

## **Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses: Feminism's Impact on Egyptology**

*Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses: Feminism's Impact on Egyptology* gathers images of powerful Egyptian women and goddesses whom Judy Chicago included in *The Dinner Party*. All of these images come from the Brooklyn Museum's renowned Egyptian collection. They include Hatshepsut -- the only female pharaoh, and the powerful queens Tiye, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra. The goddesses Isis, Hathor, Neith, Tefnut, and Wadjet who played an important role in maintaining the Egyptian power structure are also integrated into the exhibition. Feminism has changed Egyptology during the years that coincide with the creation and subsequent popularity of Judy Chicago's work. First, conditions in the academic world have improved with many more women working actively as Egyptologists than there were at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, today, both men and women Egyptologists more easily accept women wielding political power in the ancient world as they observe changes in modern society. Thus the older interpretations of Hatshepsut's reign as a violation of Egyptian protocol have fallen out of favor. Today Egyptologists understand that Hatshepsut preserved her family's claims on the throne while the male heir was still a child. Hatshepsut has transformed from villain to heroine of her own story in the most recent telling. In much the same way, Egyptologists now recognize Tiye and Nefertiti as their husband's equal? partners in ruling Egypt rather than women who attempted to claim more power than was proper for queens. Even Cleopatra, whose reputation among the ancient Romans as well as many historians was essentially negative, is today recognized primarily as the legitimate guardian of her country's political interests. These transformations in historical reputations stem from a viewpoint highly influenced by modern feminism. Feminism has enriched modern understanding of the ancient world as well as changing the world where we live.

### **Plate and Drawing**

#### **Head of a King (Hatshepsut?) as a Falcon**

Black Granite

Joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, ca. 1478-1458 B.C.

Provenance unknown

55.118, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund

Hatshepsut ruled Egypt jointly with Thutmose III, her deceased husband Thutmose II's son and heir through another wife called Isis. Thutmose III was about nine years old when his father died. Hatshepsut was chief royal wife and thus the obvious person to assume leadership while the heir was still a child. Unlike previous and subsequent queens in similar positions, Hatshepsut found it necessary to declare herself Pharaoh, probably because there was no biological relationship between herself and the heir.

In this sculpture Hatshepsut claims unity with the falcon god Horus, the divine form of the pharaoh. The remains of feathers are visible on the left side of the head cloth. Other, more complete examples of this type show the king's head with the striped nemes head cloth,

Uraeus serpent on the forehead, and the body of a falcon. Though it is difficult to distinguish heads of Hatshepsut from those of Thutmose III, the overall facial structure, with its tilted eyes, and delicate chin are characteristics associated with Hatshepsut's representations.

### **Seal of Hatshepsut before Amun-Re**

Serpentine

Joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III ca. 1478-1458 B.C.

Thebes (?)

37.118E, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund

Hatshepsut stands before the god Amun-Re as a female king wearing the ceremonial *Atef*-crown and a dress rather than male attire as she did in most of her images. She also lacks the false beard often worn in such scenes. Above the king is her royal cartouche, her name written inside an oval, followed by the words "May she live." This image is thus one of a very small number of early representations of the female king as a woman. She is here performing the royal task of offering to the chief god of the Egyptian pantheon. Images made later in the reign portray her as a man.

### **Queen Tiye**

Red sandstone

Reign of Akhenaten, ca. 1352-1336

Provenance not known

33.55, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund

Tiye was queen of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten's mother. Her political power is evident from references in diplomatic correspondence dating to her son's reign. Tushratta, king of Mitanni -- a state north of present-day Iraq -- wrote to her directly. This same king advised Akhenaten to consult his mother on diplomatic issues.

This statue resembles both Akhenaten and Queen Tiye, especially in the slightly down-turned mouth and stern expression.

### **Queen Nefertiti**

Sandstone

Early reign of Akhenaten, ca. 1352-1348

Temple of Aten, Karnak (?)

78.39, Gift of Christos G. Bastis

Nefertiti was Akhenaten's principal queen and mother of his six daughters. Her importance as a leading figure in the Amarna religious revolution (1352–1332 BC) that taught a form of monotheism, is undisputed. Nefertiti here wears the Uraeus snake on her forehead and receives life from the hand of the god Aten, two attributes usually associated only with kings. When this work was complete, she stood at Akhenaten's side as together they worshipped the

Aten, their one god. Scholars dispute whether she ruled independently after Akhenaten's death for three years. The date of her death is uncertain as is her relationship with Smenkare and Tutankhamun, the two succeeding kings. In spite of her successors' attempts to eradicate her memory, today she is the most widely recognized of Egypt's queens.

### **Ptolemaic Queen (Cleopatra VII ?)**

Ptolemaic Period, 305-30 B.C.

Marble

Provenance not known

71.12, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund

The last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty (332–30 BC), Cleopatra VII ruled from 51 to 31 BC and lived a complicated and eventful life as she attempted to maintain Egyptian independence from Rome. She shared the Egyptian throne at various times with her brothers and later tried to declare her son by Julius Caesar the king. Afterward she married Mark Anthony, Caesar's heir. They had three children together. Defeated by Octavian (later the Emperor Augustus) at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Mark Anthony committed suicide and Cleopatra followed him eleven days later on August 12, 30 BC. Of their three children, two were then raised in Rome and one married the king of Mauritania. The triple Uraeus on the queen's brow identifies her to some scholars as Cleopatra VII.

Though the Romans defamed her for political reasons, she remained a heroine in Egypt. Her political acumen allowed her to survive for over twenty years as she tried to steer Egypt on an independent course while the Roman empire grew and finally absorbed it.

### **The Goddesses**

Deities, both gods and goddesses, derived their power from a relationship with the god Horus, incarnated in the human ruler of Egypt. The goddesses represented here were Horus' mother, protector, or judge, all contributing to the Egyptian quest for a stable world.

While modern understanding of ancient Egyptian female rulers on earth has changed in light of feminism, Egyptologists have always been more willing to recognize women's power in the supernatural realm.

### **Isis**

05.315 Small Bronze of Isis Holding Horus

08.480.49 Statuette of Isis

11.682 Seated Statuette of Isis Holding Horus

16.430 Statuette of Isis (stone)

37.404E Statue of Isis Seated

37.939 Triad of Isis, the Child Horus and Nephthys

Judy Chicago included Isis at the Dinner Party, recognizing the goddess' role as both the personification of the king's throne and the mother of the royal heir. In Egyptian mythology, Isis is a single mother who raised her child until he was old enough to claim his deceased father's throne. Isis controlled the power of magic, giving her the resources to protect her child, Horus. In many representations of Isis, she nurses Horus and wears the cow-horned crown with sun disk that connects her to the goddess Hathor, giver of maternal milk. Isis' power also extends to rebirth in the next world, acting as chief mourner with her sister Nephthys. Historically, Isis worship spread throughout the Mediterranean during the Roman empire.

### **Hathor**

37.356E Standing Hathor with Cow's Head

37.584E Handle of a Sistrum

37.586E Handle of a Sistrum Ending in Two Hathor Cow Heads

61.192 Amulet in Form of Hathor Head Inscribed for Hatshepsut and Senmut

74.97 Khaemwaset holds a sistrum

Hathor personified the king's mansion. Her name means "Mansion of Horus." Artists represented her as both a woman with a cow's head or a woman with a cow's ears. Her bovine features refer to her role as provider of milk for the young king. Hathor also was linked to music and love, and thus she appears on the sistrum, a musical instrument used in temple rituals.

### **Neith**

37.357E Statuette of Neith

62.1 Statuette of Goddess Neith

79.242 Statuette of Goddess Neith

Neith was among the first goddesses worshipped in Egypt, attested in the Pre-dynastic Period (dates). She wears the royal Red Crown and carries either two crossed bows or a bow and arrow. This insignia suggest she was a goddess of war and hunting. These statuettes, when they were complete, would have included a bow and arrow in the goddess' left hand. Neith is also one of the pillars that supports the sky, a role she cites when judging between Horus' and Seth's claims to the throne. Neith threatens to let the sky tumble down if Horus does not receive the crown of Egypt.

### **Tefnut**

05.364 Tefnut as a Lioness

08.480.100 Divine Eye and Lioness Amulet

37.1297E Divine Eye and Lioness Amulet

08.480.216 Divine Eye in Gold Foil

### 09.877 Large Eye Amulet

Tefnut, as Judy Chicago recognized, represented the female principle in the creation of the earth. The goddess' male partner was Shu (air). She also was the eyes of the sun god Re. Egyptian artists represented her both as a lioness and the divine eye. Two of these amulets portray the divine eye and a lioness combined. Nefertiti, represented in a relief in this exhibition, identified herself with the goddess Tefnut. In Egyptian mythology, Tefnut, in the form of a raging lion, represented both the loss of moisture in the summer and its return with the annual flood.

### **Wadjet of Buto**

16.580.181 Uraeus (Bronze)

16.735 Uraeus (Bronze)

36.622 Wadjet as a Lion-Headed Woman

37.550E Uraeus (Bronze)

37.790E Amulet in the Form of the Uraeus (Gold)

08.480.204 Blue Glass Uraeus with Lion Head

Wadjet of Buto was a cobra goddess usually paired in Egyptian thought with the vulture goddess Nekhbet of Nekheb. Wadjet's name means "the green one" a characteristic she shared with the cobra. The Uraeus cobra protected the king and was often depicted on his brow. One of the most ancient Egyptian goddesses, Wadjet was already known in the first dynasty and is depicted on the forehead of Narmer, the first king to unite Upper and Lower Egypt.