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Abstract:
The queens of ancient Egypt (i.e., the kings' wives and kings' mothers) were distinguished by a set of specific titles and insignia that characterized them as the earthly embodiment of the divine feminine principle. By ensuring the continued renewal of kingship, they played an important role in the ideology of kingship. As the highest-ranking female members of the royal household, queens occupied a central position at court, as well. However, only in individual cases did they hold substantial political power.

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QUEEN
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Silke Roth

Königin
Reine

The queens of ancient Egypt (i.e., the kings' wives and kings' mothers) were distinguished by a set of specific titles and insignia that characterized them as the earthly embodiment of the divine feminine principle. By ensuring the continued renewal of kingship, they played an important role in the ideology of kingship. As the highest-ranking female members of the royal household, queens occupied a central position at court, as well. However, only in individual cases did they hold substantial political power.

لقد تميزت الملكات بمصر القديمة سواء كن زوجات الملوك او أمهاتهم من خلال عدة ألقاب وأوسمة شخصتهن كالتجسيد الأرضي للمبدأ الأنثوي الإلهي. وقد لعبت الملكات دورهن بالأيدولوجية الملكية فقد حرصن على تجديد الملكية بإستمرار. حملن الملكات أعلى مقام تحمله النساء بالمنزل الملكي وبالتالي حصلن على مكانة مركزية بالبلاط الملكي. لم تحمل الملكات أية قوة سياسية فيما عدا بعض االحالات المعدودة.

The term "queen" will be used here to refer to a wife and/or mother of an Egyptian king. From the earliest times, queens were characterized by a specific queenly titulary and iconography, and from as early as the Middle Kingdom their name could be written in a cartouche. To be distinguished from queens are the few female rulers who took the fivefold titulary of the king and bore kingly insignia (Altenmüller 2003; Callender 1998; Roehrig et al. 2005; Staehelin 1989).

The main sources for the study of queens and their role in divine kingship and the Egyptian state are texts and representational art, including reliefs, stelae, and statues in temples and tombs, small artifacts, administrative papyri, and diplomatic texts in cuneiform writing from Egypt and abroad. Of particular significance is the context in which the queens were depicted, as well as the shape of their tombs and the location of their tombs in relation to the kings' mortuary complexes (for the latter see Jánosi 1996: 72 - 76; Roth 2001: 315 - 320).

Attributes of the Queen

1. Titulary. Significantly, a feminine equivalent of the ruler's designation as ***nswt*** ("king") did not exist in ancient Egypt. In fact, most of the queens' titles and epithets related them to the king and the king as the earthly embodiment of the gods, respectively. Only from the Middle Kingdom onward did their titles indicate a ruling function.

The most important and therefore most frequent queens' titles include those that refer to their marriage, or kinship, to the king—***ḥmt nswt*** ("wife of the king") and ***mwt nswt*** ("mother of the king")—as well as the non-specific titles ***sꜣt nswt*** ("daughter of the king") and ***snt nswt*** ("sister of the king"). The queenly office is also reflected in the titles ***mꜣꜣt Ḥrw-Stš***

("the one who beholds Horus-Seth," i.e., the king, used mainly in the Old Kingdom), *jrjt pˁt* ("the one who belongs to the *pat*," i.e., the elite), *wrt ḥts* ("great one of the *hetes*-scepter"), *wrt ḥst* ("great one of favor"), *wrt jmɜt* ("great one of grace," used in the Middle Kingdom and later), and *ḫnmt nfr ḥḏt* ("the one who is united with the White Crown," used in the Middle Kingdom and later, the "White Crown" being an attribute of the king). Commonly attested from the Middle Kingdom onward are *ḥnwt tɜwi* ("lady of the Two Lands," i.e., Egypt) and, as early as the New Kingdom, *ḥnwt Šmˁw Mḥw* ("lady of the South and the North"), *ḥnwt tɜw nbw* ("lady of all lands"), and *nbt tɜwy* ("mistress of the Two Lands"). Evidence that the queen played a priestly role in the cult of Hathor and various other deities is provided by titles of the type *ḥmt nṯr* NN ("priestess of the god/goddess NN," used in the Old and Middle Kingdoms) and *ḥmt nṯr Jmn* ("God's wife of Amun," used in the New Kingdom and later).

In the course of a queen's career—as her role progressed, for example, from that of a king's daughter, to a king's wife, to, finally, a king's mother—the corresponding titles were added to her titulary. From as early as the Old Kingdom a typical string of "core" titles can be discerned, varying in range and order in later times (Robins 2003; Roth 2001: 42 - 44, 173 - 174, 204 - 205, 251 - 254). In instances where minimal titulary was provided, it appears that, at the very least, the titles "wife of the king" or "mother of the king" were mentioned.

To obtain an heir and guarantee the succession to the throne, Egyptian kings were polygynous; therefore, usually several coexisting wives are attested for each sovereign. As a rule, only one "wife of the king" was depicted together with her husband, so it seems that only one of them officiated as queen by holding the queen's titulary and insignia. It was not until the 13th Dynasty that the title *ḥmt nswt wrt* ("great wife of the king") was introduced to distinguish this "principal wife" from the secondary wives of the ruler. (For an overall discussion of queens' titles see Kuchman Sabbahy 1982; Robins 2003; Roth 2001; Troy 1986.)

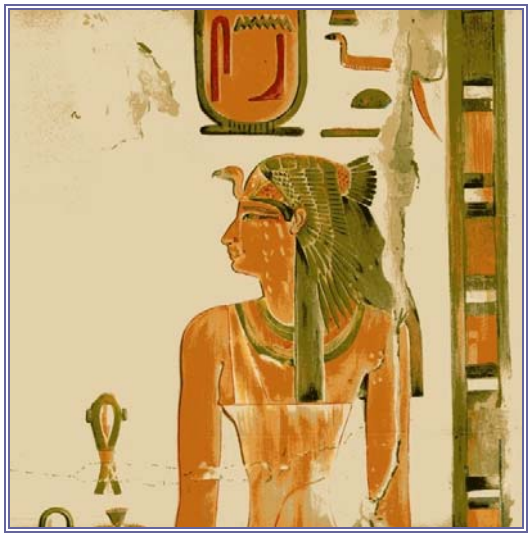

Figure 1. Seniseneb, mother of Thutmose I, with vulture headdress. Painted by Howard Carter, according to a relief in the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahri (18th Dynasty).

2. Insignia. From as early as the 4th Dynasty the queen was characterized by a set of specific insignia—in particular, by various headdresses and hand-held emblems. By borrowing these insignia from, or sharing them with, female deities, the queen associated herself with her divine counterparts. Typically, these goddesses functioned as mothers and consorts in divine families and therefore played an important role in the ideology of kingship.

Among the most important insignia are the vulture headdress (a cap made from a vulture's skin) and the uraeus (figs. 1 and 2). Taken over by the queen from the tutelary goddesses and divine mothers Nekhbet and Wadjet, they were at first exclusively worn by the royal mothers (Dynasties 4 and 5; Roth 2001: 279 - 288). Later on, the vulture headdress became a symbol of motherhood par excellence and was adopted by other prototypical mother goddesses, such as Mut and Isis. From Dynasty 6 onward the king's wives—being prospective royal mothers—also began to wear the vulture headdress and the uraeus. From the Middle Kingdom

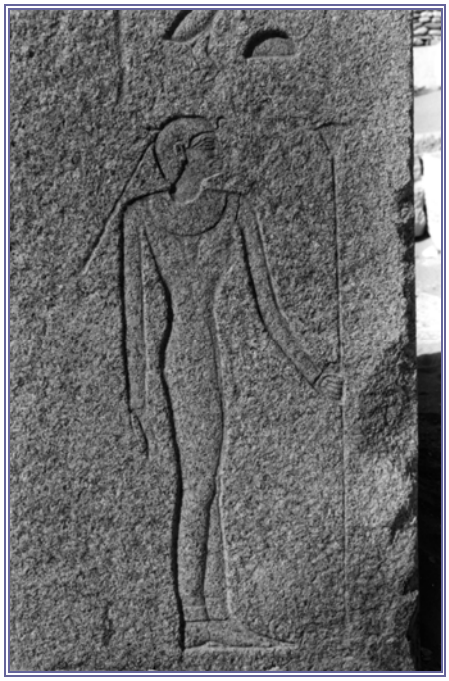

Figure 2. The king's wife Iput II with uraeus and papyrus scepter. Relief on the gate of the queen's pyramid temple, adjacent to the pyramid complex of her husband, Pepy II, South Saqqara (6th Dynasty).

through the early 18th Dynasty the uraeus became a common emblem of the king's daughters, as well (Ratie 1980). This association with the uraeus suggests a development in the status of the royal daughter during this period (Troy 1986: 123).

In the 18th Dynasty, the double uraeus occurred as a brow ornament of royal wives and mothers. Apparently it indicated an association of the queen with the dualistic concept of Nekhbet and Wadjet, the goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt, respectively, especially when adorned with the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt (fig. 3). Furthermore, it associated the queen with the two "solar eyes" and daughters of the sun god—primarily, Hathor and Tefnut. Crowned with the cow's horns and sun disc, the so-called Hathoric uraeus appeared as single and double emblems, in clear reference to Hathor and the solar eye(s) (fig. 4). It is first attested in the Amarna Period and was still in use in Ramesside times (Preys 1998). Moreover, as early as Dynasty 18 a triple brow-ornament is known, consisting of two uraei flanking a vulture's head (e.g., the uraei adorned with the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt and the vulture's head with the double crown as the embodiment of Mut; see Bryan 2008). Triple uraei occurred on queens' statues in the 25th Dynasty, at the earliest, and are well known from the Ptolemaic Period, when the middle uraeus was seemingly associated with the mother goddess Isis (Albersmeier 2002: 44 - 52).

In the 13th Dynasty a crown consisting of two tall feathers attached to the so-called modius (or kalathos) was added to the queenly insignia (fig. 3). Frequently combined with cows' horns and the solar disk (figs. 4 and 6), it became one of the most important attributes of the Egyptian queen from the New Kingdom onward. It bore a solar connotation and identified the queen as an earthly embodiment of the cow goddess Hathor in her role as consort of the sun god Ra and mistress of heaven (Troy 1986: 126 - 127).

Restricted to Tiy and Nefertiti, the "great wives of the kings" Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), were the so-called platform crown (also "tall blue crown") and the *khat*-headdress, the latter associating the queen with the tutelary goddesses Isis, Nephthis, Selqet, and Neith (see the "first version" of the famous wooden head of Queen Tiy from Kom Medinet Ghurab: Eaton-Krauss 1977; Arnold 1996: 27 - 35, esp. fig. 25).

The divine *was*-scepter and the papyrus scepter of the goddess Wadjet were occasionally attested as queenly insignia (fig. 2) in the Old Kingdom, when they frequently appeared in combination with the *ankh*-sign. These representations generally occur in the queens' tombs, so it seems that they represented deceased, "deified" royal wives (Roth 2001: 288 - 295). A certain degree of deification of the living queen, in parallel to the king, was indicated by New Kingdom depictions of queens wearing the *ankh*-sign and carrying divine scepters (for example, Tiy;

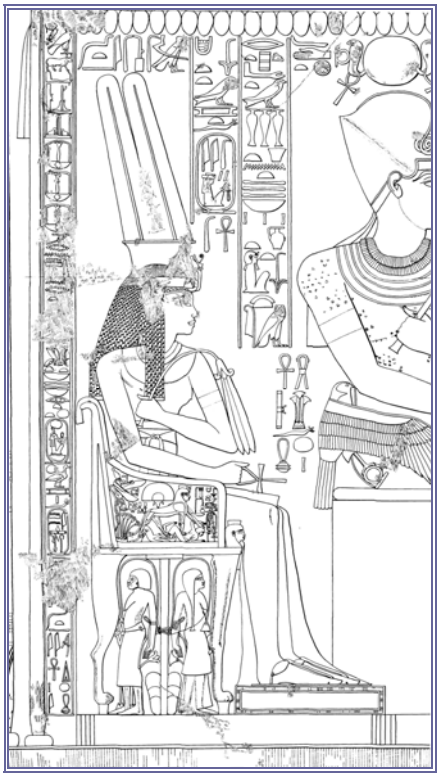

Figure 3. The great king's wife Tiy wearing double-feather crown and carrying the fly-whisk and *ankh*-sign. Drawing of a relief in the Theban tomb of Kheruef, steward of the queen (18th Dynasty).

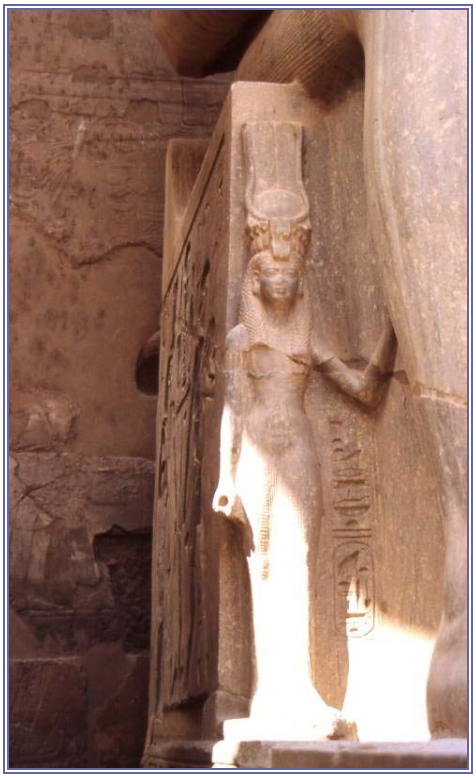

Figure 4. The great king's wife Nefertari wearing the double-feather crown with cow's horns and solar disk. Statuette of the queen flanking a seated statue of Ramesses II, Luxor Temple (19th Dynasty).

fig. 3). First attested in the Second Intermediate Period, one of the most frequent hand-held emblems of the New Kingdom queen was the so-called fly-whisk (fig. 3). (For an overall discussion of the queens' insignia see Kuchman Sabbahy 1982; Roth 2001; Troy 1986.)

Roles and Position of the Queen

1. The queen's roles in the ideology of kingship. Essentially, ancient Egyptian kingship was represented by the king in correlation with the queen. However, as an earthly embodiment of the principle deity (the sun god), the king played a predominant role. Usually he was portrayed unaccompanied. In the infrequent portrayals where he was attended by royal women, the king usually played the leading part by preceding the queen and performing the central action; moreover, he was often depicted on a larger scale (fig. 5). The various roles of the queen were defined in accordance with this preeminent position of the king.

Against the background of fundamental changes in the ideology of kingship, in the 18th Dynasty the cultic and political significance of the queen gradually increased and was assimilated to the male ruler. At the height of this development, the "great king's wife" Nefertiti was characterized as an almost coequal partner of the king (Arnold 1996; Morkot 1986). However, after the Amarna Period the queen once again became less important.

2. The queen's role in legitimizing the king's right to the throne. Although, according to divine paradigms, a king was succeeded by his son, there are numerous counter-examples of this ideal. Among the principles of legitimacy upon which a king's right to the throne was

Figure 5. The king's mother Iah attending her son Mentuhotep II. Rock drawing, Wadi Shatt el-Rigal (11th Dynasty).

Figure 6. The great king's wife Nefertari attending Ramesses II in front of the goddess Taweret, playing the sistrum and offering flowers. Relief in the Hathor temple, Abu Simbel (19th Dynasty).

based, the hereditary right through blood relation to a royal predecessor was of only secondary importance. Once the new sovereign succeeded to the crown (for example, through designation by a predecessor or by actual control of power), he was legitimized by the very act of holding the kingly office as "Horus" and "Son of Ra," and therefore as legal heir to the throne—that is, through "divine legitimation." Moreover, the king was *ex officio* considered as the son of his immediate predecessor, being in fact the last in line of the royal ancestors (Gundlach 1997). Accordingly, the queen's role in legitimizing the rule of her husband or son refers less to her own parentage or marriage-tie than to her ideological role as earthly embodiment of her divine counterparts.

Similarly, the king's office was not regularly transmitted through marriage to a princess of royal blood (a "royal heiress"), nor was it the custom of the heir to the throne to marry his (half-) sister in order to confirm his rule, although a brother-sister marriage between royal siblings was possible in principle (Robins 1983). Hence, it is not surprising that even some eminent queens were beyond doubt of non-royal origin (for example, Ankhesenpepy II, Tiy, and Nefertari).

From her biological capacity of assuring the succession to the throne derived the most important ideological role of the queen—that of mother-consort of the king. As such, she guaranteed both the continual renewal of kingship and of the individual officeholder respectively. This double role was based upon the paradigm of divine mother-consorts and became manifest in the queen's titulary and insignia, as well as in her ritual function. In fact, it was shared by the king's wife and the king's mother.

As earthly embodiment of Hathor, consort of the sun god and mother of Horus, it was primarily the royal spouse who functioned as a regenerative medium for the king in his role as representative of the sun-god on earth. In conjunction with her he procreated a rejuvenated form of himself, being father and son united in one person—that is, *kꜣ-mwt.f* ("bull of his mother"). In the New Kingdom this role was particularly reflected in the ritual function of the future king's mother as "God's wife of Amun" (Schmidt 1994).

The king's mother gained particular importance through her son's accession to the throne, and therefore many royal mothers did not become manifest in the sources before this event occurred (for example, Mutemwia, mother of Amenhotep III; and Tuya, mother of Ramesses II). Her specific role in legitimizing her son's rule naturally referred to the divine parentage of the king and was reflected in her attributes, especially the vulture's headdress and the titles *zꜣt nṯr* ("daughter of the god") and *mwt nṯr* ("mother of the god"), both titles attested as early as the Old Kingdom. Moreover, in the so-called

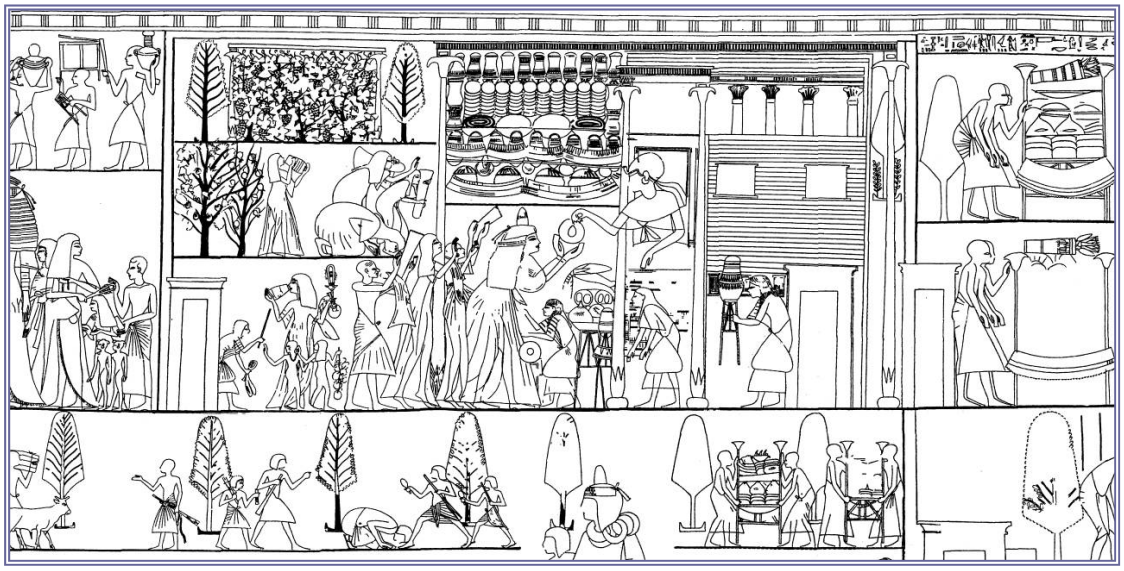

Figure 7. Scene of the palace of the king's principal wife in the vicinity of the king's palace (presumably Malqata). Drawing of a representation in the tomb of Neferhotep, Thebes (18th Dynasty, probably reign of king Aye).

"legend of the divine birth of the king," she was represented as being impregnated by the sun-god incarnate and giving birth to his heir—i.e., her son, the reigning king (Brunner 1964).

3. The queen's role in cult and ritual. From the Old Kingdom onward certain titles reveal that queens played a role in the cult of deities (for example, "priestess of Hathor," "chantress of Amun," "sistrum-player of Mut"). However, queens were only rarely depicted as sole ritualists vis-à-vis the divine addressee (the exceptions being deceased queens, Nefertiti during the Amarna Period, and Hatshepsut and Tauseret shortly before they became female rulers). If pictured in ritual scenes, which is the case only in a comparably small number of temple reliefs, the queen habitually follows the king, supporting his ritual performance by playing the sistrum and singing in order to pacify the divinity. From the Old Kingdom onward, the queen was represented in basically this manner, assisting the king at the offering ritual (fig. 6), the building ritual (Chevrier 1951: 568, fig. 1; Roth 2001: 474 - 475, fig. 19), and the hunting ritual (e.g., Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: pls. 14, 15). From the New Kingdom onward, she was also represented in the ritual of "smiting the enemies," exceptions being Tiy and Nefertiti, who, themselves, were depicted smiting female enemies (compare fig. 3: throne detail). In the course of the New Kingdom festivals, the queen occasionally played a more active role. During the Festival of Opet, for instance, her ship towed the bark of the goddess Mut (parallel to the king's ship towing the bark of Amun), and in the Festival of Min, she played the ceremonial role of Shemait, who encircled the king seven times reciting ritual texts (Roth 2006b).

4. The queen's position at court and in politics. The queens were the highest-ranking female members of the royal court (*šnwt*) and the royal household (*jpt nswt*)—the so-called "harem"—which also included the secondary wives of the ruler together with the royal children, and which was a powerful force in its own right (Haslauer 2001; Seipel 1975). As members of the harem, queens were occasionally involved in conspiracies to carry out the murder of the king (Kanawati 2003; Redford 2002).

Archaeological finds in New Kingdom royal residences, and tomb representations from the same period, attest to the existence of

separate palace apartments or buildings for the female members of the royal household, such as we see at Memphis/Kom Medinet el-Ghurab, Thebes/Malqata, and Amarna (fig. 7; Lacovara 1997a: esp. 36 - 38; Lacovara 1997b). In all probability, at least the principal wife lived near the king and accompanied him on his journeys through the country. As the most important members of the king's court and household—both in life and in the afterlife—queens were usually buried close to the king's tomb, often in the immediate vicinity of his mortuary complex (fig. 8), and sometimes actually inside his tomb (Dodson 1988; Jánosi 1996). This proximity is also illustrated in the royal necropolis of Western Thebes, where we find in the desert valleys not only the kings' tombs but the queens', nearby, with the related cult complexes on the edge of the cultivation.

Due to the fact that the majority of sources refer to the queens' role in the ideology of kingship, there is little evidence that queens held political influence. Only rarely were queens depicted or mentioned as being present at acts of state, such as royal audiences, councils, and the public rewarding of officials (for example, the audience of Sinuhe: see Lichtheim 1973: 231 - 232). It should be noted that Figure 7 is unique in its representation of a queen rewarding a noblewoman (a clear parallel to the king rewarding an official). The Amarna Period represented an exception to this norm: during that time, the public appearance of the royal couple was celebrated to propagandize a new concept of kingship that promoted the queen as an almost coequal partner of the king. In other cases in which individual queens appeared as outstanding personalities, they mostly acted as representatives on behalf of minor kings (for example, Ankhenespepy II/Pepy II, Hatshepsut/Thutmose III, Tauseret/Siptah), or in support of an absent ruler (Ahhotep/Ahmose). However, such political roles were not formally reflected in the queens' titulary and insignia (Roth 1997).

Significantly, that the queen played a role in foreign policy is attested by cross-cultural,

Figure 8. The queens' pyramids south of the pyramid of Menkaura, Giza (foreground) (4th Dynasty).

rather than Egyptian, sources, exhibiting the *realpolitik* (political pragmatism) of the Egyptian state (Roth 2002: 67 - 132). In the diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and its Near Eastern neighbors during the New Kingdom, recorded on cuneiform tablets from Amarna and the Hittite capital, Hattusas, queens featured (if only exceptionally) among the actual correspondents (e.g., the dowager queens Ankhesenamun and Tiy; and with regard to the Egyptian-Hittite treaty, Tuya and Nefertari). Numerous letters concern marriage alliances negotiated by the Egyptian ruler and the other "great kings" of Mitanni, Babylonia, Assyria, and Hatti, as well as minor vassals from Syria and Palestine, who sent their daughters to the Egyptian court (also see Roth 2003). Being a pledge of good diplomatic relations, these foreign royal wives together with their courts served as permanent missions for their home countries (Roth 2006a: esp. 108 - 112).

In contrast, it was very unusual for Egyptian princesses to be sent abroad to marry foreign rulers. The alleged matrimonies of Egyptian princesses with the Israelite king Solomon (during the 21st-Dynasty reign of Siamun) and the Persian king Cambyses (during the 26th-Dynasty reign of Amasis) are controversial (Schipper 2000, 2002).

Legacy

According to sources from later periods of Egyptian history, after the New Kingdom the

traditional concept of queenship was perpetuated, essentially unchanged. Though the royal wives of the foreign rulers from Kush wore their indigenous garments, as Egyptian queens they took on the customary titles and insignia of their Pharaonic precursors. In Egypt—unlike in their home country—they were only occasionally depicted attending the king (Lohwasser 2001).

The royal women of the Ptolemies also adopted the traditional accoutrements of the Egyptian queen, as recent studies of their statuary and their role in temple ritual suggest (Albersmeier 2002; Ashton 2003; Budde fc.; Hölbl 2003; Minas 2005). In addition to Hathor, the goddess Isis functioned as the most important divine counterpart of the queens during this period. As in Pharaonic times, some outstanding personalities appeared who functioned in an almost-equal partnership with their respective kings (above all Berenike II and III, and Cleopatra III and VII), particularly by adding kings' titles to their queenly titulary—frequently *Ḥrt* ("female Horus")—and by acting as sole ritualists vis-à-vis the gods. However, their role strongly resembles that of Akhenaten's great royal wife Nefertiti as well as of other ancient Egyptian queens who acted as representatives on behalf of minor kings (though it is not at all comparable to the role of the female kings Neferusobek, Hatshepsut, and Tauseret).

Bibliographic Notes

Systematic research on ancient Egyptian queens did not begin until the 1980s. The most comprehensive study is Troy (1986), which discusses the queens from the earliest times up to the Ptolemaic Period. Although today it is rather dated (the registers of sources, titles, and epithets are now obsolete), it remains the essential work in the field (also see Troy 2002). For a general overview see Robins (2001). The most current compilation of queens from the 1st Dynasty through the Late Period is Grajetzki's concise dictionary (2005). Roth (2001) provides a detailed study of the king's mothers from Dynasty One through Dynasty Twelve, and also gives an overview of the king's wives and an up-to-date register of sources for queens of that time period (also see Roth 1999). For queens of the Old Kingdom, specifically, see Baud (1999). The New Kingdom queens, primarily those of the 18th Dynasty, are the main focus of Robins' numerous articles (Robins 1983; 1993: esp. 21 - 55; 2002, 2003). Their role in Egyptian foreign policy and diplomacy is discussed by Roth (2002); also see Roth (2003; 2006b: 108 - 112). The royal women of the 25th Dynasty are the focus of a monograph by Lohwasser (2001). The iconography and roles of the Ptolemaic queens are studied by Albersmeier (2002), Hölbl (2003), and Minas (2005). Ashton (2003) gives a general overview of the royal women of the Ptolemies.

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Figure 1. Seniseneb, mother of Thutmose I, with vulture headdress. Painted by Howard Carter, according to a relief in the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahri (18th Dynasty). (Naville 1895: pl. XIII detail.)

Figure 2. The king's wife Iput II with uraeus and papyrus scepter. Relief on the gate of the queen's pyramid temple, adjacent to the pyramid complex of her husband, Pepy II, South Saqqara (6th Dynasty). Photo courtesy of Silke Roth.

Figure 3. The great king's wife Tiy wearing double-feather crown and carrying the fly-whisk and *ankh*-sign. Drawing of a relief in the Theban tomb of Kheruef, steward of the queen (18th Dynasty). (The Epigraphic Survey 1980: pl. 49 detail.)

Figure 4. The great king's wife Nefertari wearing the double-feather crown with cow's horns and solar disk. Statuette of the queen flanking a seated statue of Ramesses II, Luxor Temple (19th Dynasty). Photo courtesy of Silke Roth.

Figure 5. The king's mother Iah attending her son Mentuhotep II. Rock drawing, Wadi Shatt el-Rigal (11th Dynasty). Photo courtesy of Silke Roth.

Figure 6. The great king's wife Nefertari attending Ramesses II in front of the goddess Taweret, playing the sistrum and offering flowers. Relief in the Hathor temple, Abu Simbel (19th Dynasty). Photo courtesy of Silke Roth.

Figure 7. Scene of the palace of the king's principal wife in the vicinity of the king's palace (presumably Malqata). Drawing of a representation in the tomb of Neferhotep, Thebes (18th Dynasty, probably reign of king Aye). (Davies 1933: pl. 1 detail.)

Figure 8. The queens' pyramids south of the pyramid of Menkaura, Giza (foreground) (4th Dynasty). Photo courtesy of Silke Roth.