

## The social status of women in ancient Egyptian Art as Queens.



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### الملخص:

*The ancient Egyptians remarkably held long-established concepts that lasted for around three thousand years about everything, but especially about Kingship. Furthermore, when it comes to how they perceived women acquiring authority and leading the empire as a King, different theories come up. The main questions this research is attempting to answer are: were the ancient Egyptian Queens influential? were they valued? And was the way ancient Egyptians perceived the presence of women in ruling power, only exclusive to them? The research presents the extraordinary women who served as reigning Queens, such as Sobekneferu, Twosret, and of course Hatshepsut, who took matters into her own hands and crowned herself as reigning Queen. It also discusses the well-known and great ancient Egyptian Regent and Consort Queens, and it displays some of the artwork/remains that clarify and confirms their stature*

Queens, Egyptian, Art

الكلمات المفتاحية:

## Introduction

From the beginning of the Old Kingdom until the Late Period, the ancient Egyptians remarkably held long-established concepts that lasted for around three thousand years, about everything, but especially about Kingship. The king was the supreme head of all aspects of Egyptian secular life, his word was law. His main tasks, as administrator and defender of Egypt, were to protect his people, to keep the internal and external security, and to maintain order and the general status quo. The importance of the monarch was not limited to the performance of his civil responsibilities as the nominal head of a well-organized army; that was a role that could be done by any competent official. It was the existence of a recognized king on the throne of Egypt that ensured the stability of the Kingdom and was enough to maintain Ma'at, which is a broad concept that could be translated literally as justice or truth and the ideal state of the universe for the ancient Egyptians.

For such a crucial role, there was no official ban on women ruling Egypt, in fact, In the second dynasty and during the reign of King Nynetjer 'it was decided that women might hold kingly office', according to Manetho records. Except that nowhere else is it even briefly acknowledged that such a possibility could arise and one of the main aspects of polygamous royal marriages was to make sure that each king had the highest chance of begetting at least one male heir.

Egyptologists and writers such as: Joyce Tyldesley - British archaeologist; Carolyn Graves-Brown - curator of the Egypt Centre in Swansea University; Barbara Watterson - freelance lecturer in Egyptology; Gay Robins - Art's historian; Kathlyn M. Cooney - Egyptologist, archaeologist, Associate professor at UCLA and many more, have discussed different theories regarding the ancient Egyptian women, each with their own conclusion.

This paper discusses the powerful women who ruled the Egyptian empire, the royal ladies whose deeds have been kept in the official records and documents, who have left behind lasting evidence of their monuments.

## Research Question

The above facts led Egyptologists and scholars to reach different conclusions and theories regarding the female kingship in Ancient Egypt and how they

perceived it. Thereby, this research answers very important questions; Were the ancient Egyptian Queens influential? were they valued? And does the artwork/remains reflect the social status of those Queens? And was the way ancient Egyptians perceived the presence of women in ruling power, only exclusive to them?

## Research Objectives

1. Discovering how ancient Egyptian Queens reached to these high ranks.
2. Proving that these Queens were appraised and esteemed, through the remains and artwork of the Ancient Egyptians.
3. Uncovering how the Queens themselves perceived the kingship and the monarchy.
4. Assessing the stature of Queens

## Research Importance

1. Emphasizing on the influence of the Egyptian Queens, whether they are reigning Queens, Regent Queens, or Consort Queens.
2. Proving that the Ancient Egyptians valued their Queens in comparison to other cultures.

## Research Hypothesis

1. The Egyptians allowed the idea of female queens, and even if it was not preferred, it was not specifically related to Egypt, as a culture.
2. The Egyptians relied on the Queens in times of uncertainty.
3. The female rulers, both reigning Queens and Regent Queens were influential.
4. The Egyptian Queens in any case, were valued and highly respected.

## Methodology: Analytical Research

**Method:** Analyzing and comparing historical and artistic research data, studying artworks and remains left by the Ancient Egyptians, and using the analysis results to create simple statics to display the mentioned facts that prove the research's objective.

As the following:

- Study of the biographies and the artwork of the reigning Queens
- Study of the biographies and the artwork of the Regent Queens and Consort Queens
- Comparing and analyzing the Egyptian monarchs, based on gender, in Ancient Egypt and other societies.

## Research Limitation

- Time period: Ancient Egyptian Civilization (Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom)

#### Research procedures

##### • Unraveling Egyptian Queens, their reigns, influence, and their artistic artifacts

Only three remarkable women are known to have ruled Dynastic Egypt as Queens. Furthermore, 11 other women acted as Regent Queens, protecting the empire and the throne of Egypt, although the evidence relating to some of the regents is inconclusive. A fact that cannot be ignored is that each one of these Queens took the throne under highly unusual circumstances. The biographies and the artwork of these Queens that display their stature and influence, are presented below.

##### • Women at the power wheel in the Middle Kingdom - Sobekneferu, Neferusobek

Middle Kingdom, 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, 1798/97 – 1794/93 B.C. Sobekneferu was the daughter of Amenemhat III, who was succeeded by Amenemhat IV who ruled for around ten years. He might have been his son, although some researchers think he was a distant relative. There is reason to believe that Sobekneferu, who was his wife and most probably sister, or half-sister, ruled as regent during part of his reign. When he died, Sobekneferu assumed full kingship, Egypt's first (documented) female king, and ruled for only four years, concluding the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Amenemhat IV was not that influential, so Sobekneferu wanted to distance herself from him and associate herself with Amenemhat III, her father. She then deified her father as the God of Faiyum so she now, as the daughter of a God, could lawfully be a female King. Sobekneferu used male titles, and her sculpted statues were kingly, wearing a nemes headcloth and a male kilt, and trampling Egypt's enemies just like a male King would. History repeated itself when this clash of duty and gender eventually occurred again 300 years later with Queen Hatshepsut.

Nevertheless, the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty was too fragile to continue and the government eventually shattered; In the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty there were 21 weak kings who ruled for about 63 years, then six more for around 20 years, and so it continued until it reached to about 55 kings in 143 years. Therefore, it is ironic that Sobekneferu was blamed for the collapse of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, just as Nitocris was blamed for the collapse of the Old Kingdom, because when we look at the

New Kingdom, specifically during the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, there is another female queen who took charge and steered Egypt towards becoming a great empire.

##### • Women at the power wheel in the New Kingdom – First; Hatshepsut, Hatchepsut

New Kingdom, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, as Regent: 1479 – 1473 B.C. as Queen: 1473 – 1458/57 B.C.

Hatshepsut, "The Foremost of Noble Women", was not the very first female Queen, but she sure was the greatest to ever rule Egypt and is one of the most influential women in Egyptian history, in fact, the world. Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thutmose I and the wife of Thutmose II, who was also her brother. They had a daughter called Neferura and a son (from Iset, a spare wife from the harem) called Thutmose III. When his son was still too young to rule, Thutmose II died (c. 1479 B.C.) accordingly Hatshepsut, his stepmother, stepped up and took over as regent. Hatshepsut clearly liked being in control, as in 1473 B.C. she crowned herself as king. However, she had to legitimize it, so she claimed that the god Amun divulged to her through an oracle that she was his daughter and rightful leader of Egypt. As she claims that when she was born, Amun held her in his arms and said, "daughter of my loins, Maatkara, you are the king who takes the throne of Horus", Maatkara being her throne name which she got at birth. Hatshepsut even wore male clothes and a fake beard, and had herself depicted in colossal statues (like Osiris) standing proud in front of her temple and she was even portrayed in traditional kingly poses such as crushing foes, just like what Sobekneferu did 300 years before her. She built and restored temples all over Egypt – that especially emphasized Amun as he was now Egypt's Chief National God and the foundation of her kingship. She even built a processional boulevard from Karnak temple Luxor and started a new festival called 'Opet'. Moreover, military campaigns were carried out by Hatshepsut. In the 9th regnal year, an expedition to Punt led Egypt to acquire new and exotic territory along with exceptional treasures. Here was a king who could expand Egypt's territory, boost the wealth of the country, and achieve it all without war, a king who, incidentally, happened to be a woman. She ruled for approximately twenty years, usually with Thutmose III by her side, who was always recognized as co-ruler. Eventually, after she died in 1458 B.C., he

became the sole ruler. Twenty years later, Thutmose III had her monuments, images, and declarations that were stamped with magical and enduring words destroyed, at least the ones portraying her as a king, to ensure that his son, Amenhotep, would take over the throne as Amenhotep II instead of Hatshepsut's daughter Neferura.

• **Women at the power wheel in the New Kingdom – Second; Twosret, Tawosret, Tausret**

New Kingdom, 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, 1194/93 – 1186/85 B.C. To understand Twosret's biography, we need to dig deeper and follow the events that happened before Twosret came into the picture. At the end of the 19th Dynasty, conspiracies reappeared in the Egyptian court. In 1204 B.C., Merenptah, Ramesses II's 13<sup>th</sup> son and successor, died and several of Ramesses' grandsons started competing for the position, two cousins in particular: Seti-Merenptah (Merenptah's first-born son and designated heir), and Amenmesse (another grandson who might be Seti II's nephew, or even one of his sons). Amenmesse took over the power in Upper Egypt, leaving Seti II to reign in Lower Egypt and the Delta as far south as Memphis. After four years of a divided kingdom, Seti succeeded to take the power away from the usurper Amenmesse. He purged his henchmen, ordered a damnatio memoriae to seal the deal, and became the sole ruler of all Egypt for around a year or two, and then he died. During this power vacuum, a commoner who is of Syrian origin stepped in, the ambitious chancellor Bay, a master manipulator who had risen to a high position in the government and was in place to engineer the coronation of a young Merenptah-Siptah (known as Siptah). According to Toby Wilkinson, Siptah was most likely the son of Amenmesse, but Joyce Tyldesley says, that he might also be the son of Seti II by a second wife, Tiaa. It does not matter whose son he was, because Bay's intention was to set up the boy as a figurehead and run things himself. What encouraged Bay to go ahead with his plan, is the fact that Siptah was weak, sick, and had a twisted leg (maybe due to polio or cerebral palsy). However, Seti II's wife Twosret succeeded to wrench power away from Bay and have him executed. In a year, Siptah died and Twosret led as king with full titles, following Hatshepsut's steps after 280 years, and Sobekneferu 300 years before that. Twosret was careful to immediately make a

proper damnatio memoriae on both Siptah and Bay; she had Siptah's name scratched out and replaced with her dead husband Seti II name. Twosret's reign lasted only for about four years, but in her time, she showed strategic purpose and a ruthlessness that many kings might admire. Unfortunately, her legacy lacks the glamor that normally comes with admirable achievement. The dynasty led by such luminaries as Ramesses II and Seti I came to an end and once again, a woman had led the end of a dynasty, just as Sobekneferu had done 600 years earlier, and maybe Neithiqerti 400 years before that. Once again, at the end of the 19th Dynasty, a military man stepped in to put things back in order, Sethnakht, a strongman in the mold of the entrusted known great kings. In fact, this led some people to believe that the necessity for Sethnakht, as it had been for Thutmose III, was to eradicate the notion of a female king. Interestingly, Sethnakht chose to take over Twosret's tomb (KV14) for his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. He removed her remains and those of her husband, Seti II. Possibly he just wanted the place all to himself; or he might have wanted to erase Twosret from contemporary thought and historical record, and if that was his objective, it was not completely successful. At that point, and despite the fact that some of the female queens had very glorious reigns, some people assume that the idea of a female king became unliked by the Egyptians, and it was the reason that would eliminate women from the higher positions of power from then on. However, in the years ahead, something very different happened for the Egyptian royal females, as another type of Authority came to reside in the office of the God's Wife of Amun, a post that was available only to the unmarried, royal women, in which power would be passed on via serial adoption of chosen successors. That power, both secular and sacred, was considerable.

• **Demonstrating The Stature of the Egyptian Queen Regents Indicated by Symbolic and Artistic Semantics Evident in the Ancient Artistic Artifacts**

The geographical location of The Kingdom of Egypt gave it natural boundaries of desert and sea that protected it from the constant invasions, and wars that Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, Greece, or Rome endured. Thereby, compared to other nations at the

time, Egypt was different, as in these other nations, if a young child took the throne, it would be an invitation to military competition to seize the verdict. But in Egypt, Kings, no matter how young, were revered as God-Kings, and protected by women. They did not consider the child as an obstacle to power, so mothers, aunts, and sisters would support the young Kings by stepping up as Queen Regent on their behalf, until they were old enough to rule. This stabilizing system was very repetitive in Egypt's history.

The following Queens are likely to have ruled temporarily as regents on the young Kings behalf. However, most of them did not hold the title of 'King' during their time in power, and because of that they are generally not included on the known Lists of Kings:

• **Neith is Satisfied: Neithhotep, Neith-Hotep**

Early dynastic period, Pre-3000 B.C. / (c. 3150 - c. 2613 BCE). It is a possibility that Neithhotep, was the very first queen of Egypt nearly 5,000 years ago, but there's insufficient evidence to confirm this theory. It is also very challenging to pinpoint the exact period that she may or may not have ruled in, and any details about the life she led. We do know that she lived in the early period of the first dynasty and until recently, there was no evidence of her rule except the fact that her name was found inscribed on a serekh multiple times and her tomb at Naqada, which was significantly huge that it led the archaeologists to categorize it as a king's tomb and assume that Neithhotep was Narmer's heir or at the very least a king whose name was not mentioned in Manetho's compiled list of Egyptian kings.

There are a lot of theories concerning Neithhotep stature some of which are:

- King Narmer (also known as Menes) married Neithhotep of Naqada so he can strengthen his relationship with Naqada's ruling house, and after he died, she became the first female to ever rule Egypt, in fact, amongst the first females to rule in history altogether.
- At Wadi Ameyra, in Egypt's Sinai Desert, around 60 hieroglyphic inscriptions and drawings engraved into stone dating back to around 5,000 years ago have been found. These findings disclosed brand-new information about Neithhotep. One inscription was found stating

that there is a queen named Neith-Hotep who stepped up and ruled Egypt as regent to her young son, Djer, a millennia before Hatshepsut ruled the country. These inscriptions reveal that she was not Narmer's wife, as Egyptologists assumed, and instead a regent queen at the beginning of the reign of Djer.

Regardless of whose wife and mother she is, Neithhotep is still a very prominent woman, as according to the University of Liverpool, Neithhotep is the earliest historically attested woman in the world whose name survives till this very day.

• **Beloved by Neith: Merneith, Meryt-Neith, Meryneith, Merit-Neith, Mer-Neith**

Early Dynastic Period, ca. 3000 – 2890 B.C. Merneith, the wife of Djet, and the mother of his heir, Den, whom she filled in as regent for during the first dynasty. She was thought to be a male king, by scholars, who later noticed the grammatical feminine ending t (Meretneith) and realized that she was, in fact, a female. While it is confirmed that she did rule as regent queen, as Den was too young to rule, it is uncertain whether she did rule. When Queen Merneith died, all her servants were sacrificed and buried with her so they can continue to serve her in the afterlife, a practice noticed with other leaders, both females, and males. Merneith was not mentioned in Manetho's chronology, however, her name was mentioned on a Serekh\* (just like Neithhotep) as well as on the Palermo stone and remains discovered in her tomb at Abydos suggest that she was Queen of Egypt. In any case, it is believed that she provided him with a steady nation when it was time for him to rule and that she had a great impact during Den's reign, thereby, even if she did not rule, she surely exerted power on the throne.

• **The Sisters: Khentkaus I and Khentkaus II**

Old kingdom, End of 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Khentkaus I was the queen of Egypt near the end of the fourth dynasty in the Old Kingdom. Her family relationships are not entirely clear, and there is some exciting, but uncertain, evidence that she may have ruled Egypt as a regent for her son or in her own right. Khentkaus I has a large burial area at Giza which was originally believed to be an incomplete pyramid. At Giza, On the granite doorway to the valley temple of her stepped tomb there is an image of Khentkaus I with

an inscription. She is seen seated on a throne wearing the Uraeus\* and vulture headdress, along with a short ritual beard, and carrying in her hand a Hetes Scepter\* – all of which are royal symbols worn by kings of Egypt. Then there is the content of the inscription itself. Her title, “mut nesu-bity nesu-bity”, can be translated as “Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and King of Upper and Lower Egypt” or “Mother of Two Kings of Upper and Lower Egypt”. It seems that the image was modified to show her in the form of a king, and her pyramid complex was expanded around the beginning of the fifth dynasty, which might be an indicator that she took over as monarch (possibly as regent for her son) after the death of her husband. Some historians disagree about whether Khentkaus I and Khentkaus II are the same person, or whether they were two queens with the same name, both of whom used this title and both ruled Egypt? Excavation of the pyramids and enclosures at Giza and Abusir strongly suggests that there were two queens with the same name. In the case of Khentkaus II, it is certain that she was the wife of Neferirkare and the mother of two kings, Niuserre and Neferefre. She might have ruled Egypt as a reigning queen after the death of her husband. She was buried in a pyramid to the south of the pyramid of her husband at Abusir. Her pyramid was not an affiliate attached to her husband pyramid, it was supported by a small pyramid complex including a mortuary temple and had its own affiliate pyramid. On the other hand, the situation is not so clear for Khentkaus I as several possibilities have been proposed. Some Egyptologists assumed that she was Menkaure's daughter, because of the location of her mastaba at Giza (tomb LG100), as its very close to Menkaure's pyramid complex. This may indicate to a family relationship, but there is not enough data to confirm this family connection. However, there is enough to indicate that there were indeed two queens named Khentkaus. There also isn't enough evidence as to whether Khentkaus ruled the Egyptian empire as a regent or a Queen. The image of her wearing the ureas and ritual beard is a conclusive evident, and her pyramid and mortuary complex confirm that she was a person of some importance. So, whether both Khentkaus, were rulers of Egypt or not, they were certainly powerful women with sufficient prestige to

be buried in the same way as a King. However, their names do not appear in a cartouche and is not listed on any kings list.

• **Daughter of the King: Wife of the King: Mother of the King: Iput I**

Old kingdom, 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty King Teti, founder of the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, married at least three wives, which was common at the time. This was discovered from the titles of his three daughters, each from a different Queen. Only two names out of the three wives have been identified: Queen Iput I and Khuit II. Both Iput I and Khuit II were buried in their own pyramids, 100 meters away from Teti's pyramid complex in Saqqara. Khuit II might be Teti's chief wife, as the construction on her tomb started first. However, Iput I was the daughter of Teti's predecessor, King Unas, and she was also the mother of the future King Pepi I. Hence, her three titles: “Daughter of the king”, “Wife of the King”, and “Mother of the King” according to Manetho.<sup>1</sup> Some theories suggest that Iput I possibly ruled as regent for her son Pepi I at some point, but there is no evidence to prove this theory. The events surrounding the time of King Teti's death are unknown, but it is known that Userkare was his successor, and perhaps his son. The identity of Userkare's mother has never been confirmed, but it might have been Khentet.

Two years into Userkare being a King, Iput's son, Pepy I, became a king. Rainer Stadelmann pointed out that the pyramid of Queen Iput I at central Saqqara had once been a mastaba, but it was transformed into a pyramid complex by her son, Pepy I who also changed the layout of the queens cultic. Iput's unique tomb was a turning point in Egyptian history where queens were concerned. From that time onwards, Queens, both royal wives as well as royal mothers, were given pyramids. Pepi I was responsible for this change, and for other honors given to his royal women, including titles affiliating some of his wives to certain gods.<sup>2</sup>

• **She whose life belongs to Pepi: Ankhesenpepi II, Ankhesmeryre II, Ankhespepi**

Old Kingdom, 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, (2278 B.C.) Ankhesenpepi II was the wife of two Kings (Pepi I and Merenre I) and was the mother of another king (Pepi II). Her father, Khui, was a prominent official, and her mother, Nebet, was the first known female Vizier (some claim that this was an honorific title given to her when her

daughter became the wife of the King). Her brother, Djau, also served as Vizier. The interesting part is that her sister (also named Ankhesenmeryre/Ankhesenpepi) was also married to her husband Pepi I. She was not of royal blood, but her family was very influential. Her name means "Her life belongs to Pepi/Meryre", as the throne name of Pepi I was Meryre. Labrousse claims that if we pay attention to Ankhesenpepi II Pyramid Texts, we will find that the queen named herself 95 times as Ankhenes-pepy, and only 8 times as Ankhenes-meryre, therefore it's more logical to use this name. When Pepi I died, she married his successor Merenre Nemtysaf I (her nephew). It was initially believed that her son Pepi II was the son of Pepi I, but after the discovery of the South Saqqara Stone\* that records that Merenre had a minimum reign of 11 years, it turned out that Pepi II was the son of Merenre. So, when Merenre died Pepi II became the king. Many researchers and experts believe that Ankhenespepi acted as regent for the early part of his reign, because he was so young. There are a few pieces of art which support this assumption and clarify the status she reached. Ankhenespepi II and Pepi II are illustrated together in a beautiful alabaster statue. The statue is clearly making a connection between the young king and Horus, and the queen and Isis. It is also noteworthy that it marks one of the very few occasions that a king is illustrated as being smaller than another human. This could be considered a visual record of her regency, as she was also depicted with the same size as her son in a rock cut inscription, In Sina. Also, there is an interesting inscription from Wadi Maghara. The queen shown in this inscription with name (Ankhenesmeryre) holds the title of "mother of the king", written in an unusual way which places the vulture (mwt –mother) inside the word for king (nsw bity), which signifies her powerful role. An image of the queen can be seen at the bottom of the inscription, which could have been the determine for her name (appearing above the figure). It is worth noting that there is no corresponding image of the king – this might confirm that the expedition was ordered by her and not him. In addition, the burial chamber of her pyramid (the largest queens pyramid in Saqqara) is covered in pyramid texts – an honor formerly restricted to Kings (and a few of Pepi II's

wives). Her statue was worshipped at Abydos, After her death, for some time.

#### • Lah (The Moon) is Satisfied: Ahhotep I

Second intermediate period, 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, (1550 B.C.) Ahhotep I, ruled Egypt for about 10 years as regent for her son, Ahmose, with the help of Tetisheri, her mother, after both her elder son and her brother/husband Seqenenra Tao II died in battle, so she had to step up. Ahhotep was awarded Golden Flies, enough to make a full necklace, for her fearlessness and perseverance in the battle against the Hyksos. Ahhotep I took this necklace along with an axe and a dagger to her grave.

Gay Robins has stated that a large stela dedicated to Ahhotep I and built by Ahmose, her son, reads:

"She governs vast numbers of people and cares for Egypt wisely; she has attended to its army; she has looked after it; she has forced its enemies to leave and united dissenters; she has pacified Upper and Lower Egypt and made the rebels submit."

Some women ruled Egypt much earlier than Ahhotep I did, however, Joyce Tyldesley, a British archaeologist, stated that "For the first time, we have written proof that the queen regents could wield real authority." In fact, there are theories about how she might have been the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty founder, however, there is no evidence to prove this theory. Regardless, Ahhotep I accomplished a lot and most certainly lived up to her name, which means "The moon (Ah) is pleased."

#### • The God's Wife of Amun: Ahmose-Nefertari

Second intermediate period, 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, (c. 1541) Ahmose married both his sisters, Ahmose-Nefertari as well as Ahmose Nebta. However, Ahmose-Nefertari was his chief wife and the one who filled in as regent for her son Amenhotep I, after Ahmose died. She had a leading political role in the reunifying and development of Egypt during her son's reign. However, she is especially influential for two separate reasons. the first is that she was granted the title 'God's Wife of Amun' by King Ahmose, which is described on the Donation Stela in the Temple of Amun in Karnak, and she appeared on many other Stelas as well. This legitimized her religious and political power, granted her the ability to take part in the lives of the gods, thereby receiving divine protection against any evil that may harm her, gave

her a privileged position amongst the priests of the god Amun.

This also had a strong impact on the rank of women in the history of Egypt, in fact, by the third intermediate period, this office was one of the most powerful political positions in Egypt.

The second reason is that as queen regent, she brought in a commoner soldier named Thutmose I, into the royal succession, when Meritamun (who is Amenhotep's sister) died childless. Thutmose I was the first king in three generations who was an adult when he succeeded the throne. This normalized the elevation of a military commoner to a royal rank and even kingship. Moreover, Ahmose-Nefertari was associated with construction, and her name can be seen in texts that document the launching of quarries and mines, whose wealth supported the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty's achievements. Moreover, she was considered as the patron of Deir-El-Medina (Now), the village where craftsmen constructed the royal tombs in the valley of the kings.

There are many other women who might have served as queen regents, such as Meritaten, Nitocris, Nimaathap and many others. These prominent women certainly had a huge impact on the Egyptian civilization, whether they ruled as full-fledged queens or as regents.

#### • **The Beautiful One Has Come: Nefertiti, Neferneferuaten, Neferneferuaton**

New kingdom, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, ca. 1338 – 1336 B.C.

Queen Nefertiti, one of the most influential, prominent, and powerful women in ancient Egypt whose name means 'The Beautiful One Has Come' and almost 3,400 years later, she still lives up to her name. She was Akhenaten's wife, a king in the new kingdom (18th dynasty), hence, her titles; 'Great Royal Wife' and 'Lady of the Two Lands'. Evident in the famous blue crown made especially for her, Nefertiti acquired royal power as she ruled alongside Akhenaten from 1353 – 1335 B.C. who went to great lengths to present her as an equal. In numerous remains and artworks, she is depicted wearing the King's crown or attacking their enemies in war. Under Akhenaten's reign, Egypt experienced a shocking religious shift that defined the God Aten as the only God who is worthy of worship. This tossed out thousands of years of religious beliefs and Egypt has always been strictly about order (Ma'at). By his

5th regnal year, Aten had become the main national god of Egypt. In several artworks, Nefertiti is depicted worshipping Aten together with Akhenaten and sometimes even on her own as a priestess. They even lived in a city named Akhetaton (now El Amarna) in tribute to their god. However, Nefertiti eventually disappeared from all historical records around the 12th year of Akhenaten's 17-year reign, and it is still unclear to this day what happened to her. However, there are lots of theories that have emerged:

- Akhenaten might have cast her away or she left on her own as a result of disputes between them.
- Nefertiti might have died of some illness.
- Nefertiti might have been elevated to the status of Akhenaten's official co-regent under the name Neferneferuaten, which means 'beautiful are the beauties of Aten' in honor of the god Aten.
- She might have been known as Smenkhkare, outlived Akhenaten, succeeded him to the throne (New Kingdom) and cleaned up the mess he created. A theory worth mentioning as she might have followed the precedent set by Queen Hatshepsut who ruled Egypt before her, in the guise of a man.
- She was banished after the worship of the god Amen-Ra resurfaced.

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to determine what exactly happened as she is still being discovered by Egyptologists. Whether she did rule as a reigning queen, as regent queen, as queen consort, or even if she did not rule at all, no one can deny the role she played in supporting her husband, Akhenaten.

#### • **Defining the Value of the Egyptian Queen Consorts Indicated by Symbolic and Artistic Semantics Evident in the Ancient Artistic Artifacts**

The wife of a reigning king is called a Queen Consort. The queen consort typically shares the king's rank and gains the feminine equivalent of his titles; however, she does not acquire the king's military and political powers. Nevertheless, there are some remarkable women who served as queen consorts in ancient Egypt, such as Nefertari, wife of Ramesses the Great (II), Tiye (Tye, Taia, Tiy, Tiyi) wife of Amenhotep III, Meritamun daughter/wife of Ramesses the Great (II), Ahmose-Meritamun wife of



Amenhotep I, Hetepheres I, wife of Sneferu, Tetisheri, wife of Senakhtenre Ahmose, Ankhesenamun, wife of Tutankhamun, Tuya, wife of Seti I. Whether or not these notable women directly influenced the Egyptian civilization, we cannot deny the fact that they were a pillar of continuous support to their husbands, the great Kings of Egypt, who determined the fate of the country, as portrayed in countless artworks, be it sculptures or depictions. Additionally, they were also the mothers of the king's successors, thereby, they undoubtedly had a great impact on the character of Egypt's future kings. These women were very valued, and it is evident in their remains. For example, Queen Tiye, who was the favored wife of King Amenhotep III (18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, New Kingdom) who granted her a significant status within state affairs and even public ceremonies; Her name even appeared on his official documents

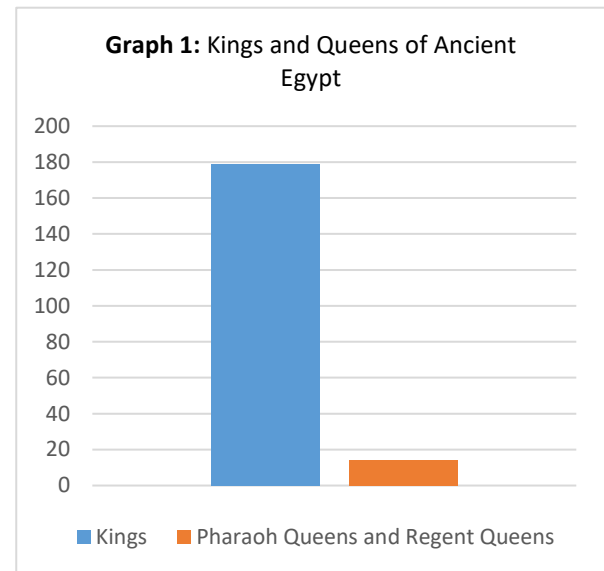
### Result and Discussion

From the biographies mentioned above, it is evident that the Egyptian Queens had a strong influence on the Egyptian Empire, whether as reigning Queens or Regent Queens as well as Consort Queens. These Queens were influential in many ways. They protected the throne, they did their civil and military responsibilities to the fullest, in fact, in some cases, such as Queen Hatshepsut, they also expanded the Egyptian Empire territories and wealth. Moreover, in times of crisis or uncertainty, the Egyptian Queens took the initiative and stepped up as regents to fill the power vacuum and keep the order (Ma'at) within the Empire and were very instrumental about the matter.

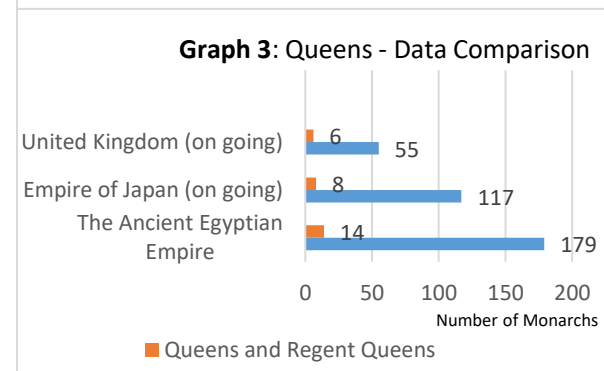
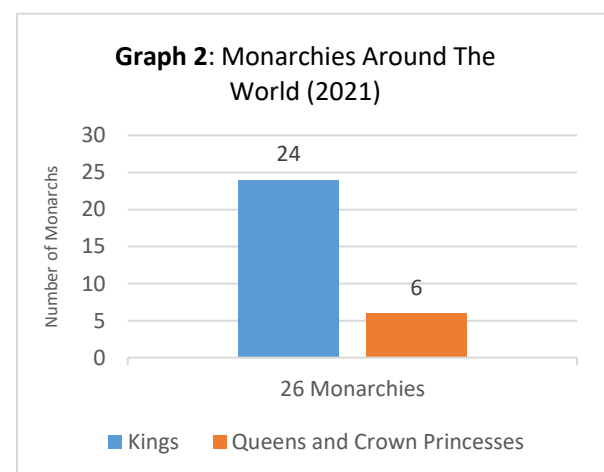
There is no doubt that the ancient Egyptians valued their Queens, and we can observe this through the artworks/remains such as pyramids, temples, grand tombs, depictions, paintings as well as the given titles that was bestowed on them that show reveal their true magnitude.

The position of the ruler of Egypt is mostly perceived as a man's role in Ancient Egypt. We concluded this fact by simply comparing the number of Kings to the number of Queens who ruled. The Ancient Egyptian civilization had approximately 182 monarchs, 3 of

whom were reigning Queens, and around 11 were Regent Queens, as per to the Palermo Stone, the Abydos Kinglist, The Turin Canon and the History of Egypt written by Manetho.<sup>(1)</sup> (Refer to graph 1)



**Interestingly, the above was not just specific to Egypt, and here is why:**



1. Metmuseum.org. 2002. *List of Rulsers of Ancient Egypt and Nubia*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phar/hd\\_phar.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phar/hd_phar.htm)> [Accessed 12 April 2021].

As of now (2021), there are only about 26 monarchies around the world. Only two of which are ruled by Queens (UK and Denmark) , in addition to 4 that have crown princesses (Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain). (Refer to graph 2)

If we take England as an example, as its one of the most well-established monarchies in the world, we will find that there have been a total number of 61 monarchs over a span of approximately 1,200 years, out of which, presumably only 6 were queens.

To further prove my suggested theory, another example is the Empire of Japan, the current oldest monarchy in the world, where there have been around 125 monarchs over a span of approximately 2,679 years.<sup>3</sup> Presumably, only 8 out of the 125 monarchs were queen regents , as Japan has a strict male-only succession rule. (Refer to graph 3)

What's more surprising, is that even in countries where the rulers are chosen through an election system, such as the United States, with all the technological advancements and developments they achieved, till this very day they have never had a female president, and only recently (2020) did they appoint their very first female vice president.

Thereby, we conclude that the ability to rule is almost universally perceived as a male attribute, no matter how civilized, advanced, and developed a country is. The reason behind this obvious bias is usually found within the society's interpretation of the function of authoritative positions and its view of the proper role of women. Nevertheless, societies might give women the opportunity to rule at times when there still isn't a competent male successor.

Meanwhile, while the ratio of Queens to Kings was massive in Ancient Egypt, millenniums ago, it is only when we compare these numbers with the current examples mentioned above, that we understand how much the ancient Egyptians were truly civilized and way ahead of their time, especially when it comes to women.

### Conclusion

All the Queens of Ancient Egypt had remarkable impact on the Egyptian Empire. It is evident in the artwork and remains left by the Ancient Egyptians that they certainly valued their Queens. Moreover, when we compare the Queens of Egypt and their power to other societies, it confirms this notion. The position of

the ruler is universally perceived as a man's role. Despite this, Egypt had several women who ruled, whether as Queens or as Regents.

### Recommendations

Based on extensive research, it is recommended to carry out more detailed and extensive researches about the reigns of the regent queens to better understand their impact and achievements. Moreover, an in-depth research about Consort Queens is recommended, to gain more confirmed insights about the lives they led and the specific achievements they accomplished.

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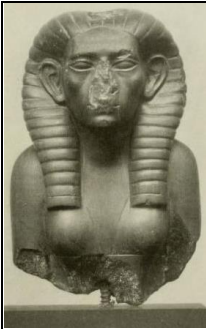
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## Resources

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## Images



**Image 1: Sobekneferu**

Previously: given as a donation to The Egyptian Museum of Berlin in 1899

Currently: Missing/destroyed since the second world war Middle Kingdom, as the age signs are evident and that was common then.

Greywacke. The Greywacke is a kind of sandstone known for its dark color and hardness. It was used in Egypt from Predynastic times

onward.

Preserved plaster mold of bust: height 14 cm; length 9 cm; depth 6.2 cm

The identity of the bust was unknown for quite some time up until the Egyptologist Biri Fay's team discovered the inferior part of the statue.



**Image 5: Meritaten Relief**

The British Museum

18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Height 22.70 cm; Weight 10.70 kgs; Width 40 cm; Depth 7 cm

Fragment of a red quartzite sunk relief. Sunk reliefs are reliefs where the figures are cut into and below the surface.

The right-hand portion is divided into three registers. In the first register, only the wheels of two chariots and the lower portions of the hind legs of the horses which drew them are preserved. On the right-hand side of the second register is a chariot, drawn by two horses and driven by a charioteer, bearing Meritaten and Meketaten. Above the horses is an inscription incised in six vertical columns. On the left are two smaller chariots also drawn by two horses. In the upper chariot the charioteer is accompanied by another person, but the occupants of the lower chariot are obliterated. In the third register, only the head and shoulders of a person are preserved. On the left-hand side at the top are the lower portions of stands for wine-jars and the figure of a man stooping with brush in hand before a door. Beneath are traces, in six vertical columns of an almost entirely erased inscription.

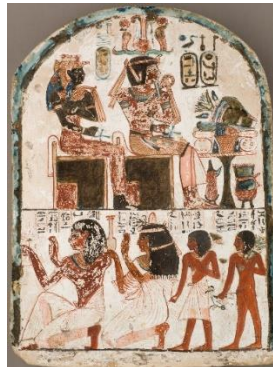


**Image 2: Hatshepsut**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. New Kingdom, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, ca. 1479 – 1458 B.C. Painted, Indurated

Limestone, which was a commonly found along the Nile Valley.

Height 213 cm; Width 50 cm; Depth 119 cm; 2750 lbs. A life-sized statue of Hatshepsut, depicted in a seated pose on a throne and dressed in the ceremonial attire of Egyptian kings; the nemes-headcloth and the Shendyt-kilt. Nevertheless, feminine features are still evident in the statue. On the sides of the throne, there are inscriptions of kingly titles that are feminized to read "The Perfect Goddess, Lady of The Two Lands," and "Bodily Daughter of Re."



**Image 6: Stela of the Sculptor Qen worshipping Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY New Kingdom. 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, ca. 1279–1213 B.C.

H. 37.7 x W. 28.6 x Th 5.8 cm, 9.3 kg (14 13/16 x 11 1/4 x 2 5/16 in., 20.4 lb.)

Qen, his wife Nefertari, and their two sons, Merymery and Huy, are shown paying homage to Amenhotep I, the second king of Dynasty 18, and his mother Ahmose-Nefertari. A lot of symbols can be spotted in this stela, some of which are the lotus flower (sesen), the Uraeus, and the Ankh.



**Image 3: Twosret**

Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza, Egypt. New Kingdom, 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Presumably red-brown quartzite sandstone. Sandstone (Mostly composed of quartz sand) was also found along the Nile Valley. H 133 cm; W 95 cm Base: L 95 cm; W 38 cm (front) and 46.5 (Back) This statue represents Queen Twosret sitting on a throne, dressed as a male king (short skirt, and an apron with six uraeus cobras). Her head is missing, but the nemes-headress can still be spotted. Inscribed is her epithet "Beloved of Hathor, Lady of the Red Mountain". Most of her titles on the statue are in male form, but her personal names are in a female form.



**Image 7: Tomb painting depicting Ahmose-Nefertari**  
The British Museum. 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Painted plaster. H 45 cm; W 20.80 cm; D 4.40 cm. Ahmose-Nefertari is depicted with black skin. The black color was linked to fertility and religious rituals.

For more related images, click on the link below:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xiQP4eHWPIUO7RHeTdfouiQsPwuT51xC?usp=sharing>