The ties between Hathor and the weaver girl (织女)

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Abstract: On the basis of Hathor as a goddess of love, beauty, Queen of wreath weaving, celestial goddess, the mistress of Heaven, goddess of cheerfulness and maternal care; each year, "Hathor travelled south from her temple at Dendera to visit Horus at Edfu"; one particular Egyptian tale - the 'Seven Hathors'. And on the basis of in Egypt, mirrors were another of Hathor's symbols; Hathor was praised for her beautiful hair; in the Old Kingdom, most priests of Hathor, including the highest ranks, were women and the only known surviving birth brick from ancient Egypt is decorated with an image of a woman holding her child flanked by images of Hathor and so on, so I can get a hypothesis that the weaver girl (织女) is probably Hathor in China.

Hathor (Het-Hert, Het-Heru, Hwt-Hert, Hethara), meaning "House of Horus [the Elder]", was a goddess of many things, from the celestial to the alcoholic! She was a celestial goddess, The Mistress of Heaven. A goddess of love, music and beauty as the Goddess of Love, Cheerfulness, Music and Dance. Hathor was known as the Mother of Mothers and the Celestial Nurse who presided over women, fertility, children and childbirth. Yet Hathor was also a goddess of baser things - she was the Vengeful Eye of Ra, the Lady of Drunkenness, and a goddess of the dead as Lady of the West. As Lady of the Southern Sycamore, the sycamore was sacred to her. It was from the sycamore tree that Hathor was thought to hand out good things to the deceased in the afterlife, and so she was thought to be a friend to the dead.

Hathor, in bovine form, emerges from a hill representing the Theban necropolis, in a copy of the *Book of the Dead* from the 13th century BC

Composite image of Hathor's most common iconography, based partly on images from the tomb of Nefertari

Hathor's name in hieroglyph is (Hart 2005, p. 61), which is to be read Ḥet-Ḥeru, and another form of it , which is to be read Ḥet-Ḥert, and its major cult center is Dendera .

Her name is translated as "House of Horus", which may be a reference to her as the embodiment of the sky in her role of the Celestial Cow, being that which surrounds the decidedly sky-oriented hawk-deity, Horus, when he takes wing. If Horus was the god associated with the living king, Hathor was the god associated with the living queen.

-- Cass, S. 1997, *Hathor*

Hathor, from the Tomb of Seti I

Hathor was also known as the Mistress of Life, the Great Wild Cow, the Golden One, the Mistress of Turquoise, Lady of Iunet (Dendera, Egypt) (her cult centre was located there), Mistress of Qis (Qusiya), Lady to the Limit (of the Universe), Lady of Punt (perhaps an area in present day Somalia - a famous expedition to this land was commissioned by Hatshepsut (1473-1458 BC), of the 18th Dynasty), the Powerful One, the Mistress of the Desert, Lady of the Southern Sycamore... and many other names, besides. She was also the goddess of the third month of the Egyptian calendar, known in Greek times as Hethara.

Sculpture of Hathor as a cow, with all of her symbols, the sun disk, the cobra, as well as her necklace and crown.

Hathor's head on the remains of a sistrum

The reason that Hathor has so many names, one would assume, is because she is an ancient goddess - she seems to have been mentioned as early as the 2nd Dynasty. Hathor may even be associated with the Narmer palette - although the two human faced bovines may also have

been a representation of the king or of another ancient bovine goddess, called Bat, who was eventually supplanted by Hathor.

The Narmer Palette, thought to mark the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt; note the images of Hathor at the top and bottom, as well as the lionesses, symbols of Sekhmet, forming the central intertwined image.

It is interesting to note, though, that there is not a personal name of the goddess mentioned in the list of names - they are all titles.

Hathor, Lady of Amenty, the Dweller in the Great Land, the Lady of Ta-Tchesert, the Eye of Ra, the Dweller in his breast, the Beautiful Face in the Boat of Millions of Years, the Seat of Peace of the doer of truth, Dweller in the Boat of the favoured ones.....

-- *The Chapter of Praise of Hathor, Lady of Amenty*

Now let us back to China. The Qixi Festival, also known as the Qiqiao Festival, is a Chinese traditional festival celebrating the annual meeting of the cowherd and the weaver girl (织女) in mythology (Zhao 2015, 13; Brown & Brown 2006, 72; Poon 2011, 100; Melton & Baumann 2010, 912–913). "Qi" means seven in Chinese, and "Xi" means night in Chinese,

so "Qixi" points out that the cowherd and the weaver maid meet with each other on the night of seventh day of the seventh month on the Chinese lunar calendar every year, so Qixi Festival is also called *Double Seventh Festival*, *Seventh Evening Festival* or *Night of Sevens*(Brown & Brown 2006, 72; Melton & Baumann 2010, 912–913; "Traditional Chinese Festivals -china.org.cn". www.china.org.cn. Retrieved 2019-03-06).

The festival originated from the romantic legend of two lovers, Zhinü and Niulang, who were the weaver girl and the cowherd, respectively. The tale of *The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl* has been celebrated in the Qixi Festival since the Han dynasty(Schomp 2009, 70). The earliest-known reference to this famous myth dates back to over 2600 years ago, which was told in a poem from the *Classic of Poetry*(Schomp 2009, 89). Contemporarily, the Qixi Festival has been given the cultural meaning of Chinese Valentine's Day, because the love tale of the cowherd and the weaver maid has made the Qixi Festival become a symbol of love("The Qiqiao Festival". en.chinaculture.org. Retrieved 2019-03-06). (It resembles Hathor as a goddess of love).

The reunion of the couple of *The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd* on the bridge of magpies. Artwork in the Long Corridor of the Summer Palace in Beijing.

The general tale is a love story between Zhinü (the weaver girl, symbolizing Vega) and Niulang (the cowherd, symbolizing Altair). Their love was not allowed, thus they were banished to opposite sides of the Silver River (symbolizing the Milky Way). Once a year, on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month, a flock of magpies would form a bridge to reunite the lovers for one day. There are many variations of the story(Brown & Brown 2006, 72). While in Egypt, each year, "Hathor travelled south from her temple at Dendera to visit Horus at Edfu, and this event marking their sacred marriage was the occasion of a great festival and pilgrimage(David., op. cit., p.99)". So this could indicate that the weaver girl(织女) was Hathor in China.

Niulang (Altair) and Zhinu (Vega) are separated by the Milky Way.

By the way, another interesting thing about Hathor is found in one

particular Egyptian tale - when the hero of the story was born, the 'Seven Hathors', disguised as seven young women, appeared and announced his fate. They seemed to be linked with not only fortune telling, but to being questioners of the soul on its way to the Land of the West.

The Seven Hathors as cows wearing the Menat of Hathor and the headdress of Hathor

Hathor often is seen carrying a sistrum, an ancient musical instrument played by the priestesses. The sistrum usually had the face of Hathor where the handle adjoins the rest of the instrument. This particular instrument was thought to have sexual overtones, relating to fertility. Hathor has a rather odd title, "Hand of God". This might be related to

how the handle of the sistrum is held, just as the relationship of the loop joined to the handle (the naos) might be related to her title of "Lady of the Vulva"!

Now let us back to China. The images below may contain Hathor.

Bronze Chunyu (鎛于), Spring and Autumn Period, unearthed in Jianbi, Zhenjiang. Notice the protrusions arranged at the edge, they may symbolize the nipple of the cow. So I think the image on the bronze Chunyu is Hathor with Chinese characteristic.

Celadon angle, unearthed in Hongshan, Wuxi. In my point of view, it resembles the horn of Hathor.

Now let us back to Egypt. Hathor was also known as the "Great Menat". The *menat*, a necklace with a special counterweight, is not actually jewelry - it is a musical instrument sacred to Hathor! (So I think the menat resembles Bronze Chunyu(鎗于)). The counter piece is similar to the fertility dolls found in ancient tombs, while the beaded necklace was believed to represent the womb. It was held in the hand and rattled to convey the blessing of the goddess.

The depiction of Hathor's sacred menat necklace details the heavy semi-circular pectoral that hung from four sistras pendants. Chains attached to these pendants linked the necklace with its counterweight that hung down the back of the wearer. The necklace on the wall probably reproduces the actual necklace worn during the temple's holy rites and one of the most important objects stored underground.

Hathor was also the "Lady of Greenstone and Malachite" and "Lady of Lapis-Lazuli", presiding over these materials as well as being a goddess of the fringes where they were mined. (Malachite is a banded light and dark green semi-precious stone that was ground up and mixed with eye make up. Lapis-lazuli adorned many pieces of ancient Egyptian jewelry. This fits in well with Hathor's role of a goddess of beauty.) She was a goddess of the west, and a goddess of Punt and Sinai and so was a goddess of far off places. This is perhaps why Hathor was also known as the "Lady to the Limit" - the Egyptians believed her to be a goddess who ruled over the known universe!

Copy of a statue of Hathor (center) with a goddess personifying the Fifteenth Nome of Upper Egypt (left) and the Fourth Dynasty king Menkaure (right); 26th century BC

An hymn to Hathor says:

Thou art the Mistress of Jubilation, the Queen of the Dance, the Mistress of Music, the Queen of the Harp Playing, the Lady of the Choral Dance, the Queen of Wreath Weaving, the Mistress of Inebriety Without End.

Hathor Temple in Abu Simbel consecrate from Ramses II to honor his most love wife Nefertari, Egypt, Africa

Egyptian religion celebrated the sensory pleasures of life, believed to be among the gods' gifts to humanity. Egyptians ate, drank, danced, and played music at their religious festivals. They perfumed the air with flowers and incense. Many of Hathor's epithets link her to celebration; she is called the mistress of music, dance, garlands, myrrh, and drunkenness. In hymns and temple reliefs, musicians play tambourines, harps, lyres, and sistra in Hathor's honor(Finnestad 1999, pp. 113–115). The sistrum, a rattle-like instrument, was particularly important in Hathor's worship. Sistra had erotic connotations and, by extension, alluded to the creation of new life(Manniche 2010, pp. 13–14, 16–17).

Banquet scene from the tomb chapel of Nebamun, 14th century BC. Its imagery of music and dancing alludes to Hathor.

Hathor was considered the mother of various child deities. As suggested by her name, she was often thought of as both Horus's mother and consort (Lesko 1999, pp. 82–83). As both the king's wife and mother of his heir, Hathor was the mythic counterpart of human queens.

Hathor as a cow suckling Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh, at Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahari, 15th century BC

Now let us go back to China. During the Han dynasty, the practices were conducted in accordance to formal ceremonial state rituals. Over time, the festival activities also included customs that the common people partook(Zhao 2015, 13).

Girls take part in worshipping the celestials (拜仙) during rituals. They go to the local temple to pray to Zhinü for wisdom(Melton & Baumann 2010, 912–913). Paper items are usually burned as offerings (Stepanchuk & Wong 1991, 83). Girls may recite traditional prayers for dexterity in needlework, which symbolize the traditional talents of a good spouse(Melton & Baumann 2010, 912–913) . Divination could take place to determine possible dexterity in needlework. They make wishes for marrying someone who would be a good and loving husband. During the

festival, girls make a display of their domestic skills(Brown & Brown 2006, 72). While in Egypt, Hathor was called "mistress of love", as an extension of her sexual aspect. In the series of love poems from Papyrus Chester Beatty I, from the Twentieth Dynasty (c. 1189–1077 BC), men and women ask Hathor to bring their lovers to them: "I prayed to her [Hathor] and she heard my prayer. She destined my mistress [loved one] for me. And she came of her own free will to see me(Bleeker 1973, pp. 40–41)". So in my point of view, this resembles Hathor as a goddess of love and the Queen of wreath weaving. Traditionally, there would be contests amongst those who attempted to be the best in threading needles under low-light conditions like the glow of an ember or a half moon. Today, girls sometimes gather toiletries in honor of the seven maidens(Stepanchuk & Wong 1991, 83). And in my point of view, this resembles in one particular Egyptian tale - the 'Seven Hathors'.

The Offerings of Qixi Festival in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao

Altar for worshipping Zhinü– Qixi Festival Traditions

Needle Threading for Intelligence in Qixi Festival

The festival also held an importance for newlywed couples. Traditionally, they would worship the celestial couple for the last time and bid farewell to them (辞仙). The celebration stood symbol for a happy marriage and showed that the married woman was treasured by her new family (Poon 2011, 100).

On this day, the Chinese gaze to the sky to look for Vega and Altair shining in the Milky Way, while a third star forms a symbolic bridge between the two stars (Schomp 2009, 70). It was said that if it rains on this day that it was caused by a river sweeping away the magpie bridge or that the rain is the tears of the separated couple (Stepanchuk & Wong 1991, 82). (I think it resembles Hathor as a celestial goddess, the mistress of Heaven). Based on the legend of a flock of magpies forming a bridge to reunite the couple, a pair of magpies came

to symbolize conjugal happiness and faithfulness(Welch 2008, 77). So I think this resembles Hathor as a goddess of cheerfulness and maternal care.

The Yongzheng Emperor's Amusements of the Twelve Months: July, Qixi Festival

Now let us look at the painting below. It is called Tang Palace Celebrates Qixi Festival. This painting from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

is said to be painted by Qiu Ying. The women are seen gathering in the yard, worshipping facing the starry sky, making wishes for excellent needlework skills just like Zhinu(织女) in the folktale. The painting portrays ladies in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) from noble families celebrating Qixi Festival by holding a banquet in the courtyard from a bird's eye perspective. We can see lively images on the painting, with some ladies looking up into the sky, some bending low to pray, some busy preparing banquets and some leaning on the rails.

Tang Palace Celebrates Qixi Festival

A detail from the painting Tang Palace Celebrates Qixi Festival

A detail from the painting Tang Palace Celebrates Qixi Festival

Sometimes maybe you notice that people also put white makeup powder, rouge, a comb and a round mirror on the altar. Furthermore, there's a basin of water and a towel on a small chair next to it. They are actually oblations for Zhīnǚ. Therefore, she can dress up and get prepared to meet her beloved Niúláng. Also, there is a number of globe amaranth, which symbolizes the wish to have many descendants. While in Egypt, mirrors were another of her symbols, because in Egypt they were often made of gold or bronze and therefore symbolized the sun disk, and because they were connected with beauty and femininity.

Some mirror handles were made in the shape of Hathor's face(Wilkinson 1993, pp. 32, 83). And a hymn to the goddess Raet-Tawy as a form of Hathor at the temple of Medamud describes the Festival of Drunkenness as part of her mythic return to Egypt(Darnell 1995, p. 48). Women carry bouquets of flowers, drunken revelers play drums, and people and animals from foreign lands dance for her as she enters the temple's festival booth.

Oblations for Zhinu

Mirror with Hathor's face on the handle, 15th century BC

Hathor was praised for her beautiful hair. Egyptian literature contains allusions to a myth not clearly described in any surviving texts, in which Hathor lost a lock of hair that represented her sexual allure. One text compares this loss with Horus's loss of his divine Eye and Set's loss of his testicles during the struggle between the two gods, implying that the loss of Hathor's lock was as catastrophic for her as the maiming of Horus and Set was for them (Selden 1998, pp. 346–348). While in southwestern part of China, painting their toenails and washing hair with tree sap are local customs. With these ways, they think they can be more beautiful and find a satisfied husband.

In the Old Kingdom, most priests of Hathor, including the highest ranks, were women. Many of these women were members of the royal family (Lesko 1999, pp. 240–241). In the course of the Middle Kingdom, women were increasingly excluded from the highest priestly positions, at the same time that queens were becoming more closely tied to Hathor's cult. Thus, non-royal women disappeared from the high ranks of Hathor's priesthood (Gillam 1995, pp. 233–234), although women continued to serve as musicians and singers in temple cults across Egypt (Lesko 1999, pp. 243–244). While in China, "worshipping the weaver girl" (拜织女) is purely a matter for girls and young women. Most of them made an appointment with their friends or neighbours in advance, and at most a dozen of them jointly organized it.

In addition to formal and public rituals at temples, Egyptians privately worshipped deities for personal reasons, including at their homes. Birth was hazardous for both mother and child in ancient Egypt, yet children were much desired. Thus fertility and safe childbirth are among the most prominent concerns in their popular religion, and fertility deities such as Hathor and Taweret were commonly worshipped in household shrines. Egyptian women squatted on bricks while giving birth, and the only known surviving birth brick from ancient Egypt is decorated with an image of a woman holding her child flanked by images of Hathor (Ritner 2008, pp. 173–175, 181). While in China, the weaver girl (织女) is a

goddess of childbirth.

Ptolemaic plaque of a woman giving birth assisted by two figures of Hathor, fourth to first century BC.

And by the way , Hathor was said to be the mother of the pharaoh, and is often depicted in a nurturing role, suckling the pharaoh when he was a child. Other than the pharaoh - a living god - Hathor was believed to have a son with Horus-Behdety (a form of Horus the Elder) known as Ihy (Ahy, Horus-Sematawy, Harsomtut), a falcon-god and child-god of music and dancing who carried a sistrum. The three were worshipped at Iunet.

My majesty precedes me as Ihy, the son of Hathor
I am the male of masculinity
.....
I escaped from her blood, I am the master of the redness.

-- Clark, R.T.R. 1960, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 88

Hathor welcoming Nefertari

And the image below is the picture and hieroglyphs of Hathor published by Brooklyn Museum.

The picture and hieroglyphs of Hathor published by Brooklyn Museum

Now let us go back to Dendera, Egypt.

Dendera (Arabic: دندرة *Dandarah*;), and its name in hieroglyph is

it also spelled *Denderah*, ancient Iunet, Tentyris or Tentyra is a small town and former bishopric in Egypt situated on the west bank of the Nile, about 5 kilometres (3 mi) south of Qena, on the opposite side of the river. It is located approximately 60 kilometres (37 mi) north of Luxor and remains a Latin Catholic titular see. It contains the Dendera Temple complex, one of the best-preserved temple sites from ancient Upper Egypt.

Dendera in Egypt

Miniature stele. It shows 2 reliefs of ears and incised hieroglyphs. The title or epithet of the "Lady of Dendera" as well as the names of Taweret and Hathor appear. From Egypt, Ramesside period. The British Museum, London

Dendera Temple complex (Ancient Egyptian: *Iunet* or *Tantere*; the 19th-century English spelling in most sources, including Belzoni, was Tentyra) is located about 2.5 kilometres (1.6 mi) south-east of Dendera, Egypt. It is one of the best-preserved temple complexes in Egypt. The area was used as the sixth Nome of Upper Egypt, south of Abydos.

The whole Dendera Temple complex covers some 40,000 square meters and is surrounded by a hefty mudbrick enclosed wall. Dendera was inhabited in prehistory, a useful oasis on the banks of the Nile. It seems that pharaoh Pepi I (ca. 2250 BC) built on this site and evidence exists of a temple in the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca 1500 BC). The earliest

extant building in the compound today is the Mammisi raised by Nectanebo II – last of the native pharaohs (360–343 BC).

Dendera Temple complex

General view of Dendera Temple complex

Entrance to the Dendera Temple complex

The dominant building in the complex is the Temple of Hathor. The temple has been modified on the same site starting as far back as the Middle Kingdom, and continuing right up until the time of the

Roman emperor Trajan(Barbara Ann Kipfer, "*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology*". Page 153). The existing structure began construction in the late Ptolemaic period, and the hypostyle hall was built in the Roman period under Tiberius(Wilkinson, Richard H. (2000). *The Temples of Ancient Egypt*. Thames & Hudson. p. 149).

Layout elements of the temple of Hathor:

- Large Hypostyle Hall
- Small Hypostyle Hall
- Laboratory
- Storage magazine
- Offering entry
- Treasury
- Exit to well
- Access to stairwell
- Offering hall
- Hall of the Ennead
- Great Seat and main sanctuary
- Shrine of the Nome of Dendera
- Shrine of Isis
- Shrine of Sokar
- Shrine of Harsomtus
- Shrine of Hathor's Sistrum
- Shrine of gods of Lower Egypt
- Shrine of Hathor
- Shrine of the throne of Rê
- Shrine of Rê
- Shrine of Menat collar
- Shrine of Ihy
- The Pure Place
- Court of the First Feast
- Passage
- Staircase to roof

Temple of Hathor; plan.

Plan of Hathor Temple

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

The recently cleaned ceiling of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera Temple complex

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Hypostyle Hall of Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Column capitol of Hathor, Dendera

Temple of Hathor, Dendera

Bes at the Temple of Hathor, Dendera (In my opinion, it resembles Tudigong (土地公 "Lord of the Soil and the Ground") in meaning and shape.)

A Tudigong (土地公) Temple

Besides, Hathor Temple has a relief sometimes known as the Dendera light because of a controversial fringe thesis about its nature. The *Dendera light* images comprise five stone reliefs (two of which contain a pair of what fringe authors refer to as lights) in the Hathor temple at the Dendera Temple complex located in Egypt. The view of Egyptologists is that the relief is a mythological depiction of a djed pillar and a lotus flower, spawning a snake within, representing aspects of Egyptian mythology("*Dendera Temple Crypt*". iafrica.com).

In contrast to this interpretation, there is a fringe science suggestion that it is actually a representation of an ancient Egyptian

lightbulb(Hornung, Helmut (2000). "Fantastereien". *Max Planck Forschung* (in German). p. 72).

Dendera Light

Now let us look at the hieroglyphs on the wall. The hieroglyph on the top, which means a golden necklace around the pharaoh's neck. So the person holding the object on the right side of the image is the pharaoh. While the rest of the hieroglyphs ,

similar to the Chinese characters (电 in oracle characters)

and (灯 in Liushutong characters) combined together. So

I get a hypothesis that the meaning of the hieroglyphs on the wall is pharaoh held a light bulb!

So from the above, I can get a hypothesis that the weaver girl(织女)is probably Hathor in China.

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