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Hatshepsut: A Female King of Egypt and her Architecture

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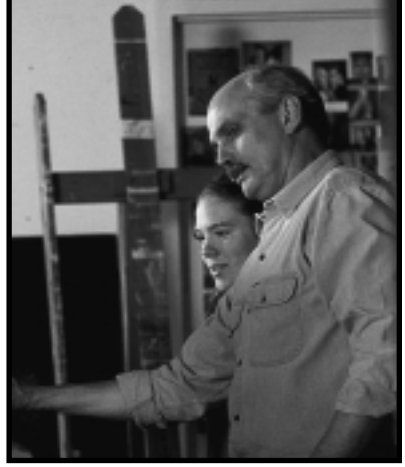


Hatshepsut

A Female King of Egypt and her Architecture

by Roger Dunn

THE PILGRIMAGE

During my years of teaching the art and architectural survey courses that cover ancient Egypt, and later in developing the course *Women in the Visual Arts*, which I co-teach with Mercedes Nuñez, I became more and more fascinated by the pharaoh named Hatshepsut, a woman who came to the throne under the titles of a king and appeared in public as one. She is the first recorded female ruler in history and the first recorded female patron of large-scale art and architectural projects. She left behind a number of artifacts testifying to the importance of her reign, which lasted from about 1504-1483 b.c.e. I had viewed on several occasions the two sculptures of her at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, one showing her in the traditional guise of pharaoh, with chin beard, kilt and linen headdress. This regal attire would have left her chest bare. The other sculpture depicts her as a sphinx. She made sure not to be mistaken for anything but a legitimate pharaoh.

This is expressed as well in Hatshepsut's funerary temple, her greatest visible legacy. It would have earned its patron a special role in Egyptian and architectural history whether built by a female or male. There is nothing quite like it in architecture in its design, siting and effect. Egyptian kings in the New Kingdom period sought an enduring monument of temple architecture to communicate to posterity their importance and power. In contrast, royal tombs were now hidden away in the cliffs on the west side of the Nile from the capital city of Thebes, seeking a security for the mummy and treasures which the prominent early pyramids had failed to insure. Located some distance away from the tomb, the funerary temple provided a place for the ongoing rituals to the divine king and favored deities, even long after the king's death. And its permanence and impressiveness would preserve the continued memory of the king, assuring his eternity in the afterlife.

Fulfilling a goal I had for myself (while helping to assure Hatshepsut's eternal existence by thus honoring her), I visited her funerary temple during a research and documentary tour of Egypt in January 2001, made possible by a CART grant. For an art historian, works of art and architecture are the primary documents of research. To be able to view first-hand the works one teaches about is very important because no reproduction and text description replace the experience of the work itself. This is especially true of architecture. Such direct study can then be communicated to students with greater knowledge and enthusiasm for the works than before.

The temple did not disappoint. The experience of ascending the ramps towards the cliffs is one of moving from the vast flat desert to soaring grandeur. Whatever losses there are in terms of original decorative effect, the scale and sequence of spaces remain and have their impact. To see the much-reproduced painted reliefs of the royal couple of the land of Punt bringing offerings to the king and Hatshepsut greeting Hathor was more meaningful when viewed in their context. Details, such as the paintings of heaped up sacrifices of bulls, grain and other produce, were remarkably colorful and easy to "read" and understand. There were discoveries, such as the lion-head "gargoyles" that serve as rain spouts and predate the famous Gothic ones by two and a half millennia. A sequence of columns in Hathor's chapel are each beautifully carved with the cow goddess' head, but I never have seen them effectively depicted in photographs of the temple. But how could Hatshepsut have placed herself on the male throne of king of Egypt, putting herself in position to create such works in her honor?

ROYAL WOMEN AND KINGSHIP

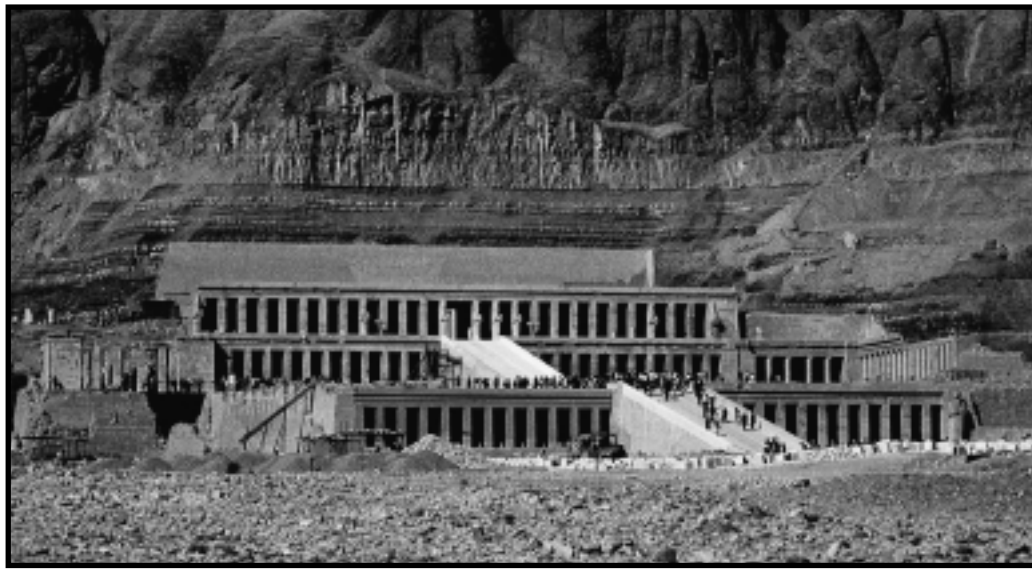
Hatshepsut's rise to the rank of pharaoh, and her ability to hold this position for two decades, is testament to a remarkable woman who overcame the long-revered historical and religious traditions that restricted the rule of Egypt to one who was a *son* of the god Amun, hence a man. However, this belief that the pharaoh was sired by the great god gave enormous importance to the royal women as consorts of Amun, who sometimes bore the title "God's Wife of Amun" or "Mother of the God (the Pharaoh)." Title and power were passed on from one king to another through connection to the line of royal

females. For a man born into the royal family, this legitimate rule usually came from his mother if she was a queen, though otherwise he might derive his authority—or further enhance it—through marriage to another royal woman, including his sister, half-sister, aunt, niece, or even his own daughter. Such incestuous unions are well documented in Egyptian history, though some scholars still dispute the concept of matrilineal succession. Even so, history records a number of instances in which a non-royal male attained kingship of Egypt by marrying a royal woman.

A good example of how royal women could legitimize a man's right to be king is found about a century after Hatshepsut in Ankhesenamun (originally Ankhesenpaaten), one of seven daughters of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti, the pharaoh's first cousin. When abandoned by his queen, who may have sided with the priesthood in overthrowing him, Akhenaten married his daughter, who was perhaps no more than eleven years old. During their marriage she bore her father a daughter. At his death, Ankhesenamun was married to Tutankhamen (King Tut), who may have been her uncle, nephew, or brother. He came to the throne at the age of nine and died nine or ten years later, so she was a few years older than he was. Within the famous contents of his tomb is a throne whose back support is adorned with a scene in hammered gold of Ankhesenamun anointing her husband. This is more than a tender image of the couple, as sometimes interpreted, for it depicts a ritual whose significance relates to the object it appears on and its symbolic location where it supports the king's "upright" position on the throne. Other items within the tomb similarly depict scenes of her favor toward him and her support of his rule. Such images of a queen embracing or anointing her husband are not uncommon in dynastic Egyptian art.

When Tutankhamen died due to uncertain causes (murder is suspected), there was a power struggle in the court, and Ankhesenamun remained a pawn of the priesthood and powerful members of her family, particularly her grandmother Queen Tiy. A document survives in which Ankhesenamun, fearing for her situation, asks the king of the Hittites, the *enemies* of Egypt, to send her a prince. In it she states she would marry him and he would become king of Egypt. This plan was foiled with the assassination of the prince enroute, and Ankhesenamun was married to her elderly grandfather Ay, who then became king. Upon his death not long afterwards, she was wed to the general Horemheb, a non-royal who became pharaoh simply through this marriage. Thus through marriage she had validated the kingship of four men, and had promised it to another who was not even Egyptian.

It is no surprise then that, even though women rarely ruled directly, they often exercised great authority within the court. Within this context Hatshepsut's story is still exceptional. Her father was Thutmose I, a non-royal general who became king by marrying the previous pharaoh's sister, Ahmose. Hatshepsut's abilities as a leader and administrator were apparently so evident as a young woman (perhaps only aged 15), that she was named co-regent by her father toward the end of his reign. To assure the passage of power to one of the pharaoh's own sons, she was married to her half-brother, the son of a minor wife, who thus succeeded their father to rule no more than three years as Thutmose II until his own death. This union begat the princess Neferure, but no male heir. Thus the chosen successor of Thutmose III was his three-year-old son born of a con-



Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut

Statues of Hatshepsut as Osiris from her temple.

cubine—obviously not a woman of royal blood. Though it seems likely that Hatshepsut legitimized this choice by marrying her daughter to Thutmose III, who was her nephew and stepson, she first served as his regent, then assumed the title and full authority of pharaoh herself, though nominally co-ruler with Thutmose III. This act reveals the level of power and support she already had achieved within the court and among the priesthood. In fact an important supporter was the Chief Steward of the god Amun, Senenmut, a man she elevated to high rank who became the most powerful member of her administration. Of the many titles and areas of authority heaped upon him, the most important was tutor to princess Neferure. Though the history of Neferure is uncertain, it is known that she did not outlive her mother's reign.

A mythology was spun to reveal that, as with other pharaohs, Hatshepsut was conceived by her mother as a result of a visit from Amun, taking the guise of the queen's husband—Amun's usual *modus operandi*. This story and that of Hatshepsut being crowned as king by Thutmose I are told in the reliefs and hieroglyphics of her funerary temple. Hatshepsut took care to follow the traditional role and appearance of the pharaoh, as previously noted. In paintings her skin is red-brown, the traditional color for men, and she is depicted with male physique. As with other kings, she also was portrayed as sphinx and in the form of Osiris, God of the Dead. Inscriptions refer to her as male and use the titles of king.

Hatshepsut's reign was one of relative peace, internal order and increased prosperity, in which her efforts were aimed at expanding trade, creating new markets for Egyptian goods while bringing in luxurious and exotic new goods from distant lands. In time Thutmose III became old enough and powerful enough to overthrow her, though nothing is known of exactly how her reign and life ended. We can suspect the worst, because her successor, perhaps resenting the many years when he was kept from coming to power, commanded much later in his reign that her name be removed from all sculpted images and monuments, including her own funerary temple. In this way he would destroy her very existence, both in earthly memory and in the afterlife. The command was only partially carried out.

PATRON OF ARCHITECTURE

To assure the continuation of their existence and greatness in this life and the next, the pharaohs built grandly, adorned their monuments richly, and inscribed their names, images, and lists of achievements throughout. In addition, pharaohs earned praise by restoring, adorning and adding to the temples built by their predecessors. Inscriptions that survive from Hatshepsut's reign attest to the commitment and pride she felt in this role of architectural patron. Through these building projects, Hatshepsut assured divine favor and prosperity for herself and her people; she proved that she was a responsible ruler securing the best for Egypt.

Particularly important was the great temple complex at Karnak, the center of the cult of Amun, a sun god who had risen to primary importance within the Egyptian pantheon and who, of course, was the father of all pharaohs including Hatshepsut. Karnak had become the most important religious center in all of Egypt. Surviving from her contributions to this temple are a pylon (entrance facade) along the southern route leading to the Temple of Mut (Amun's wife), and two obelisks (one still standing) placed within the small hypostyle hall built by her father, Thutmose I. Each obelisk was of a single stone 88-1/2 feet high and weighing 320 tons. They were originally gold-leafed on their

pyramidal peaks, and gold would have also embellished the hieroglyphics on all four sides of each tapering shaft. As was typical, the hieroglyphs on these obelisks express Hatshepsut's self-praise for her generous gift to the god, along with the expectation that the gift would assure the perpetuation of her memory into eternity. The inscription reads as follows:

> [These obelisks] are of hard granite from the quarries of the South; their tops are of fine gold chosen from the best in all foreign lands. They can be seen from afar on the river; the splendor of their radiance fills the Two Lands, and when the solar disk appears between them it is truly as if he rose up into the horizon of the sky.... You who after long years shall see these monuments, who shall speak of what I have done, you will say, "We do not know, we do not know how they can have made a whole mountain of gold."... To gild them I have given gold measured by the bushel, as though it were sacks of grain,…for I knew that Karnak is the celestial horizon of the earth (Translation from Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*).

However, Hatshepsut is best known in architecture for her funerary temple, built on the west side of the Nile across the river from Amun's temple and aligned with it on a west-east axis, establishing a close connection with the deity critical to the legitimacy of her reign. Her temple is next to the funerary temple of the earlier pharaoh Nebhepetra Mentuhotep, built more than five centuries before during the Middle Kingdom period. Once Thebes, today the location is known as Deir el Bahari. Both temples were built against the cliffs, with sanctuaries carved into the cliff rock. The site adds dramatically to the effect of the architecture. While they follow a thousand year old tradition of cliff tombs built by provincial governors and other nobles, Hatshepsut's funerary temple is much grander and shows a particularly sensitive approach of the architectural design strongly related to site. The vertical projections and crevices of the cliffs are echoed in the pattern of dark and lights created by the colonnades on the three terraces. The ascent of the ramps and terraces gives emphasis to the soaring cliffs. It is important to note that this was not the burial place of Hatshepsut, for that was hidden within the cliffs beyond. This temple was for the continued rituals that honored her as a deity, and assured her favored association with other powerful and personal gods.

The temple is typical in being designed around a long axis. From the Nile River valley, an avenue of sphinxes bearing the face of Hatshepsut once led to the terraces of the temple, each faced with double colonnades. (Though most descriptions refer to these as "colonnades," in fact many of the supports here are square piers.) The piers of the outer colonnade of the upper terrace were fronted by painted limestone statues of Hatshepsut standing in mummiform pose with arms crossing her torso in the pose of Osiris, God of the Dead. Some of these still survive, though mostly fragmentary and without their original paint.

Capital with head of Hathor; funerary temple of Hatshepsut

The approach from one terrace to another is by means of ramps that follow the processional route into the cliff face. At the end of the ramps a ceremonial gate gives entrance to a colonnaded courtyard, which is surrounded on three sides by sanctuaries usually attributed to the gods Amun, Ra, Anubis, Hathor, and of course Hatshepsut herself as well as a chapel to her father, Thutmose I. Some of these are within the cliff. As previously noted, her connection to the sun deity Amun is further established by the alignment of her temple with that of Amun at Karnak across the river. It was intended that yearly the small solid gold statue of Amun journey from his sanctuary at Karnak to cross the river and be placed in his chapel in Hatshepsut's temple, a ceremony called the Festival of Wadi. Under Thutmose III, the temple remained a cult center of Amun-Ra and Hathor, and the Festival was continued even though he abolished the cult of Hatshepsut.

The supporting posts of the colonnades vary from those square in section to those faceted with eight or sixteen sides. The latter bear a resemblance to the later Greek Doric columns, and may have been a type that influenced the columns used in such temples as the Parthenon almost a millennium later. The austerity of

Hatshepsut making offerings to god Horus from her temple.

the present condition of Hatshepsut's temple belies the fact that its surfaces were once richly carved, colored and gilded, though some of the shallow relief carvings on the inner walls have paint that is remarkably preserved. For example, shown on one wall is the pharaoh's birth, in which Amun, taking the form of Thutmose I, visits Queen Ahmose, Hatshepsut's mother. Given prominence as well is a painted relief of Hatshepsut's proudest achievement, the expedition to Punt (probably present-day Somalia), in a quest to promote trade between the two lands. Punt's King and Queen, a corpulent woman who met the standards of beauty of her culture, are shown with their retinue bearing gifts for Hatshepsut. Among the acquisitions from this expedition were fragrant myrrh trees, the basis for gardens of flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs that adorned the terraces of this temple complex. The original splendor of this place within the desert against the cliffs can only be imagined now.

The probable architect of this masterpiece was Senenmut, whose many high-ranking titles included "Overseer of Overseers of All of the Works of the King." Hence, he would have supervised the design and construction of this temple and is identified several times in its images and hieroglyphics. In fact, his name and image appear so frequently with Hatshepsut's and those of her daughter that it has been assumed that he was the king's most intimate consort. His achievement here makes him one of the greatest architects in Egypt's phenomenal history of building, though surely its design was at least partly a vision conceived by his patron.

POSTSCRIPT

For an ancient Egyptian, to have one's name uttered by posterity was assurance enough of one's eternity. A terrible irony occurred in October 1997, when the world resounded with the name of Hatshepsut because fundamentalist terrorists had opened fire on tourists gathered on the open terraces of her temple. While some were able to flee to safety behind the posts and columns and into the chapel of Hathor, a protective and powerful mother goddess, some thirty were killed, members of Japanese and Swiss tour groups. Being within the dramatic space of that recent tragedy added to my emotions in visiting Hatshepsut's temple, feeling both the greatness and baseness of human endeavors, and the eternity and temporality that together define the passage of time.

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