



Hatshepsut

For the ancient Egyptians of 3,500 years ago, it must have been an astonishing spectacle. A fleet of boats made of wood and papyrus reeds had just docked at Thebes, capital city of the mighty Egyptian civilization. To mounting excitement, sailors unloaded great treasures from the expedition to the mysterious Land of Punt, far to the south of Egypt's empire.

The crowd looked on in wonder as the strange cargoes were taken into Thebes: clay amphora jars full of incense and spices; living myrrh trees; gold, silver, ivory and ebony; baboons, giraffes and other astonishing animals. All eyes turned upon Egypt's leader, the pharaoh Hatshepsut. For although she claimed that her dead father and the gods had ordered the expedition, it had been her plan.

Hatshepsut's ships may have been transported across the desert before they sailed south to the coast of Punt.

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut wore a double crown on ceremonial occasions. It featured the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt joined together.

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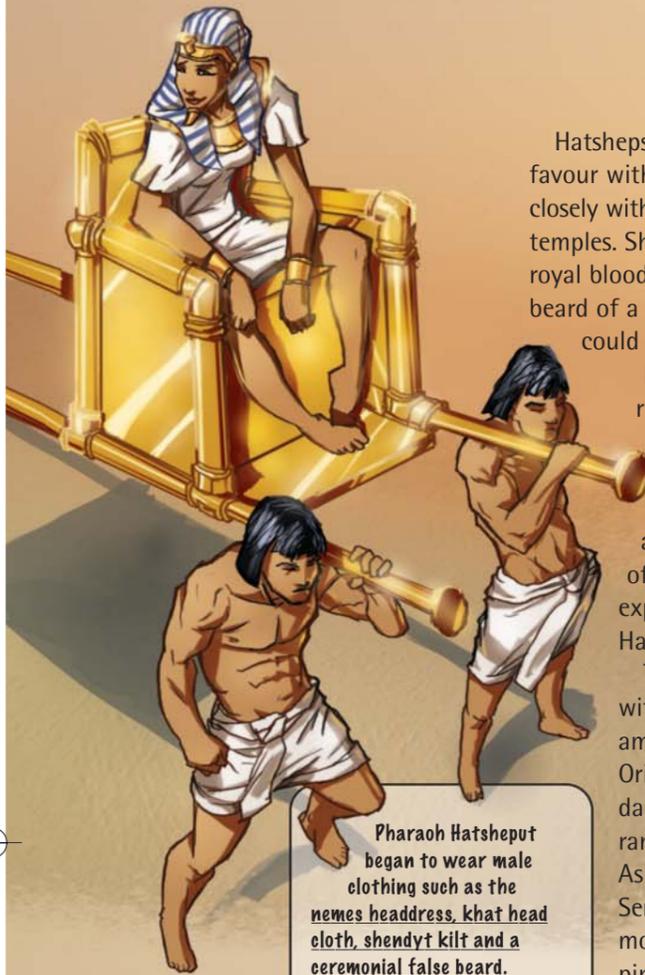


Eventually Hatshepsut took the daring step of declaring herself pharaoh of all Egypt. Women in ancient Egypt could own land and inherit wealth, but a queen declaring herself a pharaoh was extremely rare. Hatshepsut had a fight on her hands to keep hold of power.

Hatshepsut had great obelisks raised at the massive temple complex at Karnak, outside Thebes. These giant stone pillars were cut from single pieces of rock at Aswan and ferried by barge up the River Nile.

Hatshepsut was one of the first great queens. She reigned during the 18th dynasty of ancient Egypt (1550–1282BCE), when this extraordinary civilization stood at a peak of wealth and power. Hatshepsut was the daughter of the pharaoh Thutmose I, and married her half brother, Thutmose II, who also ruled as pharaoh. Queen Hatshepsut gave birth to a daughter but did not produce a male heir. Thutmose II took another wife who bore a male child, Thutmose III. When Thutmose II died, his son was an infant, too young to become pharaoh. A crisis threatened the empire. As the senior member of the royal family and Thutmose III's stepmother, Hatshepsut was appointed regent (a form of co-ruler), and Egypt may have been run by priests and officials. Hatshepsut may have had a role in government, but she wanted more power.



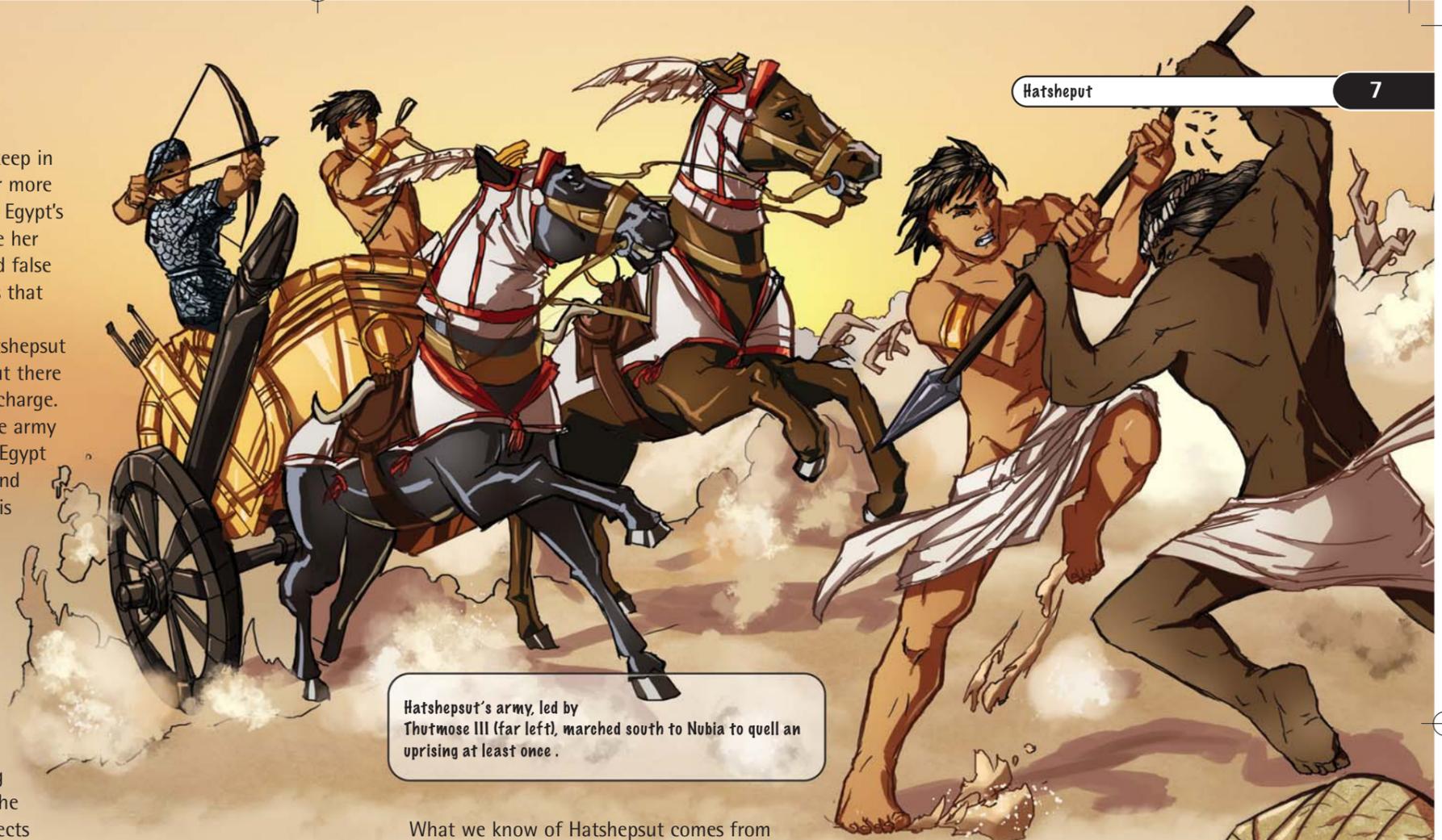


Pharaoh Hatsheput began to wear male clothing such as the nemes headdress, khat head cloth, shendyt kilt and a ceremonial false beard.

Hatshepsut was a quick-witted ruler. To keep in favour with powerful priests and to link her more closely with the gods, she improved many of Egypt's temples. She used propaganda to emphasize her royal blood. She even wore the clothing and false beard of a male pharaoh, and gave up titles that could only be held by a woman.

During her reign of 22 years, Hatshepsut ruled jointly with Thutmose III, but there is little doubt that she was in charge. She kept Thutmose busy in the army as it marched south into lower Egypt and Nubia, and voyaged to the Land of Punt. The glorious success of this expedition helped to strengthen Hatshepsut's grip on power.

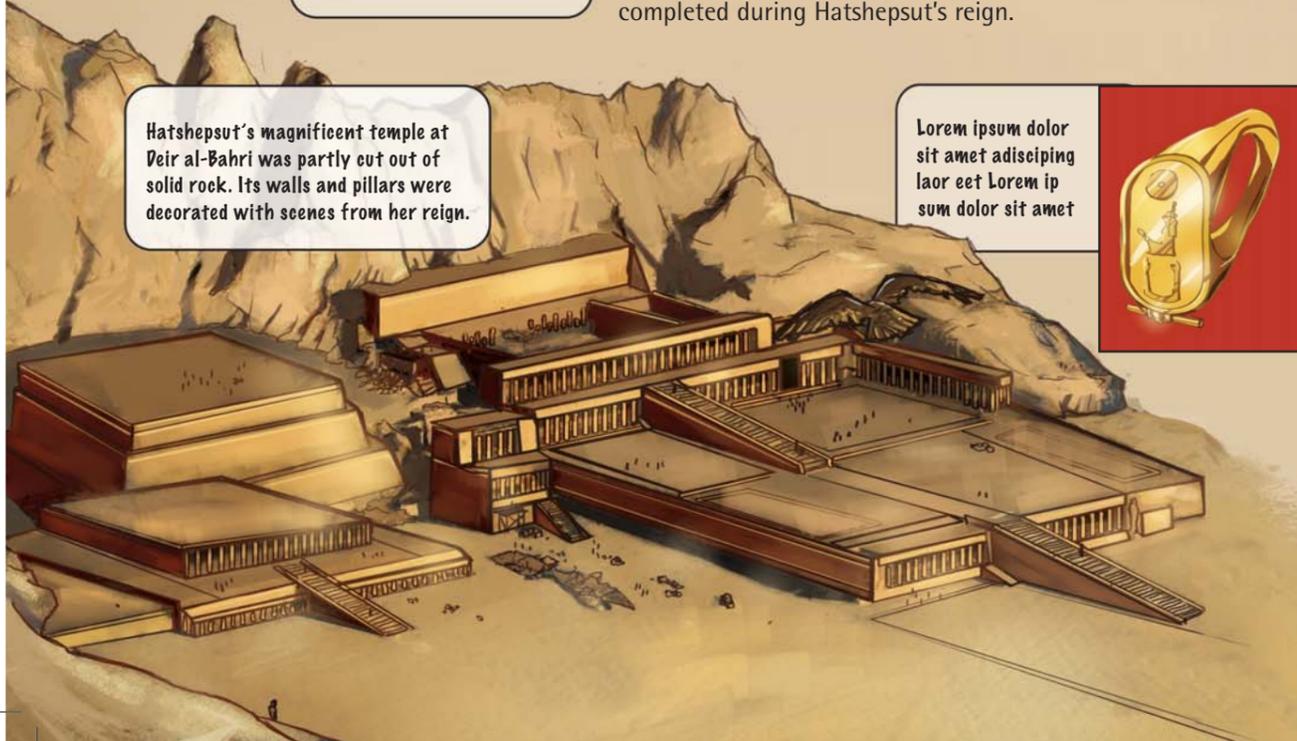
The pharaoh surrounded herself with skilful viziers (advisors), chief among them being Senemut. Originally the tutor of Hatshepsut's daughter, Senemut rose up the ranks and gained over 40 titles. As the pharaoh's chief architect, Senemut designed the awe-inspiring mortuary temple at Deir al-Bahri, the pinnacle of the many building projects completed during Hatshepsut's reign.



Hatshepsut's army, led by Thutmose III (far left), marched south to Nubia to quell an uprising at least once.

What we know of Hatshepsut comes from court records, histories written long after her death, and archaeological evidence. Many mysteries are still to be solved. Her reign ended abruptly around 1458BCE. Was she murdered, did she die peacefully or simply retire from ruling? Her tomb was found in 1903, but her mummy has yet to be identified for certain. What is certain is that Hatshepsut was a legendary ruler, and a queen who dared to become pharaoh and king.

Mysteriously, many statues of Hatshepsut were destroyed after her reign. Her name and cartouche were often replaced with those of Thutmose III.



Hatshepsut's magnificent temple at Deir al-Bahri was partly cut out of solid rock. Its walls and pillars were decorated with scenes from her reign.

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 Hatshepsut claimed a divine right to rule Egypt, handed down to her by the god Amon-Ra. Around 1,100 years later Alexander the Great marched into Egypt and was crowned pharaoh. He was hailed by Egyptian priests as the son of the king of the gods, Amon.



