

Hatshepsut: The Queen who became King

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ANCIENT-ORIGINS

Hatshepsut was the longest reigning female pharaoh. Under her reign, Egypt prospered. Known as “The Woman Who Was King,” the Egyptian economy flourished during her time as pharaoh. She directed the construction and repairs of many buildings, memorials, and temples. However, upon her death, her successors tried to erase any memory of her. While the goal may have been to eradicate her from memory, these attempts only fueled the desire of modern civilizations to know more about her. More than 3,000 years after her death, archaeologists were intrigued and mystified as they attempted to locate and identify her remains.

Born in 1508 BC, Hatshepsut was the only child born to Egyptian king Thutmose I and his principal wife and queen, Ahmose. When Hatshepsut was twelve years old, her father passed away. She married her half-brother Thutmose II, and assumed the role of principal wife and queen. She remained Thutmose II’s queen until he passed away fifteen years later, leaving Hatshepsut a widow at age 27. Hatshepsut and Thutmose II had one child together – a daughter named Neferure. Thutmose II also had a son, Thutmose III, born to a concubine. Thutmose III was an infant upon Thutmose II’s death, so Hatshepsut served as his regent. Eventually, she stepped up and assumed the role of pharaoh.

This was highly unusual at the time. Egypt’s gods had supposedly decreed that the king’s role could never be fulfilled by a woman ruling on her own. But Hatshepsut refused to submit to this and in around 1437 BC, she had herself crowned as pharaoh, changing her name from the female version Hatshepsut - which means Foremost of the Noble Ladies - to the male version, Hatshepsu.

Relief of Hatshepsut and her husband, Thutmose II

Relief of Hatshepsut and her husband, Thutmose II. Photo Credit: Kenneth Garrett

During her reign as pharaoh, Hatshepsut was often depicted in a male form, with a beard, male body, and wearing the traditional king’s kilt and crown. This was likely due to a lack of words or symbols to portray a woman with a pharaoh’s status, and not due to a desire to trick people into thinking she was a man.

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut reestablished trade routes that had been disrupted by Hyksos occupation of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period ([1650-1550 BC](#)). She was also responsible for the first recorded attempt to transplant foreign trees, when she brought thirty-one live myrrh trees from Punt. She commissioned hundreds of building projects throughout Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Her buildings were considered to be much grander than those of her predecessors, and many of her successors attempted to claim them as their own. Hatshepsut’s greatest building accomplishment was a mortuary temple built in a complex at Deir el-Bahri, located on the West bank of the Nile. This is considered one of the architectural marvels of ancient Egypt.

The Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri

The Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. Image source: Wikipedia

Twenty-two years after taking her reign as pharaoh, in around 1458 BC, Hatshepsut died, aged in her late 40s. She was buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, in the hills behind Deir el-Bahri. She had her father's sarcophagus relocated into her tomb as well, so they could lie together in death. After her passing, Thutmose III, Hatshepsut's stepson, claimed the role of pharaoh, ruling for 30 years beyond Hatshepsut's death. It was Thutmose III who demanded that evidence of Hatshepsut's rule be eradicated. He arranged for her image as pharaoh to be removed from temples and monuments. It is likely that Thutmose III wanted to remove any evidence that they had been led by a strong female ruler. For this reason, scholars knew very little of Hatshepsut's existence prior to 1822 AD, when the hieroglyphics on the walls of Deir el-Bahri were decoded.

Hatshepsut's son, Thutmose III

Hatshepsut's son, Thutmose III, tried to have all traces of her wiped from history. Image source: Wikipedia

Upon discovery of her existence, there was much speculation and wonder as to the location of her remains. In 1902, archeologist Howard Carter discovered Hatshepsut's sarcophagus, but it was empty. Many years later, Dr. Zahi Hawass began searching for Hatshepsut's mummy. First, he searched her tomb in the Valley of the Kings, known as KV20. This is the same tomb that had been cleared many years earlier by Howard Carter. When he did not find anything, he moved onto another tomb, located at Deir el-Bahari, near Hatshepsut's famous mortuary temple, known as DB320. While this tomb did not date back to Hatshepsut's reign, it was a tomb where many royal mummies had been reburied after their tombs had been ransacked during the 21st and 22nd Dynasties. While Thutmose I, II, and III were all discovered at DB320, Hatshepsut was nowhere to be found.

Dr. Hawass visited one final tomb within the Valley of the Kings, known as KV60, where two mummies had been discovered by Howard Carter. After several tests and scans, with no answers, Dr. Hawass was unsure how to proceed with identifying the mummies. He then remembered a small box which he thought might contain a decomposed internal organ. Upon scanning the box, he discovered the organ was accompanied by a tooth. The researchers reviewed the scans of the female mummies and discovered that one of the mummies had an empty tooth socket, to which the discovered tooth was a perfect match. Further testing was conducted, and through the power of modern forensic science, the mummy was positively identified as Hatshepsut in 2007.

Remains of Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut

Remains of Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut Identified (28/05/07): A DNA test of a single tooth was key to solving one of the greatest mysteries of ancient Egypt. Image source .

The identification of Hatshepsut's mummy was an archaeological wonder. While her son had gone to great lengths to erase Hatshepsut from memory and from the pages of history, modern science has ensured that this did not happen.

Featured image: Hatshepsut by catch22/deviantart

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By M R Reese

Hatshepsut & Moses

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