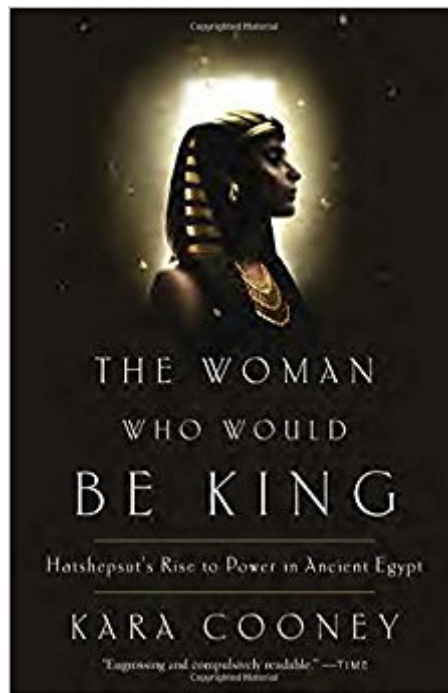




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# **The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise To Power In Ancient Egypt**



## Synopsis

An engrossing biography of the longest-reigning female pharaoh in Ancient Egypt and the story of her audacious rise to power. Hatshepsut – the daughter of a general who usurped Egypt's throne – was expected to bear the sons who would legitimize the reign of her father's family. Her failure to produce a male heir, however, paved the way for her improbable rule as a cross-dressing king. At just over twenty, Hatshepsut out-maneuvered the mother of Thutmose III, the infant king, for a seat on the throne, and ascended to the rank of pharaoh. Shrewdly operating the levers of power to emerge as Egypt's second female pharaoh, Hatshepsut was a master strategist, cloaking her political power plays in the veil of piety and sexual reinvention. She successfully negotiated a path from the royal nursery to the very pinnacle of authority, and her reign saw one of Ancient Egypt's most prolific building periods. Constructing a rich narrative history using the artifacts that remain, noted Egyptologist Kara Cooney offers a remarkable interpretation of how Hatshepsut rapidly but methodically consolidated power – and why she fell from public favor just as quickly. *The Woman Who Would Be King* traces the unconventional life of an almost-forgotten pharaoh and explores our complicated reactions to women in power.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Engrossing and compulsively readable.” – *TIME* “The life of Hatshepsut, Egypt's second female pharaoh, was replete with opulent living, complex royal bloodlines, and sexual energy; in short, the kind of drama that fuels Ancient Egypt's

enduring appeal. From Hatshepsut's self-perception, political prowess, and lifestyle emerge an image of the ultimate working mother and a compelling insight into ancient gender roles. Publishers Weekly "Cooney does a fantastic job of breathing new life into her subject and showing the woman who dared to keep herself and her nephew Thutmose III on the throne, as well as what led Hatshepsut's name to be tarnished and nearly erased from history. The book will be of great interest to those fascinated by ancient Egypt, history, and women's history. This biography could only be based on conjecture and guesswork, but the addition of expertise makes it well worth reading. The author's Egyptology background provides the nitty-gritty of daily life and animates this king (at the time, there was no word for 'queen') Cooney's detective work finally brings out the story of a great woman's reign. Kirkus Reviews "Egyptologist Cooney peels back the layers of the life of Hatshepsut, Egypt's second female pharaoh, providing a multidimensional portrait of a woman of strength, intelligence, and substance. Booklist "Highly engrossing... [an] informed-by-expertise, compellingly written conjecture that will draw curious readers in with its vivid depiction of life in Ancient Egypt and a truly remarkable woman. BookPage "The Woman Who Would Be King is a fascinating look at one of the most formidable and successful women in all of ancient history. Before Cleopatra there was Hatshepsut. Now, thanks to Kara Cooney, the real Hatshepsut stands before us in all her glory. For the first time we have a full-length biography of her that is not only a great scholarly work but also a marvelous read. Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* and *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* "The compelling biography of a fascinating woman: the daughter, wife and stepmother of kings, who defied tradition to rule the most powerful nation in the Mediterranean world as pharaoh. Cooney tells her tale with authority, sensitivity and imagination. It is a tale that deserves to be told. Joyce Tyldesley, author of *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* and *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh* "What Stacy Schiff did for Cleopatra, Kara Cooney has done for Hatshepsut. An absolutely fantastic read about one of the most powerful Pharaoh-Queens in ancient Egypt. Completely unputdownable! Michelle Moran, bestselling author of *Nefertiti* "The story of Hatshepsut, the woman who ruled Egypt as Pharaoh, is an amazing tale and Dr. Cooney tells it in a very personal way. Readers are going to love this version! Bob Brier, author of *The Murder of Tutankhamen* "This biography of Hatshepsut is an ideal blend of historical analysis and an imaginative story. With her unique

ability to address both the general public and scholars alike, Cooney's narrative flows as if it were a novel, but at the same time illuminates the historical, economic, social, and religious context of Hatshepsut's world, and that of the people surrounding her. The reader is given a glimpse into a vibrant ancient world—one that we oftentimes forget about in the midst of all the granite and mudbrick that remains today. Writing a biography of a woman about whom there is little archival information is difficult, to say the least. Nevertheless, Cooney presents a seamless picture of Hatshepsut's life and her rise to power in ancient Egypt.

Professor Kathleen Sheppard, author of *The Life of Margaret Alice Murray: A Woman's Work in Archaeology* "Kara Cooney has written a lively, engaging, historically accurate account of one of the most controversial of Egypt's female pharaohs, Hatshepsut. Weaving together evidence from historical texts, the queen's monuments, and archaeological finds, Cooney presents an accessible story of Hatshepsut's rise to power until her demise, bringing ancient Egypt, its people, and its rulers to life. A fun and interesting read!"

Salima Ikram, Professor of Egyptology, American University in Cairo

From the Hardcover edition.

KARA COONEY is an associate professor of Egyptian art and architecture at UCLA in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. In 2005, she was co-curator of Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Cooney produced a comparative archaeology series entitled *Out of Egypt*, which aired on the Discovery Channel and is streaming on Netflix.

From the Hardcover edition.

While I would not (unlike other reviewers) say I found this book to be "compulsively readable", I did find it a fascinating read - despite the author's frequent repetitions. To me, those repetitions made this book sometimes seem like it was written as a serial, a series of separately-published essays on different topics spinning off of oft-repeated fundamentals based on the understandably scarce factual historical material. But as I looked back on the whole experience, I realized Miss Cooney was probably just being extra-careful to demonstrate the logic behind the variety of interpretations of the archaeological evidence she sees. A recommendation: take the time (and trouble) to read the Notes at the back of the book! While it's annoying to have to flip back and forth at every footnote, at least try to catch up at the end of each chapter. At any rate, I found the Notes section to be almost as interesting and informative as the body of the text, and the information within it gave "teeth" to much of the conjecture. Of course, after reading this book, I have a greater appreciation of Hatshepsut's role in the early New Kingdom. But it also gave me a new view into the early life of

Thutmose III and his likely motivations. And it set the stage for some new thoughts I'm having about why, a century later, Amenhotep III and IV felt motivated to undermine the power of the priesthood of Amen...

Interesting read, gave an excellent picture of life in Hatshepsut's day. The description of all the diseases that could beset people of the time was shocking. The author is obviously very knowledgeable, and she did a good job of expanding on her knowledge of Hatshepsut's reign and the customs of the time to create an entertaining interpretation of her life. The only thing that made the book less than perfect was a slight tone of defensiveness apparently due to the author's worries that colleagues would criticize her for using imagination instead of pure scientific research. Obviously, she had to assign motivation to Hatshepsut which can't be proven. I wish she had been even more imaginative. Other than that, I enjoyed the book

I have always been fascinated by Egypt's female pharaoh, Hatshepsut, both because she was that rare ruler, a woman, and because I love her best known architectural achievement below the cliffs. As others have said, this narration is refreshing because it consistently makes clear the tentative nature of its descriptions. However, with a thorough knowledge of an Egyptologist, considering all the hints available, and taking each section of her life one at a time, Cooney has created a believable biography of an amazing woman. Several aspects of life in ancient Egypt ARE repeated in the book, but I found that helpful for someone in our day and age understanding life back then, so very, very different than ours. The prejudice against effective women leaders is still so prevalent that it's good to see that even over 3000 years ago it was indeed a prejudice, and could be overcome. Thank you, Kara Cooney.

I am loving this book! From the very beginning, Kara Cooney makes it clear that a lot of the material is going to be based on educated guesses (i.e. what other reviewers here called "speculation"), but every speculation is supported by reflections on the documentation, informed analysis, and, yes, insights into human nature. The book reads like a novel. I am learning a whole lot about a powerful woman who learned to work within a system that did not recognize women as legitimate rulers, who was cautious in how she proceeded in her ascent to power, and who was not shy about manipulating her public presentation. And I am enjoying it tremendously. The only drawbacks I see in the book are these: First, the format of footnotes is a bit annoying. The commentary notes and the reference notes are done in the same format, so every I come across a footnote (done in the

endnote format), I flip to the endnotes section to find out more. Sometimes, there is just the source reference. As I am not a historian, I am not particularly interested in which precisely source each particular bit of information comes from, although, of course, I appreciate that the information is sourced. At other times, however, there is a useful additional bit of information that contributes and complements the main text, such as reference to the existing debates, extensions of information etc. I wish the informational notes and source notes were done in different formats. Second, Dr. Cooney often refers to images and architecture, but directs the reader to other sources for the images. There is only one chapter where photos of the sculptures, obelisks, and the temple are included. It would have been a lot more informative to include those images throughout the book. For example, in the chapter relating to the officials Hatshepsut worked with, including one of the most prominent and important figures in her reign, Senenmut, there are references to his sculptures depicting his relationship with the royal daughter, Neferure. Yet the images of the sculptures do not appear until a different place in the text. But overall, the book is informative and captivating.

I love history, but this wasn't a history book. This was conjecture, fiction, and guess work with historical facts thrown in occasionally to explain why the real answers weren't known. It didn't read smoothly, it didn't come across as professional or authoritative, and it occasionally contradicted itself. However, I did learn some new things, and I'm rather intrigued by the subject herself. Honestly, I wouldn't recommend it if you want a traditional biography or historical analysis of her life. Maybe if you like History Channel specials that don't actually say anything concrete, but are full of re-enactments.

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