Hatshepsut: Transcending Gender in Ancient Egypt

Kelly-Anne Diamond

The Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian Pharaoh, Hatshepsut (c. 1473–1458 BCE), has attracted a great deal of attention for doing gender wrong, at least according to modern scholarship (Figure 1). She began her career as the regent for her step-son/nephew, Thutmose III, and then at some point within the first seven years, she ascended the throne as co-regent. Hatshepsut’s public gender identity fails to conform to our norms of cultural intelligibility, but the fact that this gender transformation occurred over the course of two decades indicates that it was a persistent and intentional gender ‘identity’ for Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut was not making claims about who she was as a private person, but instead she was subscribing to the gendered expectations of rulership. This public identity has appeared to modern Egyptologists as gender incongruity, but I will argue that Hatshepsut’s public representations were intelligible to ancient Egyptians and even a deliberate attempt to appeal to their sensibilities and provide them with solace in her rule.

A study of Hatshepsut promises to contribute to our current understanding of gender in that it reframes our typical assumptions of ancient/traditional gender constructions and provides a model we can use to move forward with our own modern discourse about gender fluidity. For Egyptologists, this study elucidates the societal and historical factors that were complicit in keeping Hatshepsut in power. The existence of hermaphroditic creator deities, the composite nature of kingship, post-mortem gender fluidity and the rules of compositional decorum all intertwined to naturalise Hatshepsut’s female masculinity and her ascension to the throne of Egypt.

Hatshepsut was not the anomaly that we think she was. There were several other leaders in the New Kingdom who displayed non-binary gender identities, such as Queen Tiye, Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Tawosret. Hatshepsut was only one example in an era of transgressors, who willingly played with composite imagery. The earliest elements added to her person were a masculine crown and the traditional title of male Egyptian king. Subsequently, she depicted herself in increasingly masculine poses, holding symbols reserved for male kings, in male dress and with male physiognomy. It was her unique position as King’s Daughter, King’s Wife and later Pharaoh that made her female masculinity more ubiquitous and therefore more discernible. Hatshepsut exemplified the virile woman who broke the bond between masculinity and the male body. In ancient Egypt, masculinity embodied the qualities that were culturally ascribed
to men and that marked the male gender. Hatshepsut embraced female masculinity – masculinity without men – in a non-dominant form, as evidenced by her remaining political images. Hatshepsut chose to present herself with stereotypical masculine traits and rejected the embodiment of conventional femininity. Hatshepsut’s representations are not, and were not, categorisable within the gender binary; however, her calculated approach to gender did maintain her supremacy.

Today, Egyptologists are restricted in what we can learn about Hatshepsut’s personal life, as the art and artefacts that emerged with her campaign of visual representation are limited to her official life. Several scholars claim that Hatshepsut dressed as a woman in ‘real-life’, while others theorise that she represented a third gender, that she was transgender or that she dressed like a man in daily life. However, these perspectives may be reductive. They overlook her savvy as a ruler by filtering her choice of masculinity too heavily through the lens of our current notions about why an individual might choose a fluid/trans identity. The truth is that we have no evidence for how she dressed from day to day. Our bias tends to ignore ancient cultural

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Figure 1: MMA 29.3.2, photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
characteristics that indicate a progressive understanding of gender – ones that did not marginalise difference. Therefore, it needs to be acknowledged that we are constrained by the evidence left to us about how Hatshepsut wanted to be perceived in her capacity as king of Egypt – her public image. There is an inherent problem in understanding Hatshepsut’s seemingly complex identity as contingent upon Egyptians’ understanding of gender. The circularity of this phenomenon has scholars using case studies like Hatshepsut to further understand conceptions of gender. Hatshepsut has shown us how she understood her public identity as ruler of Egypt and how she negotiated between femininity and masculinity to achieve her political goals. Her gender tampering was not an imitation of maleness, but rather acknowledged a ‘counterfeit masculinity’. Hatshepsut did not want to be a man, she wanted what masculinity could offer her.

The issues I explicate in this article are the following. Hatshepsut undercut the assumed connection between men and masculinity and demonstrated when and how a non-dominant masculinity was utilised for domination and rule. Hatshepsut challenged the contemporary form of hegemonic masculinity and destabilised Egypt’s hetero–patriarchal culture. Hatshepsut revealed ways that masculinity and manliness functioned in ancient Egypt by exposing another form of masculinity: female masculinity. Hatshepsut demonstrated that masculinity could be separate from the male body, that the manipulation of gender was an accepted method to achieving and maintaining power and that female masculinity was an effective tool to secure authority.

A more nuanced Hatshepsut is slowly emerging from a cloudy misreading by a western, male discourse. This history of misinterpretation demonstrates how exploring Hatshepsut through the lens of gender studies redefines her and, more broadly speaking, how Egyptology would benefit. This predisposition is reflective of the field at large, in that Egyptology has favoured the traditional because of its late beginnings in the colonial period, its elitist foundations, its lack of accessibility and the scarcity of women who worked in the field.

From the rediscovery of Hatshepsut in 1828–1829, scholars’ perspectives have produced erroneous characterisations of her. When Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) visited the temple of Deir el-Bahri and spotted an unrecognised name in a cartouche he assumed that it belonged to the wife of a king. Noting the juxtaposition of female gender endings with images of a male king, he was encouraged to read the cartouche as ‘Amenenthe’ – Manetho’s ‘Amessis’. Despite the fact that in the third century BCE the Egyptian historian Manetho remarked that Amessis was a sister of Thutmose II (c. 1492–1479 BCE), who ruled after him for twenty-one years before Thutmose III (c. 1479–1425 BCE) succeeded her, Champollion rejected the possibility that Hatshepsut solely ruled Egypt. Instead, Champollion suggested that his sister Amessis, who was then married to the regent Amenenthe, succeeded Thutmose II. He explained that the female gender endings referred to the wife of king Amenenthe, who had her name included in the cartouche with his. Our view of Hatshepsut originated in a nineteenth-century context that followed contemporary gender constructs and was not reflective of the ancient Egyptian gender spectrum.

The history of Hatshepsut was further confused by the fact that Thutmose III (c. 1479–1425 BCE) and his son Amenhotep II (c. 1427–1400 BCE) embarked on a campaign to eradicate her memory. During this destruction, Hatshepsut’s name was replaced with either the name of Thutmose III, the name of her half-brother/husband Thutmose II (c. 1492–1479 BCE), or her father Thutmose I (c. 1504–1492 BCE). These
erasures and substitutions provoked further erroneous characterisations of Hatshepsut by Egyptologists, including the theory that she was a palace conspirator and a traitor, based on the misogynist assumption that women could only gain such political power through deception or via a group of powerful male courtiers who elevated her as a figurehead. As Kara Cooney points out, posterity fancies the idea of tyrannical and dubious women who rule over men. However, Hatshepsut was not an evil stepmother or a wicked witch – she had a prosperous and stable twenty-year reign – so her triumphs were rejected and she was forgotten by ancient historiography.

These specious portrayals continued into the 1920s, during the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s expeditions to Deir el-Bahri, when Herbert E. Winlock discovered thousands of fragments of smashed statuary in and around Hatshepsut’s temple. The two primary find spots for the statuary fragments were the ‘quarry’, a deep cavity cut into the marl sediment just northeast of the forecourt of the temple, and the ‘Hatshepsut Hole’ located just east of the temple under the causeway of Thutmose III. These fragments were later assembled to form over thirty-five sculptures of Hatshepsut exhibiting female masculinity. This statuary has fueled the theory that she had to ‘pretend’ to be a man to be acknowledged as king of Egypt. The initial explanation for Hatshepsut’s apparent gender bending entailed her acknowledgment that a woman could not properly rule Egypt. Therefore, she sought to conceal her feminine gender and instead flaunt a masculine image of herself as a political stunt to deceive her subjects. Additionally, Hatshepsut’s masculinised statues had undergone Thutmose III’s damnatio memoriae, meant to eradicate the memory of Hatshepsut’s rule, which further intimated to modern scholars that it was indeed unacceptable for a woman to rule in ancient Egypt. This is an example of modern scholarship interpreting evidence to fit an already ‘established’ conclusion.

Early theories, steeped in modern bias and preconceived notions of gender, attempted to explain how a woman managed to occupy the throne during the New Kingdom. Scholarship’s position began to change in the 1960s when analytical approaches from the social sciences were introduced to Egyptology. By the 1980s, feminist theory had begun to inform problems about gender history, yet both gender history and feminist theory remain on the fringe of the field to this day. Furthermore, scholarship on bodies and sexualities has not become an integral part of the reconstruction of ancient Egyptian history. Hatshepsut’s symbolic body is an informative lens of historical analysis, as it was used by her and her administration to circumvent the contemporary power relations and the norms of social identity in order to achieve legitimacy as king, showing that gender identity was mutable. More importantly, gender trouble was flourishing in ancient Egypt.

The term female masculinity has been described and explicated by Jack Halberstam, among others. What this article does is bring a new body of theory on female masculinity to the discipline of Egyptology and to the ongoing discussion about Hatshepsut’s portrayal as a man. In Hatshepsut’s case, masculinity is exposed via a female body. Halberstam’s understanding of female masculinity – that female masculinity disrupts accounts of masculinity within which masculinity is the effect of male embodiment and male privilege – serves as a foundation for defining Hatshepsut’s unique version of masculinity. Through her statuary and relief work, Hatshepsut negotiated within the patriarchal system, revealing that masculinity could derive from, and be constructed by, outlets other than maleness. Her visual campaigns exhibit a
fabricated masculinity that gave Hatshepsut access to the currency of maleness, and these models of ‘inauthentic’ masculinity were not attached to a biologically male body.\textsuperscript{22}

Hatshepsut has been typecast as a ‘gender-bender’ and her strategic capabilities reduced. Much of modern society distrusts female masculinity, among other non-dominant masculinities (for example, gay masculinity), and embraces the hegemonic form of masculinity that invokes legitimacy, privilege and power. That this was also the case in ancient Egypt is an assumption made by many scholars, but a variety of forms of masculinity were accepted and celebrated. To understand the gender dynamics of ancient Egypt, some scholars have theorised that a male-female binary existed, similar to today’s western world.\textsuperscript{23} Other scholars have suggested that gender was more fluid and less firmly binarised.\textsuperscript{24} In fact, ancient Egypt offered both a male–female binary, in that gods, people and words could be categorised as either masculine or feminine, and it demonstrated a fluid gender system.\textsuperscript{25} This mutable gender binary enabled Hatshepsut to manipulate her gender in creative ways as part of her political strategy. Male and female elements could be combined to make new compositions that could fit anywhere on the gender spectrum, and this process was organic to ancient Egyptian culture and thought. Hatshepsut’s management of her masculinity offers new terrain to further elaborate how female masculinity might be interpreted. She must be redefined by current historians so that her female masculinity is not characterised as a disguise, but instead viewed as a complex, deliberate, sustained, productive and culturally-infused complement to her rule.

Hatshepsut’s presentation of masculinised imagery and appropriation of male prerogatives was complex. When chronicling Hatshepsut’s ‘gender representation’, some scholars have sought to identify a linear or chronological progression, suggesting that she began with traditional, feminine statues, then combined various male and female attributes to form composite statues and ultimately concluded with a fully masculinised version of herself.\textsuperscript{26} Hatshepsut was not pretending to be a man to fool her constituents, but rather was performing gender in the same way all prominent figures have recognisable and iconic images with which they wish to be associated. Hatshepsut’s statues and two-dimensional art show her as subject and allow for her self-determination. She feminised aspects of kingship and she masculinised elements of her biological sex; and, through the development of her image, Hatshepsut made her female sex invisible.

Hatshepsut is by far the best-documented female sovereign from among a handful of women who we now know ruled in ancient Egypt. In her repertoire of preserved statuary and relief work and her compositional image as king that worked intentionally to display her royal power in myriad ways. Hatshepsut negotiated her image and managed to generate what she needed – to create what was deficient. Through access to masculinity, Hatshepsut acquired mobility and social power and avoided passivity and idleness, which were considered feminine attributes. This opportunity was, however, not open to all women in ancient Egypt. For those like Hatshepsut, who already had power, masculinity could be deliberately appropriated for political gain. Gender was not the only factor at play here. This type of gender subterfuge interacted with the circumstances of Hatshepsut’s time and place and proved possible by the power she already had: her membership in the highest echelon of society, her mature age and her education all intersected to provide her with the cultural
capital to adopt female masculinity. Her social, political and economic status (as God’s Wife of Amun, King’s Daughter and King’s Wife) gave her flexibility and freedom and probably inadvertently shielded her from any adverse effects of her female masculinity.27

Within the variety of images that Hatshepsut created for herself she deliberately and strategically combined various body parts and royal accoutrements which could be identified individually as either masculine or feminine. Hatshepsut implanted her own political imagery into the machinery of masculine royal conceptions and, by exploiting conventional ideas of kingship, she negotiated male freedoms and male privilege. There were four well-entrenched cultural norms that were complicit in her rise to power and her continued authority: Egypt’s hermaphroditic creator deities, the composite nature of kingship, post-mortem gender fluidity and the rules of compositional decorum. These accepted concepts also help to explain Hatshepsut’s employment of traditionally masculine models of kingship.

Hermaphroditic creator deities

What makes Hatshepsut’s female masculinity unique is its grounding in the connections to and ideologies of ancient Egypt. A study of the hermaphroditic creator deities, who by the time of the New Kingdom were well-entrenched in the Egyptian psyche, provides a good starting point for this analysis. The connection lies in the kings’ role as mediator between the human and the divine realm and their ability to form a special relationship with the gods for the benefit of Egypt. Emulation of divine traits was not only apposite, but also customary for the ruler. Dating back to the Pyramid Texts (c. 2375–2160 BCE), the creator deities’ nature was expressed by the inversion of gender roles, the symbolic inversion of sexual function and male–female composites.28 They could lack differentiated gender definition or possess a hermaphroditism characterised by dualistic gender traits. But even though this hermaphroditism could be constituted through a combination of male and female sexual functions, these deities were defined predominately as male or female. Thus, creator deities exemplified the male–female binary superimposed by gender fluidity. Uterine symbolism consisted of enclosing and nurturing, while phallic symbolism entailed penetrating and propagating.

The appropriation of male symbolism by a female deity can be identified in several cases. For instance, in the Myth of Isis and Osiris, Isis takes the male role in the conception of Horus: ‘I (Isis) have acted the role of the male though I am female’.29 In the case of Neith, perhaps the best example of a female creator deity, her name was associated with weaponry and hunting and was written with a phallus determinative in the Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat.30 This sentiment was reiterated in the temple at Esna, where Neith was called ‘the male who acts the role of the female, the female who acts the role of the male’.31 In other inscriptions from Esna and Dendera, Neith and Hathor were described as two-thirds male and one-third female.32 The goddess Mut also had a hermaphroditic image in the Book of the Dead, Chapter 164, where she was represented with an erect penis.33 And the goddess Anat is described in Papyrus Chester Beatty VII (v. 1.9–v. 2.1) as ‘a mighty goddess, a woman acting as a man/a warrior, clad as men girt like women’.
Therefore, the hermaphroditic creator deities provided Hatshepsut with the theological foundation for her imagery, as well as the illustrations and terminology for reproducing such ideas. Since creator deities were both uterine and phallic, Hatshepsut’s composite representation would have been unremarkable in this context. Her gender manipulation was founded on the millennia-old principle of gender fluidity.

**The androgyny of kingship**

Traditionally, kingship was outwardly a male institution with the living king understood as the god Horus incarnate and the son of Re, while after death the king became Osiris. Although we tend to perceive kingship as a sphere of masculine authority, kingship could not function as an exclusively masculine realm in ancient Egypt. The androgynous construction of ancient Egyptian kingship vacillated between masculine and feminine manifestations of power. Royal women embodied the feminine element of authority that was included in the office.\(^{34}\) Queenship was formulated around the feminine as a medium for regeneration and it reinforced the kingship’s ‘renewable strength’.\(^{35}\) Hatshepsut’s transition from the feminine aspect of kingship (as queen) to the masculinisation of her public identity for her kingship should have been smooth, theologically.\(^{36}\)

There is a robust history of royal women participating in the kingship of ancient Egypt and other female sovereigns presented this composite paradigm during their reigns, albeit inconsistently.\(^{37}\) In this capacity, these women were known as the ‘Female Horus’ and the ‘Daughter of Re’; two titles that, in their masculine versions, were reserved for the king. According to Manetho’s *Aegyptiaca*, written during the reign of Ptolemy II (285–246 BCE), the legitimacy of female rule was established during the reign of King Nynetjer in the Second Dynasty (c. 2890–2686 BCE).\(^{38}\) Of course, it is possible that this section of his text was meant to legitimise the potent female role during the Ptolemaic Dynasty (332–30 BCE). However, there were several female regents in ancient Egypt with distinct reigns; some were genuine sovereigns but kept their female royal status, while others assumed the formal rank and titles of a king.\(^{39}\)

One such genuine sovereign, from the end of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1777–1773 BCE), was Sobekneferu. She displayed herself in co-regency with Amenemhet III, who provided the masculine element in the composite structure of kingship.\(^{40}\) In this capacity they appeared as the male and female Horus.\(^{41}\) Unlike Hatshepsut, Sobekneferu usually maintained her feminine garb.\(^{42}\) However, a red quartzite headless statue in the Louvre shows the queen with a female torso wearing a traditional shift dress with a king’s kilt on top and the remains of a king’s nemes headdress over her shoulders.\(^{43}\) To the best of my knowledge, this is the only statue of Sobekneferu in which a combination of female and male attributes appear. Therefore, this Twelfth Dynasty king also experienced gender trouble in her attempt to represent herself publicly as the ruler of Egypt. It is noteworthy that Sobekneferu was the first female to adopt the traditionally male pose of trampling the Nine Bows, the symbol for Egypt’s long-established enemies.\(^{44}\)

With the advent of the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1069 BCE), the status of royal women rose significantly. Evidence suggests that several kings came to the throne
quite young and needed the help of a co-regent. Queen Ahhotep (c. 1550 BCE) acted as regent for her young son Ahmose, the first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and his successor Amenhotep I (c. 1525–1504 BCE) appeared regularly with his mother Ahmose-Nefertari. These two early co-regencies not only contributed to the virilisation of female royal power, but also sanctioned any future political authority by women within the royal family.

On a stela at Karnak Temple, Queen Ahhotep is credited with caring for Egypt’s soldiers, collecting fugitives and pacifying Upper Egypt during the wars of liberation against the Hyksos. This is possibly the earliest example of a royal woman involved in military affairs. Despite the disorder surrounding the recovery of Ahhotep’s coffin and burial goods in 1859, some intriguing finds can be substantiated including ceremonial axes, three gold and bronze daggers, a necklace with three golden flies of valour and an armlet thought to be an archer’s bracer. The fly was awarded as a military dec- oration for bravery. These artefacts have been identified as conventionally masculine burial items and suggest the occupant of the coffin had a military role of some sort. Direct female predecessors, such as Queen Ahhotep, not only acted as strong role models for Hatshepsut, but also created a foundation on which she could base her own power.

Hatshepsut began her career as the regent for her step-son/nephew, Thutmose III, but at some point within the first seven years she ascended the throne as co-regent. Astonishingly, two capable rulers now occupied the Egyptian throne at the same time. Some scholars have suggested that when Hatshepsut ascended the throne of Egypt and became co-ruler with Thutmose III, her daughter Neferure assumed the feminine role in relation to Hatshepsut as king and was being groomed to take over the throne. Thutmose III’s destruction of Hatshepsut’s monuments twenty years after her death might have been associated with the royal line of succession, although there have been myriad theories for the damnatio memoria. If Neferure, or some other person from the Ahmosid family line (Hatshepsut’s familial line), did pose a threat to Amenhotep II’s succession, this would justify the obliteration of all remnants of Hatshepsut’s rule.

Unfortunately, there is little extant evidence to confirm how a woman would have been able to ascend to the throne. Troy’s study of queenship has traced the patterns that prevailed in order to better understand the mechanisms at work and the interaction of male and female roles that might have provided the ideological basis for female power. Royal women embodied the feminine principle and modelled the mother as a regenerative place with the daughter as the active, stimulating agent of renewal for the father. The kingship’s feminine component was projected onto the crown, throne, maa and Egypt herself.

This female element empowered the male and thus the question arises: Why does Hatshepsut project herself as masculine if the totality of kingship was an androgynous construction? She displayed herself as masculine so she could be the masculine aspect of kingship and have a closer ideological relationship with the gods than she would have in her female form. And since she was ruling as the senior king along with Thutmose III as the junior king, she had to place herself in the superordinate position according to the compositional rules of decorum; otherwise he would ideologically
usurp her power.\textsuperscript{57} If Hatshepsut did not illustrate herself as masculine, she would be locked into the feminine, or subordinate, role and would act as complement to the junior king. This would impede her ability to be ‘kindly’.

**Post-mortem gender fluidity**

There is evidence from the New Kingdom to suggest that royal women underwent a post-mortem sexual transformation to facilitate their rebirth into the afterlife. This phenomenon further indicates the fluidity of gender in ancient Egypt. Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri is one of the largest structures from ancient Egypt that was created for a woman, and her statuary erected there functioned in pursuit of her regeneration and rebirth for the afterlife. Like other royal women’s images in mortuary contexts, such as Nefertari’s images in her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, Tawosret’s images in her tomb in the Valley of the Kings and Tyti’s depictions in her tomb in the Valley of the Queens – all of whom lived during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (c.1295–1069 BCE) – Hatshepsut also employed masculine physiognomy and appurtenances in her statues at Deir el-Bahri.\textsuperscript{58} Ann Macy Roth, Heather McCarthy and Kara Cooney have each written extensively on the fragmented nature of female rebirth and the post-mortem process of sexual transformation.\textsuperscript{59}

Beginning in the Sixth Dynasty, the queen could experience renewal through the sun god Re and Osiris, but it is not known exactly how women achieved resurrection. According to Roth, it was the masculine power of creativity that allowed for the rebirth of the deceased and the power of fertility and creation was exclusively connected with the male sex.\textsuperscript{60} A woman stimulated fertility in a man, received the child already fully formed and was then responsible for only incubation. Therefore, the wife’s sexual role was paramount in the process of her husband’s rebirth into the afterlife. But, after the reign of the Fourth Dynasty King Snefru (c. 2613–2589 BCE), with very few exceptions, a husband is never named or illustrated in the tomb of his wife.\textsuperscript{61} In the New Kingdom, this is at least true for royal women as this is the only group of women who have separate tombs at this time.\textsuperscript{62} The reason for this was that women took on an active male sexual role to achieve their own rebirth. A wife’s husband was unnecessary in the process and his presence might even have been detrimental.\textsuperscript{63}

When a woman died, she assimilated with the god Osiris to facilitate her own rebirth. She attained a temporary state of gender fluidity in which she was both male and female. She did not permanently lose her female identity because she would need this post-rebirth.\textsuperscript{64} At this point, according to McCarthy, she was reborn by interacting with her own feminine aspect.\textsuperscript{65} A woman accessed this regenerative power in specific ways.\textsuperscript{66} For example, a woman’s name could be combined with that of Osiris (e.g. Osiris-Hatshepsut) and she likened to a male god.\textsuperscript{67} A woman’s funerary equipment could be adapted to take on the male gender. Sometimes this was done using masculine pronouns in the funerary inscriptions: Queen Nefertari is called ‘true-of-voice’ with the masculine grammatical gender.\textsuperscript{68} Furthermore, within tomb decoration goddesses were portrayed with the conventional pale-yellow skin used for females, but deceased women appeared with reddish-brown skin analogous to the male deities in the tomb.\textsuperscript{69} This post-mortem sexual transformation was yet another
example of a societal convention that sanctioned the vacillation, changeability and ambivalence of gender in ancient Egypt.\textsuperscript{70}

**Rules of compositional decorum**

Certain rules of dominance governed formal compositions in ancient Egyptian art. There were two rules of compositional hierarchy that related to gender: the owner of a monument should occupy the primary position and a husband should take precedence over the wife. To show this dominance, the Egyptians considered placement on the right the primary position and orientation to the right established lateral dominance. If the figures overlapped or appeared to be sitting side by side, forward was equivalent to right and rear to left. In general, women were more restricted than men in the monuments they could possess, but when they did appear as owners they should have been in the dominant position. This had the potential to violate the rule that a husband should take precedence over the wife.\textsuperscript{71}

These rules were challenging for Hatshepsut, as a woman and the owner of almost all the monuments on which she appeared, and she needed to formulate a way for her and Thutmose III to appear together without subordinating herself. Now, Thutmose III was not Hatshepsut’s husband, but he was male. Therefore, Hatshepsut sometimes omitted Thutmose III from her monuments, or she styled both herself and Thutmose III as male and depicted them side by side with herself in the dominant position. This placement would have been intelligible to an ancient Egyptian audience and the portrayal of Hatshepsut as male would have made sense in this context.

**How Hatshepsut challenged hegemonic masculinity**

Did Hatshepsut challenge hegemonic masculinity? Yes. First, she acted as regent for her step-son/nephew Thutmose III, instead of allowing his biological mother Isis to rule with her son, ostensibly threatening his future authority. Hatshepsut disrupted the structural aspect of patriarchy by then elevating herself to king within the first seven years – a position traditionally held by men and consisting of one occupant. She diminished Thutmose III’s personal hegemony by seizing tangible administrative power from him and eventually wielding more power than him.\textsuperscript{72} Hatshepsut’s intervention led to an approximate twenty-year period when Thutmose III was incapable of ruling independently and was powerless to present himself as a strong warrior, a great builder, an intercessor to the gods and a sexually potent, virile man.\textsuperscript{73} Thus, Hatshepsut assaulted his masculinity – a hegemonic form of masculinity – and she established herself as co-ruler even though a viable king already existed on the throne. The dual kingship gave Hatshepsut access to certain venues to promote her own authority and to present her policy and political self-definition. Even before she took the throne she had control over the official iconography of the central power as the older, more experienced member of the co-rulership. So while Hatshepsut was absent in the official imagery of the kingship in the beginning, she gradually ascended into the depictions by obliterating Thutmose III. Her unique political situation required her to find resolution through a fully masculinised image of both co-regents.\textsuperscript{74} This usurpation secured the kingship for her familial line for one more generation.
Hence, Hatshepsut had two issues to contend with: she was a woman and Egypt already had a legitimate king. There was a strong need for her and her administration to validate her reign and to display her legitimacy. She accomplished this in several ways. The most controversial method, manipulating her gender, was only one component of a complex campaign. Hatshepsut not only took the throne unexpectedly, but she also exercised her power through the office of the king. According to the tomb inscription of the official Ineni (TT 81) – who identifies her as the sister of the king, rather than his wife, but more importantly as the God’s Wife of Amun – Hatshepsut controlled Egypt.

Hatshepsut embraced the civic role of the head of state and advanced the kingdom by building for the gods, leading military expeditions and organising long-distance trade missions. She abandoned her queen’s tomb in Wadi Sikkat Taqa el-Zeid and initiated the construction of a tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Hatshepsut also built a monumental temple for her cult at Deir el-Bahri and incorporated sanctuaries for other deities as well. In her monumental artwork, she placed herself in a dominant position in relation to her co-regent, Thutmose III. The decorative program of her divine birth scene at Deir el-Bahri illustrates Hatshepsut as the physical offspring of the god Amun and as biologically male (her ka was male as well). To the right and left of Queen Ahmose giving birth to Hatshepsut, she is presented to various gods and proclaimed king of Egypt. Hatshepsut pushed this core narrative into the historical sphere through her public discourse, directly relating her birth legend to her claim that her father appointed her as his successor during his lifetime.

Hatshepsut also sought legitimation through her royal titulary, which emulated those of her predecessors but was uniquely created for a female king. It is curious that Hatshepsut did not masculinise her professional image through her titles and in fact this was probably the most significant place in which Hatshepsut’s biological gender remained visible. Her birth name means ‘Foremost of Noble Women’, but once she became king she added ‘United with Amun’, which suggests a close, personal relation with this god.

The most significant of Hatshepsut’s names is undoubtedly that of her first cartouche, Maatkara [true one of the ka of Re]. Robins suggests that this name would have connected Hatshepsut to her father, who also had the name of the goddess Maat in his Horus name, ‘Merymaat’ (Beloved of Maat). This portion of her name may provide a glimpse into how Hatshepsut navigated her relationships with men. Kings ruled according to maat and therefore all images of her name would project this notion. Maat prevented chaos from overwhelming Egypt and created balance in the universe. Maat was essential to kingship, as the king was the intermediary between the human world and the divine. Therefore, Hatshepsut subscribed to the hegemonic model and upheld the code of maat, perpetuating the enduring office of kingship. Her female masculinity guaranteed she was the proxy for the masculine element of the kingship, thus ensuring an intimate ideological relationship with the gods. But Hatshepsut also used the feminine forms of traditional (male) kingship titles, such as ‘The Female Horus’, ‘The Perfect Goddess’ and ‘the Daughter of Re’ to reinforce her connection to traditional deities associated with the kingship.

Hatshepsut had only two choices when selecting her titles and gender endings for public display: male or female. The Egyptian system supported the gender binary and thus limited Hatshepsut’s choices. There was no other way for her scribes and artists to
represent her female masculinity. The linguistic conventions that produced intelligible gendered selves found their limit with Hatshepsut. When she redistributed the terms of the binary system, her inscriptions produced a disorganisation of the rules. Therefore, it is evident that the masculinisation of Hatshepsut’s image was only one, albeit the most curious, of her methods to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

Hatshepsut launched a sophisticated campaign that was dynamic and flexible. Her campaign produced, rather than concealed, knowledge (i.e. her female gender). She deployed and manipulated the current male gender constructs and utilised her new gendered representation as an agent for promotion and advancement. Hatshepsut was not defined by her gender but exploited it energetically and ingeniously. Hatshepsut’s statuary manipulated the gender binary but productively used it to her advantage. Some statues represented her as female, some represented her as male, but many surpassed these categories. Even though Hatshepsut’s statuary and relief work has been documented extensively elsewhere, I will illustrate the progression of her gendered representation using a few examples to highlight her gendered transformation.

Hatshepsut’s feminine images were few in number (at least based on what has been discovered thus far) and they appear to date to her early career. These representations show Hatshepsut as a female with kingly accoutrements. A life-size granodiorite seated-statue of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri shows her as a female but wearing the khat headcloth and leaves no doubt about her status as king. She had the Nine Bows, the traditional symbol for Egypt’s enemies, incised under her feet and a pouch-like amulet suspended from a chain around her neck (Figure 2). Another seated-statue, also from Deir el-Bahri, illustrates Hatshepsut as a female and in female garb wearing a typical sheath dress, a broad collar, bracelets and anklets. However, she added the nemes headdress and the uraeus, which identify her as king (Figure 3). This statue is considered to be one of the earliest three-dimensional images of Hatshepsut. The inscriptions on both statues employ feminine pronouns and gender endings.

Her policy of re-carving older feminine aspects of herself enabled Hatshepsut to continually reinterpret her reign. This new portrayal emphasised her female masculinity. But before her fully masculine image was adopted, her statues and relief work experienced an experimental stage, which resulted in some unusual gender renditions. Statue MMA 29.3.2 in indurated limestone illustrates a seated Hatshepsut with feminine sex characteristics in the torso area, but she has a bare chest and wears the male shendyt-kilt, bull’s tail, nemes headdress and uraeus, but the text is gendered female (Figure 1). Statue MMA 27.3.163, a large seated-statue of Hatshepsut, depicts masculine sex characteristics but includes the epithet ‘Daughter of Re’ on the left side of her throne, an example of her remaining feminine identity (Figure 4). Overall, her feminine traits decreased and her masculine traits increased, before reaching the final masculine form. In this fragmented Osiride statue, Hatshepsut has merged with the god and has her arms crossed over her chest holding the royal emblems of kingship: the crook, was-scepter, flail and ankh symbol. Her skin is coloured a reddish-brown and she dons a false beard. Not only do these images suggest that Hatshepsut was flexible, but that gender was an effective tool to be manipulated for the visualisation of sovereignty.

The largest collection of statuary representing Hatshepsut’s fully masculinised form was discovered at Deir el-Bahri and includes a series of colossal Osiride
Figurine 2: MMA 30.3.3, photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
feminised texts suggests the management of propaganda. Hatshepsut did not disguise herself as a man but rather she highlighted her female masculinity by employing a traditionally masculine form to play a male gender role and, as Gay Robins postulates, she retained the feminine grammatical forms to preserve her feminine identity.\(^\text{100}\)

While today the Episcopal Church alters its prayers to confirm that god does not have a gender, Canada passes a bill to make their national anthem gender neutral and menswear designers present skirts on their male runway models, we should look back to Hatshepsut for reinforcement. Hatshepsut’s legacy communicates the success of her operation in using gender to craft her authority and challenge patriarchal ideals. She ruled for over twenty years and Egypt prospered. Her successor Thutmose III maintained both her circle of officials and her plans to restore monuments Egypt-wide, confirming his respect for her decisions and authority.\(^\text{101}\) So perhaps Hatshepsut was doing gender right. She proved gender’s flexibility and malleability in ancient Egypt, if only for someone of her skill and status.

As most of her citizens were illiterate, her visual images were more powerful than the written word. Her audience responded positively to her masculinised appearance throughout her twenty-year rule even though her inscriptions maintained her feminine identity. This combination of gendered elements suggests that the unmistakable

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**Figure 3:** MMA 29.3.3, photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
character of Hatshepsut as king trumped the recognition of Hatshepsut’s biological sex. It is probable that being king of Egypt encouraged the masculinisation of her public image in many respects, but how she crafted her authority was her own invention. Hatshepsut used gender to create her desired royal image and to productively negotiate her rise to power, not to obfuscate her sex; her masculinisation was not
camouflage, but a manoeuvre to construct her identity as a male king. Although the word ‘masculinity’ refers to what men do, Hatshepsut illustrated that it did not have to originate from a male body or be constructed by a man. Masculinity could also be performed by a female body, and in the case of Hatshepsut, it could be a masterful tool to access privilege, power and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{103}

Notes


2. The term ‘identity’ is heavily weighted when it comes to gender and has been used to mean ‘sameness’.

3. There are a variety of remarkable representations of Queen Tiye and in some of them she is of equal size with her husband. See G. Robins, Women in Ancient Egypt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 35–7, figs 5 and 6. Note her image in the tomb of Kheruef (TT 192) in U. Matić, “Her Striking but Cold Beauty”: Gender and Violence in Depictions of Queen Nefertiti Smiting the Enemies’, in B. Jensen and U. Matić (eds), Archaeologies of Gender and Violence (Barnsley: Oxbow Books, 2017), pp. 103–21, see esp. 112–14. Androgyny was a hallmark of the Amarna period and it is evident in Akhenaten’s public image as an earthly representation of the asexual creator god, Aten. See M. Eaverly, Tan Men/Pale Women:


7. What we see today as concrete notions of gender were displaced by Hatshepsut’s images of herself.


22. Some modern analogies to a ‘non-male’ masculinity are lesbian fatherhood, female sports icons, women soldiers in the military and drag king performances. These images are not analogous with Hatshepsut herself, but they offer modern examples that exhibit masculinity in a non-male body.


24. L. Meskell argues against a sex/gender binary and states that sexual practices were more fluid than categorical in *Archaeologies of Social Life* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 218, but Ilona Zsolnay, in her edited volume *Being a Man: Negotiating ancient constructs of masculinity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), has established adequately that the ancients were aware of gender as a social construct separate from biological sex (p. 8).


27. It is a modern assumption that in antiquity a masculine woman would have suffered the same ridicule as they might today.


29. P. Louvre 3079, 1/9–10; Depauw ‘Notes on transgressing boundaries’, p. 54.


34. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, p. 13; L. Troy, ‘The Ancient Egyptian queenship as an Icon of the State’, *NIN* 3 (2002), pp. 1–24, see esp. pp. 1–2. Heather McCarthy employs the term ‘androgyneous totality’ of rulership in ‘The Osiris Nefertari: A case study of decorum, gender, and regeneration’, *JARCE* 39 (2002), pp. 173–95, see esp. pp. 176–7. Our sources are the result of a male discourse on the subject of kingship, in that most kings were male, most officials were male and most scribes were male.

35. Troy has created a model of queenship that extends from royal ideology (‘Icon of the State’, p. 2), determining that queens are the mediums, not the sources, of regenerative energy. This idea is developed in W. Westendorf, ‘Zweiheit, Driheit und Einheit in der altägyptischen Theologie’, ZÄS 100 (1974), pp. 136–41.


38. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, p. 139.

39. A system of co-regency was established in the Twelfth Dynasty and acted as a pseudo-precedent for two rulers occupying the throne at the same time; see A. Dodson, ‘The Coregency Conundrum’, *KMT* 25.2 (2014): pp. 28–35. However, the situation with Hatshepsut and Thutmose III was distinct in that Hatshepsut did not choose Thutmose III as her co-regent, but instead asserted her own authority in place of his. Another example is Tawosret, a Nineteenth Dynasty ruler. See G. Callender, ‘Female Horus: The Life and Reign of Tausret’, in R. Wilkinson, *Tausret: Forgotten Queen and Pharaoh of Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 25–47, see esp. pp. 29–30.


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41. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, p. 140, fig. 100. It has been suggested that this co-regency was only symbolic. See W. Murnane, *Ancient Egyptian Coregencies, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 40 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 229.

42. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, p. 142.

43. Louvre E 27135. See B. Bryan, ‘In women good and bad fortune are on earth’, p. 30, fig. 7.


50. According to Peter Lacovara, a cache of artifacts found at Deir el-Ballas outside the north palace contained a collection of similar items: clay horses, clay flies of valour, etc. In his opinion, this corroborates the military nature of the finds in Ahhotep’s tomb (personal Communication).


53. Roehrig et al. (eds), *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh*, pp. 267–9.

54. To the best of my knowledge there is no evidence for the destruction of monuments of other female regents or regnants, either before or after Hatshepsut’s reign, see Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, p. 52, although Eaverly asserts otherwise in *Tan Men/Pale Women*, p. 68.

55. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*.

56. This metaphor is best expressed in the image of the sky goddess Nut who swallows the sun god Re every night and gives birth to him every morning.


61. Roth, ‘Patterns and Taboos’, p. 45.

62. Roth, ‘Patterns and Taboos’, p. 49.

63. Roth, ‘Patterns and Taboos’, p. 51.


70. It is possible that Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri, where most of the fully masculinised images appear, was constructed near the end of her reign, at the culmination of her conversion. Or, this series of masculinised statues reflects Hatshepsut’s post-mortem sexual transformation.


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73. Hatshepsut included his image on many monuments constructed during her twenty years, but she was depicted as the dominant king and she most likely made the important decisions regarding the construction and design of the monuments, see Laboury, ‘How and Why’, p. 52. For an alternative view see also V. Davies, ‘Hatshepsut’s Use of Thutmose III in Her Program of Legitimation’, JARCE 41 (2004), pp. 55–66, see esp. p. 63.


79. V. Davies gives evidence for the subordination of Thutmose III but she disagrees with this interpretation, see ‘Hatshepsut’s Use of Thutmose III’, p. 63. On the contrary, Laboury postulates that Thutmose III was excluded from scenes of strong political significance, see ‘How and Why’, p. 52.

80. S. Bickel, ‘Worldview and Royal Discourse in the Time of Hatshepsut’, in J. Galan, B. Bryan and P. Dorman (eds), Creativity and Innovation in the Reign of Hatshepsut, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations 69 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), pp. 21–32, see esp. pp. 23–4. The kȝ was the life-force or spiritual double that every Egyptian was believed to possess.

81. Roth, ‘Hatshepsut’ Mortuary Temple at Deir el-Bahri’, p. 149.


83. Robins, ‘The Names of Hatshepsut as King’.


85. The goddess Maat was the embodiment of the concept of maa t which meant truth, justice and cosmic balance.

86. In Egyptian mythology, Maat was the daughter of the sun god Re. Robins, ‘The Names of Hatshepsut as King’, p. 103.


89. My emphasis is on the potency of the images that were requisitioned and supported by Hatshepsut to further her political goals. These images, produced by the royal workshops, act on her behalf as effective agents to convey information to her citizens. She was in control of her public image, and as such was indirectly acting through her two- and three-dimensional representations.


91. Roehrig, Dreyfus and Keller, Hatshepsut, p. 171, cat. no. 95.

92. Roehrig, Dreyfus and Keller, Hatshepsut, pp. 170–1, cat. no. 95.


94. This article follows the detailed studies done by Dimitri Laboury, ‘How and Why’, pp. 49–92.

95. Szafrański, ‘The Exceptional Creativity of Hatshepsut’, p. 130. These statues have also been systematically studied by R. Tefnin, La statuaire d’Hatshepsut: portrait royal et politique sous la 18e dynastie, Monumeta Aegyptiaca 4 (Brussels: Fondation de égyptologique de Reine Elisabeth, 1979).

96. The colossal located in the southern part of the porticos wear the white crown of Upper Egypt and those in the northern part wear the double crown. Szafrański, ‘The Exceptional Creativity of Hatshepsut’, p. 130.


98. Following Tefnin’s 1979 study, the earliest of the three series of engaged limestone statues presenting Hatshepsut as a deceased ruler begin in the sanctuary of her temple. This organisation dictates that the decoration began in the west and continued outward toward the east. See Keller, ‘The Statuary of
Hatshepsut’, p. 158. The statues that were positioned inside the sanctuary were painted with yellow skin, see statue fragment MMA 31.3.155 in Roehrig, Dreyfus and Keller, Hatshepsut, fig. 64.


100. Robins, ‘The Names of Hatshepsut as King’, p. 112.

