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## One queen to rule them all, the incredible story of Pharaoh Hatshepsut's reign

Throughout the history of Ancient Egypt, tradition and religious piety are perhaps the two most important values held by the people. This is illustrated by the great spans of time that their traditions cover, despite being slightly altered along the way. For example, although tomb texts would eventually give way to coffin texts due to changing styles, the concept of writing inscriptions and spells around the remains of nobles remained constant for centuries. The famous process of mummification was considered essential to reaching the afterlife and was consistently performed for millennia. Another among the Egyptian's many traditions was the belief that Egypt was to always be ruled by a man of pure royal blood, as was Osiris in his life. While there were cases of this tradition being broken and women taking throne, most of these cases were in times of desperation and military turmoil. However, one queen stands above the others as not only one of the greatest Pharaohs of ancient Egypt, but as one of the greatest female leaders of the ancient world. Her name was Hatshepsut.

Hatshepsut was born on a path that would have surely led any male to a guaranteed seat as pharaoh later in life. She was the daughter of Thutmose I, a popular pharaoh who had made numerous achievements throughout Egypt. He had expanded the country's borders farther into Nubia than they had ever been before. Hatshepsut was the only survivor of her four siblings born to Thutmose I's royal wife. This left her the last survivor of the full royal bloodline. Ordinarily she would have ascended to the throne, but because of her gender, allowing her to ascend seemed too controversial. Instead, she was married to her step-brother, Thutmose II, who became Pharaoh in her place. He was born to a lesser wife of Thutmose I, and based on Thutmose II's mummy, it can be inferred that she was likely not happy during her marriage. He was a frail man, ill-fitting of the great stature Pharaohs were depicted as having. He also accomplished very little in his time as Pharaoh. He completed two minor building projects and completed two minor military campaigns, but he never accompanied his troops or oversaw construction. His rule is generally regarded as, at best, uneventful.

When he and Hatshepsut married, she was only twelve years old. By the time he died, she was in her thirties. They only had one son together, who would be named Thutmose III. When Thutmose II died, Thutmose III was too young to ascend to the throne. So, in his place, Hatshepsut took the position of regent. For seven years, Hatshepsut ruled Egypt as the Great Wife of Amon while Thutmose III stayed out of sight in his youth. Then, in an unprecedented move in the whole of Egyptian history, Hatshepsut decided to rule Egypt from that point onward as a full-fledged male pharaoh. All depictions of her from then on were shown without feminine features, but with the ceremonial beard and with the royal kilt worn by all pharaohs. She also wore traditional male attire during ceremonies of state. She renounced her titles as Great Wife of Amon and regent, and became a king.

This act brings about several questions, the first of which being why she chose to make such a decision. The most popular answer among Egyptologists today was that tradition demanded it. Though she made it no secret to her officials or to the people that she was a woman, the divine order of Egypt demanded that Egypt was to always be ruled as a man. She fully understood that if she was to take full power, she would have to justify herself to the gods and to the people, and

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dawning the appearance of a male instead of a feminine one was her response. She also was possibly motivated by a desire to keep her power as opposed to abdicating it to Thutmose III when he came of age. After twenty years of silence in marriage to Thutmose II, she was likely not keen on returning to her position of obscurity after she had accomplished such impressive feats as regent.

This also brings about the question of why the people allowed her to do this. What seems to be the case here is that the people were already content with her rule. Early in her regency, she began multiple construction projects, including additions at the temple of Karnak and the largest obelisk in all of Egypt, known as Hatshepsut's needle. She also constructed one of the most famous temples in Egypt, the Djoser-Djoseru. Located in the cliffs of Deir el Bahari, it was the largest monument that any Pharaoh had constructed in centuries, since most of the rulers prior had been defined by military turmoil and conquest. Its construction was a statement to the people of Egypt, that the new regent was capable of living up to the rule of her father, and surpassing that of her former husband. Apparently, it was enough.

Another question that arises from her decision to rule as a male is why her son Thutmose III allowed it, instead of rising to the throne and taking power for himself when he came of age. Research shows that Thutmose the third actually preferred for his mother to remain king instead of himself. During his mother's reign, Thutmose III lived a military life, training in Syria with the Egyptian army. For the time being, he had little interest in politics. He was content to be a soldier on the battlefield with his comrades. This is also illustrated by their depictions together in temple artworks. Hatshepsut and Thutmose III are shown as working together, as opposed to being rivals. Furthermore, in every depiction, it is Hatshepsut who stands in front of her son doing the duty of Pharaoh, while Thutmose III follows behind her. In essence, their relationship was mutually beneficial.

After becoming Pharaoh, Hatshepsut made sure to continue proving to the people that she was worthy of the title. One of her most important projects was a trading expedition to Punt, a move which no Pharaoh had made in centuries. The journey was long and the process was daunting, but the products the expedition returned with were well worth it. They came with boats loaded with gold, incense, ivory tusks, and other exotic luxury items. It was a bold move but it served well to increase her popularity as a ruler. These kinds of trade projects, as well as numerous construction projects, would come to define the prosperity of her rule.

After roughly twenty years as Pharaoh, Hatshepsut died and her son Thutmose III finally arose to the throne. His rule was quite the opposite of Hatshepsut's in terms of focus. It seems that his years in the military served him well, as he would quickly go on to create the largest expansion of Egypt's borders that it had ever seen, and would ever see again. He too would prove to be a popular ruler, as he brought victory after victory to the people of Egypt. However, after roughly 25 years as Pharaoh, Thutmose III seems to have had a change of heart about his mother's position. He ordered images of her erased, and her name to be scratched out of inscriptions. He also had her red chapel completely dismantled. Essentially, he attempted to have her erased from history.

The most likely reason he erased his mother is the same reason that she ascended to pharaoh in the first place- tradition demanded it. Thutmose III decided that the divine order of Egypt could not permit a woman to have ruled over Egypt. It was a violation of the precedent set thousands of years ago by Osiris himself. All instances of her name that he could find were

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replaced with that of her father or her husband.

This action now begs that question of why he waited so long to begin erasing her name. Part of the answer may have been that he simply did not decide it was necessary or think of the idea for a very long time. However, a more likely answer is that he was waiting for the people of Egypt to forget her on their own. Telling people that events that had occurred days ago would not have been very compelling, but questioning events that happened twenty-five years in the past can cloud even the best of memories. He made it so that the name Hatshepsut disappeared not only from the walls of her temples, but from the minds of the people as well.

Yet despite Thutmose III's best efforts, Hatshepsut's memory still lives on today, and her monuments still stand as a testament to her skill as a ruler. Her accomplishments as a builder and diplomat were vast, but in the end, her only crime was that of her sex. This continued to betray her thousands of years later, as in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many early Egyptologists were unable to believe that a woman could have accomplished so much on her own. Yet, as always, history finds a way to bring justice to those who were denied it, however long in the past it may have been.

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