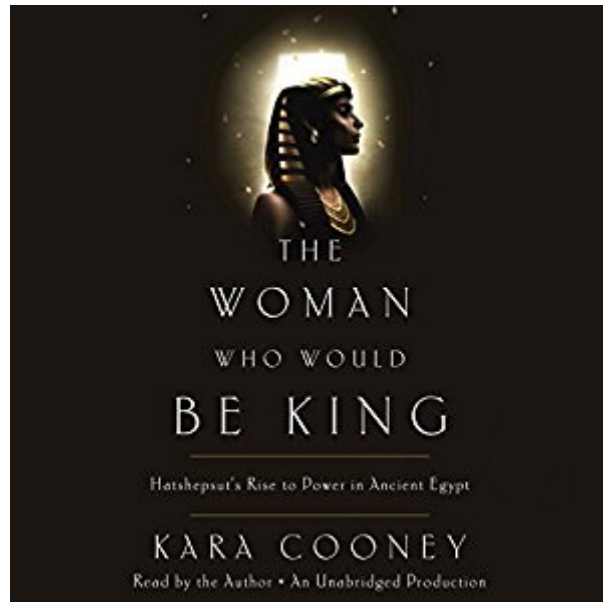


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The Woman Who Would Be King: Hatshepsut's Rise To Power In Ancient Egypt



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 and a mother with ties to the previous dynasty - was born into a privileged position in the royal household, and she was expected to bear the sons who would legitimize the reign of her father's family. Her failure to produce a male heir was ultimately the twist of fate that paved the way for her improbable rule as a cross-dressing king. At just over twenty, Hatshepsut ascended to the rank of pharaoh in an elaborate coronation ceremony that set the tone for her spectacular reign as co-regent with Thutmose III, the infant king whose mother Hatshepsut out-maneuvered for a seat on the throne. Hatshepsut was a master strategist, cloaking her political power plays in the veil of piety and sexual reinvention. Just as women today face obstacles from a society that equates authority with masculinity, Hatshepsut shrewdly operated the levers of power to emerge as Egypt's second female pharaoh. Hatshepsut 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. Scholars have long speculated as to why her monuments were destroyed within a few decades of her death, all but erasing evidence of her unprecedented rule. 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

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 22 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: October 14, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00O2CVD9Y

Best Sellers Rank: #54 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Ancient #93 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Egypt #127 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical >

Customer Reviews

This book is not a comprehensive, scholarly study on the reign of Hatshepsut. It is, instead, a lightweight and general overview of Hatshepsut's reign, with a very imaginative twist. It would probably contain more than enough detail for most people. The author, who has written for television (and it shows), tries to psychoanalyze and interpret the motives and actions of the principal players - to fill in the blanks. A lot of people will appreciate her entertaining style and much prefer it to a more academic study. Paragraph after paragraph contains words like "maybe" or "perhaps" or "could have." The language sometimes detours into the lurid and melodramatic. There are some graphic descriptions of dying infants and diseases and gastrointestinal maladies and of the mummification process that turned my stomach. Sex is a recurring topic, and anyone reading this book might incorrectly suppose that women in Egypt were viewed purely as sex objects. This is the sort of stuff that appeals to many and makes successful TV shows, but it is not necessary in scholarly studies. Buried under all the "maybes" and "could haves" is a fair and even-handed (if too brief and incomplete) consideration of Hatshepsut and her reign. I found that she was quite clear on what is fact and what is speculation. Cooney has actually done a very fine job of sifting through all the rubbish that has been written about Hatshepsut. And, oh, my, there has been so ever much rubbish written about Hatshepsut. When Hatshepsut's name was first discovered (after Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphs) she was, as a king, assumed to be a male. The idea that he was actually a she was shocking to early historians and very, very slow to be accepted.

I love reading anything I can find about Egypt and so I was excited to discover Egyptologist Kara Cooney's latest work on the life of Hatshepsut. And I was enthralled by the book - for the most part. Cooney reveals some of the most fascinating details about living as a woman in Hatshepsut's time, nearly 3500 years ago, during the 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom in Egypt. There is inherent drama in her life's story, this woman who was the first "to exercise long-term rule over Egypt as a king." And it is hard to fathom that (considering all that she was) relatively little is known about her today. But there are some potential hurdles as well as reasons for debate likely to face some readers of this book, particularly those who have trouble with speculations about a historical character's feelings and emotions without any hard evidence or proof. Right from the outset, Cooney writes that she made the decision to "break many rules of my Egyptological training in order to resurrect and reanimate Hatshepsut's intentions, ambitions, and disappointments, by engaging in conjecture and

speculation..." She also acknowledges she took some creative leaps when she imagines what Hatsheput might have thought or what motivated her actions in specific situations. As a result, there are plenty of times when words like "most likely" or "seems to have been" or speculative terms are used in place of hard facts backed up by documentation. But because Cooney has studied the historical period intensely and provides a wealth of notes on each chapter as well as extensive references at the back of the book), I was willing to stay with this work - and am glad I did.

Egyptologist Kara Cooney is one of the few whose work I do follow on a regular basis. Kara is unafraid to ask what if, and explore avenues that many of her more dogmatic colleagues either are too afraid or unwilling to look at. In this instance, Kara has taken a look at one of the most fascinating figures in all of Ancient Egyptian history, that of the "Female King", Hatshepsut. What most of the lay public does not realize is that Hatshepsut or Ma'atkare, to use her name as pharaoh, was not the first nor the last to be Pharaoh in Egypt. Most traditional African cultures and traditional African religions (ATR's) can and do have women who are or have been kings. While the women before her may have only been regents ruling in the name of sons or absent husbands for a specific, rather short term, Hatshepsut was the first to do it for such a long, uninterrupted period of time. She reigned for some 22 years. The period under her rule was marked by stability, prosperity and world influence and she did it largely on her own with the cooperation of the Amun priesthood in Ipet-sut, otherwise known as Luxor. Some critics say that Cooney has taken a feminist approach. I strongly disagree with that assertion. Kara Cooney's book on Hatshepsut takes into account a woman who did what no other woman before her had done in terms of length of rule and managed to hang on to power and influence. Earlier scholars project that Hatshepsut had wrested power away and denied it to Djehtymose III (Thutmose III), and Cooney provides some very good arguments as to why that may not have been the case and there was largely cooperation between Hatshepsut and Djehtymose III. So why did later kings try to obliterate her memory?

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