As a King

Marian Young

Traditionally in Ancient Egypt, men and women were depicted differently from each other in many ways. Women were typically portrayed in lighter skin tones such as white or yellow, while men are portrayed in red. Men were often depicted in active roles, while women were depicted in passive rolls. This difference between the genders is adhered to from the Old Kingdom in Ancient Egypt through to the New Kingdom.[1] There are relatively few examples left to us of art from this – century spanning – period of time and place depicting an individual with both male and female characteristics, or characteristics of the gender opposite we know them to be genetically. This standardization in depiction is a useful tool for a society that is not widely literate,[2] so as not to confuse the interpretation of information being disseminated in the art. This is called an artistic canon.[3] One of the most striking figures of the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt that does not adhere to the typical art canon is that of Hatshepsut. "She was the fifth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty during the period known as the New Kingdom (c. 1570 to c. 1069 BCE) and regarded as one of the most prosperous eras of the Egyptian Empire"[4]. Hatshepsut used the title of and depictions of herself as a king to control the narrative of power during her life and protect her country from instability. Her nephew/stepson, Thutmose III, destroyed these images to change the narrative and take power away from his aunt/stepmother. The surviving records of King Hatshepsut, as well as the recorded destruction of her kingly image, demonstrates how narratives of power can be shifted and adapted to suit the narrative of those in positions of authority.

Hatshepsut was the eldest daughter of King Thutmose I and married to her half-brother Thutmose II. Thutmose II inherited his father's throne in c. 1492 BCE. Thutmose II and Hatshepsut had no sons together to inherit the throne when Thutmose II died quite early in his reign. However, Thutmose II did have a son by a lesser wife, Thutmose III[5]. Hatshepsut acted as regent for

[1] Uroš Matić. "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79, no. 3 (2016): 174–83.
[2] Betsy Bryan. "Memory and Knowledge in Egyptian Tomb Painting." *Studies in the History of Art* 74 (2009): 18–39.
[3] Davies, Penelope J. E., Walter B. Denny, et al. Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition. 1. 8th ed. Vol. 1. Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010.
[4] Joshua Mark. "Hatshepsut". *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified October 19, 2016.
[5] Joyce Tyldesley. "Hatshepsut." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 8, 2022. .

her stepson/nephew after the death of her husband, as Thutmose III was in his infancy. However, in a relatively brief period, Hatshepsut would name herself Pharoah of Egypt[6]. Interestingly, it was not position of aunt and stepmother to Thutmose III or even her position as wife and sister to Thutmose II that Hatshepsut used to legitimize her claim to rule, but rather, "Hatshepsut legitimized her rule through ties to her parents, presenting herself as heir to her father the king"[7]. Though she was making decisions of state immediately after her husband's death, early images of her in power still depicted her in female garb. She did not immediately attempt to change her image and deviate from artistic canon. However, as time went on images of Hatshepsut started to shift. From the traditional male outfits and the particular crown she was depicted wearing, as well as the suffixes used for her name, the artistic depictions of Hatshepsut, and her narrative of power, shifted from Hatshepsut being regent for her infant nephew to being his co-ruler or King Hatshepsut.[8]

There is little to no evidence to suggest that Hatshepsut assuming the title of King was a mad grab for power when she took over the ruling of the kingdom. Ruling a country with her infant nephew/stepson, Thutmose III, on the throne would be imaginably difficult as she tried to unite a country and protect it from foreign entities. "Like any other Egyptian king, and perhaps more so because of her unorthodox rise to power, Hatshepsut had to prove her fitness to rule."[9], as well as her ability to protect her country and the royal blood line. A blood line that was of huge significance and importance to maintain. Vanessa Davies, in her journal article *Hatshepsut's Use of Tuthmosis III in Her Program of Legitimation* stated:

> …at the beginning of the reign of the young Tuthmosis III, the queen Hatshepsut made the decisions of state on behalf of the king.[14*] When she subsequently claimed kingship alongside Tuthmosis III, one can assume that her decision-making capabilities did not diminish. Indeed, if any change occurred at all, she would have had more authority in issuing orders and authorizing works throughout the kingdom.[10]

---

[6] Mark. "Hatshepsut".
[7] Vanessa Davies. "Hatshepsut's Use of Tuthmosis III in Her Program of Legitimation." Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 41: 55–66.
[8] Davies. "Hatshepsut's Use of Tuthmosis III in Her Program of Legitimation."
[9] Pearce Paul Creasman. 2014. "Hatshepsut and the Politics of Punt." *The African Archaeological Review* 31 (3): 395–405.
[10] Davies. "Hatshepsut's Use of Tuthmosis III in Her Program of Legitimation."
*The footnote number 14 contained in the above block quote, is a citation within the source itself. It was not used as a reference for this paper, as the source was not in a language spoken by this author.

In order to prevent an image of weakness in the kingdom and in herself as a ruler, King Hatshepsut did not rely on adapting her depictions in art to reflect a more masculine ruler. During Hatshepsut's reign she ordered successful military campaigns and trade exploration into the oft debated Punt[11]. It is likely that images depicting Hatshepsut as a man were not in an effort to take power away from her nephew, but to demonstrate the idea that a woman in her own right can be just as powerful as a man when ruling. An image which was likely sorely needed with a young child on the throne.

Whatever Hatshepsut's intention, in being co-ruler or depicting herself as king, her legacy did not last. In the late stages of the reign of Thutmose III, after the death of his aunt, he began a campaign to remove and destroy images of his aunt as king. This attempt was thorough, but ultimately unsuccessful as we still have some images of her as king to this day. It is possible that it is, in part, thanks to this attempted removal that we have such well preserved statues of King Hatshepsut. "William Hayes and Herbert Winlock, who excavated her funerary temple in the 1920s… discovered a pit full of smashed statues of the pharaoh"[12], though the statues themselves were in pieces, the pieces were relatively well protected in the pit from elements, vandalism, and other misfortunes that have befallen much of the statuary of this time. Unfortunately for historical record, "Hatshepsut's name and images were chiseled off the walls and she was excluded from the official history that now ran without any co-regency from Thutmose II to Thutmose III."[13]. There are many reasons that could have prompted Thutmose III to remove visual record of Hatshepsut's kingship. Most historical sources prior to the 1990's have argued that the reason for the destruction is power. It stands to reason however, that in order for Thutmose III to be using the destruction of his aunt's image to solidify and/or emphasize his own power and authority, he would not have waited so long into his reign to do so. In addition, the images of Hatshepsut that he attempted to eradicate, were those that showed her in male and kingly garb. There are still intact examples of Hatshepsut not destroyed by Thutmose III that show her in feminine garb from when she was First Among Queens (the title given to her by her husband).[14] Other sources suggest that Thutmose III may have been expressing a personal dislike of his aunt with extreme prejudice. However, I would

[11] Creasman. "Hatshepsut and the Politics of Punt"
[12] Pac Pobric. Unearthing Hatshepsut, Egypt's Most Powerful Female Pharaoh. Metmuseum.org. (2018, January 22).
[13] Tyldesley. "Hatshepsut: The Female Pharaoh."
[14] Tyldesley. "Hatshepsut: The Female Pharaoh."

again say that this is unlikely for the same reason. Whatever Thutmose's reasoning or intention, after the removal and destruction of kingly images and references to Hatshepsut which violated accepted art canon, we see very little substantial evidence of any king or queen attempt this drastic of a deviation again.

Keeping to an artistic canon can be an important tool of standardization for communicating information. When artistic canon is deviated from the importance of the information or narrative being conveyed increases not only to the people of the time, but to historians of today. It is likely that we will never know how many individuals deviated from the artistic and linguistic canon throughout history. Those individuals that we have record of doing so however (Hatshepsut, Nero, or Avalokiteshvara to name very few), are often powerful figures of history. Despite her successor's attempts to control the narratives of the time, as a powerful woman of history, Hatshepsut stands not as a queen, but as a king.

Bibliography

Bryan, Betsy. "Memory and Knowledge in Egyptian Tomb Painting." *Studies in the History of Art* 74, (2009): 18 - 39. Accessed September 20, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42622714.

Cooney, Kathlyn. "Changing Burial Practices at the End of the New Kingdom: Defensive Adaptations in Tomb Commissions, Coffin Commissions, Coffin Decoration, and Mummification." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 47, (2011): 3 - 44. Accessed September 20, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24555384

Creasman, Pearce Paul. 2014. "Hatshepsut and the Politics of Punt." *The African Archaeological Review* 31 (3): 395–405. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.ardc.talonline.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.43916715&site=eds-live.

Davies, Penelope J. E., Walter B. Denny, Frima Fox Hofrichter, Joseph Jacobs, David L. Simon, Ann M. Roberts, H. W. Janson, and Anthony F. Janson. *Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition*. 1. 8th ed. Vol. 1. Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010.

Davies, Vanessa. "Hatshepsut's Use of Tuthmosis III in Her Program of Legitimation." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 41: 55–66. Accessed on October 24th, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/20297187.

Goelet, Ogden. "Nudity In Ancient Egypt." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 12, no. 2 (1993): 20–31. Accessed September 22, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23202932.

HIlliard, Kristina and Kate Wurtzel. "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case of Hatshepsut." *Art Education* 62, no. 3 (2009): 25 - 31. Accessed September 21, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20694765.

Mark, Joshua. "Hatshepsut". *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified October 19, 2016. Accessed October 6, 2022. https://www.worldhistory.org/hatshepsut/.

Matić, Uroš. "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79, no. 3 (2016): 174–83. Accessed October 5, 2022. https://doi.org/10.5615/neareastarch.79.3.0174.

Pobric, Pac. *Unearthing Hatshepsut, Egypt's Most Powerful Female Pharaoh*. Metmuseum.org. (2018, January 22). https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/collection-insights/2018/hatshepsut-female-pharaoh-egypt

Tyldesley, Joyce. 2015. “Hatshepsut: The Female Pharaoh.” *Ancient Egypt Magazine* 15 (6): 52–55. Accessed on October 6, 2022. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.ardc.talonline.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=103389003&site=eds-live.

Tyldesley, Joyce. "Hatshepsut." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 8, 2022. Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hatshepsut.