

ANCIENT HISTORY

Assess modern and ancient interpretations and images of Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut's reign is both an important and controversial one. Modern scholars have debated on her and her reign and whether she was a benign ruler. They question this because she had been so utterly destroyed through records and monuments like no other throughout history.

However, it must be stated that if she were indeed a malicious and wicked ruler, why is there no evidence of opposition to her reign. The fact that she was also a woman further disproves interpretations that she was unliked because for a woman to reign for so long without any opposition or disapproval to her reign – that is an extraordinary thing.

Hatshepsut's building programs are evidence of her efficiency as a ruler. She undertook many initiatives such as repairing old buildings, finishing those of Thutmose II and building her own monuments. She states on a cliff at Aswan that she had restored the local temple of Hathor "which was in ruins". She also sculptured one of the most amazing monuments in the Ancient World, Deir el Bahri, and the obelisks. These, her own personal buildings, provided mass employment for the Egyptians. We know this because of the inscriptions concerning the construction and transportation of the obelisks inside her mortuary temple and from the weight and size of the remaining obelisks. Breasted states that she constructed these as "monuments to her father, Amun", reinforcing her ability to promote religion throughout Egypt.

Another significant aspect of Hatshepsut's reign was her expedition to Punt. It is obvious that she regarded this as her biggest accomplishment as she dedicated a whole wall of her burial tomb to it. She had, as Breasted records, gone where no king has ever gone before. She was able to extend Egypt's border and employ a large amount of Egyptians for the journey to bring back resources. Such of these include myrrh, animal skins, ebony, ivory and slaves. Myrrh was particularly important for Egypt as it was a sacred incense widely used in Egyptian temples. Her trip proved to be successful as Egypt was able to trade with King Puruha and his tribe. The resources brought back also brought great gain to Egypt's economy and continued to grow throughout Hatshepsut's reign.

Perhaps why Hatshepsut was accepted by her contemporaries was because she presented herself as male in official statues. Tyldesley states that it was a "short-lived attempt to create a new image of the pharaoh as an asexual mixture of male and female". She is shown on a black diorite statue and a limestone statue at Karnak as possessing male attributes. Such include the blue khepresh and fake beard. Because of Egypt's traditional association with a male pharaoh, the fact that she depicted herself as male made her seem more acceptable to the Egyptians. Robins states that "she established herself as de facto ruler of Egypt by drawing on kingly iconography, titulary and actions". Tyldesley agrees, stating that "by depicting herself in the most regal and heroic way, Hatshepsut was making sure that this is precisely what she would become".

Modern historians have doubted her effectiveness as ruler as they believed that she did not lead any military campaigns. However, that has been reconsidered due to the evidence found at Dra abu el Naga, Karnak and Deir el Bahri that record of a campaign into Nubia. Historians such as Redford have questioned previous thoughts by stating "perhaps there is more evidence than previously thought". Tyldesley agrees stating "there is nothing in Hatshepsut's character to suggest that she would have been frightened of taking military initiative".

Also, some modern historians such as Mertz have suggested that Hatshepsut was a wicked stepmother for usurping Thutmose II's throne. However, this idea has been questioned as if Hatshepsut had taken the throne in a cruel manner, surely Thutmose, as the leader of her army, would have challenged her rule or overthrown her. Therefore the effectiveness of her rule must be reconsidered.

In conclusion, ancient and modern images and interpretations of Hatshepsut's effectiveness as a ruler have developed over time. Perceptions keep changing about Hatshepsut's rule as there are fairly limited evidence as a lot of her monuments and inscriptions have been destroyed.