NO PREP

Hatshepsut

The Woman Who Became Pharaoh

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Hatshepsut: The Woman Who Became Pharaoh

A Queen Who Refused the Title

In ancient Egypt's long history, the role of pharaoh was almost exclusively male. The office carried divine masculine associations — the pharaoh was the son of Ra, the embodiment of Horus, the heir of Osiris. When women ruled, they typically did so as regents for young male heirs, using the title 'queen' and stepping aside when the boy came of age. Hatshepsut did something different. Serving initially as regent for her young stepson Thutmose III after her husband Thutmose II died around 1479 BCE, she gradually claimed the full title of pharaoh — wearing the double crown, the false beard, and the kilt of kingship — and ruled Egypt for approximately twenty-two years as one of its most successful rulers. Hatshepsut's biography before her rise to pharaoh is reconstructed from fragmentary evidence. She was the daughter of Thutmose I, one of Egypt's greatest warrior pharaohs, and his chief wife. When her father died, she married her half-brother Thutmose II, as was customary in the royal family. Thutmose II appears to have been a weak ruler who died

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Running Egypt: Two Decades of Achievement

Hatshepsut's reign was marked by prosperity, ambitious building, and expanded trade rather than military conquest, though she was not passive in defense of Egypt's borders. Her most famous achievement was a trade expedition to the mysterious land of Punt (probably located in the Horn of Africa, possibly modern Eritrea or Somalia), which returned with thirty-one living myrrh trees, gold, ebony, ivory, incense, and exotic animals. The expedition is depicted in remarkable detail on the walls of her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, providing one of the most

complete records of an ancient trade mission in existence. Her building program was equally impressive. The mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri (a colonnaded structure built into the limestone cliffs on the Nile's west bank near Luxor) is considered one of the finest examples of ancient Egyptian architecture, startlingly modern in its clean horizontal lines. She erected dozens of obelisks, including two enormous granite obelisks at Karnak temple, each standing over 29 meters high and capped with electrum (an alloy of gold and silver) that caught the morning sun. She commissioned statues of herself in every posture used by male pharaohs (seated, striding, as a sphinx), but with the face that artists and later archaeologists recognized as distinctly hers.

The Erasure: Thutmose III's Long Revenge

Hatshepsut died around 1458 BCE, probably of natural causes. Her stepson Thutmose III, who had been co-ruler with her during her reign and who would go on to become one of Egypt's greatest military pharaohs, outlived her by more than twenty years. Toward the end of his own reign, roughly twenty years after Hatshepsut's death, he undertook a systematic campaign to erase her from the historical record. Statues of her were smashed and buried. Her image was chiseled off temple walls. Her name in cartouches was replaced with the names of her husband Thutmose II, her father Thutmose I, or Thutmose III himself. Her obelisks at Karnak were not destroyed (they were too massive) but were encased in walls of masonry so that they could not be seen. The erasure was so thorough that Egyptologists of the 19th century, deciphering hieroglyphic inscriptions, initially assumed all the pharaoh references on these monuments referred to male rulers. It took decades of careful detective work to reconstruct Hatshepsut's identity. The motive for the erasure remains debated: some historians argue Thutmose III was angry at being sidelined during her long reign; others suggest the erasure was practical rather than personal, eliminating a female pharaoh from the succession record to prevent future challenges to male authority. The timing, twenty years after her death, suggests it was deliberate political calculation rather than immediate anger.

Finding Hatshepsut: The Archaeological Rediscovery

Despite the erasure, Hatshepsut was not entirely eliminated. Her Deir el-Bahri temple survived — its walls preserved images of the Punt expedition and her divine

birth narrative — because it was too large and too public to destroy. Egyptologist James Henry Breasted, working in the early 20th century, recognized that many monument inscriptions had been deliberately altered. Subsequent excavations by Herbert Winlock at the Metropolitan Museum in the 1920s and 1930s found the buried statues of Hatshepsut in a pit near Deir el-Bahri — over 200 fragments, deliberately smashed and buried, now partially restored and on display. The identification of Hatshepsut's mummy came in 2007, when Egyptologist Zahi Hawass used CT scanning and DNA analysis to match an unidentified mummy to a tooth found in a canopic box inscribed with Hatshepsut's name. The mummy showed an obese woman in her fifties with severe dental disease and bone cancer — a very different image from the idealized young male pharaoh depicted in her official art. The identification remains a matter of some scholarly debate, but it gave Hatshepsut a face and a cause of death 3,500 years after her erasure.

What Hatshepsut's Story Means

Hatshepsut's story raises questions about power, gender, and historical memory that remain relevant today. She found ways to exercise full royal authority within a system built for male rulers, co-opting the masculine symbols and titles of pharaonic power while apparently maintaining effective government for over two decades. Her erasure from history was deliberate and nearly complete — a reminder that the historical record reflects the priorities of those who control it. The fact that she was recovered at all is a tribute to the persistence of physical evidence: the massive temple that couldn't be demolished, the buried statues that survived beneath the sand, the tooth that matched a name on a canopic jar. Today Hatshepsut is one of the most recognized figures from ancient Egypt, the subject of countless museum exhibitions, books, documentaries, and academic studies. The statue of her as a seated pharaoh in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York — recovered from the pit where Thutmose III had ordered it buried — is one of the museum's most celebrated objects. History, it turns out, has a way of reasserting what was deliberately suppressed.

Key Information: Hatshepsut

Detail	Information
Reign	c. 1479–1458 BCE, approximately 22 years

Detail	Information
Title	Pharaoh (full title, not queen); wore false beard and double crown
Father	Thutmose I; husband was Thutmose II (her half-brother)
Major Achievement	Trade expedition to Punt (Horn of Africa); extensive building program
Deir el-Bahri Temple	Her mortuary temple, considered one of Egypt's finest structures
Obelisks at Karnak	Over 29 meters high, capped with electrum; later walled over by Thutmose III
The Erasure	Thutmose III chiseled her name from monuments ~20 years after her death
Damnatio Memoriae	Latin term for deliberate erasure from the historical record
Mummy Identified	2007; CT scan and DNA linked a mummy to her canopic box tooth
Smashed Statues	Over 200 fragments found in pit near Deir el-Bahri; partially restored

Case Study: The Name Beneath the Chisel

Seti was a mason. He had worked on temple restoration projects for fifteen years, and he knew the difference between repairs done because stone was damaged and repairs done because someone wanted a name to disappear. The work order he had been given was clear: remove the carved name from the cartouches on the south colonnade and replace it with the name of Thutmose. He had done this before, on other walls, other cartouches, at other temples. The pharaoh's command did not require explanation. But this morning, before he began, he found himself running his fingers over the carved surface. The cartouche was deep and clean — the work of a master craftsman, done perhaps forty years ago. Inside the oval, the name read clearly. He had learned enough hieroglyphs over the years to recognize it: Hat-shep-sut. He had heard older workers mention her. The woman who was pharaoh. His foreman passed by and noticed him standing idle. 'Problem with the stone?' 'No,' Seti said. He picked up his chisel. 'Efficient work today,' his foreman said. 'The name must be completely gone. No shadows, no partial carvings. As if it was never there.' Seti set the chisel against the first symbol. He thought: someone carved this name with care. Someone will chisel my work away someday too, if the wrong person gives the order. He struck the chisel with his mallet, and the first stroke fell.

1. Seti follows his orders and erases Hatshepsut's name, yet the reading tells us that Hatshepsut's story was eventually recovered. Based on what the reading says about how Hatshepsut was rediscovered, what physical evidence escaped the kind of destruction Seti is performing?

2. Seti reflects that 'someone will chisel my work away someday too, if the wrong person gives the order.' This points to a broader theme in the reading about historical erasure. What does Hatshepsut's story teach us about who controls the historical record, and how archaeology challenges that control?

Multiple Choice

1. What was the likely motive for Thutmose III's erasure of Hatshepsut, based on the reading?

a) He wanted to punish her for leading a failed military campaign that greatly weakened Egypt

b) Eliminating her from the record prevented future challenges to male succession authority

c) He was following instructions left by Hatshepsut herself in her burial documents

d) Egyptian religious law required that female pharaohs be erased after death

2. What was the Punt expedition, and why was it significant?

a) A trade mission to the Horn of Africa that returned with trees, gold, ivory, and exotic animals

b) An archaeological expedition launched by Hatshepsut to recover all artifacts from earlier pharaohs

c) A diplomatic mission to Mesopotamia that resulted in Egypt's first peace treaty

d) A military campaign into Nubia that expanded Egypt's southern border significantly

3. How was Hatshepsut's mummy identified in 2007?

a) A papyrus discovered at Deir el-Medina described the location of her burial

b) Her name was found inscribed on the coffin's inner surface in hidden hieroglyphics

c) Her distinctive facial features matched statues recovered from the Deir el-Bahri pit

d) DNA analysis of the mummy matched a tooth found in a canopic box with her name

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Regent	A) The deliberate erasure of a person from the historical record, practiced by Thutmose III against Hatshepsut
2. ___ Damnatio memoriae	B) The site of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, built into limestone cliffs on the Nile's west bank
3. ___ Electrum	C) A person who rules on behalf of a monarch who is too young or unable to rule
4. ___ Deir el-Bahri	D) The oval ring in hieroglyphic inscriptions that enclosed and identified royal names
5. ___ Cartouche	E) A natural alloy of gold and silver used to cap Hatshepsut's obelisks so they caught the morning sun

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Hatshepsut initially served as _____ for her young stepson Thutmose III before claiming the full title of pharaoh.

2. Hatshepsut's famous trade expedition traveled to the land of _____, returning with living myrrh trees, gold, ebony, and ivory.

3. Thutmose III had Hatshepsut's name removed from monuments and replaced with the names of male pharaohs in a deliberate act of historical _____ known by the Latin term damnatio memoriae.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. The reading says Hatshepsut 'co-opted the masculine symbols and titles of pharaonic power.' What does this mean, and what might it tell us about the relationship between gender and authority in ancient Egypt?

_____

_____

_____

2. Thutmose III waited approximately twenty years after Hatshepsut's death before erasing her. Why might the timing of the erasure — rather than its occurrence — be historically significant? What does it suggest about political motivation?

_____

_____

_____

3. The reading concludes that 'history has a way of reasserting what was deliberately suppressed.' Do you agree with this claim based on Hatshepsut's story? Are there cases where deliberate historical erasure has been more successful?