

The Celestial Cow Goddess Mehet-Weret

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Abstract:





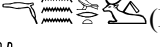



Mehet-Weret was one of the images of celestial cow goddess. Her name means the great flood and she is depicted in a number of forms, which reflect a kind of relationship with her roles. She appeared to have no any center cult, but she was a popular goddess through ancient Egyptian history and her name continued to be used in the Greek Period. She was associated with many deities like, Hathor, Nut, Neith, Isis and Ahet. She had many characteristics and played many roles as a creator goddess, goddess of the sky and the role of her seven sacred words in the afterlife. Mehet-Weret was as the powerful image of the Milky Way. This paper aims to investigate the celestial cow goddess Mehet-Weret and analysis to some texts to subtract some points in order to better understand her roles, iconography, her titles, attributes and why she was considered an image for Milky Way. This paper employs a descriptive and analytical methodology.

Keywords: Cow, Nut, Hathor, Celestial, Flood, king, Milky Way, Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead.

I. Introduction:












The cow goddess played an important role, not only in the Egyptian daily life, but also played an outstanding part in their beliefs about the afterlife. Most of the archaeological thought mentioned that the cow goddess, which affected the Egyptian life was Hathor, but studies confirmed that there were more forms for the cow goddess. These cow goddesses are Hathor, Bat, Hesat and Sekhat-Hor. This is not an attempt to cover all the cow goddesses' form, but only to show how many goddesses had taken this shape. Also, the image of celestial cow is depicted on the walls of tombs and appeared in different texts. This celestial cow is defined as ancient sky goddess, afterwards identified with Nut, while others scholars mentioned this celestial cow is associated with Hathor as a mother goddess linked to the sky, the necropolis and underworld (Piankoff, 1957:40; Ions, 1982:82; Pinch, 1993:175), but the powerful image of this goddess is Mehet-Weret and this celestial cow goddess Mehet-Weret played an important role in the Egyptian mythology as a creative goddess, who creates the whole world by her seven words.

II. Name, Forms and Titles:

The name of Mehet-Weret means "the Great Primeval Ocean" or "the Great Flood" and derived from the verb , *mh*, which means "to swim" (Griffiths, 1970:512; Wb II: 122). The name also refers to the cow, which in some sources swam in the original ocean and therefore, she was known as "the Great Swimmer" (Dunand & Zivie-Coche, 2004:347; El-Sayed, 1982:56). Its name was written in different forms. For example, her name appeared in the Pyramid Texts as , (PT I. 289-c: 156 & PT I 1131b:133), also as , (PT I. 508-a: 260) and it appeared in the Middle Kingdom as inscribed on the lid of the coffin of Mentuhotep II as  (Pleyte, 1900:22), while the name is written in the New Kingdom as appeared in the Book of the Dead as  (Budge, 1898:57). But in the Graeco-Roman Period, the name is written as  or  (Wb II: 122). Also, her name appeared on the walls of the temple of Edfu as  (Wilson, 1997: 455).

Mehet-Weret as the celestial cow goddess, was represented in the form of a bovine form or a cow with the sun disk between her horns as depicted on the walls of the tomb of Seti I, Ramses II, III and star across her body, which symbolizes the image of the sky and sometimes depicted kneeling on a reed mat and often wearing a ceremonial collar called *mnit* Neclace and with a flail over her back as a sign of her power and divinity (Fig. 1,2) (Clark, 1978:87; Kees, 1987:76; Wilkinson, 1992:59; Pinch, 1993:13b; Wilkinson, 2003:174; Hart, 2005:91). She was pictured also as a woman with the head of cow and the sun disk between her horns like her depiction on the tomb of Tawsert at Thebes (Hornung, 1982:110-113, pl. III.A; Silverman, 2001:369-375). Chapters of Coming Forth By Day (Chapter 186) show this cow goddess Mehet-Weret emerging from the western mountain with stars over her body and carrying the sun disc over her head and the hippopotamus goddess stands before her (Fig.3). Also, a papyrus scroll fragment with a drawing from the cemetery at Saqqara depicting a man worshipping before two goddess figures who stand on a mountain and the inscription mentioned that the figure of the cow was as Mehet-Weret and the figure of hippopotamus, wearing Hathoric horns and sun disk as Hathor (Schneider and Raven, 1981:11314, pl.115; Goelet, 1994:pl.37).


The Celestial Cow Goddess Mehet-Weret

Mehet-Weret had many titles like; , *mwt ntr* that means the great mother (Hafner, 1914:34), , *nbt pt* meaning the lady of the sky (Pleyte, 1900:20-23), , *hnwt t3wy* meaning the mistress of two lands (Budge, 1989:237), , *wd3t pw n R* meaning the eye of Re (Budge, 1898:57). Since Mehet-Weret was as the first creature of existence or as a goddess of the waters of Nun, from which the first life raised and the sun-god Re emerged (Lesko, 1999:23), she was known as the feminine counterpart of *p3 Nwn* (Kákosy, 1982:3-4; El-Sayed, 1982:52; Bickel, 1994:64-65; Beinlich, 2015:328-332; Beinlich, 2014:27-77). In the Graeco-Roman Period, she held the following titles; , *iw* meaning the great heir (Chassinat, 1932:230); , *wrt*, the great (Chassinat, 1932:230); , *s3t R*, the daughter of Re (Daumas, 1959, 181); , *3h*, the glorious one (Sauneron, 1963:107) and , *nbt ntrw nb*, means the mistress of all gods (Pleyte, 1900:162-163); , *ms nbwt tp w'r Nnw*, that means the golden one who was born on the leg of Nun (Pleyte, 1900:26-27) and , *mhr n mht-wrt*, meaning the suckler of goddess Mehet-Weret as inscribed on the outer wall of the Mammisi of Dendara (Daumas, 1959:181).

In spite of her power of creation, birth and rebirth, Mehet-Weret had no independent cult centre, but still depicted on the walls of temples, tombs and written in different books relating to the afterlife. She became a popular goddess and her name continued to be used in the Greek Period (Lesko, 1999:24; Wilkinson, 2003:174).


III. Mythology


The first depiction of the cow goddess is found on a palette from the Gerzean Period, (Naqada II), showing a scene of a cow head with five stars (Fig.4). There are some opinions suggesting that this shape is equated with goddess Bat, the cow of Upper Egypt (Hornung, 1982:103; Hassan, 1992:fig.4), while another thought that this was the first representation of the sky as a deity (Baumgartel, 1960:149) and the stars surely confirms her as a celestial goddess, therefore, Mehet-Weret is another possible identity for this starry head due to the appearance of Mehet-Weret as an ancestor to the sky goddess Nut in the historic period's literature (Lesko, 1999:17). Also, another early bovine form of the two-faced goddess Bat, whose name meant "Feminine Power" or "Feminine Spirit", (Fischer, 1962:718-723) is depicted at the top of the Narmer Palette (Fig.5) and also on the belt of the king. Some scholars suggested that the deity on the Narmer Palette is actually Mehet-Weret and others believe that she is Hathor, who came to be the best-known cow goddess, but, there is no actual reference to Hathor until many centuries later and the earliest representations of Hathor do not stress bovine attributes and Hathor apparently had a temple in Gebelein, as early as the Third Dynasty, and she did not appear in texts and scenes until the Fourth Dynasty (Allam, 1963:97),(Gebelein's site is known as Naga el-Gherira, located in Upper Egypt, 29 km to the south of Thebes on the west bank of the Nile (Bard, 1999:402).

In the Old Kingdom, Mehet-Weret appeared in the Pyramids Texts and equated with the sky (PT I.289c:156; Griffiths, 2001:476-480) and Horus ascends to her in the sky, where she lived: , *m prt hr m Mht-wrt*, means as Horus ascends to goddess Mehet-Weret (PT II.1131b:133).

In the Middle Kingdom, she appeared in the Coffins Texts as a creator goddess and the texts showing the role of her seven words in the creation of the world (CT V: 212-226, spell. 407-408; Dardir, 2005:112-117).

In the New Kingdom, she is considered as the goddess of reborn for those wanting the resurrection in the afterlife (Remler, 2010:119-120) and depicted in different texts and her name is written before the cow on the outer shrine of Tutankhamon and as appears in the following text: (Mystre, 1941:110):


Mht-wrt iw wsir nswt twt-nh-imm hk3 iwn sm' nh nn mwt.f m whm m hrt-ntr, means Mehet-Weret, the Osirian king Tutankhamon, may he live and not die again in the necropolis and another text reads as (Mystre, 1941, 110):

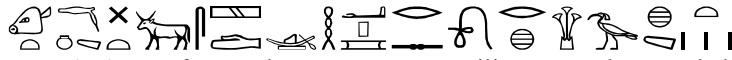

dd mdw in Mht-wrt m-di ii ir.k s3 n ht mry nb t3wy nb-hprw-R, words spoken by Mehet-Weret in coming by you the son of her body, the beloved of the lord of the two lands, Nebkheprwre (Dardir, 2005:181).

In the Late Period, the seven sacred spell of Mehet-Weret was depicted on the lid of the sarcophagus of Ankhmereweret, who dates back to the 23rd dynasty and now it is displayed in Louvre Museum (Buhl, 1953: 99-100). During the Graeco-Roman Period, Mehet-Weret appeared on the walls of the temple of Edfu as a nurse or a suckler of Horus, providing him with the offerings and the text reads as (Chassinat, 1932:230; Wilson, 1997: 455):





dd mdw in hr-bhdt ntr 3 nb pt hrd n iht-wrt iw mnhst sd n wryt mhr n Mht-wrt, words spoken by Horus of Behedt, the great god, the lord of the sky, the child of Ihet-Weret, the excellent heir of the great nurse, the sukler of Mehet-Weret. Also, she appeared as a nourishing goddess, who causes the flood of the Nile (Chassinat, 1930:56):



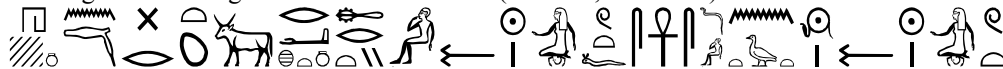
hnt Mht-wrt s3d h'py r.s wrh 3hw, Before Mehet-Weret, Hapy sailing to north towards her, who flourishes the fields.

Also, there is a text on the northern wall of the Mammisi of Edfu mentioning that she appeared as a creator goddess in Edfu temple and the king suckles from his mother Mehet-Weret to renew his youth (Chassinat, 1959:154; Haikel, 1975:47).



Mht-wrt ib.s 3wt h'cc.tw nt pt whm.n.s rnp, Mehet-Weret, Her heart is happy, the joyful in the sky, she renews the youth.

Another text from the Mammisi of Dendara mentioning that she as a nurse and a nourishing goddess, who gives the offering to the child god and the text reads as (Daumas, 1959:181):



hrw n mht-wrt rdi ht n hrd m hrw mswt.f s'nh.s dt.(f) n s3t R' m hrw mswt.(f), the day of Mehet-Weret which gives the offering to the child in the day of his birth, which revives his body to the daughter of Re in his birthday and another text from the Mammisi of Dendara showing that the goddess is feeding the child king and the text reads as (Daumas, 1959:36):



nh ntr nfr s3 ht-hr sd n Mht-wrt.....n hrw m pr mswt.f.....n s3 R', means may the good god live, the son of Hathor, is being fed by Mehet-Weret.....to the children in the house of his Birth,.....to the son of Re

In the temple of Kom Ombo, she was as the mother of god Re and she was identified with the goddess Shedit, the mother of god Re in this Nome (Gutbub, 1973:482). She was as a nurse goddess, who suckles the crocodile god and was described as the goddess, who revives the body of the god Re in her form as Neith (Sauneron, 1963:48).

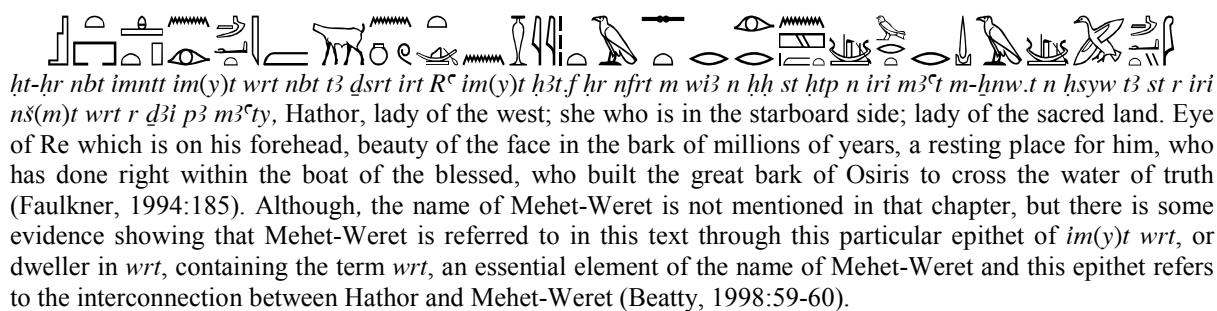
IV. Identification with Deities:

Mehet-Weret was associated from early times with Hathor. There are many references for this identification showing the two goddesses as one (Pinch, 1993:175; Griffiths, 1998:43-47). Chapter 186 of Papyrus of Ani is confirming that relationship (Fig. 6) and showing Hathor in the form of Mehet-Weret and the deceased enters the afterlife by the help of that goddess and under her protection from the powers of darkness (Lurker, 1980:59). In this Chapter 186, Hathor as Mehet-Weret is appearing from the mountain, which is surrounded by marsh and papyrus plants. She wears a disc, horns and two plumes over her head and a *mint* Necklace (𓆎), which is an adornment sacred to Hathor and a heavy bead necklace with a crescent front piece and a counterpoise attached at the rear. The power of Hathor can be seen as being transmitted to Mehet-Weret through this *mint* Necklace. In front of Mehet-Weret is a hippopotamus standing on her legs and holding with her right hand a flaming torch for dispelling the forces of evil (Wilkinson, 1992:173,197), while in her left hand, there is *nh* Sign (𓆎) resting on *s3* sign (𓆎) of protection and wearing the disc and horns like Mehet-Weret. She shows with a heavy breast and a bulging stomach suggesting pregnancy, fecundity and nursing role and this is the image of goddess Taweret, but here it is clear that she like Mehet-Weret, identified with Hathor and symbolizes the protection for the deceased and aids in the rebirth of the deceased in the afterlife (Wilkinson, 1992:197; Pinch, 1993:294). Although the name of Mehet-Weret is not mentioned directly in the text of this chapter, but there is many evidence confirming that this form for Mehet-Weret like the name of the chapter is called “a hymn of praise to Hathor, mistress of Amentet and to Mehet-Weret” (Budge, 1989: xlvi). The name of this chapter asserts the direct relationship between Hathor and Mehet-Weret as the text reads (Neville, 1886:203);

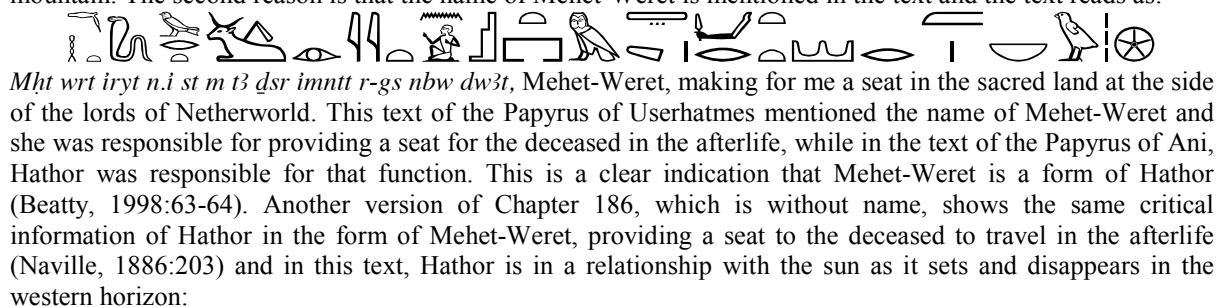


dw3 ht-hr nb(t) hnwt n Mht-wrt, worshipping Hathor, the lady, mistress of Mehet-Weret. Also, the text of Chapter 186 reads as follows (Budge, 1989:490):

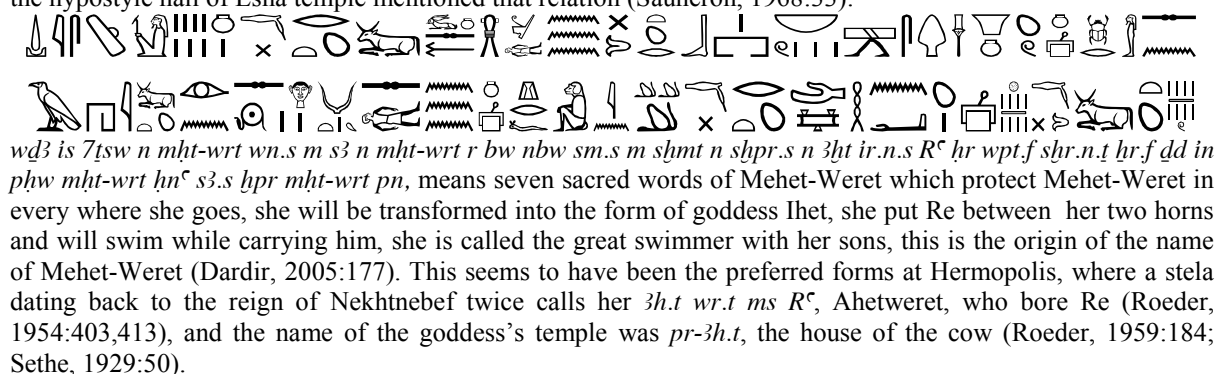




There are different versions of Chapter 186 and one of these versions comes from the Papyrus of Userhatmes and its text is very important for many reasons. One reason is that the text shows the body of Mehet-Weret draped with stars, while the Papyrus of Ani showing most of the body of Mehet-Weret is obscured by the mountain. The second reason is that the name of Mehet-Weret is mentioned in the text and the text reads as:



Mehet-Weret could also be linked with Isis (Wilkinson, 2003:174) as Isis-Mehet and portrayed in one of the funerary beds of Tutankhamon in the form of two cows each with a sun disk between the horns and with curling tails (Fig. 7) (Heath, 2015:65; Wilkinson, 2003:174). Mehet-Weret is associated also with Neith and Ahet (Dunand, 2004:347). Neith is identified as the mother of the solar god Re at Esna and Mehet-Weret took this aspect of her role. Mehet-Weret is not a regenerative mother, but the primeval creator of the solar god Re and his divine realm. According to the identification of the two goddesses as represented in the temple of Esna, that has a preserved creation myth in which, Mehet-Weret as Neith, was the early celestial cow and primeval creative goddess (Hornung, 1992:44; Wilson, 1997:455), who was preparing the world of the gods for the arrival of her son Re (Troy, 1997:238-270) and she was supposed to have created the cosmos by means of her creative utterances (El-Sayed, 1982:51-65). Also, she protected her child, the sun-god Re, from those who rebelled against him and was assisted in that task by her seven creative utterances (El-Sayed, 1982:73-74, 106-109) as mentioned by the text of the temple of Esna (Sauneron, 1968:273). At Esna, another form for Neith-Mehet-Weret, the mother of Re, was *3h.t*, the cow or sometimes *3h.t-wrt*, the great cow (El-Sayed, 1982:24-27; Ryhiner, 1986:58, note 5 and 159, note 8; Hornung, 1982a:93, 96-101; Kákosy, 1980:124-125) and a text from the hypostyle hall of Esna temple mentioned that relation (Sauneron, 1968:33):



There is another myth in Fayium mentioning the divine cow that protects the sun-god Re from the enemies and both Mehet-Weret and Ahet are attested as names for her (Beinlich, 2015:328-332; Beinlich, 2014:27-77). There is a link between this cow goddess and Thoth and both are said to take control over the seven *d3is.w* “creative utterances”. Moreover, both assist the solar deity in overcoming those who rebelled against him (Smith, 2002:83). Many sources show that the cow goddess protected the solar god from rebels by raising him upon her back or placing the solar disk between her horns (Sauneron, 1963:170, 280; Sauneron, 1968:33, 54; Gutbub, 1973:71,119). There is many spells of the Coffins Texts that speaks of placing the solar egg on the back of the cow goddess (Buck, 1956:267f-g; Bickel, 1994:66-67). According to the heavenly cow book, in the result of the rebellion against Re, the sun-god Re was born up to the heaven on the back of his mother then transferred

into the sky (Hornung, 1982:11-13). Another reference from the Fayium describes the Ogdoad, with upraised arms to raise the divine cow and her child heavenwards (Beinlich, 2015, 328-332; Beinlich, 2014:27-77).

V. Mehet-Weret's Roles

Mehet-Weret played an important role in the rebirth of the sun-god Re and the texts of the coffin of Mentuhotep II and of the tomb of Siptah in the Valley of Kings confirm this role and mention that the sun-god Re was reborn every morning between the thighs of Mehet-Weret and then Re appeared to the world and he was seen as a child issuing from the womb of the sky goddess or as a calf, the offspring of the celestial cow Mehet-Weret and this indicates that she is the great mother of the sun-god Re and she was as a creator goddess (Jequier, 1946:fig.75; Sethe, 1912:6; PT II, 1688b:391; PT II,1835a:449 (cf. PT I, 698d:380); Grapow, 1916:36f., with German translation:16, note.2; Dardir, 2005: 110). The sun-god Re cross, over the waters of the great flood, field of Earu to the place, where the gods are born and he may be borne there with them and the water of Nun is said to bear Re every day (Junker, 1910:67). That daily rebirth of the sun-god Re was very closely connected with water and washing and that water was regarded as the medium of the rebirth. Mehet-Weret, the name of the celestial cow goddess that gave birth to the sun-god Re every morning means the great flood, which shows her connection with water (Junker, 1910:67f). The idea of that the sun god baths every morning before the appearing in the eastern sky, brought the use of water and rebirth into close connection. This connection would have been strengthened by the concept of giving life to water and by the belief that the sun god was born out of the waters of the primeval ocean Nun.

Also, according to the Papyrus of Boulac, she was considered as a creator goddess by making the division of the two lands by her hands and the text reads as:



mht-wrt pw hr ir ʿwy tʿwy means it is Mehet-Weret, who made the division of the two lands by her hands (Pleyte, 1900:20-23). This confirms that she was a creator goddess. Mehet-Weret as a maternity goddess came forth from the great ocean as a cow and she became the great mother of all creatures according to the legend of creation of Heliopolis (Kees, 1987:76). Another reference indicating Mehet-Weret was as a creator goddess is the legend of creation from Esna temple. This legend shows the seven creatures words that comes from the mouth of Mehet-Weret and were responsible for organizing the process of creation and otherwise goddess Neith after her creation was ordered by the seven words of Mehet-Weret to create the earth, cities, gods and people (CT V:214-222, spell. 407; Dardir, 2005:111).

As a goddess of the sky, the Pyramid Texts show Mehet-Weret as the sky and Horus ascended to the sky, where its place (PT I. 289c:156; PT 1131b:133) and she represented the darkness of the night, which was part of the great ocean from which Re was born again (Bleeker, 1973:31-32). Also, Mehet-Weret represents the sky and the celestial water from it the rain falls and helps the solar boat of Re to sail (Pleyte, 1900:22-24; Piankoff, 1977:36). The shape of the celestial cow goddess Mehet-Weret is represented on the wall of tomb of seti I standing on a base taking the shape of the sky “*pr*” with a star on her belly. The god Shu, standing between the cow’s legs, supports her belly with his raised arms. Each leg is itself supported by two Heh-gods. Two solar barks are on her belly, one between her front legs displaying the sun-god Re as a passenger, the other beneath her udder (Fig.8) (Mystre, 1941:109-110). The outermost golden shrine of the sarcophagus of Tutankhamon and the walls of the tombs of Seti I, Ramses II, and Ramses III represented the myth that told that the sun-god Re was very aged and tired and has a desire to retire from his earthly responsibilities and ascends into sky on the back of the celestial cow. The concept of the sky itself as a gigantic celestial cow is also preserved and is graphically portrayed on Tutankhamon’s golden shrine (Mystre, 1941:109-110; Piankoff, 1977:142, fig. 46).

Mehet-Weret played an important role in the afterlife. When the deceased entered the afterlife, he expressed his desire and wishes to see Mehet-Weret, the mysterious of birth of the sun and his desire to be borne again with Re by the help of Mehet-Weret (Pleyte, 1900:5; Piankoff, 1977:36). According to the Coffin Texts, the seven words of Mehet-Weret played an essential role in the final judgement and held the balance of the judgement of the night and they were witnesses in the process of cutting the head of the deceased, the texts reads (CT VI: 323, spell 691): *7 tsw rnm ʿw hʿt hr grh pw n ip wdʿt.sn n nw tpw*, meaning seven words of Mehet-Weret, the arms of the balance at the night of their sacred eye, who cut off the head. Also, another reference is showing their role in extracting the heart and the internal organs of the deceased and protecting the dead from the evil spirit of the afterlife (CT VI: 323, spell 691; Dardir, 2005:111-120; Pleyte, 1900:26-27). And one of the examples, which show the role of the seven words of Mehet-Weret in the afterlife, is the representation of the seven words on the lid of the sarcophagus of a nobleman from the Late Period. This scene depicted them in the form of falcons and the deceased as a falcon with a human head and he was guided by the seven words of Mehet-Weret (Buhl, 1959:99-100, fig.58) and a text from the northern hypostyle hall of Esna temple mentions that form (Sauneron, 1968:197):











ḏ3i sw 7 n mḥt-wrt m irw.sn n bikw, means the 7 sacred words of Mehet-Weret in their image of falcon. Also the texts of the temple of Edfu mentioned that the help of the seven words to Osiris in his final judgement held in the hall of Mehet-Weret, where the deceased as Osiris and Mehet-Weret weighted the heart on the balance and the text reads as:

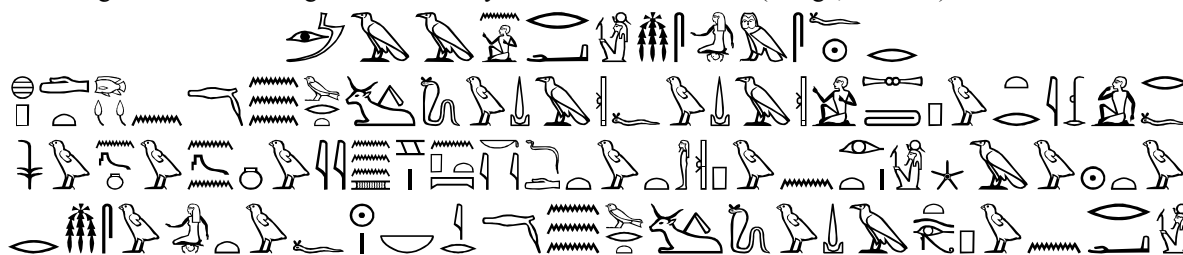


ḏd mdw in ḏ3i Wsir 7 tsw ḥnm mḥt-wrt ḥbsw t3wy ḥnꜥ ib ḏḥwty bh, words spoken in the judgement of Osiris, the seven words in the hall of Mehet-Weret, account the two land with the heart of Thoth (Pleyte, 1900:26-27).

VI. Mehet-Weret and Milky Way:

This celestial cow Mehet-Weret is considered as the powerful image of the Milky Way due to the stars on her body. Her name is written in the form of an adjective as epithet *mḥt*  as flood and *wrt*  as great, indicating not only the size of the flood, but also its importance and its value (Dardir, 2005:55-56). The name of Mehet-Weret is followed by a determinative of celestial cow () which refers to goddess Hest and the white thing of goddess Hest is the milk (Faulkner, 1991:177). Hence, Mehet-Weret highlights the fact that the Milky Way is the great flood of the goddess Hest and this flood refers to the flood of stars on the body of celestial cow that is imagined as milk streaming from her udders. Budge believed that Mehet-Weret is not only a celestial cow, but she was also linked to cosmology and to the creation of the world (Beatty, 1998: 39-43; Mitton, 1993:254). Also, the name *mḥt* can be translated as the north referring to the location of the flood. Hence, the great flood is situated in the north of the sky and this is true because the Milky Way dominates this part of the sky (Gardiner, 1957:569; Faulkner, 1991:114). Another sign of the recumbent celestial cow is the *nh3h3* () flail appearing from the centre of her upper body and another determinative is a cobra (). Davis observed that the flail is to visualize the movement of the Milky Way (Davis, 1985:102). This dynamic is depicted on the body of Mehet-Weret as the flail gives us a clear image of the movements of the great flood and the determinative of the cobra could associate the great flood with the underworld and describe its movement. Cobra could associate the great flood with the underworld as the Greek use the helix to refer to the spiraling and coiling movement of the Milky Way that looks like the image of a serpent (Santillana and Dechend, 1969:256). Krupp provides also an image of the movement of the cobra that many cultures use it to describe the nightly and seasonal meanderings of the Milky Way (Krupp, 1991:259).

Various texts confirms Mehet-Weret as the image of the Milky Way as introduced in Chapter 17 (Beatty, 1998:44-50), which shows Mehet-Weret in a recumbent position atop the hieroglyph *mr* () suggesting a body of water bordered by the banks and a flail () appears from the centre of her body and over her head is the sun disk between the two horns and around her neck is the *mnit* collar () (Fig.9). The texts called her as a creator goddess of the sun-god Re and the eye of Re as the text reads (Budge, 1898:57):




m33 n.i Rꜥ ms m sf r ḥpdy n Mḥt-wrt wḏ3.f wḏ3.i ts phr pw tri r.f sw nw nnwy n pt ky ḏd twt n irt Rꜥ dw3w.tw r msw.tw.f hrw nb ir Mḥt wrt wḏ3t pw n Rꜥ (Beatty, 1998:45), I have seen this sun-god who was born yesterday from the buttocks of the Mehet-Weret; if he be well, then I will be well and vice versa. What does it mean? It means these waters of the sky, otherwise: it is the image of the Eye of Re in the morning of its daily birth. As for the Mehet-Weret, she is the sacred eye of Re (Faulkner, 1994:45; Allen, 1974:29; Barquet, 1967:60). Here, Mehet-Weret as the waters of the sky or great flood stretching from west to east and this is the prominent features of Milky Way. In the nightly sky, the movement of the Milky Way imitates the daily motion of the entire sky and this is important because it is believed that the Milky Way as a beautiful image in the nightly sky signals the approaching dawn because at this point it seems to be the brightest in the sky and this fact is known by different old civilizations. The ancient Egyptian held a similar view as they imagined a relationship between the eye of Re in the morning and Mehet-Weret, the Milky Way (Beatty, 1998:49). The eye of Re is the power to see, to illuminate, to act and it is the energy that reflects the primeval light of creation and creator who manifest itself throughout creation and this title of eye of Re also shows the protective aspect of the divinity (Ogdon, 1985:41; Wilkinson, 1992:43). As the eye of Re, Mehet-Weret is the image of the Milky Way, as a kind of remaining afterglow of the sun or even the rays of the sun in the heaven. The epithet of Mehet-Weret as the eye

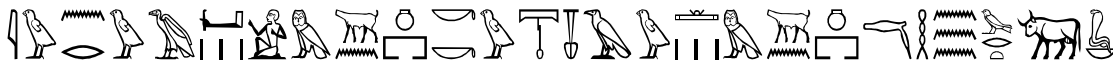
of Re suggests that these are not just any waters of the sky; these are radiant waters of the sky that glow in the nightly sky and certainly can be likened to the sun Re in this aspect. Mehet-Weret as the Milky Way is the great flood of stars that move from horizon to horizon across the nightly sky (Beatty, 1998:50). Beside the title of the eye of Re, there are many epithets in Chapter 71 (Budge, 1989:237):



mht wrt nbt pt hnw *Ḥwy*, Mehet-Weret, the lady of the sky, mistress of the two lands. These titles show Mehet-Weret, the Milky Way as the lady of the sky and provide a great image of her in the sky that can be seen. This Chapter 71 is called the Chapter of Coming Forth By Day because the deceased travels in the afterlife and Mehet-Weret would be a prominent waterway on which to travel and the text of this Chapter 71 shows a clearly link between Mehet-Weret and the primeval waters as the text reads as follows (Budge, 1989:156):



dd.f i bik wbn m nww nb Mht wrt, He says O the falcon rising from the primeval waters, lord of Mehet-Weret. This text shows that Mehet-Weret was not only an image of the sky, but also is linked to the primeval waters. In this text, Mehet-Weret was not Nun, but she was a prominent manifestation of it (Obenga, 1993:297-298). As the falcon rises from the primeval waters, Mehet-Weret as the Milky Way can be imagined as rising from these waters and establishing her universe. The rising and shining falcon is showing the light of Nun that transferring to Mehet-Weret. Both Nun and the goddess are taking the same  sign and suggesting showing the connection between Nun with Mehet-Weret, the great flood. Also, the absence of the cow as a determinative in the writing of her name confirms her relationship as the Milky Way to the source of all beginnings rather than her procreative aspects that might be seen with the determinative of cow. According to the relationship between primeval waters and the Mehet-Weret as mentioned in the text of Chapter 71 and imagining Mehet-Weret as the Milky Way, Mehet-Weret is shown as the celestial cow with stars on her body and her name means the great flood or the great flood of stars in the nightly sky and these stars provides a nightly image of the light and the light is associated with Mehet-Weret as the title of lord of Mehet-Weret giving as an epithet to the rising and shining of falcon from the primeval waters. This light seen in the nightly sky is the common image of the Milky Way. The relationship of Mehet-Weret to Nun is suggesting that the Egyptian saw Mehet-Weret more than a great flood of stars stretching across the nightly sky. This image in the nightly sky was linked to the source of all beginnings and this great group of stars was linked to the beginnings of life in the universe. The relationship between the Milky Way and the source of all beginnings is much nuanced and powerful understanding of Mehet-Weret as the Milky Way (Beatty, 1998:50-53). Another Chapter 124 has another feature of Mehet-Weret focusing on her appearance in the nightly sky as the text reads as follows (Budge, 1898:245):



iw nrw m hnw kkw sm3w m hnw Mht wrt, It causes disturbance together with the total darkness in the interior of Mehet-Weret. Mehet-Weret is composed of thousands of brighter individual stars that stretch in the horizon in the nightly sky. Within the Milky Way, there are a number of gaps that are visible and appear to be dark points (Cole, 1974:344). When the deceased travel inside Mehet-Weret, the Milky Way, he cannot avoid these dark points. To travel in these points that splinter the Milky Way, he must be strong to terrify and strike the fear into any opposition to guarantee and achieve journey (Beatty, 1998:55-56).

As mentioned above, Chapter 186 of Papyrus of Ani is confirming the relationship between Hathor and Mehet-Weret and the name of Mehet-Weret is not mentioned directly in the text of this chapter, but it is mentioned in the title of the chapter. Another version of Chapter 186 comes from the Papyrus of Userhatmes showing the body of Mehet-Weret covered with stars and the name of Mehet-Weret is mentioned in the text and she was responsible for providing a seat for the deceased, while Papyrus of Ani, Hathor was responsible for that function. This is an obvious signal that Mehet-Weret is a form of Hathor. Another version of Chapter 186, which is without name, shows the same critical information of Hathor in the form of Mehet-Weret, providing a seat to the deceased to travel in the afterlife (Navelle, 1886:203) and in this text, Hathor is in a relationship to the sun as it sets and disappears on the western horizon:



ht-hr nbt imntt hnm.t r' htp.f n nh mwt ntrw irt swt, Hathor, lady of the west, whom Re joins when he sets in life, mother of the gods who provides seats. To interpret Hathor coming forth in the form Mehet-Weret as the sun disappears on the west, there are some evidences confirming this idea. Commenting on the Papyrus Carlsberg, which had been categorized as an astronomical text by Neugebauer and Parker, Clagett mentioned that the appearance and disappearance of the sun and stars are connected to each other as related phenomena (Clagett, 1995:363; Neugebauer & Parker, 1960:37, 88-93). Also, he asserts that the stars have a relation to the

sun, which determines the yearly disappearance and reappearance of the stars as well as their visible rising and setting as the text of cenotaph of Seti I mentioned (Clagett, 1995:397). Therefore, the Egyptian stated that with him these the stars enter and with him they go forth (Neugebauer, & Parker, 1960:61) and stated the astronomical concept of the disappearance of the sun in the western horizon and the appearance of the stars, which is highlighted on the body of Hathor in the form of celestial cow Mehet-Weret. The sun disc is placed in between the horns of Mehet-Weret because they wanted to convey the fact that these stars enter into the afterlife within him and go forth with him. Thus, Mehet-Weret as the Milky Way appears as the sun disappears on the western horizon and comes forth in the nightly sky to guide the deceased in the afterlife. Besides, the sun is not moving alone. The sun is placed between the horns of Mehet-Weret, who bears the sun-god Re in the nightly sky and the sun-god Re moves in harmony with the stars along the body of Mehet-Weret because it is one of many stars in the world. These are evidences confirming that Mehet-Weret is a powerful image of the Milky Way especially in the Book of Coming Forth By Day (Beatty, 1998:65-66).

VII. Conclusion:

The name of Mehet-Weret means “the Great Primeval Ocean” or “the Great Flood” and is derived from *mh*, which means to swim and so, she was known as “the Great Swimmer”. Mehet-Weret is represented as a cow with the sun disk between her horns and the star across her body and sometimes depicted kneeling on a reed mat and wearing a *mnit* Necklace and with a flail over her back. She was pictured also as a woman with the head of cow and the sun disk between her horns. Mehet-Weret was a goddess of the waters of Nun, from which the first life raised and the sun-god Re emerged. Mehet-Weret had no independent cult centre, but still depicted on the texts and continued to appear in the Greek period. The first depiction of this cow goddess is found on a palette from the Gerzean Period, (Naqada II) and another early bovine form is depicted at the top of the Narmer Palette and some scholars suggested that the deity on the palette of Gerzean and Narmer Palette is actually Mehet-Weret. In the Old Kingdom, Mehet-Weret appears in the Pyramids Texts and equated with the heavens and as a creator goddess and the Coffins Texts mention the role of her seven words in the afterlife. In the New Kingdom, she is considered as the goddess of reborn for; those wanting the resurrection in the afterlife. Mehet-Weret appeared as a nurse or a suckler of Horus, providing him with the offerings to renew his youth and as a nourishing goddess, who causes the flood of the Nile.

Mehet-Weret was associated with Hathor and the texts show the two goddesses as one. Mehet-Weret was also linked with Isis as Isis-Mehet and portrayed in one of the funerary beds of Tutankhamon. Mehet-Weret is associated also with Neith and Ahet. Mehet-Weret took the aspect of the mother of the sun-god Re at Esna and she was the one, who prepares the world of the gods for the arrival of Re and she was supposed to have created the cosmos by the means of her creative utterances. Also, she protected her child from those who rebelled against him and was assisted in that task by her seven creative utterances.

The goddess played an important role as a creator goddess and the great mother of the sun-god Re. Also, she was a goddess of the sky and the Pyramid Texts show Mehet-Weret as the sky and Horus ascended to the sky, where its place. Mehet-Weret represents the sky and the celestial water and from it the rain falls and helps the solar boat of Re to sail. Mehet-Weret had an important function in the afterlife; when the deceased entered the afterlife, he expressed his desire and wishes to see Mehet-Weret, the mystery of the birth of the sun and his desire to rebirth again with Re by the help of Mehet-Weret. According to the Coffins Texts, the seven words of Mehet-Weret played an essential role in the final judgement and hold the balance of the judgement and they were witnesses in the process of cutting the head of the deceased, in extracting the heart and the internal organs of the deceased and protecting the dead from the evil spirit of the afterlife. Also, the helping of the seven words to Osiris in his final judgement, held in the hall of Mehet-Weret, where the deceased as Osiris and Mehet-Weret are weighting the heart on a balance.

Mehet-Weret had many titles like; *mwt ntr*, the great mother, *nbt pt* or the lady of the sky, *nbwt tp w^rr Nwn* or the golden who was born on the leg of Nun, *wrt* or the great, *s3t R^c* or the daughter of Re, *3h* or the glorious one and *nbt ntrw nbw* or the mistress of all gods, *hnwt t3wy* means the mistress of two lands, *iw^c mnht* means the great heir.

Finally, this celestial cow Mehet-Weret is considered as the powerful image of the Milky Way due to the stars on her body as appeared in the texts of the Book of Coming Forth By Day and carries the sun god between the horns and embraces the deceased as the sun disappears in the western horizon. This suggests that the movement of the sun must be seen in harmony with the movement of the stars on the body of Mehet-Weret, the Milky Way. Also there are parts of Mehet-Weret where the deceased must be strong to terrify and strike the fear into any opposition to guarantee and achieve journey. She is linked with the primeval waters from which all life emerged and that role for her would be to embrace the deceased in the western horizon and elevate the deceased high in the northern sky, which she dominates and thereby move the deceased close to the area of imperishable stars, the region the deceased wanted to be ferried across to in the great bark. Hence Mehet-Weret provide with powerful image of Milky Way as mentioned by the texts in the Book of Coming Forth By Day.

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The Figures:



Fig.1: Mehet-Weret being adored by a kneeling Egyptian (Mahmoud, 2002:152)



Fig. 2: Mehet-Weret on a sign of the heavenly flood-water (Mahmoud, 2002:152)



Fig.3: Mehet-Weret appearing from the western mountain and goddess Taweret stands before her (Faulkner, 1994:186-187)



Fig. 4: The Gerzean palette (Petrie, 1912: fig.6)

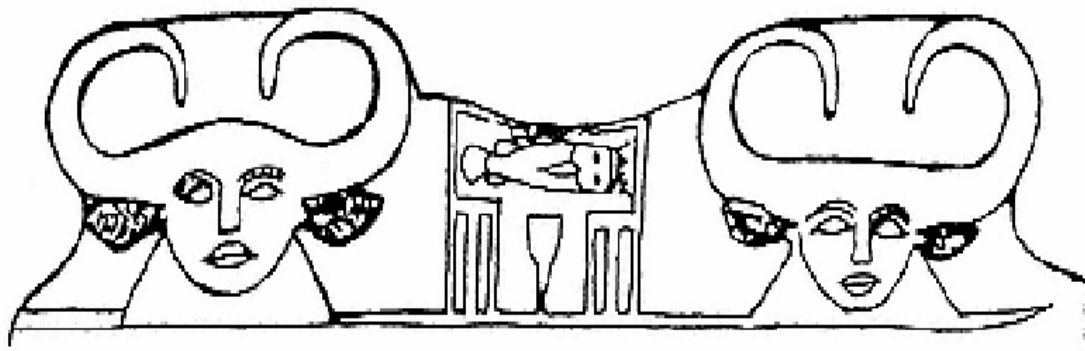


Fig. 5: Narmer palette (Lesko, 1999:18)



Fig. 7: Isis-mehet on the funerary couch of Tutankhamon, Egyptian museum

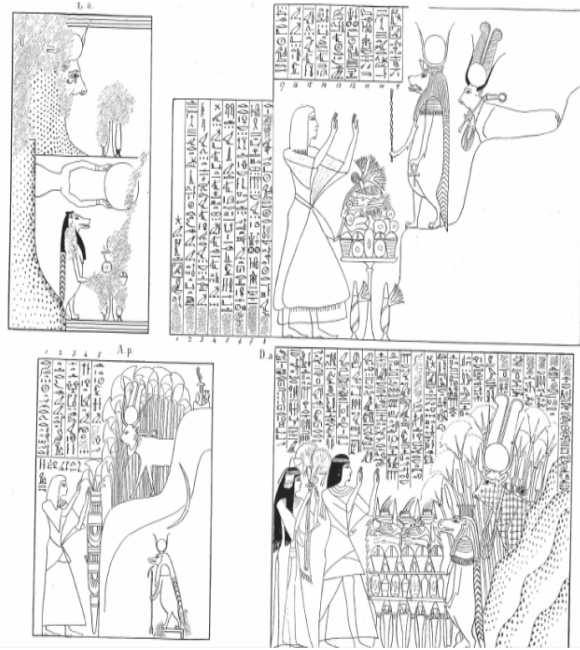


Fig.6: Mehet-Weret appearing from the western Mountain and goddess Taweret stands before her (Neville, 1886: pl.CCXII)

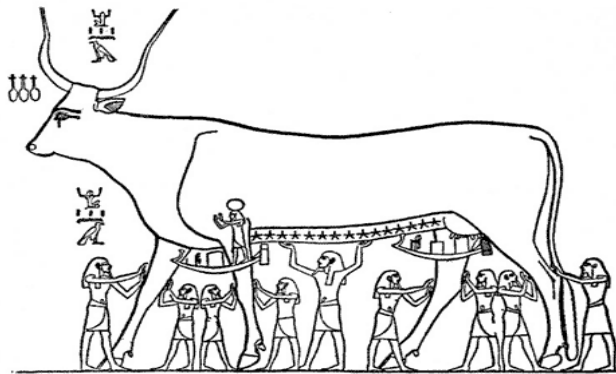


Fig. 8: The celestial cow goddess (Mystre, 1941:109-111)

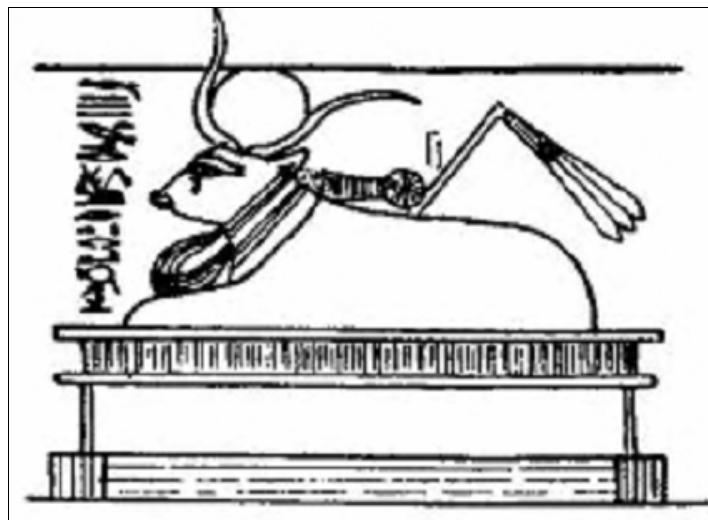


Fig.9: Mehet-Weret in a recumbent position atop the hieroglyph *mr* from Chapter 17 of the Papyrus of Ani (Budge, 1895, p. 279).