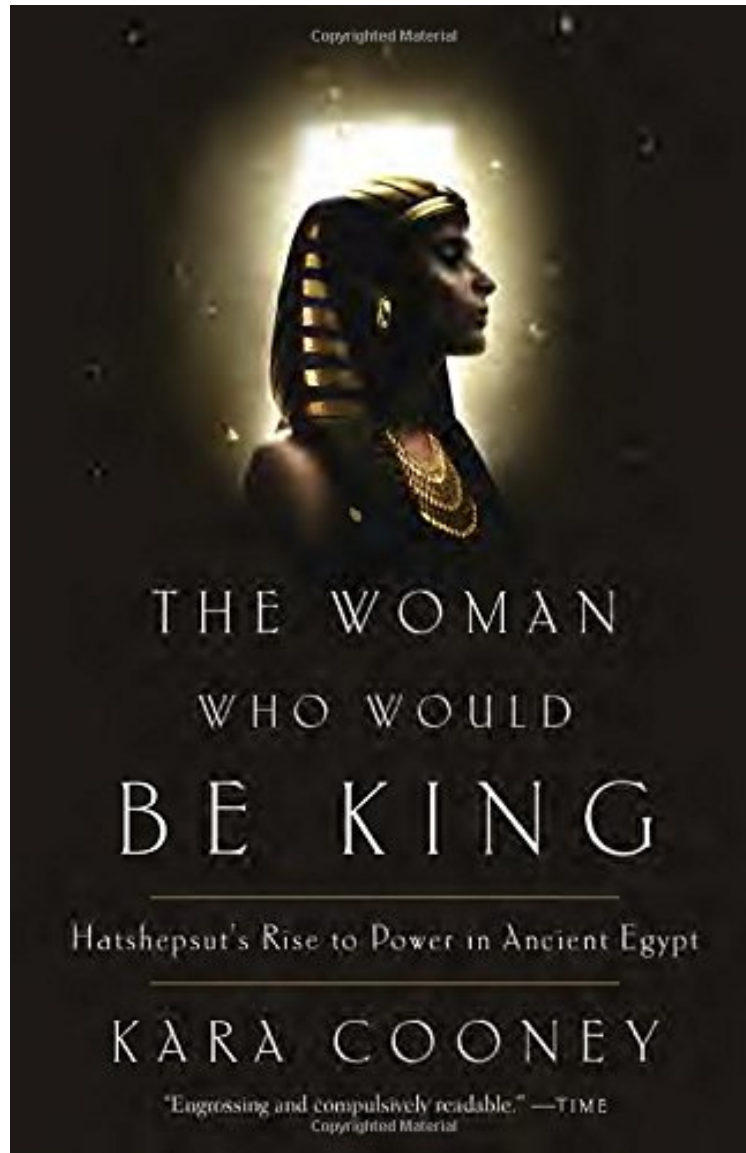


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# The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt

*Kara Cooney*

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**Kara Cooney : The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt:

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An engrossing biography of the longest-reigning female pharaoh in Ancient Egypt and the story of her audacious rise to power. Hatshepsutthe daughter of a general who usurped Egypt's throneas expected to bear the sons who would legitimize the reign of her fathers family. Her failure to produce a male heir, however, paved the way for her improbable rule as a cross-dressing king. At just over twenty, Hatshepsut out-maneuvered the mother of Thutmose III, the infant king, for a seat on the throne, and ascended to the rank of pharaoh.Shrewdly operating the levers of power to emerge as Egypt's second female pharaoh, Hatshepsut was a master strategist, cloaking her political power plays in the veil of piety and sexual reinvention. She successfully negotiated a path from the royal nursery to the very pinnacle of authority, and her reign saw one of Ancient Egypt's most prolific building periods.Constructing a rich narrative history using the artifacts that remain, noted Egyptologist Kara Cooney offers a remarkable interpretation of how Hatshepsut rapidly but methodically consolidated powerand why she fell from public favor just as quickly. The Woman Who Would Be King traces the unconventional life of an almost-forgotten pharaoh and explores our complicated reactions to women in power.

Engrossing and compulsively readable. TIMEThe life of Hatshepsut, Egypt's second female pharaoh, was replete with opulent living, complex royal bloodlines, and sexual energy; in short, the kind of drama that fuels Ancient Egypt's enduring appealFrom Hatshepsut's self-perception, political prowess, and lifestyle emerge an image of the ultimate working mother and a compelling insight into ancient gender roles. Publishers WeeklyCooney does a fantastic job of breathing new life into her subject and showing the woman who dared to keep herself and her nephew Thutmose III on the throne, as well as what led Hatshepsut's name to be tarnished and nearly erased from history. The book will be of great interest to those fascinated by ancient Egypt, history, and women's history.Library JournalThis biography could only be based on conjecture and guesswork, but the addition of expertise makes it well worth reading. The author's Egyptology background provides the nitty-gritty of daily life and animates this king (at the time, there was no word for 'queen') Cooney's detective work finally brings out the story of a great woman's reign.Kirkus sEgyptologist Cooney peels back the layers of the life of Hatshepsut, Egypt's second female pharaoh, providing a multidimensional portrait of a woman of strength, intelligence, and substance.BooklistHighly engrossing... [an] informed-by-expertise, compellingly written conjecture that will draw curious readers in with its vivid depiction of life in Ancient Egypt and a truly remarkable woman.BookPageThe Woman Who Would Be King is a fascinating look at one of the most formidable and successful women in all of ancient history. Before Cleopatra there was Hatshepsut. Now, thanks to Kara Cooney, the real Hatshepsut stands before us in all her glory. For the first time we have a full-length biography of her that is not only a great scholarly work but also a marvelous read. Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* and *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*The compelling biography of a fascinating woman: the daughter, wife and stepmother of kings, who defied tradition to rule the most powerful nation in the Mediterranean world as pharaoh. Cooney tells her tale with authority, sensitivityand imagination. It is a tale that deserves to be told. Joyce Tyldesley, author of *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* and *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh*What Stacy Schiff did for Cleopatra, Kara Cooney has done for Hatshepsut. An absolutely fantastic read about one of the most powerful Pharaoh-Queens in ancient Egypt. Completely unputdownable! Michelle Moran, bestselling author of *Nefertiti*The story of Hatshepsut, the woman who ruled Egypt as Pharaoh, is an amazing tale and Dr. Cooney tells it in a very personal way. Readers are going to love this version!Bob Brier, author of *The Murder of Tutankhamen*This biography of Hatshepsut is an ideal blend of historical analysis and an imaginative story. With her unique ability to address both the general public and scholars alike, Cooney's narrative flows as if it were a novel, but at the same time illuminates the historical, economic, social, and religious context of Hatshepsut's world, and that of the people surrounding her. The reader is given a glimpse into a vibrant ancient worldone that we oftentimes forget about in the midst of all the granite and mudbrick that remains today.Writing a biography of a woman about whom there is little archival information is difficult, to say the least. Nevertheless, Cooney presents a seamless picture of Hatshepsut's life and her rise to power in ancient Egypt. Professor

Kathleen Sheppard, author of *The Life of Margaret Alice Murray: A Woman's Work in Archaeology* Kara Cooney has written a lively, engaging, historically accurate account of one of the most controversial of Egypt's female pharaohs, Hatshepsut. Weaving together evidence from historical texts, the queen's monuments, and archaeological finds, Cooney presents an accessible story of Hatshepsut's rise to power until her demise, bringing ancient Egypt, its people, and its rulers to life. A fun and interesting read! Salima Ikram, Professor of Egyptology, American University in Cairo

From the Hardcover edition. About the Author KARA COONEY is an associate professor of Egyptian art and architecture at UCLA in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. In 2005, she was co-curator of Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Cooney produced a comparative archaeology series entitled *Out of Egypt*, which aired on the Discovery Channel and is streaming on Netflix.

From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. One Divine Origins

The Nile, lifeblood of the world's first great civilization, flowed calmly outside her palace window. The inundation had receded, and she could see the farmers readying themselves in the predawn hour, milking their cows, getting their sacks of emmer and barley seed ready to cast upon the rich black earth. In a few hours, the air would fill with the sounds of men shouting, children laughing, and animals bleating as they ran behind the plows, treading upon the scattered seeds and driving them into the soil. But for now, the sun was yet to crest the horizon. There was still time before she would be called to awaken the god in the temple. The girl dismissed her handmaiden to have a moment of privacy for herself. Hatshepsut was around sixteen years old, and her life's purpose was over. Her husband Aakheperenre Thutmose, Lord of the Two Lands, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, may he live, was gravely ill, despite his youth. He and Hatshepsut had failed to produce an heir. She had only one daughter, Nefrure, who was strong and healthy but just two years old--not old enough to marry, reproduce, or forge the alliances that princesses so often do. Hatshepsut herself was the daughter of the previous king and was married to her father's successor--her own younger brother. She now sat as the king's highest-ranking wife. Her bloodline was impeccable: daughter of the king, sister of the king, wife of the king. Her biggest failing was not giving birth to a son: the heir to the throne would not come from her. Why had Amen-Re, the king of the gods, not blessed Egypt with a son of pure royal blood? Why had he only given Hatshepsut a daughter? A man could spread his seed and produce offspring in profusion. A woman's womb could give but one child a year. And Hatshepsut's womb had been blessed only with a girl--or at least Nefrure was the only child that had lived. Her husband did have some boys in the royal nursery--but from other mothers. The kingship should always pass from father to son; however, these boys were mere babies. The king had only been on the throne for three short years, not long enough to sire a stable of healthy potential heirs. And worse than that, the mothers of these children were nothing more than Ornaments of the King--pretty young things brought in to arouse the king's pleasure, with faces and bodies that would excite even the most sickly of monarchs. These girls had no family connections of any importance. How could one of these women be elevated to King's Mother? The idea was insupportable. Hatshepsut understood that she wielded great power as queen. Her husband had never been in good health. His kingship had never been expected, but his two elder brothers died before they could take the throne. Thus Thutmose was not trained for kingship as he should have been. When they married, it was Hatshepsut who advised her brother on which officials to trust, which families to avoid, and how to make his mark as a monarch. It still seemed to her as if he had been plucked from the royal nursery one day, called to be king, to his own horror as much as anyone else's. The heartbreaking death of one brother after another had brought the crown to young Thutmose and the queenship to Hatshepsut. From as far back as she could remember, Hatshepsut understood that she was training for a life of great power and influence. But now it was all over. With no direct connection to the next king, she would be shut out of worldly affairs, her life's journey confined within luxurious palace walls. But Hatshepsut still walked the halls of power as the God's Wife of Amen. And she sensed that it might be difficult for people to support the claim of an infant to the crowns of the Two Lands. Would their subjects watch passively as a young prince without connections, the son of one of the King's Beauties, was propped up as king? Such a vulnerable monarch could only be maintained if Hatshepsut stood behind him as his regent and made the decisions; otherwise, all would be lost; her father's Thutmose line would be broken after only two generations. Many great men of the court were emphasizing their connections back to the Ahmoside family--the kings who had ruled before her father--in an attempt to lay claim to the thrones of Upper and Lower Egypt; if the White and Red crowns passed to one of them instead of to a son of her brother, then all that her parents had entrusted to her would be lost. It would be a shameful end to her father's dynasty: dying out after only two Thutmose kings--her father and her brother. Somehow she had to create the circumstances for a third Thutmose king. Hatshepsut was not only the King's Great Wife but also the God's Wife of Amen, and she understood how to use that position. She served as the most important priestess in all of Egypt and had been trained from childhood by Ahmes-Nefertari, the most revered and aged royal queen and priestess in the land. As Hatshepsut prepared for her duties at the temple, she decided to ask the god what to do. She would place the burden in his hands. Somewhere beyond the palace, she heard the beating of drums and the shaking of sistra. It was time to awaken Amen. Hatshepsut hurried into the temple of Ipet-Sut, the Chosen Place for the gods of Thebes, moving through a series of majestic plastered gateways, light-filled courtyards, cool columned halls, and dark, smoke-filled inner sanctuaries, to her own robing rooms. As was her daily custom, she bathed in the sacred lake within the temple walls; the dawn air chilled her flesh. Having been thus purified

in preparation for the morning meal with the god, she was anointed with oils by her Divine Adoratrices and then dressed in a pure linen robe pleated with hundreds of folds pressed into the gauzy fabric. This particular morning was not a festival day, so the temple staff had to complete only the simplest of preparations, which included the slaughter of a bull for the god's meal of a few dozen courses of milk, cakes, breads, and meats. To Hatshepsut, this temple was a second home. She found comfort in the juxtaposition of its frenetic activity against a calm, divine presence. Frantic priests ran through their preparations in the outer rooms as she walked with her ladies deep into the very heart of the temple. The chanting and drumbeats now sounded more distant as she entered the small, dark, windowless sanctuary where Amen dwelled--a room filled with brightly painted relief whose low ceiling and close walls acted as a womb of rebirth for the god. Finally, she stood before the shrine of Amen himself; in the lamplight, gold and lapis gleamed through the incense smoke, a sight that never failed to set her heart pounding. The First High Priest of Amen joined Hatshepsut in the sanctuary while the Second High Priest arranged the sacred texts and instruments. After all the offerings of food and drink were arrayed, the lower-ranked priest retreated from the sanctuary, wiping away his footprints as he backed out of the room. The next moments of the ritual involved waking the vulnerable god from his sleep of death. All but the most important priests waited outside in the offering hall, shaking their sistra and beating drums to calm the god and to keep danger at bay. Only Hatshepsut and the First High Priest were able to witness the god's visage and exposed body. The high priest was the first to approach the shrine of Amen. With cool and reverent hands, he removed veils covering the unknowable and hidden image. The fact that the Great God was an immobile statue of gold did not make him any less real. Closing her eyes, Hatshepsut began the incantations to awaken the god, calling him to his meal. Shuffling behind her, the First High Priest burned wax figures of the enemies of Egypt, so that the sanctuary would be clear of any danger. All around them incense burned in profusion, narrowing her vision in the lamp-lit room to a tunnel with the god's image at the end. Hatshepsut then reached for her golden sistrum, ready to shake the sacred tambourine of Hathor to awaken the god. As she chanted and shook the sistrum, she opened her linen robe, revealing her naked body to the Great God's eyes. Meanwhile, the high priest offered him food, starting with milk, because the newly awakened divinity was as weak as an infant, and then building up to great bloody cuts of freshly sacrificed beef as he gained strength. After the last course, Hatshepsut moved closer to the statue so that the god could complete his morning renewal. As the God's Wife of Amen, Hatshepsut was also known as the God's Hand, the instrument of his sexuality. Reverently, she took his phallus into her palm, allowing him to re-create himself through his own release. Outside the sanctuary, her Divine Adoratrices were chanting, their voices rising higher and faster with the urgency of the moment. She stood before his statue, opened her linen robe wide to reveal her young body, and chanted praise of Amen, King of All the Gods, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, the Lord of All, until she felt his orgasm. Her eyes were closed. Her head was dizzy from the incense, herbs, and chanting. She felt herself fall to the floor before him--something neither she nor the high priest expected. With her eyes closed and her head bowed down before his shrine, she began to talk to her sacred husband, the god Amen-Re. She told him of the king's great sickness and impending death. She told him that a young Horus had not yet been chosen, and that all the candidates were merely nestlings, puppies. She told him that she had served him faithfully and would do as he asked. But all of Egypt would soon be in mourning and silence. She needed to know what to do to maintain the Black Land and Amen's rule in it. She was young, but she could hold and keep power. She needed his guidance. In return she received a revelation. He spoke to her. Amen-Re, Bull of His Mother, Sacred of Arm, told her that she was elemental to the plans in his mind: he had chosen her, Hatshepsut, to carry them out; he would reveal his instructions over time, so she must be always ready, listening. And he told her more, too, secrets of power and fearlessness that left her breathless and weeping. And then the revelation was over. In silence and in secret, her voice shaking with emotion, she gave Amen a secret promise. She would be his instrument. We have no historical record of Hatshepsut's worries and schemes upon the death of her husband, Thutmose II, but by examining her unprecedented choice to ultimately take on the kingship we can imagine how an educated royal woman might have understood and created a place for herself within Egypt's court. Because the Egyptians enacted their politics through the rituals of religion, we cannot know exactly where the affairs of government ended and the ideology started. Hatshepsut herself tells us in many monumental texts that her assumption of power was decreed by Amen-Re, her father. Indeed, she probably believed this to be true. The nature of the evidence from her reign--her temples and monumental texts, the decorated tombs of her courtiers, her tomb in the Valley of the Kings, all her statuary and painted reliefs, even the recent identification of a possible mummy--has encouraged us to understand Hatshepsut's story through the things she built and touched. She did not leave us any letters or diaries. We have little access to the human emotions of her story. The difficult part of a biography of any Egyptian king is that we fall into the gaps of the personal history left untold. If the king was meant to be a living god on earth, then naturally he had to be shrouded in ideology and not defined by his personality, schemes, plans, and ambitions. Unlike the Romans, who produced countless lascivious stories about their own emperors and senators, not to mention Cleopatra, that foreign seductress of good Roman generals, the ancient Egyptians played their politics close to the vest, and for good reason. The system of divine kingship and cosmic order mattered most to them, not the individual person who was king at a particular time. The institution of kingship was unassailable even when the dynasty was in jeopardy, when there was competition for the throne, or when a woman dared to take power. Among

thousands of often meticulous Egyptian historical documents, hardly a single word betrays any human emotion of delight, heartbreak, jealousy, or disgust concerning political events.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian ideological systems took precedence over the emotions, decisions, wants, and desires of any one individual or family. Gossip among the elite and powerful of ancient Egyptian society was almost unheard of, at least in any recorded form that we can decipher. Formality ruled the day. The drama of a public scandal was swept under the rug, never to be entered into official documents or even unofficial letters. The ancient Egyptians never underestimated the power of the written word; anything that smacked of personal politics or individual opinion was excluded from the formal record. It seems that such things could only be spoken of in hushed tones. Ancient Egyptians preserved the "what" of their history in copious texts and monuments for posterity; the "how" and the "why," the messy details of it all, are much harder to get at. And, for our modern minds, it is the recording of events that allows them to become real and valid.<sup>1</sup> There are no texts from Hatshepsut's time--historical, administrative, religious, or otherwise--that betray openly expressed negative feelings toward the ruling king or political activities of officials. We do have veiled references from earlier Middle Kingdom literary texts that obliquely discuss the regicide of Amenemhat I, the instability of the times, and the royal family's inability to trust any of the courtiers and officials. See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 1, The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 135-38. Later legal texts will point toward another regicide, that of Ramses III in Dynasty 20, and the involvement of the royal harem. See Susan Redford, *The Harem Conspiracy: The Murder of Ramesses III* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002). The *Tale of Wenamen*, a text from the end of Dynasty 20 that belongs to both the literary and historical genres, reveals the opinion that the Egyptian king had lost his power over foreign lands and even his own country. See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 2, The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 224-30.