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The Power Behind the Crown: Messages Worn by Three New Kingdom Egyptian Queens

Mary Abram

THROUGHOUT the ages and among diverse cultures, the crown has been recognized as a statement of power, honor, and high political or religious office. In the deeply symbolic society of ancient Egypt, the crowns and headdresses worn by royalty represented more than mere emblems of authority. Various symbolisms accompanied the crown's different components. An evaluation of the crowns worn by three New Kingdom queens—Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, and Nefertari—places the pronouncement of royal status as only one of a multi-layered message. These messages even transcend traditional symbolisms of Egyptian iconography. The particular components for each crown chosen by these women actually reveal personal and political agendas. Before reviewing the life and times of these New Kingdom royal figures, however, an outline of standard wear for queens will illustrate how these three individuals conformed with or contested the norm, thus providing the first insight into their respective personalities.

The Standard Headdress for Queens

The two basic headdress elements for queens consisted of the

vulture and uraeus, or cobra representations. This tradition can be traced to the vulture goddess Nekhbet, the protectress of Upper Egypt, and the snake goddess Wadjet who guarded Lower Egypt. The representations of these two goddesses were depicted together and entitled “The Two Ladies.”¹ Together in purpose as well, they protected the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt. The actual images of these goddesses evolved to headdresses worn by the respective deities when they wished to appear in human form, and the head of the snake goddess could replace the vulture head. “When Wadjyt appeared in human form, she adopted the vulture headdress of Nekhbet, only substituting a uraeus for the vulture head. Later the vulture headdress became used by other goddesses, too.”² The vulture was also the sacred animal of the goddess Mut, wife of the sun god Amun.³ Beginning in the Fifth Dynasty, about 2500 B.C., and lasting throughout pharaonic Egypt, queens wore the vulture headdress as did depicted deities. This insignia on the head of royalty “may have marked a divine aspect of queenship.”⁴

The uraeus, a cobra rearing in a fierce, defensive stance, represented “the fiery eye of the sun god Re” along with the Delta deity Wadjet.⁵ The uraeus, an aggressive guardian who protected the king and the gods from their enemies, became the primary emblem worn by kings, and its appearance on the head of a queen implied more than defense. It not only marked her connection with the king and her royal status, but also “carried references to Wadjyt and other female deities on the one hand, and to solar mythology on the other, linking the queen with Hathor as the daughter and eye of Ra.”⁶

Combinations of symbols occurred, beginning in the New Kingdom Eighteenth Dynasty, about 1550 B.C.. Both queens and

1. M. Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 86.

2. G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23.

3. Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary*, 82, 127.

4. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 23.

5. R. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 109.

6. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 24.

goddesses wore two uraei side by side, called the Double Uraeus, and each snake sometimes wore one of the crowns reserved only for kings—either the Hedjet white crown of Upper Egypt or the Deshret red crown of Lower Egypt. These two crowns could express another type of duality. Along with symbolizing geographical rule, the White Crown could “signify the eternal aspect of Egyptian kingship, and the Red its earthly manifestations.”⁷ The two crowned uraei might take on a feminine aspect themselves and wear cow horns surrounding a solar disk, a clear identification with Hathor. Such elaborate combinations also developed in connection with the vulture headdress.⁸

Earlier, about 1770 B.C., during the Middle Kingdom Thirteenth Dynasty, queens wore a combination of two feathered plumes with a solar disk center added by the New Kingdom era along with Hathor horns in another version of the crown. The symbolism of these feathers is not certain.⁹ The queen wearing them may have attempted an identification with three particular deities: (1) The falcon god Horus who had, from the Pre-Dynastic time of Narmer, been paralleled with the living pharaoh, (2) Maat, the embodiment of truth and order who wore an ostrich plume, or (3) Osiris, the god of the underworld who symbolized resurrection and who characteristically wore the Atef crown consisting of the Hedjet and two feathers topped by a solar disc. Various elements could be added to the Atef crown worn by Osiris, such as ram’s horns, additional plumes, and sun disks. Like the Hedjet and the Deshret, the Atef crown was reserved for the pharaoh who wore it for ritualistic purposes.¹⁰

The Queen Who Became King: Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut, who reigned from about 1473–1458 B.C., did not just marry into the royal family; she was born into it, with an impressive

7. D. Dodson and D. Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 28.

8. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 24.

9. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 24.

10. D. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Yale University Press, 1997), 109.

genealogy stretching back into the Second Intermediate Period. Her father Thutmose I had married the daughter of Ahmose, the pharaoh who had defeated the Hyksos and established the New Kingdom. Ahmose's wife Nefertari and their son Amenhotep I, Hatshepsut's grandmother and uncle respectively, were later deified and worshipped at Deir al-Madina during the New Kingdom era.¹¹ Hatshepsut married her brother Thutmose II and outlived him. His young son by another wife, Thutmose III, took the throne while Hatshepsut ruled with him as co-regent. At some point during the next five years, Hatshepsut took total control as pharaoh. She expended a great deal of energy, not only in that role, but in attempts to justify it. She did this mainly through stressing her notable lineage. "Hatshepsut did not attempt to legitimize her reign by claiming to have ruled with or for her husband Thutmose II. Instead, she emphasized her blood line."¹² She insisted that her father Thutmose I had named her as his successor before his death and, in her temple at Deir el-Bahri, documented in relief her divine birth as a daughter of Amun.

The temple . . . contains scenes depicting Hatshepsut's divine birth as the result of a union between her mother and the god Amun, who had appeared in the form of Hatshepsut's father, Thutmose I. This is a clear attempt to legitimize her rights to the Egyptian throne by showing that, like other kings, she had been chosen by the state god Amun.¹³

Hatshepsut's transition from queen to king can be traced in her choice of headdress. In the beginning, her clothing and crown portrayed her as a queen and traditional in appearance. She wore the vulture headdress accompanied by the uraeus to stress her queenship over Upper and Lower Egypt along with her connections with Amun, Hathor, and Mut. The double plumes above this headdress had

11. Z. Hawass, *Silent Images: Women in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 48.

12. B. Bryan, "The Eighteenth Dynasty before the Amarna Period," in *An Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. I. Shaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 238.

13. J. Malek, *Egyptian Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 233.

reference to other deities—Horus, Maat, and Osiris.

Seated on a throne, Hatshepsut appeared next as a woman wearing two items previously reserved only for male rulers: the shendjyt pleated linen kilt and the Nemes headdress. This headdress was particularly associated with kings of the Middle Kingdom period.¹⁴ Hatshepsut had already revealed her proclivity to link with former pharaohs and to align herself with the Middle Kingdom, in particular by building her funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri, upon the same site and patterned after the temple of the Middle Kingdom Pharaoh Mentuhotep II.

In her next phase, Hatshepsut assumed a male form entirely. A granite colossus from her temple at Deir el Bahri shows her kneeling to make offerings. Her torso is that of a man's. She wears, like the male pharaohs who preceded her, the White Crown of Upper Egypt and even the Osirian beard. In an even more characteristically male ritual reserved for pharaohs, Hatshepsut runs the Heb Sed race, implying her rejuvenation and continued ability to rule. In this portrayal of sunken relief from her chapel, Hatshepsut wears the pharaonic kilt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. In another sunken relief, this one from a fallen obelisk in the temple of Amun at Karnak, Hatshepsut kneels under the hands of Amun. Looking like a man, she takes on another exclusively male crown, the Khepresh, or War Crown, "worn especially by Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs and associated with the sun god."¹⁵

Hatshepsut revealed her political ambitions in three phases. First, she commissioned her depiction as queen over both Upper and Lower Egypt. Next, she maintained some feminine characteristics while using her clothing and headdress to pronounce her rule as pharaoh. Finally, she dropped all traces of womanhood, preferring to portray herself as king and only king. This bold move may have caused the later destruction of artwork connected with Hatshepsut. When Thutmose III took over the throne after his step-mother's death, he ordered her name obliterated and many of her monuments destroyed. The campaign against the woman who seized power from him may have been an attempt to restore tradition rather than a personal vendetta.

14. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt*, 109.

15. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt*, 109.

The purpose of expunging her memory may have been not so much vengeance as a desire to correct an episode—a woman assuming the role of a male king—which was not in accordance with the cosmic order and the ideal world that the king was supposed to uphold. Her images as queen in female dress and regalia were not touched.¹⁶

Hatshepsut's monuments portray her as a strong-willed woman who possessed the ambition of any pharaoh to the extent of exercising her authority despite tradition. Her determination to achieve her aim to rule Egypt, even suppressing her gender to do so, is the message behind the varied crowns she wore.

The Revolutionary Queen: Nefertiti

Nefertiti, the Eighteenth Dynasty queen who lived a century after Hatshepsut, achieved modern fame due to the exquisite, sculpted replica of her head found in the ruins of the city she once inhabited. Her image appears more frequently in art than that of any other Egyptian queen.¹⁷ Nefertiti's origins, however, are obscure. She may have been another example of a non-royal woman, like her mother-in-law Queen Tiye, who rose to power. Her father could have been Ay, a possible relative of Queen Tiye and a court official who claimed the throne after Tutankhamun's death.¹⁸

Nefertiti married Amenhotep IV, the son of Amenhotep III and the woman he married for love, Queen Tiye. The affection between these two may have formed the foundation for later scenes of open expression so prevalent in the art of Amenhotep IV, Nefertiti, and their daughters.

In her early days as queen, Nefertiti wore headdresses in the tradition of her predecessors. One example from Karnak shows Nefertiti as a passive and supportive wife, dressed in a partially

16. Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 34.

17. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 53.

18. J. Van Dijk, "The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom," in *An Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, 292; Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 49.

extant headdress and shaking the sistrum, the sacred rattle associated with Hathor.

Traces of the uraeus at her brow and the modius on her wig identify this figure as a queen who shakes a Hathor-headed sistrum behind a much larger figure of the king. . . . Complete, Nefertiti's headdress would have included a sun-disk, horns, and features above her modius (crown base), which, like her sistrum, are attributes of Hathor, goddess of fertility, femininity, and music, and daughter of the sun-god Ra. Representations of Nefertiti shaking a sistrum . . . are found a number of times on talatat blocks from Karnak, and allude to her role as a priestess.¹⁹

The priestess role was one that Nefertiti continued and even elaborated on later, as evidenced by her varied crowns. One emblem avoided by Nefertiti was the vulture headdress, probably due to its association with Mut, the wife of Amun. Early in his reign, Amenhotep IV initiated a religious revolution, banning the worship of all gods except the sun disk Aten and taking measures to enforce this. He changed his name to Akhenaten and even defaced his own father's monuments by striking the name "Amen" from them.²⁰ He moved his capital from Thebes, the historical center of the Amun cult, and built an entirely new city at Tell el-Amarna. Art forms changed as well, an unusual occurrence in the Egyptian tradition. These changes introduced by Akhenaten are known today as the Amarna Style. Deity no longer appeared in human or even animal form. The one god, Aten, was represented by a solar orb with rays ending in hands that bestowed blessings on Akhenaten and his immediate family.

Nefertiti supported her husband in his revolution. She added to her name "Nefer-Neferu-Aten" which means "Beautiful is the beauty of the Aten."²¹ The queen appeared in reliefs making offerings to the elevated solar deity. In the spirit of innovation characterized by the Amarna era, Nefertiti even devised her own unique crown. This was a

19. R. Freed, Y. Markowitz, S. D'Auria, *Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamen* (Boston: Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown, and Company, 1999), 209.

20. W. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (Yale University Press, 1998), 174.

21. Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 49.

tall, straight-edged and flat-topped blue crown. Its color and shape suggest that it was the female version of the Khepresh, the blue leather war crown covered by protective discs and worn by Egyptian kings.²²

This crown implied power and, in Egyptian iconography, a subjection of enemies or the forces of chaos. The wielding of a mace over a foe's head was another icon of dominion dating back at least to Pre-Dynastic times and the Palette of Narmer. This pose was reserved for kings. Blocks found at Hermopolis, however, reveal Nefertiti on a boat in a smiting position.

The role of smiter had until now been exclusively a king's role, and by implication a man's role. The fact that Nefertiti was allowed to play the part of the king in this ritual must be read as an indication of her increased ritual and/or political importance.²³

Nefertiti's power may be inferred from other visual evidence such as scenes of riding in a chariot with her husband or "driving her own chariot in kingly fashion."²⁴

The characteristic blue crown worn by Nefertiti may have had other connotations of fertility and rejuvenation.²⁵ Nefertiti wore a flimsy, open robe along with her unique crown, and this could have been her representation of another queenly role. "Some queens had enjoyed a more intimate relationship with the gods. It was recognized that the queen could stimulate or arouse susceptible male deities."²⁶ Nefertiti, living in a day of greater expression, was apparently more open than previous queens in displaying erogenous zones to assure the continuity of divine offspring through her.

Nefertiti's high profile in the new religious order is further attested in the artifacts from the era. "The king and the queen were the new deity's main officiants, and it was only to them, as representatives of mankind, that the sun-disc extended its arm-like rays in the new

22. J. Tyldesly, *Nefertiti: Egypt's Sun Queen* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), 64.

23. Tyldesly, *Nefertiti*, 62.

24. J. Samson, *Nefertiti and Cleopatra* (London: The Rubicon Press, 1985), 63.

25. Tyldesly, *Nefertiti*, 142.

26. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti*, 58.

religion's principal icon."²⁷ Even more than sitting passively under the sun disk's beneficent rays, Nefertiti took an active part by making offerings to the Aten herself, and without assistance from the king.

Nefertiti's prominence in what until now had been a king-dominated sphere, is beyond dispute. . . . Women had always been permitted to serve in temples as priestesses, musicians and dancers, and many queens had held honorary positions in the cult of Hathor. . . . Centuries of tradition, however, decreed that the king, and only the king, as chief priest of all cults, should offer to the gods. Within the precincts of Hwt-Benen [a subsidiary of the open temple of Aten east of the Karnak complex] it was Nefertiti and not Amenhotep who took the king's role of priest. . . . Her stance is that of a king offering to a god . . . while the king is nowhere to be seen.²⁸

One libation scene reveals Nefertiti wearing the elaborate Atef crown. Both the purification ritual she performs and the crown worn in conjunction with it, were prerogatives of the king.²⁹ A similar crown, complete with multiple plumes and cobras, solar disks and ram's horns appears in a painting of the god Osiris dated about 1050 B.C.. Nefertiti wearing such a crown, especially while participating in a libation ceremony, emphasizes her significance in the Aten's cult. "The only other woman known to have worn this crown was Hatchepsut in her role as female pharaoh."³⁰

Nefertiti wore a variety of crowns. One common element, the cobra, unified them all. A sandstone block from Karnak, completed early in Akhenaten's reign, shows Nefertiti wearing a modius, or crown base, encircled by cobras while Aten's rays reach toward her. The cobra component of Nefertiti's crowns often appeared in multiple forms with one of at least three snakes dangling and played with by her daughter in the limestone relief example from Amarna. Another relief from Amarna, a sculptor's model, shows Nefertiti's characteristic crown draped with two cobras. The cobra, traditionally linked to solar

27. Malek, *Egyptian Art*, 266.

28. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti*, 58–59.

29. Samson, *Nefertiti and Cleopatra*, 61.

30. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti*, 144.

mythology, was apparently an acceptable symbol in the new religious order. Very likely, the uraeus maintained its protective connotations and Nefertiti's duplications of its form implied increased defense.

The rearing cobra fixed over her forehead coiled up in wait to spit its fiery venom into the eyes of her enemies. Nefertiti sought extra protection by increasing the number of cobras over her brow to two and even adding a further pair at each side of her face in the form of two snakes rearing up from the end of ribbons hanging down from her gold diadem.³¹

Possibly, Nefertiti felt the need for extra protection from these multiple cobras in an era when she and her husband had so drastically altered religion, art, and customs in Egypt. The quick rebound to earlier traditions after Akhenaten's death and the stigma later attached to the Amarna regime seems to validate Nefertiti's concern.

Two relief examples of Nefertiti wearing traditional female crowns are puzzling in a queen dedicated to religious revolution. There may be three explanations for her choice of headdress. First, the representations may have been symbolic of Amarna ideology rather than linked to the past worship of other deities besides the Aten. The solar disk, for instance, could have symbolized the Aten instead of Re, or the horns formerly associated with Hathor meant, in the new regime, power and rejuvenation.

The second explanation is based on a theory that Nefertiti lived after Akhenaten's death and tried to restore the old regime.³² If this were true, Nefertiti might have kept her old accoutrements for a more auspicious day. The relief of Nefertiti wearing the traditional crown while offering to the Aten behind Akhenaten, however, does not support this theory.

The third possibility is more likely. Nefertiti merely directed the worship of all former goddesses to herself who, with her husband, served as a lens of the Aten.

The royal couple and the Aten together formed a triad that was worshipped, echoing the triads of deities common in traditional religion.

31. J. Fletcher, *The Search for Nefertiti* (New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 2004), 287–88.

32. Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun*, 91.

Other evidence shows that private people could address prayers directly to the queen. Thus, Nefertiti played a fundamental role in the Aten cult, filling the gap left by the proscription of traditional goddesses.³³

The end of Nefertiti's life is even more obscure than its beginning. Shortly after the death of her second daughter, Meketaten, Nefertiti faded from the records.³⁴ Her eldest daughter Meritaten succeeded her as the Great Royal Wife. Some believe that, at that time, Nefertiti began to rule with Akhenaten as coregent. The Wilbour Plaque, purchased near Amarna in 1881 by Charles E. Wilbour could, if authentic, support this claim.

Although the relief has sometimes been viewed as a forgery, there are compelling reasons to see it as the work of an accomplished artist of the Amarna Period. . . . Carved in the curvilinear, organic, and sensuous late Amarna style, the queen appears mature and forceful. This relief may represent Nefertiti as an active and energetic coregent with Akhenaten.³⁵

Besides being coregent, "some scholars believe that Nefernefruaten, an obscure pharaoh said to have ruled briefly following the death of Akhenaten, may have been Nefertiti herself."³⁶ Others purport that Smenkhkara, the pharaoh before Tutankhamen, was Nefertiti.

An ephemeral king Smenkhkara with the same throne name as Nefertiti/Nefernefruaten appears in some inscriptions from the end of the Amarna Period. . . . The identity of this Smenkhkara is uncertain. Many scholars continue to see him as Nefertiti's male successor, perhaps a younger brother or even another son of Akhenaten, but there is a strong possibility that "he" was actually none other than Nefertiti herself, who, like Hatshepsut before her, had assumed a male persona and ruled alone for a brief period after the death of Akhenaten, with Meritaten in the ceremonial role of great royal wife.³⁷

33. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 54.

34. Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun*, 88.

35. Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun*, 245.

36. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt*, 88.

37. Van Dijk, "The Amarna Period," 281.

An additional theory claims that the objects “found in the tomb of Tutankhamun may originally have been prepared for the burial of Smenkhkare, an ephemeral ruler who may in fact have been Akhenaten’s great royal wife Nefertiti.”³⁸ Before Nefertiti’s death, however, she apparently committed an unforgivable act by soliciting a prince from one of Egypt’s great rivals to rule at her side in the place of Akhenaten. This Hittite prince named Zannanza was murdered en route to Egypt. Some believe that Ankhesenpaaten, Nefertiti’s daughter and Tutankhamun’s widow, suggested the Hittite alliance. Others attribute this to Nefertiti as the “one treasonable act—the inevitable outcome of defying maat by the elevation of a woman to supreme power [that] sounded the final death-knell of the Atenist regime.”³⁹ Due to either her own actions or her association with the king later labeled as a heretic, Nefertiti’s monuments were dismantled or destroyed by Horemheb, the last king of the Eighteenth Dynasty. While mystery and intrigue surround Nefertiti’s final days, one certain image emerges—this revolutionary queen was as diverse, powerful, and unique as her crowns.

A Link with Traditional Egypt: Queen Nefertari

Nefertari, the Nineteenth Dynasty queen who lived about 1270 B.C.E., was the Great Royal Wife and favorite queen of the famous Ramses II. She was the daughter of a Theban nobleman. The monuments built in her honor, notably her temple at Abu Simbel and her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, testify of her husband’s esteem for her. The marriage was a politically shrewd move for Ramses since his progenitor who established the Nineteenth Dynasty was a non-royal general of King Horemheb who was himself a usurper. Besides her noble lineage, Nefertari’s name “recalled a resplendent moment in Egypt’s history and her sobriquet invoked the Temple of Karnak, home of Egypt’s first divine family.”⁴⁰

38. Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 52.

39. Freed, *Pharaohs of the Sun*, 91.

40. J. McDonald, *The Tomb of Nefertiti* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996), 15.

Nefertari wore only the vulture headdress, either alone or topped by the solar disk and double plumes. This latter crown paralleled that of the goddess Isis in a relief of Seti I, Nefertari's father-in-law, making an offering to this particular deity. Nefertari was personally associated in relief with Isis but also aligned with the queen-deity Ahmose-Nefertari. This queen, the wife of King Ahmose who had ousted the hated Hyksos and established Egypt's New Kingdom, obtained a unique status beyond just the Great Royal Wife or chief wife and consort. Ahmose had contributed heavily to the Amun cult at Thebes and achieved for his wife the priestly title of God's Wife of Amun, a religious office inherent with economic power and the highest possible position for a woman.

Part of the function of the god's wife was to play her sistrum before the god, so as to pacify him and avert his potential anger, and also to stimulate him in her role as god's hand, so that he would forever keep the fertility of the universe from flagging.⁴¹

Ahmose-Nefertari was so revered that she was later worshipped. One depiction shows her wearing the vulture headdress with uraeus and "the black skin of a deity of resurrection."⁴² On a stela honoring Ahmose-Nefertari and her son Amenhotep I, the deified queen wore the complete vulture headdress. This is same the headdress worn in every representation of Nefertari, the wife of Ramses II, and she likely chose it to connect with Ahmose's wife.

To her countrymen, Nefertari's name no doubt evoked a wealth of positive associations, above all with the memory of Ahmose-Nefertari, the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty [who] lived through the glorious days of Thebes' rise to power and her husband's expulsion of Asiatic invaders, the Hyksos. . . . It was probably intentional that Nefertari's chosen headdress—a vulture surmounted by double plumes—was also the headdress favored by Ahmose-Nefertari.⁴³

41. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 156.

42. McDonald, *The Tomb of Nefertiti*, 15.

43. McDonald, *The Tomb of Nefertiti*, 15.

Nefertari also served as chief priestess and “the living manifestation of the goddess Hathor.”⁴⁴ A relief from the First Pylon of the Temple at Luxor depicts Nefertari standing behind her husband, as a good queen would, and shaking the sacred sistrum associated with Hathor. She wears the vulture headdress with uraeus topped by twin plumes. Traditional hierarchy of scale, giving the man and king greater importance, is evidenced here. Nefertari, apparently, conformed to expectations and used examples from goddesses and revered historical figures to define her own personality. “Unlike Nefertiti, the great royal wife of Rameses II, Queen Nefertari, is never seen to do anything out of keeping with Egyptian traditions.”⁴⁵ The repeated use of Nefertari’s vulture headdress reveals her willingness to conform to and even perpetuate established Egyptian ideals. It is no coincidence that, unlike the damages inflicted upon images of Hatshepsut and Nefertiti, only time has defaced the monuments of Nefertari.

Conclusion

Three prominent Egyptian queens—Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, and Nefertari—lived within the same general era labeled as the New Kingdom by historians. Each queen, however, experienced far different circumstances. Yet, in one unifying gesture, each queen expressed her individual circumstances and aspirations in a visual, defining way. Each queen provided glimpses of her personality while conveying specific messages through the same devise. Hatshepsut took on the regalia of pharaoh. Nefertiti’s unique crown coincided with a unique religious and artistic period in Egyptian history. Nefertari, while lacking the personal power and innovative genius of her predecessors, stood out as the example of Egyptian tradition. In all cases, each queen publicly revealed her private ambitions and reactions to her personal world through the crown she wore.

44. Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 53.

45. Hawass, *Women in Pharaonic Egypt*, 52.