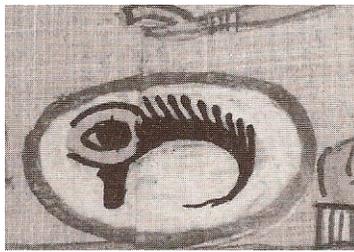


The Eye of Horus

“Originally an explanation of the daily disappearance and reappearance of the sun, ‘Horus’s eye’ became a symbol of permanent soundness and was evidently adopted in rituals to signify the eternal viability of the offering.”¹

“The legend of the flight of the eye and its return is obviously similar in many respects to the legends of the Destroying Eye of Re, of the angry eye which became the serpent on the diadem of the sun-god, of Onuris who fetched the divine lioness from the eastern desert, and of Hathor of Byblos. All these legends are intricately interwoven—so much so, indeed, that is often very difficult to decide to which of them a particular feature or *motif* primitively belongs.”²

Of all the divine entities in the Egyptian pantheon, the Eye of Horus remains the most enigmatic and misunderstood. This is only to be expected, perhaps, given the fact that the original celestial identification of Horus himself continues to elude Egyptologists.



The Eye of Horus

In order to understand the multifaceted and often peculiar symbolism attached to the Eye of Horus, it is essential at the outset to come to grips with the Egyptian traditions telling of its incendiary rampage that reportedly brought the world to the very brink of extinction.³ This archaic mythological theme is most familiar, perhaps, from a text known as the “Destruction of Mankind,” one of the oldest mythological narratives to survive from ancient Egypt.⁴ There Hathor is dispatched by Re to punish mankind:

¹ J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 6.

² J. G. Griffiths, “Remarks on the Mythology of the Eyes of Horus,” *Chronique d’Egypte* 33 (1958), p. 32.

³ See J. G. Griffiths, “Remarks on the Mythology of the Eyes of Horus,” *Chronique d’Egypte* 33 (1958), pp. 182-193; K. Sethe, *Zur Sage vom Sonnenauge* (Leipzig, 1912); G. Rudnitzky, *Die Aussage über ‘Das Auge des Horus’* (Copenhagen, 1956); R. Anthes, “Das Sonnenauge in den Pyramidentexten,” *ZÄS* 86 (1961), pp. 1-21.

⁴ W. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 2003), p. 289.

“Then mankind plotted something in the (very) presence of Re...Then they [Re’s advisors] said in the presence of his majesty: ‘May thy Eye be sent, that it may catch for thee them who scheme with evil things...It should go down as Hathor.’ So then this goddess came and slew mankind in the desert.”⁵

The destructive campaign of the raging Eye was commonly mythologized as a “bloodbath” waged by the warrior-goddess Hathor or her alter ego Sakhmet. Indeed, in the same text we read: “Hathor will wade in the blood of mankind as Sakhmet.”⁶ The testimony of this text, as of the earlier Pyramid and Coffin Texts as well, is that the Eye’s rampage occurred at the Dawn of Time—i. e., *in illo tempore* when the ancient celestial gods still ruled on earth.⁷

Although this particular text dates to the New Kingdom,⁸ the myth of the raging Eye-goddess is attested already in the pyramid of Unis (circa 2350 BCE) and alluded to repeatedly throughout the three thousand years of Egyptian history. In Unis’s pyramid we read that the flame from Horus’s Eye produced an all-encompassing storm:

“I [Horus] will put flame in my eye, and it will encompass you and set storm among the doers of (evil) deeds, and its fiery outburst among these primeval ones. I will smite away the arms of Shu which support the sky.”⁹

⁵ J. Wilson, “Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction,” in J. Pritchard ed., *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton, 1958), p. 4.

⁶ A. Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind...,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000), p. 291.

⁷ A. Spalinger, *op. cit.*, p. 261. See also E. Hornung, “Exploring the Beyond,” in E. Hornung & B. Bryan eds., *The Quest for Immortality* (New York, 2002), p. 33.

⁸ S. Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London, 1992), p. 164 dates it to the time of King Tut. See also A. Spalinger, “The Destruction of Mankind...,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000), p. 259, who observes: “We are forced to date this literary narrative to Dynasty XVIII at the earliest.”

⁹ *PT* 298-299.

The Coffin Texts are likewise replete with allusions to the primeval catastrophe wrought by the Eye of Horus. Spell 316 emphasizes the terrifying power of the raging goddess:

“I am the fiery Eye of Horus, which went forth terrible, Lady of slaughter, greatly awesome, who came into being in the flame of the sunshine, to whom Rē granted appearings in glory...What Rē said about her: Mighty is the fear of you, great is the awe of you, mighty is your striking-power...all men have been in the sleep of death because of you and through your power...I am indeed she who shoots.”¹⁰

Here, as elsewhere, the Eye is likened to a heaven-spanning “flame.” The Eye is elsewhere associated with fire falling from the sky, as in Spell 946 wherein it is made to announce: “I am a fire in sky and earth, and all my foes are under my flame.”¹¹ Other hymns report that fire and devastation accompany the Eye’s rampage: “The fire will go up, the flame will go up...the fiery one will be against them as the Eye of Rē.”¹² Elsewhere it is said of the warring Eye-goddess: “Its flame is to the sky.”¹³

At one time or another, every major Egyptian goddess is identified with the Eye of Horus: Hathor, Isis, Wepset, Wadjet, Mut, etc. The goddess Sakhmet offers an instructive case in point. In the Bremner-Rhind papyrus, it is Sakhmet who protects the king and wards off his enemies as the raging Eye:

“Thou art (condemned) to this fire of the Eye of Rē; it sends forth (?) its fiery blast against thee in this its name of Wadjet; it consumes thee in this its name of ‘Devouring Flame’; it has power over thee in this its name of Sakhmet; it is fiery against thee in this its name of ‘Glorious Serpent’.”¹⁴

¹⁰ CT IV: 98-100. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations from the Coffin Texts are from R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Oxford, 2004).

¹¹ VII:162.

¹² CT V: 264.

¹³ CT III:343.

¹⁴ R. Faulkner, “The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus— IV,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 24 (1938), p. 45.

The image of Sakhmet as a raging goddess is abundantly attested among the sacred texts discovered at Philae. Here, as elsewhere, Sakhmet is identified as the “Eye of Horus”:

“Sakhmet, the strong one (*wsrt*), is in Bigeh in her form as the Eye of Horus, the living [eye...] while [spreading fire (?)] with the flame when she goes round, while scorching the rebels with the heat of her mouth. She is the primeval snake (*krht*).”¹⁵

In the texts from Edfu, Sakhmet is once again compared to a flame-throwing serpent and celebrated for her protective powers. Witness the following passage:

“O Sekhmet, Eye of Rē, great of flame, Lady of protection who envelops her creator...O Sekhmet who fills the ways with blood, Who slaughters to the limits of all she sees, Come towards the living image, the living Hawk, Protect him, and preserve him from all evil.”¹⁶

According to scattered statements preserved in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, the raging Eye-goddess was eventually pacified or otherwise dissuaded from her terrifying rampage, thereby saving the world from total annihilation. The following account from the Coffin Texts alludes to this motif: “The storm of Her who is mighty of dread, Mistress of the land, is quelled(?)”¹⁷ This peculiar “pacifying” of the raging Eye is typically attributed to the heroic interventions of either Shu or Onuris (the two gods were commonly identified). Thus, Shu was described as follows in Spell 325 from the Coffin Texts: “He subdued the Eye when it was angry and fiery, that he might lead the Great Ones and have power over the gods...”¹⁸ The same idea is alluded to in Spell 75, wherein Shu is made to announce:

¹⁵ Quoted from J. F. Borghouts, “The Evil Eye of Apophis,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 59 (1973), p. 136.

¹⁶ Quoted from A. Roberts, *Hathor Rising* (Devon, 1995), p. 13.

¹⁷ *CT* VII:36.

¹⁸ *CT* IV:155.

“I have extinguished the fire, I have calmed the soul of her who burns, I have quietened her who is in the midst of her rage...(even she) the fiery one who severed the tresses of the gods.”¹⁹

The phrase translated by Faulkner here as “extinguished the fire”—*ḥm sḏ.t*—seems to have served as a *terminus technicus* for the calming of the raging Eye.

Numerous texts from the Ptolemaic period likewise allude to the “calming” of the raging Eye by Shu/Onuris or, alternately, by Thoth. These traditions were collected and analyzed by Hermann Junker and have come to be known by the generic name of the Wandering Goddess theme.²⁰ Although nearly two thousand years later than the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, such texts are still well worthy of serious study as they frequently manage to preserve archaic motifs of profound import even though they betray rather clumsy attempts to historicize and localize the myth of the raging Eye goddess, originally celestial in nature.

The basic plot of the Wandering Goddess theme finds the Eye goddess (variously identified as Hathor, Tefnut, Wadjet, Mut, etc.) going into exile and abandoning Egypt for some distant land—typically Nubia or Libya—whereupon she goes on a destructive rampage in the form of a raging eye or lion. It is only through the magical interventions of Shu, Onuris, or Thoth that the warrior-goddess is pacified and induced to return to Egypt. Much as the departure of the Eye-goddess throws the world into confusion and chaos so, too, does her return restore order to the world: “With her pacification, the order of the cosmos is also restored.”²¹

¹⁹ CT I:378.

²⁰ H. Junker, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien* (Berlin, 1911).

²¹ B. Richter, “On the Heels of the Wandering Goddess,” in M. Dolinska & H. Beinlich eds., *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung* (Wiesbaden, 2010), p. 156.

The myth of the Wandering Goddess as raging Eye formed a central theme in various New Year's rituals celebrated throughout Egypt during the Ptolemaic period.²² The rite in question typically featured prodigious bouts of drinking, the lighting of torches, loud music, and ecstatic dancing in an apparent attempt to pacify the raging goddess.²³ Evidently the rite culminated in the marriage of the Eye-goddess with her rescuer (Shu, Onuris, or Horus himself).²⁴ John Darnell summarized the *hieros gamos* as follows: "The return of the goddess coincided with the coming of the god, and their union at the entrance of the temple, the place of nocturnal celebration and inebriation."²⁵

A measure of just how important the rite was deemed to be can be seen from the fact that Egyptian monuments from this period depict the pharaoh emulating (or reenacting) the role of Shu/Onuris by performing a series of gyrating dances and other magical acts, such as the vigorous rattling of sistrums, in an attempt to pacify the raging goddess.²⁶ Such mimetic performances were performed in order to calm (*shṭp*) the Eye's raging (*nšn*). According to Darnell, the boisterous music and dancing was believed to soothe the goddess and ward off noxious elements: "Their noisy revelry [of the celebrants] appeasing the ever more calm goddess, and the cacophony driving away baleful influences."²⁷

Although the precise circumstances attending the pacification of the Eye of Horus are never spelled out as explicitly as we might wish, it seems clear that, upon being soothed, the Eye was returned or otherwise restored to the god Horus.²⁸ Indeed, a wealth of evidence suggests that the Eye-goddess eventually came to adorn the Horus-star as his royal headband or crown. An instructive text in this regard is Spell 220/221 from the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 155 writes: "one of the most important festivals celebrated during the Ptolemaic Era."

²³ See here the discussion in J. Darnell, "Hathor Returns to Medamud," *JEA* 22 (1995), pp. 49.

²⁴ H. Junker, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁵ J. Darnell, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

²⁶ H. Junker, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 72, 85.

²⁷ J. Darnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

²⁸ J. G. Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Pyramid Texts, wherein the Eye-goddess is addressed by a series of epithets identifying her as the Red Crown:

“He has come to you, O *Nt*-crown; he has come to you, O Fiery Serpent; he has come to you, O Great One; he has come to you, O Great of Magic, being pure for you and fearing you...He has come to you, O Great of Magic, for he is Horus encircled with the protection of his Eye, O Great of Magic...Ho, Crown great of magic! Ho Fiery Serpent! Grant that the dread of me be like the dread of you; Grant that the fear of me be like the fear of you...If Ikhet the Great has borne you, Ikhet the Serpent has adorned you; If Ikhet the Serpent has borne you, Ikhet the Great has adorned you, Because you are Horus encircled with the protection of his Eye.”²⁹

As stated here in no uncertain terms, it is the “encircling” (*šn*) of Horus by the fire-spewing uraeus-goddess—addressed as Ikhet the Serpent, among other archaic epithets—which provides the star-god with his Eye and thereby equips him with magical source of protection. A classic text in this regard is the so-called coronation hymn of Haremhab, wherein we read that the uraeus-serpent—explicitly addressed as “Great of Magic”—was indispensable for the “crowning” of the Egyptian pharaoh: “[her arms] in welcoming attitude, and she embraced his beauty and established herself on his forehead, and the Divine Ennead...were in exultation at his glorious rising.”³⁰

A much later passage from the Ptolemaic hemispeos at Elkab addressing the Wandering Goddess seems to attest to the same general idea:

“Welcome! Says Re, ‘Welcome! Come back upon the head of him whom you have protected, the head from which you went forth!’”³¹

²⁹ *PT* 194-198.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ Quoted from J. Darnell, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

According to Egyptian tradition, the return of the raging Eye to its rightful place atop the brow of the Horus-star endows the latter with power, glory, and his magical crown. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the Eye goddess “invests” the Horus-star as the King of the Gods through this act of encirclement or “conjunction.” Susan Johnson has summarized the primeval events in question as follows:

“The god of creation appeased the eye, which had become a cobra, by placing it on his forehead as the uraeus, *irt* [Iaret], ‘the Risen One’, who guards the crown. The pacification of the cobra thus marked the establishment of monarchy, and the uraeus became the protective symbol of legitimate kingship and unity.”³²

Johnson’s conclusion is right on the money and bears repeating: It is the *pacification and reunion of the uraeus-serpent with the Horus-star* which marks the establishment of kingship and thereby restores order to the world after the catastrophic events attending its departure. Katya Goebis has recently offered a similar assessment: “The return of the Eye(s) corresponds with the investiture of the new Horus-king and—on a cosmic level—to the daily rising of the sun.”³³

Even from this brief survey it is evident that the Eye of Horus plays a central role in ancient Egyptian conceptions regarding kingship and divinity. How, then, are we to explain the peculiar mythology attached to the raging Eye-goddess? James Allen, together with the vast majority of Egyptologists, would identify the Eye of Horus with the Sun. Allen summarized the rich symbolism attached to the Eye as follows:

“The uraeus-goddess is essentially the destructive power of the sun. She is a goddess because the sun is viewed in this case as the eye of the sun-god (Horus or Re), which is feminine (*jrt*). She is normally represented as a cobra (*wadjet*, also feminine) because of the notion of a power that can strike and kill: the hieroglyphic representation of this is N6

³² S. Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1990), p. 6.

³³ K. Goebis, *Crowns in Egyptian Funerary Literature* (Oxford, 2008), p. 143.

(sun-disk with cobra) [𓂏]. The same power is viewed as inherent in the king's headgear, which is why it also has a uraeus. The primary thing to keep in mind, however, is the notion of the eye. In myth she represents both the sun as an eye and its destructive power. Her common epithet 'Great of Magic' (*weret-hekau*) derives from the idea of the eye as conveyor of intent—same notion as the 'evil eye' (which also existed in ancient Egypt). Through syncretism, she is associated with other major goddesses, such as Isis and Hathor.”³⁴

Yet if the Eye of Horus is to be identified with the Sun, how are we to understand its departure from Horus? For if Horus is to be identified with the Sun, as Allen assures us, one is left with the seemingly paradoxical situation wherein the Eye/Sun departs from itself and, after threatening the world with destruction, returns to encircle or “crown” *itself!*

It must also be asked why the Egyptian skywatchers would conceptualize one and the same celestial body as simultaneously both male (Horus) and female (Hathor as the Eye). Insofar as the Horus-star represented the celestial prototype of the masculine warrior-king, while the Eye represented the celestial prototype of the mother goddess, this hypothesis strains credulity to the very limit.

The explicit catastrophic imagery attending the raging of the fire-spewing Eye is equally difficult to explain by Allen's hypothesis. Under what circumstances does the Sun threaten to destroy the world? In what sense is the Sun displaced from heaven while presenting a terrifying serpentine form? What is there about the Sun's familiar appearance that would lead it to be conceptualized as a serpentine-goddess “protecting” the Horus-star by encircling it as a luminous crown or headband?

Far from being a reference to one and the same celestial body, Horus's relationship to the Eye can only be understood as reflecting an interaction or conjunction between two

³⁴ Personal correspondence, 8-29-2010.

entirely different stars. On this matter the preponderance of evidence is unequivocal: The Eye of Horus is to be identified with the mother goddess herself and, as such, it represents a wholly different star from that associated with the masculine Horus (Mars).³⁵ In ancient Egypt, as around the globe, only one star fits the bill as the celestial prototype for the mother goddess—namely, Venus.³⁶ In this conclusion we find ourselves in complete agreement with Rolf Krauss who, in a number of publications investigating Egyptian astral religion, argued that the Eye of Horus is to be identified with the planet Venus.³⁷

Granted the possibility that the planet Venus is the subject of the Egyptian traditions regarding the Eye of Horus, how are we to understand the cataclysmic imagery attending its destructive rampage? Whence derives the Eye's pronounced capacity for raining fire and destruction on mankind? Why would the planet Venus be conceptualized as a raging Eye at one moment and as "pacified" or calmed on another? On these all-important questions Krauss had nothing substantive to offer, noting simply: "It remains unclear how the observer understood raging and peacefulness."³⁸

As we intend to document, the ancient Egyptian texts provide a wealth of testimony on each of these questions. This testimony, in turn, can then be compared with literary traditions from ancient Mesopotamia and elsewhere that describe the planet Venus in similar terms—i. e., as an agent of terrifying world-engulfing disaster, one prone to

³⁵ R. Krauss, "The Eye of Horus and the Planet Venus: Astronomical and Mythological References," in J. Steele & A. Imhausen eds., *Under One Sky* (Münster, 2002), p. 194 reached a similar conclusion: "If this myth reflects reality or nature, then the eye which leaves the sun god and afterwards returns to him cannot be identical with the sun disk itself."

³⁶ E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001).

³⁷ R. Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 193-208. It will be noted that Talbott and I offered this identification over a decade before Krauss.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

assuming a fire-spewing, serpentine form.³⁹ It was in the latter form, according to *The Exaltation of Inanna*, that the war-mongering planet-goddess rained fire from heaven:

“Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the land, When you roar at the earth like Thunder, no vegetation can stand up to you. A flood descending from its mountain, Oh foremost one, you are the Inanna of heaven and earth! Raining the fanned fire down upon the nation...When mankind comes before you In fear and trembling at your tempestuous radiance.”⁴⁰

Analogous imagery is evident in early literary accounts of the Semitic goddess Ishtar who, like the Sumerian Inanna, was explicitly identified with the planet Venus:

“I rain battle down like flames in the fighting, I make heaven and earth shake (?) with my cries...I constantly traverse heaven, then (?) I trample the earth. I destroy what remains of the inhabited world.”⁴¹

Here, as in the Sumerian hymns describing Inanna, *it is the planet Venus* that is raining fire and destruction from the sky. The celestial context of the imagery in question is at once explicit and unequivocal.

In ancient Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, the raging planet-goddess brings an apocalyptic storm in her wake. The testimony of a Sumerian text known as BM 23280 is representative in this regard:

“Inanna, who pours down rain over all the lands, over all the people, loud-thundering storm. Hierodule, who makes the heavens tremble, who makes the earth quake, Who can soothe your heart? You who pour down firebrands over the earthly orb, who flash like

³⁹ See here the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Fossil Gods and Forgotten Worlds* (Ames, 2010), pp. 77-123.

⁴⁰ W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 15-17.

⁴¹ B. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, 1993), p. 74.

lightning over the highland...Whose cry reaches heaven and earth, whose roar is all-destructive...Your angry heart is a terrifying flood.”⁴²

In this hymn, as in other texts, Inanna/Venus rains down fire and flood from the skies much as is reported of the Eye of Horus in Egyptian texts from the same general period (circa 2000 BCE). And as we found to be the case with the Eye of Horus, the Sumerian gods are eager to pacify Inanna’s raging. Indeed, the gods’ attempt to dissuade the raging Inanna from her path of destruction is the theme of a rare and largely unknown text from the Old Babylonian period known as BM 29616. A few excerpts from this important hymn follow:

“Queen of Ibgal [Inanna], what has your heart wrought! How heaven and earth are troubled! What has your raging heart wrought! What has your flood-like raging heart wrought!”

Line 25 of the hymn in question echoes the prayers of BM 23280: “Lady..., may your heart be soothed!”⁴³ At this point in the narrative, Enki decides to create the *gala*—a special class of professional mourners—in order to calm the raging goddess: “He fashioned for her the *gala*, him of the heart-soothing laments...he arranged his mournful laments of supplication.”⁴⁴ Samuel Kramer, the scholar who first translated this hymn, had this to say about its central plot:

“The theologians of this period [i. e., that of Hammurabi], according to the author of this composition, believed that it was Enki who actually fashioned the *gala* and that he did so

⁴² S. Kramer, *From the Poetry of Sumer* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 89.

⁴³ A. Gudotti, “The Nar and Gala in Sumerian Literary Texts,” in R. Pruzsinszky & D. Shehata eds., *Musiker und Tradierung* (Berlin, 2010), p. 54.

⁴⁴ M. Bachvarova, “Sumerian *Gala* Priests,” in A. Suter ed., *Lament* (Oxford, 2008), p. 33.

for a specific purpose, that he, the *gala*, should soothe the angry, raging heart of the goddess Inanna who was tormenting heaven and earth.”⁴⁵

Even from this brief summary the striking parallels between the mythology attached to Inanna/Venus and that attached to the Eye of Horus are readily apparent. Yet in the dozens of monographs devoted to the Egyptian Eye goddess—not to mention the hundreds of articles that have addressed the mythological theme and symbolism of the raging Eye of Horus—I am unaware of any scholar who has even commented on the parallels between the Eye and Inanna/Venus, much less offered a systematic cross-cultural analysis of the traditions. Suffice it to say that knowledge of comparative mythology is not widespread in modern Egyptological circles. As a result, modern Egyptology remains mired in the same solar interpretations that ruled at the turn of the 20th century, seemingly oblivious to the fact that ancient Sumerian descriptions of Inanna/Venus share a virtual one-to-one correspondence with Egyptian descriptions of the Eye of Horus.⁴⁶

As is the case with any unifying thesis that seeks to resolve a number of hitherto insoluble or difficult problems, the devil is in the details. Indeed, it is the specific details of the Egyptian myth of the raging Eye that must be resolved and accounted for if modern science is ever going to make serious inroads in reconstructing and understanding the celestial events that inspired the archaic myth in question.

To return to the Egyptian testimony, it will be remembered that the raging Eye produced an all-encompassing storm. Recall again the following account from Unis’s pyramid, quoted earlier, wherein the flame from Horus’s Eye is likened to a raging storm:

⁴⁵ S. Kramer, *In the World of Sumer* (Detroit, 1986), p. 235. See also S. Kramer, “BM 29616: The Fashioning of the *gala*,” *Acta Sumerologica* 3:3 (1981), pp. 1-11.

⁴⁶ E. Cochrane, *Fossil Gods and Forgotten Worlds* (Ames, 2010), pp. 77-123.

“I [Horus] will put flame in my eye, and it will encompass you and set storm among the doers of (evil) deeds, and its fiery outburst among these primeval ones. I will smite away the arms of Shu which support the sky.”⁴⁷

In addition to shaking heaven from its foundations, the raging Eye lets loose a “storm” (*nšn*) on the evildoers. As for how we are to understand the “storm” in question, it is evident that it is a meteorological phenomenon of cosmic dimension. Certainly it is relevant to note that the word *nšn* is used throughout the Coffin Texts to denote an apocalyptic storm.⁴⁸ Yet in Spell 335 from the Coffin Texts the same word is employed to describe the “wrath” of the raging Eye-goddess: “I raised up the hair from the Sacred Eye at the time of its wrath.”⁴⁹ The seemingly incongruous reference to “hair” in conjunction with a stellar Eye is addressed—if not fully clarified—by a gloss appended to the spell in question:

*“What is the Sacred Eye at its time of wrath? Who raised the hair from it? It is the right Eye of Re when it was wroth with him after he had sent it on an errand. It was Thoth who raised the hair from it.”*⁵⁰

Here the catastrophe-bringing “wrath” (*nšn*) of the raging Eye is explicitly linked to its “hair” (*šnj*).* This tradition alone confirms that the “wrath” or “storm” associated with the Eye of Horus is indissolubly connected to its extraterrestrial “hair.” The same conclusion is supported by the fact that there is an obvious etymological relationship between the Egyptian words *šnj*, “hair,” and *šnjt*, “storm,” the latter term being commonly employed to denote the primeval storm that accompanied the deceased king’s ascent to heaven (indeed this very term is elsewhere substituted for *nšn*).⁵¹ The following

⁴⁷ *PT* 298-299.

⁴⁸ *CT* 4:40, 4:396, VI:306, and 7:376.

⁴⁹ *CT* IV: 238.

⁵⁰ *CT* IV: 239-240.

⁵¹ See especially *PT* 1150, 2366 and *CT* V:150, VI:330. See here the discussion in R. Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

passage is one of several that could be cited in this regard: “N will dispel the storm.”⁵² (It will be noted that the word translated as “dispel” here is *ṯs*, a cognate of the word *ṯs* translated as “raised” in the passage above describing Thoth’s raising of the hair from the Sacred Eye.)

Here, then, is the answer to the question which so baffled Krauss regarding the Egyptian traditions describing the Eye of Horus as the planet Venus—namely, how to explain its raging aspect. The Eye/Venus was conceptualized as “raging” because it appeared to “fall” from heaven while displaying wildly disheveled “hair.” The pacification of the Eye, on the other hand, has reference to the celestial events wherein Venus returned to its original “home” in the northern polar heavens and its “hair” appeared to be dispelled or otherwise tied up or controlled (“uplifted” in the previous passage quoted from Spell 335).

Yet this finding raises another question: How is it possible to understand the planet Venus suddenly sprouting unruly hair? The answer, it must be said, will not sit well with the Central Dogma of modern astronomy, which holds that the respective planets have not fundamentally changed their appearance or orbits in many millions of years. Alas, we must follow the evidence where it leads. As Sherlock was fond of saying, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”⁵³ As improbable as it must appear at first sight, the testimony of the ancient skywatchers tells a consistent and compelling story, one it would be unwise to ignore or attempt to explain away as playful metaphor.

In order to clarify the nature of Venus’s “hair” from the standpoint of natural science, it is helpful to return to the Egyptian traditions recounting how the uraeus-serpent encircled the Horus-star with his royal head-band. Spell 510 from the Pyramid Texts is especially instructive in this regard. There the uraeus is addressed as Ikhēt the Great: “I am this head-band of red colour which went forth from Ikhēt the Great; I am this Eye of Horus

⁵² CT VII:110.

⁵³ *The Sign of the Four*.

which is stronger than men and mightier than the gods.”⁵⁴ Here the all-powerful Eye of Horus is specifically identified with a head-band emanating from the Ikhmet-Serpent. The same head-band is alluded to in another equally enigmatic passage from Spell 519: “So that I may ferry across in it together with that head-band of green and of red cloth which has been woven from the Eye of Horus in order to bandage therewith that finger of Osiris that has become diseased.”⁵⁵

The Egyptian word translated as “head-band” in Spells 510 and 519 is *sšd*, determined with the following glyph: . If Horus is to be identified with a celestial body, as all Egyptologists agree, how are we to understand this encircling head-band?⁵⁶ This question is directly related to another: Why would a “head-band” be likened to—or identified with—the terrifying Eye of Horus “which is stronger than men and mightier than the gods”?

In addition to “head-band,” the word *sšd* also denotes a flame-throwing star or “meteor”-like object.⁵⁷ There are a number of Egyptian texts, in fact, which speak of an *sšd*-star streaking across the sky and raining fire down on the pharaoh’s enemies. Thutmose III, for example, likened himself to an *sšd*-star “strewing its fire in flame and yielding its downpour” (*sšd stj bsw=f n sdt*).^{58*} As Wainwright pointed out in his discussion of the celestial imagery in question, the terrifying nature of the *sšd*-star is a decided point of

⁵⁴ PT 1147.

⁵⁵ PT 1202-1203.

⁵⁶ C. Manassa, *op. cit.*, p. 26 suggests that the reference is to the Milky Way: “The *sšd*-fillet in this Pyramid Text passage [Spell 519] may also allude to the Milky Way, providing further evidence for the Egyptian association of the eye of Horus with astral bodies other than the sun and moon.”

⁵⁷ R. Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I* (Mainz, 2003), p. 1244, entry 30768.

⁵⁸ Line 15 of the king’s poetical stele as translated in R. Faulkner, “‘The Pregnancy of Isis’: A Rejoinder,” *JEA* 59 (1973), p. 219. K. Goebis, *Crowns in Egyptian Funerary Literature* (Oxford, 2008), p. 373 translates as “a shooting star that scatters its flame of fire.”

emphasis in the Egyptian texts: “Its dangerous nature is certified by the desire of the Pharaoh to seem to his enemies in battle to be like the *sšd*.”⁵⁹

Hitherto overlooked, however, is the fact that the *sšd*-star’s propensity for scattering flames of fire and inspiring terror is precisely mirrored in Egyptian reports of the raging Eye of Horus. Recall again the following account from Unis’s pyramid, quoted earlier, wherein the flame from Horus’s Eye is likened to a raging storm: “I [Horus] will put flame in my eye, and it will encompass you and set storm among the doers of (evil) deeds, and its fiery outburst among these primeval ones.”⁶⁰

The Eye of Horus is here said to unleash a fiery “outburst” or flood (*hflft*) on the primeval ones.⁶¹ This tradition recalls the fact that a “downpour” was associated with the *sšd*-star on Thutmose’s stela. But an extraterrestrial “flooding” is precisely the disaster dispensed by Inanna/Venus, as evidenced not only by the Sumerian story quoted above (BM 23280) but various others besides. Witness the following passage from a Sumerian hymn known as *The Exaltation of Inanna*:

“Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the land...A flood descending from its mountain, Oh foremost one, you are the Inanna of heaven and earth! Raining the fanned fire down upon the nation.”⁶²

In light of the Egyptian testimony identifying the *sšd*-headband with the Eye of Horus (Venus), it is necessary to consider the possibility that the two celestial forms shared a fundamental affinity or were conceptually related in some fashion. In fact, this is precisely our claim: *It was the planet Venus itself that formerly presented a comet-like form and scattered fire across the sky*, an event mythologized as a fire-spewing serpent

⁵⁹ G. Wainwright, “Letopolis,” *JEA* 18 (1932), p. 162.

⁶⁰ *PT* 298-299.

⁶¹ R. Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 190 translates the word as “flood.”

⁶² W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 15-17. See also J. Black, G. Cunningham, E. Robson & G. Zolyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford, 2004), p. 94, wherein Inanna is invoked as follows: “Her wrath (is)...a devastating flood which no one can withstand.”

(the Eye of Horus or Inanna-dragon) or, alternately, as an unfurling red head-band (*sšd*) encircling the Horus-star. The raging “storm” associated with the fire-spewing Eye of Horus, according to this view, has direct reference to the terrifying meteorological phenomena associated with the “hair” of the Venus-comet which spanned the sky and threatened to block out the light of the Sun forever.*

As we have documented elsewhere, the Egyptian testimony describing the raging Eye-goddess shares much in common with the ancient testimony associated with comets.⁶³ Thus it is that ancient skywatchers around the globe likened comets to long-haired stars (*crinita, juba*), apocalyptic storms, stellar “flames” (*Flamma longa*), a fire-spewing serpentine monster (Typhon), torches (*lampades, fax caelestis*), and luminous “crowns.”⁶⁴ In ancient China, moreover, wherein cometary observation had a long and distinguished history, comets were compared to cloth unfurled across the sky: “The 19th ‘ominous star’, ‘long path’ (*chhang-kêng*) (not to be confused with Venus, which is also known by this name) is like a roll of cloth which extends across the heavens.”⁶⁵

The fact that the planet Venus shares the name *chhang-kêng* with the cloth-like comet is doubtless no coincidence.

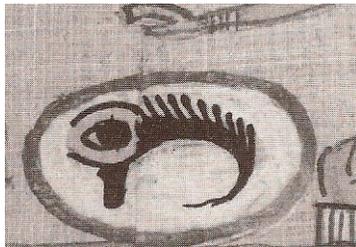
To summarize our findings in this chapter: A wealth of evidence confirms that the Eye of Horus is to be identified with the planet Venus. This finding, in turn, has profound ramifications for the proper understanding of ancient Egyptian religion insofar as the history of the Eye-goddess is catastrophic from start to finish, marked by apocalyptic cosmic disaster, terrifying “storms” spanning the sky, and the disturbance or displacement of the other star-gods. After an indeterminate period of time, the raging Eye was eventually “calmed” or pacified and, as a result, apocalyptic disaster was averted

⁶³ E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 113-151.

⁶⁴ U. Dall’Olmo, “Latin Terminology Relating to Aurorae, Comets, Meteors and Novae,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 11 (1980), pp. 16-17. See also E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 113-151.

⁶⁵ H. Yoke, “Ancient and Mediaeval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources,” *Vistas in Astronomy* 5 (1962), p. 164.

and cosmic order restored. According to the account preserved in Spells 220-221 from the Pyramid Texts, the Eye eventually came to encircle the star-god Horus as a serpentine goddess (Ikhet the Serpent), thereby providing him with a heaven-spanning head-band or crown. It is our view that the Eye-goddess's "head-banding" of the Horus-star has direct reference to dramatic astronomical events in which Ikhet/Venus appeared to conjoin with the Horus-star (Mars) and encircle it with a comet-like band (*sšd*). Hence the otherwise inexplicable situation wherein one word—*sšd*—denotes at once Ikhet's head-band as well as a flame-scattering star. The fact that the same word is elsewhere determined by the following glyph——confirms its intimate relationship with the uraeus-serpent that came to form the encircling crown of Horus.⁶⁶ In light of the evidence adduced here we are emboldened to consider the possibility that the Eye of Horus, Ikhet-serpent, and *sšd*-head-band are simply variant mythological interpretations of the same celestial form—a comet-like Venus. Given this working hypothesis, it stands to reason that it was the terrifying rampage of the Venus-comet which provided the historical prototype for Egyptian traditions regarding the raging Eye of Horus *and* the *sšd*-star.



⁶⁶ W. Barta, "Zur Bedeutung des Stirnbands-Diadems," *Göttinger Miszellen* 72 (1984), p. 8.