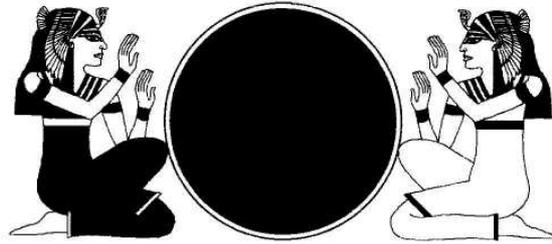


Temple of the Dark Moon



Hathor: Mother of the Gods

© Frances Billinghamurst (first published in "Insight" July 2005)

The ancient Egyptians had a plethora of Deities, from the much loved Goddess Isis, through to many lesser known ones. One Goddess in particular is said to have been the most complex. Earliest references of this Goddess date back to the 2nd dynasty, where she was worshipped not only in ancient Egypt, but also in Somalia, the Sinai peninsula and Phoenicia for over 3,000 years. This particular deity was Het-Hert. We know her better today by the Greek derivation of her name - Hathor, the Egyptian patroness of lovers, the protector of women and children, and beloved of both the living and the dead.

With her name meaning "the house above", it is little surprise that Hathor was an Egyptian celestial Goddess, the Mistress of the Heavens. However, Hathor was more than that. She was said to have been the original mother of every God and Goddess of the Egyptian pantheon, the one who "brought forth in primeval time herself, ever having been created".

In Egyptian mythology, Hathor, in her form as the sacred celestial cow, provided the much needed sustenance to her worshippers. She was often depicted as a slim and beautiful woman wearing the horns of a cow. Other times she was seen in her bovine form with a Sun disk and horns, often protecting or suckling pharaohs. In earlier myths, Hathor was responsible for raising the youthful Sun to the sky with her horns. This was further enforced by another interpretation of her name being "the dwelling of Horus", referring to the fact that within her the Sun God resided, being enclosed each evening in her breast to be born again in the

morning. In later times, this role was taken over by Isis, and Hathor became known as the daughter of the Sun God, Ra, as well as consort of Horus (the patron of kings and son of Isis).

The Goddess of Death

Although Hathor was well disposed towards the living, she cherished the dead even more tenderly. As the “Lady of the West”, she was the guardian of the Theban necropolis who helped the deceased into the Underworld. Vignettes in the Egyptian Book of the Dead show Hathor, in her cow form, emerging from the Libyan mountains, which were considered to be the most western part of Egyptian habitation. Here she would welcome the dead upon their arrival in the Underworld. It was believed that to those who understood how to beseech her, and by what means of prescribed formulae, she would carry them safely on her back. Once in the Underworld, the deceased would be assured of a safe passage through the “demons of Island of Fire” by possessing her outer garment, which was known as the *tjetsen*.

On funerary stelae and papyri, Hathor was depicted as a wild cow coming forth from the papyrus swamps. This imagery in particular indicates her connection with the world of both the living and the dead, and between the teeming life in the Nile valley and the silent tomb of the cemetery.

The “Lady of the Sycamore” was another title that was bestowed upon Hathor for it was from the foliage of this tree that she would appear to the dead with milk and water. In Thebes there is such a painting depicting Hathor as a nourishing and protective tree spirit offering not only milk and water, but also shade and rest to the deceased.

Festivals of Hathor

The 17th day of September was considered to be one of Hathor's holy days. At Dendera, the place of her sacred and most famous temple, rituals and celebrations commenced before dawn with the placement of a ritual mirror in the temple's doorway. This was done so that the first rays of the rising sun would be reflected back into the temple. Mirrors were considered to be sacred to Hathor, who was, after all, the Egyptian Goddess of Beauty. Egyptian mirrors were made from metal polished to a high sheen. Often they were shaped with the body or head of Hathor that formed the handle. This way the user of the mirror would never forget to honour the Goddess.

Another festival associated with Hathor occurred during the "Festival of the Valley" which took place at the dawn in Thebes. During this festival the kas (or spirit) of the dead were revived. A lightened torch was extinguished in a bowl of cow's milk, symbolising rebirth and the successful return of the dead to Hathor.

The Seven Hathors

Throughout Egyptian mythology reference is made to the "Seven Hathors" who would appear as either cows or beautiful women. In their bovine form, they were usually seen in a funerary context, where they were accompanied by the sky bull, the "Bull of the West". On the beautifully decorated tomb of Queen Nefertari, they were named "Lady of the Universe", "Sky Storm", "You from the Land of Silence", "You from Khemmis", "Red Hair", "Bright Red" and "Your Name Flourishes through Skill".

In their human form, the Seven Hathors were considered to be holy midwives who were associated with the seven heavenly spheres. They gave each Egyptian seven souls at birth and determined the fate of the newly born, making them the forerunners to the faery Godmothers. They were also called upon for help in matters of love, as well as protection from evil spirits, which they did by binding such spirits with their powerful red hair ribbons. Another role of the Seven Hathors was to protect the dynasty, even by exchanging an ill-fortuned prince with a more fortunate child in order to do this.

The following Hymn of the Seven Hathors, translated by Barbara Ann Richter, comes from the 5th Crypt at the Temple of Dendera. It sheds some light upon the worship of Hathor through music and dance:

*"We play the tambourine for your ka,
 We dance for your majesty
 We exalt you - to the height of heaven.
 You are the Mistress of Sekhem, the menat and the sistrum
 The Mistress of Music for whose ka one lays
 We praise your majesty every day
 From dusk until the Earth grows light,
 We rejoice in your countenance, O Mistress of Dendera.
 We praise you with song.
 You are the lady of Jubilation, the Mistress of the Iba dance,*

The Lady of Music, the Mistress of Harp playing,
 The Lady of Dancing, the Mistress of Tying on Garlands,
 The Lady of Myrrh and the Mistress of Leaping.
 We glorify your majesty - we give praise before your face.
 We exalt your power over the Gods and Goddesses.
 You are the Lady of Hymns,
 The Mistress of the Library - the Great Seshat.
 At the head of the Mansion of Records,
 We propitiate your majesty every day.
 Your heart rejoices at hearing our songs.
 We rejoice when we see you, day by day.
 Our hearts are jubilant when we see your majesty,
 You are the Lady of Garlands, the Mistress of Dance
 The Lady of Unending Drunkenness.
 We rejoice before your face, we play for your ka.
 Your heart rejoices over our performance."

About the Author:

Frances first connected with the Divine Feminine in the late 1980s. This connection was strengthened in 1993 when during a Wiccan rite known as "Drawing Down the Moon" the great Egyptian Goddess Isis made her presence felt.

Since that time Frances has continued to strengthen her personal relationship with the Divine Feminine - the Ancient Matriarch - the Goddess. Now Frances is drawn to share her knowledge and experience with others in order to assist them to re-connect with this ancient, yet powerful force.

Since 2002 Frances has been regularly writing for Australia's No.1 spiritual lifestyle magazine, "Insight", and her articles have appeared in over 10 separate publications around the world, including "SageWoman" and the 2008 Llewellyn "Witches" calendar. She has also appeared in the "Sunday Mail", the "Messenger" and the "Melbourne Age".

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