

MUSEUM REVIEW

Hatshepsut and Her World

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HATSHEPSUT: FROM QUEEN TO PHARAOH. THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 28 March–9 July 2006, and at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 27 August–31 December 2006, organized by Catharine Roehrig.

HATSHEPSUT: FROM QUEEN TO PHARAOH, edited by Catharine Roehrig, with Renée Dreyfus and Cathleen Keller. Pp. 340, figs. 112. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Yale University Press 2005. \$50 (paper); \$65 (cloth). ISBN 1-58839-173-6 (paper); 1-58839-172-8 (cloth).

Hatshepsut, the famous Egyptian queen who became pharaoh, ruled during the early 18th Dynasty (ca. 1479–1485 B.C.E.) of the New Kingdom. Her career, first as regent for her stepson/nephew Thutmose III and her later joint rule with him, lasted less than 15 years, but it is a reign that is writ large in history. The character and motivations of this woman have been the issue of speculation ever since there was a discipline of Egyptology. In the mid 20th century, the usually sober *Cambridge Ancient History* painted her in misogynistic terms as “conniving,” as a “shrewd, ambitious and unscrupulous woman,” and as the “detested stepmother.” Her assumption of full regency was characterized as “flaunting the royal titulary.”¹ Another standard reference for Egyptian history commented: “It is not to be imagined, however, that even a woman of the most virile character could have attained such a pinnacle of power without masculine support.”²

This subject is a museum director’s dream: an exhibition about a powerful yet misunderstood woman (an Egyptian pharaoh to boot), who left an incredibly rich material legacy and whose history is in dire need of reexamination. And who better to organize such an exhibition than the Metropolitan Museum of Art?³ The institution excavated many of her monuments and houses many of the major artifacts of her era.

Considering the popular and scholarly interest in, and uncertainty about, the events of the period and the allure of the topic (a powerful woman, hints of a sexual relationship, frayed family relations), it is surprising that it took so long for a major reexamination of the era to be mounted. From 1996 to 1998, *Geheimnisvolle Königin Hatshepsut: Ägyptische Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* toured Berlin, Hanover, Munich, and Warsaw. That exhibition consisted of 89 objects drawn from German and Polish museum collections. A smaller

show, *Hatshepsut Königin Ägyptens* (note the clever pun in “Königin”), was mounted in Munich in 1999. It was a heavily historical exhibit that consisted of 24 objects that, with one exception, came from German collections.

Finally, we have an exhaustive presentation, the scale of which is characteristic of the Metropolitan Museum with its tremendous influence and resources. *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh* consists of 200 objects, from small to monumental, drawn from collections throughout the world, including items from Cairo. There are few objects from the era that the curators did not include. This is truly an ambitious and ultimately successful exhibition.

The museum’s Egyptian department and its designers give visitors a preview of the exhibition’s glories before they even enter the galleries. A colossal granite sphinx (fig. 1) from the joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III stands in the lobby, enticing museum-goers to the show.

The exhibition is arranged in a series of nine large rooms in the vast Tisch galleries. The dark blue introductory chamber highlights a sole spectacular object: a granite statue of the queen in her guise as king (cat. no. 94). The wall text gives historical background on Hatshepsut, on that period in Egypt (“the pyramids were more than one thousand years old”), and on female kings in other eras, and introduces the woman and her career up to the time of her coronation as senior co-ruler with her nephew Thutmose III. Although there is a limit to the amount of text that can be included on gallery walls, the omission of any reference to the proscription of the queen in the sole reign of Thutmose III—such an important part of the story—seems odd, for this is one of the great riddles and well-known controversies in Egyptology. After the death of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III ordered that monuments showing her as king be effaced and recarved with the name of her father or husband, Thutmose I and II. Traditionally, it was assumed that these acts of *damnatio memoriae* took place when Thutmose came to the throne as sole king, and that they were in retribution for having to share the throne with Hatshepsut. However, over the last two decades, this issue has been examined, and the exhibition (and even more so the catalogue) is the perfect vehicle for making this recent and highly technical research accessible. The reinterpretation is based primarily on the research of the late Charles Nims and on the more recent work of Peter Dorman, who notes that the erasures were not undertaken early in the reign of Thutmose III but at least 20 years after Hatshepsut’s death, which implies a different motivation. Further, not all images of Hatshepsut were altered, only those that showed her as

¹ Hayes 1973, 317–18.

² Gardiner 1961, 184.

³ Together with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



Fig. 1. Colossal sphinx of Hatshepsut, early 18th Dynasty, granite (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund 1931, 31.3.166).

king. Although there does not seem to be a simple explanation for the actions of Thutmose III, Dorman cautiously suggests in a catalogue essay that the deliberate rewriting of history may have been either a response to the “conceptual and practical complications”⁴ of a female king (although she was not the first or the last female to claim the throne) or an attempt to eliminate references to the potentially competing Ahmoside line to the throne (but as Dorman further notes, there seems to have been no Ahmoside contender). The introduction to the exhibition would have benefited from at least a hint of these issues.

The introduction segues into the first gallery, which is devoted to the predecessors of Hatshepsut and the formative art of the time. Here, the visitor is introduced to the historic events of the Second Intermediate period and early New Kingdom (ca. 1650–1550 B.C.E.), with the expulsion of the Hyksos and the rise of the Ahmoside and Thutmoside lines. Objects from a woman’s burial of the later Second Intermediate period demonstrate the richness of elite tombs of the period immediately preceding Hatshepsut. The gallery also contains a wealth of early 18th-Dynasty sculpture, including the bust of a queen (cat. no. 8); the seated statue of Thutmose II’s mother, Queen Mutnofret (cat. no. 9); and small-scale statues of men and women (cat. nos. 17–20). All of these

give excellent background on the art of the era. Among the spectacular pieces is a limestone relief of Hatshepsut’s husband, Thutmose II, kneeling before the god Amun (cat. no. 38). This enormous relief (107 x 109 cm) from the Open Air Museum at Karnak is just one of the little-known masterpieces of Thutmoside sculpture.

The next gallery has no text panel to identify its theme. Presumably it continues from the previous room, although the spaces are not the same color. The gallery is dominated by the famed sculpture of a very feminine representation of Hatshepsut (fig. 2) but one expressed in terms of male iconography. Unlike earlier statues that show her in this same pose wearing a female garment, her garb here is male (she wears the royal *shendyt* kilt with a bull’s tail between her legs). Yet the delicate proportions of her heart-shaped face and the subtle but obvious breasts mark the figure as a woman. This same ambiguity is evident in the texts on the front of the throne that simply add feminine endings to male kingly titles, employing “Lady of the Two Lands” for the traditional “Lord of the Two Lands.” A final assertion of kingly power is represented by the Nine Bows, the traditional enemies of Egypt, under her feet—a detail that was not included in her images as queen. Other objects include a handsome chair of Renisenb (cat. no. 192), a block statue (cat. no. 53) of

⁴Roehrig 2005, 269.

Satepihu on loan from the University of Pennsylvania, and other small objects from early in Hatshepsut's era. Visitors with little background in the history of the 18th Dynasty might be puzzled by the label for the fine *shawabti* of Puyemre (cat. no. 51), which refers to hacking out the name of Hatshepsut in the reign of Thutmose III, because this issue is not mentioned earlier. The same minor discontinuity is apparent on the label for the statue of Senenmut (cat. no. 64), which refers to the proscription of his memory.

The subsequent gallery discusses Hatshepsut's rise to kingly status as a legitimate ruler and her reign in an era of prosperity, peace, and creativity. Objects reflect mainly daily life: two metal jars on stands (cat. nos. 177–78), pottery vessels in the form of baskets (cat. nos. 157–59), a small, multicompartiment box (cat. no. 187) (fig. 3), and a linen storage chest of Perpauti (cat. no. 25) painted with scenes of him with his family. There are some fascinating objects in this gallery, such as a section of the Book of the Dead of Maiherperi (cat. no. 35). A Nubian nobleman raised in the Egyptian court, Maiherperi was buried in the Valley of the Kings. A highlight of the gallery is the spectacular gold dish of General Djehuti (cat. no. 176).

The next gallery, painted a dramatic dark blue, is dedicated to the family and career of Senenmut, "The Great Steward of Amun" and tutor to Neferture, Hatshepsut's daughter. Upon entering, one sees material from the tomb of Senenmut's parents, Hatnefer and Ramose. The Metropolitan Museum's discovery of the tomb in 1936 is a fascinating story related in the wall text. The objects include Hatnefer's chair (cat. no. 47) (fig. 4) and heart scarab (cat. no. 41), which was certainly a royal gift, judging from its exquisite quality (even though it was reinscribed for Hatnefer). Other touching personal items such as a razor and cosmetic containers are also exhibited.

Senenmut's role in the reign of Hatshepsut and the nature of his relationship with her have long been debated. In popular accounts, Senenmut is rumored to be the female pharaoh's lover, or at least a palace schemer and manipulator, and an evil genius who was behind Hatshepsut's rise to power. This historical fantasy is not addressed in the exhibition, but it is eloquently discussed by Keller in the catalogue essay, "Hatshepsut's Reputation in History." The scholarly uncertainty concerning the exact role that he played in the conception of the royal temple at Deir el-Bahri is reflected in both the show and the catalogue. The text panels state, "It may also have been Senenmut who conceived Hatshepsut's exquisite temple at Deir el-Bahri," and the catalogue notes, "it was he who provided the inspiration for this monument."⁵ But elsewhere one reads, "The common claim that Senenmut was the architect of Deir el-Bahri . . . is otherwise unsubstantiated."⁶ What is clearer is the man's creativity and his access to the royal workshops, as demonstrated by the many statues of himself that he commissioned and that introduce entirely new compositional types: he holds the royal princess (cat. nos. 60–1), he presents a *sistrum* (the monumental Cairo statue [cat. no. 66] specifically states that it was a royal gift), he poses with his surveyor's cord (cat. no. 65). There are also statues that incorporate a cryptographic writing of Hatshepsut's name (cat. nos. 70–2). In the inscription on one statue,



Fig. 2. Hatshepsut as king, early 18th Dynasty, crystalline (indurated) limestone (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund 1929, 29.3.2).

Senenmut boasts that the sculptures represent "Images which I have made from the devising of my own heart and from my own labor; they have not been found in the writings of the ancestors."

The assembling of virtually all the known statues of Senenmut in one gallery is reason enough to see and love this exhibition. As a bonus, the conservators in New York have cleaned decades of Cairo grime off the monumental statue, exposing its beautiful color. The wall text here finally addresses the issue of the effacing of his name that has spawned so many dramatic historical reconstructions of this era. The grouping of Senenmut statues also gives the viewer the rare opportunity to compare sculptural representations of a single individual executed over a short time span. One may note variations in the shape of Senenmut's face: the larger statues are generally broader through the cheekbones than the smaller examples. Other variables are the style of the wig and the presence or absence of fat rolls on an otherwise slender body, an indication of exalted status rather than actual body type. Such elements are due to the symbolic nature of Egyptian art. These are not portraits of the man but eternal

⁵Roehrig 2005, 113.

⁶Roehrig 2005, 108.



Fig. 3. Box with two sliding lids, early 18th Dynasty, cypress, boxwood (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund 1936, 36.3.199).

images intended to convey information about his status and his relationship to the royal family.

The following room, in a less intense mood, details the famed funerary temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri and how it relates to royal ritual and popular cult activities. The text also explains how the design of Deir el-Bahri is derived from the nearby temple of Mentuhotep II (the founder of the Middle Kingdom). Through emulation of architectural styles, Hatshepsut sought to reinforce her own position as king. A kneeling statue of Hatshepsut as king (cat. no. 93) is illustrative of the many statues that flanked the processional way (this example is from the middle terrace). The gallery also contains a selection of one of the royal foundation deposits (consisting of scarabs, beads, amulets, and model tools [cat. nos. 75–7]) that established the identity of the ruler who commissioned the structure. The relevance of the temple for the local elite is indicated by objects from a tomb of a woman who was buried at the base of the cliffs near the temple, as well as by objects from a nearby funeral deposit. Beautiful items, such as a group of blue faience “marsh bowls” (cat. nos. 101–5), many of which were votive offerings to Hathor of Deir el-Bahri, are presented. The connection of the selection of figure vases (cat. nos. 161–68), the relief from Elephantine (cat. no. 49) showing the goddess Anukis, and a fragment of a Karnak obelisk (cat. no. 78) to the site of Deir el-Bahri is not immediately apparent.

The following gallery is dominated by three great sphinxes: two of Hatshepsut and one of a queen of Thutmose III (cat. nos. 11, 88–9). The labels underscore the irony that those of Hatshepsut were preserved through their destruction; the pieces were later recovered for reconstruction by the Metropolitan Museum.

Gallery 6 addresses the relationship between Hatshepsut and her father, Thutmose I. She claimed the right to the throne through him, a succession that was justified by an oracle and furthered by her claim to be descended from Amun. One aspect of the story is told by the great granite false door of Thutmose I (cat. no. 87) from the upper terrace of Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri. It is displayed in a recess that imitates the chapel in which it was found. In the recess for Hatshepsut’s image is a granite statue of the female

king (wearing female garb and no false beard [cat. no. 61]), which may have been the focus of cult worship at the temple. Opposite are reliefs of Thutmose I (with splendid carving and pigment [cat. no. 83]); one of Hatshepsut recarved as Thutmose II, presumably upon the order of Thutmose III (cat. no. 84); and one of Thutmose III (cat. no. 85), which neatly summarizes the relationship of these individuals.

Gallery 7 focuses on the foreign wives of Thutmose III and the material from their shared tomb, as well as other examples of contemporary jewelry not associated with that find. Most stunning is the well-known diadem with gazelles (cat. no. 113), which, according to the label and catalogue, was worn by a woman who participated in rituals associated with the goddess Hathor. It is not clear why the statue of Hatshepsut presenting a *nemset* vessel (cat. no. 91) is located in this gallery, or how the headrest (cat. no. 190) and the fittings from a bed (cat. no. 191) relate to the theme of this section. The wall text that explains the theme of the gallery is a little too inconspicuous and therefore easily overlooked.

The small Gallery 8 is painted an appealing blue. The text describes the transition from Hatshepsut’s original cliff tomb to her final tomb in the Valley of the Kings (to show her kingly status). The gallery is dominated by the granite sarcophagus of Hatshepsut recarved for Thutmose I (cat. no. 108) and small objects associated with the tomb, such as two alabaster jars (cat. no. 106) probably originally intended for the royal tomb but recovered with the material from the foreign wives. Objects with a purely funerary function (gold sandals and finger and toe stalls [cat. nos. 134, 135a–b] are also shown). The association with the tomb of a beautiful jasper gaming piece in the form of a lion’s head (cat. no. 107) is not explained on the label or in the catalogue. A map showing the location of the tomb and/or a plan of the tomb would have helped place the artifacts in context.

The final gallery is devoted to the successful reign of Thutmose III and the debt he owed to the tutelage of Hatshepsut. Yet later in his reign, he chose to attack monuments that perpetuated her memory. Physical attacks were not limited to her own monuments but also included those around her, as documented by the statue of the official, Ahmose (cat. no. 198), whose inscriptions have been altered (the name Thutmose I or II was substituted for the name of the female pharaoh). A large case heaped with smashed pieces of Hatshepsut’s statues (not listed in the catalogue) is a vivid illustration of the destruction of her monuments. It is an intriguing jumble of painted and carved fragments, some of which can be identified as parts of an ear, nose, or crown. The large-format photographs of the Metropolitan Museum’s excavation of the fragments at Deir el-Bahri evoke the scale and difficulties of the work and the fury of the ancient destruction.

This is an excellent and comprehensive exhibition. Few of the major monuments from the era, large or small, are omitted. The spacing of the cases is generous, and most objects can be viewed in the round. A significant number of the large sculptures and reliefs are not in cases, which allows uncompromised viewing. The lighting (by Clint Ross Collier and Rich Lichte) is arranged well. The viewer casts no irritating shadows on the labels or cases. The designer, Daniel Kershaw, has restrained himself to just two wall colors, gray and blue, that effectively mark the transition between galleries without creating a jarring contrast.



Fig. 4. Chair from the tomb of Hatnefer, early 18th Dynasty, boxwood, cypress, ebony, linen cord (courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund 1936, 36.3.152).

Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh is presented as an art and archaeological exhibition, and without the excellent catalogue in hand, most visitors may not be aware of the tremendous amount of new scholarship that the show reflects. Among the topics addressed in the catalogue's short essays are new perspectives on the relationship of Hatshepsut and Senenmut, the monuments of Hatshepsut, and, most importantly, a new and less hysterical reading of the relationship of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. Some notable sections discuss the temple of Thutmose III at Deir el-Bahri (written by Jadwiga Lipinska, who oversaw their excavation), the queen's complex (by Dieter Arnold, a prominent architectural historian, Egyptologist, and curator in the Metropolitan Museum's Egyptian department), the statuary of Hatshepsut and Senenmut (by Keller), and the proscription of Hatshepsut (by Dorman). The catalogue distills this highly academic and technical research for a more general audience, making it an important new resource for early 18th-Dynasty history and art.

This is an ambitious, exhaustive, and exhilarating exhibition that will have wide appeal—from die-hard fans of Egypt

to those who simply love beautiful antiquities and are not so concerned with the historical issues. It is difficult to imagine that this amount of material pertaining to Hatshepsut and her contemporaries will ever again be compiled. The catalogue is an important piece of scholarship that will do much to remove many of the colorful misconceptions of the era.

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