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Hatshepsut and Akhenaten: Dualities of Gender, Religion, and Implementation of Queer Theory

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by

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ABSTRACT

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QUEER THEORY

Sadie Anderson, Master of Art History and Visual Culture, 2024

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This paper discusses 18th Dynasty pharaohs Hatshepsut and Akhenaten and the images they portrayed during their reigns. Hatshepsut, though being female, adhered to the preconstructed image of a traditional male pharaoh while Akhenaten defied the long-established artistic canon in order to create a more androgynous pharaonic identity. Both did this to legitimize their rule, connect themselves to divinity, and interpret the duality of gender innate to Egyptian religion through their iconography. Hatshepsut's masculine depictions cemented her as the father of the polytheistic Egyptian empire over which she reigned. Akhenaten's more androgynous representations, on the other hand, portrayed him as both the mother and father of the newly monotheistic Egypt he created. Modern discourse has taken great interest in the masculine representations of Hatshepsut, but not the androgynous depictions of Akhenaten. Queer theory has been implemented in order to gain more knowledge of gender systems of the past as well as to break though hetero-normative thought; but in some cases, it ends up reinforcing it. Akhenaten has not received this same type of attention from queer theorists. These theories tend to disconnect Hatshepsut from the political, social, and religious motivations behind her depictions. Reasons for this difference in approach include the biological sex of both pharaohs, their contrasting strategies of addressing the dualities of gender, as well as Hatshepsut's lack of a male counterpart within her iconography.

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Introduction

Since the very creation of the ancient Egyptian empire, gender, duality, and balance have been baked into countless facets of Egyptian life.[1] These aspects include everything from religion, politics, and social structures to their deep artistic tradition.[2] In order for the universe to function appropriately, balance must be maintained between complementary concepts such as king and queen, man and god, life and death, and of course, male and female.[3] In some instances, the binary is firmly established, but in other cases it can be manipulated in order to gain power, express complex ideas, continue tradition, and cultivate a strong pharaonic identity. 18th Dynasty pharaohs Hatshepsut and Akhenaten spent a great deal of their lives carefully crafting their gender representations within royal artwork. Hatshepsut, for example, depicted herself as male, while Akhenaten ended up taking a more androgynous approach.[4]

This gender alteration, upon first glance, seems to defy the conventions established by the ancient Egyptian artistic canon. However, this was only the case for one of these kings. By showing herself with male dress and male anatomy, Hatshepsut was able to continue the masculine oriented artistic representation of pharaohs.[5] The person occupying the position of kingship in pharaonic Egypt was always shown as male due to the fact that they were seen as the earthly embodiment of the male god Horus.[6] Therefore, it was necessary for her to appear as male in order to legitimize her reign, connect with male deities, and portray herself as the father of Egypt.[7]

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[1] Suzanne Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," *Religion Compass* (2010), 2.
[2] Emily Teeter, "Egyptian Art," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* (1994), 15.
[3] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 1.
[4] Hatshepsut and Akhenaten
[5] Caroline Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would be King," *Humanities* (2005), 20.
[6] Kristina Hilliard and Kate Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," *Art Education (*2009), 27.
[7] Sara Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology: A Proposed New Approach for the Amarna Artistic Style," *The International Journal of Visual Design* (2021), 5.

It was in fact Akhenaten who left the previous artistic canon behind in favor of a new style of artwork.[8] His radically different style was created in order to convey the ideas and beliefs of his equally radical monotheistic religion. As this religion consisted of only one god, Akhenaten had to take a different approach to reconciling the dualities of male and female within a single entity.[9] He did this by adopting both male and female dress as well as anatomy into his kingly depictions. It was this androgyny that enabled him to portray himself as both mother and father of Egypt.[10]

Other theories as to the purpose of these representations do exist, of course. Some scholars posit that Akhenaten's abnormal anatomical features within artwork are evidence of a genetic disorder.[11] When it comes to theories concerning Hatshepsut and her masculine imagery, however, the questions that have been raised are primarily filtered through the lens of queer theory. For example, both scholars and popular culture have taken Hatshepsut's male imagery as a sign of possessing a deviant gender identity or sexual orientation.[12] What is especially notable about this type of modern discourse, is the fact that this same line of queer questioning has not been taken when addressing the iconography of Akhenaten. Because of this lack of investigation by queer theorists, one is led to question why the focus has been placed on Hatshepsut alone.

There are several reasons that may account for this difference in study. First, we must consider the social implications behind Hatshepsut being female while Akhenaten male. Secondly, the fact that Hatshepsut's depictions ended up completely crossing the established gender binary instead of encompassing it like Akhenaten, must also be taken into account. Lastly,

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[8] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 9.
[9] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 10.
[10] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2.
[11] Brien Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 97.
[12] Uroš Matić, "(De) queering Hatshepsut: Binary Bind in Archaeology of Egypt and Kingship Beyond the Corporeal," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* (2016), 814.

it must be acknowledged how the presence of Nefertiti within Akhenaten's works may be compared to those of Hatshepsut in which she lacks a male counterpart.[13]

Before delving into the complex concepts of sex and gender both within ancient Egypt, as well as modernity, the complex social, political, and religious structures of Egyptian society must be rebuilt. This includes the intricate dynamics of Egyptian religion, from the immense importance of dualities, to the existence of gender non-conforming deities, to its deep connection with kingship, politics, and artwork.[14] Establishing the state of women's rights as well as the attributes that make up Egyptian masculinity will help lay the foundation for further examination of the gender system at large.[15] The artistic canon as well as its social and religious implications will also be explored before ultimately moving to the analysis of several depictions of Hatshepsut and Akhenaten.

Four different methodologies will be used within this thesis: feminism, gender studies, queer theory, and structuralism. Feminism will be utilized to bring light to pharaoh Hatshepsut, her artistic representations, and the near total erasure of her legacy. It will also be used to address women's rights and their positions within religion and society. Queer theory and gender studies will prove useful in analyzing the potential interpretations, both modern and ancient, of the iconography of Hatshepsut and Akhenaten, as well as the proposed difference in the implementation of these theories. Structuralism will be vital in establishing the social, religious, and political constructs during the time in which these pharaohs ruled, as well as examining how gender roles wove their way into these structures. For example, how were these roles practiced in

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[13] Uroš Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," Near Eastern Archaeology (2016), 178.
[14] Kelly-Anne Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," *Near Eastern Archaeology* (2021), 272.
[15] Janet Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," *The University of Chicago Library Digital Collections* (2000), 1.

society, expressed within visual art, and how could they be manipulated in order to change one's image, alter their ability to wield power, and influence modern perceptions?

Background Information

Religion

Many aspects of life in ancient Egypt, beginning with their religion, were heavily based on the concept of duality: light and dark, god and goddess, king and queen, life and death. But perhaps the most prominent of these dualities within ancient Egyptian religion and society is that of female and male. These dualities exist "in order to ultimately be reconciled."[16] Though other cultures normally associate the creation of life with women, in Egypt, it is viewed as a distinctly male act, with the phallus seen as a symbol of regeneration. In the Heliopolitan myth cycle, Amun, the creator god, engages in masturbation in order to bring several pairs of male and female deities into existence: twins Shu (male and related to air) and Tefnut (female and related to moisture). Shu and Tefnut then conceived the male God of Earth, Geb, and the female Goddess of the Sky, Nut.[17] This further emphasizes the importance of duality at the very core of Egyptian religion and establishes the two binary genders. This vital balance between male and female can only be unified via the process of reproduction.[18]

Continuing with the basics of Egyptian mythology, Geb and Nut then birthed Osiris and Isis, as well as Seth and Nepthys. Finally, Osiris and Isis produced Horus, the God of Kingship.[19] In ancient Egypt, pharaohs were seen not only as leaders, but as the earthly embodiment of gods, specifically Horus.[20] In life, a pharaoh was said to personify Horus, the Falcon God.[21] Upon death, the king would then take on the image of Osiris, God of Death.[22] The pharaoh was

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[16] Carolyn Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor: Women in Ancient Egypt,* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010: 104
[17] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2-3.
[18] Graves-Brown, *Dancing for Hathor*, 104.
[19] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2-3.
[20] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 27.
[21] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2-3.
[22] Matić, "(De) queering Hatshepsut," 814.

ultimately tasked with honoring these gods and maintaining order, or *ma'at* which required balancing the dualities mentioned above.[23]

Horus and Seth

The dichotomy of light vs. dark, good vs. evil, and civil vs. uncouth is embodied in the religious characters of Horus and Seth. As can be deduced above, Seth is the uncle of Horus. Geb, God of Earth, divided Egypt into two halves so that both Horus and Seth could rule as kings, bringing the concept of duality to the landscape of Egypt itself. Horus was designated as king of Upper Egypt while Seth was made king of Lower Egypt.[24] However, as written in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*, a tale dating to the New Kingdom, Horus finds himself as sole ruler after the death of Osiris. Because of this, Seth tries to rape Horus in the night, "attempting to wrest kingship from Horus in part based on his perceived 'domination' of the younger god."[25] This highlights the difference between the tame Horus and the wild Seth, symbolizing the "male/dominant role" as the giver of seed and the "female/submissive role" as the receiver of seed.

Horus ends up tricking Seth into ingesting his semen, leading him to become pregnant with a solar disc. Because of this, Horus is seen as playing the "male role" and is rewarded by being able to maintain his kingship.[26] A similar story can be found in the *Pyramid Text of Pepy I* from the Old Kingdom, though this version cites "complete reciprocity in the sexual encounter(s) between Horus and Seth,"; it is this type of reciprocity that "conforms to the general balance between these two deities."[27] These stories make even clearer the fact that the ability to create

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[23] Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would be King," 20.
[24] Stephanie Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, Taylor & Francis (Routledge, 2023), 263.
[25] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 148.
[26] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 265.
[27] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 263.

was exclusive to males. Additionally, though these sexual acts may be deemed "deviant" by contemporary society, it was only playing the role of the passive partner that was considered taboo. This reference to male and female roles, though both played by men, actually serves to support the binary.

Androgynous Deities and Regeneration

Beyond these two opposing gods, there are several deities that are presented as neither exclusively masculine nor exclusively feminine, "exhibiting any combination of gender attributes that may or may not correspond to biological or assigned sex."[28] The presence of androgynous and intersex deities shows that the binary was somewhat malleable, at least in terms of the divine.[29] The most prominent of these deities is likely goddess Neith. She was associated with weaponry and hunting, which were typically seen as masculine due to their violent connotations.[30] Inscriptions in the Temple of Esna describe her as "the male who acts the role of the female" and define her as being "two thirds male and one third female."[31] Other examples of mixed gendered deities include goddess Sekhmet whose anatomy and way of dress are feminine, "but her head is that of a lion, not a lioness, as she sports a mane." Both goddesses Sekhmet and Mut, the wife of creator god Amun, incorporate male anatomy into an otherwise feminine appearance in the form of "an erect phallus."[32] As Mut is shown this way within the *Book of the Dead*, the phallus is likely a symbol of the "regenerative power" that was usually attributed to men.[33]

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[28] Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 272.
[29] Troy as referenced by Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 273.
[30] Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 276.
[31] Depauw as referenced by Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 277.
[32] Simini as referenced by Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 278.
[33] Capel, Markoe, and McCarthy as referenced by Deborah Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," *Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2011), 5.

This regenerative power, or lack thereof, is taken into account even in death. Both women and men must follow the same path to the afterlife. However, this journey includes having intercourse with the Goddess of the West in order to be reborn from her in the next world.[34] This detail makes it clear that the deceased must be male in order to complete the transition between life and death. Because of this, a woman must engage in a postmortem ritual of gender fluidity. Evidence of this religious process can be seen in the tomb of Queen Nefertiti in which she is shown "undergoing a fragmentation of her gender identity at death, which allowed her to be identified with Osiris and Ra," who are male deities, "in order to be regenerated."[35] This spiritual practice reaffirms the binary, highlights the biological differences between men and women, and further emphasizes the creative power of males over females.

Idealized Masculinity

A king, in order to ensure that the divine duality of masculinity and femininity was honored, must have a queen by his side, making them the mother and father of Egypt.[36] The social constructs of the "ideal man," pharaoh or not, fluctuated over the course of the Egyptian civilization. The qualities he was expected to embody depended on his profession, social, religious, and political standing, as well as the stability of the civilization at the time. When the state was unstable, violence was a source of not only survival, but also of prestige and virility for men.[37] During times of peace, however, a more culturally sophisticated man ready to climb social ladders in order to achieve political power was preferred. This vacillation between warrior and bureaucrat suggests that masculine assets were malleable, able to be redefined in order to

[34] McCarthy and Cooney as referenced by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 4.
[35] McCarthy and Cooney as referenced by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 4.
[36] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2.
[37] Ellen Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities: Historicizing and Contextualizing the 'Civilizing Process' in Ancient Egypt," *Journal of Egyptian History* (2021), 127.

better suit the society in which they lived.[38] These ideals were often expressed through art.

Egyptian Artistic Canon

The ancient Egyptian artistic canon was established early on, perhaps with the *Palette of Narmer,* 3100-2600 B.C.E., one of the oldest figurative/narrative depictions discovered in ancient Egypt. This stone palette from predynastic Egypt is a larger, more politically charged representation of smaller palettes used for mixing makeup. It has been dubbed "the first fully articulated example of royal representation."[39] The palette shows Narmer, who is widely believed to be Menes, in the middle of a smiting scene. Through this act, Narmer/Menes is able to unite Upper and Lower Egypt, becoming the first king of the 1st Dynasty. His torso faces towards the viewer while his feet and face are shown in profile. This composite view would become an easily identifiable marker of Egyptian artwork, both for art historians studying these works and even for the casual viewer. Because of this, the palette has come to "stand as a symbol of dynastic Egypt itself," therefore cementing the Egyptian artistic canon and setting the stage for all future artistic representations of the elite.[40] This preservation of visual continuity served to help Egypt convey itself as consistent and unwavering as power passed from pharaoh to pharaoh. [41] It is this consistency that helped to maintain Egypt's image as a powerful and stable civilization in the eyes of friends and foes alike.[42]

The gender binary present within Egyptian religion and societal structures is further reinforced within traditional Egyptian art. Both female and male subjects had to abide by the strict artistic canon and its methods of differentiating between the two sexes. These methods,

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[38] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 128.
[39] David O'Connor, " Narmer's Enigmatic Palette," *Archaeology Odyssey* (2004), 16.
[40] O'Connor, " Narmer's Enigmatic Palette," 16.
[41] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 15.
[42] Gay Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* (1994), 33.

such as contrasting skin color, serve to not only separate male and female figures, but to depict them as opposites, reinforcing the concept of duality between genders. Though these religious and artistic conventions were built around an androcentric society, they could be both utilized and altered in order transform the royal personas of those who were not male.

Female Pharaohs

Female pharaohs, while not common, did in fact exist, some turning out to be some of the most influential rulers in Egypt's three-thousand-year history.[43] These female kings include: Merneith (1st Dynasty, ca. 2950 B.C.E.), Sobekneferu (last ruler of 12th Dynasty, mid 1700 B.C.E.), Hatshepsut (18th Dynasty, ca.1473-1458 B.C.E.), Neferneferuaten (18th Dynasty, ca. 1334-1332 B.C.E.), Tawosret (final pharaoh of 19th Dynasty, ca. 1191-1189 B.C.E), and Cleopatra VII (Ptolemaic Period, ca. 69 or 70-30 B.C.E).[44] Nefertiti, wife of Akhenaten, is also expected to have served as sole ruler after her husband's death, though this is not confirmed.[45]

Discovery, Rule, and Erasure of Hatshepsut

This composition will focus on the life, reign, and artistic representations of female pharaoh Hatshepsut as well as the seemingly androgynous male pharaoh Akhenaten. Hatshepsut, originally born as Maatkare, lived from approximately 1507-1458 B.C.E.[46] The identity and legacy of King Hatshepsut remained unknown until 1828, when historian Jean Francois, famous for deciphering the Rosetta Stone, happened upon several male statues that were accompanied by feminine labels.[47] This mismatch of gender between visual and written information likely made

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[43] Brian Alm, "Women of Power and Influence in Ancient Egypt," *Academia* (Academia.edu Publishing, 2023), 19.
[44] Robert K. Liu, "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," *Ornament* (2006), 34.
[45] Alm, "Women of Power and Influence in Ancient Egypt," 2.
[46] Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would Be King," 18.
[47] Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would Be King," 19.

the process of identifying the king much more difficult, forcing her legacy to lie dormant for thousands of years. After this discovery, research began into her life, reign, accomplishments, and ultimate erasure.

Hatshepsut was the daughter of King Thutmose I and his great royal wife, Ahmose.[48] This established her as having direct royal lineage and, therefore, a partial claim to the throne. She was married to her half-brother, Thutmose II, who was born to a minor wife of Thutmose I, Mutnefret. Her other siblings are listed as: Amenmose, Wadjmose, and Neferubity.[49] Hatshepsut and Thutmose II would produce just one daughter together, Neferure.[50] This was Hatshepsut's only child, not counting her stepson/nephew who was born to Thutmose II and a minor wife, Iset, that would become her heir.[51]

It is reported that Thutmose II reigned for only three years after the death of his father before succumbing to illness.[52] At the time of Thutmose II's death, the heir to the throne, Thutmose III was only nine years old, making him too young to rule.[53] His birth mother, being only a secondary wife of Thutmose II, was of too low of class and potentially dead at the time and, therefore, could not rule as his regent. Because of this, Hatshepsut, his stepmother and aunt, was given the position of regent. She ruled as his regent for seven years before eventually appointing herself as king.[54] As she rose to power, Hatshepsut claimed to be not only of royal blood, but also of godly descent. Upon the walls of her mortuary temple, Hatshepsut chronicles

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[48] Edward L. Margetts, "The Masculine Character of Hatshepsut, Queen of Egypt," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1951), 559.
[49] Bernard Paul Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt: New Kingdom Period 18th Dynasty: Including the Princes and Princesses, Royal Titles, Family Trees and Timelines*, (Ark Publishing, 2015), 92.
[50] Alm, "Women of Power and Influence in Ancient Egypt," 5.
[51] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 93.
[52] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 813.
[53] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 813.
[54] Alm, "Women of Power and Influence in Ancient Egypt," 5.

the story of her birth, showing Amun-Ra (the king of gods) impregnating her mortal mother.[55] Hatshepsut reigned as sole ruler of Egypt for approximately two decades (1479 BCE-1458 BCE).

Upon her death, successor, and stepson/nephew Thutmose III, for whom she had ruled as regent, took to the throne.[56] Though the timeline of the following events is highly debated amongst scholars, it is widely believed that Thutmose III's campaign to destroy all evidence of Hatshepsut and her legacy did not begin until towards the end of his reign. He threw statues of her into pits, scratched out inscriptions mentioning her name, and removed her likenesses from temple reliefs. [57] Potential motives for this *damnatio memoriae* span from revenge, to the legitimization of Thutmose III's successor, to the idea that a female ruler may have disrupted the cosmic order of *ma'at*. It was for one, or possibly a combination, of these reasons that "her statues were destroyed, her obelisks walled around, and her name and figure erased from temples and other public structures throughout Egypt and Nubia."[58] The names of other kings were carved over her own, and she was left out of all future lists of kings.[59]

Discovery, Rule, and Erasure of Akhenaten

King Akhenaten met a similar fate after his death. The city of Amarna is named after "the Beni Amran tribe that lived in the region and founded a few settlements." Though before this, the city was known as Akhenaten, "which most translate as meaning 'Horizon of the Aten'."[60] This was of course the holy city constructed by Akhenaten, with the purpose of honoring the new monotheistic religion he had created that worshipped the sun disc, Aten. By moving the religious

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[55] Barbara Lesko, "Women's Monumental Mark on Egypt," (The University of Chicago Press Journals, 1991), 11.
[56] Liu, "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," 34.
[57] Liu, "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," 34.
[58] Charles F. Nims, "The Date of the Dishonoring of Hatshepsut," *Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde (1966), 97*.
[59] Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would be King," 18.
[60] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 97.

center of Egypt from Thebes to Akhenaten, the pharaoh was able to separate himself from the polytheism of the past as well as the cult of Amun, who had come to hold significant power under his father's regime.[61] After Akhenaten's death, the city was abandoned entirely, with many of its monuments purposely destroyed. It wasn't until the 19th century when the city was rediscovered by the West, specifically in expeditions led by William Flinders Petrie. A mummy, who many believe to be that of Akhenaten, was discovered in tomb KV55 in the Valley of the Kings in 1907 by Edward Ayrton.[62] Though this mummy is not confirmed to be Akhenaten, its discovery sparked further research into his previously hidden art, religion, and reign.

King Akhenaten, like Hatshepsut, also ruled during the 18th Dynasty. Originally born Amenhotep IV, he lived from approximately 1353-1336 or 1351-1334 B.C.E. Thus, it can be concluded that he was born between 95 and 97 years after the death of King Hatshepsut.[63] This gap can be seen as rather minor when taking into account the thousands of years in which the ancient Egyptian empire operated. When looking at a family tree of Egyptian royals, one is faced with a complicated web of incestuous marriages, the multiple wives of kings, mysterious deaths, as well as gaps or uncertainties in our own knowledge. To put it simply, royal succession proceeded as such: Hatshepsut > Thutmose III > Amenhotep II > Thutmose IV > Amenhotep III > Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten).[64]

Upon investigating Akhenaten's direct family, it is clear that his parents were Queen Tiye and Amenhotep III. He had several wives, including Nefertiti and Kiya.[65] His list of potential consorts also includes several of his daughters such as Meritaten, Meketaten, Neferneferuaten Ta

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[61] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 16.
[62] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 6-7.
[63] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 159.
[64] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 158.
[65] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 159.

Sherit, and Ankhesenamun (whose name may have been changed upon her marriage to Akhenaten). This leads us to his long list of children: Meritaten, Meketaten, Neferneferuaten Ta Sherit, Ankhesenamun, Neferneferura, Setepenra, and, potentially, Tutankhaten (later changed to Tutankhamun).[66]

Akhenaten was not the first-born male of his father Amenhotep III and, therefore, he was not first in line for the throne. Amenhotep III's eldest son was actually Prince Thutmose, who ended up dying an untimely death by unknown means. His death is dated somewhere between years twenty-seven and thirty-three of his father's reign where he disappears from record.[67] This event caused Akhenaten to eventually ascend to the throne. He was crowned at age sixteen, ruled for approximately seventeen years, and died during the last year of his reign, around 1336 or 1334 B.C.E.[68] The cause of his death has yet to be discovered.[69]

Akhenaten's succession has been somewhat obscured as his name, as well as those who came immediately after him, have been left off of the official list of pharaohs. "The last dated appearance of Akhenaten and the Amarna family is in the tomb of Meryra II, and dates from the second month, of year twelve of his reign. After this, the historical record in unclear, and it is only with the succession of Tutankhamun that Akhenaten's lineage is somewhat clarified."[70] Most sources name Smenkhkare as his initial successor. Because the identity of Smenkhkare is unclear, some speculate that the name "was actually an alias of Nefertiti or Kiya, and therefore one of Akhenaten's wives."[71] When looking at inscriptions from year sixteen of Akhenaten's rule, they confirm "the presence of a living Queen Nefertiti." This proves that "Akhenaten and

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[66] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 160-165.
[67] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 154.
[68] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 5.
[69] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 164-165.
[70] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 52.
[71] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 31.

Nefertiti were still a royal couple just a year prior to Akhenaten's death."[72] Because of this, it is likely that she outlived her husband and potentially served as sole pharaoh for a short time. After Smenkhkare, female pharaoh Neferneferuaten likely came to rule. Though similarly to Smenkhkare, the name Neferneferuaten has also been suggested as a pseudonym of Nefertiti, complicating Akhenaten's succession even further.[73] After Neferneferuaten, whoever she may have truly been, Tutankhaten (later Tutankhamun) ascended to the throne.[74]

Just like Hatshepsut, Akhenaten was vilified after his death. The 18th Dynasty kings who came after him "discredited Akhenaten and his immediate successors, even referring to Akhenaten himself as 'the enemy ' or 'that criminal' in archival records."[75] His succession, as demonstrated above, is incredibly difficult to piece together. This is due to the fact that "Akhenaten, Neferneferuaten, Smenkhkare, Tutankhamun, and Ay were all excised from the official list of Pharaohs, which instead reports that Amenhotep III was immediately succeeded by Horemheb."[76] With his death, also perished the Aten cult. In the second year of his reign (1332 B.C.E.), "Tutankhaten changed his name to Tutankhamun and abandoned the city of Akhenaten, which eventually fell into ruin."[77] Tutankhamun then moved the religious center of Egypt back to the city of Thebes and reinstated the traditional polytheistic religion. [78]

The tomb that contained the possible mummy of Akhenaten housed various "Amarna era objects including a royal funerary mask which had been deliberately destroyed," as well as his sarcophagus which heavily was defaced.[79] Also similar to Hatshepsut, his successors, namely Ay

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[72] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 53.
[73] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 57.
[74] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 56.
[75] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 6.
[76] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 59.
[77] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 58.
[78] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 107.
[79] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 55.

and Horemheb, "disassembled temples Akhenaten had built, including the temple at Thebes, using them as a source of easily available building materials and decorations for their own temples."[80] On top of this, much of the Amarna style artwork created during Akhenaten's reign "was defaced or destroyed in the period following his death, particularly during the reigns of Horemheb and the early 19th Dynasty kings."[81] All of this carnage made the once great city of Akhenaten difficult to discover, shrouding the legacy, life, and religion of Akhenaten in mystery.

Connections Between Kings

Both rulers are remembered for their unique depictions in which they changed their appearance and gender. This was done in order to legitimize their reigns within the wider context of 18th Dynasty Egyptian society. Hatshepsut changed her feminine appearance to masculine so that she could fulfill the masculine role as pharaoh as previously defined, therefore highlighting and honoring the duality of gender within Egyptian religion. This was done by portraying herself with masculine anatomy, as well as adorning herself with the *nemes* headdress and fake royal beard of a pharaoh.[82] Akhenaten, however, created his own religion in which there was only one god. As a result of this, traditional duality was altered, leading Akhenaten to encapsulated both male and female within a single body, likening himself to the genderless Aten. Statues of him feature an elongated, feminine face, with wide hips and a bulbous stomach. Both kings had their names left off of or removed from future lists of pharaohs, leaving their lives, art, and legacies buried under the sand until only recently. Their unique pharaonic identities both dealt with the overarching concept of divine harmony, but in very different ways.

When it comes to how these pharaohs are viewed in modernity, their visual

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[80] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 58.
[81] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 19.
[82] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.

experimentation with gender inevitably comes into play. The growing field of queer theory has been implemented in the study of these depictions, looking to posit possible theories and to deepen our understanding of gender and sexuality in ancient Egypt. However, questions as to gender identity and sexual orientation have focused exclusively on Hatshepsut, leaving Akhenaten out of the conversation completely. In order to formulate potential explanations for this, concepts of gender, sex, and identity must be assessed both in reference to modern scholarship and to this ancient society.

Literature Review

Sex vs. Gender

The exact definitions and implications of sex and gender are highly debated amongst contemporary scholars, both within ancient Egypt and the modern world. Sweeney defines sex as "whether the individual is identified as a male or female," upon birth. She also asserts a distinct difference in the definitions of sex and gender. To Sweeney, gender is "the sum of constantly changing associations, attitudes, and practices prescribed by human social groups for their members according to their sexed bodies."[83] Budin concurs with the idea of this division. She refers to sex simply as a "biological, reproductive designation," while describing gender as "the beliefs held about individuals based on their sex".[84] Sofaer summarizes these perceived differences by asserting that "people do not see each other as genes, but as bodies in the world."[85] Other scholars agree with these dual definitions such as Connell, Matić, and de Beauvoir.[86]

Connell states that while biological sex cannot be chosen, we can indeed "make our own gender."[87] de Beauvoir furthers this line of thought by arguing that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one."[88] In saying this, de Beauvoir establishes sex as a biological identifier and gender as a socially constructed concept. Butler sustains this assertion, defining gender as "a performative practice that simultaneously proclaims and sustains a binary division of our bodies

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[83] Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1.
[84] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 1.
[85] Sofaer as quoted by Uroš Matić, "Gender and Queer Archaeology," *Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (2024), 343.
[86] Connell as quoted by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 8; Matić, "(De)Queering Hatshepsut," 811; de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 77.
[87] Connell as quoted by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 8.
[88] de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex," 77.

through the constant citation of previously established heteronorms."[89] However, she disagrees with de Beauvoir, Connell, Sweeny, and Matić in their distinction between sex and gender. She offers that notion that "if gender is the cultural significance that the sexed body assumes, and if that significance is codetermined through various acts and their cultural perception, then it would appear that from within the terms of culture it is not possible to know sex as distinct from gender."[90] If these distinctions do in fact exist, they become even less clear when, as Walker states, "people in all disciplines" often use the terms "sex and gender interchangeably."[91] Budin echoes this by saying that "there is a tendency in modern academia (and elsewhere) to blur the boundaries between sex and gender."[92]

Biological Sex

Biological sex, just like gender expression, has its nuances. It is important to remember, according to Budin, that "not 100% of humans conform to the XX/XY = female/male paradigm."[93] Many genetic variants exist that result in intersex/hermaphroditic individuals which often go unconsidered in discussions of the perceived binary of biological sex. Biologist Fausto-Sterling defines no fewer than five sexes: "the 'herm' (a true hermaphrodite with one testis and one ovary), the 'merm' (with a testis and some aspects of female genitalia), and the 'ferm' (with ovaries and some aspects of male genitalia)."[94] In terms of antiquity, individuals of variant sexes likely had "a high perinatal death rate, removing them from the general population and

[89] Butler as quoted by Matić, "(De)Queering Hatshepsut," 811.
[90] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* (1988), 524.
[91] Connell as quoted by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 8.
[92] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 8.
[93] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 3.
[94] Fausto Sterling as quoted by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 4.

construction of sex/gender identity."[95] This makes them nearly impossible to study due to the sparse record of their existence.

Gender Over Time and Cultures

Viewpoints on the matter of sex vs. gender depend heavily on the culture and period one is looking at. Scholars such as Budin believe that "the assumption that concepts such as male and female were static across time and space is unsupportable." She also states that many tend to "oversimplify the ways in which people thought about identity and indeed about what it meant to be human."[96] Merleau-Ponty, Butler, and de Beauvoir have referred to gender as a "historical situation" rather than a "natural fact," meaning that gender is not a stable concept and is molded by the society and time in which one operates.[97] Similarly, Matić asserts the importance of acknowledging the differences in how gender and identity were perceived by ancient civilizations compared to modern day.[98] Therefore, when looking at gender in ancient Egypt, it is necessary to examine gender roles and ideals against a background of the political, religious, and societal structures in place at the time being studied.

It is the structures discussed above that help to create the molds in which we are all encouraged to fit. Connell believes that while one can create their gender, it cannot be made "however we like" and that we must bend to "the gender order in which we find ourselves."[99] Continuing this thought, Budin states that "there are two levels of gender manifestation – the individual and the societal." The individual factor operates internally, while the societal factor operates externally.[100] Both Merleau-Ponty and Butler agree with this notion, stating that "the

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[95] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 7.
[96] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 5.
[97] Merleau-Ponty as quoted by Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 520.
[98] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 813.
[99] Connell as quoted by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 8.
[100] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 28.

body is a set of possibilities," though these possibilities are inevitably "constrained by available historical conventions."[101] Butler goes even further by labeling gender as "a strategy of survival," emphasizing the pressure to conform. She calls attention to the consequences of not giving into these societal pressures as "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished."[102]

In terms of ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding sex and gender, Allen argues that "the Egyptians also understood biological sex to be binary, and they expressed the idea in similar ways."[103] According to Onstine, this binary was not only understood, but that "this duality of gender, a balance of masculine and feminine, was central to not only Egyptian kingship, but was a fundamental element of their religion."[104] However, it is incredibly important to acknowledge that while the modern Western world continues to operate primarily on a binary system, that does not mean these systems functioned in the same way.[105] As shown above, there are a multitude of modern definitions of sex and gender as well as their possible distinctions. Sweeney suggests that the widely believed differences between sex and gender should be considered when looking at ancient Egyptian society as well as the art they produced. Meskell on the other hand, argues against the separation of sex and gender as the Egyptians did not do this.[106] Sweeney disagrees, saying that the two in fact coincide.[107] She insists that "gender never operates in isolation, but overlaps with many other factors, such as social standing, age, ethnic background, and so on," and can be altered and expressed through material culture.[108]

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[101] Merleau-Ponty as referenced Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 521.
[102] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 522.
[103] Allen as referenced by Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 18.
[104] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 2.
[105] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812.
[106] Meskell as cited by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1.
[107] Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1.
[108] Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1.

Sexuality, Identity, and Same-Sex Intimacy

Voss notes that sexuality in antiquity is fairly difficult to study because the entire concept is "generally subsumed under 'fertility' and associated with 'cults' of phallic or goddess worship."[109] These are attempts to generalize the extremely complex notion of sexuality and fit it into a nonthreatening/noncontroversial box, such as fertility. It is these generalizations and their lack of true depth that "reify the mistaken notion that the complex sexual politics of the present are a uniquely modern phenomenon."[110] Additionally, the prevalence of sex negativity throughout much of the ancient world (and still today) "has suppressed evidence of sexual diversity in the past."[111] Also stifled by this is the number of texts and artistic works available to study, as many "explicit" images and artifacts have been destroyed. On top of this, as voiced by Matić, Sweeney, and Voss, there is a great difference in which specific acts, beliefs, and imagery are considered to be sexual across different cultures and times.[112] Because of these immense differences, Joyce states that "gender, sexuality, the body, and personhood have become increasingly intertwined in archaeological interpretations."[113]

In reference to divergent sexual orientations and same-sex intimacy, Parkinson argues that Egyptians were not categorized due to sexual preference.[114] It has widely been argued, specifically by Meskell, Matić, Joyce, and Voss, that "before the 19th century, there were no sexual identities, only sexual acts."[115] This means that the intimacy one engaged in did not

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[109] Barbara Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2008), 318.
[110] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 318.
[111] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 318.
[112] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812; Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1; Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 318.
[113] Joyce as referenced by Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 319.
[114] Parkinson as cited by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 7.
[115] Meskell as cited by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 1; Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812; Joyce as referenced by Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 319; Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 323.

constitute an integral part of their identity, but was rather a purely corporeal experience with a beginning and an end. Foucault agrees with this thought, positing that both homosexuality and heterosexuality were not considered "distinct sexual natures" until approximately 1870.[116] This, of course, is far from the time of the ancient Egyptians and not too far removed from even modern day when looking at the great expanse of human history. Voss reasserts the notion of sexual acts over sexual orientation, stating that "the current emphasis on sexuality as a determinant of social identity appears to be a relatively modern Western phenomenon, with many present and past cultures emphasizing gendered differences more than sexual partner choice."[117]

Beliefs on same-sex intimacy were also viewed very differently in ancient Egypt than they are today. As established above, one's sexual acts or preferences were not considered to be part of their identity, and terms referring to sexual orientation did not exist during the time we are discussing.[118] When investigating same-sex intimacy in ancient Egypt, most research has focused on male same-sex pairings rather than female. According to Voss, Matić, and Budin, sexual relations between two males was not taboo.[119] Instead, what was more important is the position each individual played within the encounter. This can be seen in mythology concerning Horus and Seth where the active role, that of penetrator was painted as masculine and dominant. The passive role, or that of the penetrated, was seen as acting as a woman, and therefore undesirable or disgraceful.[120] This difference of views between ancient Egypt and modern society is perhaps

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[116] Foucault as referenced by Matić, "Gender and Queer Archaeology," 344.
[117] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 323.
[118] Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 178.
[119] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 323; Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 178; Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 264.
[120] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 264.

highlighted best by Matić, stating that same-sex intimacy had no legal implications and was "not the subject of medical and psychiatric examinations like in the West."[121]

Queer Theory

Queer theory, as put by Voss, "was developed to better understand the ways that normative social structures are promulgated and reproduced."[122] Boellstorff, Halperin, and Joyce further this notion by describing how this lens of questioning "foregrounds the interdependence of gendered and sexual identities," and "facilitates an integrated approach" when researching these complex and ever-changing concepts.[123] This theory draws heavily from "feminist theories of gender and sexuality," which are closely linked to the interpretations of Butler as already reviewed above. [124] Morris echoes the conclusions made by Butler regarding the construction of gender through repeated performance of social norms. Queer theory must first address these norms of gender and sexuality of the past before being able to determine what counts as a deviation from said norms. These societal standards are established by queer theorists through the examination of primary text sources as well as the visual representations of a certain culture during a certain time. As demonstrated via the literature review, it is widely agreed that concepts of gender and sexuality are not universal and are heavily grounded in the time and place of study.[125] Because of this, there is a separation that must occur between modern thought and the conceptions, beliefs, and societal norms of ancient cultures. Though in terms of the case of Hatshepsut, these distinctions are not always considered.

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[121] Matić, "(De)Queering Hatshepsut," 812.
[122] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 330.
[123] Boellstorff, Halperin, and Joyce as referenced by Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 323.
[124] Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology," 328.
[125] Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 180.

Hatshepsut's Depictions and Speculation

Female pharaoh Hatshepsut, though incredibly accomplished, is perhaps most famous for portraying herself as male in various royal sculptures and inscriptions and donning traditional masculine dress and anatomy.[126] When discussing Hatshepsut and her masculine representations, it is highly debated whether or not modern ideas, terms, and identities can, or should be, translated onto ancient cultures. Recent discourse has focused largely on her male depictions and whether or not they might point to a specific gender identity or sexual orientation.[127] Matić believes that this translation leads to the queering of anyone who breaks a binary system that we do not understand.[128] In other words, it is counterproductive to assume that a male/female, sex/gender system is a "cross-cultural fact".[129] Matić, Šehović, and Sweeney are pushing for the deconstruction of "hetero-normative interpretations of the past."[130] This can be achieved through the emphasis of Hatshepsut's accomplishments as pharaoh as well as paying greater attention to the religious and political motivations of these depictions over concerns of her personal identity.[131]

Margetts argues that Hatshepsut's male depictions as king were indeed influenced by her personal identity. He presents the rather extreme theory that Hatshepsut's masculine depictions might "indicate a maladjustment in heterosexuality," or "abnormal psychology."[132] Popular culture, along with the quickly expanding field of queer theory, suggest that she may have been

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[126] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 27.
[127] Matić, "(De)Queering Hatshepsut," 810.
[128] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 810.
[129] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 811.
[130] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812; Amina Šehović, "Ancient Egyptian Female Pharaoh Hatshepsut as a Model of Female Power in Antiquity and Her Visual Representation: The Gender Issue of the 'Royal Queer'," *Societatea de Analize Feministe AnA* (2022), 156; Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 2.
[131] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812.
[132] Margetts, "The Masculine Character of Hatshepsut, Queen of Egypt," 561.

transgender or simply gender-nonconforming. Dorman and Matić warn against the potential logical fallacies that can be crafted by incorrectly translating modern ideas onto ancient societies.[133] Šehović makes clear that these representations were public versions of the king, not private. Such public representations of pharaohs "were embellished and never portrayed intriguing or personal details of life." In other words, Hatshepsut's pharaonic imagery was "nothing personal," and "nothing human is contained in it."[134]

While several scholars, such a Margetts, claim that her masculine and androgynous images are evidence of "abnormal psychology", it is this kind of thinking that firmly keeps her within the confines of the gender-binary as European modernity perceives it.[135] It has been highly suggested that any further analysis of Hatshepsut's various gender expressions should go beyond her physical body, considering the context of how ancient Egyptians viewed their rulers, gods, ancestors, sex, and gender as a whole.[136] There have been many reasons posited by scholars as to the purpose of Hatshepsut depicting herself in masculine attire and with male anatomy within artwork. The leading theory is that she was simply continuing the long-established tradition of male presenting pharaohs. This idea is shared by Matić, Hilliard and Wurtzel, Kim-Brown, and many others.[137] Hilliard and Wurtzel argue that she "had to defy the typical feminine visual representation used by queens before her in order to establish herself as king," and that she was "slowly addressing the intersections of gender and kingship, cultivating a new pharaonic identity."[138]

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[133] Peter Dorman, "Wicked Stepmother or Joan of Arc," *The University of Chicago Digital Collections* (2004), 1; Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 817.
[134] Amina Šehović, "Ancient Egyptian Female Pharaoh Hatshepsut as a Model of Female Power in Antiquity and Her Visual Representation: The Gender Issue of the 'Royal Queer'," 156.
[135] Margetts, "The Masculine Character of Hatshepsut, Queen of Egypt," 559 and 561.
[136] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 810.
[137] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 815; Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25; Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would be King," 20.
[138] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.

Problems in Research

When examining the views and practices of ancient cultures, one must remember that, as put by Budin, "in most instances in antiquity, data are provided by men, as they were the most common scribes, authors, and artists."[139] This can pose a problem when delving into topics such as sex, gender, religion, and women's rights as we are provided almost solely with the dominant viewpoint of the time. Onstine concurs with the assertions of Budin, stating that "much of what we know about gender in general and with respect to religion specifically, comes from a male point of view," as the few "religious texts and images that survive are largely a product of male elite culture."[140] On top of this, Onstine argues that the narrative has been further skewed "because the nature of visual sources is largely to portray an idealized version of both men and women."[141] This focus on the idealized elite makes it difficult to delve into the practices, views, and depictions of the wider Egyptian population.

Akhenaten's Depictions and Speculation

Transitioning now to Akhenaten, there are countless theories as to why he chose to depict himself, and his family, in a more androgynous and even sickly way. These images are somewhat more naturalistic than the idealized figures that had been the standard for Egyptian art up until that point; though at the same time, they are also more stylized. This iconography painted the royal family with what Foerster describes as "elongated heads, protruding stomachs, heavy hips, thin arms and legs, and exaggerated facial features."[142] Many scholars have posited that these bizarre attributes could be indicative of some sort of body altering illness or genetic

[139] Budin, *Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 28.
[140] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 1.
[141] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 1.
[142] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 21.

disorder. For example, Aldred, Smith, and Strachey have suggested that the king may have suffered from Froelich's Syndrome/Adiposogenital Dystrophy.[143] Froelich's Syndrome would explain some of his exaggerated features, but because the disorder results in sterility, and Akhenaten fathered several children, this theory has been disproven. Ashrafian, a surgeon at Imperial College London has put forth the theory that Akhenaten and potentially several of his family members may have suffered from Familial Temporal Epilepsy as it accounts for "his abnormal endocrine body shape." This theory might also explain "Akhenaten's religious conviction due to this type of epilepsy's association with intense spiritual visions and religiosity."[144]

Burridge, on the other hand, has theorized the presence of Marfan's Syndrome. This syndrome is "associated with a sunken chest and long curved spider-like fingers." Additionally, individuals suffering from this illness tend to be "taller than average, with a long thin face, and elongated skull, overgrown ribs, a funnel or pigeon chest, and larger pelvis, with enlarged thighs and spindly calves."[145] Most of these external physical features are indeed present in depictions of Akhenaten and could be a possible explanation. However, DNA tests performed in 2010 on the confirmed mummy of Tutankhamun, of whom Akhenaten is the supposed father of, proved that Tutankhamun is negative for Marfan Syndrome.[146] As this disease has a 50% chance of being passed on to one's offspring, this theory could still be possible whether or not Akhenaten is indeed the father of Tutankhamun.

The mummy most often posited to be that of Akhenaten (mummy 61074) was "found in

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[143] Aldred, Smith, and Strachey as referenced by Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 21.
[144] Ashrafian as referend by Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 83-84.
[145] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 77.
[146] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 78.

KV55, an unfinished tomb in the Valley of the Kings."[147] While there are many theories that support this conclusion, it is in no way confirmed. Much of this claim seems to be based on the idea that Akhenaten fathered Tutankhamun with one of his biological sisters, a mummy known as "The Younger Lady." This is because DNA analysis has confirmed this woman to be the mother of Tutankhamun.[148] While this evidence makes his paternal role possible, and even likely, as some would say, it does not prove this claim.

Beyond the realm of genetic disorders, Winckelman suggested that the anatomy of Akhenaten's body was realistic, and the artist was portraying what he saw."[149] Though the heavily stylized and oddly proportioned nature of Akhenaten's depictions goes against this theory of naturalism. James puts forth yet another possibility for these images that is clearly unique from the others. He suggests that "the Aten cult was influenced by the Mesopotamian goddess Innana, who appeared in the shape of a sun disc above the kings of Mesopotamia in the period before Akhenaten."[150] However, no solid evidence has been found to support this idea at the time of writing.

After all of these theories of genetic disorders, naturalism, and cross-cultural influence it is Montserrat who asserts: "there is now a broad consensus among Egyptologists that the exaggerated forms of Akhenaten's physical portrayals are not to be read literally."[151] He argues that Akhenaten was perhaps made to look "androgynous in artwork as a symbol of the androgyny of the god Aten."[152] In Amarna tomb texts as well as in the *Hymn to Aten*, supposedly

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[147] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 24.
[148] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 27.
[149] Winckelman as referenced by Sara Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 5.
[150] James as referenced by Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 5.
[151] Montserrat as quoted by Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 80.
[152] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 80-81.

composed by Akhenaten himself, Aten is referred to as: "'mother and father' of all that is."[153] This theory of Akhenaten using androgynous depictions of himself to become the earthly embodiment of the genderless entity Aten is widely accepted in the field. Images and sculptures of Akhenaten done in the Amarna style therefore serve as "a symbolic gathering of all the attributes of the creator god into the physical body of the king himself." This allows the pharaoh to "display on earth the Aten's multiple life-giving functions."[154]

There is great emphasis on the creative power of Aten and how that power was instilled in the human body. Abdoh states that Akhenaten searched for this "hidden power in the bodies of humans, and found that it is present in fertility."[155] This puts forth a specific explanation as to why the abdominal region of the pharaoh seems to be appear swollen in most all of his depictions, as if he were pregnant. Furthermore, Abdoh theorizes that the circular shape found within the torso of a pregnant body takes on a whole new meaning in itself. Created from nothing, with no beginning or end, "the circle represents the soul and universe." In other words, the circle symbolizes a regenerative, cosmic power, given to the Egyptian people by the circular sun disc of Aten, that lies within the human body. As written in the *Hymn to Aten*: "you who places seed in woman, and makes sperm into man."[156]

Implementation of Queer Theory

While countless theories are suggested by scholars to explain the androgynous appearance of Akhenaten, surprisingly, none examine these depictions through the lens of queer theory. Hatshepsut, however, has been faced with barrage of theories questioning her gender

[153] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 24.
[154] Montserrat as quoted by Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 81.
[155] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 9.
[156] *The Hymn to Aten* as quoted by Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 9.

identity and sexual orientation. It is clear that both pharaohs changed their appearance for several widely accepted reasons concerning political and religious motivations. So, while many of the theories around Hatshepsut's male imagery are not centered around "queering" her through the use of modern perceptions, they are certainly the ones that have gained the most attention. Though both kings altered their gender via art, it is clear that Hatshepsut was merely continuing pharaonic tradition while it was in fact Akhenaten who stepped far outside the box of the ancient Egyptian artistic canon.

Disparity in Study

There are multiple reasons why queer theory has clung to the depictions of Hatshepsut far more so than those of Akhenaten. For example, perhaps it was her unique position as a female pharaoh that has caused her to be looked at more closely by Egyptologists, while Akhenaten's maleness allowed him to avoid these questions of identity and gender. Because Hatshepsut was perceived as breaking tradition by becoming a sole female ruler, she has been assumed to have continued defying norms, even if that wasn't exactly the case. This has created a sort of ripple effect that has led some to the conclusion that she rejected the established gender system altogether, by portraying herself as what modern viewers have readily identified as transgender.

Though Hatshepsut ultimately landed on strictly male imagery while Akhenaten eventually stuck with androgyny, both pharaohs have been shown as male, androgynous, and feminine throughout their representational journeys. Having a similar repertoire of iconography, why is it that the male depictions of Hatshepsut have been brought to the forefront? Is it possible that Hatshepsut has garnered more attention and queer questioning by ultimately crossing the binary rather than encompassing it like Akhenaten? Another possibility for this disparity in queer inquiry is the fact that Akhenaten was routinely represented with his female counterpart,

Nefertiti, while Hatshepsut never remarried after Thutmose II's death and is usually portrayed alone. Could it be that scenes of Akhenaten and Nefertiti are seen as adhering to current heterosexual perceptions, while Hatshepsut's lack of a visual heterosexual partnership causes individuals to jump to what can only be defined as the "opposite" conclusion?

The uniqueness of this study lies in the acknowledgement of this difference in study between Hatshepsut and Akhenaten in regard to queer theory. In order to assess the possible reasons for this, one must first develop an in-depth understanding of how various facets of ancient Egyptian society operated. This includes the state of women's rights and social positions, gender dualities within society and religion, as well as the canonical differentiations of genders within artwork. Against a background of a detailed study of gender expectations and expressions in 18th Dynasty Egypt, different artworks depicting Hatshepsut and Akhenaten will be examined. By understanding the visual symbolism present within these works, we can begin to gain insights into their social, religious, and political purposes. Through the analysis of these works, concepts of sex, gender performance/gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and tradition will be addressed.

Results/Analysis

Linking Hatshepsut and Akhenaten

Upon reviewing the vast amount of literature compiled on the lives, reigns, and artistic representations of King Hatshepsut and King Akhenaten of 18th Dynasty Egypt, it is easy to see why these two pharaohs stand out. However, despite all of their similarities, existing literature fails to link the two together. If one does appear in literature concerning the other, it is only in passing. Both produced striking imagery that now fascinates modern viewers by manipulating their gender within artwork, whether that be by crossing over the binary entirely or uniting it. By doing this, they were able to acknowledge the inherent dualities found within life, art, and religion and address them in ways that were most conducive to their political, social, and religious goals.[157] Considering goals such as these in reference to the artwork created is paramount.[158] Both kings constructed their pharaonic identities with the intent of asserting power, connecting to divinity, and legitimizing their rule.[159] But in the end, both had their images and names erased from the record, leaving their legacies hidden for modern archaeologists to uncover thousands of years later.[160]

Leading Theories

Though many reasons for these depictions have been expressed by the scholars above, the leading theory concerning Hatshepsut and her masculine persona is simply the continuation of the distinctly male iconography of the long-established pharaonic image.[161] In this way, she was able to paint herself as the father of Egypt, as was the role of the pharaoh. Akhenaten instead

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[157] Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," 3.
[158] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 813.
[159] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 99.
[160] Kim-Brown, "The Woman Who Would Be King," 18
[161] Matić, "(De)queering Hatshepsut," 812.

used a primarily mixed gendered approach in order to liken himself to the formless, genderless Aten, the primary god of his newly founded monotheistic religion.[162] Through his iconography, he was able to embody the roles of both mother and father.[163] However, even though researchers have landed on a widely accepted theory as to the depictions of each pharaoh, this does not mean that other lines of questioning have ceased to exist.

Continued Inquiry

Beyond the religious functions of Akhenaten's androgynous imagery, his iconography is mainly examined with the potential of a genetic disorder in mind.[164] Most of the discourse surrounding Hatshepsut, however, seems to be personal. With the ever-growing popularity of queer theory, her male likenesses have led to a certain curiosity as to her perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation.[165] These inquiries and assertions are not inherently harmful, though they seem to detach her from all of the social, political, and spiritual motivations behind her royal image. This detachment puts aside all of the context around her rule and the Egyptian civilization at large that has been repeatedly established. What is strange, however, is the fact that Akhenaten's androgynous and sometimes even feminine images have not been met with even a fraction of the theories questioning his personal identity as faced by Hatshepsut.

Intention of Study

My goal is to provide potential reasons as to why this disparity in queer oriented study exists between the two kings. To do this, one must examine the social, political, and religious structures present in 18th Dynasty Egypt as well as modern discourse on the topic. As 20th-21st

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[162] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 78.
[163] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 9.
[164] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 72.
[165] Liu, "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," 34.

century theories on the matter have already been discussed, the next step is to provide ample research as to how ancient Egypt operated, from looking at the rights and positions of men and women, to sexuality, gender, and identity, to the deeply rooted dualities within the Egyptian religion. Once the functioning of this ancient civilization has been reconstructed, the artistic representations of Hatshepsut and Akhenaten can be examined upon a rich background of vital cultural context. Establishing this context will help immensely in addressing how these depictions were perceived, not just by the people over which these pharaohs ruled, but by the modern eye as well.

Importance of Biological Sex

When considering these pharaohs, the most obvious difference between the two is that Hatshepsut is biologically female while Akhenaten is male. This fact is likely the root of a large amount of the discourse regarding her personal identity. It is no secret that men and women have different expectations thrust upon them by the culture in which they exist. Therefore, it can be determined that Hatshepsut and Akhenaten, because of their difference in biological gender, operated under extremely different expectations, perceptions, and cultural norms. In order to properly assess the assertions regarding gender, sexuality, and personal identity posed through the lens of queer theory, we must first understand how ancient Egyptians viewed these concepts, which is no small task. We will first survey the state of women's rights at the time in comparison to those of men, as this forms the very basis of the gender system at large.

Rights and Roles of Men

The distinctions between the lives of men and women in ancient Egyptian society are made clear when examining the legal rights and social standing of each gender. Men in ancient Egypt had the right to own property, participate in legal proceedings, as well as engage in

commerce and agriculture.[166] They could also hold various religious titles through which they could participate in and lead rituals, as well as hold titles of nobility. These included titles such as: "priest," "governor," "overseer of the chamber," "overseer of the army," and, of course, "pharaoh."[167] It was possible for women to achieve both positions of nobility and religious significance, but was very rare.[168] It was even possible for women to become pharaoh, as we have already discovered.

In terms of professions, men were typically expected to follow in the footsteps of their fathers when they came of age. These career paths were closely tied to one's social status, which was fairly static, but could conceivably be altered. It was "expected of men to establish themselves in their career before seeking a wife."[169] These differences between higher and lower ranking men also determined the quality of education they would receive with separate schools reserved for nobility. [170] Schools, no matter your class, taught subjects such as "mathematics, geography, history, and medicine."[171] At around fourteen years of age, a young boy would leave school with the goal of beginning his career. Upper class men typically went into positions of business and government, while lower class males began working in agriculture, cloth weaving, or even as slaves to the rich.[172]

Multiple Masculinities

Like many other cultures, there were multiple types of masculinity to be cultivated. In so-called "honor cultures" as ancient Egypt was, respect (or honor) became a man's "most prized

[166] Stephen Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," *Legends and Chronicles* (2021), 1.
[167] Fredrick Arthur, "Titles in Ancient Egypt," *Bibalex.org*. (Bibalex, 2024), 1.
[168] Smith "Ancient Egyptian Men," 1.
[169] Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," 2.
[170] Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," 1.
[171] Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," 3.
[172] Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," 3.

possession."[173] Therefore, the prevailing archetype of idealized masculinity at any certain time can be determined by examining what a man had to do or what traits he had to possess in order to achieve honor. In predynastic Egypt, when the state was unstable, the warrior mentality was in place. This initial type of honor culture "privileged violence, economic independence, and the ability to mobilize personal connections to avenge perceived slights."[174] As summed up by Hobbes: "Reputation of power, is Power."[175]

However, as the state stabilized and power became centralized, this system of rewarding those who commit violent acts "constituted an ever-present threat to royal authority."[176] In order to transform Egyptian men from "warriors into courtiers," the pharaoh had to alter how men achieved honor. [177] To do this, one must first "eliminate opportunities to enhance honor through violence," and praise other types of behavior instead.[178] "Militarized masculinity" was slowly replaced by a push for literacy and cultural sophistication. This is supported by the drop in weapons found in later burial sites.[179] The previous way of attaining glory through military success was then "actively denigrated" in order to cement the establishment of the new honor culture.[180] Masculine attributes were now gained through internal pursuits rather than external. Now it was scribes that were held above soldiers within Egypt's social hierarchy. A teacher advised his students: 'Be a scribe, that your limbs may become sleek and your hands soft, that you may go out dressed in white, finding yourself promoted to higher status, that courtiers might greet you."[181]

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[173] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 140.
[174] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 140.
[175] Hobbes as quoted by Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 140.
[176] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 143.
[177] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 150.
[178] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 143.
[179] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 129.
[180] Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities,"159.
[181] Vernus as quoted by Morris, "Machiavellian Masculinities," 158.

Pharaonic Masculinity

The pharaoh, however, adhered to different constructs than the common man or even other elites. As "Egypt's defender, the semidivine king is hyper masculinized," and "highly adversarial."[182] The king is said to be an embodiment of both Horus and Seth, "deriving his power from the fusion of justice and loyalty with wildness."[183] Royal masculinity includes traits such as sexual potency (with the goal of creating a male heir), dominance (over both other civilizations and fellow elites), and valor (both in war and domestic pursuits). Although it was rare, sometimes the king could be portrayed as "lovable and even affectionate," without betraying his tough exterior.[184] Both "dominance and grace were essential elements of his rule," returning to the concept of duality and the pharaoh's embodiment of both Horus and Seth.[185]

Rights and Roles of Women

We must also take into account what rights were held by women at the time, what roles they played in society, as well as their influence on religion and politics. When looking at the rights and roles of women in ancient Egypt, one might be surprised as to how they compare to those of other ancient civilizations and even to so-called "advanced societies."[186] They were allowed to enter the general workforce, own property, pursue education, and marry and divorce as they pleased.[187] They essentially enjoyed a legal status "nearly identical with that of Egyptian men."[188] This was vastly different from ancient Greece where women held no legal identity

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[182] Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 2-6.
[183] Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 2.
[184] O'Connor and Silverman as referenced by Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 6.
[185] Parkinson and Assmann as referenced Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," 2.
[186] Edwards, Amelia Blandford, and Patricia O'Neill. "The Social and Political Position of Woman in Ancient Egypt," *PMLA* (2005), 843.
[187] Edwards, Blandford, and O'Neill. "The Social and Political Position of Woman in Ancient Egypt," 844.
[188] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 1.

whatsoever and could not own property. Because of this, they would need to be represented by their fathers or husbands in court proceedings rather than acting on their own behalf, as they did in Egypt.[189]

It is clear to see that women in ancient Egypt enjoyed an abundance of legal rights that were not granted to their contemporaries living in other Near East societies. One must also acknowledge, however, the existence of a "great disparity between the social and legal status of women."[190] For example, a man's social status was derived from the job he held within the public sphere. This established his worth, influence, and social class. On the other hand, a women's social status was determined by her relation to the men in her life, such as her father, husband, and brothers, and what jobs/titles they possessed.[191] Because women held less of a public role than men, they were therefore defined by their domestic identities. To quote a New Kingdom text entitled *The Instructions of (a man named) Any*: "A woman is asked about her husband, a man is asked about his rank."[192] Some incredibly telling insight can be gathered by reading a passage from *The Instruction of the (Vizier) Ptahhotep*, from Middle Kingdom Egypt:

> *"When you prosper and found your house and love your wife with ardor, fill her belly, clothe her back; ointment soothes her body. Gladden her heart as long as you live; she is a fertile field for her lord."*

In short, it is deemed an important part of one's masculinity to love one's wife, take care of her, and treat her kindly, with of course the ultimate goal of producing children. However, this quote is immediately followed with the text found below:

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[189] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 4.
[190] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 1.
[191] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 1.
[192] *The Instructions of (a man named) Any* as quoted by Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 1.

"Do not contend with her in court. Keep her from power, restrain her – her eye is her storm when she gazes. Thus, will you make her stay in your house."[193]

After exploring the nearly equal legal rights between men and women in ancient Egypt, it may be a bit jarring to return to this androcentric line of thinking. Because of the robust legal rights of women, it was necessary that other societal structures whether they be social, political, or religious be more conducive to maintaining the patriarchal society in which they lived. Being aware of the legal vs. social status of women is "of major importance in understanding how the Egyptian system actually worked."[194] This is also true when considering what positions a woman could hold.

Much information about a person's life can be found on funerary stelae. These death monuments bore any titles that were held by the deceased during life and were fairly common in various social classes, not just those of the elite or royal. Because of this, these stelae reveal many of the surprisingly varied roles held by women in ancient Egyptian society. Titles such as "judge," "vizier," "physician," "scribe," and "farmer" were found on women's stelae, along with more specific positions such as "Director of Dining Hall," "Overseer of Funerary Priests," and "Overseer of the Weavers' House."[195] If no other titles were listed, a common one was "Mistress of the House", denoting a woman's importance and power within her household.[196] On top of this, there are inscriptions within 18th Dynasty temples that describe women acting as

[193] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 1-2.
[194] Johnson, "Women's Legal Rights in Ancient Egypt," 2.
[195] Lesko, "Women's Monumental Mark on Ancient Egypt," 5.
[196] Lesko, "Women's Monumental Mark on Ancient Egypt," 8.

priestesses.[197] This multitude of titles portrays women as having a much more active role in society than previously thought.

Expectations of Women

Despite these varied roles, comprehensive legal rights, and the existence of several female pharaohs, we must lend immense credence to how women were *expected* to behave and participate in society. It is important to acknowledge the fact that men were still viewed as above women in ancient Egypt. As demonstrated above, especially via the excerpt of *The Instruction of the (Vizier) Ptahhotep*, women were expected to play a primarily domestic role and were discouraged from holding positions outside of the home or participating in public life. Ambition and autonomy were seen as negative qualities that threatened the very structure of the firmly established patriarchy. In the end, the ultimate purpose of an ancient Egyptian woman was widely believed to be the production of offspring and caring for the home, as these were the social norms ingrained into Egyptian society.[198]

The Novelty of a Female Pharaoh

While the expectations of men varied over time, expectations of women were largely centered around childrearing, managing the household, and occupying the seemingly submissive role within heterosexual relationships. Men were defined by their public identity (such as their occupation) and women were defined by their domestic identity.[199] Because of this, it would naturally be jarring to see a woman step out of her firmly established domestic role in order to occupy a public position instead, especially the position of pharaoh. Though it was clearly possible for a woman to rule as king, it was far from the norm. This made Hatshepsut's kingship

[197] Edwards, Blandford, and O'Neill, "The Social and Political Position of Woman in Ancient Egypt," 851.
[198] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.
[199] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.

more of an anomaly than that of Akhenaten, or even somewhat of a novelty in the eyes of a modern viewer. It is for this reason that the actions, behaviors, and images of a female pharaoh were likely put under a larger spotlight than those of a traditional male pharaoh. This caused her life, rule, and artistic representations largely being examined in reference to her gender rather than focusing on other aspects of her reign such as her accomplishments.[200]

Therefore, upon the discovery of her seemingly transgender iconography, as seen in *Hatshepsut with Offering Jars* ca. 1479-1458 B.C.E. (fig. 1), the concept of being a novelty is pushed even further, leading to curiosity surrounding her gender identity. The heavy focus on her identity as a woman detaches her from the various political and religious motivations behind the construction of her male persona, such as legitimizing her rule, connecting herself to male deities, and conforming to pharaonic imagery. Many 21st century onlookers simply see a woman being shown in male attire and often with male anatomy. This immediate jump to queer questioning neglects to acknowledge the artistic conventions of the time, leading viewers to think that she is breaking tradition rather than adhering to it, as has been widely concluded.[201]

This investigation into personal identity based on kingly appearance becomes even more interesting due to the fact that Hatshepsut was not the first female pharaoh to adopt a royal male identity. It was around three-hundred years earlier, that Sobekneferu, last pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty, became the first female king to depict herself as masculine within artwork. This was done for the same reasons as Hatshepsut: continuing tradition and legitimizing her position.[202] It was Sobekneferu who "promoted a separation of masculinity from the male body," allowing the

[200] Matić, "Gender and Queer Archaeology," 343.
[201] Šehović, "Ancient Egyptian Female Pharaoh Hatshepsut as a Model of Female Power in Antiquity and Her Visual Representation," 158.
[202] Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 272.

expression of masculine concepts such as kingship without having to be biologically male.[203] And just is the case with Hatshepsut, it vital to remember that "what is preserved pertains only to her public image not her private life."[204]

Hatshepsut with Offering Jars

Such well-preserved works as *Hatshepsut with Offering Jars* ca. 1479-1458 B.C.E. (fig. 1) allow for thorough examination of what type of attributes she presented to the public. In this statue, the female pharaoh is depicted with male anatomy, and dressed in male clothing. She is seen wearing a ceremonial beard and a *nemes* headdress, both powerful pharaonic symbols, the latter aiming to liken pharaohs to cobras due to their shape.[205] The cloth head covering is often adorned with an *uraeus*, or small cobra ornament that is phallic in shape and associated with Amun-Ra, the creator god, whom Hatshepsut claimed to be her divine father.[206] This highlights Hatshepsut's various religious motives in presenting herself as occupying a male body. In order to further legitimize her reign, she made known not only her birth right to rule, but her divine right as well. Upon the walls of her mortuary temple, Hatshepsut chronicles the story of her birth, showing Amun-Ra (the King of Gods) impregnating her mortal mother. Throughout her lifetime, she produced a multitude of temples, obelisks, and other monuments to honor Amun-Ra.[207] Here, she is shown kneeling in respect to her divine father, as pharaohs knelt only before gods. She extends to him votive offerings, both to express her gratitude for the power he had bestowed upon her, as well as to ensure further success and prosperity.[208] The pharaoh wears a male tunic, exposing a flat, masculine chest. These physically male bodies presented a link with

[203] Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 272.
[204] Diamond, "Gender, Deities, and the Public Image of Sobekneferu," 273.
[205] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.
[206] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 27.
[207] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.
[208] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.

which Hatshepsut could firmly connect herself to the male god Horus, of which pharaohs were said to be the earthly manifestations of, according to Egyptian mythology.[209]

Akhenaten Perception and Iconography

Akhenaten's maleness naturally meant that his position as pharaoh was less shocking, possibly serving as a barrier against the potential scrutiny and questioning of his identity that he may have received upon being female. Upon first glance, it seems that Hatshepsut was the one who strayed from pharaonic tradition, when in fact it was Akhenaten. Instead of portraying himself as masculine and idealized, he flipped the artistic canon on its head and painted himself as androgynous, sometimes even feminine. If investigated via queer theory like Hatshepsut, some might claim that Akhenaten was non-binary or otherwise non-gender conforming. Though upon further research, these claims are nowhere to be found, demonstrating the different approaches scholars have taken in studying the male representations of Hatshepsut and the androgynous imagery of Akhenaten. Though he did not adopt female dress, he certainly utilized female anatomy as can be seen in the *Colossus of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten in the Khat and Double Crown* ca. 1350-1333 B.C.E. (fig. 2). In order to properly examine the intentions and symbolism of this work, the specifics of Akhenaten's religion must be explained.

The Cult of Aten

Akhenaten (originally Amenhotep IV) changed his name upon becoming pharaoh. This was done during the fifth year of his reign in order to connect himself to the new, monotheistic religion he had established, fervently separating himself from the polytheism of Egypt's past. This new religion centered around the sun disc known as Aten, rather than the chief creator god

[209] Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 177.

Amun and the various gods he birthed.[210] The name Akhenaten means "Son of Ra, Blessed Akh-Spirit of Aten."[211] During his father's reign (Amenhotep III), the priesthood of Amun had become increasingly powerful, threatening governmental authority all the way up to the throne.[212] Once King, Akhenaten sought to alter this hierarchy of influence and bring all power back to the pharaoh once again. He made it clear to the people of Egypt that "Aten was not merely the supreme god, but the only god."[213] He also claimed that he, as the king of Egypt and sole ruler of this new religion, was the "only intermediary between Aten and his people."[214] Many scholars believe this to be "the first instance of monotheism in history."[215]

This religious shift began in the first year of his reign in which he continued work on pylons started by his father at the Karnak Temple Complex. However, upon their completion, the monuments were not dedicated to Amun, but rather Aten.[216] During the second year of his reign, he began constructing temples in Thebes, the religious center of Egypt at the time, in which he replaced the name of Amun with Aten.[217] By regnal year four, he started work on the city of Akhenaten as well as a new artistic style.

The Colossus of Akhenaten

When looking at the *Colossus of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten in the Khat and Double Crown* ca. 1350-1333 B.C.E. (fig. 2), it is quite evident just how far it strays from the usually idealized, muscular depictions of past pharaohs. Traditionally, both royal men and women were shown in an idealistic style. Women were typically shown as "youthful and slender." While men

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[210] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 161-162.
[211] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 159.
[212] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 161.
[213] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 163.
[214] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 163.
[215] Smith, "Ancient Egyptian Men," 5.
[216] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 161.
[217] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 161.

were also portrayed as young, they exhibited highly defined musculature not seen in females.[218] This representation of Akhenaten, however, could not be more different from the previously described canon. He sports the strap on fake beard of a traditional pharaoh as well as the Double Crown, a symbol of the union between Upper and Lower Egypt.[219] His chest is exposed, and he wears a masculine kilt. This is where tradition ends. When looking at the forms of his body, they appear very soft and organic with an undulating silhouette. Every feature from his face, to the one arm present, to his torso are noticeably elongated.[220] What appears most prevalent, however, is his exaggerated hourglass shape, giving him an overtly feminine appearance. On top of this, his abdomen appears swollen and sagging, as if pregnant. As for his facial features, the eyes appear large, the bridge of his nose long, and his lips full.[221]

It is clear that Akhenaten's figure does not reflect the previously established masculine ideals of pharaonic representation. In this depiction, his chest is flat and clearly male. Upon being coupled with more curvaceous features, the form seems to be androgynous. This gender ambiguity is perhaps Akhenaten's way of translating the duality of male and female from the traditional Egyptian religion to the one he created.[222] He reconciles the differences between men and women by becoming a representation of both. This androgyny is essential to conveying the creative power held within the single god of Aten, who represents the unity between genders.[223] In the traditional polytheistic religion of ancient Egypt, it was pairs of male and female deities, as well as the semi-divine king and queen who managed the duality of the genders. Through this

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[218] Mary Ann Eaverly, *Tan Men/Pale Women: Color and Gender in Archaic Greece and Egypt, a Comparative Approach*. University of Michigan Press, 2013: 29
[219] Jacquelyn Williamson, "Evidence for Innovation and Experimentation on the Akhenaten Colossi," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (2019), 27.
[220] Williamson, "Evidence for Innovation and Experimentation on the Akhenaten Colossi," 25.
[221] Williamson, "Evidence for Innovation and Experimentation on the Akhenaten Colossi," 26.
[222] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 9.
[223] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 3.

piece, Akhenaten effectively becomes the earthly embodiment of Aten.[224]

This image of Akhenaten can be seen as androgynous or even leaning more towards the feminine side. Though he does not have breasts, his small waist and wide hips are reminiscent of the female shape. Furthermore, his full lips and large eyes are similarly conducive to a feminine appearance as well. Beyond appearing not binary, it seems that this representation of the pharaoh could be seen as predominantly feminine, especially when you consider the protruding abdomen as a possible sign of pregnancy.[225] Though even in this form, one still does not encounter literature postulating a potentially queer gender identity for King Akhenaten. Traditional masculinity abandoned, depictions of Akhenaten seem to float between the binary, never really settling on a particular gender. It could be his position as a biological male that deters those from delving into investigations of his personal identity, no matter how radically different or androgynous his depictions may be. As a male pharaoh, his position is not one of particular uniqueness, perhaps garnering less attention, and less questions.

Artistic Variations of Gender

It is important to note that Hatshepsut did not have strictly masculine depictions and that Akhenaten did not have strictly androgynous depictions.[226] As discussed above, sometimes Akhenaten's iconography crossed into the feminine. And Hatshepsut, first shown in scenes with her father and then husband, was originally depicted with female dress and anatomy. It wasn't until she became regent that she began to cross into androgynous territory on her way to mainly masculine representations. Akhenaten, too, originally as Amenhotep IV, was shown as an

[224] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 2.
[225] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 8.
[226] Arlette David, "Hybridism as a Visual Mark of Divinity: The Case of Akhenaten," *Picturing Royal Charisma: Kings and Rulers in the Near East from 3000 BCE to 1700 CE* (Archaeopress, 2023), 22.

idealized male when pictured in tomb reliefs before changing his name and religion. Just like Hatshepsut, it was only after coming to power that Akhenaten's gender began to be altered within royal artwork, speaking more towards their political motivations than personal identity.[227]

Because each of these gender transformations began at one end of the binary and occurred gradually, there is a multitude of images of each pharaoh that can be considered male, female, and androgynous. So why then, are the gender and sexuality of Hatshepsut brought to the forefront of study via queer theory and gender archaeology far more often than Akhenaten? This is done despite their similar range of genders within artwork. Could it be simply because these "in between" experimentations of representation by the female pharaoh are referenced much less than some of her more popular/intriguing imagery? In order to further understand the following images, it is important to delve into the ancient Egyptian artistic canon and the different gender identifiers that exist to visually differentiate between male and female.

Rules of Gender Differentiation within Art

Egyptian art utilized fundamental artistic principles such as composition, size, position, pose, and color to clearly differentiate between male and female figures. More specifically, men would occupy the right side of works and were portrayed as larger than their female counterparts, denoting their importance over that of women.[228] Additionally, men were shown in stiff poses with darker skin and hidden genitals. Women, on the other hand, held less static poses, had lighter skin, and often had outlined genitalia.[229] This artistic canon was designed to emphasize the divinity and strength of pharaohs by depicting them as stiffly posed figures with masculine,

[227] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 80.
[228] Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," 35.
[229] Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 174.

athletic bodies, and idealized visages free of flaws.[230] This served not only to connect pharaohs to the gods, but also to ensure the preservation of their legacies, as well as the continuation of their souls into the afterlife.[231]

It is clear that a binary gender system did exist when looking at the artwork of ancient Egypt. In terms of expressing gender within art, the rules remained fairly consistent. They are expressed most widely in funerary art. The owner of a funerary monument, of royal blood or not, was always depicted as above the rest of their family, allowing them to occupy the "primary position in the composition."[232] Even if a woman had commissioned her own funerary monument, she was always shown below her husband if he appeared anywhere within the image. Compositions continued to present men over women in the fact that men usually occupied the right side, or dominant side, of the scene. The right side was also the place in which gods were most commonly depicted. In any cases of overlapping figures, the male figure was always set before the female[233]. It was odd for women to be portrayed alone on any sort of monument. It was deemed necessary, or at least commonplace, for a woman to be paired with a male relative, whether that be a husband, father, or son. In these compositions, the female figure is typically smaller, therefore adhering to hierarchy of scale. This fundamental principle of composition serves as yet another reason Hatshepsut depicted herself as male. When sharing the image plane with heir Thutmose III, it was necessary for Hatshepsut to also be represented as male in order to be shown as equal to or even above him.

However, exceptions to this rule do exist. If the male that a woman was depicted with

[230] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 15.
[231] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 20.
[232] Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," 33.
[233] Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," 35.

was an infant, perhaps her child, she would then be larger than him[234]. Also, in the case of Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti, they were often portrayed as equal in size and therefore equal in power[235]. In summary, men tend to have darker skin, stiffer poses, hidden genitals, and occupy active roles within a scene. Women, on the other hand, possess a lighter complexion, hold slightly less static poses, have outlined genitalia, and behave more passively within the work[236]. These rules helped to convey familial relationships, male dominance, power, social standing, and to visually differentiate between the genders.

The Seated Statues of Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut utilized these rules of traditional Egyptian art to her advantage rather than defying them, as many believe. It was a necessary part of her persona as king to present herself as a strong male pharaoh as was dictated by both the artistic canon and religious beliefs.[237] This series of statues features a seated Hatshepsut at four different periods throughout her reign (ca. 1479-1458 B.C.E.). Their names are as follows: *Hatshepsut Wearing the Khat Headdress* (fig. 3), *The Female Pharaoh Hatshepsut* (fig. 4), *Seated Statue of Hatshepsut* (fig. 5), and *Large Seated Statue of Hatshepsut* (fig. 6). As they are pictured in chronological order, one can easily observe the gradual change of gender. These statues range from purely female, to a mix of masculine and feminine attributes, and then finally to predominantly male. In the first figure (fig. 3), though her face is missing, one can clearly see the division in the stone above her ankles denoting the hem of a dress, a feminine garment.[238] This is opposed to the masculine kilt that she would later incorporate into her representations. It appears that she is wearing a wig and has not yet donned

[234] Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," 34.
[235] Lesko, "Women's Monumental Mark on Ancient Egypt," 12.
[236] Matić, "Gender in Ancient Egypt: Norms, Ambiguities, and Sensualities," 174.
[237] Kara Cooney, "The Woman Who Would Be King," (London: One World, 2015), 142.
[238] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 27.

the pharaonic *nemes* headdress.[239] Her breasts are clearly visible, helping to further establish this image as feminine. Additionally, her dress clings to her body as was typically the case with traditional female iconography.[240]

As we move on to the second seated sculpture (fig. 4), the mixing of masculine paraphernalia with her still feminine form has begun. One might notice the presence of the *nemes* headdress, which was associated with kingship and masculinity. Though the headdress is draped over her chest, her bust is still visible and well defined. The lack of division between her legs above the ankle once again establishes the fact that she is wearing a dress. Because she has incorporated elements from both genders, whether that be through clothing or anatomy, this image can be considered androgynous.

Her breasts begin to flatten into the rest of her torso by the third image (fig. 5), though they are still noticeable. She once again dons the *nemes* headdress, though now her original apparel has changed. No longer does she adorn a long, tightfitting dress. Though it is difficult to see exactly what she is wearing, it is clear that her clothing does not extend beyond her knees. This image, too, can be considered androgynous. It is once we arrive at the last statue in the series (fig. 6) that her breasts disappear entirely, her chest now exhibiting a more muscular appearance as her pectorals are emphasized. Again, she is no longer wearing a gown or anything below the knee. Her shoulders appear wider, and the presence of the statue overall seems to exude a highly masculine air.

Tomb Relief of Akhenaten

Early imagery of Akhenaten is understandably still true to the original artistic canon. A

[239] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 25.
[240] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 3.

traditionally masculine image of the king can be seen in a relief within the tomb of Vizier Ramose (TT55) who served under both Akhenaten and his father Amenhotep III. This relief is known as *Amenhotep IV Relief in Tomb of Vizier Ramose*, ca. 1353 or 1351 B.C.E. (fig. 7).[241] His transition from male imagery to androgynous occurred between the first and fourth years of his reign. In this image, Akhenaten is already depicted as pharaoh, but still displays strictly male physiognomy. Because of this, the relief can be dated to the first year of his reign.[242] The cartouche below the carving identifies the male figure as Akhenaten (still Amenhotep IV at the time). He is shown young and idealized therefore adhering to the traditional style. His muscular arms, flat, angular torso, and chiseled jawline emphasize his strength, youth, and virility. There is no evidence of elongation of the face, arms, or body. He wears a male kilt and is seen holding a crook a flail, symbols of kingship and masculinity in pharaonic Egypt.[243] Because this image contains only male identifiers, with no female dress or anatomy, this depiction can be categorized as male.

House Altar of Akhenaten

Akhenaten's androgyny becomes especially apparent in the *House Altar Depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Three of their Daughters* ca. 1350 B.C.E. (fig. 8) where it is nearly impossible to tell the king apart from Queen Nefertiti without referencing their regalia. Within the relief, Akhenaten and Nefertiti are shown playing with their daughters under the expanding rays of the sun disc of Aten.[244] As stated in the analysis of the Egyptian artistic canon, males were almost always portrayed as larger than females, and therefore more important.[245] However,

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[241] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 7.
[242] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 12.
[243] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 12.
[244] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 122.
[245] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 26.

Akhenaten and Nefertiti are shown as being equal in size, and therefore of equal importance. In terms of their figures, the couple is shown with elongated arms, torsos, and especially heads. Their chests seem almost sunken in, while their stomachs are rounded and slightly protruding. Because Akhenaten's torso is exposed, we can even see a slight fold where his sagging abdomen meets his legs. As the royal couple are almost identical except for their clothing, this image shows a truly androgynous Akhenaten.

This relief is unique in that fact that it shows a "realistic scene of the royal family," as the king and queen are shown holding their children and kissing them affectionately. As the position of pharaoh was traditionally marked by a stoic, emotionless male figure, images of a king showing affection to his family were very new.[246] The outward emotion and warmth displayed by Akhenaten in this image connects him to what was viewed as a more feminine trait (both then and now), further removing him from past depictions of pharaonic masculinity.

Presence or Absence of a Romantic Partner

Another reason the sexual orientation of Hatshepsut has been such a hotly debated topic over that of Akhenaten, is the fact that Akhenaten was regularly portrayed alongside his wife Nefertiti.[247] Hatshepsut, however, was usually portrayed alone. The presence of a female seemed to balance out Akhenaten's maleness, even though portrayed as androgynous. To the modern eye, one would think they were simply looking at a heterosexual couple. Furthermore, the two were often portrayed with their children, serving as further evidence of Akhenaten's perceived heterosexuality through the implication of the heterosexual act of reproduction. Therefore, many have taken this absence of a heteronormative partnership within Hatshepsut's iconography as

[246] Abdoh, "Sculpture and Technology," 3.
[247] Badham, *A Concise Chronicle of the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt*, 160.

evidence of a deviant sexuality. It is this juxtaposition of Akhenaten with his partner vs. Hatshepsut alone that has spurred queer theorists to further investigate her personal identity and potential sexual orientation.

Pair Statue of Akhenaten and Nefertiti

We have already addressed the famous *House Altar Depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Three of their Daughters* ca. 1350 (fig. 8) that shows Akhenaten, Nefertiti and their three children, though there are many other works that picture the royal couple together.[248] For example, the *Pair Statue of Akhenaten and Nefertiti* ca. 1352-1335 B.C.E. (fig. 9) shows the two side by side holding hands. These pair statues used to be fairly common between ancient Egyptian kings and queens, though the queen was normally shown behind the king instead of beside him.[249] Similar to the equal sizing of the pair within the *House Altar Depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Three of their Daughters* ca. 1350 (fig. 8), this shoulder-to-shoulder positioning elevates the queen's importance as equal to that of her husband. Though Akhenaten is depicted as taller than Nefertiti, the naturalism of the rest of the piece seems to suggest that this might have been realistically accurate. Both figures hold active poses with their right legs stepping forward. Such poses were traditionally reserved for men. Though it should be noted that Akhenaten's stride extends further towards the viewer than Nefertiti's. This small detail may signify that Akhenaten is being portrayed as slightly more powerful than the queen.

Though the royal couple is pictured in similar dress as also observed in the *House Altar Depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Three of their Daughters* ca. 1350 (fig. 8), the style is atypical of the Amarna period. The elongation of the head, limbs, and torso have been drastically

[248] Foerster, *Akhenaten: The Heretic Pharaoh*, 37.
[249] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 17.

reduced, leading to more anatomically sound proportions. As per the ancient Egyptian artistic canon, Nefertiti appears to be shown with a lighter skin tone than her husband.[250] While many aspects of the piece do adhere to the traditional canon, especially compared to other images of Akhenaten, the pair does not appear to be idealized. Akhenaten still possesses a noticeably rounded abdomen that extends slightly over the upper edge of his kilt. He is not portrayed as particularly muscular, but does appear more male in this piece compared to his many androgynous works. The two hold hands, denoting an affectionate, if not romantic partnership, therefore seemingly establishing the pair as portraying a heterosexual relationship.

Votive Statue of Hatshepsut

In *Hatshepsut in a Devotional Attitude* ca. 1479-1458 B.C.E. (fig. 10), found within her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, the pharaoh is seen standing alone, though in a similar pose to Akhenaten in the *Pair Statue of Akhenaten and Nefertiti* ca. 1352-1335 B.C.E. (fig. 9). Both kings are shown with their right legs striding forward, conveying movement and therefore an active, masculine role within the piece.[251] She is again shown in an idealized male form, adorned with the *nemes* headdress and ceremonial pharaonic beard. [252] There is no evidence of breasts, as can be seen in previous more feminine/androgynous representations of the king. Instead, her pectoral muscles are highlighted, along with broad shoulders and strong arms to complete her muscular physique. She wears a masculine kilt, similar to her portrayal in *Hatshepsut with Offering Jars* ca. 1479-1458 B.C.E. (fig. 1). Though ultimately, she stands alone, with no counterpart of either gender by her side. It is this absence of a partner that spurs inquiries into her

[250] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 10.
[251] Teeter, "Egyptian Art," 16.
[252] Hilliard and Wurtzel, "Power and Gender in Ancient Egypt: The Case for Hatshepsut," 20.

personal identity, assuming that the lack of a heterosexual partnership denotes one of a deviant sexuality.

Conclusion

The imagery we have at hand seems to have garnered great curiosity as to the personal identity of female pharaoh Hatshepsut. However, the same cannot be said for King Akhenaten. Reasons for this difference in study range from Hatshepsut's female identity, to her crossing of the binary, to her lack of a romantic partner within her iconography. It is these differences in sex, representation, and strategies of reconciling gender dualities that have influenced how the two kings have been perceived and studied by contemporary scholars. Because of this, many studies conducted on Hatshepsut's iconography understandably evoke the implementation of queer theory, while those done on images of Akhenaten surprisingly do not. I encourage more research on Akhenaten's androgynous iconography utilizing queer theory. This is not for the purpose of queering him or pushing the addition of false labels, but as simply another means of study to help us gather more information as to the beliefs, identities, and social functioning of the ancient world. Though it is important to remember that all of these images, no matter which king they are depicting, at which point on the gender spectrum, were created explicitly for public view, and ultimately hold no bearing on their hidden personal identities.

Because of the lack of queer history, especially before the 20th century Western world, it can often be tempting to see what we want to see. With few queer icons to look back on, some historical figures have sometimes been pushed into boxes in which they might not actually fit, such is the case with Hatshepsut. This can be due to a lack of understanding of the vast changes in beliefs, politics, social constructs, and identities that have occurred over the course of sometimes thousands of years through countless cultures. Though, ultimately, all of this stems from a need shared by many LGBTQ+ individuals, including myself, to simply say "we are not new" or "we were there." It is for this reason that I advocate for the responsible implementation

of queer theory in all fields of study regarding the human experience, for it is this experience that binds us all, no matter how many thousands of years separate us. Because this theory is relatively new within the world of academia, there is absolutely no limit to what could be discovered.

Figures:

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

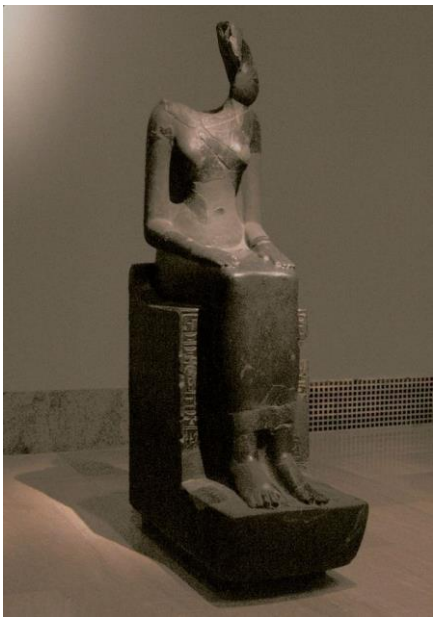

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

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