Hatshepsut: the Female Pharaoh

In the sixth in a series of articles exploring Egypt's better-known queens, Dr Joyce Tyldesley reviews the evidence for Hatshepsut, who served as both a queen consort and a female king during the Eighteenth Dynasty.

Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thutmose I and his wife Ahmose, and the wife of her half-brother, Thutmose II. It seems likely that she would have lived her life as a fairly conventional queen consort had her husband's early death not altered the dynamics of the royal family.

Hatshepsut the Consort
In many ways Hatshepsut was a typical New Kingdom consort. But already there were signs that she was not afraid to challenge tradition, and her preferred title, 'Mistress of the Two Lands', was a clear reference to the king's title 'Lord of the Two Lands'. Hatshepsut now commissioned a pair of obelisks to stand in front of the Karnak temple of Amun (see opposite, left). Obelisks had until then been the very expensive gifts of kings to their gods.

When Thutmose II died after just thirteen years on the throne, the crown passed to Thutmose III, a son born to the harem queen Isis. As the new king was an infant, tradition dictated that Hatshepsut should rule on behalf of her stepson.

Hatshepsut the King
Initially Hatshepsut allowed Thutmose to take precedence in all recorded activities. But by Year Seven she had been crowned king. Thutmose was acknowledged as a co-ruler, and the years continued to be counted from the date of his accession, but Hatshepsut was now the dominant monarch. Only towards the end of her life would Thutmose acquire anything like equal status with his co-ruler.

Hatshepsut offers no explanation for this assumption of power. We can only guess that it was precipitated by a crisis requiring a fully adult king. Carved into her stone walls Hatshepsut does, however, offer us some justification. We are told that she is entitled to claim the throne because she both the daughter and intended heir of Thutmose I and the daughter of the god Amun.

Divine Birth
Hatshepsut's semi-divine nature is emphasised on the walls of her mortuary temple, where a sequence of images (see opposite, top right) and a brief text tell the story of her divine birth. Amun has fallen in love with a beautiful queen, and has determined to father her child. He visits Ahmose, disguised as her husband, and tells her that she has been chosen to bear his daughter. Nine months later, Hatshepsut is born.
Egypt’s new king has a male body. This is Hatshepsut’s response to the artistic dilemma that, three centuries earlier, saw Sobekneferu depicted in a mixture of men’s and women’s clothing (see AE 88). Towards the beginning of her reign Hatshepsut was depicted either as a conventional woman or as a woman wearing king’s clothing (see opposite left). Quickly, however, she evolved into an entirely typical king, with a male body, clothing and accessories.

**Princess Neferura**
Like any other king, Hatshepsut needed a queen to fulfil the feminine aspect of her monarchy, and for this she turned to her daughter Neferura. Neferura started to use the titles ‘Lady of Upper and Lower Egypt’ and ‘Mistress of the Lands’ and assumed the religious role of God’s Wife of Amun. A series of statues show Neferura with and her tutor, Senenmut. Neferura has the shaven head and side-lock of youth worn by elite children, while Senenmut assumes a typical woman's role by seating the princess on his knee, holding her tight and wrapping her body in his cloak (see right).

Senenmut enjoyed a rapid rise through the ranks to become Hatshepsut’s most prominent courtier, and this has sparked speculation over their relationship. The fact that Senenmut carved his image into Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple — an unprecedented move for a non-royal — certainly suggests a close bond between the two.

**Policy**
Hatshepsut’s reign started with a brief, satisfying series of military campaigns. She then turned her attention to trade.
There were missions to the Lebanon for wood, and increased exploitation of the Sinai copper and turquoise mines. Most exciting of all, there was a mission to Punt, the source of many exotic treasures: resins, wild animals, ebony, ivory and gold. Flora and fauna shown on the walls of Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple suggest that Punt was situated somewhere along the Eritrean/Ethiopian coast (see above).

**Building Projects**

Hatshepsut probably instigated a temple building programme in all of Egypt’s major cities, but today it is only at Thebes that we can appreciate her grand design. The Karnak temple benefited greatly from her generosity. There was another pair of obelisks (entirely covered in gold foil), a new barque shrine (the Red Chapel) (see below), a new pylon, a new palace and a series of improvements to the processional routes which linked the temples within the complex.

**Deir el-Bahri**

Hatshepsut’s most impressive building was her mortuary temple, set in the Deir el-Bahri bay (see opposite, top). Defined by a limestone wall, the complex included a garden complete with plants, trees and pools. The temple itself occupied three ascending terraces set back against the cliff. Its tiered porticoes were linked by a long, open-air stairway running through the centre of the temple towards the dark sanctuary cut into the living rock.

Deir el-Bahri was a multi-functional temple. The main sanctuary was dedicated to Amun, and there was a suite of chapels devoted to the royal ancestors. An open-air court dedicated to the sun god Ra-Horakhty balanced the gloomy mortuary chapels linking the dead with the cult of Osiris. One level down were the chapels dedicated to Anubis, and to Hathor (opposite, bottom), who was both the goddess of the Deir el-Bahri bay and ‘Mistress of Punt’.

Hatshepsut did not build a new tomb in the Valley of the Kings, preferring to enlarge her father’s tomb (KV 20). Her plan was that father and daughter would lie side-by-side in matching yellow quartzite sarcophagi for eternity. This did happen for a time, until Thutmose III had his grandfather re-interred in a brand new tomb (KV 38).

A stela raised at Armant tells us that Hatshepsut died on the tenth day of the sixth month of the twenty-second year of her reign. Her tomb was looted in antiquity. We have Hatshepsut’s sarcophagus and her canopic chest, but her body vanished and is today the subject of much speculation. The recent identification of an Eighteenth Dynasty mummy as Hatshepsut on the basis of a tooth found in a royal cache tomb is still questioned by many.

**Damnatio Memoriae**

Towards the end of Thutmose’s long reign an attempt was made to re-write history. Hatshepsut’s name and images were chiselled off the walls and she was excluded from the official history that now ran without any co-regency from Thutmose II to Thutmose III. While it is clear that this occurred during the
later part of Thutmose's reign, it is not clear why it happened.

For many years Egyptologists assumed that this was an act of revenge: a damnatio memoriae, or the deliberate erasure of a person's memory, which would cause them to die again in the Afterlife. But it seems unlikely that Thutmose would have brooded for two decades before attempting to revenge himself on his dead stepmother. Furthermore, the erasure was sporadic and haphazard, with only the more accessible images of Hatshepsut removed. So it seems more likely that Thutmose was, towards the end of his life, simply engaged in 'tidying up' his personal history. By eliminating the more obvious traces of his female co-regent, Thutmose could claim all the achievements of their joint reign for himself.

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All photos, except where indicated: RBP

ABOVE
Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, highlighted in the dawn light.

BELOW LEFT
The Hathor Chapel on the left (south) of the second terrace of Hatshepsut's temple.

BELOW RIGHT
One of the Hathor-headed columns in the interior of the Hathor Chapel.

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