

Goddesses and Queens in Ancient Egypt: Roles and Influences

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Abstract

Primitive life continued for thousands of years, and no one knows how many years it lasted, because the emergence of the science of history regarding the emergence of human life is considered something recent. However, most historians and anthropologists in the world agree that the female had a greater human and social value than the male, and that the ancient god was female and that before the emergence of the patriarchal family (patriarchal system) society was matrilineal; moreover, the mother was the origin and is the nerve and she is the one to whom children are attributed. As a result of the dominance of the patriarchal system over the history of humanity, we may have neglected at some point to listen to the voice of the female goddess who appeared in the civilizations of the ancient East, specifically in the Neolithic Age.

There is much evidence that era was dominated by feminist culture, especially after women invented agriculture and became the source of life, i.e. earth goddess. They are the ones who revive the earth after its death so that it blooms and bear's fruit; the mother and the young virgin daughter were often worshiped, and the word "virgin" in those days meant "independent." The patriarchy, as we know it, has not existed since the beginning of time. There is no doubt that history has written with a masculine perspective, and the available information about the status of women or the relationship between them and men in prehistory is under by male domination.

Keywords: matriarchy, patriarchy, ancient Egyptian civilization, female power

1. Preface

Ancient civilizations played a major role in building the concept of human rights, for example, we find that the inheritance system was left to us by five basic civilizations: "the ancient

Egyptian civilization, the Confucian civilization in China, then the Zoroastrian civilization in Persia, the Hindu civilization in ancient India, then the Asian civilizations that were inspired by the teachings of the god Buddha, and not forgetting the Assyrian civilization that arose in Babylon and Assyria. (Metwally, 2005) "If we go back to the first introductions to the Nile River civilization in Egypt, "the day when husbands lived at home and did spinning, and when the banner of femininity was raised, which meant the birth of the sacred," and "the old system of maternal kinship continued, with its preference for women over men in matters of property and inheritance." (Stone, 1998)". But the dominance of the patriarchal system over human history for thousands of years prevented us from listening to the voices of the feminine deity that appeared in the civilizations of the ancient East. (al-Meskini, 2017) Max Miller says: "Max Miller says: "There is no people, ancient or modern, that has raised the status of women as much as the inhabitants of the Nile Valley. The engravings depict women eating and drinking among the people and conducting whatever tasks they need in the streets - without supervision - over them, without weapons in their hands, and carrying out industrial and commercial work with complete freedom." The husband's obedience to his wife in the Nile Valley was a condition stipulated in marriage contracts. (Durant, 1950)It is difficult to know much about the circumstances and characteristics of the cultural and intellectual life and religious and spiritual beliefs of these early Egyptians who settled on the banks of the Nile at that time immemorial. (Aldred, 1965) The era of women's prosperity and respect, which reached the level of sanctity, continued into the Stone Age, where it was dominated by feminist culture and even feminine sexual characteristics. Women in the modern era were undoubtedly the source of life. Women seem to have enjoyed a high status in many respects. (Riley, 1985) Until her position began to collapse to be lower than men with the beginning of land ownership and the era of the Seventh Dynasty until the Tenth Dynasty 2420 to 2140 years BC. (Khamis, 1985) Perhaps the reasons for this decline are the impact of the patriarchal traditions introduced by the Hyksos, and the impact of the country's transition from its agricultural isolation and from a state of peace to a phase of colonialism and war. (Durant, 1950) There is no doubt that history was carried out with a male memory and that the information available about the status of women or the reality of the relationship between them and men in prehistory was written under the rule of male hegemony, so what "was written about women by men must raise suspicions; Because they are opponents and rulers at the same time, and they have harnessed theology, philosophy, and laws to their advantage. (de Beauvoir, 2015) Had it not been for the advent of modern archaeology, we would have been shackled to this culture until today.

2. Political and Social Presence

The ancient Egyptian civilization was concerned with giving priority to the interest of the group over the interest of the individual. Pharaoh's advice to his minister stated: The gods hate favoritism; you must be concerned with the requests of the unknown person, such as the one you know, and the affairs of the distant person, such as the relative. (Metwally, 2005) Thus was the position of the Egyptian woman - apparently - a happy citizen in a country where gender equality was considered from the earliest times to be so natural and deeply entrenched that the issue was never raised, and this equality was rooted in the Nilotic tradition that men and women were equal. (Noblecourt, 2000)The ancient Egyptian civilization was based on respect for humanity, human appreciation, establishing justice, and denouncing injustice, establishing

the law for everyone, and establishing moral values. In addition, the ancient Egyptian civilization was the first to inscribe the word logos. For example, some historians claim that man appeared for the first time in the land of Egypt about one hundred thousand years ago, and that the ancient Egyptians were the first to build an organized and independent political society, and they had a political philosophy similar - to some extent - to the idea of the social contract that Greek philosophers developed later. (Metwally, 2005) This great status of women in ancient Egypt was not limited to being a god or a ruler, but also a woman from the common people. She worked on weaving and spinning looms, traded in the markets, and participated in fishing with her husband. It found that even in the Third and Fourth Dynasties (2780) BC, women drawn on the tomb in a size equal to the man. In the ruins of the ancient Egyptians, we find the statue of “Panjem” in the Karnak Temple, showing the woman or wife precedes her husband, and there is a special monument to Mrs. (Beseth) from the era of the Old Kingdom shows that she was a director of doctors, and women had a wealth of culture. (Metwally, 2005) We also see this in the double statue representing King Menkaure and his wife. We clearly see the warm human feelings that bind a husband and his wife, those who stand by him as equals - even if - this husband is a king and a queen. The expression of marital sympathy evident in this duo statue is noticeably clear. The woman's body was a common subject in pre-dynastic statues, and the woman took the image of the god and the mother. (Aldred, 1965) This lofty status of women is due to Egyptian society's tendency to give some precedence to the authority of the wife over that of the husband. Evidence of this is that women not only had complete sovereignty in their homes, but also that all agricultural property was transferred to females. “Until later times, the husband used to cede to his wife in his marriage contract all of his property and future gains. (Durant, 1950) Documents of transactions between individuals in ancient Egypt proved that women were equal to men in inheritance and were his sole heir if they did not give birth to children. The woman had a large share in assuming the throne, as it devolved on her in the absence of a male, and if the king died leaving the eldest offspring a daughter, the throne became hers, just as Hatshepsut and Cleopatra sat on the throne of Egypt for a long time. (Khamis, 1985) Ancient Egyptian society was the first to recognize women's full rights and equality with men in the fields of politics, work, and commitment. His men proudly and proudly accepted to be rule by queens, and their reigns were a symbol of justice, progress, and stability. Thus, he was able to build his glory by glorifying women to the point of sanctifying her and considering her a source of goodness, mercy, strength, and justice. (Shafiq, 1955) We will talk about the role of the female goddess in ancient Egyptian civilization, represented in the myth of Isis, and we will mention the role of some of the following queens who ascended the throne and ruled Egypt for years.

3. Female Goddess

In ancient, prehistoric Egypt, the goddess achieved supremacy in Upper Egypt (south) under the name (Nekhebet), and they symbolized her with the eagle. (Stone, 1998) The goddesses to whom sacrifices are made and to whom feasts and parties are held, among them are also the goddesses of justice, fields, the sky, writing, harvest, love, beauty, and the goddess of pleasure, music, and childbirth; the history of ancient Egypt is full of them. (Khamis, 1985) Early in the pre-dynastic era, the Egyptians took the goddess Isis as a deity, and the myth of Isis and Osiris is considered one of the oldest myths in the world. It dates to prehistoric times and wasn't

written down until the beginning of the Dynastic Period, becoming an integral part of the Egyptian human heritage. Isis and Osiris ruled Egypt with love, justice, and mercy, but hatred and jealousy took possession of the heart of Set, the younger brother of Osiris, so he killed him, usurped the throne, cut his body into twenty-two parts, and scattered it in different parts of Egypt so that no one could reach him. At that time, Isis decided to search for the body parts of her lover throughout Egypt until she collected them. (Thibault, 2004) According to ancient Egyptian mythology, after Osiris was killed and his body parts were scattered, Isis used her powers to assemble the parts of Osiris' body into the form of a mummy. Using a healing spell, the spirit of life breathed its wings into him, and then Osiris returned to life. As a result of their union, Isis became pregnant and gave birth to Horus, and Osiris remained a mummified corpse until the child (Horus) grew up and regained his father's throne as the legal heir. In the end, Horus avenged his father's death and regained the throne. This myth highlights the importance of matriarchy; Isis is a strong defender of her family and supports her son Horus to avenge his father and reclaim the throne.

In the first millennium BC, Isis became the most worshiped and famous Egyptian goddess, and her influence extended to different parts of the world. It went beyond its original religious character, to be manifested in the arts and literature in various cultures - including - Arab culture, specifically in the famous character of Scheherazade, the narrator of the tales (One Thousand and One Nights), noting that some of these tales revolve around women who bear some of the legendary characteristics of Isis. The legend of Isis, Osiris and their son Horus is mentioned for the first time in the Pyramids of Giza (Hassan, 2019) which are considered the first ancient Egyptian funerary texts. Over the years, Isis was able to carve out a unique place for herself not only in ancient Egypt, but in the entire world. According to the professor of the history of religions (Françoise Dannon), (Isis) or (Issa) was the most important great Egyptian symbol, it was passionate about philosophers, sculptors, peasants and clergy and slaves as a symbol of motherhood and giving. Dannon, an honorary professor at Mark University, mentions in her book "Isis, Mother of the Gods", which was translated from French and issued by the National Center for Translation in Cairo: Ancient legends remind Isis of many titles, namely "Great Mother", "Mother of God", "Giver of Law" and "Goddess of the Lighthouse." Even believe the statue above the ancient lighthouse of Alexandria was of Isis. In Roman times, Isis was the focus of the depicted elements on Egyptian coins. Just as Isis was in the middle Ages the role model that artists followed in their sculptural works, engravings, or even writing operas. In the city of Memphis, which was founded in 2200 BC, and was the capital of ancient Egypt for many years, a stone plaque was found inscribed with sayings attributed to Isis, including: "I am the one who was called a goddess by women, and I am the one who taught men how to venerate them." From Memphis to Rome, within the first millennium BC, we find the association of the worship of Isis with the names of some other gods. According to Françoise Danon's book, documents were found in various parts of Italy, indicating the status of Isis among the Romans, who built temples for her. The presence of Isis in Greece was also of particular importance, and it began in cities with ports. Moreover, it should be noted that interest in Isis moved to Spain as well as Africa. The spread of the Isis religion, according to the book's expression, occurred in Gaul, that is, in Europe and Britain. (Dannon, 2022) In the second half of the 19th century, Isis took over the thought of the French writer Gerard de

Nerval (1808-1855) until she became the focus of his poetry and prose. He brought charming female faces, which, despite their sadness and eccentricities, all flow into the same idea that dominates him, which is the mother, whom I miss. The beginning of this intimate connection was during his trip to Egypt, and after his return he wrote: "I thought back to Isis, the immortal mother and holy wife, and everything my soul and prayers desired was mixed with her magical name, and I felt as if I were living in her, and sometimes I would see her in the form of ancient Venus.

Isis became the focus of intellectual speculation that was born at the end of the Middle Ages, based on ancient texts whose translation was characterized by a Platonic touch. Denon believes that Isis was the goddess of the ancient French. It is said - according to the book - that the Church of Notre Dame in Paris was built on the ruins of a temple to Isis. It was stated in Bonneville's book (*The Religious Spirit*), published in 1791, that Isis had a temple near Paris. From the previous narration, it becomes clear to us the extent of the greatness of women in ancient Egyptian civilization. She was not only a sacred mother and was not only a ruler of the country, but rather she reached the rank of a goddess who was worshipped. Some even considered her a mother to the gods of ancient Egypt out of reverence for her. (Dannon, 2022)

4. Egyptian Queens

In the Dynastic Era, specifically in the First Dynasty, Queen Merit Nit was the first woman to rule in the history of Egypt and the world, as she ruled Egypt for about 10 years in the period from (2939 - 2929) BC, and history knows her as a woman of a unique type. Archaeologists consider it a key to the rule of the ancient Egyptian kings of Egypt in the dynastic era, as it belonged to the First Dynasty and was able to rule Egypt in the cradle of civilization and the beginning of history after the death of her husband, when she shared with her son, King (Den), who inherited the throne from his father when he was a young child, so she did not leave the affairs of government. The royal court, and she assumed the regency of the throne, which is why she is the first woman to rule in the history of humanity, and after that her son, Dan, was able to assume power and was one of the most important kings of this era. During his reign, Egypt enjoyed economic prosperity and political and social stability. At that time, his mother (Merit Nit) participated in the government and was the decision-maker. History did not mention any queen in this period as much as (Merit Nit) mentioned, which clarifies her status. She even had with two royal cemeteries, one in Abydos and the second in Saqqara. (Ashour, 2018)

In the third part of the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* by Selim Hassan: We find (Queen Sobekneferu), who was called the Lady of the Two Lands, who assumed the throne of Egypt at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty, after the death of her brother, King Amenemhat IV, and (Sobekneferu) even shared with her father (Amenemhat Third) in ruling the country. This is the first time in the history of ancient Egypt that a woman was referred to as a woman and a pharaoh at the same time. According to some historical sources, (temples, tombs) Sobekneferu sat on the throne of Egypt without a partner for about three years and four months. Her reign was stable, and she was buried next to Amenemhat IV. With the end of the rule of Neifer Sobek, the rule of the Twelfth Dynasty ended, and the upper part of one of its statues was found and is currently preserved in the Louvre Museum in Paris. (Hassan, 2019)

When we mention the role of the queen mother in ancient Egypt; We cannot ignore the role of

Queen Ahhotep in the Seventeenth Dynasty, the one who famously said, “I will not hear from you a word for my mother, nor will you hear from me a word for my son until we liberate Kemet, our holy land,” which is the old name for Egypt, which some have translated (the Black Land). This name given to Egypt in reference to the fertility of its land and the silt that accumulated on the banks of the Nile after the flood. But, it means green land due to the presence of the fertile Nile in the land of Egypt, and one who contemplates the dark green color finds it the closest color to black, but in fact it is the color that expresses the continuation of life on the banks of the Nile. The queen was (Ahhotep) the first woman to lead armies, the first to use a chariot on the battlefield called the Battle of Liberation, and she fought on the battlefield carrying the highest military medal at the time, which was the Golden Fly Medal. This medal had a great status in ancient Egypt. It was given to military warriors and army commanders. In addition, she is the first woman to obtain the military rank (general); She played a major role in winning the battle and completely expelling the Hyksos from Egypt along with her son, King Ahmose, who then established a new family, the Eighteenth Dynasty. (Badran, 2019) (Hassan, 2019)

When we mention the Eighteenth Dynasty, two of the most famous queens in ancient Egyptian civilization immediately come to mind: Queen Hatshepsut and Queen Nefertiti.

Queen (Hatshepsut) is one of the most famous Egyptian queens who assumed power in a period that was characterized by strength and prosperity in the era of the New Kingdom. Hatshepsut belongs to the Eighteenth Dynasty. She is the son of King Thutmose I, and there are official documents that show Hatshepsut and her father Thutmose I, indicating that she participated with him in the affairs of the country. She is the wife of Thutmose II, who passed away and left behind only Thutmose III, who was too young to rule, by himself; Hatshepsut became the regent on the throne of Egypt and the de facto ruler of the country, succeeding her husband. Hatshepsut was known for being a great achiever in countless construction projects, the most famous of which is the Red Cabin in the Karnak Temple.

In addition, it restored the movement of trade, which had been disrupted during the periods of turmoil and foreign occupation in the era of the Second Transition, as it launched its famous journey towards the country of Punt - located between modern Ethiopia and Sudan now - to import ivory, ebony wood, spices, and other goods Value. Queen Hatshepsut ordered the famous trip to the country of Punt to be recorded on the walls of her temple in Deir El-Bahari, with all its features, details, and the nature of this country. This temple is considered one of the most wonderful architectural and artistic models from ancient Egypt. In addition to this, the Queen implemented a huge architectural program in various capitals of Egypt. The French scholar Christiane DesRoches says in her study entitled “Women in the Time of the Pharaohs” that Hatshepsut “seized the opportunity to embark on her great adventure, as soon as the celebrations for ascending the throne and installing the heir began.” (Hassan, 2019) Hatshepsut sat on the throne of Egypt for twenty-two years, and the great influences she left for us and her ability to lead the country during her reign confirm that Egyptian women were able, in early periods of history, to become leaders, queens, and building engineers whose temples filled the country, east and west.

Hatshepsut was not the only queen who represented female power in the Eighteenth Dynasty. There was also Queen Nefertiti, whose name in the ancient Egyptian language is Nefertiti,

which means (the beautiful one came). Nefertiti married King Akhenaten, the pioneer of monotheism in ancient Egypt, during the period (1336-1353). BC, and on the walls of tombs and temples built during the reign of Akhenaten, she was depicted - side by side - with her husband and the same size as him. (Hassan, 2019) What Queen Nefertiti is most famous for is the bust made of colored sandstone, which was rediscovered in 1913 AD in the city of Akhenaten, or Tel Amarna, in the Minya Governorate in Upper Egypt. This statue became a global symbol of female beauty and strength, and few months later, Nefertiti's head came out of Egypt with fake papers concealing the value of this wonderful antiquity. It remains to this day in Germany despite many Egyptian attempts to restore it, unlike the statue of (Queen Nefertari), which was recovered from. The United Kingdom, specifically on July 28, 2001, when Egypt was able to recover the head of Queen Nefertari from the British Museum in London.

Queen Nefertari is the wife of King Ramesses II, who lived in the Nineteenth Dynasty in the New Kingdom era. Nefertari's titles were found engraved on the walls of her temple. Her husband called her the goddess of temptation and beauty, beautiful in nature, the lady of the North and the South. The Temple of Queen Nefertari is considered one of the most beautiful Egyptian temples carved in rocks. It was established by her husband, King Ramesses II, to commemorate his wife (Nefertari) and to worship the goddess (Hathor). The temple contains a few wonderful scenes that represent the king striking an enemy, and next to him is the queen in the presence of a number of deities, in addition to the Holy of Holies, which contains a statue of the deity (Hathor).

Nefertari was a powerful and influential queen during the reign of her husband, the most famous ancient Egyptian king, Ramesses II. At that time, she played a major role in diplomatic affairs in the ancient Egyptian state. Due to the many skills she possessed, such as: the arts of writing, especially hieroglyphics, reading, and the principles and arts of diplomatic correspondence; Egypt benefited from her great skills and her husband, the great king, in addition to her love and loyalty to her husband, which made the love story of Ramesses II and Nefertari the greatest stories of love and passion that man immortalized in stone before he immortalized it in the arts and literature.

Nefertari passed away in the thirtieth year of the reign of Ramesses II, and was buried in her most famous, largest, and most important tomb among the Valley of the Queens tombs.¹ One of the most famous expressions of love in history, and even considered the first flirtation sentence, is that which Ramesses II said to his beloved wife Nefertari, when he said: (She is the one for whom the sun shines). Thus, Nefertari is also considered one of the most important Egyptian women mentioned in history, and even the most famous in the history of humanity at all.

5. Conclusion

Religious beliefs in ancient Egypt honored women and raised the female status. This is why it is not strange for a woman to be the wife of a god in ancient Egypt. We find that the ancient

¹ Salim Hassan, Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt, Part VI, The Era of Ramses II and the Establishment of the Second Empire, Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture, pp. 334, 397, 411, 412, 413 et seq., p. 572.

system of maternal kinship - that is, the ratio of children to the mother - which continued until Roman times, gave women preference over men in issues of governance and inheritance. Women legally enjoyed equal rights with men. She obtained her rights under the law based on her social status and not her gender. All property inherited from the mother to the daughter. She also had the right to manage her own property, whether by buying or selling, to sign and bear witness to legal documents, to file lawsuits in court, and she had the right to adopt a child in her own name. This confirms to us that women in ancient Egypt, whether they were from the nobility or from the common people, were empowered with their rights in the literal sense of the word. What was common regarding the status of women in ancient Egyptian civilization was an exception in some other human civilizations, which confirms that Egyptian women have enjoyed a tremendous status in Egypt since the dawn of history.

The Egyptian woman was and still is a decision-maker. There is a decision capable of defining the features of an entire era. This is what happened in the myth of Isis, and in the role of Queen Ahhotep, mother of Ahmose, the warrior who liberated Egypt with chariots. In addition to Merit Net's decision to protect the throne for her son. In the construction of enormous architectural masterpieces during the reign of Hatshepsut, in addition to the role that Nefertari played in diplomatic affairs in Egypt through her many skills in writing and the arts of correspondence. It is the same thing that confirms that women have an active role in their society throughout the ages, and it ignores the saying that women are a mere shadow of men and confirms that they are capable not only of pregnancy and childbirth, but also of raising children to be heroes and kings, thus becoming makers of the glory of history and civilization.

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