely assert either way, and because the metaphor works just as well ‘as is’. Though, it must be stated that the efficacy of spells in ancient Egypt often depended on the target, or recipient, of the spell being identified with the god(dess) in question (Pinch, 1994: 21).

There is another poem, which is divided into stanzas of speech by the man and the woman alternately. This is in the Papyrus of *Chester Beatty I*, in Stanza 5, where the man thanks Hathor for bringing his beloved to him:

*I praise the Golden, I worship her majesty,
I extol the Lady of Heaven;
I give adoration to Hathor,
Laudations to my Mistress!
I called her, she heard my plea,
She sent my mistress to me;
She came by herself to see me,
O great wonder that happened to me!
... I make devotions to my goddess,
That she grant me my sister* as gift...*

(Lichtheim, 1974: 184)

Here it is clear that the speaker played the role of the stereotypical unrequited lover, but after asking the goddess’ help, his love was granted him. It is interesting that the choice of language is ambiguous as one could perhaps read the praises of Hathor, as being those of his beloved, or vice versa. In the following stanza the woman speaks and tells of why

* “Sister” is not meant to indicate a literal blood-relation, but instead was how lovers referred to one another, echoing mythology, as the divine couple (Isis and Osiris, Geb and Nut, Shu and Tefnut) were brother and sister. Because of this, Egyptians would refer to their lovers as “brother” or “sister”. This is also often cited as the reason for the false impression that incest was widely practised in ancient Egypt (Robins 1993:74).

she had not visited her beloved, the reason being that his mother disapproves of her. She then asks the “Golden” (Hathor) to help his mother know that she is kind, by “put[ting] it in her heart”. Thus Hathor brings the lovers together and helps them to overcome obstacles which may hinder their love, such as in-laws.

However important her role was as fertility goddess, we must remember that sex in ancient Egypt was not merely a recreational activity. It was celebrated because it resulted in children. Hathor was a goddess of fertility and even though sex and fertility walk hand-in-hand; her role with regards to fertility probably took precedence. Hathor was venerated because it was believed that she promoted fertility, as Lesko (1999: 114) explains by quoting an artist-priest’s votive inscription: “I am the priest of Hathor, who hears the requests of all maidens who weep, and tells us that Hathor listens to the miserable”. Another statue addresses the inhabitants of Thebes: “Go! ... tell your requests to the Cow of Gold, to the Lady of Happiness, to the Mistress of [all the gods], ... may she give us excellent children, happiness, and a good husband” Lesko (1999: 114). This clearly illustrates that Hathor was known for her fertility and ability to grant the childless children and love.

It should perhaps also be made mention of, that Hathor was also the name of the third month of the Egyptian calendar, which started with the inundation of the Nile. The third month was when the inundation usually reached its peak. This was generally a celebration of fertility and the signifier of future prosperity (Strouhal 1992: 91-93). It is thought that because of Hathor’s connection to the Nile flood, that the menstrual cycle of the ancient Egyptian women was thought to also signify their future fertility, or readiness to bear children (Robins, 1993: 79).

The ancient Egyptian women had close bonds to the goddess Hathor, because of her connections to female-specific aspects, such as infertility (in the Egyptian context this was female-specific) and feminine sexuality. Her importance in this regard cannot be overstated, as the overwhelming amount of evidence speaks for itself. The fact that these artefacts were, in some cases, produced by men indicates that both sexes were aware of

Hathor's potency in granting women their wishes, or in aiding them with their feminine-problems.

3.1.2. Birth

One such issue, which is uniquely feminine, is birth. Pregnancy was a time of great joy for Egyptian women, but they had natural concerns about the birth. Birth in ancient Egypt was a very dangerous time in the life of a woman and in the life of her infant. Infant mortality and mortality resulting from the complications of birth was incredibly frequent and the Egyptian mothers-to-be were completely justified in their fears. There were a number of precautions the ancient Egyptians took, in order to ensure a safe delivery. None of these had any scientific clout, but they may have had a placebo effect in some cases.

Ancient Egyptian women would make use of magic in order to ensure the safety of both themselves, and their unborn children. In one spell the expectant mother invokes Hathor, "Rejoicing, rejoicing in heaven! Birth giving is accelerated! Come to me, Hathor, my mistress, in my fine pavilion, in this happy hour" (Robins, 1993: 83). Clearly the purpose of this spell was to accelerate the birth-process. The invitation in this spell would have been in order to invite Hathor into the birth-house (an essentially private place). She would also (as in the love spell) be identified with the goddess herself, "Hathor, the Lady of Dendara, is [the] one who is giving birth" (Robins, 1993: 82). These spells are among the magico-medical papyri.

There are a number of gods, who are more directly linked to birth than Hathor, but this is why these spells invoking her are so interesting. Even though she is not *the* goddess of birth, she is still invoked and asked to hasten the birth (thus lessening pain, and reducing complications). This seems to either indicate that the gods and goddesses who were more closely linked to birth, such as Taweret, Bes and Heket, were probably extensions of Hathor, or at least closely related to her with regards to their function; or it indicates the great affinity that the ancient Egyptians felt with Hathor, that she be invoked in this way.

Though it is from the later Roman-period, we do have some examples of birth-houses, and interestingly, these birth-houses (called *mammisi*) are illustrated with the birth of Hathor's own son, Ihy (Lesko, 1999: 96). This probably indicates that Hathor's relationship to the birth-process increased in the later period of Egyptian history, but it could also indicate that her role in the birth-process has perhaps been slightly understated. Though, if her role was more prevalent, we would expect to see her mentioned a lot more often than what she is.

Accepting that Hathor has a close connection to Taweret and Bes, we have a lot of amulets and household items which may have been employed in a protective capacity during the woman's pregnancy. Household items, such as beds, mirrors, pots and tools were fashioned to look like, or represent, these gods. Taweret was the hippopotamus goddess, who (because of her shape) was undoubtedly connected to the pregnant mother; whereas Bes, a leonine dwarf, was purely used in a protective capacity. He was responsible for warding off evil spirits, especially at night. He also had connections to music, and it is proposed by Spencer (2003: 112) that his dancing warded off evil spirits during childbirth.

The magico-medical papyri also instruct various other ways of hastening the childbirth, such as binding the belly and vaginal suppositories. There is also a spell, which Pinch (1994: 84) makes mention of, which tells of Hathor laying her hands on the woman suffering in childbirth. Ivory rods with hands on their ends may have been used in order to manifest this spell, since the Egyptians did make use of certain magical "tools" (Pinch, 1994: 84).

What is extremely interesting for this study is the extent to which Hathor is involved in the birth-process. She is not a goddess directly related, or connected to childbirth, but she is the goddess from whom the great sun-god Ra is born every morning (Pinch, 2002: 180). Her role as expectant mother was perhaps not embraced by the Egyptians (in their households) in the same way that Taweret was embraced; but this may have been simply

because she was foremost in their minds as goddess of fertility and sex. Perhaps since she had caused the pregnancy, it was better to delegate the actual birth to a different goddess, Heket. Though, this being said, we do have evidence that she was regarded as part of the birth-process.

In Figure 20 (page 36) she is depicted on either side of the mother giving birth. This is an important artefact in itself, since depictions of the actual delivery are extremely rare, and the fact that Hathor is depicted on one of the very few, is telling. Graves-Brown (2010: 64) mentions that scholars have also found one of the bricks, which would have been used in the birth-process (Figure 52, page 112). Upon it a woman holding a baby boy, accompanied by two other women, are depicted and the scene is flanked by Hathor standards.

Perhaps Hathor's role as goddess of birth is understated, when compared to how she appears in different capacities, but it should be stated that each example made mention of in this section is a rarity, and that Hathor is mentioned on these examples does indicate that she was important (to some extent) in this capacity as well.

3.1.3. Healing and Safeguarding

Ancient Egypt, for all its beauty and intricate social systems, was still an ancient society; and as such, it had the many dangers and superstitions which accompanied all ancient societies. The ancient Egyptians rationalised their fears of the unknown, by creating religious dogma. Fear of the unknown, is something that (arguably) all humans have in common. We fear that which we do not understand, or cannot understand. In ancient Egypt, this boiled down to the most basic things, such as: why the sun rose and set, why people died, why children died and sickness.

We must remember that before modern science, many superstitious and religious practices and beliefs, which now seem absurd, were practiced quite regularly in Western Europe, as well as elsewhere. Because humans are rational beings, we tend to need to

understand the *status quo*, and the ancient Egyptians did so by creating elaborate religious stories. For the sun, they had the myth of the sun-cycle (with its theme of birth, death and rebirth); for death, the myth of the sun-cycle contributed to their understanding, as this is then how they viewed death. Their views on why children died and sickness are not so “easy” to explain. To the ancient Egyptian, the death of an infant, as well as sickness, was often seen as the influence of an evil spirit (Pinch, 1994: 132).

These evil spirits were not exactly “demons”, but they were viewed as spirits, or forces, which could do one tangible harm. The fear of spirits is basically a fear of the unknown, as they seem to have been feared more greatly during night-time (Pinch, 1994: 41). This is because sight is our primary sensory organ and we cannot fully rely on it to protect ourselves when it is impeded by darkness. In ancient Egypt, the largest predators did not confine their activity to the daytime and night-time made the ancient Egyptians vulnerable to the onslaught of lions, hippopotami, crocodiles, etc. Thus, it is no real surprise that night-time was a fearful time for the ancient Egyptian. This is perhaps a contributing factor to why the ancient Egyptians had such a strong sun-myth, i.e. a sun that lived continuously.

The fear of darkness could be equated to their fear of the West (where the sun “died”), i.e. the “Land of the Dead”. They did not fear death, but they feared the chaos that reigned in the territory west of the Nile: the territory of the god of chaos, Seth. The Egyptians did not explicitly fear the god himself (though his popularity fluctuated throughout Egyptian history), he is an ambiguous figure (Pinch, 2002: 84). He represented chaos, but the god Horus (who was an incarnation of the sun), defeated him; thus maintaining order/ *maat*. Thus, what the Egyptians feared was disorder/ chaos, manifest as things which were unknown. As such, the ancient Egyptians relied on spells and religious magic (which is a tautological term in itself), to protect them from discord.

In the section on Hathor, a large part is dedicated to the mythology surrounding Hathor and her apotropaic aspects. As such, it does not seek to rehash that section, but the reader is reminded of the mythology and Hathor’s role therein. It is also of critical importance

that, as Hathor was viewed in this apotropaic light, we view her as a perpetuator of order as well. Hathor has not been linked to order as much as other gods have, but this thesis would propose that the maintenance of order was one of her defining attributes, as she undoubtedly fulfilled this role in the religion, as a protector. In this capacity, the Seven Hathors should be mentioned and the protection they provided as “fates”, already covered in a previous section. It must perhaps also be stated that the potency of the deity was multiplied, because of the larger number (especially seven, which was a sacred number) (Pinch, 1994: 37). The Seven Hathors were also connected to the colour red, which is the colour of blood and fire, and as such, symbolises power and potency (Laite, 2002). The colour is associated not only with Hathor in her form as the Seven Hathors, but also as the goddess manifest as herself. The Seven Hathors could be invoked as protection through spells which bind the demon(s) with a red ribbon.

Amulets were often an ancient Egyptians greatest source of religio-magical power; and thus protection. The ancient Egyptians, as stated and explained earlier, believed in the great potency of creation (Pinch, 1994: 16). Creation in this sense meaning making anything come into existence, whether a vessel, jewellery, amulet, or (most obviously) writing. Anything an ancient Egyptian made was through the gods and sometimes in honour of the gods (Hagen & Hagen, 2005: 93). Thus, an amulet had intrinsic magical power, because it was in essence a hieroglyph, and as such, could be read (as a spell) (Wenzel, 2004: 403). If someone wore the Eye of Horus as a necklace, it would not be a simple decoration. The jewellery would be worn with a significant religious function. Pinch (1993: 282) draws a distinction between Egyptian jewellery and amulets, though one could argue that this distinction should perhaps not exist. The terminology will be used, in the sense that an amulet is a designated piece of jewellery (thus not drawing a distinction, but creating a sub-category of reference).

To our minds, jewellery is something aesthetic and often worn for the sole purpose of adorning the body. In ancient Egypt this was not the case. Jewellery was worn because it had specific magical properties (Pinch, 1993: 281). This is not to say that there was no vanity, or aesthetic aspect; rather it should be viewed like one views Egyptian art (and in

fact many would agree that Egyptian jewellery is in itself a form of their art). The art was indeed beautiful, but beauty was not its sole function. It was not beautiful for the purpose of being beautiful. It was beautiful, while it served a religious function (Pinch, 1993: 281). In this way we should view Egyptian jewellery. This argument could even be extended into our modern society where many people adorn themselves with items of jewellery, not simply for aesthetics, but for symbolic purpose: such as an engagement/wedding band. They are often quite expensive and aesthetically beautiful, but this is not their sole function.

Thus, Egyptian jewellery often featured religious themes and was essentially hieroglyphic representations. The most popular amulet (as can be judged by how frequently scholars have come into contact with them) was the scarab (Pinch, 1993: 290). The scarab beetle is a strong theme in Egyptian mythology because the scarab is thought to be the embodiment of the reborn sun as the god Khepri. Thus, it had strong connections to themes of rebirth, and thus: hope. The scarab amulet would often double as a seal, which was often used in magical practice. In fact, the word “amulet” is often used when the word “seal” is meant (Pinch, 1994: 109). Khepri, though not directly related to Hathor by virtue of her fertility, or music, is related to her through their connection to the solar deity. The solar deities all shared a connection through this celestial body, and as such, all have links to rebirth, regeneration, etc.

Khepri was not a popular amulet for use against evil spirits. The greatest symbol for protection was the *udjat*-eye (the Eye of Horus). The left eye was often used in conjunction with the right in amulets in order to ward off evil (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 22). The eye was all-seeing, as it was also an embodiment of the sun.

Though the eye was potent on its own, its potency could be increased when it was paired with other symbols of protection, such as the uraeus. The serpents were thought to be other forms of the eye (from the “Myth of the Cataclysm”), which would spit venom into the eyes of one’s enemies. These amulets have great protective value and are more directly linked to Hathor through the “Myth of the Cataclysm” (as she is identified with

the Eye, and thus also the Uraeus). Cf. Figure 9 (page 16), which is a pectoral which the deceased (Tutankhamun) was buried with. It depicts the deceased in the solar-boat along with gods, which is flanked by two uraei atop an *udjat*, which is similarly perched atop a winged scarab, holding lotuses, also flanked by uraei. The symbolism is clear. This piece is meant to protect the deceased on his journey through the afterlife and ensure his rebirth. The colours which are most apparent are gold and blue: both of which are connected to the solar deities, and thus Hathor. Though Hathor in her cow-form is not present here, that is not to say that her presence is not implied. It must be remembered that her cow-form, though her most recognisable, was docile and benign. Whereas her other forms (the cat/ lion, eye and uraeus) were the apotropaic forms. These were the forms she would assume when she fulfilled the protective role.

Amulets, which were quite popular with the worshippers of Hathor, and specifically with women, were often representations of Taweret and Bes (Pinch, 1993: 290). These two figures were previously discussed, but their role in/ on amulets should be given further attention. It is unclear in which capacity these amulets were used. Whether they were intended to promote fertility, or perhaps they were used in a purely protective capacity (during pregnancy). What is clear however is that these gods were definitely the protectors of women, children and the domestic sphere, thus: women's domains (Robins, 1993: 84-85). These amulets could be made of faience, which is important because of the direct link the colour symbolically has with Hathor (as a celestial deity). Bes' capacity to frighten away evil spirits was his greatest trait and he himself takes the form of an androgynous dwarf-lion (perhaps because this form would be frightening to evil spirits). There is no question as to why Taweret (a hippopotamus-goddess) would be a popular form for a protector of children to take, as hippopotami (especially) are fiercely protective of their young. Thus, even though Hathor in her bovine form is not represented in an apotropaic capacity, this does not mean that she is omitted. She is present through her connection to other deities (whose forms were perhaps thought to be more potent for the task at hand).

Her capacity as a goddess of healing has also been discussed, and though Isis is the healer *par excellence* in Egyptian mythology, Hathor (perhaps because the two were so closely linked) also fills this role. This is mainly because of Hathor's theriomorphic form, i.e. her cow-form. The cow, as a mythological symbol of fertility, has been discussed; and because of the religious dogma surrounding cows and the aspects of regeneration connected to their milk (especially the milk of Hathor), Hathor was venerated for her healing-powers as well.

This may have been because of the fact that sicknesses which caused fever, or household accidents, which were caused by fire, were often associated with the goddess Sekhmet (Hathor's malevolent side), or her emissaries (Pinch, 1994: 141). There are not so many spells which directly invoke Hathor, that are concerned with healing, though there are spells which have direct connections to cow's milk and breast-milk. Thus, we may infer a connection to Hathor, which may have been implied, but not explicitly stated.

Pinch (1994: 83) makes mention of the fact that an important part of an Egyptian pharaoh's coronation ceremony, would be the ritualistic drinking of the milk of a Hathor cow, this was often an act that the pharaoh repeated throughout his reign and it was meant to give him life, power and dominion; with the emphasis being on life, as the pharaoh reigned for as long as he lived (Schneider, 2004: 325). Here the emphasis is on sustained protection, not only of the pharaoh as a person, but also of the pharaoh as the god Horus incarnate.

There is a spell in the Leyden magico-medical papyrus, which seems to have been used to alleviate an eye-ailment. The spell asks the practitioner to create a ball from lizard's blood and other magical ingredients (saffron and "stibium of Koptos") which should then be rubbed with the milk of a woman who had borne a son. This should then be placed upon the right eye before a lamp or the "Shoulder" constellation of the evening (Griffith & Thompson, 2008: 117-118). This last sentence may perhaps simply be flowered speech which implies that the treatment should be administered in the evening, or it may have symbolic significance to Hathor as a celestial goddess. Furthermore, the connections to

the Hathor myth are quite obvious, as the treatment is for an eye-affliction and milk is used in the treatment. Firstly, the blood would have coloured the ball of saffron and “stibium of Koptos” red, which is one of the colours of Hathor; then the ball would be rubbed with the milk of a woman who had borne a son, after which it is placed in the person’s right eye. All of these acts are significant, as the milk being administered to the eye is directly related to how Hathor healed Horus’ damaged eye and the fact that it is to be administered to the right eye, is even more significant, as it was the left eye of Horus which was damaged. Thus, perhaps by placing it into the eye that was left undamaged in the myth, the person invokes Horus’ eye’s potency; regardless of which eye was damaged on the person.

3.1.4. Music

As the patron-goddess of music, it was undoubtedly an integral part of her cult. Music, dance and musical instruments in “Hathoric” symbolism play an incredibly important role. Firstly, this role had a protection-aspect; secondly, it had a placation-aspect; and lastly, it had a sexual-aspect. Though a distinction is drawn between these aspects, it must be understood that the ancient Egyptians most probably did not. They probably would not have played an instrument for the sole purpose of protection, but also in order to placate the goddess, and also to promote fertility. Similarly, festivals often had multi-fold purposes (especially within the Hathor-cult); though a distinction is drawn in order to maintain clarity and focus within the argument.

It is widely accepted by scholars that the musical instruments employed by Hathor (as well as Bes) and her priestesses were used in order to frighten away evil spirits, in particular the clappers (cf. Figure 11) (page 17). The sistrum was probably used in the same capacity, as it also made a loud rattling sound. Though most scholars would agree that these instruments served musically as percussion instruments, it must be stated that they do not only fulfil this role (Lesko, 1999: 125). Percussion may simply have been the result of the ritual-process; or perhaps the instruments’ magical properties were “proposed” by the ancient Egyptians after their usefulness as percussion instruments was

“discovered”; though this argument is not the main focus of this thesis, it must be stated that often in ancient societies one comes across a cause and result situation where it is not exactly cut-and-dried which one is which; and compelling arguments could be made for both.

In festivals, music played quite an important role. Not only was there the use of these instruments, but there was also singing (of religious music) and dancing. Dancers, especially in the Hathor-cult, would have worn the *menat*-necklace, which would have added to the sounds, because of the rattling-effect the bead-strings would have created when they were moved, or shaken, with the body. Evidence suggests that there may also have been beer-drinking and drunkenness, though this probably only occurred during the “Festival of Drunkenness” (which Lesko 1999: 129 proposes was in honour of the myth wherein she becomes inebriated).

Festivals were great occasions for ancient Egyptians, as they were not restricted to the elite. Often a festival would involve the temple-statue of the god(dess) being paraded through the street. Thus, this was about as close to the physical embodiment of the god on earth as the general ancient Egyptian could come. There would be a festival procession and many people would gather to watch it and to partake in the festivities. Dancing formed an important part of any Hathoric-festival and the pharaoh is mentioned to have taken part, as well as professional dancers. Though, as Bleeker (1973: 57) states, the general populace were also able to take part. Dancing was meant to be part of the celebrations and not stiff-ritual. We know comparatively little about the general practice during a festival, but we do know that dance (as part of the festival and Hathor-cult) was not intended to be something rigid. It was steeped in ritual-significance (probably connected to fertility), but not rigid.



Figure 38: A musical troupe. They were not originally depicted with dresses, consequently, these are deteriorating. The middle girl's dress has completely vanished. The original rendering portrays her naked, wearing only the hip-girdle.

Though the general public and even the pharaoh could partake in dance, professional dancers and musicians were employed by the temples of Hathor. They were skilled and their dancing was probably something more akin to acrobatics than dancing (judging from their representations). They were indeed scantily clad, often wearing nothing but a hip-girdle (which is thought to have been a symbol of fertility) (Robins, 1993: 185). Thus these musicians and dancers themselves were symbols of fertility. There has been some disagreement over the roles of these dancers, whereby some scholars (as attested by Manniche, 1987: 12) labelled them prostitutes,

though most scholars nowadays agree that they probably were not prostitutes.

This thesis proposes that the dancers and musicians themselves (as well as the dances and music) were symbols of fertility, perhaps they were even viewed as the physical embodiment of the fertility dolls (as they were often also depicted wearing the hip-girdle). This idea is supported by the fact that some of these women had the aforementioned tattoos their thighs and abdomens (like the fertility figurines); which obviously alludes to fertility (cf. figures 19, page 35 and 26 page 51).

One could make a compelling argument against the tattoos being trademarks of prostitution, simply because prostitutes are not meant to symbolise fertility, or procreative sex. Prostitution is simply sex for the sake of sex and the act (for both participants) was probably devoid of all thought of procreation. Although sex and procreation in the ancient Egyptian context were closely linked concepts, they were still separate ideas (as can be judged from the contraceptive/ abortive methods the ancient Egyptians employed) (Tyldesley, 1994: 69).

3.1.5 *Death*

Hathor's connection to the death-cult is perhaps understated compared to her connection to other aspects of ancient Egyptian life, but she was still quite a prominent feature. In fact, one entire section of the "Books of the Dead" tells the "Myth of the Cataclysm", though it is named: The "Book of the Heavenly Cow" (Lichtheim, 1976: 197-199). It tells the entire story of how Hathor was sent to destroy humanity, but the book also has a secondary function. Besides the cataclysm, it also tells the story of how the gods formed the afterlife, as it was in the ancient Egyptian understanding at that time; since before this act of genocide, the value of humans was not yet completely seen by the gods (Assmann, 2001: 115). Only through their near-destruction was their value understood, and they were saved from total extinction and an afterlife was given where they could dwell. Thus, Hathor is directly responsible for the afterlife as the Egyptians saw it.

This myth greatly contributes to her status as a celestial goddess, since in the myth she is directly related to the sun and the mythological "sky-world", i.e. the realm of the gods. She is often depicted as a white cow, with star-symbols. When regarding Figure 5 (cf. page 3), we see that she was definitely not the first cow-goddess related to the celestial-sphere, as Bat, on the Gerza-palette, is surrounded by stars as well. Thus, we may draw the conclusion that Hathor perhaps assimilated this celestial aspect from Bat, but if we do so, we must bear in mind that this would not diminish Hathor's importance, as fluidity throughout Egyptian gods, may perhaps be seen as a characteristic of Egyptian religion.

It must be mentioned here that the celestial aspect of Hathor, may have been what elevated her from merely a domestic goddess. As we have seen, lesser god(desse)s, such as Heket, Taweret and Bes all fulfil some of the roles of Hathor, but they did not have her status. They were popular, but as an extension of her cult, because they were lesser embodiments of her. Though this is not directly stated in the same way as her connection to the uraeus, or Eye, we may draw this conclusion, because of the overlapping functions, and because we find votive offerings depicting these gods at Hathor's main cultic sites. Thus, the main conclusion we may draw is that by being directly related to the sun-god

(thus the “main” god) of ancient Egyptian religion, Hathor is elevated beyond the domestic sphere.

Here we may draw a further conclusion. As the pharaoh was the sun-god, Horus, manifest on earth, Hathor also had strong connections to the pharaoh-ship. Though this has been explained elsewhere and it is not the focus of this thesis, we may see that perhaps the only god(esse)s elevated beyond the domestic-sphere (read: sphere of women’s affairs) were the ones who were directly related to the issues surrounding the pharaoh and pharaoh-ship, such as Isis, Neith, Nut and Hathor. Thus, we see the patriarchal influence in Egyptian society flow into the religious sphere of Egyptian women, because Hathor was not a goddess for either, but rather for both. Therefore, it is proposed that Hathor was perhaps regarded by women as a goddess they could relate to on a similar level as men, because of her celestial aspects.

Hathor was a popular goddess in tomb-art, for both men and women; her aspects of regeneration and rebirth obviously contributing largely to this fact. Her iconography as tree-goddess plays a striking role here. The texts/ spells referred to are collectively known as the “Books of the Dead”, but they are not books, rather spells for entering the afterlife and gaining life eternal. These “books” were seemingly initially restricted to the elite, but a “democratization” (as some scholars call it) occurred and people from the peasant classes started to make use of them as well. Smith (2009: 1) disputes the term “democratization”, as he posits that no one gained access to something which they did not already have access to (2009: 9). This author would propose that there is not really enough evidence to support or deny this claim, at this stage. Nevertheless, they serve to guide the deceased through the afterlife, through a series of spells which the deceased must recite at precise moments, because of the potency of the spoken and written word in Egyptian ideology. One extract from the “Pyramid Texts” reads:

*That Eye of yours which is on the horns of
Hathor,
Which turns back the years from me;*

I spend the night and am conceived and born every day.

(Lesko, 1999: 88)

This utterance clearly identifies the deceased with the god Horus, and she is possibly addressing the god Ra. This utterance clearly illustrates the Egyptians' conceptions about death and rebirth, through Hathor.



Figure 39: Hathor as tree-goddess providing nourishment to a temple musician

Though, Hathor's reach as a tree-goddess, and goddess of regeneration and rebirth was not restricted to the elite, or to men. But all spheres of society could (and did) venerate her as death-goddess. This is illustrated in

a letter from a mother (Merti) written to her deceased son (Mereri), wherein she writes that her son will be given bread and beer "in the presence of Hathor" (Wente, 1990: 214). This letter was written on a bowl, which presumably had ritual significance. Therefore it is obvious that Hathor was venerated as the provider of sustenance in the afterlife to all spheres of society, since it is unclear whether this man had a title. We may presume that he died young, and thus probably did not yet have a title, since his mother wrote the letter; also if he did have a title, it would most probably have been mentioned.

In a spell from the "Book of the Dead", Spell 148, the deceased calls upon the college of Hathors, the Seven (cows and their bull, the bull here being probably the symbol of the god Horus). The spell is about the rebirth of the deceased and then her sustained nourishment by the cows:

Hail to you ... I know the names of the seven cows and their bull who give bread and beer ...

*may you ... make provision for me, so that I may
... come into being under your hinder-parts.*

(Faulkner, 1985: 137)

Then the deceased proceeds to name each cow, and although none are explicitly named “Hathor”, they do share her epithets:

Mansion of Kas, Mistress of All.

Silent One who dwells in her place

She of Chemmis whom the god ennobled.

The Much Beloved, red of hair.

She who protects in life, the particoloured.

She whose name has power in her craft.

Storm in the sky which wafts the god aloft.

(Faulkner, 1985: 137)



Figure 40: Funerary bed of Nefertari, in the form of a lion.

It is also quite telling that certain mortuary beds (upon which the deceased was laid for ritual-purpose) often had animal-heads; such as the examples found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. These animals were a cow, hippopotamus and a lion. It is rather telling that all of these animals have significant connections to the Hathor-cult (Ikram, 2003: 134). It is unclear exactly what purpose/ role these beds fulfilled, but it is unlikely that they

were used outside of ritual, as the heads upon them, render them useless for the purpose of sleeping.

An important aspect in the funerary ritual was dance (Spencer, 2003: 115-116). Often dancers would accompany the funerary procession, or dance at the entrance of the tomb. These dancers are most often depicted as women, but there are examples of men and dwarves. The fact that dance was a part of the funerary ritual, is important, because the funeral was a significant rite of passage for the deceased. Specific acts that occurred

during the funeral (such as the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony) were integral parts of the funeral as a whole, and of the future life of the deceased in the afterlife. Without performing certain ritual acts, the deceased would not be able to gain entry into the afterlife, or she would lose the use of a limb, or she might be unable to consume food, breathe or drink (Faulkner, 1985: 66). The ancient Egyptians realised that the physical body would decay, and that death rendered our physical bodies useless (for the time being). Through these ritual acts, the deceased would slow, or stop, the decay of her body in the afterlife, as well as enable her to utilize all of her faculties, as though she were alive (since in Egyptian thought, she was) (Faulkner, 1985: 12). Thus, the fact that dance was incorporated at all, should not be brushed off as just a small aspect of the funerary procession. It should be viewed as a part of the ritual-process, since if it was not significant and symbolic, it probably would not have been included; since everything in ancient Egypt that had to do with their ideas about rebirth and magic, had a specific, important, symbolic function.

3.2. *Personal Relationship*

The ways that Hathor featured in the everyday lives of the ancient Egyptian woman, from her birth to her death, has been shown. Now the personal relationship such a woman might have had with the goddess shall be investigated from the vantage-point of their votive offerings to her. This could be the most convincing gauge we may use, seeing that the average ancient Egyptian woman was illiterate. Therefore she would probably not have worshipped the goddess through the written word, but rather through a physical votive.

This is not to say that examples of written text did not exist, like in a letter from a daughter to her mother, where the daughter writes: “May Hathor gladden you for my sake” (Wente, 1990: 63). This utterance is extremely important, since it is a sentence written in passing. It is not a letter to the veneration of Hathor, or a prayer; but this statement does perhaps function magically in the sense of a wish. It indicates the

relationship between women and Hathor, as a goddess to be called upon for the wellbeing of one's family.

It was also not uncommon for Egyptian women (both royal and non-royal) to assume the guise of Hathor in ritual function (Galvin, 1981: 205). Thus she would embody the goddess, perhaps not unlike the pharaoh was thought to embody the god Horus. Therefore this specific feature of Hathor-worship shall also be discussed, with a distinction made between royal and non-royal women.

3.2.1. Votive Offerings

Votive offerings, though perhaps less formal than state architecture or art, still conformed to the strict rules which governed Egyptian religion and art: *maat*. They were not, for the most part, expressions of personal piety, because of the strict rules which governed them. This changed slightly during the New Kingdom, when household cult objects, such as fertility figurines, were integrated into state religion (Pinch, 1993: 360). The integration forced them to conform from an object which clearly denoted personal piety, to an object which denoted personal piety while conforming to state religious principles, thus the gap between private religion and state religion was bridged, through votive offerings.

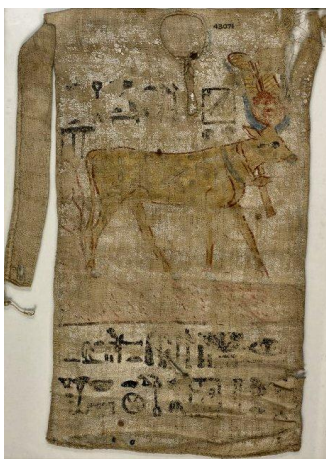


Figure 41: A votive shirt, depicting Hathor as the solar cow

worship.

The most common votive offered by women, especially those of the lower social classes, is textile (Pinch, 1993: 134). These cloths are thought to have been exclusively offered by women. They vary in size and could be in the form of a length of cloth, or a shirt. Upon them there are many depictions of Hathor and Pinch argues that their function was similar to that of stelae; in that they are a votive object glorifying the deity, but that they also have features in common with tomb paintings, and may

have served as banners at festivals. These cloths are most closely associated with the Hathor cult and Hathor

The cloths could depict Hathor in both her human, and cow, forms, but they contain very little writing. Where there is writing present, this is mainly in the form of epithets. It seems the images upon the textile played a more important role than words, since the vast majority of the people who would have offered these textiles, would have been illiterate women. The images often depict Hathor as the cow emerging from the marshes, which would seem to imply that they had a funerary function, and though this cannot be entirely ruled out, we should take cognisance that the vast majority of them were found in temples, and not in tombs. This would suggest a different function, such as Pinch has suggested.

It is unclear why exactly textiles would have been a favourable offering in the Hathor cult, but one theory could be a connection to the Seven Hathors' association with thread, as they "weave fate with a scarlet thread" in a love spell (Foster, 2001: 90). Since, it has been mentioned that one of the most important tasks of a woman was to weave and clothe her household, perhaps this suggests that by weaving these specific textiles, the women were creating their own act of magic and influence on destiny. These cloths probably acted as magical objects within themselves, and the depictions upon them served to strengthen whatever their magical intent was. Though, it is still unclear what exactly was meant to be gained, if anything. Perhaps these cloths were purely votive in nature, since they do not suggest to have connections to any part of the Hathor cult (save the funerary practice, and this has been called into question). Whatever their purpose, they do suggest a strong tie between Hathor and the women of ancient Egypt, since there are many examples and the vast majority were dedicated by women to Hathor.

Stelae could probably be considered the most important votive objects, because of the wealth of information they provide for scholars. From stelae, we are able to see who dedicated it, to whom it was dedicated and for what purpose. All three these things did not always appear simultaneously upon the specific stela, but of the three things usually placed upon it, at least one would have been present. It is important to mention here that both men and women could, and did, offer stelae. The purposes of which varied from

prayers and pleas, to veneration (Pinch, 1993:101). The most common type of stela would be a spell in order to ensure the deceased's life in the afterlife. A very large proportion of the stelae found at Hathoric cult sites were dedicated by women, and those that were dedicated by men, were often dedicated by priests (Pinch, 1993: 101).

This study will now refer to a collection of objects which Pinch (1993: 135) groups together under the term *Hathor masks*. These objects range from the sistra, to column-capitals; meaning that they could vary in shape and purpose, but they have a common denominator: Hathor's forward-facing face. This thesis will use Pinch's terminology, because it agrees with her that the other term which encompasses objects with Hathor's face on it, sistra, is used too broadly (Pinch, 1993: 138). It should be understood by the reader, that when this thesis refers to a sistrum, it is referring to the musical object, which could also have a Hathor mask upon it.

Because of the wide range of objects which may be classed as Hathor masks, it is obvious that the materials used, and purposes of them would have just as wide a range. Therefore each individual object shall not be discussed at length in this regard; rather their possible symbolic functions will be discussed, as this is of greater importance to the purpose of this thesis.

Sistra, up until this point, have been referred to as one thing: musical instruments, but this thesis would like to establish a distinction at this juncture. They have been referred to as one group, but in fact there were two distinct types of sistra: the *naos* and the loop sistra. The distinction seems to not only be superficial, but functional as well. The *naos* sistra seems to have had a higher status than the loop sistra, as the loop sistra does not appear on plaques, bowls, or other types of formal offering (Pinch, 1993: 138, 159). There are a few examples of small loop sistra that seem to indicate that they were used as amulets, but they did not have the same regard as the *naos*. It seems that the loop sistra were largely used as cult objects, and did not necessarily need to be functional, whereas the *naos*' near-sole purpose was ritual and functional. We see this from tomb paintings where the *naos* is represented (cf. Figure 10, page 17).

There are also examples of the *naos* being worshipped as a separate entity, not merely as an instrument. This seems to suggest that perhaps Hathor herself was present within the *naos* and that it may have acted as her sanctuary. This being said, it was not at all the most popular votive image of the goddess herself. The most interesting aspect of both types of *sistra* is how Hathor was represented upon them, in that she often had two faces (back-to-back, on both sides of the *sistrum*). This is not merely decoration, as we have some examples of the face appearing with a flat-back. This two-facedness represents the two personas of Hathor. This is perhaps why she is represented as a woman, for the most part, and not explicitly in her bovine form.

It is not unreasonable to assume a link between the goddess Bat and Hathor's iconography where the masks are concerned, since Bat was the first cow-goddess portrayed in this way. Though, Bat and representations of Hathor are similar, there is usually very little confusion when identifying which goddess is represented, because of both goddesses' specific cult centres and periods of popularity.

Hathor's face is also a popular addition to bowls, and other votive objects. These most likely were not intended to be functional and, since they are vessels for containing other objects, we may assume that they probably had connections to fertility, or had some other ritual function (Pinch, 1993: 321-322).

The Hathor-columns and *Quadrifrons* have been discussed earlier in this study, and therefore shall not be discussed at length here. Rather they are made mention of, because they too fall into this category. They were most probably intended to symbolise Hathor's cosmic aspects, but other interpretations could also be applied to them. Thus we may say that each different Hathor mask should be viewed in context, and then one should attempt to assess what its purpose was, rather than label them all *sistra* and therefore, perhaps regard their values and functions as equal.

Obviously, considering the range of items which are Hathor masks, we may assume that a variety of people offered them as well. Both men and women could offer any of these items, and though a column-capital should not be considered an “offering” in the strict sense of the word, it may still be considered as “votive”, though perhaps they were not “offered” by any one person. The rest of the objects could be offered by independent individuals, who were, for a large part, women. A lot of the men who offered these objects were temple priests, and therefore should perhaps not be considered as part of the general male populace.

It is interesting that in Hathor’s “Hathor mask-form” she still often retains bovine ears and that this organ was also frequently incorporated into votive offerings, or simply was the offering (Pinch, 1993: 259). It is interesting that the ears should have been venerated along with the eyes, since there is no known specific mythological story to indicate the importance of ears, as is the case with eyes. Thus, we may only guess at the purpose of the ears, but once one is familiar with the cult and mythology of Hathor, this is not such a difficult task.



Figure 42:
Hieroglyphic:
“to hear”

The ears that are incorporated into stelae and other votive offerings are assumed to serve the same function as the modelled ear-offerings. These ears took the form of human ears and appeared apparently randomly upon objects, or on their own. It is important to note that the hieroglyph for the word “to hear” contains the determinative F21, a bovine ear (Gardiner, 1994: 463). The obvious theory, and possibly the most acceptable one, is that the ears magically invoked the ears of the gods. The ears may have suggested a magical link between what is being asked and the god’s ear.



Figure 43: A stela with four ears depicted on it

But something different may be proposed. Since the hieroglyph for hearing incorporates a bovine ear into it, it may not be too presumptuous to suppose a relationship between our cow-goddess and hearing; especially since this is the body part that is left in its bovine state when she is represented in her Hathor mask-form,

and since she is known as one of the deities who “listen to prayers” (Pinch, 1993: 359). It is also suggested that the ears, as Pinch (1993: 253) has rightly asserted, could not have held merely an invocative function, since this would probably have made them a lot more popular to add to votive offerings than they are. Their frequency does not seem to correlate with strengthening the magic.

Now, let us review the Hathor cult: the cult is steeped in musical ritual, for exciting sexual pleasure, enjoyment, jubilation and frightening away evil spirits. Obviously ears were an important part of this ritual process, since hearing was probably the sense that was most indulged during Hathoric festivals and Hathor worship. Thus, the ear is still a means to connect to the goddess, but not merely in order to invoke her ears to hear one’s plea.

The ears are interesting for a few reasons, and the main reason is that their purpose is not definite. Another reason is the form that they take. Why, if they were intended to promote the hearing of the goddess (for the purpose of hearing the plea) were they not in their bovine form, since the hieroglyphic determinative for hearing is indeed a bovine ear? The hieroglyphic determinative (D4 in Gardiner’s sign list) for seeing, incorporated the Eye, as we know it in its cultic, mythological and popular representation (Gardiner, 1994: 451). It maintains one (human) form. The ears offered here are odd, because they do not (in terms of their hieroglyphic quality) mean “hearing”, but simply “ear” (Gardiner, 1994: 452). Thus, this thesis would like to suggest that the ears did not simply invoke the goddess’ ears, but played a different unknown role, which may only be guessed at. This is not to suggest that they absolutely did not invoke the goddess’ ears, but rather that perhaps the case is not as cut-and-dried as previously supposed.



Figure 44: Hieroglyphic:
“to see”

This being said, the most popular sensory organ in Hathoric worship and offerings was the eye. The eye’s importance and various functions have been discussed in this thesis at length and its form, as another representation of the goddess, has also been discussed at length. The eye’s most important function was apotropaic and it was used in this respect.



Figure 45: A stela depicting a combination of eyes and ears.

There are interesting examples of stelae which incorporate both eyes and ears, and the fact that these organs are used in conjunction would allude to a deeper meaning than simply invoking the gods' ears and eyes. It could be interpreted to imply that the person who offered it was cured of blindness and deafness, but many scholars, have interpreted it metaphorically, reading the inscriptions as an allusion to resolving spiritual blindness, or (as in the case of Tutankhamun) misery caused by royal displeasure (Pinch, 1993: 257).

Jewellery generally is not strictly considered to be a votive object, since we have no clear indication whether these were used in personal adornment and somehow wound up at the Hathor shrine, or if they were actively gifted to the goddess. There is some evidence which suggests that *menat*-necklace counterpoises were dedicated, or at least had ritual function, but we cannot be certain (Pinch, 1993: 281). Rings were not very popular, but bracelets and necklaces were, large amounts of beads have been found and these would appear to have formed part of *menat*-necklaces. It is unclear by whom the jewellery would have been dedicated, but Pinch (1993: 281) suggests that they seem to have been official, rather than private gifts; which is interesting, since there is very little use of precious metal. One would perhaps expect that if the jewellery were gifts from the state, they would have been made out of more valuable substances, but perhaps their symbolic value was greater than their physical value. It is not impossible to imagine, however, that owners may have offered jewellery, especially amulets, to the goddess after wearing them.

Cats and cow figures were also relatively popular offerings at certain sites. The donors may have been from both sexes, and their purpose varied, though their obvious purpose is veneration of the goddess and invoking her benevolence (Pinch, 1993: 196). Hathor, in her cow form, is docile; whereas in her lioness form, she is fierce. The cat was seen as the tamed version of the lion, thus also a tamed version of the goddess Sekhmet. The cat-

goddess was named Bastet and she was venerated within the home. The cat-cults of ancient Egypt were popular during certain periods in Egypt's history and they were linked to Hathoric worship through mythology, because Bastet was linked to Sekhmet, and she, in turn, was linked to Hathor (Pinch, 1993: 196). The cat should not be viewed synonymously with the cow however, since the cat still had a bit of fierceness to her, she was just less violent than the lioness. Perhaps we may view the cat as a middle-ground goddess, halfway between malevolence and benevolence.

3.2.2. *The Queen as Hathor*

The queen of Egypt, as mentioned before, was, for the most part, a legitimising force, meant to complete the triad of husband, wife and child. Without the queen, there could be no child, and thus no triad. The queen was essential in fulfilling the function of royal wife and mother. In mythology, this royal wife could have been either Isis or Hathor, but queens during the New Kingdom started adopting the guises of Hathor to a greater extent.

The obvious reason for this would be that that Hathor was Horus' female consort and the pharaoh was the embodiment of Horus on earth. Thus, this could suggest that the portrayal of the queen as the goddess Hathor equated her with this goddess. Perhaps the symbolism suggests that there is more to the queen's relationship with Hathor than has previously been suggested.



Figure 46: Nefertari depicted with the Hathoric wig.

During the New Kingdom, queens started to be depicted more and more symbolically like Hathor; though "Hathoric" elements can be found in earlier examples, their popularity and frequency increased in this period (Troy, 2002: 21). Their hairstyles changed, as well as their headdresses and clothing. This may have been in order to embody the potency of the goddess Hathor, since Hathor stood for power (in the context of the Egyptian monarchy). Hathor

was a potent figure, and her potency could have been what was sought by the Egyptian queens by adopting her regalia. Though, it must be stated that our primary evidence for this assertion is tomb art, and tomb art was (for the most part) commissioned by men and then executed by men. It is impossible to say that no queen ever had a hand in commissioning art, but there is little evidence to directly suggest it (with the exception of Hatshepsut).

Symbolically, elevating the queen from simply a figurehead, to goddess, would have been incredibly significant. If the art is indeed attempting to do this, and if it is a reflection on reality, this does suggest a slight heightening in the status of the queen during the New Kingdom. Though, it is suggested that this is precisely what took place, since the most prominent queens, that is: the queens with the most influence, (Hatshepsut and Nefertari), were closely identified with Hathor. Being portrayed as the goddess in artwork, or displaying a very close relationship towards the goddess in artwork. It is impossible to say whether their portrayal as the goddess, or a close relationship to the goddess, definitely gave rise to, or was a consequence of, their elevated status, but to deny any connection would perhaps be too presumptuous as well.

A question of purpose arises at this point, as one may question why they would need to suddenly be portrayed as the goddess in order to illustrate their elevated status; since this was not needed previously. A simple answer would be that, it was not *really needed* previously. In the New Kingdom, the pharaoh's status was more elevated than ever before (Kessler, 2004b: 143). He wielded massive amounts of power, and his potency could not be called into question. His monarchy needed to be indisputable, because of Egypt's history up to that point. A weak pharaoh meant a weak state, and a weak state could be invaded easily and this meant that foreigners could potentially take control of Egypt. To the Egyptian mind-set (as can be gauged from their portrayal of foreigners in art), there could be nothing more terrible than this for state and society. Every other nation was inferior to the Egyptians from the Egyptians' point of view. As can be seen in Lichtheim (1975: 208):

Everywhere the stranger is the servant of the inferior man.

He arouses wrath in the crowd though he has done no wrong.

Someone will despise him [though] he does not spite him.

He must listen to insulting cursing and laugh at it as a joke.

He must forget the crime of [being treated as] a woman because he is a stranger.

A rich man who is abroad is one whose purse gets rifled.

When a wise man is far away his heart seeks his town.

Thus, when Egypt was run by foreigners, the state and society collapsed, as can be attested by the art of the intermediate periods. This meant that the Egyptian monarchy needed to appear incredibly strong and godlike (in the religious sense of the word).

It is the opinion of this thesis that the queen was portrayed as a goddess, for the same purpose that the pharaoh was portrayed as a god: to impress the masses, by maintaining (and believing) in the idea that the pharaoh and his consort (and thus their offspring) were divine. It is perhaps easier to have faith in divine leaders, than mere mortal ones. The idea of divine leadership would have been all the more potent in Egypt, considering the extremely religious nature of the society. Religion was an inextricable part of everything the ancient Egyptians came into contact with, including their leadership.

Thus, in portraying the queen as a goddess, not only was her status elevated, but also that of her husband (the pharaoh) and child(ren). They were the divine triad, not only the divine pharaoh. This is significant in any social construct where an absolute monarchy reigns (sometimes oppressively), since any perceived weakness in the monarchy could

relate to a weakness in the pharaoh and thus, the state. The state here, not only existing as an entity within the borders of Egypt, but also in relation to foreign countries. Thus, if the queen were perceived as strong, her husband would be perceived as even stronger, and therefore the state as well.

One might ask why Hathor, specifically was chosen in order to convey the power of the queen as a regent, rather than another goddess perhaps. The answer is complicated, yet simple, at the same time. It is complicated, because it is difficult to distinguish the Egyptian goddesses from one another at times. They have many overlapping features and characteristics. It is a difficult task to try and say definitely that the one was the patron of one thing above all the others, and one such a thing is power. Hathor was a goddess who possessed real power, but not necessarily in her bovine form. Hathor, as the cow, is docile, loving and playful. She enjoys dancing and is extremely beautiful. She is benevolent, but she is also strong. Her strength lies in that despite her docile nature, she can become malevolent. Her power lies in her dual nature. Hathor is a strong goddess, because of the many facets of her strength. But most importantly, for the socio-religious context, Hathor was the consort of Horus. And as Hathor is the consort of Horus in mythology, the queen should embody her as the consort of the earthly embodiment of Horus.

The queen, in being portrayed as Hathor, not only gave power to religious constructs, but also to the pharaoh and lastly, to herself. Thus, emphasizing the most important features for the maintenance of order (*maat*) in ancient Egyptian society: religion and the pharaoh, since religion ordered the way the ancient Egyptians lived their day-to-day lives. It gave their lives meaning and sense. The pharaoh was the patron of maintaining this order. Thus his strength symbolised a strong Egypt.

Thus, the queen's status may have grown along with that of her husband, through a divine portrayal of her as Hathor. It is also entirely possible that some queens may have used this identification with the goddess in order to further their status elevation. Nefertari, as an overtly sexualised queen, may have identified herself with Hathor in

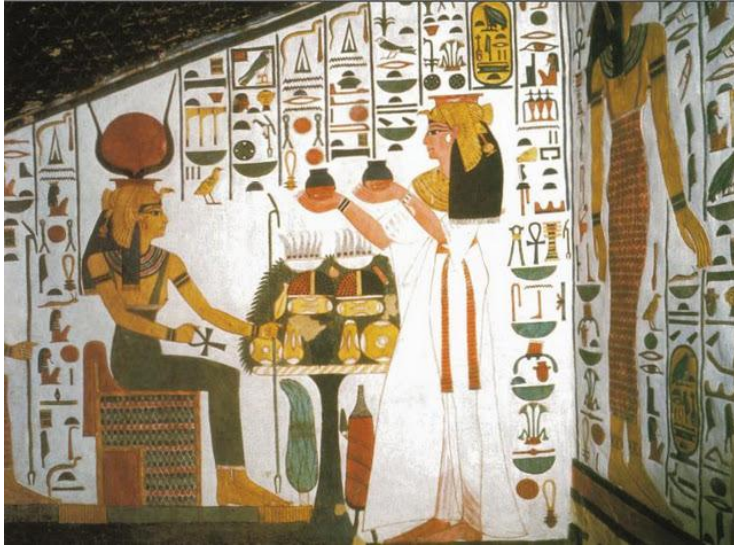


Figure 47: Nefertari depicted in a sheer dress interacting with Hathor

order to further, specifically, this aspect of her. In her temple at Abu Simbel she is often seen in close contact with the goddess. In her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, especially her sexualised image is apparent, as she is portrayed in several scenes wearing a sheer dress, while in the company of the goddess (McDonald, 1996: 92).

Though, it must be mentioned that Hathor was not the only goddess with whom Nefertari identified herself. She was also identified with Isis, and especially Mut, as Mut was the goddess of Karnak and Thebes. Mut was also closely associated with the goddesses Sekhmet and Bastet (Lesko, 1999: 270). Perhaps Nefertari used her relationship with these goddesses in order to elevate herself, or to create an appearance of power. She was venerated beyond “normal” measure by her husband, Ramses II. Perhaps this was due to her own ambition, or her use of Egyptian religion and iconography. It is impossible to say for certain. But what is clear, is that she was greatly venerated by her husband, and that he in turn, was greatly venerated by the Egyptian people, and also foreign people and their countries.

3.2.3. Non-royal Women as Hathor

Non-royal women were not depicted (in the strictest sense of the word) as Hathor, as often as royal women were. The depictions were not always as tangible as that of royal women. There are statuettes and tomb paintings, which directly depict a non-royal woman as Hathor, though not in the same way as in the case of royal women. Thus, the depictions spoken of in this section will be in the sense of non-royal women assimilating Hathor, or her guise, in some other way. The most obvious way, would be through magic.

In magical spells, non-royal and royal women alike were identified with Hathor. Especially during birth and death (as in the spells previously mentioned).

It is important to note however, that in the Egyptian household (in its most nuclear form) the symbolic portrayal of the woman as Hathor, would not have served as a legitimizing force for the potency of the husband. There are two major arguments against this. Firstly, the husband was not the head of the household, not in the sense that the pharaoh was the head of his family and the state (Schneider, 2004: 325-326). The wife in ancient Egypt was the head of the household. This is not to say she had free reign, since Egypt was still a patriarchal society, and the amount of influence the wife had in her home cannot be measured with certainty. Though, we do know that in an idealised construct of the household, the wife was its head. She and her children would still be subject to her husband; but within the home, the husband and children were subject to the wife, because the house was her domain. Secondly, the husband in Egypt's power as head of the family (which was a distinct role from that of head of the household) could not really be called into question, since it was the accepted norm and functioned as such. Neither is it apparent that Egyptian men had a specific affinity with any of the male gods, in the same way that the women had an affinity with Hathor. The pharaoh was the embodiment of Horus, but this did not trickle down into society in the sense that every husband was identified with Horus.

Therefore, this thesis would like to argue that Hathor's identification with non-royal women had less to do with the mythological triad-construct, and more to do with her other magical faculties. This is not to say that the triad can be completely ignored. Indeed the mythological triad served as the basis for the monarchy's ideal family unit, and so too that of the populace, but that is not to say that this was the basis for the non-royal women of Egypt identifying themselves with Hathor. Thus, in the non-royal construct, identification with the goddess was not used as a legitimizing force. Hathor's image, it seems, would have been used in a more magical capacity, in the sense that the woman embodying the goddess would also embody her magical properties and potency.

Naturally, fashions trickled down from the monarchy to the general populace. Thus, it would not be imprudent to assume that some more affluent women would have worn the Hathor wigs in the same way that the royalty did. And, as previously mentioned, this may have been done in order to harness the goddess' sexual potency, in the same way that the spells in which the women are identified with the goddess serves to harness her potency.

There exists an immediate difference in the symbolism between non-royal women portrayed as Hathor and royal women portrayed as her. Either neither portrayal should be concerned with the triad-mythology, or this is not the sole explanation for royal women's portrayal as Hathor. This thesis would opt for the latter, since the former is in direct contrast with a known and accepted fact (Pirelli, 2008: 23). It is suggested that ancient Egyptian women's embodiment of Hathor had a deeper significance than has been previously suggested, for both royal and non-royal.

Hathor symbolised potency within herself and could be named the "Goddess of Power". Since, above all, this was what she symbolised, and from this power, came all her other attributes. She is not omnipotent, but she does possess immense power; powers that can potentially influence the most important aspects of daily life. She possessed the power to dictate destiny (through her manifestation as the Seven Hathors). She possessed power over birth and life in infancy. Then she possesses the power to facilitate joy in life through her music, dance and love aspects. Through her love powers, she facilitates sex and procreation, therefore starting the cycle again. Though, she is still there at the end of the earthly-life, facilitating passage and safe-guarding into and through the afterlife, by providing rebirth and then also sustenance in the afterlife. Hathor was not omnipresent in the sense that the Christian God is perceived to be omnipresent, but she was omnipresent in the sense that she had influence (to a greater or lesser extent) in every aspect of the ancient Egyptian women's lives. Her influence was powerful and her power was tangible, perhaps in a way that we cannot fully understand in our modern context.

Thus, it is suggested that women, both royal and non-royal portrayed themselves as Hathor, in order to harness her power. Power in this sense meaning both: potency, or the

ability to affect situations; and dominion, dominion over the domestic sphere (and perhaps beyond). Perhaps ancient Egyptian women portrayed themselves as Hathor in order that they may be elevated beyond their station, even if this elevation was only momentary. This is extremely significant for the non-royal woman, as there existed virtually no means by which she could attain this power of her own volition. Perhaps in portraying herself as Hathor, the ancient Egyptian woman felt a greater sense of control, and perhaps even self-determinism.

3.3. *Priestesses of Hathor*

One way by which women could attain a modicum of power, was through the priesthood in the cult of Hathor. The priesthood was structured by a hierarchy. The cult of Hathor flourished in the Old Kingdom and with it the number of priestesses of Hathor. For reasons unknown, the cult-dynamic changed and the popularity of priestesses along with it. By the Twelfth Dynasty in the Middle Kingdom, there is virtually no mention of priestesses of Hathor. The title only crops up again in the New Kingdom, but not in any functional capacity, rather to serve as a legitimizing force (Gillam, 1995: 211).

Within the cult, there were the head priests, then lesser priests and then there were the ritual performers (who were not priests, but formed part of the priesthood). The cult of Hathor was not unique in its function, though its titles and who the title-holders were, were often-times unique. The cult of Hathor cannot be dated with complete accuracy, nor can the appearance of the first Priest of Hathor, but what is interesting to note, is that the earliest examples of the title, coincide with the earliest evidence of the cult and Hathor being worshipped as a deity in her own right (Allam, 1963: 1-2).

There were several titles within the cult, which could be held by men and women. The most important being that of “Head Priest”, then there was the “Priest(ess) of Hathor” (which this thesis shall be focusing on). The title, Priestess of Hathor could be accompanied by a Hathoric epithet (Galvin, 1981: 6-7). The title was also not always the sole title held by the title-holder.

During the Old Kingdom, as has been stated earlier, the tasks of the priests were performed on a shift-basis and the tasks could be performed by anyone who was ritually pure at the time. This means that both men and women could perform the act of ritualistically clothing, bathing and feeding the cultic statue, i.e. the goddess (Gillam, 1995: 212-213). Though the appearance of women mentioned performing these tasks is virtually non-existent, evidence suggests that both men and women *could* perform these tasks.

The priestesses were mainly in charge of presenting the goddess (her statue) with sacred items, such as a sistrum or a *menat* necklace. The goddess' divinity would then travel into the objects, i.e. she would become them (Allam, 1963: 38-39 and Galvin, 1981: 239). The priestess would presumably have been clothed in a ritualistic fashion, representing the goddess herself (Galvin, 1981: 239). She would probably have worn a *menat*, a red scarf tied around her neck and sistra. The red scarf was only used during the Old Kingdom and had been dropped from use by the First Intermediate Period (Galvin, 1981: 239). The priestesses were not musicians, however. As previously stated there is no evidence which clearly states that a priestess is performing music. The musicians were also employed by the temple, or cult, but they were not priestesses and did not perform the rituals (Gillam, 1995: 222). They did participate, but only in order to provide the necessary musical accompaniment. Furthermore, they were not clothed to represent the goddess, rather (as has been suggested elsewhere in this thesis) they were symbols of fertility and were clothed as such.

The prevalence of female priests changed toward the Middle Kingdom, when it is thought (by scholars, such as Gillam, 1995: 233) that women were considered to be less pure than men, because of menstruation and child-birth. This conclusion is drawn from the statement in *P. Westcar XI*: 18-19, where Rudjedet purifies herself for fourteen days after giving birth (Gillam, 1995: 212). Ahwere, the wife of Setne (from the first tale of Setne), also refers to her menstruation as her purification. Thus, we may deduce that women needed to be purified, whereas men (presumably) were naturally pure. It is unclear why

the “purity” of women may have become a moot-point during this timeframe, but one possible answer could be that Mentuhotep II (as mentioned earlier) married priestesses (such as Amunet) of Hathor in order to legitimize his claim to the throne (Gillam, 1995: 225).

Mentuhotep II was also the first to use the idea of a god coupling with a mortal woman, in order to claim his divinity (Gillam, 1995: 225). He named himself the “Son of Hathor”. It is possible that regents following him did not want to be dethroned by claimants based on marriage to a priestess. It is also possible that the weakness of the Eleventh Dynasty was blamed on Mentuhotep II’s perceived illegitimacy, and that the priestesses were an easy scapegoat. All speculation aside, for one reason or another, priestesses became increasingly less frequent toward the end of the Middle Kingdom, and there are scarcely any during the New Kingdom (Gillam, 1995: 211). By then, the priesthood had basically become a boys’ club.

Up until this point it has been argued why specifically women may have been drawn to Hathor as a goddess. Perhaps these reasons also contributed to why her female priesthood was so strong. Or, one could argue that her influence among women was strong, specifically because she had such a strong female-priesthood base. A compromise is proposed: Hathor was an established deity, entering on the coattails of other cow-goddesses with established cults, such as Bat (Gillam, 1995: 215). She quickly gained a cult following, because of her immense reach (into both the religious and social sphere). The cult gained popularity and quickly amassed a priesthood, containing both men and women. This in turn allowed that the Cult’s following swell in numbers, specifically female numbers, because of the feminine influence in the cult. The inclusion of female priests in the cult probably meant that more women wanted to be female priests. Thus, Hathor’s popularity grew. It is proposed that Hathor’s affinity and relationship with, specifically women, allowed for her female-priesthood. Hereby not suggesting that Hathor’s cult excluded men, just that it was perhaps more inclusive towards women than the other main cultic deities.

This thesis would not want to overreach on this point, but there might be some credence to the idea that a goddess allowed more freely for the inclusion of female priests. Although there is evidence that male gods' temples and cults also employed some women as priests, the numbers are nowhere near that of Hathor's cult and neither is the status of the titles. Hathor's cult not only allowed for females to know a certain amount of power-equality (in the workplace) with men, but also allowed women to be closer to the goddess (i.e. her statue) than would otherwise be allowed. Perhaps these are the two main reasons for the great number of recorded female priests in the Hathor Cult.

3.4. Art

This section will aim to review the representations of women's relationship with Hathor in Egyptian art. The main aim of this section will be to establish the relationship as portrayed through the art. What is important to note for this section, is that the artists were all male. Very little, if any, of the art was drawn by women, and there is no evidence that women ever commissioned art, with the exception of Hatshepsut. Therefore we shall be viewing the relationship between the Egyptian women and Hathor through the eyes of men. Secondly, it is important to note that most of the art is from tombs, and was therefore never meant for the eyes of the living, therefore the art was not meant for the purpose of "appearance", but for ritual, though Hatshepsut is an exception here, once again. The art of ancient Egypt can be read, and in the reading, this thesis hopes to find the nature of the relationship between Hathor and the women of ancient Egypt.

3.4.1. Personal Art

Personal art will be referred to as any art (or art-piece) that may have been used in a slightly more personal capacity. The pieces shown will be pieces which are intended to venerate the goddess, for the sole purpose of veneration, as well as the purpose of gaining something from the goddess. These pieces will vary from statuettes, to bowls, to furniture, to linen, to jewellery. The nature of some of the artefacts (such as the bowls and linens) are exceptionally good, because we may almost certainly say that the people that offered/ made use of them are the same people who made them: i.e. women. In the

case that the items were perhaps not made by women, they were still primarily used by women, which is still of great importance to this study. As the items themselves and their varying purposes have been discussed elsewhere in this study, this section will focus mainly on how Hathor is portrayed upon these items and what the purpose of the portrayal might be in each individual case.

Statuettes have not really been discussed in this thesis on the same scale as the other items; therefore this study shall provide a brief background of their purpose. Statuettes serve as the “living image” of the goddess. They are where she may come to dwell, if she so chooses, during the daytime. Statuettes of Hathor were quite popular among the household cults (along with Heket, Taweret, Bes and Bastet) (Robins, 1997a: 85). The statuette would be placed in the household shrine. There is no way of knowing exactly how worship of the deity occurred in the ancient Egyptian private household, as formal worship was on a local and national level, but not really on a personal level. Furthermore, we cannot say with absolute certainty that the ancient Egyptians thought that the goddess manifested in the statue in a household shrine, since the Egyptians believed that the goddess would manifest in the statue of her temple, where she was only attended by pure priests. Thus, it stands to reason that the personal shrines were not concrete manifestations of the goddess, but perhaps invitations to her, that she may manifest, if she so wished.



Figure 48: A statuette of Beset

Statuettes of Hathor’s counterparts, such as Taweret, Heket, Bastet and Bes were very popular too, as well as Bes’ female counterpart Beset (David, 2002: 285). Beset was basically just a female version of Bes and it is not really clear why she existed at all, since Bes himself already contains female characteristics. Perhaps his mythology underwent a sexual reassignment at one point or another. Whatever the case, Beset was a lot less popular and not nearly as widespread.

This being stated, the statuette may theoretically have been the most important object in the household cult, but perhaps this theory does not ring exactly true. If this were the

case, one would expect to have many more examples of household shrines and the statuettes that these shrines would have housed. The evidence is simply lacking. This may be due to various factors. It may be that scholars are yet to discover more examples, or that they have simply been lost to the deterioration of time, or that many statuettes have been displaced into other settings. This study would suggest that many of these statuettes were perhaps reused, or repurposed, as funerary objects. Especially those related to the Hathor-cult would have been ideal to repurpose, because of Hathor's relation to the death-cult.



Figure 49: A bowl depicting a woman wearing a hip-girdle with a Bes tattoo (or drawing) on her thigh

Bowls, and other vessels, were quite popular, though if they were purely used for votive purposes, is debatable. These vessels often contained the patterns, which we may now associate with fertility (and thus, the Hathor-cult), or depiction of the goddess herself, or the god(desse)s associated with her (Figure 49). They were often blue, whether faience, or a paste made to look like faience, and we may deduce that this was done with the specific purpose of venerating the “Turquoise Lady”, as Hathor was known.

Since a bowl is a multi-purpose utensil, it is difficult to discern whether they were used exclusively in ritual, or perhaps in daily life. It is impossible to say whether they were considered too sacred to be made general-purpose use of, or if they were specifically reserved and set aside. Furthermore, it is equally impossible to know whether they were only made in order to be offered to the goddess at the temple, or if they could be used within the household (for ritual, or personal, use). The bowls varied in shapes and sizes, but they are extremely interesting for their many uses. They could also be repurposed easily.

This study proposes that bowls were popular surfaces to illustrate Hathor, or her associated god(desse)s, because a bowl is first, and foremost, a receptacle. Metaphorically speaking, the bowl as a receptacle, may have translated into the womb as a receptacle. This may have been why bowls were a popular offering to Hathor specifically. It is unclear what exactly these bowls were meant to keep, but a distinct connection to Hathor is obvious. Though, it is suggested that even if they were merely used for the purpose of eating out of, this would still have related to Hathor, because she provides nourishment in more than one of her forms. However, it seems unlikely that poorer people would have used expensive objects, such as these, as merely crockery. This study would suggest that these bowls held ritual significance, which is yet to be determined. The bowls seem to, more often than not, represent Hathor, in her Hathor-mask form. This motif is often combined with the blue-colouring, the “fertility-dotting” and flower-motifs.



Figure 50: A bowl with fish and lotuses

One thing that may suggest that the bowls were used for eating, is the presence of fish (Figure 50). Though, here the reader is reminded of the fish’s own connection to fertility and rebirth in mythology. The addition of the fish on a blue bowl may have been a way to safeguard against infertility, or to promote fertility. On the other hand, it may simply be decorated crockery. Though, this this opinion is strongly opposed, because nothing in Egyptian art was ever done merely for aesthetic value. The aesthetics of Egyptian art are a happy coincidence, in accordance with *maat*.

The same idea may be used when viewing Egyptian furniture, such as beds, chairs, and vanity tools, such as mirrors. As has been shown, Hathor was an important addition to the decorative funerary beds, as used by Tutankhamun. Her addition to household furniture has been explained as stemming from her apotropaic nature, as well as her aspects of fertility and femininity. It is also extremely important to, once again, take note that the



Figure 51: Neck-rest in the form of a miniature chair with Bes' face on it for protection during the night.

objects used within the household could be recycled for use in the burial, or as a temple-offering. There is no way to know for certain that the furniture, especially vanity tools, were not used exclusively for votive purposes. Though, it is suggested that they were not. The craftsmanship of the items, with the exception of the funerary bed, is not delicate enough to suggest that no one could use it (Ikram, 2003: 134).

Hathor is most often depicted in her cow-form, on the furniture items, and Hathor-mask form, on the vanity items. It is interesting that, especially on mirrors, the Hathor-mask should appear, often with the double-faced rendering. It is entirely possible that women, as they were looking into the vanity mirror, perhaps were aspiring to emulate these aspects of Hathor and her dual-nature. The mirrors were often made of precious metals, probably for both function, in order to promote reflectivity, and form (in the cult of Hathor), in order to connote the connection to the “Golden Goddess”.

Linen is probably the most interesting offering offered to Hathor. It was virtually exclusively offered within her cult, was virtually exclusively offered by women, and the evidence would suggest that large amounts of the offered linens served no ritual purpose outside of the votive (Robins, 1993: 161-162).

The reason for Hathor's and the Hathor-cult's connection to linens may be explained through Hathor's connection to cloth. In the “Coffin Texts”, Spell 484, Hathor is venerated as “[the person in question] will give praise to Hathor, for [(s)he] ha[s] seen her beauty. [(S)he] will give her the fabric, for her form is more distinguished than the gods.” (Lesko, 1999: 90). This spell may have operated more like a hymn, since it references the offering of linens.

The linens often contained scenes from the “Books of the Dead”, depicting Hathor as the “Lady of the Sycamore” and the “Cow from the West”, or the “Cow from the Mountains”, depicting Hathor’s connection to the funerary cult (Allam, 1963: 112-113). Though, as has been stated, it is not clear why these depictions are upon the linens, since they do not seem themselves to be associated with funerals or funerary-rites.

A possible solution to the question of relevance of funerary motifs may be relatively simple. If we agree that the majority of the women who donated these linens made the linens themselves and that they were illiterate, then we must suppose that they probably did not draw the scenes onto the cloths themselves, or at least, could not read them. If this study is allowed to speculate, several suggestions come to the fore: perhaps the act of illustrating the linens was delegated to other people, thus the scribes who illustrated them, illustrated what they knew off-by-heart (the formulae of the funerary spells) (Wimmer, 2004: 348). On the other hand, these funerary scenes may have been executed by the women themselves, though, being illiterate, they could not vary the scenes. Perhaps they only drew scenes that they were familiar with, because they knew of no alternative.

A further option may be that the linens served double duty: perhaps their main objective was votive, but perhaps they were meant to act as worship of Hathor’s capacity as goddess of the underworld. This idea is proposed as the most likely, since the quoted hymn comes from a coffin text. Thus the deceased was worshipping the goddess by offering linen. Hathor was worshipped in all her forms. Perhaps that of death-goddess is just unusual in its veneration by the living?

Hathor’s veneration through jewellery is interesting, because of the various aspects the various manifestations of her may connote. Jewellery in this section specifically meaning depictions of her, or the divinities associated with her, on necklaces, amulets, rings and bracelets. The various depictions and manifestations, as well as their specific purposes have already been discussed. Thus, jewellery as a means of veneration shall be discussed.

Undoubtedly the most important piece of jewellery for the study of the Hathor-cult is the *menat*-necklace. The *menat* was not just a necklace, it symbolised the potency of the goddess (Galvin, 1981: 205). By wearing a *menat*, a woman could potentially employ some of this potency. The *menat* was a ritual object. It is believed that the priests of Hathor (as mentioned previously) would present the statue of the goddess with the *menat* and the goddess would then manifest some of her “essence” in the *menat*. The *menat* was used in an apotropaic capacity, but also in percussion. It was worn only by priestesses and some royal women. Other jewellery within the Cult of Hathor did not carry symbolic significance of the *menat*. Though, that is not to say that other jewellery associated with the Cult was without significance.

The question that arises is: why would a woman wear Hathoric jewellery specifically? The answer is embedded in Egyptian culture and the significance of symbols in the culture and religion. With what we know of Egyptian culture, it can confidently be stated that the primary reason for wearing Hathor-specific jewellery would have been firstly, for veneration; secondly, for protection and lastly, for fertility. It is suggested that veneration is the most important reason, because of the ritual (and thus cultural) significance the *menat*-necklace must have had.

Thus, this section discussed art and portrayals of Hathor upon items which women (primarily) would have come into contact with, these items and their nature suggest that the women of ancient Egypt had a deeply personal relationship with the goddess. She was invited into their homes, to their dinner-table, and into their daily beauty-routine. And they, in turn, invited themselves into her funerary cult, through the offering of linen. Hathor was in every sphere of the personal, daily, lives of the women of ancient Egypt, and they venerated her for it.

3.4.2. Interactions with Hathor

This section will be focused mainly on the interactions between Hathor and women in art. No distinction shall be drawn between royal and non-royal women, though a distinction

shall be drawn based on purpose. A contributing factor for the distinction not being drawn between royal and non-royal is the fact that the majority of the evidence depicts a royal woman's relationship with Hathor. Unfortunately the majority of the women of Egypt died as peasants and therefore, left very little in the way of material evidence. There are also distinct differences in the relationships between Hathor and royal woman, versus Hathor and non-royal women; these differences shall be pointed out, as the reader encounters them, reasons for these differences shall also be provided.

The art shall be divided up into the life-stages as used previously: birth, life, pregnancy and death. These scenes shall be drawn from several media, such as tomb-paintings, linens and temple decoration. Different scenes shall be discussed specifically. In doing so, this study may be able to understand how Egyptian women related to Hathor in the art. Though, since the most of the art was commissioned and executed by men, examples have been sought out which may have had the woman in question's personal input.

The birth-process was kept from the public eye, and because of this, we have very little details to work with. One example of how the birth-process occurred is Figure 20 (cf. page 36). The birth-process has been discussed, but this specific depiction is extremely important to this study of Hathor. Here Hathor is directly involved in the birth. She flanks the woman, aiding her. She occurs twice in the depiction, which is important, because ancient Egyptian magic works on the principle of repetition for potency: thus two Hathors, equals double potency (Pinch, 1994: 86). This depiction, as has been stated, is extremely rare: in the first place, because it depicts a birth; and secondly, because Hathor (instead of Heket, Taweret, or Bes) is included. Hathor (in effect) is acting as midwife in this scene, an important note, because in the spells relating to birth, Hathor is usually invited into the birthing bower (Robins, 1993: 83). Something of equal interest is the way the woman is depicted: she is wearing the Hathoric-wig, thus equating herself with the goddess. This is important, because it has already been illustrated how the spell's efficacy was increased if the person in question was equated with the god(dess). In this scene, one may view that Hathor is aiding the woman giving birth with tripled efficacy: doubled, because of the double Hathors flanking the woman; and tripled because the woman is

equated with Hathor. This depiction would have served magically to hasten the birth, thereby making it less painful and less risky; thus also protecting both mother and child.

The second example of a birth scene is found on a birth brick, which belonged to the noblewoman, Renseneb. The scene is a not exactly formal, but it is less literal than the former. The birth-process seems to have been implied through this depiction. The mother is holding her new-born and she is flanked by women, we may presume female family members, who were acting as midwives. The scene is flanked by Hathor-standards (again doubling the magical potency), which implies the goddess' presence in the scene. This scene is interesting, because Hathor is the only goddess explicitly depicted in the scene. She is not the main goddess associated with birth, yet she is depicted upon this object as the only goddess present. This is all the more exceptional, because of the nature of the object, which was used in a largely private capacity.



Figure 52: Birth-brick depicting the mother, child, midwives and Hathor-standards.

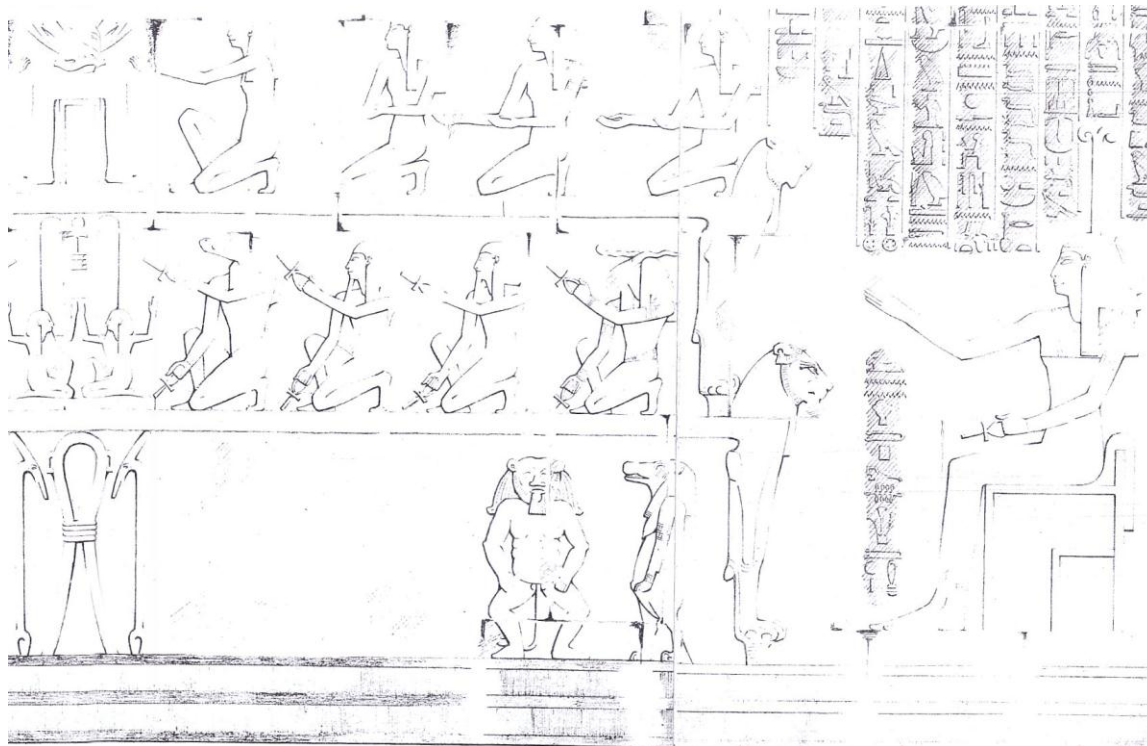


Figure 53: Hatshepsut's birth, Queen Ahmose, Taweret and Bes are visible, but Hatshepsut has been erased from her mother's lap.

The last example of a birth including Hathor, is the birth of Hatshepsut. Here the birth is again implied. Here this study would like to draw the distinction between the non-royal versus the royal portrayal of the birth. The most important distinction would be purpose. Hatshepsut's birth depiction was not magically intended to have eased her birth, since she was an adult when she herself commissioned the depiction. Rather, this depiction had a different magical intention: the intention of legitimisation. The birth here is an important aspect in Hatshepsut's claim to the throne, since it depicts her mother, Ahmose, giving birth to her as a boy. The god Bes and goddess Tawaret are both present at the birth, possibly just as witnesses, and protectors. Hathor is implied in the scene, through their presence. She is also implied through Ahmose's depiction: she is wearing the Hathoric headdress, the horns with the sun-disk and uraeus. This depiction is extremely important for our understanding of Hathor's differing relationship towards royal versus non-royal women. The depictions of the birth-process could not be more different, and neither could their purposes. Though, here it must be stated as well, that Hatshepsut cannot be viewed as simply a royal woman, since she ruled as pharaoh. She used Hathor largely to

legitimize her reign, which was unnecessary for other royal women to do. Royal women were not thought to be of divine birth, but this is what Hatshepsut claimed and depicted in the art she commissioned.



Figure 54: Hatshepsut being presented to Amun by Hathor, she has also been erased from this scene

Hatshepsut's claim to legitimacy is the primary reason for her depictions alongside Hathor. Since she is not shown as being born from Hathor explicitly, and since the divinity of the pharaoh was traced, not maternally, but paternally, Hatshepsut needed to depict herself as the daughter of Amun as well. She does this by depicting herself being presented to Amun, as his daughter, by the goddess Hathor. It is interesting that she chose Hathor to fulfil this role. Hathor here, acts in a legitimizing capacity, not only to the people of Egypt, but also symbolically to the god Amun, who then accepts Hatshepsut

as his daughter (son).

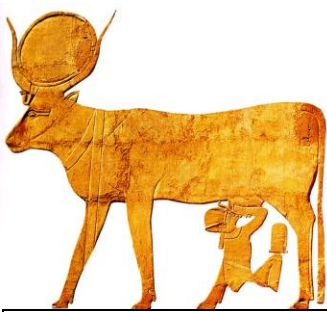


Figure 55: Hatshepsut is shown suckling Hathor

This legitimizing function that Hathor fulfils for the pharaohs of Egypt was greatly exploited by Hatshepsut, which is why she is shown (unlike any other female, royal, or non-royal) as suckling Hathor. This image was exclusively reserved for depictions of the god Horus and Hathor, or the pharaoh as Horus and Hathor. She is shown, in this example, suckling Hathor as a cow.

There are few depictions of Hathor expressly involved in the daily lives of the ancient Egyptian women. The most apparent reason for this is the lack of depictions of the daily lives of ancient Egyptian women. The scenes which we do have are often from the tombs

of men and do not depict specific women, but rather women in general; thus, no woman is singled out as having a relationship with any specific god(dess). The examples here will depict mostly the royal women, Nefertari and Hatshepsut, since perhaps they were important enough that the “mundane” in their daily lives involved a goddess. It is important to note that a difference in the purpose of the depictions shall once again be quite salient, since Nefertari was a queen and Hatshepsut was a pharaoh (which perhaps also alludes to the difference in the status occupied by the pharaoh, versus that of the queen). Also, it should be mentioned again that Nefertari’s status was not just that of queen. She was extremely revered by her husband, Ramses II, and therefore had a lot of status (perhaps more status than the average queen of Egypt).

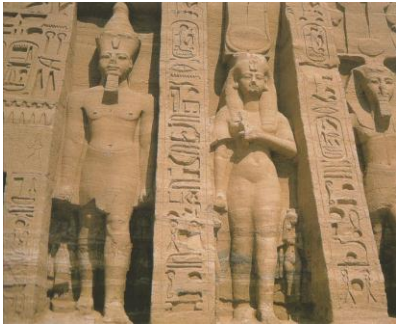


Figure 56: Nefertari’s chapel façade at Abu Simbel

The first depiction is of Nefertari on her temple’s façade at Abu Simbel. She is not expressly shown interacting with the goddess here, but this temple was not just in honour of Nefertari, it was also in honour of the goddess, Hathor. On this temple-façade, she is shown alongside her husband as Osiris, something that is completely unique. This uniqueness may perhaps be attributed to the fact that Nefertari is not simply representing herself here, she is also representing Hathor. Thus, the interaction between Nefertari and Hathor is that of assimilation. Perhaps being equated with Hathor is what prompted the addition of Nefertari to the façade. It is also extremely important to note that there is no noticeable size difference between Nefertari and her husband, which may perhaps again be attributed to her assimilation of Hathor.

Within the temple, there are various depictions of various god(desse)s interacting with each other and Nefertari. One important scene is a depiction of Nefertari presenting two sistra to Hathor. In this scene she is not being equated with Hathor, but with the iconography usually associated with a queen. Hathor is seated, holding a staff in her left hand, while wearing her iconographic *menat*-necklace and holding an Ankh in her right hand. This study feels that this scene functions on two levels: literal and symbolic. This

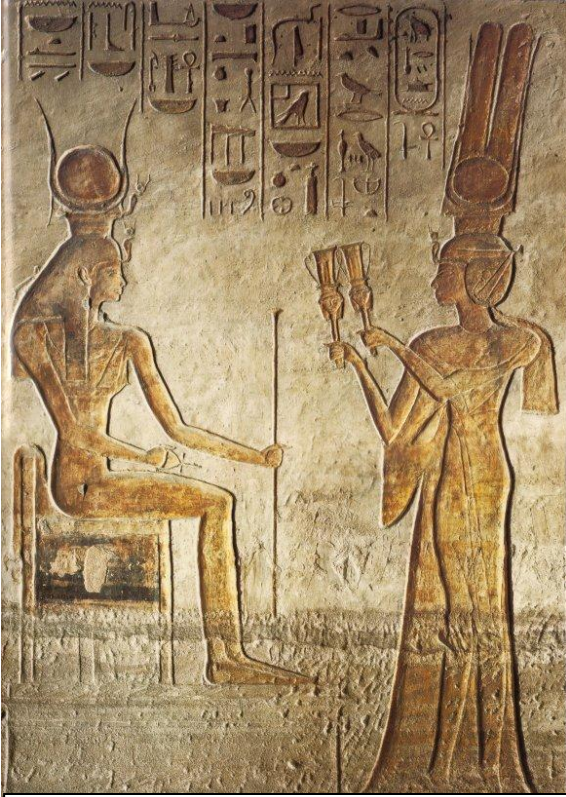


Figure 57: Nefertari presenting Hathor with sistra

scene may literally be a depiction of Nefertari performing the rituals of the Hathor-cult, presenting the goddess (her statue) with sistra for her to manifest her divinity in/ on. Symbolically, this scene may represent the queen venerating the goddess, or performing the ritual, without her needing to literally do so. Since the temple is dedicated to both Nefertari and Hathor, and in part by Nefertari to Hathor, we may presume that certain rituals probably took place within it. We may not presume that Nefertari herself literally performed the rituals however. Since the priesthood in the New Kingdom was monopolized by men, it would be unusual

for a woman to have performed sacred ritual, even if the woman were royal (Gillam, 1995: 211). It is impossible to say definitively that Nefertari never performed this ritual, but it is proposed that it is highly unlikely. Perhaps the depiction functioned magically and symbolically in a votive capacity.

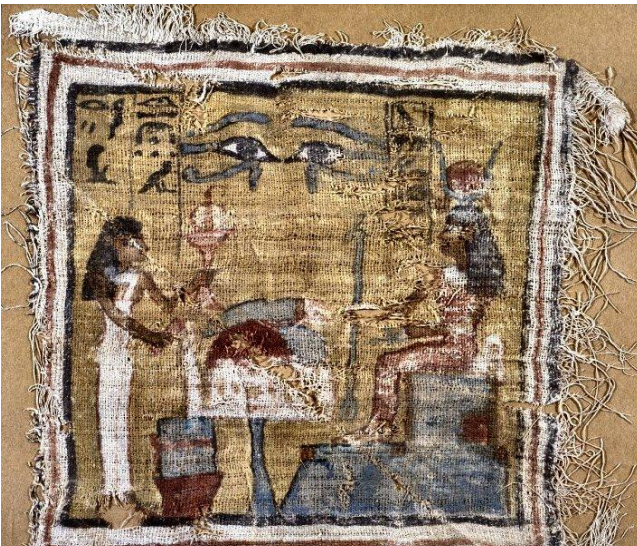


Figure 58: A votive cloth depicting Nubemiry libating Hathor

This suggestion is strengthened by a scene on a votive cloth from Deir el-Bahari. This scene depicts a non-royal woman, Nubemiry, censuring and libating Hathor, below the solar eyes. This study would like to argue that this ritual activity did not literally take place, but rather took place symbolically through the act of depicting it, and then offering the

depiction as a votive. The purpose of this depiction, it is argued, is the same of the former: symbolically (and thus realised through magic) venerating Hathor.

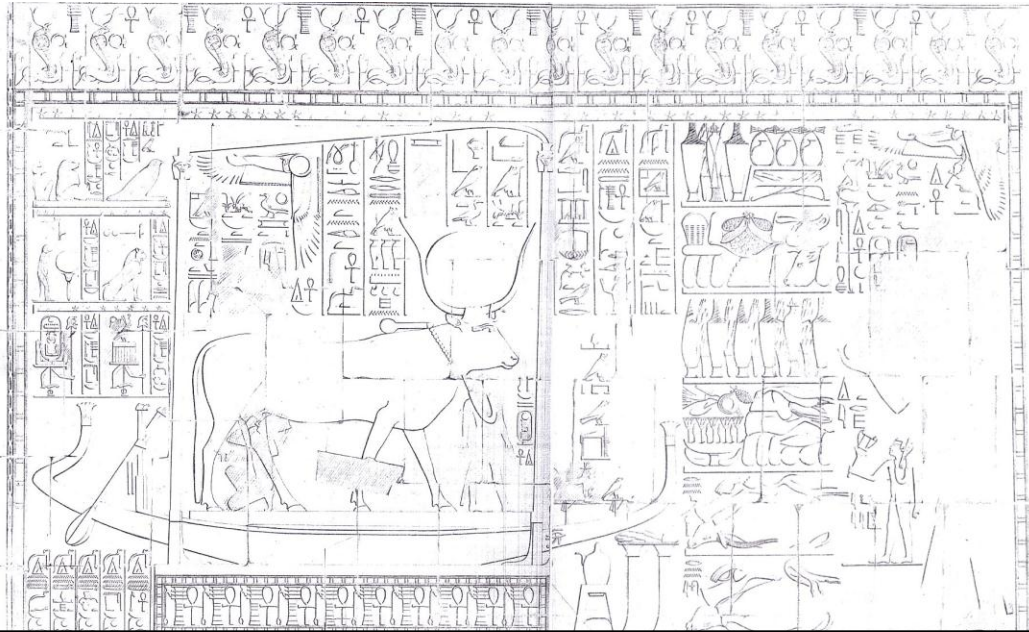


Figure 59: Hatshepsut (erased) is shown offering wine (among other goods) to Hathor on a ceremonial bark

It is proposed that the following depiction of a woman offering to Hathor probably is not merely symbolic, but literal too, since the woman in question, is Hatshepsut; thus, not only a woman, but a pharaoh. Here Hathor is depicted upon a sacred boat, which is probably a literal depiction of a festival. Hatshepsut is depicted as a man, offering wine (among other things) to the goddess. The depiction is accompanied by promises of life, happiness, health and stability (Neville, 1908: 5). The pharaoh is known to have generally participated in this capacity at festivals (Schneider, 2004: 327-328). It was an essential part of ensuring his (and Egypt's) continued prosperity (Schneider, 2004: 328). Hatshepsut's depiction in this fashion differs from Nefertari and Nubemiry's for the simple reason that Hatshepsut's is most probably a literal depiction of events, and theirs not. The purposes of the depictions differ, thus illustrating the differing relationships that these women had with Hathor. Nefertari and Nubemiry's operating in a votive capacity, and Hatshepsut's doing double duty as votive and literal (thus also propagandistically perpetuating herself as pharaoh).

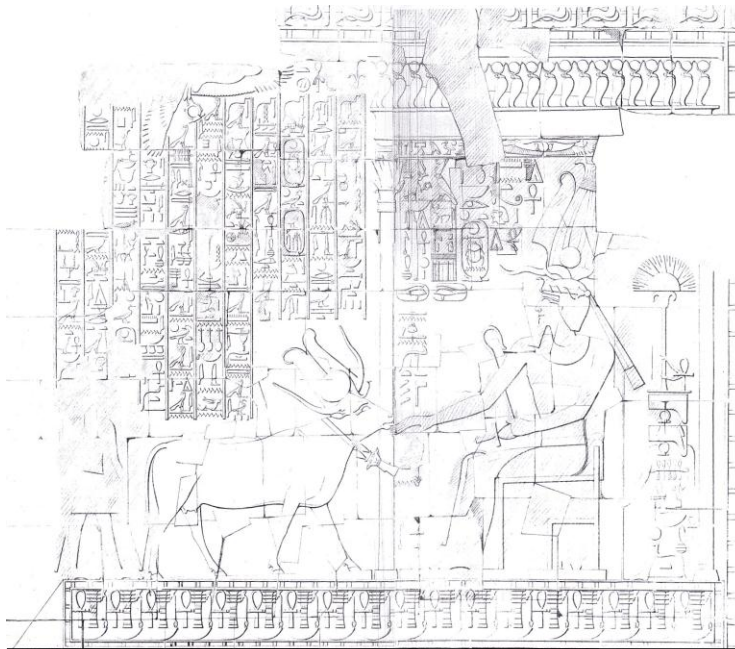


Figure 60: Hathor licking Hatshepsut's hand

In this scene Hathor is depicted licking the hand of the pharaoh Hatshepsut, which was meant to indicate that Hathor was kissing (literally smelling) her hand (divine flesh) in order to “endow the king [(Hatshepsut)] with life and purity (happiness)” (Navelle, 1908: 3). This depiction is accompanied by the following words:

“Said by Hathor [...]; my daughter [Maatkare], I have come, I rejoice in my love to thee; [...] my daughter of my bowels, [Maatkare], my Horus (child) of gold. I am thy mother with a sweet milk. I have suckled thy Majesty with my breasts; they impart to thee life and happiness. I kiss thy hand, I lick thy flesh with my gentle tongue”*

(Navelle, 1908: 3)

This scene is meant to illustrate Hatshepsut's divinity through Hathor, as well as the extreme affinity Hathor has for Hatshepsut. Therefore, we may once again see how this rendering serves double duty for Hatshepsut: as a votive for the goddess, while serving in a propagandistic capacity to meet her own ends. This depiction not only venerates the goddess, but Hatshepsut too.

* Maatkare was Hatshepsut's throne name, though in Navelle's rendition of the passage, he renders it as “Ramaka”, since the source is dated. Maatkare is the contemporary rendering of the name.

There are virtually no depictions of pregnant women from ancient Egypt, because of the private nature of the birth-process. It is impossible to say for certain why there are so few depictions, but a possible reason may be that the art was mainly done for men, by men, and men do not fall pregnant. Another possibility is that a pregnant woman was not in her optimal “state”, as in accordance with *maat*. This seems ironic, considering the status of pregnant women in society, but *maat* was focused on order, thus things in their essence (or “normal” state). Pregnancy was perhaps seen as too fleeting a state to be depicted as the “norm”.



Figure 61: Ahmose, led by Heket to the birth-bower

Hatshepsut, once again, challenges the norm by depicting her mother, Ahmose, as being seemingly pregnant with her. This is done expressly because Hatshepsut is attempting to claim her divine parentage through her mother’s pregnancy. The scene starts

where Amun decides (in the presence of Hathor, among other god(esse)s) that he has decided to father a princess to govern Egypt. He then visits Ahmose in the guise of Thutmose I (her husband) and she becomes pregnant with Hatshepsut. The scene progresses until we meet Ahmose, minimally pregnant, being led by Heket to the birth bower (implying Hathor’s presence as well). Thus, the pregnancy here confirms Hatshepsut’s divinity and destiny, despite her gender. It is important to comment on the depiction of the pregnancy: Ahmose here is meant to be full-term, but the pregnancy is not depicted as being that advanced, nor is she mentioned as being pregnant (though it is implied by the events immediately preceding and following this scene). This study would suggest that this rendering occurred as an attempt to stay within the confines of convention, while tentatively pushing the boundary, in order to attempt to maintain *maat*.

Since the vast majority of the information from Egypt is from the Death Cult, the examples here will contain more from non-royal women than the other life-stages discussed. Nefertari shall once again be made mention of, because her tomb is one of the best preserved and most beautiful in ancient Egypt. Death in Egypt acted as a unifier between the classes, to a certain extent, since there seems to be no apparent difference

between the purposes of the royal versus the non-royal depictions. The goal and purpose was the same between the classes: the continuation of life after death (Verhoeven, 2004: 483).



Figure 62: Nefertari, welcomed by Hathor to the Netherworld

In this scene, we see Nefertari being welcomed by Hathor to the Netherworld. Here Hathor's primary function is that of funerary goddess, and she welcomes Nefertari into her afterlife. Nefertari is wearing the traditional costume of the queen, while Hathor is depicted wearing a red shift dress. She is also wearing her iconographic *menat*-necklace. Hathor's divinity is emphasized by her colouring, contrasted by that of Nefertari. While Nefertari is the traditional light-tan colour; Hathor is coloured golden: simultaneously emphasizing her connection to the solar cult, and her divinity.

The following two examples are added slightly reservedly, since they appear on votive cloths, thus their intention (as proposed by this thesis) was not the mortuary cult. Though, as has been stated, their contents are connected to the mortuary cult, and Hathor appears upon them in her capacity as goddess of the Netherworld.

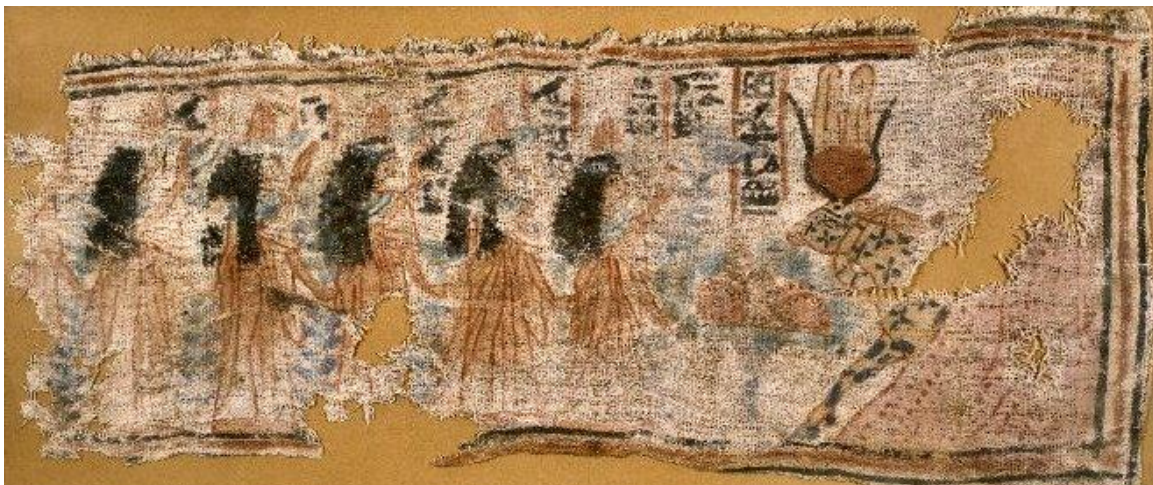


Figure 63: Votive cloth depicting six women offering to Hathor.

In this example Hathor is emerging as the solar cow from the mountains, thus echoing her mythology that she appeared from the mountains of the West (the Netherworld) (Allam, 1963: 112-113). Six women are offering papyrus to her in this scene. In the mortuary cult, this scene would function as veneration from the dead to the goddess. Scenes depicting the deceased offering to the god(esse)s are extremely common appearances in tombs. Though, it is interesting that six women appear together on one offering. This may indicate their affluence (or rather, lack thereof), since if they were perhaps more affluent, they would have each offered a cloth individually.

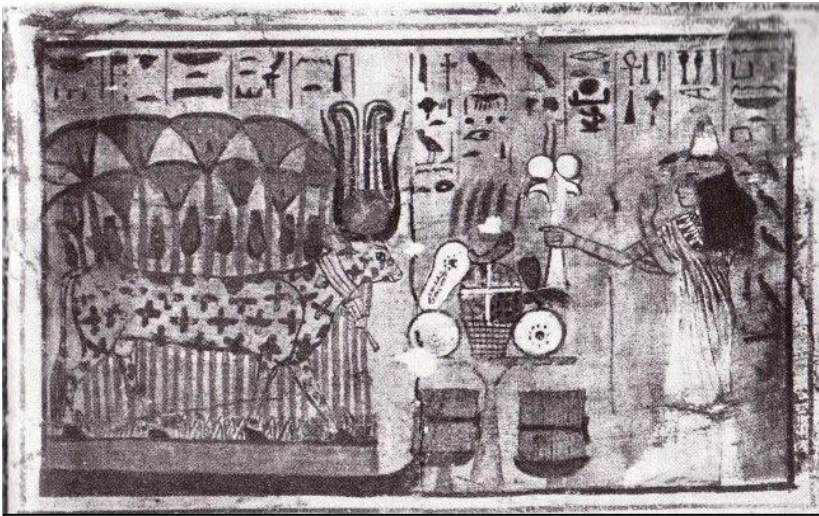


Figure 64: A votive cloth depicting a woman censuring Hathor.

Here, as before, the woman is performing a votive act: censuring, but Hathor is in her solar-cow form emerging from the papyrus thicket. This votive offering's purpose is undoubtedly that of prayer, since a prayer appears upon it,

accompanied by the name of the donor (Pinch, 1993: 111). Though this item is meant to be votive, the scene depicted upon it is in fact from the mortuary cult, as can be deduced from Hathor's iconography. Hathor emerging from the papyrus thicket has a near-identical meaning to Hathor emerging from the mountains of the West (Allam, 1963: 112-113). Her depiction in this context was to welcome the deceased and the act of libation would generally be performed by the deceased, though the donor (in this case) was presumably not deceased at the time of the offering. Here we see how Hathor as goddess of the Netherworld functioned in society in the lives of the ancient Egyptian women. Perhaps, by incorporating these scenes from the death cult into these votive objects, the women were (as has been suggested previously) ensuring their continued lives in the Netherworld, as well as venerating the goddess; while still alive.

This section has illustrated the relationship that Hathor had towards different women in art. The depiction of the relationship, the level of intimacy and its purpose varied between the different stations of the women. The relationship between non-royal women and Hathor was found to be largely votive and perhaps more distant than that of the royal women. This same distinction was found between the royal women Nefertari and Hatshepsut's individual relationships with the goddess. Though Nefertari's relationship was more personal than that of the non-royal women, it was still less personal than that of Hatshepsut, who ruled as pharaoh.

3.5. Conclusion

It has been illustrated that Hathor had an immense impact on the daily lives of the ancient Egypt women. This was done by investigating the different aspects of the lives of the women of ancient Egypt and discovering Hathor's impact on each specific aspect. It has been argued that Hathor was an extremely popular goddess, as can be attested by the many cult-centres and vast amounts of votive offerings that have been found. Hathor's reach as domestic goddess might be slightly further than has been previously supposed, through her addition to the birth-process, which, traditionally, is not one of her domains.

Hathor was a welcome addition to the lives of the ancient Egyptian women, because she was a goddess of potency. In all of her manifestations, she is incredibly powerful. It is proposed that this potency is what made Hathor so attractive to the women of ancient Egypt. She was a goddess that one could emulate, but she was relatable at the same time. Hathor had traits that made her divine, but she also had traits (her love of excess) which perhaps made her seem more human.

It has been shown how specific women related to Hathor through art. It was found that Hathor's potency could be used in order to legitimize the reign of a female pharaoh and elevate the status of a queen in order that her status (at least on the temple façade of Abu Simbel) rivalled that of her husband's. It was also found that Hathor could alleviate the

pains of childbirth and was invited to share this incredibly private moment with the women in the examples found; which is notable, since these examples are among a very small group. Furthermore, it was found that the types of offerings women could offer to Hathor may have served many purposes: both ritual and practical. Especially the offering of textiles is notable, because this type of offering was perhaps the most readily accessible to most of the worshippers of Hathor.

The relationship between Hathor and women of ancient Egypt is not easy to define. In many ways it appears to have been much more personal than the relationship between the women of Egypt and other goddesses, but in many ways it can also be distant and alienating. This thesis has deduced from the art and the different ways in which Hathor was incorporated into the lives of the women of ancient Egypt, that she was a goddess who appealed to the masses, because of her potency in all of her aspects.

Final Conclusion

By looking at the goddess Hathor and the women of ancient Egypt, a specific relationship which existed between them has been ascertained. Hathor was a goddess unlike any other goddess, because of her vast reach, many guises and many purposes. She was a multi-fold goddess, who could help in any situation, especially if the situation were female specific.

Hathor's many functions come to the fore in the lives of the women of ancient Egypt. She is there when they are born as the Seven Hathors; then through their childhood she manifests while they sing, dance and otherwise enjoy their innocence; then when they reach puberty, she is again there, representing their soon-to-be "marriageability" through her connection to the Nile flood and menstruation. Then, when they come of age, she enters to make them attractive to the opposite sex, though not only attractive, but fertile as well. She aids them in finding love and then, when they have been married, she aids them in their own pregnancy and birth, hastening it in order to lessen its pain. Once the child is born, Hathor aids the mother in the home, by keeping her children safe from harm and helping to heal them when they are ill. The women of ancient Egypt could also rejoice in Hathor, through her music and drunkenness. Hathor allowed for pleasures and the Egyptian women enjoyed them. Finally, when the Egyptian woman reached the end of her life, she would be born again through Hathor and meet her, in the Afterlife, where she would be nourished and provided for by this goddess in her manifestation as the "Lady from the West", or as Tree Goddess.

Not only did the women have a close relationship with Hathor, but they could also use her as a tool to drive their personal ambitions. Through the cult of Hathor's priesthood they could gain titles and epithets, without necessarily being of the elite class, and with these, perhaps occupy roles that were at a more-or-less equal status to those of men. The cult of Hathor also made the goddess, who already permeated every aspect of female life, all the more accessible, and a female priesthood could not have hurt this accessibility.

Royal women too used Hathor as a means by which to advance their personal status, as has been shown through Nefertari and Hatshepsut. Nefertari elevated herself to a highly revered position, through her relationship with various goddesses, including Hathor. But no other women so successfully wielded Hathor's power as Hatshepsut. She became pharaoh and justified her reign through a close relationship to the "Goddess of Power".

This thesis has shown how Hathor featured in the everyday lives of the ancient Egyptian women, both royal and non-royal, and it has been argued that they most definitely felt a close affinity with this goddess. It has been proposed that Hathor should be named the "Goddess of Power", since this is, according to this thesis, (above all) what she symbolises. She was potent in every sphere of life, in every stage of life and made things happen for Egyptian women.

This can be seen through the fact that, even though Hathor is not a main goddess of birth, she is still depicted and invoked in the examples of text and art that were found (which are, regardless of the goddess depicted on them, already rare). Furthermore, no other goddess had an iconography that was so inextricably her own, with the cow-head and the *menat* necklace and the sistrum as her symbols. It should also be mentioned that Hathor's cult was the only one wherein cloths were regularly given as votives, and that we know that the majority of the cloths were produced by women for women, which makes them a near-unique type of offering.

To conclude: Hathor was a goddess of potency, with whom the ancient Egyptian woman could have a personal relationship (to a certain extent), because Hathor was in every sphere of her personal and public life. It could be proposed that this was because of Hathor's relatable dual-nature, which makes her seem more human, and at the same time divine in the superlative. The nature of the relationship between Hathor and the women of Egypt can be said to have been highly religious, but highly personal. The extent of this relationship stretched into every sphere of the ancient Egyptian woman's life. Hathor was a goddess for all Egyptian people, but she was especially important to women of ancient Egypt.

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