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Offerings to Hathor

GERALDINE PINCH

THE great temples of ancient Egypt are monuments to the state cults rather than to personal piety. In theory it was the King himself who officiated in every temple, daily adorning the image of the resident deity, and presenting offerings. In practice this task was delegated to the higher ranks of the priesthood and took place in a sanctuary deep within the temple where no observers were permitted. The deities were honoured to ensure their continuing benevolence towards Egypt, so the daily ritual was carried out on behalf of the whole community, with little place for any expression of individual needs.

Since only those in the correct state of ritual purity could approach the deity, the ordinary person could rarely hope to penetrate further than the enclosure wall or the first courtyard of a temple. The only opportunity for closer contact was during the festivals at which the divine images were carried out of their sanctuaries. However, from the New Kingdom¹ onwards, there is ample evidence for a desire on the part of individuals, from all levels of Egyptian society, for a more personal relationship with their deities. This is particularly well documented among the workmen who cut and decorated the royal tombs in the Theban necropolis. Excavations at their village, Deir el Medina,² have allowed Egyptologists to reconstruct the lives of these men and their families in some detail.

From the vast Egyptian pantheon, the artisans of Deir el Medina each tended to select a small group of deities on which to focus their worship. They carved these deities on stelae and lintels, set up their images in household shrines and made them daily offerings of foodstuffs and real or artificial flowers. Nevertheless, contact with the deities of the state temples still seems to have been sought, particularly in times of personal crisis. A scribe from Deir el Medina who had been sent on a dangerous mission to Nubia wrote anxiously to his family: 'As soon as my letter reaches you, you shall go to the open court of Amon of the Thrones of the Two Lands, taking the children along with you, and coax him and tell him to save me.'³

The Egyptians often distinguished between the manifestations of their great deities resident in different temples, just as the Roman Catholics, for instance, have ascribed special characteristics to the Virgin Mary at her various shrines. 'Amon of the Thrones of the Two Lands' was the form of Amon resident in western Thebes. The Amon of the great temple of Karnak in eastern Thebes was 'Amon-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, the Great God who presides over Ipt-Swt.' A Deir el Medina draughtsman named Neb-Re appealed to this form of Amon when his son was gravely ill. The boy was cured and Neb-Re set up a stela with a hymn of praise to Amon, 'You are Amon, the Lord of the meek, who comes at the voice of the poor. When I called to you in my distress, you came and rescued me.'⁴

On the stela Amon is depicted in the form of a colossal statue seated in front of a temple pylon, with Neb-Re kneeling before him. This is just one of the pieces of evidence for a general tendency to adore images placed in the outer areas of temples.

Colossal statues of kings, which stood at temple gateways, are known to have been used in this manner, and several bore the epithet 'He who listens to prayers.'⁵ Statues of lesser persons might fulfil an intermediary role. Two pairs of statues of prominent officials were found in front of the Tenth Pylon at Karnak.⁶ The inscriptions on the statues urge visitors to the temple to make offerings and say prayers for the spirits of the dead officials. In return the statues promise to pass on prayers to the god within the temple. 'Oh people of Karnak who wish to see Amon, come to me and I will report your petitions, for I am the herald of this god.' The statues show the officials as seated scribes and the scrolls stretched across their laps have been half rubbed away: perhaps by the hopeful touch of thousands of visitors anxious for their services.

Such 'Intermediary Statues' have been found at several New Kingdom temple sites, including Deir el Bahari, where in the 15th century B.C. Queen Hatshepsut built her exquisite mortuary temple. In the vicinity of this temple large numbers of votive offerings have been found, which form one of the best sources for the study of ancient Egyptian 'Folk Religion.' These objects were presented to the goddess Hathor in her sanctuary in Hatshepsut's temple, or in the neighbouring rock shrine dedicated by Hatshepsut's successor, Tuthmosis III. When these shrines became overcrowded the custodians appear to have thrown the surplus offerings down into the courtyard of an earlier temple, where they were found by modern excavators.⁷

Hathor is one of the most complex and fascinating deities in the Egyptian pantheon. She can be represented either as a beautiful woman, wearing a sun disc and horns on her head, or as a cow. It was the latter form that was most common at Deir el Bahari and a magnificent statue of the Hathor cow was found intact in the rock shrine.⁸ The two forms can also be combined and the goddess is often represented by a woman's head with cow's ears. (Plate 1).

Hathor could be a formidable goddess, the potential destroyer of mankind, but her festivals were characterized by wild rejoicing, and she was the mistress of music, dancing and drunkenness. Hathor was the patroness of lovers and the protector of women in childbirth. She was considered the goddess of distant places and the commodities that came from them, such as incense, turquoise and gold. As a tree goddess she refreshed the dead on their journey through the underworld, and as the Divine Cow she embodied the sky and acted as a mediating figure between the worlds of the dead and the living.⁹

These numerous aspects of Hathor are reflected in the diverse offerings made to her at Deir el Bahari. The bulk of these offerings consists of strings of beads, scarabs and small amulets. Bowls of Egyptian faience, decorated with marsh scenes, and various kinds of pottery vessels for making libations, burning incense and presenting flowers, are also abundant. Sometimes the pottery is decorated with miniature cows or Hathor heads and these are also found as separate offerings. In smaller quantities there are model cats, nude female figurines, wooden phalli and representations of eyes and ears.

It is uncertain whether these objects were votive in the sense of being gifts offered in fulfilment of a vow, after an answered prayer. This type of bargain with a deity is mentioned on the stela of Neb-Re, but this is very rare. The numerous forms of magical 'coercion' employed in Egyptian funerary religion suggest that the offerings were made in anticipation of a desired effect. Neither is it always clear whether the offerings were made at times of personal crisis or as the result of custom. Some types of offering raise further important questions.

The beads, scarabs and amulets¹⁰ are chiefly made of the glazed composition known as Egyptian faience. They are the colour of the bluish turquoises that the Egyptians

mined in the Sinai desert. Since one of Hathor's titles was 'Lady of Turquoise,' it is possible that necklaces made up of beads and amulets of this colour were thought to be particularly pleasing to the goddess. Such faience necklaces could have been easily mass-produced and cannot have been expensive, yet they seem to have been beyond the means of some visitors to the temple. Necklaces made from straw and cakes of mud stuck with broken beads suggest the presence of the very poorest stratum of society, and its desire to make some offering, however humble, to Hathor.

Images of Hathor in full human form hardly ever appear among the offerings; it may have been considered inadmissible to borrow from temple iconography in this context. Instead, images of the cow, or the cow-eared head of the goddess, were presented. Small faience amulets in the form of the cow-eared head, usually with a long, full, wig and a striped 'podium' head-dress, are common among the offerings and may have been worn in daily life.

Sometimes the head of the goddess is incorporated into a *sistrum*; an object used in the cults of several goddesses, but particularly associated with Hathor.¹¹ There are two kinds of *sistra*, the *loop* and the *naos*, but only the *loop sistrum* is found at Deir el Bahari. The loop was threaded with wires and metal discs, which made a rattling sound when shaken, but the examples from Deir el Bahari are only faience models. The triangular, cow-eared face of the goddess forms the base of the loop on each side of the model. (Plate 1).

Hathor is often shown on columns and amulets, and occasionally in reliefs, with two or even four faces. It has been suggested that the four-faced images show Hathor in her cosmic aspect, ruling the four quarters of heaven.¹² However, the double face could well be evocative of Hathor's dual nature, fierce and gracious, destructive and benevolent. The rattling of the *sistrum* was one of the traditional methods of pacifying the goddess and invoking her benevolent aspect, so it is hardly surprising to find model *sistra* among the offerings.

The cow also personified the benevolent aspect of the goddess, since it was in this form that Hathor nursed the infant Horus when he was hidden from his murderous uncle Seth, in the marshes of Chemmis. Among the Deir el Bahari offerings cows occur in the form of pottery and faience models. They are also found carved on stelae, painted on linen and faience bowls, and incised on metal and faience plaques (Plate 2). Among the jewellery buried with three minor wives of Tuthmosis III were three gold plaques incised with Hathor cows, which closely resemble those from Deir el Bahari. In spite of their precious metal, the plaques are very crudely made and the excavator of the burial thought them 'atrociously ugly.'¹³ They are a valuable example of how an object's religious connotations could outweigh its crudity, even with royal ladies. The plaques were probably souvenirs of a visit to one of the Hathor shrines at Deir el Bahari, where such objects may have been available either to dedicate to the goddess or to carry away.

In the Hathor shrine incorporated in Hatshepsut's temple the Queen Regnant is identified with the infant Horus in the marshes of Chemmis, and the Hathor cow is made to say to her: 'I have come as your protection. Your mouth is full of my milk, life and stability is in it.'¹⁴ Hatshepsut is shown drinking from the udders of the Divine Cow, and this scene recurs in several New Kingdom temple reliefs and statue groups. The statue in the rock shrine at Deir el Bahari depicts the Hathor cow standing in a papyrus thicket suckling King Amenhotep II. Another figure of the same king stands beneath the cow's chin encircled by her *menat* necklace. This piece of jewellery is closely associated with the cult of Hathor and wooden and faience examples are found



Plate One. Head of Hathor in turquoise 'faience.' Part of a model *loop sistrum*. 15th century B.C.

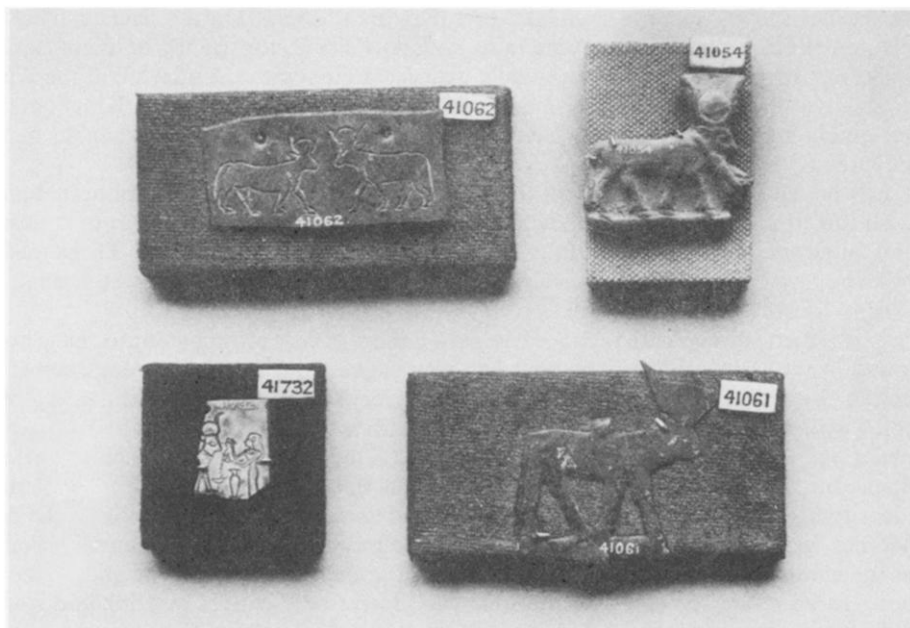


Plate Two. Top left: copper plaque with two Hathor cows. Top right: blue 'faience' Hathor cow with lotus collar. Bottom left: 'faience' plaque: woman libating to a Hathor cow. Bottom right: copper Hathor cow pendant. 15th century B.C.

among the offerings.¹⁵

In New Kingdom tomb paintings, in illustrated copies of the Book of the Dead, and on decorated coffins, the Hathor cow is shown emerging from a hillside scattered with tombs, sometimes with the King standing under her chin. This hillside is the Western Mountain of the Theban necropolis, the entrance to the realm of the dead. The Hathor cow statue at Deir el Bahari is placed in an actual opening in the Western Mountain. The gesture of encircling the King with a *menat* may symbolize the aid which Hathor gave in his transition from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead, where he would be nourished by her life-giving milk and emerge re-vitalized.

This might also be extended to the ordinary Egyptian. The Coffin Texts (the funerary prayers of the Middle Kingdom) are full of appeals to Hathor for help in achieving a successful afterlife. The inscriptions accompanying the image of the cow standing on the boundary of the two worlds, make her role clear: 'She protects everyone on earth and is gracious to the one who enters and does not go forth. Great and small are brought (by her) to the Place of truth.'¹⁶ The words given to the Hathor cow in the same tomb inscription are: 'To the West, to the West, oh favoured one, to the West. Make your home in the necropolis, like the followers of Horus, all your family are in it.' A mummy-case from Leiden even shows a dead Egyptian entering the afterlife riding on the back of the Hathor cow.¹⁷

Only Kings are shown actually suckling from the Divine Cow, but the imagery of the marshes of Chemmis is often implied by a clump of papyrus surrounding Hathor as she emerges from the Western Mountain. Among the Deir el Bahari offerings marsh symbolism is also prominent. The cows shown on the faience bowls wear lotus collars and are surrounded by marsh flora and fauna, and on the painted cloths the cows are sometimes shown standing on a boat in a papyrus thicket.¹⁸ On the faience or metal plaques the cows sometimes wear lotus collars (Plate 2: top right), or stand beside stalks of papyrus. Many ideas originally associated only with the afterlife of the King gradually came to be standard elements of funerary religion. By the New Kingdom the life-giving milk of the Divine cow may have been thought to be available to all Egyptians.

It is not essential to assume that the imagery of the Hathor cow was connected only with the afterlife. The texts in Hatshepsut's temple that name Hathor as the mother and nurse of the monarch, could apply equally to birth or rebirth. The benefits bestowed by her milk, such as stability and dominion, would certainly be desired in earthly life.

Small linen shirts painted with images of Hathor, in cow or human form, have been found in the Deir el Bahari area.¹⁹ It has been suggested that these were presented to Hathor by mothers, in gratitude for a safe delivery, or as means of identifying their child with the divine nursling. Identification with mythical persons or events plays a major part in Egyptian medical texts of the New Kingdom and Graeco-Roman period. Spells for the cure of snake or scorpion bite on stelae of the Graeco-Roman Period identify the victim with the infant Horus.²⁰ A description of the agony of the Divine Mother, here identified with Isis rather than Hathor, is followed by a dramatic account of the halting of the boat in which the sun sails across the sky, until the gods agree to heal Horus. Water poured over the stela was given to the patient to drink and it was presumably hoped that he would share in the miraculous cure of Horus.

A similar idea is found in a spell from the New Kingdom in which a mother is made to say to her sick child: 'My hands are upon this child and the hands of Isis are upon him, just as her hands were upon her son Horus.'²¹ The Deir el Bahari offerings

indicate that the Divine Cow was evoked at both the great crises of birth and death, and that the King was not the only Egyptian child placed under the protection of the Divine Mother.

The cow is not the only animal form of Hathor; she can also be linked with the feline genus. In New Kingdom iconography the most commonly depicted cat was 'The Great Cat,' which slew the chaos serpent, one of the traditional enemies of the Sun God. 'The Great Cat' is explicitly stated to be a form of Re, or of deities closely associated with him, such as Hathor, the daughter of Re.²² The model cats found at Deir el Bahari could be representations of 'The Great Cat,' but Hathor is also linked to the cat by another legend.

Sekhmet, Bastet and Tefnut, a group of goddesses closely associated with Hathor, first appear in Egyptian iconography in leonine or semi-leonine forms. Gradually these leonine forms begin to alternate with cat forms. In the cases of Hathor and Tefnut, the lion and the cat may have come to represent the duality of their natures; on the one hand fierce and destructive, and on the other, gentle and generous. Due to a typical piece of Egyptian syncretism, Tefnut often appears to be no more than a form of Hathor, and this is particularly apparent in the legend of the Distant Goddess. This story has been pieced together from texts in temples of the Graeco-Roman Period but is certainly as old as the New Kingdom.²³

The Distant Goddess is Tefnut, the Eye of Re. The solar eye was thought of as a separable entity, which could be used against the Sun God's enemies. In the text known as the Book of the Divine Cow,²⁴ Hathor is named as the Eye of Re and sent to destroy mankind. She carries out her task with such ferocity that Re is moved to pity. To save the remnant of humanity he makes the angry goddess drunk with no less than seven thousand jars of beer, dyed to look like blood.

In the legend of the Distant Goddess Re needs the solar eye to fight his enemies, but Tefnut has withdrawn to the Nubian desert. There she appears as a ferocious lionness, or as lionness and cat alternately. A Graeco-Roman temple text refers to Hathor-Tefnut as being 'Furious as Sekhmet, Joyful as Bastet.'²⁵ Here Sekhmet stands for the lion aspect of the Distant Goddess and Bastet for the cat aspect. Shu, the brother of Tefnut, and Thoth, the wisest of the gods, are sent by Re to bring back the solar eye. They pacify the goddess with music and dancing and with promises of a temple where she will receive daily offerings of meat and wine. Tefnut consents to return to Egypt, where she is transformed into the beautiful and benevolent Hathor.

The number of model cats from Deir el Bahari is small, but among the offerings at two desert temples of Hathor, Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai and Timna in the Negev,²⁶ cat plaques and models are much more numerous. Most of the animals portrayed are clearly serval cats,²⁷ a wild species found only in Africa. This is a strong indication that the cats represent the Distant Goddess who inhabited the Nubian deserts. Possibly this goddess came to embody the ancient Egyptian's ambivalent attitude towards the desert: a place of danger and hardship, yet rich in desirable resources, such as the gold and turquoise associated with Hathor. In the potentially hostile environment of the desert model cats have been offered to Hathor to evoke the gentle and benevolent aspect of the goddess of distant places.

The concept of Hathor as the Eye of Re may also be relevant to the model eyes found among the offerings. The presentation to a deity of models of parts of the body in gratitude for cures was a widespread custom in the ancient world, but there is no definite evidence for the practice in Egypt until the Graeco-Roman Period.²⁸ A different explanation must be sought for the models from Deir el Bahari.

Ears and eyes are found in roughly equal quantities among the offerings. In addition to model ears in faience, wood and stone (Plate 3), there are copper plaques and miniature wooden stelae decorated with ears. These provide a link with a curious group of monuments from New Kingdom temples, known as 'Ear Stelae'.²⁹ These are stone or wooden slabs carved with any number of ears between one and four hundred. There is usually a brief inscription, and in many cases the donor of the stela is shown worshipping a deity. All the evidence points to the ears on the stelae belonging to the deities named or depicted, rather than to the human donors.

The large number of ears often shown on a single stela makes it unlikely that they belong to the donor, but fits in well with the Egyptian fondness for multiplying divine images.³⁰ Most Egyptian sculpture was originally painted, and where the colour survives on the stelae the ears are red, yellow, green or blue. Red and yellow can be human colours but blue and green certainly belong to the gods. An even stronger indication of divine ownership is an ear stela from the temple of Ptah at Memphis³¹ which shows a pair of ears placed on the kind of pedestals used for divine images.

None of the inscriptions on the ear stelae mention healing, and they make requests, rather than express thanks for help already given. Many of the deities named in the inscription have the epithet 'the One who hears Prayers,' and the very literal way in which the Egyptians associated the receipt of prayers with hearing is illustrated by the naming of a shrine at Karnak as the 'Hearing Ear'.³² Given that the ears on the stelae belong to the deities, there are several possible interpretations of their purpose. It has been suggested that the ears were intended to permanently retain the prayers made into them.³³ Others have seen the ears as a magical method of forcing the god to hear. Alternatively the ears may do no more than symbolize the hope that the gods will be gracious enough to listen to the petitions of their worshippers.

Similar interpretations have been put forward for the model eyes, but the evidence for their purpose is not so conclusive. Two types of eye are found among the Deir el Bahari offerings, the ordinary human eye (Plate 3, centre, bottom) and the *wadjet* eye (Plate 3, centre, top), usually associated with falcon-headed Horus. Both types of eye occur as models and on plaques and miniature stelae, and on one plaque from Deir el Bahari an eye and an ear appear together.

Ears and ordinary eyes grouped together are found on a small number of stelae mainly from the artisans' village, Deir el Medina. The texts on these stelae are penitential prayers, and phrases like 'He has caused me to see darkness by day' have been interpreted as references to physical blindness, thought to be caused by the displeasure of the gods.³⁴ It is more probable that such phrases allude to the spiritual darkness of separation from God, but this would still suggest that the eyes on the stela expressed the desire of the donor to see his deity. Requests to be allowed to see the beauty of a god or goddess are certainly common in Egyptian hymns and prayers.

However, the inscriptions on this group of stelae also contain pleas to the gods to see and hear the donors: 'Be merciful to me! Look on me that you may be merciful.'³⁵ Given the firm evidence for the ears being divine, and the obvious oddity of mixing divine ears with human eyes, it seems more reasonable to assume that the eyes were intended to induce the deity to look favourably on the worshipper.

The *wadjet* eye, which was said to have been wrenched from Horus during his struggle with Seth, is one of the most common of Egyptian protective symbols.³⁶ The eye of Re, often named as Hathor, can be depicted either as a normal or a *wadjet* eye, and Hathor in cow form frequently has *wadjet* eyes. It seems possible that the *wadjet* eyes among the Deir el Bahari offerings (Plate 3, centre, top) belong to the goddess,

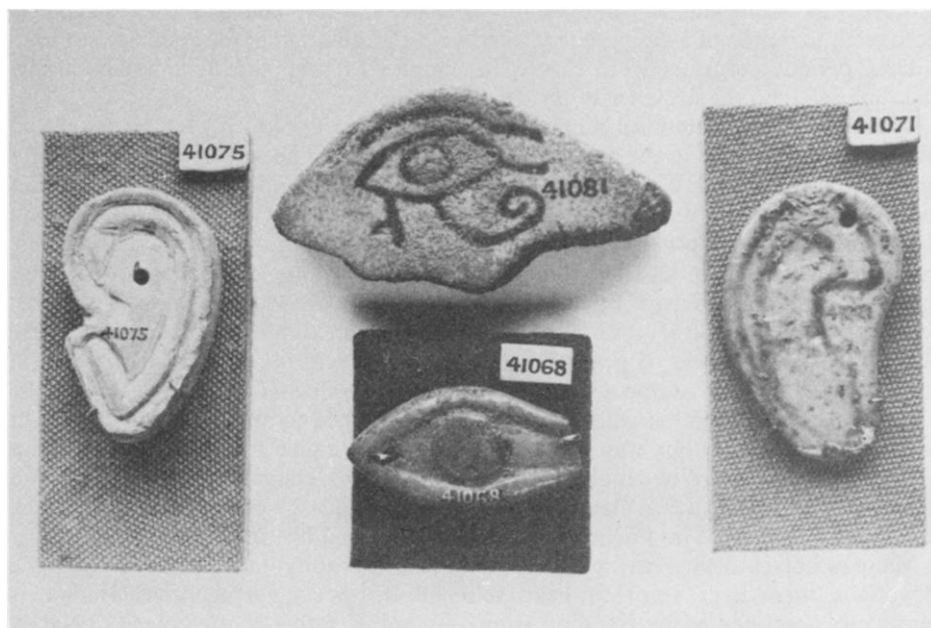


Plate Three. Left: model ear in glazed steatite. Right: model ear in blue 'faience.' Centre, top: *Wadjet* eye in blue 'faience.' Centre, bottom: model eye in blue 'faience.' 15th century B.C.



Plate Four. Two Terracotta 'Fertility Figurines.' Left: Type Two. Right: Type Three.

especially as *wadjet* and human eyes appear to be used interchangeably. Eyes and ears both seem to represent a desire to reach and hold the attention of the goddess, just as in a later period footprints were carved in temples to keep the donor symbolically standing safely in the presence of his deity.³⁷

There are other anatomical models among the offerings which *may* be associated with healing, but only in the area of sexual dysfunction. The sole objects to be found inside the rock shrine of the Hathor cow were crude wooden phalli, and further examples have been discovered elsewhere on the site.³⁸ The phallic element in Egyptian religion is most common in the Graeco-Roman Period, and classical writers associate it chiefly with Osiris and the life-giving fluid of the Inundation.³⁹ However, from the very beginnings of Egyptian history the god Min was shown in ithyphallic form and revered as the source of fertility for men, animals and crops. Hathor was also celebrated as a bestower of general fertility and this role is reflected in the festival calendars of temples of the Graeco-Roman Period. One Hathor festival was the 'Opening of the Womb,' at which childless women hoped to become pregnant, and at another ceremony Hathor was presented with 'The Phallus that Makes All Things Flourish.'⁴⁰ This could be an oblique reference to the Heliopolitan creation myth in which the *primaeva* deity, Atum, creates the first gods by masturbating: 'For the Ennead of Atum came into being through his semen and his fingers.'⁴¹

Many scholars have remarked on the unusual crudity of this myth, and the Egyptians themselves seem to have softened it by re-interpretation. Hathor is sometimes described as the Hand of Atum. The same epithet is often given to Nebet-Hetepet (The Lady of the Vulva), a goddess closely associated with Hathor.⁴² Hathor-Nebet-Hetepet is usually shown in the form of a Hathor-headed *naos* sistrum. In a temple relief of the Graeco-Roman Period such a sistrum is shown with its handle replaced by a hand holding a phallus.⁴³ On the basis of such evidence it has been suggested that the Hand of Atum was re-interpreted as a symbol of the female creative principle, embodied in Hathor-Nebet-Hetepet.⁴⁴ This could be taken either as emphasising the ambisexual nature of the *primaeva* deity, or as a more concrete expression of the act of creation as the first union between the male and female principles.

The rock shrine and its contents were sealed off by a landslide sometime in the 13th century B.C. It is most unlikely that the wooden phalli found scattered over the floor had ever been intended to remain there permanently. They were probably placed in the shrine during some particular festival, possibly one that commemorated Hathor's role in the Heliopolitan creation myth. The donors could have been childless couples, who by presenting a phallus to Hathor hoped to participate in the first creative union and share in the fertility of the Divine Mother.

It is possible that a cure for impotence, rather than sterility, was the aim of the phallic offerings, but in ancient Egypt it is rarely possible to separate sexuality from fertility. The desire for a son to carry out the proper funeral rites for his parents was very strong, and even in the Afterlife the Egyptian male hoped to beget children.⁴⁵ Such a desire may be the motive for the nude female figurines found among the Deir el Bahari offerings.

These figurines have been found in burials, houses, and temple sites, all over Egypt. They have often been misleadingly labelled as 'Concubine figures,' and looked on as sexual playthings for the dead.⁴⁶ Such an interpretation is ruled out by the appearance of these figurines in female burials and domestic contexts. The counter-theory that they are merely children's toys is made unlikely by finds in adult male burials and

among offerings to Hathor.⁴⁷

The figurines can be divided into six types. Three out of the six are found at Deir el Bahari and only these will be described here.⁴⁸ The simplest form is crudely mass-produced in bright blue faience. It consists of a slender, naked girl lying with her hands at her side. She wears a long wig and, sometimes, a girdle about her hips. Such figures are always small, often no more than 1 cm. high, and frequently pierced for suspension.

The second type of figurine found at Deir el Bahari is in terracotta and shows a slim young girl, usually adorned with a girdle and necklace (Plate 4, left). Such figures often appear to be lying on beds and sometimes hold a lotus, a bird or a kitten between the breasts. This type has a high circular head-dress pierced with holes originally threaded with hair.

The third type from Deir el Bahari is also in terracotta but shows a woman of more ample physique. (Plate 4, right). The sexual organs are crudely emphasised, a feature also found in some figurines of the second type, and the full breasts are draped with heavy necklaces. A girdle is usually marked round the hips and the ears are pierced for earrings. The face is reduced to a beak nose and slashes for eyes. Above a fringe the head is elongated into a convex disc and pierced for the suspension of strands of hair.

Many Egyptologists have felt unable to accept that these gross figurines could possibly be native products. Origins as far apart as Nubia and Syria have been proposed.⁴⁹ The question is too complex to go into here; whatever their origins the figurines were certainly used by Egyptians. The figurines of the third type appear to be handmade and it might be thought that they were the offerings of the poorest visitors who could not afford the more refined types. However, crude figurines of this kind have been found in the tombs of moderately wealthy officials, so it would seem a matter of choice rather than necessity. Possibly many people considered the robustly sexual figurines to be the most effective. In the cause of fertility crudity has often been respectable, even in otherwise reserved societies. Egyptologists are divided over whether the figurines were charms to promote a successful sex-life, or were specifically connected with the desire for children. Hathor's role as patroness of lovers in New Kingdom poetry, and similarities between the figurines and women featured in Egyptian erotic art,⁵⁰ might suggest that they were purely connected with sexuality. On the other hand, three out of the six types of figurine (including the third of the Deir el Bahari types), are sometimes shown as carrying babies. The same three types have strong affinities with scenes, painted on walls and ostraca, showing naked, bejewelled women, nursing babies,⁵¹ and Hathor was 'The Mistress of Birth' and 'the One Who Saves Pregnant Women.'⁵²

Again it is probably wrong to look on the desire for sexual potency and the craving for children as separate motives. It has been suggested that it was customary for young girls to present the figurines at a temple or the tomb of their ancestors, on the occasion of marriage or reaching puberty.⁵³ Certainly in the Graeco-Roman Period newly married couples were presented with nude female figurines to be kept in the house to ensure fertility, but this may have been an imported custom. Not enough of the figurines survive from the New Kingdom to suggest that their use was universal. It seems more likely that the figurines were offered to Hathor, or kept in the homes of people troubled by impotence or barrenness. They might also be placed in the graves of those who would be particularly anxious for a family in the afterlife, such as girls who died before childbearing age. The term 'Fertility Figurine' seems the best description for these objects.

Early Egyptologists tended to describe the 'Fertility Figurines' found in temples as 'Hathors,' but a direct identification is unlikely. Egyptian goddesses are rarely shown naked and none of the six types of 'Fertility Figurine' resembles any known representation of Hathor. However, the figurines could have embodied the identification of the ordinary women with the Divine Mother. The concept of identification with mythical persons and events, which I have already described, is most prominent in connection with the twin crises of birth and rebirth. In both these crises Hathor was one of the deities most often appealed to for aid.

In the Afterlife the Egyptian might identify with Hathor herself, or with Ihy her son,⁵⁴ and in New Kingdom spells aimed at easing childbirth it is specifically stated that 'Hathor, Mistress of Dendera, is the one who is giving birth.'⁵⁵ Spells such as this, and the Deir el Bahari offerings in general, suggest a widespread knowledge of Hathor in all her aspects and the myths in which she appeared. Since our own impression of the myths has been pieced together from classical writers and fragmented temple texts and hymns, it is interesting to speculate how such knowledge was disseminated. The existence of a strong oral tradition, largely independent of temple texts, seems probable.

One story, 'The Contending of Horus and Seth,' may hint at the way in which myths were told among the laity.⁵⁶ In this text the great contest between Horus and Seth for the throne of Egypt seems to be reduced to a farce. Horus is cunning, and bad-tempered enough to cut off his scheming mother's head, and Seth is a homosexual buffoon. When his judgement is questioned the Sun God sulks in his tent until Hathor restores his good humour by exposing her private parts. All this seems very distant from the decorous temple texts, and Egyptologists have long been shocked by the bawdy humour and apparent irreverence of the story. It is, however, the kind of irreverence that is permissible in a climate of unquestioning faith.

The Deir el Bahari offerings make it clear that the ancient Egyptians had faith in Hathor to protect them in life and in death. They sought personal contact with her and brought their daily problems to her, as well as seeking more general blessings. In life she was associated with sexuality and birth, and thereby equally important to the peasant and the great official. In her role as conductress of souls into the Afterlife she softened the fear of death and gave hope of rebirth. All this is reflected in the variety of objects presented to her. Difficult as they are to interpret, these unspectacular offerings, gathering dust in museum cupboards, can probably tell us as much about religion in ancient Egypt as the great temples themselves.

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NOTES

1. Egyptian history is divided into the following periods:
Old Kingdom c. 2686-2181 B.C. First Intermediate Period c. 2181-2052 BC.
Middle Kingdom c. 2052-1786 B.C. Second Intermediate Period c. 1786-1567 B.C.
New Kingdom c. 1567-1085 B.C. Third Intermediate Period c. 1085-715 B.C.
Late Period c. 715-332 B.C. Graeco-Roman Period c. 332 B.C.-392 A.D.
2. For a full account of the excavations see the volumes by B. Bruyère published between 1922 and 1951 in *Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*. For a general description of life in the village, M. Della Monica, *La Classe Ouvrière sous les Pharaons. Étude du Village de Deir el Médineh* (Paris 1975).
3. E. Wente, *Late Ramesside Letters* (Chicago 1967), p. 18. The letter was written in the early 11th century B.C.
4. The stela is published in A. Erman, *Denksteine aus der Thebanischen Grabstadt* (Berlin 1907), pp. 1087-97. For an English translation of the inscription see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Volume Two (California 1976), pp. 105-7.
5. C. Nims, 'The Eastern Temple at Karnak,' in *Beiträge zur Ägypten Bauforschung und Altertumskunde* (1971), p. 108.
6. G. Legrain, 'Au Pylon d'Harmhabi à Karnak,' in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* (1914), pp. 15-38, pls. 1-4. For a discussion of Intermediary statues see J. Yoyotte in *Sources Orientales; Les Pèlerinages* (Paris 1960), pp. 42-5.
7. H. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el Bahari* (New York 1942), p. 81; D. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el-Bahari* (Mainz 1974), p. 83; E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el Bahari* (London 1913), pp. 13-18, 28-31, pls. 22-7, 30-2.
8. E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el Bahari* (London 1907), pp. 63-7, pls. 27-3-.
9. For further information on Hathor in all her aspects see C. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth* (Leiden 1973); H. Bonnet, *Reallexicon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin 1952), pp. 277-82.
10. The most common types of amulet among the Deir el Bahari offerings are the duck, the frog, the *Tilapia Nilotica* (a species of fish), and the hippopotamus deity, Taweret. These are all thought to have associations with birth and rebirth. See E. Hornung and E. Staehelin, *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen* (Mainz 1976), pp. 137, 110-11, 112-3, 127-8.
11. For both types of sistrum see H. Hickman, *Musicologie Pharaonique* (Cairo 1956). and H. Bonnet, *op. cit.* pp. 716-20. It is not certain whether the *naos sistrum* was ever a real musical instrument.
12. P. Derchain, *Hathor Quadrifons* (Istanbul 1972).
13. H. Winlock, *The Treasure of Three Egyptian Princesses* (New York 1948), pp. 28-9.
14. E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el Bahari* Volume Four (London 1901), p. 4, pl. 96. For the motif of the King suckled by the Divine Cow, see A. Zayed, 'Some Notes on a Statuette of a Cow,' in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* (1962).
15. H. Hickman, 'La Menat,' in *Kemi* (1954); P. Barguet, 'L'origine et la signification du contrepoids de collier-menat,' in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* (1953); H. Bonnet, *op. cit.* pp. 450-1.
16. N. de G. Davies, *Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah* (London 1948), pl. 27.
17. R. Lanzzone, *Dizionario di Mitologia Egizia* (Turin 1882). pl. 322.
18. E. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el Bahari* (London 1913), pl. 27 (bowls), pl. 30 (cloths). For a general discussion of the cow in the marshes, see L. Keimer, 'La Vache et la cobra dans les marécages de papyrus de Thebes,' in *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* (1956).
19. R. de Rustafjaell, *The Light of Egypt* (London 1909), pp. 51-2, pl. 26.
20. R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London 1959), pp. 188-93; A. Klasens, *A Magical Statue Base* (Leiden 1952).
21. A. Erman, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kinde* (Berlin 1901), pp. 14-15.
22. H. Bonnet, *op. cit.* pp. 371-2, 280-1.
23. H. Junker, *Die Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien* (Berlin 1911); W. Spiegelberg, *Der Ägyptische Mythos von Sonnenaue* (Strasbourg 1917).
24. A. Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York 1955), pp. 27-9.
25. H. Junker, *op. cit.* p. 31.
26. W. F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London 1906), pls. 153-4; B. Rothenberg, *Timna* (London 1976), p. 166, fig 4; R. Giveon, 'Egyptian Objects from Sinai in the Australian Museum,' in *The Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* (1974-5). p. 30.
27. J. Baldwin, 'Notes and Speculations on the Domestication of the Cat in Egypt,' in *Anthropos* (1975), p. 431.

28. Anatomical models were presented to Imhotep, an Old Kingdom official deified as a god of healing, during the Graeco-Roman Period. W. Emery, 'Preliminary Report on the Excavations at North Saqqara,' in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (1970).

29. For examples and discussion see P. Blok, 'Remarques sur Quelques Stèles dites "A Oreilles,"' in *Kemi* (1928); B. Bruyère, 'Stèles Trouvées par M. E. Baraize à Deir el Médineh,' in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* (1925); S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza Volume Eight* (Cairo 1954), p. 44; W. F. Petrie, *Memphis Volume One* (London 1909), p. 7, pls, 10-13.

30. P. Munro, 'Eininge Votivstellen an Wp W3wt,' in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (1963).

31. W. F. Petrie, *op. cit.* pl. 10, No. 11.

32. C. Nims, *op. cit.* 107-11.

33. S. Hassan, *op. cit.* p. 44.

34. B. Gunn, 'The Religion of the Poor in Ancient Egypt,' in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (1916), pp. 88-9. Ear and Eye stelae are published in A. Gardiner and T. Peet, *The Inscriptions of Sinai* (London 1952), pl. 88; M. Tosi and A. Roccati, 'Stele e altre epigrafi di Deir el Medina' (Turin 1972), pp. 87 and 283; *Hieroglyphic Texts in the British Museum* (London 1914), pl. 43; *Hieroglyphic Texts in the British Museum* (London 1970), pl. 31.

35. *Hieroglyphic Texts in the British Museum* (1970), p. 36.

36. H. Bonnet, *op. cit.* pp. 854-6.

37. J. Yoyotte in *Sources Orientales: Les Pèlerinages* (Paris 1960), pp. 59-60.

38. G. Hornblower, 'Phallic Offerings to Hat-hor,' in *Man* (May 1926).

39. J. Griffiths, Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (London 1970), pp. 173-5; J. Hani, *La Religion Égyptienne dans La Pensée de Plutarch* (Paris 1976), pp. 372-77.

40. M. Alliot, *Le Culte d'Horus à Edfou au Temps des Ptolémées* (Cairo 1949), pp. 226.

41. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume One* (California 1973), p. 54.

42. J. Vandier, 'Iousaas et (Hathor) Nebet-Hetepet,' in *Revue d'Égyptologie* (1964-6).

43. P. Derchain, *op. cit.* pl. 7a.

44. P. Derchain, *op. cit.* pp. 45-8.

45. H. Bonnet, *op. cit.* pp. 94-5.

46. H. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el Bahari* (New York 1942), p. 36.

47. W. F. Petrie, *Objects of Daily Use* (London 1927), p. 8.

48. For a full description of all six types see G. Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor in New Kingdom Temples* (Oxford D. Phil. thesis, forthcoming).

49. For a Nubian origin see B. Bruyère, 'Figurines féminines de l'Hathor nue Égyptienne,' in *Deir el Médineh 1934-5* (Cairo 1939); for the Syrian, W. Albright, 'Astarte Plaques and Figurines from Tell Beit Mirsim,' in *Mélanges Syriens Offerts à Monsieur René Dussand* Volume One (Paris 1939).

50. In the cycle of love poems in Papyrus Chester Beatty One both men and women appeal to Hathor 'The Golden One,' to grant them their beloved's favours. See A. Gardiner, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty; The Chester Beatty Papyri, No. 1* (Oxford 1931), pp. 27-39, pls, 16-17, 22-26; A. Hermann, *Altägyptische Liebeslieder* (Wiesbaden 1959), pp. 14-28. For Egyptian erotic art see L. Keimer, 'Remarques sur le Tatouage dans l'Égypte Ancienne,' in *Mémoires présentés à l'Institut d'Égypte* (Cairo 1948); J. Omlin, *Der Papyrus 55001 und Seine Satirisch-Erotisch Zeichnungen und Inschriften* (Turin 1975).

51. E. Brunner-Traut, 'Die Wochenlaube,' in *Mitteilungen des Institute für Orientforschung* (1955).

52. J. Borghouts, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden One* (Leiden 1971), p. 153.

53. C. Desroches Noblecourt, 'Concubines au Mort et Mères de Famille au Moyen Empire,' in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* (1953). For the Graeco-Roman practice see K. Polaczek-Zdanowicz, 'The Genesis and Evolution of the Orant Statuette against a Background of Developing Coptic Art,' in *Études et Travaux* (1975).

54. R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts Volume One* (London 1973), pp. 255-7.

55. J. Borghouts, *op. cit.* p. 29.

56. A. Gardiner, *op. cit.* pp. 8-13; H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York 1948), pp. 126-9.

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