The Queens of Egypt

The Complexities of Female Rule in the First through the Nineteenth Dynasty

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Honors Thesis
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PASS WITH DISTINCTION
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As thesis advisor for Rachel Haran.

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

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9/21/06
Date
Précis

Nefertiti and Hatshepsut are well-known Egyptian queens, but few people are familiar with other note-worthy queens like Sobekneferu or Tausret. More than eleven women may have ruled Egypt after the founding of the first dynasty in roughly 3000 BCE; and while there are numerous works written about a few famous queens, there is no single work examining female queens as a group in ancient Egypt. Despite this lack of comprehensive examination, there exists within Egyptology a belief that women have only ruled Egypt at the end of dynasties in the absence of male candidates in an attempt to preserve the domination of a dying kinship group. This belief is the result of an incomplete understanding of female rule in Egypt, and the examination of the rule of eleven Egyptian queens reveals that female succession to the Egyptian throne was based on more than just a simple attempt to extend a dynasty.

The most effective method of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the role of Egypt's ruling queens is by carefully considering both the textual and archaeological evidence for their rules. I began by discussing the two most fully attested early Egyptian queens, Merytnit of the first dynasty and Sobekneferu of the twelfth, using both the king lists and various artifacts, such as stelae and statuary. I then proceeded to investigate the more obscure early queens: Nitokerti and Ankhesenpepi II of the sixth dynasty and Khentykaues I of the fifth dynasty. The first part of the paper, is not, therefore, arranged chronologically. I felt that considering the early queens with the greatest evidentiary support first would provide a framework for the understanding of later female rulers which was more important than discussing them in order from first to last. This was unnecessary in the later New Kingdom period because the reigns and even the existence of ruling female queens and pharaohs is more fully attested. In examining the New Kingdom, I proceeded chronologically through the women of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties: Ahhotep I, Ahmose-Nefertari, Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, Ankhessenamun, and Tausret.
The majority of my sources were ancient, but I also used journal articles and books dealing with the latest Egyptological discoveries, such as Pierre Grandet's article in *Le Bulletin de L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* which details his discovery of an ostraca related to the reign of Tausret.

While my research reveals that dynastic circumstances did influence female rule in Egypt, it is clear that at least some of Egypt's royal women ruled the country or served as regents based on their own abilities. Women often did rule at the end of dynasties, but they did not always do so, as in the case of Hatshepsut. My research also reveals that women were often chosen to rule on behalf of under-aged offspring, and this could be interpreted to mean that women were only tolerated as interim rulers for their children. There were always ample supplies of male candidates and advisors eager to fill the position of regent, however, and the selection of a woman over qualified male candidates indicates that the woman was extraordinary or capable in some way that her competitors were not. The imposition of western ideas of the roles of ruling royal women rather than an objective consideration of the unique cultural traditions inherent in an ancient, eastern society has resulted in an incomplete understanding of ruling Egyptian women. Modern conceptions of gender roles should not be applied to ancient societies. The long-held idea within Egyptology that women only ruled at the end of dynasties in a desperate attempt to continue the male dynastic line is the result of superficial assumptions about female rule, and it can no longer be accepted without question. In the larger context, there is a great need for historians to question preconceived ideas about history, and to consider ancient Egyptian history and specifically ancient Egyptian women without the traditional biases of western culture. Ruling Egyptian women as a group have been sorely neglected, and I hope that this paper will be the first of many attempting to understand female rule in Egypt from a new perspective.
Historiography

Egypt is a fascinating, ancient land of mystery; unfortunately, the mystery that makes Egypt so entrancing to scholars is due in part to a paucity of records. Historians and archaeologists must rely on the sometimes scanty bits and pieces that are all that remain of Egypt's distant past. The scarcity of original sources often forces Egyptologists to supplement their knowledge with secondary sources that must be examined carefully for accuracy and possible bias. Difficulties with translation and unfamiliar cultural traditions further complicate matters, so that for historians, the careful reconstruction of ancient Egyptian history presents its own set of unique challenges.

Ancient Egyptian records are comprised of very few contemporary documents; the vast majority of available information about the Egyptians comes in the form of funerary and religious inscriptions carved on artifacts and into the walls of tombs, monuments, and temples. Egyptian dwellings, both palaces and more humble accommodations, were built of mud brick and did not survive well; so that while archeology has done much to improve modern knowledge of how the Egyptians lived, stone texts remain the richest source of information about the ancient Egyptians. Such texts were expensive and therefore produced under the auspices of the wealthy classes, particularly the royal family, and as such present an idealized view of Egypt and an undeniable bias toward the interests of the elite. Death, the afterlife, and the glories of the pharaoh are constantly repeating themes; and while such records can depict what the Egyptians believed, they do not always communicate the realities of the ancient world. Some inscriptions, particularly those of the pharaohs, are little more than propaganda justifying the rule of a particular dynasty or listing the accomplishments of a king.

Further complicating the matter is the natural aging and wear on records that may have existed for over three thousand years in Egypt's environment of flood, sun, and sand. Vandalism, both ancient and modern, has not improved the situation. It was not uncommon for a pharaoh to put his name on one of his predecessors' monuments, to erase or destroy the records of an enemy, or even to reuse an
already inhabited tomb; and in the case of unusual pharaohs like Hatshepsut or Akhenaten, such contemporary vandalism went especially far. Modern monotheists, including both Muslims and Coptic Christians, have added their share to the desecration of the monuments of a polytheistic society, as have the far more invasive acts of treasure hunters. Even bad archeology has contributed to the deplorable condition of some of Egypt's national treasures.

When dealing with those records that do survive, Egyptologists encounter difficulty in the translation. Egyptian hieroglyphs represent the spoken language of ancient Egypt, a language that is now lost; and in common with Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic, the written Egyptian language records only consonants, not vowels. The careful study of Coptic, the only related language still spoken, and of Egyptian words transliterated into Greek and cuneiform in antiquity has provided some insight into the correct pronunciation of the language, but the articulation of most Egyptian words and names remains controversial. Egyptologists have dealt with this in a variety of ways, resulting in the numerous spellings and versions of Egyptian words. Early Egyptologists commonly used Greek variations of Egyptian names; this is why the queen who may have ruled at the end of the sixth dynasty is more commonly known as Nitocris, the Greek name, rather than Nitokerti, the closer approximation of the Egyptian name. Some later scholars derived Egyptian names from what they believed were Coptic equivalents, but most modern Egyptologists simply use the original Egyptian consonants linked together with token vowels. In writing my paper I have tried to use the Egyptian name most closely transliterated from the original. I have also taken the liberty of using the words pharaoh, king, and monarch interchangeably, when each of these words is merely an attempt to express the meaning behind the original Egyptian word for absolute ruler: per aʼa.

Modern historians have divided ancient Egyptian history by the rule of more than thirty families or dynasties, grouping these dynasties further into periods of prosperity and expansion, called Kingdoms, and more chaotic periods, called Intermediate Periods. While this method of periodizing Egyptian history is a purely modern construct, it has been universally accepted by Egyptologists as a
very useful way of organizing over three thousand years of information, and I have made reference to it in my paper. I have not, however, made mention of the exact dates associated with the reigns of various pharaohs or periods, although I have used dynasties and regnal years. The Egyptians themselves marked the passage of time by reference to the regnal year of the pharaoh ruling in that period. When one pharaoh died, the dating system began again with year one of the new pharaoh's reign, a situation further confused by scribal errors, co-rules, and the deliberate omission or erasure of heretic pharaohs like Hatshepsut and Akhenaten from the record. Lengthy king lists have survived but have proved impossible to reconcile exactly with the modern calendar, making precise dates a matter of argument; so that while Egyptologists can say that a pharaoh like Hatshepsut ruled for twenty-two years between the rules of Thutmosis II and Thutmosis III, they cannot say exactly when those twenty-two years fall in the modern conception of time.

The king lists, despite their discrepancies and biases, are excellent sources for documenting the chronology of kings. The work of Manetho, a Egyptian historian and priest under the reign of the Ptolemies, is of particular use to Egyptologists in this area. Manetho is believed to have written his *Aegyptiaca* or *History of Egypt* in Greek in the third century BCE, and he was the first to divide the pharaohs into dynasties. Unfortunately, Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* was not preserved in its completed form, but only as excerpts in other works, the first of which was the *Contra Apionem* of Josephus, a first-century-CE Jewish historian. Josephus wrote as part of a religious debate, and his work only includes sections of Manetho's king list, skipping some dynasties like the eighteenth and nineteenth and excluding much of Manetho's original commentary.

Either contemporary to or shortly after Josephus' excerpt, an epitome of Manetho's original *Aegyptiaca* was created by an unknown author, detailing dynasties, the lengths associated with various reigns, and some of the commentary the unknown epitomizer deemed important. The accuracy of the epitome as a reflection of the original work cannot be clearly estimated, but in the third century CE both Sextus Julius Africanus and Eusebius of Caesarea reproduced versions of this epitome that
historians believe to be fairly reliable, and Eusebius's transmission was again preserved in the writings of Jerome, Syncellus, and an unknown Armenian author. For the purpose of this paper I have used a translation of *Aegyptiaca* that attempts to reconstruct Manetho's original work as much as possible by placing the various transmissions side by side, but even in its complete, original form *Aegyptiaca* cannot be accepted without cavil. The Hellenistic influence on Manetho is obvious; he names both Egyptian and Greek gods as pre-dynastic rulers, and attempts to transliterate the names of some pharaohs into Greek. Manetho was also not consistent or always totally accurate in his recording of names and titles, which has often led to confusion. In the case of the female ruler Tausret, for example, Manetho is believed to have switched the consonants in her name, titling her “Thouoris.”

The sources Manetho used in writing his *Aegyptiaca* are also unknown, but his style is very similar to that of the Turin Canon, another important and much older king list. The Canon is a badly damaged hieratic papyrus dated to the reign of Ramesses II in roughly the thirteenth century BCE or later, and it has been pieced together from over one hundred and fifty fragments. The kings listed in the Canon are recorded by the years, months, and days of their rule; and the beginning and the end of the list are missing, along with the record of rulers after the seventeenth dynasty. Stylistically, the Canon is similar to Manetho's later account; but while the two lists agree in many respects, they are not by any means identical. The Turin Canon also records the rule of foreign Hyksos kings in the Second Intermediate Period, which many of the king lists do not. The sources used to write the Turin Canon are unknown, but the listing of unpopular kings, combined with the fact that the Canon does not appear to have been sponsored by a particular monarch, has led scholars to believe that the Turin Canon is as objective and factual in its recording as can be expected. In addition, I have made reference to other New Kingdom king lists like those of Saqqara and Abydos, which, while much shorter and less complete than either the Turin Canon or Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*, can provide valuable information and corroboratory evidence, particularly for the rule of later pharaohs.

Another valuable source of information is the writings of Herodotus. The Greek historian
Herodotus visited northern Egypt in the fifth century BCE when the country was under Persian rule, and he wrote down his experiences in his *Histories*, now known as *The Persian Wars*. Herodotus' writings provide one of the oldest accounts of ancient Egyptian civilization; and while his work does not always succeed in differentiating between historical fact and fiction, Herodotus did succeed in preserving the legends and traditions that the Egyptians themselves believed to be true. Such traditions, like the fabled rule of the sixth-dynasty female pharaoh Nitokerti, cannot be taken at face value, but they do generally have some historical basis and can be used as research points or reflections of what might once have been a reality.

Commentators like Herodotus and Manetho and documents like the king lists are essential for the effective reconstruction of female rule in Egypt, but when possible I have used inscriptions and stelae contemporary to the period of each female ruler in preference to later records. In the reign of Hatshepsut, for example, I have cited both obelisk inscriptions and murals carved on the walls of her mortuary temple, Djeser Djeseru. Even records kept by associated civilizations can prove useful, as in the case of the Ankhesenamen's alliance letter to the Hittites, which was preserved on a clay tablet in the Hittite capital of Hattusas.

New interpretations, translations, or understandings of old evidence must also be considered, however, and for this reason I have also used the work of respected modern Egyptologists like Joyce Tyldesley of Liverpool University and James Allen of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Journal articles, like Pierre Grandet's ostracon article in *Le Bulletin de L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, have provided access to the most recent and often the most revolutionary discoveries in Egyptology. In addition, I have used the work of the classic authorities in the field, including Sir Wallis Budge and William M. Flinders Petrie. There are many sources that deal with individual Egyptian queens; however, there is no source that deals with ruling Egyptian queens as a group. It is my hope that this paper will be the first in a long line of writings that fully consider the significance of all the women who have ruled ancient Egypt.
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Eleven women or more may have ruled Egypt from the founding of the first dynasty to the final demise of the Ptolemies. There is a pervasive view within Egyptology that these women only ruled at the end of dynasties after the deaths of all other capable males in the family in a desperate attempt to continue the dynastic line. This belief is the result of an incomplete understanding of female rule in Egypt. A careful evaluation of the rule of Egyptian queens from the first through the nineteenth dynasties—including Merytnit, Nitokerti, Sobekneferu, Khentykaues I, Ankhesenpepi II, Ahhotep I, Ahmose-Nefertari, Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, Ankhesenamen, and Tausret—reveals that female succession to the throne of Egypt was more complex than a mere desire to extend a dynastic line.

Queen Merytnit of the first dynasty may have been the first woman to rule Egypt, but her name cannot be found in any of the surviving king lists. Although the textual support for her rule may be scanty, the archaeological evidence is plentiful. She was the wife of the third pharaoh of the first dynasty, Djet, and the mother of and probable regent to his successor, Pharaoh Den. Her tomb at Abydos was discovered in 1900 by William Flinders Petrie amid the tombs of other early kings; and despite the fact that the stele bearing her name lacked the Horus mark that denotes kingship, Petrie naturally assumed that Merytnit was an undiscovered king. Only when it became known that Nit was a female goddess was Merytnit relegated to the place of an influential queen rather than a ruling monarch.


The evidence suggests, however, that she was far more than another obscure queen. An unusual seal found at Abydos, in the tomb of Den, places Meryntit among the kings of the first dynasty. Her name, once again, is not accompanied by the Horus falcon, which indicates that she never assumed the formal titles of a pharaoh. Nevertheless, the seal shows that in the mind of the pharaoh who commissioned it, her son Den, she was equal in many ways to the powerful male rulers of the first dynasty. There would have been no reason for his creation of such a seal if her title had referred only to her position of wife and mother of pharaohs and she had not wielded real power of some sort. In Meryntit’s case, it is unlikely that there was a shortage of suitable male guardians for the young Den, so it is simplistic to assume she was simply tolerated as regent because she eventually would have been replaced by her son.

A stone bowl, also found at Abydos, reinforces the idea that Meryntit ruled as regent by revealing that she controlled for a period of time one of the most important institutions of the pharaoh: the treasury. The label on the vessel identifies its origin as the Royal Treasury, specifically called “Meryntit’s Treasury.” In sharp contrast, inscriptions on funerary items dating to the reign of Djer or Djet make it clear that in earlier times Meryntit was supplying her monuments from her personal storehouse.

In addition to the Abydos tomb excavated by William M. Flinders Petrie in southern Egypt, Meryntit also had a funerary monument at Saqqara, in northern Egypt. The practice of building two tombs, one real and one a cenotaph, was peculiar to the early kings of Egypt; and


4. Ibid., 494.

5. Ibid., 495.
Merytnit is the only early Egyptian queen known to have been honored in this way. Furthermore, her monument at Saqqara contained a solar boat, a royal privilege reserved for the afterlife of the pharaohs.

Different versions of Manetho’s king list, which was compiled by an Egyptian priest during the reign of Ptolemy I (third century C.E.), record Den’s reign as lasting either 23 years or 42 years; and either number leaves room for a regency of a reasonable length. The Turin Canon, the most comprehensive but also the most damaged of the king lists, does not specify a time frame for Den’s reign.

There is some evidence that Merytnit may have been the daughter of the second pharaoh of the first dynasty, Djer; and if this is true, she could be the earliest example that would support the heiress theory of female succession. The heiress theory suggests that kingship passed through marriage to the royal female line, making each princess a potential heiress. According to this idea, Djet would have married Merytnit, the daughter of Pharaoh Djer, as a necessary step to obtaining the kingship. For the heiress theory to be correct, however, every king would have had to marry a royal woman, and this did not always happen. Egyptian succession might not have

7. Ibid.
been matrilineal, as claimed by those who subscribe to the heiress theory, but at the same time it was not strictly patrilineal either. While a few kings did marry outside the royal family, the majority chose to marry a woman of the royal line. The preference shown for alliances with royal women suggests that there was some benefit to be had from marriages of this sort.

According to both Eusebius and Africanus, Manetho stated that during the reign of Binothris, the third pharaoh of the second dynasty, it was decreed by law that a woman could be pharaoh. In a society that had accepted the female authority of Merynit, it is unlikely that the decree was revolutionary but rather was an articulation of an unspoken ethos present in Egyptian society. Regardless, this law would not have been passed without reason. The most obvious motivation is that Binothris had no sons and that he or a powerful official wished to make certain that his successor, if a woman, could not be denied the throne on a legal technicality related to her sex. Binothris was succeeded by three or more shadowy pharaohs about whom little is known, and the king lists that discuss these kings disagree on their names, order of rule, and the durations of their reigns. It is entirely possible that one or more of these pharaohs was a woman. Binothris’ law could reasonably be interpreted to mean that preserving the power of the kinship group was more important than gender considerations.

Gender was certainly not a consideration during the reign of Sobekneferu, the last


pharaoh of the twelfth dynasty and the first fully attested female ruler to carry a king’s titulary. Sobekneferu is listed in the Turin Canon, the Saqqara king list, and in Manetho’s writings; and she is also represented archaeologically, although her tomb has never been definitely identified.\(^{14}\) Manetho identified Sobekneferu as the sister of Amenemhat IV, the pharaoh who preceded her; and while this has led some scholars to identify her as his wife, there is no evidence of any sort to indicate that she ever bore the title King’s Wife.\(^{15}\) On her monuments, including a granite column from Hawara, Sobekneferu herself claimed to be the daughter of Amenemhat III; and according to both the Turin Canon and Manetho, she ruled for four years.\(^{16}\) The brevity of her reign, combined with her place at the end of the dynasty before the chaos of the Second Intermediary Period, has often been interpreted as direct evidence of a woman made king grudgingly to extend a dying dynasty. Yet the reign of Amenemhat IV was only eight years, and the reigns of some of the thirteenth-dynasty kings who followed Sobekneferu to the throne were even shorter.\(^{17}\) Pharaoh Khutawire, who ruled almost directly after her, was king for barely two years.\(^{18}\)

There is also no indication that Sobekneferu was resented in any way by her subjects. The fact that she was included in all the major king lists is an indication that she was perfectly

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18. Ibid.
acceptable as a ruler, and no attempt was ever made to destroy the records of her rule, unlike
later queens like Hatshepsut. A number of statues from Tel Daba portray Sobekneferu as a
clearly female monarch, and on a statue now housed in the Louvre she wears a woman’s dress
partially covered by a pharaoh’s kilt. The statue also shows the remains of a nemes head cloth,
a part of the royal regalia worn exclusively by kings. This is hardly a traditional representation
of a royal female and, combined with Sobekneferu’s use of a full titulary, makes it clear that the
rule of a woman was neither revolutionary nor provocative. The lack of protest or backlash from
the unabashed rule of a female queen suggests once again that masculinity or femininity was not
as important to rule in Egypt as ability and membership in the exclusive kinship group.

In contrast to Merytnit, no physical evidence contemporary to the sixth dynasty exists to
support the existence of Nitokerti, a sixth-dynasty queen who may have been Egypt’s first female
pharaoh. Although her name has become associated with many legends, she is still well
represented in the king lists. The earliest record of Nitokerti’s rule is from the Turin Canon,
compiled for Ramesses II in the thirteenth dynasty B.C.E., and it places Neith-ikret after Pepi II

19. Joyce Tyldesley, Daughters of Isis, 220; Catherine H. Roehrig and Glenn E. Markoe,
Hills, 1996), s.v. “In Women Good and Bad Fortune are on Earth: Status and Roles of Women in
Egyptian Culture,” by Betsy M. Bryan, 30.

20. Elisabeth Delange, Catalogue des Statues Egyptiennes du Moyen Empire, (Paris: La

21. Ibid.


23. There is no evidence that Merytnit, although she predated Nitokerti, ever adopted the
title of pharaoh; and if Nitokerti existed, this means that she would have been the first female
monarch to rule Egypt under the title pharaoh.
and Merenre II near the end of the dynasty.\textsuperscript{24} The Canon gives Merenre II a reign of one year and Nitokerti a slightly longer reign, but the suggestion that Nitokerti reigned as one final, desperate attempt to extend the dynastic line in the absence of potential male heirs is not supported by the evidence. According to the Turin Canon, Nitokerti was followed to the throne by a string of obscure, presumably male, pharaohs, including Neferka and Ibi.\textsuperscript{25} It seems reasonable to assume that the Egyptians, if truly desperate to extend the male line, would have accepted the rule of Neferka over that of a woman, as his ascendance directly after Nitokerti indicates that he was likely a relative of some sort.

Manetho, on the other hand, recorded Nitokerti as the sixth and last king of the sixth dynasty, crediting her with a twelve-year reign and lauding her beauty, bravery, and nobility.\textsuperscript{26} He also credited her, erroneously, with building the third pyramid at Giza. This confusion was caused by the fact that the pyramid was remodeled near the time of her reign (it was built by Pharaoh Mankaura of the fourth dynasty). Herodotus, a Greek historian who visited Egypt in the fifth century B.C.E., wrote that Egyptian priests read him the story of Nitokerti, or Nitocris, from a papyrus, as follows:

\begin{quote}
The queen bore the same name as the Babylonian princess, namely, Nitocris. They said that she succeeded her brother; he had been king of Egypt, and was put to death by his subjects, who then place her upon the throne. Bent on avenging his death, she devised a cunning scheme by which she destroyed a vast number of Egyptians. She constructed a spacious underground chamber, and, on pretence of inaugurating it, contrived the following: Inviting to a banquet those of the Egyptians whom she knew to have had the chief share in the murder of her brother, she suddenly, as they were feasting, let the river in upon
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} Jacques Kinnaer, “Turin Kinglist,” (14 February 2006).

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Manetho, \textit{The History of Egypt}, 55.
them, by means of a secret duct of large size. This, and this only, did they tell me of her, except that, when she had done as I have said, she threw herself into an apartment full of ashes, that she might escape the vengeance whereto she would otherwise have been exposed. 27

While traditions recorded by Herodotus and Manetho are highly stylized and not strictly accurate, they do preserve a consciousness of female rule in the sixth dynasty.

Ankhesenpepi II, another sixth-dynasty queen, may also have ruled Egypt, although unlike Nitokerti she did not do so as a pharaoh. Ankhesenpepi II was the second wife of Pharaoh Pepi I and the mother of Pepi II, the fourth pharaoh of the sixth dynasty. 28 She was the daughter of a hereditary prince and not a member of the royal family, making her one of Egypt’s few non-royal queens. Ankhesenpepi II was the sister of Pepi I’s first wife, Ankhesenpepi I, and the aunt of Pharaoh Merenre I, the third pharaoh of the sixth dynasty. 29 Manetho credited Merenre I with a reign of seven years. After his death he was succeeded by Pepi II, his six-year-old half-brother and cousin. 30 Manetho recorded Pepi II’s rule as ninety-six years, the longest rule in Egyptian history. 31 Given his age and the length of his rule, it is certain that Pepi II had a regent of some sort, and a likely candidate was his mother.

Ankhesenpepi II is not mentioned in any of the kings lists, but a statue now in the Brooklyn Museum depicts her seated on a throne with a child-sized but fully adult Pepi II

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
perched on her knee. This statue could certainly be interpreted as a commemoration of Ankhesenpepi II’s rule, all the more unusual because she was not royal. If she did act as regent during Pepi II’s youth, she must have done so on the authority of her own influential family, a theory to an extent in accord with the heiress theory of succession. As in the case of Meryniet, there were undoubtedly many male candidates eager for the guardianship of Ankhesenpepi II’s young son, men more closely related to the royal clan; and yet Ankhesenpepi II was still the most likely guardian of Pepi II. To suggest that she was tolerated merely as an interim ruler for her son, if she did in fact rule as regent, is a failure to fully analyze the connotations of the status of Ankhesenpepi II as a non-royal queen.

Khentykaues I of the fifth dynasty, like her sixth dynasty counterpart Ankhesenpepi II, may have ruled as regent for her children. She is believed to have been the wife of Userkaf, the founder of the fifth dynasty, and the mother of the two pharaohs who succeeded him, Sahure and Nefererkere. Her name is not found in the king lists, but a huge tomb was erected for her between the monuments of two earlier pharaohs, a great honor. On the granite doorway of her tomb is an inscription that has traditionally been translated “mother of two kings,” but which modern translators acknowledge can also be legitimately translated as “king and mother of a king.” Her name has never been found in a cartouche, which tends to discredit the claim that she ever held the title of pharaoh, but it is not unlikely that she could have served as regent for either or both of her sons. Manetho recorded Sahure’s reign as thirteen years and Nefererkere’s as


twenty years, and this does leave room for a regency of average length.35 After her death a royal
cult and estate were established to honor her, a sure indication that--whatever her position--she
was a powerful figure in the early fifth dynasty.36

It is clear that from its early days Egypt was no stranger to female authority, but no period
of Egyptian history is more characterized by strong female leadership than the eighteenth
dynasty, nearly three centuries after Sobekneferu's rule. The eighteenth dynasty was preceded by
a period of hundreds of years of unrest due to the invasion and occupation of Egypt by a group of
Asiatic invaders known as the Hyksos. The Hyksos ruled from the northern delta, receiving
tribute from the south, where a line of Egyptian kings centered at Thebes eventually succeeded in
expelling the invaders and uniting the land once again. The seventeenth dynasty of Thebes
became the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt, the first of an era called the "New Kingdom." It's
political ideology increasingly featured prominent roles for royal women.

Ahhotep I, daughter of Sekenenre Tao and Tetisheri, may have been the first of the New
Kingdom's female rulers. Ahhotep married her brother, Sekenenre Tao II, who subsequently died
in battle with the Hyksos. She is believed to have been the mother of Kamose, the successor of
Sekenenre Tao II; of Ahmose, the brother and successor of Kamose; and of Ahmose-Nefertari,
Ahmose's wife. Kamose ruled for only a short period of time; and while there is little evidence
to suggest that Ahhotep served as regent during his short reign, such a situation was certainly
possible. There is a significant body of data demonstrating her position of authority after
Kamose's death, during the official reign of Kamose's brother Ahmose.


Ahhotep may have acted as regent in Ahmose's youth, and she may also have acted as his co-ruler. Ahmose fought a long campaign to expel the Hyksos far from his administrative capital, and while he did so it was necessary for someone to maintain order and royal control in Thebes. The most likely candidate is Ahhotep. Her active role is reflected in her prominence in Ahmose's monuments and in the names of her followers. A stele at the Temple of Karnak detailing royal gifts to Amen-Re gives Ahhotep the powerful title used by other female pharaohs like Sobekneferu and Hatshepsut, "Mistress of the Two Lands," along with other very important titles. The stele of Kares, Ahhotep's chief steward, also known as the limestone stele of Dira abu el-Naga, quotes a decree from the queen giving Kares a tomb at the royally owned precinct of Abydos. The power to award a tomb or funerary monument to a servant or private individual in any royal property was a prerogative exclusively of the pharaoh, showing that Ahhotep was making administrative decisions and dispensing royal favors like any other ruler.

Another stele from the Karnak temple of Amen-Re, authored by Ahmose, suggests not only a co-rulership between Ahmose and his mother Ahhotep, but also hints at possible military action on her part. Ahhotep is described as the "one who cares for Egypt. She has looked after her soldiers, she has guarded her; she has brought back her fugitives and collected together her deserters; she has pacified Upper Egypt, and expelled her rebels." The weapons and the three golden flies found in Ahhotep's intact tomb in 1859 confirm the idea that Ahhotep acted as both


39. Ibid., 29-32.
an administrative and active ruler. The three golden flies was a military decoration awarded for
courage in battle, and Ahhotep is the only queen known to have been awarded this honor.\textsuperscript{40}

After Ahhotep's death, Ahmose-Nefertari continued the role established by her mother.
As the sister and wife of the Pharaoh Ahmose, Ahmose-Nefertari retained much of Ahhotep's
power in Thebes and was a prominent figure in the government throughout the reign of her
husband and her son, Amenhotep I.\textsuperscript{41} There is little evidence that Ahmose-Nefertari ever directly
ruled Egypt, but considering her prominence and the length of Amenhotep I's reign, it is entirely
possible that she acted as regent during the early portion of his rule. It is clear, however, that
Ahmose-Nefertari was greatly revered by her brother-husband, her son, and even by her son's
successor, Thutmosis I. Ahmose even purchased the second priesthood of Amen and deeded it
to Ahmose-Nefertari and her successors in perpetuity, greatly expanding the holdings of the
God's Wife and offering both economic and religious power. Ahmose-Nefertari made the title of
God's Wife of Amen her chosen designation and used it in preference to all other titles on records
and monuments. Ahmose's gift allowed Ahmose-Nefertari and her heirs a form of independence
never before experienced by Egyptian queens.

Hatshepsut was one of the first queens to enjoy Ahmose's gift, and she, too, in her early
years, preferred the title of God's Wife of Amen to any other. Hatshepsut was the daughter of
Thutmosis I and a woman named Ahmose, believed to have been a relative of some sort of
Amenhotep I. Hatshepsut married her half-brother Thutmosis II, son of Thutmosis I and an
obscure, non-royal harem woman; and as his Great Royal Wife she occupied a prominent place

\textsuperscript{40} "Details of the Object: Three Golden Flies," \textit{The Egyptian Museum Online}, (May

\textsuperscript{41} Robins, \textit{Women in Ancient Egypt}, 44.
in the monuments of Thutmosis II. The extent to which Hatshepsut was involved in her husband's government is unclear, but monuments erected by Thutmosis II at Karnak often emphasize the king and queen nearly equally, hinting at a fairly active role for Hatshepsut.42

Thutmosis II and Hatshepsut produced only one known child, the princess Neferure, and after a short reign Thutmosis II died. A very young Thutmosis III, the nonroyal son of a harem woman, assumed the throne; but a biographical inscription on the tomb of Ineni, a servant to Thutmosis II, indicates that Hatshepsut had claimed the governance of Egypt:

His son stood in his place as king of the two lands, he having assumed the throne of the one who had begotten him. His sister, the God's Wife Hatshepsut, settled the affairs of the land, the Two Lands in her governance. It was by Egypt with bowed head that she was served, the excellent seed of the god, who came forth from him. The prow-rope of the South, the mooring stake of the Southerners; the excellent stern-rope of the Northland is she; the mistress of command, whose plans are excellent, the two banks being satisfied when she speaks.43

The inscription emphasizes the power of the God's Wife of Amen, as well as her lineage. Hatshepsut was the daughter of two royal parents, something neither her husband nor her stepson could claim. Not only did Hatshepsut possess a superior pedigree, but she was already a powerful figure in the government of Egypt, two factors that would have made it very easy for her peers to accept her authority.

Hatshepsut may initially have been regarded as regent to Thutmosis III, but gradually she moved to the position of co-ruler and king alongside her stepson, eventually superseding him so that Thutmosis III remained in the background throughout her reign. Hatshepsut's dominant


position is indicated by the fact that, sometime after Thutmosis II's death, she combined the economic holdings of the God's Wife of Amen with the holdings of the king and the temple of Amen. Hatshepsut's retainers, like the steward Senenmut, could hold titles from all three institutions. She was fully in command of Egypt, or Hatshepsut would never have relinquished control of the estate of the God's Wife of Amen, her means of economic and financial independence.

Like Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut chose a full pharaonic titulary: "Horus Powerful of Kas, She of the Two Ladies Flourishing of Years, the Golden Horus Divine of Appearances, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Maatkare, the Daughter of Re United-with-Amen Hatshepsut." She used both masculine and feminine figures and titles to represent herself in inscriptions, a necessity in the time of the New Kingdom, when Hatshepsut as pharaoh was both the son and incarnation of Amen. This is illustrated by Hatshepsut's obelisks. Hatshepsut exercised all the prerogatives of the pharaoh, including an extensive campaign of monument building. She erected four obelisks in the Temple of Amen at Karnak, two of which are gone and one of which has fallen. The fourth, the northernmost obelisk of pink granite from Aswan, still stands 97.5 feet and is the highest standing obelisk in Egypt. Inscribed on the shaft and base on all four sides, the obelisk emphasizes once again Hatshepsut's devotion to her divine father Amen and earthly father Thutmosis I. She claimed, "The god knows me well, Amen, Lord of Thrones-of-

44. Dorman, Senenmut, 204-206.

45. Ibid.

the-Two-Lands; he made me rule,"\(^{47}\) and maintained, "I am his daughter in very truth, who serves him, who knows what he ordains. My reward from my father is life-stability-rule, on the Horus throne of all the living, eternally like Re."\(^{48}\) Masculine and feminine designations used on the obelisk alternate, making Hatshepsut both the son and daughter of Amen.

One of Hatshepsut's most famous monuments is her elaborate limestone mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri in Thebes. At this temple, named Djeser Djeseru, Hatshepsut recorded her trading and military expeditions and her extensive building projects, all of which demonstrated her effectiveness as the preserver of Maat, divine order. It is also the location of many of Hatshepsut's male manifestations. Hatshepsut is repeatedly shown as the male god Osiris, and one relief even depicts Amen presenting the baby Hatshepsut, complete with male genitalia, to the gods for celestial acceptance and acclaim. Other inscriptions show Thutmosis I presenting Hatshepsut to Egypt as his heir. Whole sections of Djeser Djeseru are dedicated to enhancing Hatshepsut's relationship to both her father Thutmosis I and Amen-Re, the sun god.

Hatshepsut repeatedly emphasized her royal birth and divine associations, and the evidence indicates that she also made great efforts to foster the cult of Amen. During her reign the number of both male and female officials associated with the cult of Amen-Re increased notably, and the reasons for Hatshepsut's unusually active patronage are clear.\(^{49}\) In the New Kingdom the cult of Amen was associated with Hatshepsut's family line, so that the divinity of


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 29.

Hatshepsut's ancestors and therefore of Hatshepsut herself was based on their relationship to Amen. At the same time the cult of Amen had risen to power because Amen was the patron god of Thebes, the eighteenth-dynasty capital patronized by Hatshepsut's family line. The rise of the power of Amen coincided with the rise of the eighteenth dynasty, so that the cult of Amen depended on royal patronage for survival; and Hatshepsut and her ancestors depended on the cult of Amen for support and divine justification. Strengthening Amen strengthened Hatshepsut.

Whatever her methods of maintaining power, they must have proved effective, because Hatshepsut ruled Egypt for 21 years and 9 months as recorded by Manetho.\(^50\) Thereafter Hatshepsut disappears from the record, and her mummy has never been definitively identified. Thutmose III initiated 30 years of prosperous rule, and in the final days of his reign he began a systematic desecration of Hatshepsut's name and monuments. Traditionally, Egyptologists have identified Hatshepsut's gender and her subordination of Thutmose III as the motive for his actions, but the time lag between his ascension to power and his actions against Hatshepsut suggests that external factors were at work.

It is probable that Hatshepsut's gender was a factor in the erasure of her memory, but it is unlikely that it was the main cause. Women like Sobekneferu and Ahhotep I had ruled Egypt earlier; but female rulers were still the exception rather than the norm, and no woman had ever ruled as long or as effectively as Hatshepsut. There is no indication of any kind, however, that female rule fell outside the bounds of Egyptian political ideology. There is also no indication that a female incarnation of Amen or Horus was offensive to the Egyptians. According to the Egyptian cosmology, every man and woman on death became the male god Osiris; and in the

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\(^{50}\) Manetho, *The History of Egypt*, 101.
New Kingdom women, like men, were buried with penis symbols to allow regeneration in the next world. In the *Book of the Dead* the many gods of Egypt, both male and female, represent different body parts of Osiris; and divine objects were often characterized as both male and female. The goddess Mut, for example, even appears with an erect penis.  

A now famous graffito found in an unfinished tomb above Deir el-Bahri depicts a bent female figure being penetrated from behind by an upright male figure, and it has been identified as a political statement about Hatshepsut and her chief steward and accused lover Senenmut, illustrating public negative feeling toward the pharaoh and commenting on the unusual nature of a female king.  

While this is a possible interpretation of the graffito, no text identifies the sketch and it uses no common royal representations, such as a ureaus, which could have been placed on the female figure's wig, a common headdress of the eighteenth dynasty. In addition, depictions of sexual acts are common in Egyptian monuments, and only its proximity to Hatshepsut's mortuary temple suggests that the graffito is a political commentary expressing dissatisfaction with Hatshepsut's gender. Moreover, the tolerance extended to preceding female rulers tends to negate even the tenuous implications of the proximity of the graffito to Djeser Djeseru. Hatshepsut's gender may have functioned as an accessible excuse for the vandalism of her records by her successors, but it was “as much a pretext as a motive.”  

It is much more likely that Thutmose III attacked Hatshepsut's memorials in an effort to

secure the succession for his son, Amenhotep II. Thutmosis III himself was only the son of a concubine, so his son was even farther removed from the royal line. While it is nearly certain that Hatshepsut and her daughter Neferure were both dead at the time, it is possible that other collateral family members, maybe even a son of Neferure, existed and could have garnered support from Hatshepsut's former allies. When possible, Thutmosis III did not destroy Hatshepsut's monuments, but rather erased her name and replaced it with his own or that of Amenhotep II. It was to the benefit of Thutmosis III to claim Hatshepsut's accomplishments for himself and his son, a ready means of protecting his own diverging dynastic line.

While Hatshepsut's long, prosperous rule and the posthumous defacement of her monuments and records left an indelible mark on Egyptian history, the role of one of her most well-known successors is far less clear. Nefertiti was the Great Royal Wife of the famous Akhenaten, and she had a prominent role in his radical pursuit of Atenism, the worship of the sun god to the exclusion of all others. Nefertiti was probably not royal and never held the title of God's Wife of Amen because of Akhenaten's rejection of polytheism, but she appears to have fulfilled the same functions, occupying such an important place in her husband's monuments and inscriptions that some Egyptologists believe she acted as Akhenaten's co-ruler. In opposition to this theory is a shawabti death doll that identifies Nefertiti as Great God's Wife, but not a ruling monarch. Contradictorily, the shawabti is also holding a pharaoh's scepter, suggesting she did


55. Dorman, Senenmut, 79; Catherine H. Roehrig and Glenn E. Markoe, eds. Mistress of the House, 34.

rule to some extent.

The Amarna tomb of Panehesy shows Nefertiti and Akhenaten both wearing the Atef crown of kingship, although Nefertiti’s crown is smaller and less elaborate. One inscription shows her dressed in male garb but wearing a female crown while killing the enemies of Egypt; another shows her making offerings to Aten. Both activities were normally reserved for the pharaoh. She is also found in Sphinx form, although some scholars believe such depictions are simply a manifestation of the growing prestige of eighteenth-dynasty queens. The extent to which a queen's prestige could grow before she would be equivalent to a co-ruler is unclear, however; and while the records indicate that Nefertiti held a very important place in Akhenaten's governance, her exact position remains speculative.

Nefertiti disappears from the record between the twelfth and the fourteenth year of Akhenaten's reign, replaced as Great Royal Wife by her daughter Meritaten. Some scholars believe she somehow fell from Akhenaten's good graces or simply died. There is no evidence to support either conclusion, however, and other scholars suspect that Nefertiti instead became Akhenaten's co-regent, Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten. Egyptologists believe that Akhenaten adopted Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten as his co-regent near the end of his reign, and like Hatshepsut, Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten's cartouche was characterized by both male and


female elements. Unfortunately, the evidence associating Nefertiti with Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten is sparse. Nefertiti’s shawabti death doll identifies her as “Neferneferuaten, Nefertiti,” but Nefertiti was not the only woman known by the name “Neferneferuaten” in the Amarna Period. Inscriptions of Nefertiti characterized by both male and female power symbols suggest further correlation, but such circumstantial evidence is hardly conclusive. If Nefertiti had taken the name Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten and ruled as Akhenaten's co-ruler, it would explain her disappearance from the records and the absence of any memorial regarding her death, but the lack of substantiating proof has led many Egyptologists to explore other solutions to the identity of Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten.

One such candidate for the role of the female pharaoh is Nefertiti and Akhenaten's oldest daughter, Meritaten, but as she is identified as Great Royal Wife in inscriptions with both Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten and Ankhkheperure Smenkhkare, Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten's probable successor, it seems unlikely that Meritaten ruled Egypt as Akhenaten's co-ruler. Other Egyptologists believe that Ankhkheperure-Smenkhkare was Akhenaten's sole male co-ruler and successor, but the primary evidence associating Smenkhkare with Akhenaten is a jar inscribed with the cartouches of the two pharaohs, an object that easily could have been constructed after Akhenaten's death to lend Smenkhkare legitimacy by association, a common practice. A number of stelae dated from the end of Akhenaten's reign,


however, show Akhenaten with a co-ruler, first identified as a female king by J.R. Harris, and the only known candidate for this female pharaoh is Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten.65

James P. Allen of the Metropolitan Museum of Art has even theorized that Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten must have been Nefertiti and Akhenaten's fourth daughter, Neferneferuaten-tasherit, the only other royal woman known to have used the name Neferneferuaten. He suggests that Akhenaten appointed Neferneferuaten-tasherit as his co-ruler in the hope that she would produce a male heir where her mother and sisters had failed, and baring that preserve Akhenaten's direct dynastic line on the throne for at least one more generation after his death.66 This theory, for which there is little direct evidence, implicitly embraces the common idea that a king would only choose a woman as his successor if he had no appropriate male descendants, while also assuming that Tutankhamen was not Akhenaten's son but rather a collateral relative descended from Thutmosis IV, Akhenaten's grandfather, or Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father.

If it is accepted that a pharaoh would never be succeeded by a woman given a male candidate, and it is also accepted that Tutankhamen was not Akhenaten's son but rather a distant relative, an argument could be made for Akhenaten's choice of Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten as his co-ruler and heir over the infant Tutankhamen. Most Egyptologists believe, however, that Tutankhamen was Akhenaten's son; albeit not fully royal, and if this is true, Akhenaten's selection of a female co-ruler is all the more puzzling. As his radical pursuit of monotheism


indicates, Akhenaten was hardly a predictable or traditional monarch, but the choice of a daughter as heir in preference to a son seems unlikely.

Whether Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten was Nefertiti or someone else, it can be claimed with some certainty that a female pharaoh did exist before or after the end of Akhenaten's reign. Her canopic jars, designating her as king, have been found reused in the tomb of the later pharaoh Tutankhamen, and Manetho recorded the twelve-year rule of a female pharaoh named “Akenhkeres,” a plausible cannibalization of Ankhkheperure.\textsuperscript{67} Manetho's dates remain unverified, but it is known that Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten ruled for at least three years, as indicated by a Theban graffito from the tomb of Pairi that identifies the regnal year of the ruling king at that time.\textsuperscript{68} All the records seem to indicate that a female monarch of some sort, probably named Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten, ruled Egypt in the eighteenth dynasty before Tutankhamen's succession to the throne.

Tutankhamen assumed the throne of Egypt at a very young age, and it is entirely likely that his Great Royal Wife, Ankhesenamen, was several years his senior. Ankhesenamen is believed to have been the third daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, originally named Ankhesenpaaten; and reliefs from Amarna indicate that Ankhesenpaaten produced at least one child during Akhenaten's reign, a daughter named Ankhesenpaaten-tasherit.\textsuperscript{69} Many Egyptologists believe that Akhenaten was the father of his daughter's child; but regardless of the

\textsuperscript{67} Marc Gabolde, \textit{D’Akhenaton à Toutânkhamon}, 185; Manetho, \textit{The History of Egypt}, 109.


\textsuperscript{69} Rainer Hanke, \textit{Amarna Reliefs Aus Hermopolis: Neue Veröffentlichungen und Studien}, (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1978), 142-145.
child's parentage, Ankhesenpaaten would have had to have been at least in her early teens to give birth during the last years of Akhenaten's seventeen-year reign. Tutankhamen, however, is estimated to have inherited the throne between the age of ten and eleven years based on the wine-jar records found in his tomb, suggesting that Ankhesenamen was quite a few years older than her child-husband.70

If Ankhesenamen was in her middle or late teens, she could have acted as her young husband's regent, ruling the country in his stead. Such a situation is certainly possible and would not have been unacceptable to the Egyptians, but there is little evidence to support this theory. This scenario would, however, certainly explain Ankhesenamen's unprecedented actions after Tutankhamen's early death. Clay tablets from the Hittite capital of Hattusas record correspondence between Ankhesenamen, called Dahamunzu, and the King of the Hittites, Suppiluliumas, wherein Ankhesenamen requests a royal husband:

My husband is dead. I have no children. Your sons are said to be grown up. If you will give me one of your sons, he will be my husband, he will be of help to me. Send him forthwith and thereafter I will make him my husband.71

Suspicious of overtures from Egypt, an old enemy of the Hittites, Suppiluliumas requested more information, and Ankhesenamen's reply makes her intentions explicit:

He [Tutankhamen] is dead and I have no son. Should I take a servant? I have not written to any country on this matter, I have only written to you. Your sons are said to be grown up. Send me one of your sons, and he shall be my husband and King of Egypt.72


72. Ibid.
The obvious implication is that marriage to Ankhesenamen was the only qualification required for the rule of Egypt, an implication that would tend to support the heiress theory of female succession. Previous pharaohs had asked for foreign wives, but this is the first known instance of a queen requesting a foreign husband. Ankhesenamen's solicitation of a foreign spouse indicates that she was attempting to maintain a position that was threatened in some way; the most obvious source of such a threat was the activity of the government official Ay.

Ay is believed to have been an older relative of Tutankhamen and Ankhesenamen, and some scholars have even speculated that he was Ankhesenamen's maternal grandfather. The records indicate that his career stretched from the reign of Amenhotep III into the reign of Tutankhamen, whom he served as vizier; and painted scenes in Tutankhamen's tomb depict Ay presiding over the burial of the dead pharaoh. Conducting the burial rites of a dead pharaoh was an act of legitimization performed by the king's successor, so by burying Tutankhamen, Ay was making a claim to the throne. Ankhesenamen's actions in seeking a foreign alliance showed that she believed that Ay would usurp her position in the government; and since Ay would hardly have been interested in usurping the role of a queen, it can reasonably be concluded that Ankhesenamen was attempting to protect her role as a ruling monarch.

Ankhesenamen's eventual fate is unclear; however, it is known that her attempt to maintain control of Egypt failed. Suppiluliumas did send his son Zannanza to marry Ankhesenamen, but the Hittite records show that the prince was ambushed and murdered on the border of Egypt.\textsuperscript{73} Although there is little evidence to support their views, many scholars

speculate that Ay was responsible for Zannanza's death. A questionable blue glass ring bearing the cartouches of both Ankhesenamen and Ay has led some scholars to suggest that Ankhesenamen was forced to marry her nonroyal grandfather to legitimate his claim to the throne, but all that can be said with certainty is that after Ay's ascension Ankhesenamen, like her mother Nefertiti, disappears from the record.

If she did rule Egypt, Ankhesenamen was the last known female ruler until the end of the nineteenth dynasty, when Tausret became pharaoh. Tausret was the Great Royal Wife of Seti II; and while there is no indication that she had royal ancestry, her prominence during her husband's reign implies a near joint rule. After Seti II's death she was appointed regent for her young step-son Siptah, another indicator of her power in Seti II's government; but traditionally Egyptologists have regarded a prominent government official, Chancellor Bay, as the real power behind Tausret. The publication of a section of a recently translated potsherd sent to the workmen of Bay's tomb reveals, however, that Chancellor Bay had been executed by or before the fifth year of Tausret's regency:

Pharaoh life-prosperity-health, has killed the great enemy Bay.75

The ostracon cites Siptah as the pharaoh responsible for Bay's death; but considering Siptah's youth and Tausret's regency, it is entirely possible that Tausret had a hand in the demise of an official who interfered with her authority. Regardless of who was directly responsible for Bay's elimination, after Siptah's premature death six years later, Tausret assumed the throne unopposed,


counting the six years she ruled as regent as her own six regnal years. Imagery of Tausret is unabashedly female, and she was undeniably a female pharaoh. She has been identified as Manetho's nineteenth dynasty pharaoh “Thouris,” and it is believed that after four more years of rule, Tausret died. The cause of her death is unknown and her mummy has never been positively identified, and like so many female monarchs she simply disappears from the record. Her tomb in the Valley of the Kings was converted into a tomb for Sethakhte, the founder of the twentieth dynasty.

A careful evaluation of the rule of Egyptian Queens from the first through the nineteenth dynasty shows that female succession to the throne of Egypt was more complex than a mere desire to extend a dynastic family line. While dynastic circumstances did influence female rule in that membership in the exclusive kinship group was a prerequisite of power, it is clear that at least some of Egypt's female monarchs ruled or served as regents based on their own abilities, not simply because they were the last representatives of dying dynasties. There was always a supply of male candidates eager to fill the position of regent or pharaoh, and the selection of a woman over qualified male candidates indicates that the woman was extraordinary or capable in some way that her competitors were not. The application of western ideas of royal female rule and gender roles is not appropriate within the context of an ancient eastern society with a different culture and traditions. The idea within Egyptology that women only ruled at the end of dynasties in a desperate attempt to continue the male dynastic line is the result of a superficial examination of female rule, and it can no longer be accepted without question.

76. Manetho, The History of Egypt, 149.


