

HATSHEPSUT: HOW A WOMAN TOOK THE THRONE

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A female, Hatshepsut (c. 1506-1458 B.C.) ruled Egypt as its pharaoh (the Egyptian word for king) for about 22 years.

HATSHEPSUT LIVED 3,500 YEARS AGO. IN SPITE OF CENTURIES OF TRADITION THAT A PHARAOH MUST BE A MALE, SHE ROSE TO BE THE LEADER OF THE KINGDOM OF EGYPT AND BROUGHT EGYPT TO A NEW PERIOD OF PROSPERITY.

Hatshepsut was born in Thebes, which by 1500 B.C. had become the center of ancient Egypt. Her father, Thutmose I, ruled as pharaoh (the Egyptian word for king) from 1506 to 1493. Her mother was a princess of royal blood.

Her father died when Hatshepsut was about 12, and her half-brother and husband Thutmose II became pharaoh (marriage between brothers and sisters was common in Egypt to ensure the purity of the royal line). As a wife of the pharaoh, Hatshepsut was accorded the conventional queen's titles of "king's daughter," "king's sister," and "king's wife." She bore a daughter, named Neferure, but no sons. Like other, pharaohs, however, Thutmose II had more than one wife, and one of those women bore him a son, named Thutmose III. Being a male, Thutmose III was destined to succeed his father as pharaoh.

Historians believe that Hatshepsut behaved as a traditional queen during her husband's brief reign. But Thutmose II died soon after Thutmose III's birth. Hatshepsut, about 16 years old, was called on to act as regent for her stepson (who happened to also be her nephew). A regent takes temporary authority and rules until the minor child can take control. It was not unusual in Egypt for a widowed queen to act as regent for her son. Even

though Thutmose III was her stepson, Hatshepsut acted as a model queen regent for him, allowing herself to be seen standing behind the new king. But at some point Hatshepsut decided that she too would be a pharaoh.

Hatshepsut's Rise

While Thutmose III was still a baby, Hatshepsut began building temples and monuments throughout the country. Inscriptions on the surviving monuments show how Hatshepsut transformed herself from a conventional queen to a pharaoh.

In a series of images on the walls of her mortuary temple, Hatshepsut presented a story of her divine conception and birth. The story begins in heaven. The mighty God Amun, the king of the gods, announces to the other deities that the time has come to father a princess who will govern Egypt: "I will join for her the Two Lands . . . I will give her all lands and all countries." The story continues with Amun coming to Queen Ahmose (Hatshepsut's mother) and telling her that she is to bear a baby named Khnemet-Amun Hatshepsut, which means "The one who is joined with Amun, the Foremost of Women." When the infant is born, she is presented to Amun, who says: "Come to me in peace, daughter of my loins, beloved Maakare, thou are the king who takes possession of the diadem on the Throne of Horus of the Living eternally."

The story continues, showing Hatshepsut consecrated to the kingship by Amun and other gods,

growing into maidenhood and again crowned by the gods. The story ends with pictures of an earthly coronation in which Thutmose I presents his daughter Hatshepsut to the court and nominates her as his intended successor. In the inscription, Thutmose I says to Hatshepsut:

Come thou blessed one, I will take thee in my arms that thou mayest see the directions [carried out] in the palace Thy brow is adorned with the double crown united on thy head, for thou are my heir. This is my daughter Khnemet-Amun Hatshepsut, living. I put her in my place.

The story is meant to justify Hatshepsut's rise to power, but there is no other evidence that Thutmose I intended to pass over his son (Thutmose II) to honor his daughter. And indeed, while Thutmose II was alive, Hatshepsut acted only as a queen. But after her husband died — and probably by year seven of the “reign” of Thutmose III — still a very

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young boy — Hatshepsut had transformed herself and announced to the world that she had been selected by her father and by the great God Amun to rule Egypt as king and pharaoh. To do so, Hatshepsut must have had both the support of the priesthood and the army.

Hatshepsut Takes the Throne

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut had enormous power. A pharaoh was an absolute ruler. A pharaoh could conscript subjects to work on labor-intensive projects like building a temple or a mortuary. The pharaoh was responsible for making laws and running the country, for collecting taxes, for storing



A detail from Hatshepsut's mortuary temple.

Gullién Pérez/flickr

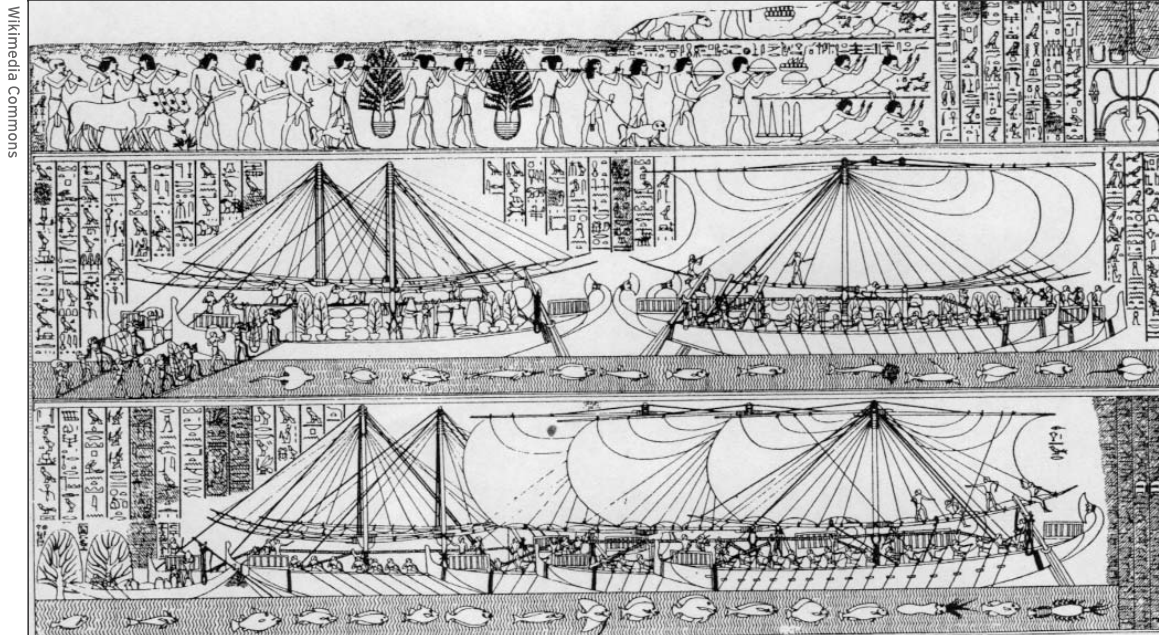
food in case of famine, and for digging canals and maintaining law and order. As head of the armed forces, the pharaoh was also responsible for maintaining an army and keeping the country safe from foreign invaders.

In addition, the pharaoh held a divine office, representing the gods on Earth. The pharaoh's divine status allowed him to speak directly to Amun and the other deities. The pharaoh was responsible for paying homage to the gods and officiating at religious ceremonies. Only if the pharaoh did proper service to the gods, would the gods bring prosperity to the country and *ma'at* would be preserved. (*Ma'at* was a central principle to the Egyptians, meaning justice or the preservation of balance in the universe.)

After assuming the throne, Hatshepsut changed how she was depicted in images. In her role as queen regent, Hatshepsut was always depicted in a long sheath dress and wearing a queen's crown. But after her coronation, she was shown as wearing the customary royal clothes of a king, in a short kilt, a false beard, a broad collar, and a crown, or head cloth. With the change of dress, she made a clear distinction between her former role as queen regent and her new role as pharaoh.

A Powerful Legacy

As king, Hatshepsut embarked on a huge project of restoring the monuments of past pharaohs and building new temples throughout the “Two Lands” of Egypt (Upper and Lower Egypt) to honor the gods. She needed an efficient bureaucracy to carry out the huge projects. She relied on a staff of devoted civil servants including an architect named ▶



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Pictures of Hatshepsut's most famous expedition, to the land of Punt, are carved on the walls of her mortuary temple.

Ineni and an administrator (“steward”) named Senenmut. Senenmut had held posts in the palace during her father’s reign, serving as steward of the property owned by Hatshepsut and tutor to her daughter Nefurure. Some historians believe that Senenmut may even have masterminded Hatshepsut’s rise to the throne. In any case, Senenmut is believed to have been the most powerful person in Hatshepsut’s court and a key figure in overseeing the huge construction projects.

Opposite the Karnak temple complex, on the other side of the Nile, Hatshepsut built her own mortuary temple, which included walls with inscriptions detailing her life story. The mortuary temple is named Djoser-Djeseru, which means “Holiest of Holies.” The temple has columned porticos and is built into the side of a mountain. It was unique in its time, and most agree that it is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

Hatshepsut is generally thought to have avoided war campaigns though she may have led a raid against Nubia or Canaan. Rather than going to war, Hatshepsut showed her strength in trading expeditions, including trips to Phoenicia to collect wood for building ships and trips to copper and turquoise mines in the Sinai.

Her most famous expedition was to an exotic place called Punt, which is thought to be along the coast of the Red Sea, in modern-day Somalia. Punt had been long known as a source for luxury goods. The expedition is depicted in pictures and brief texts carved on the walls of Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple, opposite the story of her birth. The pictures show five Egyptian sailing ships with oars arriving

at Punt, meetings between Hatshepsut’s envoy named Neshi and the chief of Punt, and the expedition ships being loaded with baskets of myrrh and frankincense, bags of gold and incense, ebony, elephant tusks, and panther skins for the return journey. The pictures show Hatshepsut sitting while all the priceless goods are presented to her.

Throughout Hatshepsut’s reign, Thutmose continued in a prominent role. At one point, he even became commander of the Egyptian armies.

Blotting Out Her Legacy

Hatshepsut died after 22 years of her reign, in the year 1458 B.C. No record survives showing how or why she died. (In 2007, however, a mummy was identified as hers and tests revealed that she may have had diabetes and bone cancer.)

Her nephew Thutmose III took over the throne retaining many of the officials who had served his aunt. He began a career as warrior king, waging at least 17 successful military campaigns and creating the largest empire that Egypt had ever been. He too was a monument builder and reigned for over 50 years. He even had a large mortuary temple built for himself right next to Hatshepsut’s. Egypt continued to prosper, and the legacy of Hatshepsut’s time on the throne seemed secure.

But toward the end of his reign, some 20 years after Hatshepsut died, gangs of workmen began destroying statues, images, and titles of Hatshepsut on temples and monuments. At the site of her mortuary, crowds of men pulled down and smashed dozens of colossal statues depicting her that fronted the columns. “Hatshepsut’s Pit,” discovered in

1922, contained pieces of dozens of limestone and granite statues from which her features had been carefully destroyed. One archaeologist, who was working on the site, observed that every conceivable indignity had been heaped on the likeness of the fallen queen. Archaeologists, however, noted that in many cases it was only designations of her as pharaoh that were removed, and that her other titles such as the “king’s daughter” or “king’s wife” were untouched. Figures of Hatshepsut dressed as a pharaoh were chiseled out while pictures of her as a queen were not. In other cases, her name and titles were replaced with those of Thutmose III’s son, Amenhotep. (He like his father was born the son of a secondary wife.)

Indeed, Hatshepsut’s legacy was almost lost for thousands of years. Only in the last 200 years have archaeologists been able to reconstruct her story.

Hatshepsut created the most successful female kingship in the ancient world. By reinventing herself and taking on the attributes of a male pharaoh, Hatshepsut is today recognized as one of the great monarchs of ancient Egypt.

DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. Who was Hatshepsut? Using evidence from the article, describe the challenges she had to overcome.
2. What was *ma’at*? Why was it important to a pharaoh and the ancient Egyptians?
3. What did Hatshepsut accomplish as pharaoh? How did she attempt to assure her legacy?

ACTIVITY: Archaeologist Roundtable

In drawing conclusions about matters in ancient history, archaeologists and historians sometimes have to rely on limited evidence because much of the record of the time has been lost. Consider this question: Why were the statues and titles of Hatshepsut destroyed?

Different conclusions have been drawn over time. Here are some theories:

The Evil Stepmother: On finding Hatshepsut’s Pit and other sites of defacement, some scholars concluded that her memory was attacked by a vengeful Thutmose III, who resented her for seizing the throne and hated her for keeping him out of power.

The Protective Father: More recently, scholars have questioned the first theory, noting the nature of the destruction and other facts, and have theorized that Thutmose was more likely trying to undercut Hatshepsut’s claim as pharaoh to assure that his own son would be protected from others possibly claiming kingship through blood lines to Hatshepsut.

The Too Powerful Woman: Others have theorized that the attacks on Hatshepsut’s memory were motivated by a sense that by asserting herself as pharaoh, she had violated long-held religious beliefs and traditions, and authorities were trying to blot out the memory.

Imagine you are archaeologists at a conference, working on the question presented above.

1. Working individually, review the three theories and reread the article carefully noting facts and evidence that might support or refute each of the theories.
2. Form small panels and appoint a discussion leader to address the following questions:
 - a. What evidence supports Theory A? (Repeat the question for Theories B and C.)
 - b. What evidence refutes Theory A? (Repeat the question for Theories B and C.)
 - c. Based on the evidence, which theory is the most valid?
3. Select a spokesperson to report and cite evidence for your findings to the rest of the panels. Be prepared to answer questions. When all of the panels have reported, take a vote to determine which of the theories has the most support among the archaeologists assembled.

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National High School U.S. History Standard 8: Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. (2) Understands how Federalists and Anti-Federalists differed (e.g., their arguments for and against the Constitution of 1787, . . . , their backgrounds, service during the Revolution, political experience). (3) Understands the Bill of Rights and various challenges to it (e.g., arguments by Federalists and Anti-Federalists over the need for a Bill of Rights . . .).

National High School Civics Standard 8: Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society. (1) Knows major historical events that led to the creation of limited government in the United States (e.g., . . . Bill of Rights (1791) . . .)

National High School Civics Standard 15: Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power. (1) Understands how the overall design and specific features of the Constitution prevent the abuse of power . . . to protect individual rights . . . using a system of checks and balances (e.g., . . . the Bill of Rights).

Common Core Standard RH.11B12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

California History-Social Science Standard 11.1: Students analyze the significant events in the founding of the nation and its attempts to realize the philosophy of government described in the Declaration of Independence. (1) Analyze . . . the debates on the drafting and ratification of the Constitution and the addition of the Bill of Rights.

California History-Social Science Standard 12.1: Students explain the fundamental principles and moral values of American democracy as expressed in the U.S. Constitution and other essential documents of American democracy. (6) Understand that the Bill of Rights limits the powers of the federal government and state governments.

Hatshepsut

National High School World History Standard 5: Understands the political, social, and cultural consequences of population movements and militarization in Eurasia in the second millennium BCE. (2) Understands the beliefs and accomplishments of . . . Egyptian rulers . . .

Common Core Standard RH.11B12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Common Core Standard RH.11B12.3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

California History-Social Science Standard 6.2: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush. (7) Understand the significance of Queen Hatshepsut . . .

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