

Some images of the king and queen together in stele of Ahmose I

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Certain textual images of Ahhotep II and Ahmose-Nefertiry in stele of Ahmose I illustrate the authority of the principal queen as an active female counterpart of the king during the early 18th Dynasty, perhaps partly inspired by the mythological model of Osiris and Isis. These images may presage the accession of Hatshepsut as king, which can therefore be seen as the outcome of a cultural process rather than as an act of political opportunism.

Algunas imágenes en textos de Ahhotep II y Ahmose-Nefertiry en estelas de Ahmose I ilustran la autoridad de la reina principal como una contrapartida femenina activa del rey a comienzos de la dinastía XVIII y se encuentran quizás inspiradas en los modelos mitológicos de Osiris e Isis. Estas imágenes pueden anunciar el ascenso de Hatshepsut como monarca, que puede, no obstante, ser visto como el resultado de un proceso cultural más que como un acto de oportunismo político.

EARLY in the reign of Thutmose III, whilst still queen, Hatshepsut:¹

... appeared in scenes drawn from the iconography of kings, and used titles modelled on those used by kings, which described her position as ruler. Officials used titles and phrases which would normally contain a title or phrase referring to the king, but now contained the title god's wife or lady of the Two Lands.²

In her major study of queenship, Troy suggested that it would be a short step from here 'to the reign of a female monarch'.³

However, in her valuable article on 'god's wives', Robins assumed that Hatshepsut's kingly iconography was a retrospective response to her *de facto* assumption of kingly authority as regent, and that her accession as king resulted from a refusal to surrender power at the king's majority.⁴ In particular, she suggests that the title 'god's wife' may have become 'a base from which to achieve her own ambitions to the detriment of the king'.⁵ Dodson similarly dismissed Troy's suggestion because 'there seems to be a failure to distinguish between the realities behind the situation of a queen-mother acting as regent for her (step-)son, and those

1. By 'queen' I am following typical practice by referring principally to women titled *hmt nsw*, and especially to those titled *hmt nsw wrt*, where *wrt* refers, not to the king, but to the queen's status relative to other wives of the king. Since the following discussion is based on the monuments of a king, the subjects raised are necessarily seen from the perspective of the kingship.
2. G. Robins, 'The God's Wife of Amun in Ancient Egypt', in A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt, *Images of Women in Antiquity*, Revised Edition (London, 1993), 74.

3. L. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Boreas. Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Civilisations, 14 (Uppsala, 1986), 132.
4. Robins, *op. cit.* 74-5.
5. Robins, *op. cit.* 75-6. However, she also notes, *op. cit.* 70, that this title 'had nothing to do with the myth of the king's divine birth', which subsequently became the dominant mythic model legitimating Hatshepsut's accession in the Theban context.

concomitant with a woman's physical assumption of the crown'.⁶

In support of Troy's suggestion, we might point to the later 18th Dynasty, when the representation of the principal queen as an active counterpart of the king reached its fullest and most distinctive development in iconography during the reigns of Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV. In particular, Tiy and Nefertiti were sometimes depicted worshipping the gods, and slaughtering enemies, so effectively blurring traditional distinctions between king and queen. Indeed, Morkot has documented violent images of queens from as early as the reign of Thutmose IV to as late as that of Ramesses II, and concluded that 'from the reign of Amenhotep III a duality in the ideology of rulership is apparent in which the female principal, if not equal, is given greater prominence'.⁷ Such images, as is well known, may be understood to presage the accession of queen Nefertiti as king Nefernefruten.

Here I would like to consider some analogous, but much earlier, textual images of the queens Ahhotep II and Ahmose-Nefertiry during the reign of Ahmose I. I would suggest that these images foreshadow the accession of Hatshepsut as king in such a way that it can be seen as an event consistent with the developing 'ideology of rulership' during the early New Kingdom, rather than as an isolated phenomenon explicable mainly in terms of putative dynastic politics.

Both queens belonged to the 17th Dynasty royal family at Thebes, which unified the kingship of Upper Egypt and Wawat at the beginning of the New Kingdom. Although

there may have been several queens named Ahhotep at this period,⁸ a major queen, usually styled Ahhotep II, can be identified on the basis of the coincidence of her titles on an enormous coffin from the royal cache at Deir el-Bahri,⁹ and on a stele of Ahmose I from Karnak. On the stele she is titled *hmt nsw* 'king's wife', *snt ity* 'sovereign's sister', *s3t nsw* 'king's daughter', and *mwt nsw* 'king's mother'.¹⁰ This queen was probably the first to be married to her own brother, if her titles are understood as referring to (a) a brother-husband,¹¹ (b) a father, and (c) a son. Such consanguineous marriage apparently then became the norm for the king and his principal wife until the marriage of Hatshepsut to her brother, Thutmose II.

The stele in question is the largest known of Ahmose I.¹² Doubtless it originally held a privileged position near the sanctuary of the temple of Amun-Ra, although it was subsequently buried to facilitate the development of the north-south processional axis. Its text is an elaborate eulogy of the king and his prodigious endowments for the cult of Amun-Ra, but incorporates a well-known passage about Ahhotep:

(1) CG 34001, 24-6:

imm hnw n nbt t3
hnwt idbw h3w nb(w)t
k3t rn hr h3st nbt
irt shr ʕ3t
hmt nsw snt ity s3t nsw mwt nsw
špst rht ht
nwt kmt
ʕw3.n.s mnfyt

6. Review of Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* XLVI (1989), 47.
 7. R. Morkot, *Wepwawet: Research Papers in Egyptology* 2 (1986), 1-9.
 8. See W. Seipel, *LÄ* I, 98-99.
 9. Cairo CG 61006. See L. Troy, *GM* 35 (1979), 91.
 10. Apart from the specific ordering of the titles, the main difference is that the stele has *snt ity* and *hmt nsw*, whereas the coffin has *snt nsw* and *hmt nsw wrt*

hnmt nfr hdt. For the epithet *hnmt nfr hdt*, see G. Robins, *GM* 56 (1982), 82-3; M. Gitton & J. Leclant, *LÄ* II, 795.
 11. The identity of this king is uncertain, although common sense dictates that it is one of the immediate predecessors of Ahmose I, *i.e.* Kamose or Taa.
 12. Cairo CG 34001. Dimensions: height 2.36 m, width 1.05 m. For text, see *Urk* IV 14/1-23/16.

nbnb.n.s sy
nw.n.s wthw.s
ink.s tšw.s
sgrh.n.s šm^c
dr.s bṯnw.s
hmt nsw i^ch-htp ^cnh.ti

Give praise to the lady of the land,
mistress of the banks of the *h3w nbwt*,
exalted of name over every hill-country,
who counsels the multitude,
king's wife, sovereign's sister, king's
daughter, king's mother,
the noble lady who understands matters,
and united Black Land,
having taken hold of the bureaucracy,
and secured it,
having collected those who fled her,
whilst surrounding those who deserted her,
having pacified Upper Egypt,
whilst obliterating those who defied her,
the king's wife, Ahhotep, living.¹³

The prominence accorded to the queen by this passage has led some scholars to conclude that it refers to specific historical events, which happened at Thebes early in the king's reign¹⁴ although the imagery is drawn from the typical phraseology of kingship. An enigmatic phrase has been *hnwt idbw h3w nbwt* 'mistress of the banks of the *h3w nbwt*', since this might be understood to incorporate a reference to a specific location. Meyer long ago concluded that *h3w nbwt* referred to Crete and the Aegean islands, indicating an alliance between the Egyptian royal family and rulers of Minoan Crete.¹⁵ The same idea has been mooted more

recently by Jánosi and Bietak.¹⁶ Vandersleyen, on the other hand, suggested that *h3w nbwt* in this text referred to peoples of the coasts of the *t3w fnhw*, and accordingly speculated that Ahmose I had conquered the coast of Palestine.¹⁷ More recently Seipel has also concluded that:

hnwt idbw h3w nbwt 'ist nicht als Ausdruck einer kretisch-ägyptisch Allianz zu verstehen, sondern bezieht sich auf die erfolgreichen Feldzüge ihres Sohnes Ahmose gegen Vorderasien'.¹⁸

Nevertheless there is no compelling evidence in favour of the conclusion that Ahmose I ever conquered the coast of Palestine,¹⁹ still less that this title embodies a specific reference to such an event.

Other scholars have objected that such a precise rendering of *h3w nbwt* is not possible. Edel concluded that *nbwt* simply refers to 'eine geographischer Form der Erdoberfläche deren Umgebung bewohnbar ist'.²⁰ For W. S. Smith *h3w nbwt* 'belongs to a series of generalised appellations with little specific meaning, apparently referring to the far-off Asiatic shores of the eastern Mediterranean'.²¹ Iversen argued that *nbwt* is a synonym of *iww* 'islands', hence that *h3w nbwt* denotes any peoples living overseas from Egypt.²² These three arguments can be reconciled by concluding that *h3w nbwt* refers, not to people in a particular location, but to people living on a particular kind of land –and virtually or completely out at sea. If so, *h3w nbwt* might

13. This and the following translations have been divided with obvious reference to syntax, but without attempting to emulate any putative metrical structure.
14. For example, A. H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs. An Introduction* (Oxford, 1961), 173. Also, in the seminal study of the king's reign, C. Vandersleyen, *Les guerres d'Amosis, fondateur de la 18e dynastie* (Bruxelles, 1971), 168-74.
15. E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, II2 (Berlin, 1928), 54-7.
16. P. Jánosi, *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 5 (1991/92), 104-5; M. Bietak, *Avaris, the Capital*

- of the Hyksos. Recent Excavations at Tell ed-Daba* (London, 1996), 80.
17. Vandersleyen, *op. cit.* 175-7. See also J. Vercoutter, *BIFAO* 46 (1947), 125-58.
18. Seipel, *op. cit.* 98.
19. The inscriptions of Neferperet at Tura apparently refer to cattle brought from the *t3w fnhw*, see *Urk IV* 25/12. However, there is no reason to assume that the cattle were brought to Egypt by conquest rather than as tribute or the result of raiding.
20. E. Edel, *ZÄS* 81 (1956), 13.
21. W. S. Smith, *Interconnections in the Near East* (New Haven & London, 1965), 28.
22. E. Iversen, *ZÄS* 114 (1987), 55-9.

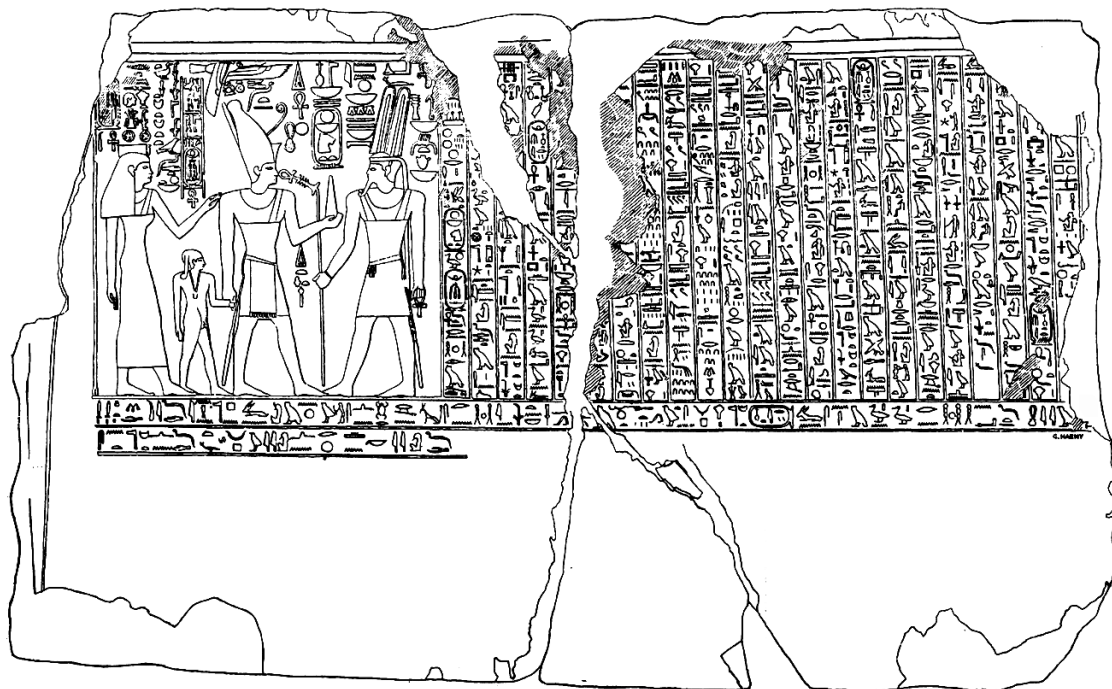


Figure 1: “Karnak donation stela”

refer to the inhabitants of the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Aegean— indeed of any islands or estuaries, including perhaps the fringes of the Nile delta.²³ This observation is the key to understanding the passage about the queen, who, ahead of her queenly titles, is said to have authority over three qualitatively distinct types of land: *b* ‘flat land’, *h3st* ‘hill country’, and *nbwt*. Since these would constitute the only types of land known to the ancient Egyptians, Ahhotep is thereby said to have authority in any place people live, hence the summary epithet *irt shr 33t* ‘who counsels the multitude’.

This imagery is, as noted above, typical of the symbolism of kingship in the early 18th

Dynasty. In the same stela, the king’s authority is described in similar terms:

(2) CG 34001, 9-13:

hr w3h mrt
iw n.f rsw mhwtw i3btw imntw
iw.f mn m nb
smn t3wy.fy
it n.f iw^ct wtt sw
t3wy tm hmw n.f
di.n n.f st it.f spsy
iw h^f.n.f hnmmt
3mm.n.f rhyt
iw p^ct di.sn n.f i3w
hr nb hr nb.n pw
h3w nb(w)t hr sms.n im.f
t3w hr wnn.n n.f

23. In view of the connection and partial identification between the Nile delta and *w3d-wr*, see C. Vandersleyen in S. Schoske (ed.), *Akten des vierten*

internationalen Ägyptologen-Kongresses, München 1985, SAK Beiheft 4 (Hamburg), 345-52.

opposite direction to the Nile²⁶. Bradbury and Spalinger suggest that it refers to a campaign by Thutmose I in Kush.²⁷ It might be better explained as a symbolic rather than politically specific statement, in which the ‘inverted’ river has become an evocation of the far reaches of the earth. A slightly later passage clearly is symbolic:

(5) Tombos, 16:

ti hm.f m hrw
itw m nsyt.f nt hh m rnp(w)t
gnh n.f iww sn-wr
t3 r-dr.f hr tbt.fy

Now, his person is Horus,
 who has seized by his kingship of millions of
 years,
 so the islands of the Great Ocean serve him,
 and the whole earth is under his sandals.

Regarding the text of this stele, Bradbury has commented:

There is not a single word about Mittani, Hurrians, the *Phr wr*, the Marshes of Asia, the Hittites, Naharin, any Syrian city-state, Byblos, God’s Land, *Kdm-Kdn*, the Fenkhu-lands, Asiatic peoples, Upper and Lower Retenu, or any Palestine city-state or peoples.²⁸

Whilst this is certainly true, it is puzzling for her to conclude that it therefore refers to Kush, since neither is there any word about Nubian sites or peoples. Clearly the description of the king’s dominion is a statement of politically transcendent authority, in which the peoples mentioned are archetypal foreigners, characterised as being from the ends of the earth (*rsw*, *mhtw*), from countries completely unlike Egypt (*hrw-scy*, *h3stw*), or enemies of the gods (*bwytw ntr*).

The Mahatta stele of Thutmose II paints yet another picture of the transcendent dominion of the king:

(6) Mahatta, 3-5:

st hm.f m ch.f
b3w.f shm(.w)
snd.f ht t3
sfst.f m idbw h3w nb(wt)
pssty nbwy hr st-hr.f
psdt pdt dmd hr tbt.fy
iw n.f mntw hr inw
iwnt(w)-sti hr g(3)w
t3sf.rsy r wp(t) t3
mhty r ph(w)
stt m ndt nt nb t3wy

Now his person was in the palace,
 with his power dominating,
 with fear of him throughout the earth,
 and dread of him in the banks of the *h3w nbwt*,
 with the twin portions of the twin lords under
 his care,
 and the entire nine bows beneath his sandals,
 with the nomads coming to him bearing
 tribute,
 and the Nubian tent-dwellers bearing gifts,
 with his southern boundary at the horns of the
 land,
 and the northern one at the rumps,
 with Asia as the personal property of the lord
 of the twin lands.

In this passage, the situation of the *idbw h3w nbwt* (filled with *sfst.f* ‘dread of him’) is associated with that of *t3* (filled with *snd.f* ‘fear of him’). An obviously symbolic reference then invokes the earth as the *pssty nbwy* ‘the twin portions of the twin lords’ (presumably Horus and Seth), and its population as the *psdt pdt* ‘the nine bows’, i.e. the traditional enemies of the king. The particular peoples mentioned bearing tribute for the king – *mntw* ‘nomads’

26. For example, Vandersleyen, *Les guerres d’Amosis*, 121-5.

27. L. Bradbury, *Serapis* 8 (1984-5), 7; A. J. Spalinger, *Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient*

Egyptians, Yale Near Eastern Researches, 9 (New Haven & London, 1982), 46.

28. Bradbury, *op. cit.* 6.

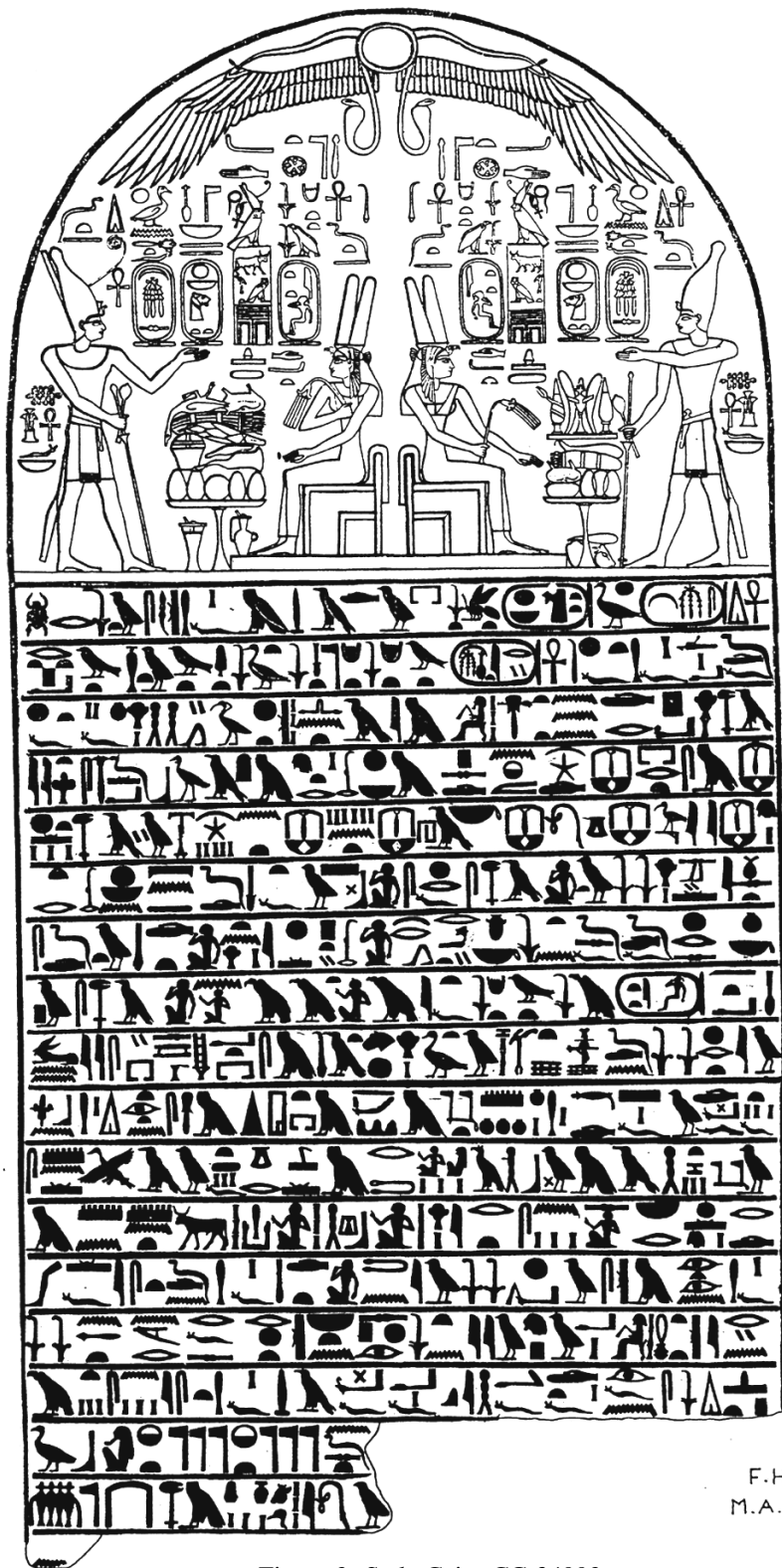


Figure 2: Stela Cairo CG 34002

and *iwntw-sti* ‘Nubian tent-dwellers’ – may be understood as archetypes of the *h3stw* and/or *hrw-sꜣy* mentioned in the stele of Ahmose I and Thutmose I. Finally, the king’s dominion is shown to stretch to the ends of the earth by employing the holistic symbol of the horns (*wpt*) and rump (*pḥw*) of a bull.²⁹

These various statements of the king’s transcendent dominion couched in symbolic terms indicate that the language of example (1) regarding queen Ahhotep cannot be understood in isolation. Her authority is presented in the same terms as that of the kings. In a political sense, the words would be vague and untrue, since Ahhotep probably had no authority outside Upper Egypt and Wawat. But as a statement of her political transcendence, the words are absolutely truthful: the queen was the female counterpart of the king, and so held authority over every land.

Ahmose-Nefertiry inherited the role of Ahhotep II as principal queen of Ahmose I. Robins has suggested that she may have regarded the title *hmt ntr* ‘god’s wife’ as even more important to her position than her queenly titles. Given the prominence of the principal queens at this period, it seems unlikely her authority was solely based a title which was entirely sacerdotal in significance,³⁰ and wholly Theban in scope.³¹ Moreover, Robins overstates the political importance of that office by assuming it is associated with the considerable donations of

land and goods set out in the so-called ‘Karnak donation stele’ (fig 1),³² whereas the office at issue there is clearly that of *hm-ntr 2-nw n imn*.³³ However, the full titles and epithets of Ahmose-Nefertiry on that monument are very revealing. She is almost as closely related to the king as her predecessor, being titled *s3t nsw* ‘king’s daughter’, *snt nsw* ‘king’s sister’, *hmt ntr* ‘god’s wife’, and *hmt nsw wrt* ‘great king’s wife’. In addition, her epithets express her authority in the language of kingship, styling her as *ddt ht nb(t) irt.n.s* ‘one who says everything she has done’, and *hrt-tp smꜥ mḥi* ‘chief of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt’. The first recalls the traditional phraseology of royal stele in which the king is said to ‘speak’ and so ‘act’.³⁴ It also echoes the royal title *nb ir ht* ‘lord of action’. The significance of the second epithet is self-evident, and recalls the kingly title *hry-tp t3wy* ‘chief of the twin lands’ in example (3), as well as her own titles, attested elsewhere, *nbt t3wy* ‘lady of the twin lands’, and *hnwt t3wy* ‘mistress of the twin lands’.³⁵

Nevertheless, the most striking witness to the authority of Ahmose-Nefertiry is the stele of Ahmose I from the funerary chapel of queen Tetishery at Abydos (fig. 2).³⁶ The stele is surmounted by balanced scenes of the king offering to Tetishery, employing the typical iconography of the tomb-based offering cult. The text, however, is quite exceptional because it takes the form of a dialogue between the king and the living queen about how he should

29. G. Posener, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, 2 (1965), 70-1.

30. Gitton & Leclant, *op. cit.* 792.

31. Robins, *op. cit.* 66.

32. Robins, *op. cit.* 70-1. For text, see E. Drioton, *BSFE* 12 (1953), 20-5; I. Harari, *ASAE* 56 (1959), pl. II.

33. The text is so difficult to interpret, it is unclear even whether Ahmose-Nefertiry is relinquishing or receiving the office. Compare, for example, the contradictory conclusions of C. Vandersleyen, *LAI* 100, and of Gitton & Leclant, *op. cit.* 793.

34. The most important examples of this phraseology prior to the 18th Dynasty occur in the texts of the

boundary stele of Senusret I at Semneh and Uronarti, e.g. Semneh, 3, *ink nsw dḏw irrw*, ‘I am a king who speaks and acts’. For text, see C. Obsomer, *Les campagnes de Sésostris dans Hérodote. Essai d’interprétation du texte grec à la lumière des réalités égyptiennes* (Bruxelles, 1989), fig. 24.

35. For example, in the inscriptions of Neferperet at Tura, see *Urk IV* 25/4-5.

36. Cairo CG 34002, see also *PM V*, 92. For text, see *Urk IV* 26/1-29/5; E. R. Ayrton, C. T. Currelly & A. E. P. Weigall, *Abydos*, 3 (London, 1904), pl. 50-52.

properly observe the cult of his great female ancestor. Although Ahmose plays the leading role, the observations on proper conduct are not simply stated by him, as might be expected, but emerge instead out of the dialogue. The setting, which heads the text before even the royal titulary, presents the king relaxing in the *ḏ3dw*-hall.³⁷ This intimacy, together with the family context of a king and queen who also happen to be brother and sister, and relatives of the late queen, is strongly reminiscent of art from the Amarna period, when kings and queens are characteristically shown enjoying each other's familiar company. On the other hand, their familiarity can be contrasted starkly with near contemporary images of the king in the company of others, such as the antagonistic meeting between the king, his *ḏ3ḏ3t*-council and council of elders in the First Stele of Kamose.³⁸ Much of the repertoire of textual images used by kings of the New Kingdom was being formulated at this time, and, as Spalinger has noted, various images were subsequently rejected.³⁹ The image of the king and queen relaxing as equals and intimates was one which did not gain a hold in royal stele of the early 18th dynasty, but apparently did reemerge nearly two centuries later in the art of the Amarna period.

A key problem in understanding the career of Ahmose-Nefertiry has been her adoption of the

title *mwt nsw* during the lifetime of her husband,⁴⁰ although there is no compelling evidence that Ahmose was ever coregent with any son of hers.⁴¹ Perhaps, in taking over the role of principal queen, she was simply able to assume any of the titles of her predecessor.⁴² This suggestion leads to an explanation of the remarkable titles held by Ahhotep II and Ahmose-Nefertiry derived from the mythology of kingship.⁴³ The king was Horus, son of the dead king, Osiris, but also father of his own eventual successor. Therefore, there were three potential generations: king's father, king, and king's son. Correspondingly, there were three generations of queens: *mwt nsw*, *snt-ḥmt nsw*, *ḥnd s3t nsw*. In life these queens would normally be different women. However, in mythology the female counterpart of the king was embodied in a single figure, Isis.⁴⁴ Hence we might suggest that first Ahhotep II and her brother, and subsequently Ahmose I and Ahmose-Nefertiry, were brought together in a divinely modelled consanguineous marriage. Such a marriage may have been symbolic and ritualistic, unless the divine model sanctioned a genuinely incestuous relationship that would otherwise have been abhorrent to ancient Egyptian culture.

At the accession of her own brother-husband, Thutmose II, Hatshepsut became principal queen and adopted familiar titles, including *s3t nsw*, *snt nsw*, *ḥmt ntr*, and *ḥmt*

37. Cairo CG 34002, l. 1, *ḥpr swt sndm.f m ḏ3dw*.

38. For text, see W. Helck, *Kleine ägyptische Texte. Historisch-Biographische Texte der 2. Zwischenzeit und neue Texte der 18. Dynastie* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 83-7. See also the comments of Spalinger, *op.cit.* 35-7.

39. Spalinger, *op. cit.* 47.

40. According to the inscriptions of Neferperet at Tura, see *Urk IV* 25/4.

41. The title *mwt nsw* was accepted as evidence of a coregency with Amenhotep I by W. J. Murnane, *Ancient Egyptian Coregencies* (Chicago, 1977), 230. However, such a coregency had earlier been rejected by D. B. Redford, *History and Chronology of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt: Seven Studies* (Toronto, 1967), 51. I have also argued against the evidence of this title, W. P. Manley, *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 2 (1988), 53. A limestone stele (Manchester Museum 2938) from

the Abydos pyramid enclosure, showing Ahmose, Ahmose-Nefertiry and Amenhotep I, is undoubtedly from later in the dynasty, see D. Randall-Maciver & A. C. Mace, *El-Amrah and Abydos, 1899-1901* (London, 1902), 76.

42. It is noteworthy in this regard that, on her coffin, Ahhotep II was for the first time titled *ḥmt ntr*, 'sans doute à l'imitation d'Ahmose Nofretere', Gitton & Leclant, *op. cit.* 793, n 22.

43. Following E. Leach, *RAI News* 15 (1976), 19-21. Leach's exposition is couched in terms of his own structuralist views, but need not be treated as inherently structuralist since the mythic model proposed may have been employed quite consciously by the ancients.

44. Of course, the mythology of Osiris, Horus and Isis was especially celebrated at Abydos, the provenance of stele CG 34002.

nsw wrt. Given a cultural context in which king and queen had been drawn closely together within the imagery of kingship, was her subsequent accession as king simply political opportunism, or was it a consequence of the presence of the queen as the active

female counterpart of the king? Undoubtedly the stele of Ahmose I present Ahhotep II and Ahmose-Nefertiry as queens whose authority foreshadowed Hatshepsut as queen regnant, and thereafter may have resonated throughout their dynasty.

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Número 1

2002

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