

The Lady in the Temple before the Hebrews: Hathor of Egypt

Dr. John F. Hall

Today it falls to me to speak of temple traditions beyond the more familiar Judeo-Christian conventions. My remarks will be confined to a consideration of rites and patterns of temple worship found in ancient Egypt and their parallels in Israel. The subject, of course, is the Lady in the Temple. In the case of the topic of this address, I refer to a different lady and a different temple, both strikingly similar to the lady and temple familiar to this audience, yet antedating the temple of Solomon and the rites peculiar to it, by more than three thousand years. I speak, of course, of the Egyptian mother and queen of gods and men, Hathor, regal consort of Amon, into whose presence pharaohs and their queens, nobles and their ladies, and even common men and women sought to return by ascent through the seven heavens beyond the fiery sphere of the empyrean.

A few words about the nature of the Egyptian temple and its purposes may be in order before proceeding to examine Hathor's place and role in that ancient process of salvation, divinization, and exaltation, as well as her connections to Asherah/Mary whom Dr. Barker has so clearly revealed in

her *The Lady in the Temple* volumes.

Egyptian religion existed with comparatively little change for roughly four millennia. That is a very long time. The lack of alteration in doctrine and practice is usually described as the result of the endurance and stability of the whole of Egyptian society. While that is undoubtedly an essential condition for maintaining the rites and tenets of a religion oriented culture, perhaps of greater import as relates to specific ritual was the basic belief that whatever rite was performed in this world, must also be done simultaneously in both the world of the dead and in the realm of the gods. For an earthly ritual to acquire validity in the heavens it must be properly performed to accord exactly with its concurrent performance in the realms above. Consequently, Egyptian religion was obsessed with exact observance in order to avoid variation or change in any manner. Because the gods did not change, nor did they alter the rituals and ceremonies they had given and because it was clear that man had no power to change what had been wrought in divine realms, doctrine and practice must transpire not as man but as the gods had dictated.¹

Despite such effort, however, change did happen. Alteration was minute and typically limited to the interchange of divine personae as part of the ongoing process of syncretism among Egyptian heavenly beings. for

example, the role of Hathor was occasionally shared with alter ego Sekhmet or with Lussasset, an Egyptian Eve figure, or in later periods attributed to Isis, wife of Hathor's son Wsr/Wr , the Horus /Osiris figure who paralleled Yahweh and Christ of Judeo-Christian tradition. For this reason, and despite the existence and approximate dating of a host of Egyptian religious documents spanning two thousand years, little analysis of these religious writings from successive eras has been performed to establish a chronology of change in ritual or in the alteration of the role of any god or goddess in those ceremonies. This no doubt derives in part from Egyptian religion being treated as a single whole by the majority of scholars.

Disciplines reconstructed from archaeology often receive the methodological treatment commonly exercised in archaeology.

Archaeological analysis and reconstruction of a civilization is typically synchronic rather than diachronic. In short the civilization, or in this case Egyptian religion, is viewed as a single whole, devoid of time reference and without attention to processes of change. In contrast to such a synchronic method, diachronic analysis is historical, chronological, and seeks to examine by considering development or decline through time. In the instance of ancient Egypt it is almost always the case that decline occurs. Consequently, I instruct my classes that the best sense of Egyptian religion,

at least as the Egyptians themselves originally defined it, ought to be derived from the earliest documents which are also the most complete and theologically profound. To learn the role of the Lady in the Temple then, close attention must be given the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, and the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom, but also later documents such as Book of Breathings and the Book of the Dead since they define the Great Lady as she was known at the time of the Hebrew exodus and could offer explanation for syncretic connections with the Hebrew Lady in the temple as celebrated by the pre-Deuteronomistic Hebrews.

This emphasis of returning to the earliest times to access the earliest, and therefore, the most extensive body of knowledge, belonged to the ancient Egyptians themselves. And for them it was particularly important in reference to the temple ceremonial and ritual that was believed to constitute the most profound knowledge imparted by the gods to man. The Egyptians believed their own ritual preserved elements of temple rites that were claimed to stretch back in time to the zp.tpy, or first age of the ancient first fathers, from whom a heavenly being and revealer of the eternal truths later established the The Egyptian temple rites.² He was called Thoth, and from descriptions of him as initiator of temple ritual, scribe of the gods,

revealer of heavenly knowledge, including the way of ascent through the heavens, he appears to parallel closely the figure familiar from Judeo-Christian tradition and similarly the teacher of such information about temples, the heavenly spheres, and the ascent, the one whom we call Enoch, the Enoch of our own pseudepigraphic tradition. As Enoch is portrayed as preserving the original religious practices given Adam, in like fashion the so-called “Building Texts” of Egyptian temples assert a long line of descent from the rites of those first fathers called “the senior ones” who were identified as the founders of the temples of the primeval age stretching ultimately to the Egyptian god Atum. Moreover, just as Hebrew tradition holds that Enoch was given Adam’s Book of Life to transmit to his posterity, so too Egyptian religion attributed to Thoth the transmission of a book of Atum, a treasure that tradition held had been carefully preserved by being handed down from one Pharaoh to another.³

I have been employing the conventional terminology of god and goddess to refer to the Egyptian heavenly beings. Some may feel discomfort at a serious consideration of multiple gods and goddesses. It is perhaps appropriate to note that these were the terms by which the Egyptologists of the 19th and early 20th centuries identified those who may perhaps be better termed heavenly beings. The extensive angelic system of

the ancient Hebrews is analogous. Indeed, Dr. Barker has provided us much information on the most ancient Hebrew beliefs relating to the role and function of such beings.

In an age where western religious culture has been inculcated with monotheism since the time of the Deuteronomists , the period when reference to the Most High God *El Elyon* was suppressed and the Father was conflated with the Son, *Yahweh*, leaving but one divine figure among the Jews, since that time mention of multiple gods evokes in many the judgment of “ignorant polytheistic pagans.” I do not accept that such a judgment properly extends to either the early Hebrews or to ancient Egypt, though it may have influenced the Egyptologists who initially rendered the Egyptian term *neter* as “god” and its plural *neteru* as “gods.” It might be preferable to think of those so designated, by a new rendering such as “dwellers in the heavens” or “heavenly beings.” Indeed, it is well known that in ancient Hebrew religion there were many dwellers in heaven in addition to a father god; there was his wife, about whom, as “Lady in the Temple,” this symposium is convened to consider. Identified as angels were the many sons and daughters of El. Yahweh was identified as “The Great Angel” and, of course, there were also archangels, and angelic heaven dwellers of all kinds whether seraphim, cherubim, or others.

Egyptologist Eric Hornung posits as deriving from the hieroglyph for *neter*, the sign of a flag at the top of a pole, that the proper translation of *neter* is “one charged with power,” while Dimitri Meeks suggests that the meaning relates to one who has come to be, through ritual. The chief ritual of Egypt was, of course, the ancient temple ceremonial in which ascent to Amon, enabled by Hathor, was presented; and in which, first of anyone in the world, Osiris, the *neter* who on earth died and was resurrected, passed upward as far as possible in completed ascent beyond even the seven heavens and so returned to the very presence of his divine father and mother, thus opening the way for others to follow.⁴ In the ascent process enacted, dramatized, and memorialized in the Egyptian temple, the three key players were Father Amon to whom ascent was directed, Mother Hathor who enabled the passage, and their son who in his Osiris persona through death and resurrection opened the way upward from this earth and who then in his Horus persona completed the ascent process in its entirety, thereby empowering others by at-one-ment with him, to follow the way he had opened. These three comprised the ancient divine triad that was celebrated in the earliest Egyptian temple rites of the fourth millennium B.C. and onward, the same ancient divine triad of Father, Mother, and Son later prominent in Solomon’s temple.⁵ With the emphasis placed on

preparing for and completing the ascent, perhaps the term *neter* is best rendered to refer to one who has made the heavenly ascent back to Amon, the precise theme of the temple ritual. Accordingly, the word *neteru* is best translated not by the term *gods* but more properly rendered *ascendant ones* or *those who have completed the heavenly ascent*.

Could this language of ascent be synonymous with the Christian usage in Matthew 5:48 where Jerome employed in the Latin Vulgate the Latin word *perfectus* to translate the word *teleios* in the Greek New Testament text? He was not mistaken in his translation since the Latin verb *perficio*, of which *perfectus* is a participle, shares meaning with the Greek verb *teleioo* from which *teleios* derives. The actual meaning is “completed, having come to the end,” and can be utilized in relation to “completing” the ascent. Might we then translate the verse not as “be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect” but rather *complete the ascent just as your Father in Heaven completed the ascent*. After all, as was demonstrated in last year’s meeting of this group, the Sermon on the Mount is itself a temple text, and such an allusion to the ascent would not be out of place.

Thus, ancient Egyptian temple ritual provided for ascent and theosis. Indeed, perhaps the most important purpose of the temple ritual was to

assist men in returning to and joining the company of the *neteru* in the heavens. The coronation follows the ascent and as part of the coronation sequence, the initiate is ceremonially received back to Father Amon, where acceptance into the company of the *neteru* is confirmed by words recorded in an inscription upon an 18th dynasty temple stele “I am thy son O Great One, I have seen the hidden things which are thine, I am crowned upon thy throne as a king and a god. I shall not die.”⁶

Proof that the Egyptians believed that the ascent and its resultant divinization was not merely a matter of ceremony but could transpire in actuality, is demonstrated by the examples of Imhotep and Amenhotep, neither of whom were pharaohs, but rather men of learning and wisdom, separated from one another in life by 1200 years. The former, chief scribe and architect of the world’s first cut stone building, the step pyramid of Djoser of the third dynasty, the latter a 15th century B.C. scribe, astronomer, mathematician, and designer of Karnak temples, both ascended through the heavens to become divinized “and though real men, historical figures beyond doubt, whose existence is attested in many monuments and documents... in time were hailed as gods and worshiped in their own temples... examples of human beings, whose beneficent labors were held up as examples to be equaled ... by their fellow mortals.”⁷

The centrality of the ascent in the temple in the Wisdom literature of the early Hebrew religion, its necessity to the individual salvation of man, and its emphatic position in the temple ritual of the Solomonic era, has been elucidated by Dr. Barker throughout her work and is familiar to all here. Ascent is similarly paramount to the purpose of the Egyptian temple ceremonial which existed to provide for the salvation of man, whether king or commoner. Because receiving the knowledge of how to ascend was essential to each and every person who desired to return to the presence of the divine triad of Father, Mother, and Son, the persons and roles of the *neteru* involved in the temple ritual requires mention, but here the role and function of the Lady in the Temple will receive particular attention.

In the Middle Kingdom the divine high triad of Amon, his consort Hathor, sometimes alternatively named Mut, and his son Horus, in some eras and places identified by the name Khonsu, entered in procession to open the ceremonial at the great temple complex of Karnak, past way stations (in John 14:1 -- Gk. *mona*, Lt. *mansio*) marking the pathway of eternal life, the way of permanent ascent. *Simulacra*, or platform mounted effigies, of Amon, Mut, and Khonsu were carried before the initiates to open the way in a fashion reminiscent of more familiar Roman lectisternal processions of a later age. Finally, it is to the presence of this ancient

familial triad, and into their ceremonial embraces, paternal, maternal, and fraternal, that the initiate returns after his ascent. Indeed, the entire Egyptian temple ceremony must be understood as an ongoing procession in various stages of which corresponding salvific instruction is provided. It represents the process all initiates must undertake by entering the temple in the entry procession in which they are accompanied by the divine triad, and by Thoth the divine guide and revealer of the mysteries, by Mother Hathor herself who oversees earthly ordinances of purification and preparation, and finally in the ascent by Osiris/Horus who accompanies their ascent in the very way that he opened up, with the procession coming to an end when the initiates are received back into the presence of the divine triad. The existence of a similar divine triad of father, mother, and son in early Hebrew temple religion is clearly established by Dr. Barker in her most recent work when she demonstrates the identity of the Lady in the Temple to be, not the consort of Yahweh, but rather the wife of El and the mother of Yahweh. Moreover, much of the ceremonial of the Hebrew temples is reminiscent of that practiced in Egyptian temples.⁸

It was to the presence of Amon's throne, then, that initiates, as "followers of Horus," sought to ascend by ceremonial means in the Egyptian rites. In the Pyramid Texts, the earliest religious writings of

substance, Amon is described as the creator of all, the ultimate source of life force and energy. He is frequently called “the hidden one” alluding to man’s search for the lost way to return to his presence. Iconography portrays him as a man in a cosmic crown of two feather plumes, perhaps representing light and truth.

After ritual cleansing by lustration and anointing with the holy oil, the temple’s ceremonial instruction begins with a dramatized account of creation. In the Heliopolitan version the work of creation is directed by Atum in behalf of his Father, and assisted by the Ennead; in the Hermopolitan ceremony and in the Theban version celebrated at Karnak, an Ogdoad with female gods depicted as serpents, accomplishes the work of creation under the direction of Amon and Mut, herself a fiery serpent goddess. Mut is the Egyptian term for the Mother, who is Hathor, also sometimes depicted as a protecting serpent goddess. In both versions of the rite the process takes its beginning in a great heavenly council of the gods over which Amon presides. A garden sequence follows in which Atum and his consort, usually named Lussaset, make covenant with the head god of the gods, Amon, thereby to receive knowledge regarding the way to return and ascend into the presence of Father Amon and Mother Hathor. The ritual cleansing, anointing, and clothing of initiates, traversing the

cosmos through ascents in the solar barque of Horus, first the neshmet barque through the twelve lower heavens which are represented as the 12 gates passed during the 12 hours of night in the Amduat,⁹ and then through the seven upper heavens in the sokar barque which tradition casts in the role of conveying Hathor from the south into Egypt, or from the point of heavenly transit to the world via the tree of life through the process the Egyptians named *kae-e-vanrash*. The ceremonial instruction served the ultimate purpose of returning the temple initiates to Father Amon where at the end of the temple rite they would be ceremonially seated upon Amon's throne to receive crowns of godhood, a process reminiscent of John's being seated on God's throne in the Johannine Apocalypse. For the Egyptian man or woman the highest goal was to depart the world and continue on the path that would ultimately return one to the company of the *neteru* to assume one's place in their company.¹⁰

Before examining the cult of Hathor a few comments about her son are in order. Indeed, the very name of Hathor proclaims her identity as mother of Horus. Horus, of course, is a Greco-Roman transliteration of the Egyptian Heru. Hathor is similarly a transliteration of *hat-Heru*, the ancient Egyptian version of the goddess's name. The word means house of Horus, a clear identifier of the mother of Horus. In fact, one of several

common forms of Hathorian statuary depicts the goddess in madonna with child fashion, holding on her lap an infant Horus (so also in later periods Isis with Horus the younger). Horus is represented by his familiar falcon iconography, often enthroned in his solar bark, the barque of millions in which those who are to be raised to divine status will accompany Horus, an Egyptian version of the Hebrew fiery throne chariot as a means of heavenly conveyance, so confirming the role of Horus in facilitating ascent into the presence of Amon. Horus' alternate appellation of Khonsu, which signifies one who is in motion, may have similar association. Horus is sometimes also titled "the opener of the ways" That is of the heavenly pathways, hidden from man, that lead to the realm of the neteru. Associated with Horus' symbolism is the wedjat eye which placed among the undying stars of the northern pole, marks the exit from the earthly realm. It is Horus who overcame and defeated the evil Set in combat, placing his own left eye lost in battle, the *wedjat*, in the midst of undying circumpolar stars to serve as beacon for the way of the ascent. The fiery wedjat eye was also connected to Hathor, especially in her guise as a fiery serpent goddess and wearer of the serpent uraeus in her headgear along with the great solar disk. Horus is sometimes identified by the double nomenclature of Wsr.Wr, simply Ausar/Heru or Osiris/Horus. The distinction between

Horus and Osiris may be similar to that between Yahweh and Christ, a mere difference of name, one heavenly, the other for use on earth. For in earthly guise Horus is Osiris, who was killed by Set, but through the assistance of his wife Isis, achieved resurrection to reassume his identity as Horus.¹¹

These events were dramatically depicted in the triennial religious celebration known as the Set (Sed) festival which, despite its name, commemorated the resurrection of Osiris and the triumph of Horus, as well as the restoration of the cosmic covenant with equinoctial balance between opposing solstices that was integral to the ancient solar cult. Not only documents but also pictorial representations name Horus as Osiris Seker and depict Horus as rising from the dead body of Osiris. It is Osiris/Horus, who after his resurrection is acknowledged as the first being to have lived on earth to complete the ascent through the heavens, and in ritual ceremonial enacted for three millennia in the temples of Egypt, initiates followed the very path discovered by Osiris/Horus in their effort to return to Amon.¹² This path lay among the stars rotating about the northern pole. The number of stars in this part of heaven was fixed and the ascending soul could assume his place among the undying stars only if a place had been vacated by another who had moved onward in the ascent. Cosmic balance

had to be maintained not only in the solar year and in the daily traversing of the sun in its path in both sky and at night below the earth in the Amduat, but also in relation to the motion of the cosmos, and between the stars both those wandering and those imperishable.¹³ While Horus is connected with balance in solar cult and also in Egypt's earlier sidereal cult, it is Hathor who is described as the principal motivator of the sun's traverse and therefore keeper of order in the solar rotation. Alison Roberts connects the heavenly sky mother Nut to Hathor in the primary responsibility of maintaining cosmic balance, asserting that "the rising and setting of in this heavenly circuit was ruled by the mother goddess," and that "dying and living, ascending and descending" constituted "the pattern of existence weaving through the New Kingdom view of celestial order" thereby complementing the theology "of stars so beloved of Old Kingdom Egyptians, centered on the Imperishable Stars of the northern sky, eternally swinging around a pole star, undying stars because they never rise or set, and to which the Osirian king ascends as described in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts."¹⁴

Hathor wore the regal headdress of the serpentine uraeus, and her distinctive solar disk surrounded with cow horns. The solar disk indicated her role in maintaining the equilibrium of solar reckoning along with the

eternal round of the stars of the cosmos. The iconographic horns pointing outward to welcome in loving embrace, also reminded of Hathor 's sometimes depiction in bovine form as the great celestial cow, giver of life, nurturer through the life journeys of long celestial ascent, and transcendent at the juncture of the two realms of heaven and earth, she concerns herself with not only the cosmos but also the inhabitants of earth. Hathor is thus a true Mother figure, and like the Mother of God about whom Dr. Barker writes, Hathor is also the Great Lady who can make the transit between heaven and earth at will.¹⁵

In Egypt she is called the Lady of the Temple for four important reasons. First, the temple itself is cast in the role of that nexus point of Hathor's control where the tree of life unites earthly and heavenly dimensions. Second, purification and preparation to begin the ascent, and therefore permission to enter or depart via the tree of life in the garden, is entirely the province of Hathor. Third, it is Hathor who provides nourishment from the fruit and the water of life of the tree, to occasion rebirth and provide sustenance for the ascent, Fourth, it is to the divine triad, including Hathor, that ascent culminates. It is therefore quite suitable for Hathor's involvement in the temple ritual to occur at several stages of the process, stages both earthly and heavenly, and in between.

Likewise it is this same ability to transition between dimensions heavenly and earthly that makes the Lady in the Temple so adept in the capacity of Hebrew Wisdom, conveying the nourishment of heavenly light to mankind.

The realm over which Hathor presides in the temple rite is, therefore, quite appropriately the garden. The sacred garden exists on both eastern and western horizon, where the sun enters his circuit in the morning and departs in the evening. There exists an outer garden before passing the temple's great entry pylons that symbolize the *aht*, or the Horizon where transpire encounters between man and god. The Egyptian *aht* pylons are no doubt imitated by the Boaz and Jachin pillars of Solomon's temple. In an exterior precinct of the temple is an actual garden where trees surround a pond with fountain of living water where lustration ceremonies were conducted. The *miqvaot* pools of Solomon's temple corresponded to this exterior location.

In this place after purification by living water anointing with the holy fragrant or fiery oil was performed. Hathor presided over an assortment of goddesses in the Garden, where washing and anointing took place. As Hathor anointed Horus with seven fiery oils to enable his ascent through the seven heavens, so in the ceremony in the *per-neser*, the shrine of fire, does she anoint initiates before their ascent either as Hathor, Mother of

Gods, or in her syncretic guise as Sekhmet, the Lion Lady. The Divine Lioness was also a fiery serpent goddess bearing the serpent uraeus. She was a destroyer of men who opposed the gods.¹⁶ Indeed, Hathor is identified in the *Book of the Divine Cow* as the divinity sent to ascertain the extent of rebellion on earth that occasioned the ending of the first time, a time that had been marked by the association of man and god together. That world of the first time or zp.tpy was in some accounts brought to an end by flood, and in most accounts by destruction at the hands of Hathor functioning as Sekhmet, the fiery warrior lioness goddess syncretically linked to Hathor, just as in Hebrew tradition the so called lioness of El, Ariel, is similarly connected to Asherah.¹⁷

In the pyramid texts of the third millennium B.C. there are seven oils of anointing known as the fiery oils and are associated with the fiery Eye of Horus, the aforementioned entrance to the ways of light and fire of the celestial regions. In the traditions of the Hebrew first temple period, Wisdom anoints with oil which represents light. For oil or the light which oil symbolizes was the sacrament of Wisdom and to the anointed ones Wisdom was mother, as she was mother to the anointed Messiah. (Barker, *Temple Themes*, 236) A late papyrus from the New Kingdom preserves hymns of the ceremony, replacing the name of Hathor with that of Isis, as

was customary in that era. Brooklyn Papyrus, II.36 reads

See the oil which exalts the skin

See the protection comes

Which to the son of Hathor belongs

The ointment which is given to the Pharaoh

when he is crowned as Re

Sekhmet is on his head preserving with her mysterious power

and the fiery Eye of Horus protects.

With the anointing of each oil, the accompanying chant proclaims the protective power given to the pharaoh, Through anointing with these fragrant oils, the ascent is enabled. Allison Roberts suggests that in this ceremony the wife of the king functions as Sekhmet-Hathor in a regenerative role to bestow the trappings of godhood and renew the pharaoh by surrounding him with the fulness of life, and through the sealing oil, writing on a leaf of the holy Ished tree, the name of Pharaoh so in this manner confirming his sonship under Amun-Re.¹⁸

Perhaps to honor Hathor in her Sekhmet guise, as well as to imitate the skin garment of the god Atum, it is in lion skins that initiates are first clothed before entering the inner temple to later receive robes of light. All these ceremonies are conducted in the garden, through which the earth is entered and from which it is departed. In that place Hathor bears the title

of Lady of the Ished, or Lady of the Sycamore, an epithet which acknowledges her actions protecting her sacred tree of life from the great serpent.¹⁹

The pylons are passed and the temple edifice is entered where initially an account of the creation sequence is presented as ritual drama in the Great Hall of Shu and Nut. In the very early Memphite theology, Shu and Nut, earth and sky, are manifestations of Atum's male and female personae, (not hermaphroditic but rather a notion similar to "and so God created Adam in his own image, male and female created he them). In the temple ritual Shu and Nut are counterparts to the figures of Atum and Lusasset, prominent in other theological texts.

Following the creation sequence the initiate processes to a second garden setting, but located within the edifice of the temple, situated directly in front of the path of heavenly ascent upward to that holy of holies where ultimately is to be found beyond the seven heavens, the House of God with the emerald and diamond throne of Amon resting on a dais of glass and fire. In that second garden, instruction about the coming of Atum and his consort, and the defeat of the false serpent is given, but of greatest importance is the nourishment the initiate receives from the tree of life at the hands of Hathor. The garden functions, then, not only as the place

where the world is entered or exited, or as a place of prophetic divination from the rustlings of the ished tree leaves, but significantly as a place of rest and feasting, upon entering - to recuperate from the difficult transit to birth through the duat, and upon departing - to receive sustenance for the ascent and rebirth in higher realms.²⁰ Feasts conclude with a bread and wine offering in commemoration of the death of Osiris and victory over evil of his alter ego the great god Horus. But the greatest sustenance that reinvigorates to life comes from Hathor's disbursement of fruit and living water from the tree of life. For in the garden the initiate, a symbolic Atum, is awakened from a deep sleep, the sem sleep, by the water of life that Hathor draws out of the tree thereby regenerating life in the awakened Atum.²¹ The Book of Breathings account of the ceremony at this point proclaims "Happy is the heart of him who is reborn in the temple of the Lady of the Tree" and an Old Kingdom inscription recording this segment of the rite shouts praise to the Mother descending from heaven and exiting from the tree into the garden with these words, "The Mother comes forth (from the Tree), fair of face." Hail Mother, Lady of the Tree of Life, Great Queen of Earth and of Heaven.²²

A representation of the tree of life was found within each temple. After the pattern of the great ished tree of Heliopolis, home of the ben-ben bird or phoenix that rose in fiery regeneration, in earlier centuries always planted in temples was an ished tree or the *Persea Egyptiacus*, with its fabled delightful white fruit. As this species became extinct with the dessication of Egypt's climate, the sycamore tree replaced it in temples. Thus Hathor was initially titled Lady of the Ished, and in later times Lady of the Sycamore. The garden setting surrounded and protected the ished tree on whose leaves were written the names of the recipients of life among the neteru. Whether ished tree or sycamore, the tree in the temple represented the great world pillar or tree of life that leads upward to other worlds and heavenly spheres.²³

In the garden sequence of the ceremonial ritual dramatization depicts the assault upon not only upon Atum and Lusasset by the evil serpent Apophis, but also on the tree of life itself and on the way of ascent to the son of Hathor that it guarded. This seems to be the same Apophis who elsewhere in the ritual attacks the solar barque of Horus attempting to prevent the progression of those anointed initiates who endeavor to make the ascent to the realm of the neteru and the thrones of the divine triad.

In Egyptian theology there are serpents good and evil. Indeed, a sign of the ruling *neteru* is the serpent. Symbolic of ruling power among the *neteru*, were the serpent derived staffs wielded by male gods, the *was*-scepter, and the serpentine uraeus of female goddesses that was perhaps a symbol of the depiction from earliest times of the highest goddesses as fiery serpents, much like the seraphim of the Holy of Holies of Solomon's temple. In juxtaposition to the evil Apophis who assaults both soker barque and tree of life, in an effort to escape his imprisonment within the bounds of this world and sow evil throughout the cosmos, is the righteous serpent Mehen who guards both the tree and the *neteru*. The Horus child is often depicted resting protected within the surrounding coil of Mehen. As prototype of the ouroboros world serpent, Mehen demarcates the boundary between creation, the organized cosmos and chaos, that vast region of unorganized matter in various states of entropic degeneration.²⁴

Indications of these serpent opposites is to be found in the Hebrew tradition as well. The contest between Moses' serpent and those of the priests comes quickly to mind, but even more significant is Moses' Nehustan. Numbers 21 recounts how this brass serpent protected from the venom of evil serpents in the desert, and John 3:21 identifies it as a symbol associated with the Christ, the true serpent who will overcome the false

serpent. Similarly, the Egyptian temple ritual depicts Horus, anointed with seven fiery oils in order to overcome the seven poisons of the serpent, as defeating the great false serpent when Apophis assaults the celestial barque thereby enabling the continued ascent through the heavens in the way Horus had opened; so too does his Lady Mother overcome Apophis in the garden.²⁵

John differentiates in Revelation evil and righteous serpents in the stars, constellations rife with meaning and that John observed no doubt in the course of his own heavenly ascent. Remember that the Greek draco is properly rendered serpent rather than dragon. The conflict alluded to by John as between the Lady and the dragon hearkens back four thousand years to the earliest articulation of that enmity in the garden of the Egyptian temple ritual. Dr. Barker observes that the conflict was between the serpent and the Mother of the Lord in the temple. She further rightly comments that in Hebrew tradition the defeat of the serpent by the Lady was accepted, but that the serpent was victorious in the garden.²⁶ Whether the garden account was subject to Deuteronomistic tampering is a topic for another day, but by contrast, in Egyptian theology the evil serpent was defeated in the garden by Mother Hathor defending the tree and the child. In some versions of the story it is as the cat goddess Bast that Hathor

defeats Apophis by tearing and crushing his head. There was a victorious serpent in the garden, but it was not Apophis. Rather, it was the fiery serpent Mother Hathor whom Roberts names “the fiery genetrix of the cycle of life and death,” the very cycle whose events culminated in entry and exit through the garden. Moreover, Roberts links Hathor to the *mehetweret* cow who further involved herself in the process by assisting individuals in passage through the twelve hours of night in the Duat for them to be awakened and returned to life in the garden.²⁷

Perhaps because of her successful defense of the tree and her control to the access of its life restorative power, Hathor is depicted as dwelling in the tree, and in some instances as actually becoming the tree in a fashion reminiscent of Asherah and her tree.

When the initiate completes his ceremonial ascent, as noted above, in the House of God Hathor as one of the divine familial triad embraces him, after which she also plays a part in his theosis, seating him upon the throne of her husband Amon. Among the iconographic symbols of Hathor is the calf (the great bull calf who was son of Amon and of the divine cow Hathor.) Images of the sacred golden calf of the Sun is found throughout shrines of Hathor. The Sun is mentioned in some later versions of the ritual because by the New Kingdom times of the Hebrew Exodus, Amon had been

syncretically merged with the sun god Re to become Amon-Re. However, dating back to the time of the first dynasties of Egypt, was another sun symbol of the Lady Hathor, the winged sun disk, found in abundance not only in shrines of Hathor, but in the great temples where initiation ceremonies were conducted. The image is ubiquitous, placed over gates, doors, on stelae etc. This image of ascent through the seven heavens was associated with both Horus Behedty, the great Horus of Edfu, due to his presiding over the ascent via his solar barque and with his mother, Lady of the Temple whose role in enabling the ascent through instruction and preparation was so predominant. The prominence of the winged sun disk throughout the temples clearly reveals Hathor as the Lady of the Temple.²⁸

Dr. Barker has pointed out not only the use of this symbol in Solomon's temple, but also its connections with the Lady in the Temple. Similar connections of the Lady to Hathor include items removed from the Holy of Holies in the Josiah reform, such as the sacred tree and the golden calf throne. Dr. Barker similarly notes that the Lady's persona of Ariel, named by Isaiah (29:1-7) the lioness of El, is strikingly like the Sekhmet persona of Hathor.²⁹

The sun disk symbol may also suggest Hathor's connection to the way back to the neteru. Hathor's famous still surviving temple at Denderah,

with its hall of ancient Egyptian constellations and observatory, stands as clear proof of Hathor's role in maintaining cosmic balance and the solar cult of Egypt. Denderah corroborates the often taught dictum that in Egypt the temple was viewed as a scale model of the cosmos and existed for teaching purposes as well as ritual experience. Part of that teaching was to "take bearings of the universe and in the eternities, both in time and space. Accordingly, the Egyptian temple served as an astronomical observatory where the cycles of the sun, moon, and stars were charted and recorded, as well as the progress of equinoctial processions, believed to indicate the coming of future events in correspondence to the sun as it followed its equinoctial path through constellations where important historical events were believed to have been prefigured by the gods. An extremely ancient passage from the Pyramid Texts (503) describes the sightings of sun, moon, and stars at the temple through established apertures that were placed in the temple structure to mark the progression of the solar year. Stars were considered not only the realm of the undying ones, but also beacons marking the path back to Amon hidden in their midst. The Egyptian temple was, therefore, the center of both a heliacal star cult and the center of the important solar cult.³⁰

Early astronomical parallels are shared with Hebrew religion and its temple. The notion of stars as the dwelling place of heavenly beings was not unfamiliar to the early Hebrews since the Book of Numbers (24:17) identifies great angelic figures as stars. Abraham was widely known to have been skillful in celestial science, and is said to have attributed to Enoch his expertise in the science of the stars, which he is also reported to have taught in Egypt. Of course, it is Enoch to whom ancient Jewish accounts give credit for establishing the astral arts since the secrets of the stars were first revealed to him in conjunction with the ascent experience that is chronicled in the Books of Enoch. Not only comprehension of the stars but also knowledge of the sun and the solar calendar belonged to Enoch as Enoch's Book of Astronomy (1 Enoch, 72-82) reveals by describing the sun as placed in a circuit around 182 waning thrones and 182 waxing thrones a configuration common in Egyptian temples.³¹ Just as the Egyptian temple promoted the solar cult and with it a solar calendar, Dr. Barker has collected convincing evidence that a solar cult and solar calendar were part of the temple cult of Solomon's temple. Indeed, the chariot of the sun in the temple precinct and the solar calendar followed in that era by the temple, as well as certain associations of the sun with the Lady, paralleling the sun connections of Hathor in Egypt, establish the reality of a solar cult

among the Hebrews, possibly brought with them from their Egyptian sojourn.³²

Can so many parallels between the persons of the Hebrew Lady in the Temple and Hathor as the Egyptian Lady of the Temple be considered mere coincidence? The original temple cult must have derived from Moses' tabernacle cult and Moses as a high ranking Egyptian would surely have been extremely well versed in Egyptian religion. Likewise the connections of Abraham and his descendant Joseph to Egyptian erudition are well established in the religious tradition of the Hebrews. Indeed, Joseph is known to have become a ruler and high priest of On, married to the high lady Aseneth from a royal line of Egypt, daughter of the chief priest of On, the holiest temple city of Egypt which was called Heliopolis by the Greeks because it was the center of the old heliacal cult of Atum and the solar cult of Amon-Re. The temple city of On was also the location of the sacred ished tree that Egyptians believed had been defended from the serpent in the Garden, and the ben-ben stone of primeval creation, the holy mount of first life.³³

Despite such evidence of contact, someone could conceivably argue that the connections between the Hebrew lady and the Egyptian lady constitute coincidence in modern scholarly observation and theory rather

than legitimate syncretism, for has not our tradition taught that all rites foreign to the Judeo-Christian practice must needs be dismissed as Pagan. But one astounding discovery irrefutably demonstrates the association of the two great Ladies, or perhaps better said, the Great Lady as she is cultivated in two religious cultures once plausibly interconnected four millenia past.

In Sinai at a place today named Serabit al Khadim exists a large temple complex of Hathor. The site has been known to Europeans since the mid 16th century and was excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie in 1904-05. It is located in a region of turquoise and copper mines. A shrine to Hathor is unsurprising even in such a place and outside Egypt proper, since the goddess was also known by the epithet, Lady of Turquoise, and turquoise was a stone sacred to her. Inscriptions on site indicate that the mines were opened under Pharaoh Sneferu of the 4th dynasty in about 2800 B.C., the temple contains inscriptions dating its erection to the 12th dynasty in 1964 B.C. It may have replaced an earlier shrine but it functioned as a full temple complex of Hathor thereafter. It was expanded on several occasions, lastly in about 1100 B.C. under the Ramessid 20th dynasty, until it became massive in size. In its ruins were found the expected items associated with her cult. There are cult statues and bas-reliefs of Hathor as

Mother goddess with her usual iconographic accoutrements, and also in bovine form. The golden calf, son of the Sun, is also prominent at the site. This is not unusual for where the Mother is honored, typically so too is her son.

Unexpectedly, however, there were found on site inscribed on stone tablets more than 30 graffiti written in an unknown script possessing certain similarities to hieratic. Sir Alan Gardner found these to constitute a proto-western Semitic script that he conjectured derived from the Egyptian hieratic with words he determined to be pan-Canaanite, often simply called old Hebrew. Among these writings was discovered an offering inscribed bl.t or balat which is best rendered “to the Lady.”

With this discovery of an offering to the Hebrew Lady in a shrine of Hathor, there is sure evidence of syncretism. Moreover, offerings to the Lady and sacrifice seem to be made in the Semitic as well as in Egyptian mode. Such Semitic style sacrifices continued beyond the proto-Semitic inscriptions with later offerings found that date to the 9th, 8th, and 7th century B.C. As first suggested by Flinders’ assistant Lena Eckenstein, the discovery occasioned a revision of place for the Sinai events of Exodus, as well as of tradition that the mountain long held to be Mt. Sinai, located 40 miles from Serabit is misidentified and that Mt. Gebel Saniya near Serabit

is Moses' sacred mount. Furthermore, the incident of the golden calf is set in a context other than the Deuteronomists redaction of the event merely to a condemnation of idol worship; so too the role of Marion as an Hathorian priestess, or at least as a priestess of the Lady has been suggested in a number of scholarly articles.

Petrie also found evidence of a cave site no doubt pre-dating the temple of Hathor, a cave with semitic style worship of the Lady. The Hathorian temple dates to about 2000 B.C., but a shrine no doubt existed since the 4th dynasty when the site was opened for mining. The unanswerable question is whose shrine first occupied the site, that of the Lady or of Hathor. Dr. Barker notes that the Hathor shrine may have been constructed on the site of a still existing sanctuary where transpired worship of the Lady and her son, identified possibly with the local associated male deity, Sopd, literally rendered the Judge, certainly a role of the Lord and that from the evidence conjecture can be made that worship of the Lady of Sinai and her son pre-dated by centuries the Mosaic events and worship system, perhaps extending as far back to the time of the patriarchs. ³³

For purposes of the present paper the sanctuaries of Serabit on the Sinai serve to demonstrate that the Egyptians and the Hebrews themselves

recognized the syncretic connection of the two Ladies. Moreover, if the Egyptians were correct in asserting their preservation of worship forms handed down from Atum via Thoth/Enoch, the two ladies may represent different preservations and developments of the Lady of the Tree, the Heavenly Mother who would have nurtured the being variously called Atum or Adam, and was known as Mother of the bringer of salvation and exaltation who in the different strains of this old religion was known as Osiris/Horus and Christ/Yahweh.

John F. Hall, Ph.D.

Professor of Classical Languages and Ancient History

1. Egyptian society as imitative of heavenly society, and Egyptian ritual as imitative of heavenly occurrence underpins Egyptian religious doctrine and practice. See for example, E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982); J. Assman, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001); Jane B. Sellers, *The Death of God in Ancient Egypt* (London, Penguin, 1992); R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959). For the notion of earthly counterparts to heavenly beings, offices, and practices in Hebrew belief systems, see M. Barker, *The Older Testament* (London: SPCK, 1987), 110-112.

2. Rundle Clark, 177, 263-6; H.W. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 262-5; Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd

Ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 106.

3. Nibley, *Message*, 101-4, 124-6, 206-215, 328-30; Rundle Clark, 35-67.
4. Hornung, 41-44, 55-65; Nibley, *Message*, 41-5, 227-9; D. Meeks, "Notion de dieu et structure du pantheon dans l'Égypte ancienne," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 205 (1988), 425-46.
5. Hornung, 218; Sellers, 166; A. Roberts, *Hathor Rising* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1997), 72-80; J. Hall, "Ancient Mediterranean Temple Ceremonies," in *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition*, (Logan, Ut.: USU in association with *BYU Studies*, 2013), 52; Nibley, *Message*, 422. For the Hebrew divine triad see, M. Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 121-23, 193-7, 309-10.
6. A. Gardiner, "The Coronation of King Haremhab," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 39(1953): 13-31.
7. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 286. See also D. Wildung, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* New York: NYU Press, 1977).
8. Hall, 51-4; Nibley, *Message*, 422; Roberts, 54; see also note 5 above. On the procession of divine effigies see Hall, 52; Hornung, 54.
9. See A. Schweizer, *The Sungod's Journey through the Netherworld: Reading the Ancient Egyptian Amduat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 35-210; J.A. Rush, *The Twelve Gates: A Spiritual Passage through the Egyptian Books of the Dead*, (Berkeley, CA: Frog Ltd., 2007), 137-253.
10. Sellers, 223-4; Hall, 52-3; Nibley, *Message*, 131-456, by examining manuscripts of the Book of Breathing summarizes the Egyptian temple ceremonial of ascent from washing and anointing in the exterior garden, through sequences relating to creation, events in the garden before the sacred tree, the ascent, and coronation.
11. Sellers, 126-36; Rundle Clark 110, 127, 135, 2009-33; Assman, 49-50, 131-47; Hall 48; Nibley, *Message*, 80, 170, 280-6, 397-403, 415-31.
12. Sellers, 219-36, 306-10; Rundle Clark, 195-212; Assman, 131-41.
13. Sellers, 96-8, 234-5, 3221-4; Nibley, *Message*, 223-6, 285-99, 436; Hall, 55-6. N. Lockyer, *The Dawn of Astronomy: A Study of Temple Worship and Mythology of the Ancient Egyptians*, 35-40, 55-7, 72-9, 117, 173, 198, 341-67. For the Ancient Egyptian *Book of the Order and Motion of the Stars*, see Nibley, *Message*, 301.
14. A. Roberts, *My Heart My Mother: Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt* (Rottingdean, Sussex: Northgate Publishers, 2000), 98, 100.
15. Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 9-12, 21-3, 41-4.

16. Nibley, *Message*, 135-50; Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 31-3, 43, 79; Hall, 53.
17. Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 10-15; Nibley, *Message*, 339-49; Hall, 53.
18. Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 10-15, 57-61.
19. On the events of the garden in Egyptian ceremonial, see Nibley, *Message*, 288-93, 304-315. On the Lady of the Sycamore see Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 8, 58, 106; Rundle Clark, 88; Nibley, *Message*, 287.
20. Nibley, *Message*, 279-320.
21. Ibid. 238-44, 250-2.
22. Ibid. 284-7, 297-8, 305-6.
23. Ibid. 287-98.
24. Ibid. 311-20, 325-6.
25. Ibid. 397-400.
26. Barker, *Mother*, 361-7.
27. Roberts, *Hathor Rising*, 43-6.
28. Ibid. 10, 26-7, 66-7, 82-6; Sellers, 322-3, Nibley, *Message*, 260-76, 349-50.
29. Barker, *Mother*, 85, 227.
30. Sellers, 27, 38, 234-5, 321-4; Lockyer, 73-119, 210-25, 341-58; Hall, 55.
31. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 299, 300-2, 310, 453; H. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 11-24, 77-78; Barker, *Mother*, 53, 287; Hall, 47-9, 54-6.
32. Barker, *Mother*, 45-8, 83-5, 101, 152, 321.
33. Sellers, 76-7, 101, 132, 237-46; Lockyer, 74, 316-29; Nibley, 220, 244, 257, 267-73, 285, 291, 339-42.
33. Barker, *Mother*, 114, 224-6; R. H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames&Hudson, 2000), 239. The excavations findings are detailed in the reports of Flinders-Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: 1906) and that of his assistant, Lina Eckenstein, *A History of Sinai* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921). For linguistic analysis of epigraphic discoveries see W.F. Albright, *The Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and Their Decipherment*. Oakland: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1948).