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# BLACK WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

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# BLACK WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

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# THE AFRICAN EVE: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

**Ivan Van Sertima**

In an earlier preparation for this special volume, *Black Women in Antiquity*, we were tempted to dwell upon the controversy raging over the first woman, our earliest known human ancestor, the African mother of all mankind, "Lucy." We have been forced to resist that temptation. Archeology has its fascination, yes, but apart from Lucy's age (three and a half million years), her height (three feet), her weight (sixty pounds), and her place of origin (Ethiopia) next to nothing of very real significance in the study of woman is known about her. The controversy, though animated and prolonged, is a huddle between technical experts over a bundle of bones and a bundle of classificatory terms. The drama surrounding the find of the African Eve is intriguing, especially in the way it is handled by Donald Johannson and Maitland Eddy in their classic work on this subject. But for those of us who are primarily interested in the adult stages of civilization rather than in the first infant steps of the hominid, it is not particularly illuminating. We have found it far more useful to focus our attention on the materials gathered and selected under our editorship for this book.

Most of our writers have concentrated on the queens and goddesses of Ethiopia and Egypt. This has been so, not only because of the fact that the documents in the Nile Valley are voluminous compared to the sketchier record in other parts of Africa but because the imagination of the world, not just that of Africa, was haunted by these black women. They feature just as prominently in European mythology as in African reality. *Andromeda*, daughter of the Ethiopian king, Cepheus, is taken to wife by the legendary Greek hero, Perseus. *Circe*, the magician and enchantress of Homer's Odyssey, is painted on Grecian vases as a black woman. Her niece, *Medea*, daughter of the Colchian king, Aeetes, uses her powers to help young Jason in his quest for the golden fleece.

Larry Williams and Charles Finch trace these women, so prominent in Greek myth, back to their Ethiopian origins. They also introduce us to the most powerful line of all black queens—the Candaces (from the Meroitic "Kentake," which means Queen-Mother). They point out that unlike the Egyptian queens, who largely owed their authority to being the great wives of pharoahs (Hatshepsut being the exception), the Ethiopian queens were independent rulers. This raises the question as to what extent the early African matriarchal patterns underwent changes as the Africans moved down northwards into Egypt. Williams and Finch contend, however, that "such independent female rulers are found throughout Africa in time and space" and that "the relative frequency of the queenship—

compared to other parts of the world—reflected the persistent matriarchal patterns in Africa through the course of history."

The period of Ethiopian history covered by these researchers encompasses about two thousand years (from 1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.). Barring the Candaces in the much later Meroitic period, no black queen of ancient times (or no queen for that matter) had such a legend built around her as Makeda, the queen of Sheba. She is known in the bible as the great black beauty who melted King Solomon's heart into a song. The child she bore for him, Menelik, started the Solomonid line of Ethiopian kings, a line which, but for an interruption of 300 years, continued right down to the late Haile Selassie. Williams and Finch show that the story of the romance between Solomon and the queen of Sheba probably overshadows more important roles and accomplishments of this black queen. She organized an extensive trade network and ruled an empire larger and more substantial than Solomon's, her business with him involving commercial and diplomatic settlements, not just romantic concerns. The hospitality he lavished upon her was a tribute not simply to her beauty but to her position of eminence and influence in the ancient world.

The later Ethiopian queens (300 B.C.—300 A.D.) which we have come to know as the Candaces, were among the greatest of African builders, erecting magnificent palaces and tombs, ushering in a cultural renaissance that produced some of the finest examples of Meroitic architecture and art. Perhaps the most memorable among them is *Amanirenas*, who struck back at the Roman invaders under Augustus Caesar. When the Romans occupied Egypt and threatened Nubia, this warrior queen led the Kushite army across the Egyptian border, attacked the Roman-occupied towns, and routed their garrisons, destroying the statues of Caesar. The Romans reacted savagely, sacking the towns of the blacks, razing their capital at Napata. But she retreated and regrouped and struck again, forcing them to renounce the tribute they had imposed upon the people of Lower Nubia in her domain. This was the spirit of these great queens.

They were not only masters of the state but masters of the spiritual capitals as well. Beginning with Piankhy, the pharaohs of the 25th dynasty made it a practice to install their female relatives as the high-priestesses of Amon at Thebes. These women were given almost royal privileges and formed a kind of parallel dynasty, with succession from aunt to niece. While the Ethiopian pharaohs ruled, there were two lines of high-priestesses—one at Thebes (Mistress of Egypt) and one at Napata (Mistress of Kush).

The power of the queen in Egypt, however, seems to have been (in spite of the same African emphasis on the woman as the key to succession) qualitatively different. Diedre Wimby argues, in fact, that "the Kemetic concept of rulership categorically denies this position to women." Women came to the throne only under particular circumstances, even though they wielded considerable power behind the throne. If the pharaoh died and left no male heir, then the queen would



be allowed to rule until such time as a new dynasty could be initiated. Also, in cases where the king's only legal heir was too young to assume office, the queen consort was expected to rule until he attained maturity.

The situation, however, is more subtle than at first appears, and Miss Wimby is at pains to make this clear. There were reasons why a man was thought to fit more aptly into the symbolic role played by the pharaoh. Yet the rulership of Kemet (Egypt) was, as she shows, "a balanced situation: the man was the personification of divine authority, the woman the source of his power." The queen was the guardian of the royal lineage.

Wimby lists the ruling mothers and wives of the pharaohs and spotlights those, who, by dint of personality or circumstance, came to stand out from the mists of antiquity. There is *Neith-hetep*, whose only claim to fame seems to be the fact that she was the wife of Aha-Menes, the first pharaoh of the first dynasty, and *Mer-Neith*, who commanded great respect because she was wife of one pharaoh and mother of another. But Queen *Nitocris*, known as "the noblest and loveliest woman of her time" touches us still with the spark she lit in the sixth dynasty, not by virtue of whom she married or whom she mothered, but by what she was and what she did. We can still stand in the shadow of a monument she built, the third pyramid at Giza. And there is Queen *Tetisheri* of the 17th dynasty, who kept up the revolutionary war against the Hyksos invaders, and Queen *Ahmose-Nefertere*, who, when her husband Ahmose drove these aliens out, helped to reconstruct Kemet, the beloved country. She was the first to hold the title of "divine wife," and, as high-priestess of Amon, had her own college of priestesses, a chief of troops, a majordomo, scribes, and a vast retinue of fieldworkers, whom she organized to rebuild a city of the dead at Deir-el-Medina.

Not one of these Egyptian queens, of course, dominated the times in which she lived, like the Pharaoh Hatshepsut. She is known as a warrior queen and it is true that she was aggressive, overpowering, a born dynast. But her battles were against her own rivals for power in the Egyptian hierarchy. She waged no wars abroad. Egypt had just thrown off the Hyksos yoke, and though her father, Thutmose I, smashed his fist against the face of Asia, his armies charging even up to the Euphrates, this great black queen concentrated on building rather than on fighting. She organized commercial expeditions instead of military campaigns. And though she trumpeted the war cry "I came as Horus, darting fire against my enemies," it is of enemies within her own camp and country that she speaks. She is the most unusual of Egyptian queens. As Wimby says, "She created a new science of rulership, the essence of which was the female manifesting male attributes." She donned male attire, sported a beard, even referred to herself, and insisted on being referred to, as *he*.

The power of the mother or wife in the royal houses of Kemet did often balance out that of the pharaoh, even in cases where she was not reigning. Sonia Sanchez presents the metaphysical basis for this balance and partnership. She

contrasts the African myth of Osiris and Isis against the patriarchal myth of Adam and Eve. The woman in Africa was not seen as a rib or appendage or afterthought to man, but as his divine equal. Thus she claims "the goddesses retained their prestige in becoming wives: the couple was the religious and social unit; woman seemed to be allied with and complementary to man: woman has the same rights as man, the same powers in court: she inherited, she owned property." Her story of Nefertiti and Akhnaton bears out this beautiful balance. But Sanchez is alert to the subtle undercurrents, the opposite doctrine prevailing among the priests of Amon that contested this position. Though Nefertiti became the divine female partner to Akhnaton, the vision of these priests reasserted itself on Akhnaton's death. They would not accept the idea of women bypassing the male priesthood with a mother-goddess, in their worship of the Divine.

In the end it is the force of personality, the stature of an unusual individual, that overrides these chauvinistic prejudices and conventions. Such an individual was Queen Tiye, mother of Akhnaton, mother-in-law of Nefertiti. Lady of Both Lands, she was born in Nubia but reigned as queen consort and queen mother of Egypt for half a century. In her sensitive portrait of Tiye, Virginia Simon shows us how she quietly wielded power during three critical periods of the 18th dynasty, becoming the stabilizing force in the nation. These are the years when the powers of Amenhotep III (whose bride she became at 13) began to wither with age, when her son Akhnaton, the religious innovator, neglected the defense of the nation, when her youngest sons, Smenkare and Tut, were too immature to rule. She moved into the power vacuum. She became Secretary of State for her sick husband. Kings of Asia bypassed him to deal directly with her. And when the priests insisted that, in the royal sculptures, a queen should be depicted only knee-high to a king, Amenhotep, ruled by a love that transcended the idiocies of convention, swept their objections away. He builds massive statues in which she sits beside him as an equal. He digs an ornamental lake one mile long and names it after her. Poems and palaces rise to immortalize her beauty and his love. And, following the strongest African custom, strengthened by a Nubian in the royal bed, it is the princesses, not the princes, who enjoy venerated status. The importance of the female in the royal family is once more stressed. Even fashion is profoundly influenced by Tiye. Her hairstyle, her earrings, her wigs, set the style for female beauty in the royal court.

Another queen of the south but a mythical one, among the firstborn of the goddesses, is Isis. Eloise McKinney-Johnson presents her as Egypt's quintessential sweetheart, wife, and mother. She is worshipped as the sister-wife of Osiris, the "King of the Dead," and mother of Horus, the "King of the Living." What lyrical hymns in praise of her own divinity are chanted from the lips of Isis herself!

> I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time . . . the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven . . . the lamentable silences of the world below.



Egypt, Greece, and Rome bowed down to this African goddess, and "the pictures and sculptures wherein she is represented in the act of suckling Horus formed the foundation for the Christian paintings of the Madonna and Child."

Runoko Rashidi also touches on this aspect of Isis as the original black madonna. Statues of her and the baby Horus, whom she suckles, passed for representations of Mary and Jesus in many European churches, especially those in Italy (the first Euro-Christian shrines). In his erudite essay on the three African goddesses who exerted the largest influence in ancient times, Rashidi gives us the historical background to the cults that grew up around them, not only in Africa but in Greece, in Rome, in Minoan Crete, in Phoenicia, in parts of Asia, even (in some instances) in the British Isles. Apart from *Isis*, to whom, we learn, even the mad Roman emperor Caligula, erected a temple, there is *Neith*, probably older than Isis herself, who speaks with the timeless voice of the original creator: "I am whatever was or is or will be." There is *Hathor*, the self-begetting goddess, donor of life, protector of the dead, goddess too of the senses, linked with laughter and dance and song and music. The religious concepts behind these African goddesses, Rashidi tells us, lie not in the Nile Valley (although the most substantial documentation of them may be found there) but in the Great Lakes region of East/Cental Africa. There, "in the continental heartland, the primordial center, occurred the molding and forming of the religious and philosophical ideas that were to critically shape the world."

It is also in this continental heartland that we must look for the earliest portraits of the African woman. Rosalind Jeffries opens a window on the most ancient gallery of art in the world. We see the primal mother in the cave art of Zimbabwe, we follow her protuberant curve and shadow among the Bambara, the Senufo and the Kun, we see her taking the same form on the Grimaldi horizon in Stone Age Europe, as humankind spreads out everywhere from its African ancestral home. Woman stalks the imagination of the dawn of man, both a giver and killer of life, now raining food and moisture down, now the arrows of death. We are struck by the way the forms of the female link vastly diverse and distant areas in a continuity of symbol, sign, and concept. It is as if, from the streams of her loins, a river of images—that of fertilizing rainmaker and devouring vulture, virgin of purity and serpent of evil, mate and mother and murderer—branches an art of creativity and destructiveness that flows through the earliest imagination of the world. This is one of the few essays in this volume that attempts, however brokenly (since our earliest traditions are scattered) to probe those pristine roots that lie behind the later flowering in Ethiopia and Egypt.

Camille Yarbrough also explores African art as a document in the history of woman. She finds the beginnings of so many beauty aids in Africa—cornrows five thousand years old in the Sahara, exquisite and elaborate wigs, eye shadow, pellets of sweet spices or anti-gum (a kind of chewing-gum) as breath-fresheners, the staining of fingernails and toenails with the henna plant, scented pomades and oils for the skin and the hair, beautifully polished copper mirrors, jewelry of all

sorts, particularly earrings, necklaces, strings of beads. She points to a little-known fact, that vaccination began in Africa centuries before Europe because of the use of tattoos, either as identification or as beautification marks. Once again, however, because the best pictorial documentation lies in Egypt and Ethiopia, almost all of our examples of female style and beauty in ancient Africa are taken from that region.

It is therefore refreshing to read the second half of John Clarke's essay, which introduces us to the warrior queens, *Nzingha* of Angola and *Yaa Asantewa* of the Ashanti. The stories of these two women are important chapters in the struggle against Portuguese, and British imperialism in Africa. In 1623, at the age of forty-one, Nzingha became queen of Ndongo (Angola). Like Hatshepsut, she forbade her subjects to call her queen. She insisted on being called king and marched into battle in the clothing of a man. But according to Clarke, "she possessed both masculine hardness and feminine charm, which she readily used, depending on the need and occasion." She fought the Portuguese all her life, suffering severe setbacks. Her sister was beheaded, her body thrown into a river. Yet this did not break Nzingha's spirit. As Professor Glasgow points out: "Nzingha failed in her mission to expel the Portuguese [but] her historic importance trancends this failure, as she awakened and encouraged the first known stirring of nationalism in West Central Africa."

Yaa Asantewa, the Queen Mother of Ejisu, in Ghana, nurtured the same smoking flame. When the British in 1896 exiled King Prempeh of Ghana and, two years later, sent a governor to Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti, to demand the Golden Stool, even the bravest member of the tribe was cowed. Clarke recaptures that remarkable moment as Yaa Asantewa rises to shame the chiefs: "If you the men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. . . . We will fight the white men." It was the beginning of a war that was to lead to her capture and deportation but revive the spirit of pride and resistance among her people.

We conclude with an essay by the historian Edward Scobie, which deals with the black woman in early Europe. She occupies extreme positions in the European imagination. She is on the one hand the sex goddess and courtesan. The kings and the noblemen of France and Portugal, a cardinal in Italy, later to become a pope, Baudelaire and Shakespeare, greatest of poets, rush to her bed. She is so irresistible that, in spite of all the racial prejudices of the day, her blood ultimately runs through the royal and noble families of Europe—Queen Charlotte Sophie, the Duke of Florence, the Medicis, the Gonzagas, the Duchess of Alafoes, St. Hilaire, son of Louis XV—the list is great. But the contradiction is greater. For she is virtuous—the Greek goddess of chastity, Artemis, is black; she is wise—the goddess of wisdom is Minerva, an African princess; she is a saint, as are the black madonnas of Loretta in Italy, Nuria in Spain, Czestochowa in Poland.



Woman has lived under the shadow of man's ego, even as, in the past few centuries, the black has lived under the shadow of the white. The myth of female inferiority seems to have been far more developed in Europe and Asia than in Africa. This was due to differences in metaphysic and social structure, even, perhaps, in the very nature of the Indo-European male temperament itself. Whatever it was, the black queens, madonnas, and goddesses dominating the imagination of antiquity have few European or Asiatic counterparts. Yet it would be idyllic to assume that woman did not have to strive to achieve and maintain her equality in Africa, regardless of the countervailing myths, like that of Isis and Osiris, which ranked her as a divine equal. She complemented but she also competed with man, even, at times, embracing both male and female attributes and appurtenances (as was the case with Hatshepsut and Nzingha) in order to establish her domination.

In spite of this perennial contest with, and occasional or perpetual suppression by, the male, her role in the history and development of civilization has been just as great. To prove this is not easy since a great deal of history would have to be rewritten with a different emphasis and orientation. This book, we hope, is one of the opening chapters in that new history.

# THE GREAT QUEENS OF ETHIOPIA

By Larry Williams and Charles S. Finch

***Summary:*** *The matriarchy, probably the oldest form of social organization, appears to have evolved first in Africa. Even when the patriarchy emerged and began to supplant the older social organization, matriarchal social forms in Africa have thrived in whole or in part up to the present. Even the avowedly patriarchal pharoaonic theocracy of Egypt felt this imprint, since the inheritance of the Egyptian throne was determined through the female line. The authors seek to examine the Ethiopian queenship as a way of shedding light on the vigor and vitality of matriarchal values in the Nile Valley and in Africa as a whole.*

It is essential, as a prelude to this discussion, to define what Ethiopia is and was in time and space. As is well known, the word "Ethiopia" is Greek and means "land of sunburnt faces." This meaning is reflected in the myth recounted by Ovid in *The Metamorphosis* in which Phaeton—the son of Phoebus Apollo and also a native of Ethiopia—in ill-advisedly driving his father's chariot of the sun, loses control of it, causing it to dip too near the earth, thus turning the inhabitants of Africa black. In ancient times, Ethiopia had no precise boundaries. It was a name used variously to refer to Libya, Nubia, Cush, Abyssinia, parts of Upper Egypt, and the entire African continent. Even farther afield, the term encompassed what is today southern Arabia, Yemen, southern Persia, and India.[1] For the purposes of this discussion, we will designate as 'Ethiopia' an area that includes Egypt below Aswan, the Sudan, and what is today Ethiopia proper. This is an area most easily identifiable by that amorphous term 'Ethiopia' and includes the ancient lands of Saba (Sheba), Cush, Nubia, and Abyssinia.

With reference to the institution of the queenship in the lands we are generically calling 'Ethiopia,' source material is not overabundant. One of the most important single documents available is the *Kebra Negast* ('The Glory of Kings'), an Ethiopian historical work in the Ge'ez language which contains the most complete recounting of the Makeda or Queen of Sheba story. E.A. Wallis Budge translated that part of it dealing with Makeda and her visit to Solomon, into English, under the title of *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menelik*. Since the oldest surviving manuscript of the *Kebra Negast* dates just from the 14th century, doubts about its authenticity, veracity, and accuracy have been raised. However, William Leo Hansberry has set forth reasons why it can be relied upon as a more or less authentic document.[2] One of the difficulties that has arisen in the minds of some scholars is that many have located Saba or Sheba in



southern Arabia, thus casting doubts on the nature of the Ethiopian presence in the civilization of Saba (Sheba). However, from the earliest times, southern Arabia and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) were virtually identical in language, religion, and racial composition; indeed were part of the same geopolitical structure.[3] Thus, there need not be any controversy about where Sheba was exactly located: it incorporated both Ethiopia and southern Arabia.

In the centuries just prior to the Christian era there existed a remarkable line of Ethiopian queens in Meroitic Cush known as the "Candaces," a Latin word derived from the Meroitic "ktke" or "Kentake" which means "Queen-Mother." We know these queens existed not only from the testimony of Latin writers like Strabo and Pliny but also because we have authentic pictorial representations of them and inscriptions by and about them among the ruins of old Cush. Nonetheless, our information about them and their reigns is rather sketchy. This is due mostly to the fact that the Meroitic script is largely undeciphered so we are virtually handcuffed when it comes to filling in any but the most spotty details about their history. What we are able to decipher comes from certain inscriptions which are derived from or similar to the Egyptian hieroglyphics with which early Meroitic writing is closely allied.

The Falasha queen Judith represents a special case. She was considered by the Solomonids of Abyssinia to be a usurper because she conquered and ruled over Abyssinia for 40 years. However, the official Ethiopian Chronicles virtually ignore her and much of what we know about her comes from fragments of non-Ethiopian literature. She must have been a remarkable woman, one with unusual ability as a political and military leader.

Before dealing with our historical material, it is enlightening to examine some of the figures out of mythology as a way of understanding the Ethiopian queenship in another light. Plutarch, in his *Isis and Osiris*, mentions the Ethiopian queen Aso who assisted Set in his war against Osiris.[4] In Egyptian mythology in dynastic times, Osiris represented the principle of Good and Set the principle of Evil; Plutarch's version of the myth reflects this. But Set did not always have this evil character. Among the earlier peoples of the Nile Valley he was a very benevolent god but in the course of time, he lost his position to Osiris. Nonetheless, powerful centers of his worship remained in parts of Cush (Ethiopia) even after the Osirian ascendancy[5] and the association of the Ethiopian queen Aso with Set may have been a way of representing this.

Another interesting figure out of mythology is Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus the Ethiopian king, who was rescued by Perseus from a sea-monster and made his queen. Perseus is considered the founding ancestor of Mycenae, which was the advanced proto-Greek civilization derived largely from Egyptian-influenced Crete, which formed the backdrop of the great Homeric epics. The later, "classical" Greek civilization took its impetus from Mycenae. Andromeda, the Ethiopian princess and Perseus's queen, figures as the founding ancestress of

Figure 1. Terracotta vase with the figure purported to be *Andromeda*. Early 4th century B.C.



Mycenae, pointing to an early Ethiopian antecedent of Greek civilization, rendered mythologically."

Lastly, there is the fascinating figure of Medea who was the daughter of the Colchian king Aeëtes. Herodotus informs us that the Colchians were a colony of Egypto-Ethiopians which he adduced from their black skins, wooly hair, and traditions.[7] Medea was renowned in antiquity as a mistress of the magical arts and in the legend of the Golden Fleece, Jason is able to win the Golden Fleece and make good his escape by virtue of Medea's powers. There is one other datum pointing to Medea's ethnic origins: she is the niece of Circe, whom Odysseus encountered in his wanderings, and Circe, also a mistress of magic, is represented on Grecian vases as a Black woman.[8]

With respect to the historical queens under discussion, there are some general points to be made. In Egypt, with the remarkable exception of Hapshetsut, women became powerful and influencial by virtue of their positions as Consorts or "Great Wives" of the pharoahs. This observation is not meant to diminish the position of the pharoaonic Great Wives because their role in the matrilineal succession assured them of tremendous prestige, enabling some to equal and even exceed their husbands in position and power. However, the most important of the Ethiopian queens we are considering were independent rulers, their husbands

Figure 2. Negroid *Circe* offering a magic potion to Odysseus. Late 5th century B.C. from Kabeirion.

were consorts to them. These queens ran the civil administration, led armies against military foes, promoted long-distance commerce and diplomatic relations, and engaged in massive building programs. In every way, they exercised the full prerogatives and powers of rulership. Such independent female rulers are found throughout Africa in time and space and it is our contention that this relative frequency of the queenship—compared to other parts of the world—reflected the persistent matriarchal patterns in Africa through the course of history. As we will be able to show in this paper, even where the kingship was well-established, the queen-mother in these African states figured as the second most prominent and politically important individual in the nation. It was through her that African kings, in Ethiopia and elsewhere, derived their legitimate claims to the throne. A clear deference was always paid to the queen-mother which fortifies the contention that through most of African history, women had important, sometimes predominant, roles to play in politics and government.

Our period under discussion encompasses about 2,000 years—1000 BC-1000AD. We will begin with the story of Makeda who, through her son Menelik, is considered the founder of the Solomonid line of Ethiopian kings. We will then examine the Kentakes of Cush who wrote a brilliant chapter in the annals of the African queenship. Finally, we will consider the figure of Judith who may have been the most potent warrior-queen in African history.

## Makeda, The Queen of Sheba

Ethiopia has been labeled a land of many fables and legends. The names of Prester John, Ezana, Menelik I, Theodore Raday, and the Beta-Israel are familiar names in these legends. But a name that has captured the imaginations of historians, poets, playwrights, and explorers is that of Makeda, the legendary Queen of Sheba.[9] There are numerous fragments of information concerning the fabled Queen of Sheba, who was also called Belkis in southern Arabia. Josephus, the Jewish historian, called her the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia. Queen Makeda was also a great administrator, builder, and international stateswoman. Her life represents firmly the way in which the matriarchy co-existed in Africa side-by-side with the patriarchy.

The dynasty that Makeda belonged to, according to tradition, was established in Ethiopia in 1370 B.C. It was instituted by Za Besi Angabo and lasted 350 years. Makeda's grandfather and father were the last two rulers of this dynasty. Her brother, Prince Noural, apparently died at an early age and Princess Makeda became the heiress to her father's throne. African people take seriously the raising of children and Makeda's parents were no different. Makeda observed all the affairs of state as she grew into maturity. Her mother especially, Queen Ismenie, very aptly prepared Makeda for her eventual role as Queen of Ethiopia.



In 1005 BC, Makeda's father from his deathbed appointed her to succeed him. As Queen of the Ethiopian empire, Makeda ruled her country with justice, fortitude, and wisdom for 50 years. Tradition has it that the land area she governed was quite extensive and while it is not always possible to separate legend from fact, the various lands ascribed to her empire included parts of Upper Egypt, Ethiopia, parts of Arabia, Syria, Armenia, India, and the whole region between the Mediterranean and the Erythraean Sea.[10] By this tradition, India and southern Arabia constituted the eastern half of Makeda's empire while the seat of her power was in what was later known as Axum. The Yemenite kingdom of Himyar also acknowledged her suzerainty. Historian Margaret Shinnie, writing about the inhabitants of Axum, tells us:

> The most powerful of Kush's neighbors were the Axumites, people from the southern tip of Arabia who had settled across the sea from their homeland and made a kingdom on the western Coast of the Red Sea—the Kingdom of Axum.[11]

There are some writers who theorize that this fabled kingdom of Sheba extended even beyond Arabia and India. Arnold Heeren, writing in the mid-19th century, averred that the Ethiopians of Arabia gained extensive control in India and may even have settled on the coasts of Hindustan.[12] Whatever we may think of this, it is instructive that tradition, at least, gives Makeda dominion over a vast empire. We can at least say that she ruled over a substantial nation-state and may have exercised control over more far-flung lands that gave her dominions the status of an empire.

In order to rule her empire, it was necessary for Makeda to engage in extensive trade to ensure its economic survival. Her astuteness as a commercial trader is observed by the boldness of her trade relations in the markets of Damascus and Gaza. The trade network she organized was both by land and sea and was effectively manned by vigilant Ethiopian merchants. The leader of these merchants was Tamrin, who is described in the *Kebra Nagast* as a wise man. So great was his expertise at trade that he utilized 520 camels and 370 ships laden with wealth from the empire of Queen Makeda. Makeda's merchants are aptly described in Ezekiel 27:22-24, which reads:

> The merchants of Sheba and Raamah were thy merchants; they traded in thy fairs with the best of all spices, and with all precious stones, and gold. Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad were thy merchants. These were thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes, and embroidered work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords, and made of cedar, among thy merchandise.

Because of the great trade relations Queen Makeda established, it is possible that

Figure 3. Makeda, a legendary queen of Sheba and Ethiopia (from *Ebony* magazine, 1965).



there was even, in 985 BC, a Chinese expedition to the land of Sheba.[13] The evidence of Makeda's extensive trade network, however, remains fragmentary.

An aspect of Makeda's life that has been overlooked is her exploits as a builder. In the *Book of Axum*, it is recorded that when she ascended the throne of Ethiopia, Makeda built her capitol in the district of Azeba. The *Kebra Nagast* then records that she built her capitol at Debra Makeda or "Mount Makeda." John Henrik Clarke has said, "Debra Makeda later became a meeting place for the early Christians of Ethiopia."[14] John D. Baldwin had this to say about one of the building projects of Belkis-Makeda:

> Hamza of Isphan says: The Himyarites relate that Belkis, having become Queen, built in Saba the dike called Arim. The other inhabitants of Yemen dispute this, and maintain that the dike Arim was constructed by Lokman, the second son of Ad: and they say that time having brought it to a condition of decay, Belkis, on becoming Queen, repaired the damage it had suffered.[15]

J.A. Rogers, writing in 1946, related, "A few years ago her tomb, as well as the ruins of a great temple and twenty-two obelisks of her period, were excavated at Axum.[16] These examples provide some insight into the building carried out by Makeda during her reign as Queen of Ethiopia.

Most of the attention given to the Makeda story has centered around her legendary visit to King Solomon, third King of Israel. Some of the important facts related to the visit have been obscured by the romance that sprung up around these two sovereigns. When Queen Makeda became aware of King Solomon from her chief merchant Tamrin, she decided on a visit to Jerusalem. Her visit may have been to negotiate a trade agreement with Solomon since he may have controlled some trade routes which were important to the Sabaeans. Thus it is interesting to speculate on reasons for the visit not usually considered in the conventional treatments of the story. One thing we can safely surmise, is that the empire that Makeda ruled was at least as important as Solomon's and if any of the traditions about the extent and scope of the empire are even partially correct, she ruled an even more substantial and more important kingdom than did Solomon. The Biblical version of the story is given in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9. It is said that Makeda "came to test him with hard questions" which may just as easily been questions of a political, diplomatic, or commercial nature as questions to test his wisdom. In 1 Kings 10:2, we are told that "she talked with him of all that was in her heart" which, again, might refer to some serious dickering over affairs of state. There are those who might see in the 120 talents of gold given by Solomon to Makeda, a commercial or diplomatic settlement. Such a sum would be valued today at over $4 million.

The level of hospitality accorded to the Queen of Sheba by Solomon was a tribute to her position and influence. Solomon prepared an apartment built of crys-

tal from the floor to the ceiling for her to reside in. Also he had a throne set up along side his which was covered with silk, fringes of gold and silver, and studded with diamonds and pearls. Gorgeous feasts in halls perfumed with myrrh, gabanum, and incense were lavished upon the Queen of Ethiopia. Solomon was terribly smitten by this Queen and a love affair ensued which led to birth of their son Menelik who became the first king in the Solomonid line of Ethiopian kings. This line lasted, with a 300-year interruption, until the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974. The story of Menelik itself is quite a chapter which is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

According to scripture, Queen Makeda achieved her goal in her visit to Jerusalem. It is written in 2 Chronicles 9:12, "King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desires, whatever she asked, beside what she had brought to the King. So she turned and went away to her own land, she and her servants." A trade agreement, diplomatic relations, and possibly a military alliance may have been among the things given by Solomon to Makeda.

After her return to Ethiopia, Makeda ruled until she abdicated in favor of her son Menelik. But she remained her son's advisor until her death in 955 BC. Her place in history is assured and she stands as a prototype of all the later great queens of Ethiopia.

## The Queens of Napatan and Meroitic Cush

Earlier in our discussion, we mentioned the role of the Great Wives in the pharoaonic kingship of Egypt. They were often very prominent in dynastic history and because the line of pharoahs was usually traced through them, they lent a matriarchal cast to the pharoaonic kingship. This does not alter the fact that the rulership in Egypt was decidedly patriarchal in almost every other important respect and in this differed significantly from the cognate civilization to the south, Cush. In Cush, the royal institution of the "Kentake" or "Queen-Mother" was well-established. The Kentake exercised an authority and a degree of political power rarely enjoyed by her counterpart in Egypt. By the Meroitic period in the history of Cush, her authority and influence had become so pervasive that she was able to assume the rulership independently, giving rise to a line of rulers known to history as the "Candaces," a Latinization of the word "Kantake." Strictly speaking, all the mothers of the kings in the history of Cush were Kentakes, but the title of Candace was applied to just four—some say five—of these queen-mothers who became independent rulers.

Unlike the fabulous example of Hatshepsut during Egypt's 18th dynasty, the accession of these Meroitic queens to their positions as independent rulers did not entail anything like a "palace revolution." They had legitimately been wielding power for centuries and their accession to the throne in Meroitic times (300 BC-



300 AD) was a natural outgrowth of their innate abilities and powers. It should be pointed out that by the time Meroe became the capital of Cush, the country had moved away significantly from the pervasive Egyptian influence and had begun to evolve in a fashion that owed more to its typically African antecedents.[17] Thus the unmistakable matriarchal pattern in the royal succession of Meroitic Cush, as distinct from Egypt, was due to a strengthening of the African basis of Meroitic culture.

From about 800 BC—when Cush first begins to make an important appearance on the stage of world history—until 300 BC, the capitol of Cush was located at Napata. Around 750 BC, the Napatan dynasts of Cush under Piankhy and his immediate successors took a giant leap forward onto the world spotlight by their pacification and reunification of Egypt. At this juncture in history, that part of Upper Egypt south of Thebes had become a part of Cush but the rest of Egypt had disintegrated into mutually warring petty kingdoms. We cannot delve into this chapter of Egyptian history in any detail but suffice to say that when Piankhi undertook to reunify Egypt, he was not looked upon as a usurper or foreign conqueror but rather as a deliverer. As a pious and devoted follower of Amon-Ra, his intercession was, for the most part, welcomed. With the entrance of the kings of Cush into Egyptian history we have the inauguration of the 25th or 'Ethiopian' dynasty of Pharoahs. The 25th dynasty sparked a renaissance in an otherwise moribund Egyptian culture, with some of Egypt's most vigorous art and monument building emerging in this period. There is evidence too of a program of world-wide commerce and exploration that was initiated during the 25th dynasty.[18] As we shall see, the Kentakes played an essential part in this unique Egyptian dynasty.

The Cushite civilization of the 8th century BC was thoroughly Egyptianized with respect to language, writing, art, dress, and religion. In some ways, they seemed more Egyptian than the Egyptians. Thus when the 25th dynasty brought order and stability to Egypt, the kings of Cush did not effect any extraordinary changes. At least to some extent, this applied as well to the role of women. With regard to this dynasty, Jean Leclant informs us:

> In the Sudanese part of the empire the entourages of Kushites frequently included their mothers, wives, sisters . . . This was not so in Egypt proper . . .[19]

Apparently, the Napatan dynasts of Egypt were observing local custom in this regard. Yet in another very important respect, they seemed to have departed significantly from local tradition. Beginning with Piankhy, the pharoahs of the 25th dynasty made it a practice to install their female relatives as the high-priestesses of Amon at Thebes. There was no mere ceremonialism about this for as Leclant says of these "divine votaresses" of the Theban Amon:

**Figure 4. Queen Amentari and King Netek-amen, worshipping the three-headed lion-god. On west wall of large temple at Nagaa. From Lepsius, *Denkmaler*.**

**Figure 5. Queen Qalhata, mother of Tanutamon—25th dynasty, 7th century B.C. Mural painting in the pyramid of Qalhata.**



> Conceded quasi-royal priveleges, the Amenirdises and the Shepenoupets formed a kind of parallel dynasty with succession from aunt to niece . . .[20]

These women, working through their own prime ministers, were in effect rulers of Upper Egypt. They undertook massive restoration and public works in Thebes and throughout Upper Egypt. Their names are on scores of monuments, buildings, and statues and they are portrayed both as sacerdotalists and administrators. The Cushite pharoahs ruled mainly from Napata and seemed to have had the utmost confidence in their female relatives to govern Upper Egypt. Indeed, there were two lines of these high-priestesses, one at Thebes and one at Napata, and they are designated respectively "Mistress of Egypt (Thebes)" and "Mistress of Cush." At Thebes, the high-priestesses and their immediate successors were no doubt related by blood, as the above quote indicates, but a policy was enacted—which was continued by later generations of Cushite queens—whereby the high-priestess of Amon formally adopted her successor as her daughter.

A number of women from the royal house of Cush figure prominently in the 25th dynasty. One such was Kenensat, the Great Royal Wife of Piankhy. There is an extremely affecting and revealing episode recorded on the stela of Piankhy which provides a rare insight into the character and influence of Kenensat. A certain petty king of Lower Egypt named Nimrod had resisted Piankhy only to suffer defeat at his hands. Piankhy was renowned for his charity and mercy toward defeated enemies but was also known not to take kindly to those who unduly resisted him. In order to put himself at the best advantage, the defeated king Nimrod sent his wife Nes-thent-nes to Piankhy's queen Kenensat to plead his case. The subsequent encounter from Piankhy's stela is worth quoting at length:

> Then (Nimrod) sent forth his wife . . . Nes-thent-nes, to supplicate the queens and royal concubines, and the king's daughters and sisters. And she threw herself prostrate in the women's house, before the queens (saying) 'Pray come to me ye queens . . . appease Horus, the ruler of the palace (Piankhy). Exalted is his person, great is his triumph. Cause his (anger to be appeased before) my (prayer); else he will give (over to death the king my husband, but) he is brought low!' When she had finished (her speech, Her Majesty) was moved in her heart at the supplication of the queen.[21]

This embassy of supplication to Kenensat must have been successful because Nimrod's life was spared and he was allowed to stay on his throne. Kenensat's magnanimity on the one hand and her gentle influence on Piankhy on the other, stand out clearly in the history of this most unusual dynasty.

The first Cushite priestess-sovereign to ascend to the position of "Chief Prophetess of Amon" and "Queen of Thebes" is Amenirdas I who was the daughter of Kashta—the father of Piankhy—and Shepenapt or Shepenoupet, a princess of Thebes. Amenirdas was installed by her brother Piankhy and, in the words of Janet Buttles, "was the reigning sovereign of the principality of

Thebes, a province which extended as far South as Aswan, and had its Northern boundaries at Thinis and Khemmis . . .''[22] Records of her reign are found almost the entire length of Egypt from Aswan to Memphis, and by any measure, she must have been an able and vigorous ruler. Numerous statues, statuettes, and other pictorial representations of her have been preserved as well as a number of items of her personal property.

The successor to Amenirdas was Shepenoupet, the namesake of the Theban princess who was Amenirdas's mother. Some authorities state that she was the niece of Amenirdas whom the latter adopted as her daughter; others affirm that she was actually the daughter of Amenirdas. In any case, the office was handed down through the female line. Either she or her immediate successor, also named Shepenoupet—there is uncertainty about this—held the position of Prophetess of Amon during the period of the demise of the 25th dynasty and the ascension of the 26th dynasty. The reigning Shepenoupet, in spite of the Assyrian conquest of Egypt, maintained her hold on her position at Thebes and with the emergence of the 26th dynasty under Psamtek, marries the new pharoah. It is important to bear in mind that the Cushite dynasty of Egyptian pharoahs was *the legitimist* line, not a line of usurpers. Thus Psamtek, the founder of the Saitic or 26th dynasty, had

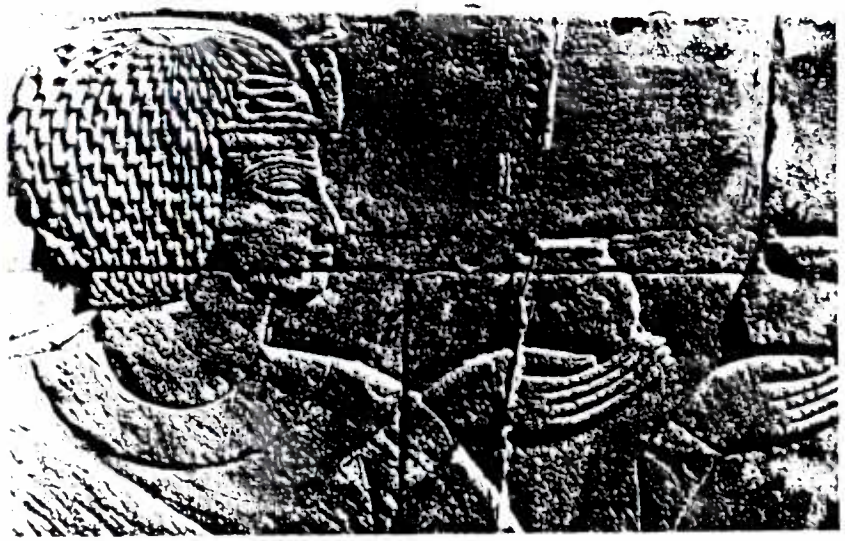


**Figure 6. Amenirdas I presenting bowls of wine to Amon. 25th dynasty, late 8th century B.C. From Karnak, chapel of Osiris-Heqa-djet.**



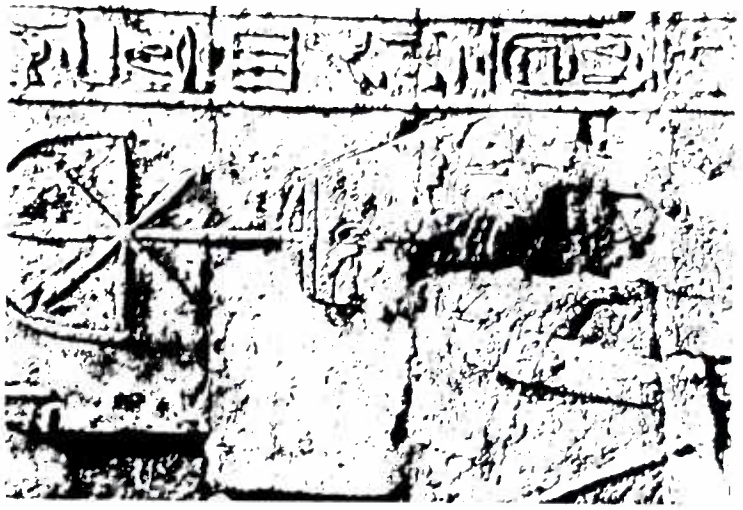


Figure 8. Amenirdas I facing Sekhet-'abu, 25th dynasty, late 8th century B.C. Karnak.

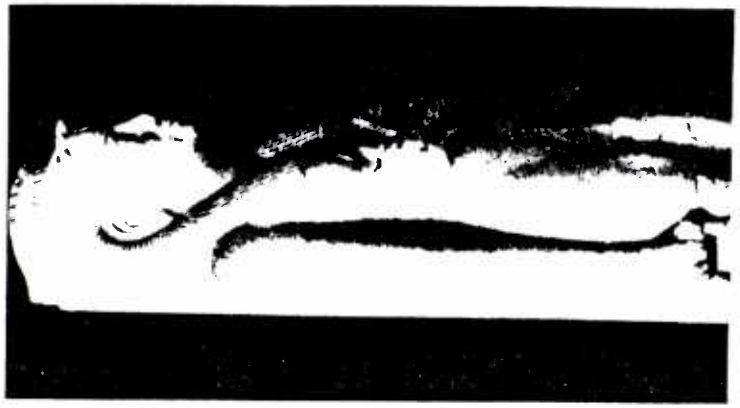


Figure 7. Statue of Amenirdas I, Karnark North. 25th dynasty, late 8th century B.C.

to legitimize his own position by marrying the last remaining female representative of the Cushite (25th) dynasty, Shepenoupet, Chief Prophetess of Amon and Queen of Thebes. Psamtek made no attempt to undermine the power and authority of Shepenoupet during her lifetime though she was compelled to adopt a daughter of his as her own. Her own blood relation, Amenirdas II—who was either her daughter or niece—apparently died before she could inherit from Shepenoupet. Shepenoupet thus stands as the last of the royal dynasty of Cush that reigned in Egypt and represents the bridge between the 25th and the 26th dynasty. Statuary likenesses of this Cushite Queen of Thebes have also come down to us.[23]

**Figure 9. Sphinx of Shepenoupet, 25th dynasty, late 8th century B.C. Karnak.**



The inscriptions reveal to us other of the Cushite royal women who are part of the 25th dynasty. Taharqa's mother Abar (Abale) figures very prominently on his stela. Taharqa, who some consider the most able of the 25th dynasty pharoahs, informs us that until he was 21, he lived with the royal brood under the care of his mother Abar, also known as the "divine wife of Amon" and the "royal mother." Taharqa, when he was still quite young, ascended to the throne of the Egypto-Cushitic empire. He carefully inscribed on his "coronation stela" how his mother, Queen Abar, came downriver from Napata to officiate at his coronation, thus giving us a valuable insight into the role of the Queen-Mother or Kentake. The Cushite kingship was elective and the Kentake had the decisive role in the selection of the king from the pool of eligible royal princes. The royal inheritance never passed to the next generation until all of the eligible princes of the reigning generation had died. Thus when Piankhy died, his brother Shabaka inherited the throne before it was passed to Taharqa on the death of Shabaka. Taharqa's legitimate claim to the throne was derived from his mother so it is no wonder that she is the chief officiant at his coronation.

Taharqa's wife was his "royal sister" Amendukhat. Unfortunately, not much is known about her but as the wife of a king beleagured by the Assyrians, she must have, in the words of one writer, "passed through some trying scenes." Equally shadowy, though we do have a pictorial representation of her, is Qalhata, the mother (some say the elder sister) of Taharqa's successor Tanutamun, the last pharoah of the 25th dynasty.[24] Qalhata was given the cognomen, "Mistress of Cush" and another female relative of Tanutamun, Gerarheni, claimed the title of "Mistress of Egypt."

In our look at the 25th dynasty, we can get a sense of the very real prominence, both politically and religiously, of the queens of Cush during this period. They seemed to wield power that was almost unprecedented in Egyptian annals and are instrumental, even after Cush has retired from Egypt, in the transition to the 26th dynasty.

We have begun to piece together, at least to some extent, the way in which the Kentakes exercised their very real power. In the history of Cush subsequent to the 25th dynasty, the role and position of the Kentake came to be exemplified in another important way: the practice of formally adopting her daughter-in-law, the Great Wife of the king. We see early analogies to this custom with the priestess-sovereigns of Thebes in 25th dynasty, but in the Napatan phase of Cushite history, the practice of brother-sister royal marriages would not require this custom with respect to the royal house. In later Cushite history, however, there were kings who apparently married outside the immediate family. Then it became essential, as a way of maintaining the female line of royal succession, to institutionalize this practice of adopting the royal daughter-in-law. We can see the effect of this with Nasalsa, the Kentake of one of the later Napatan kings:

> . . . Nasalsa adopted Madiqen, wife of Anlamani, who soon died and was succeeded by his brother Aspelta whose wife Henuttskhabit was eventually adopted by both Nasalsa and Madiqen.[25]

This practice had the effect of strengthening and stabilizing the power and influence of the Kentake and the royal house in general, as witnessed by the remarkable lack of political strife in the 1000-year history of Cush. Also, this process enabled the Kentake in the later, Meroitic phase of Cushitic civilization to rule in her own right without objection or interference from anyone.

Another important index of the power, prestige, and position of the royal women of Cush whether as Kentakes or Great Wives is the way they are represented in the iconography of Cush. In Egypt, there are elegant statues of the 25th dynasty Cusho-Theban priestess-sovereigns, Amenirdas and Shepenoupet, in addition to a number of reliefs and inscriptions depicting them in their sacerdotal and administrative functions.[26] Qalhata, mother of Tanutamun, is portrayed on a mural at El Kurra showing her being led by two divinities. Like other Kentakes, she was entombed in her own pyramid.[27] The relationship of the royal women to the king of Cush is frequently portrayed in reliefs and murals on monuments and tombs. In what appears to be a standard pose for the monarchs of Cush, Aspelta is shown with his mother and sister-wife who are each pouring a libation from a vase in the right hand and carrying a sistrum, a sacred instrument, in the left.[28] The stelae of Hersatef, Nastasen, and Natakamani, which have been recovered, depict the exact same pose: the king presiding at some ritual function with either the Kentake or the Great Wife—or both—helping him perform his ministrations. Nastasen, who is of interest to us because he was instrumental in the defeat of the Persian autocrat Cambyses who attempted to invade Cush, follows the lead of Taharqa and other kings by showing his mother officiating at his coronation. Through her, he claimed his inheritance.

By Meroitic times (after 300 BC), the Kentakes were increasingly represented either alone or in the forefront on their own stelae and sculptures. This of course reflected their emergence as independent sovereigns. They are sometimes portrayed with their husbands but are just as often shown with their sons who often inherit from them directly. Reliefs dated at about 170 BC show Queen Shenakdakhete occupying the throne alone and, indeed, she is the first acknowledged independent Meroitic queen. In one interesting group sculpture, she is represented as standing in the forefront with her son in attendance a little behind her.[29] Additionally, we see some of the Kentakes striking the pose—a convention among Nile Valley sovereigns from pre-dynastic times—of spearing captives and military enemies. The stela of Amanishakhete is an excellent example of this.[30] As will be seen, the Kentakes did not shy away from military exploits.

There is a distinct line of sovereign Kentakes in Cushite history—four of whom were actually designated by the Graeco-Roman title "Candace"—who



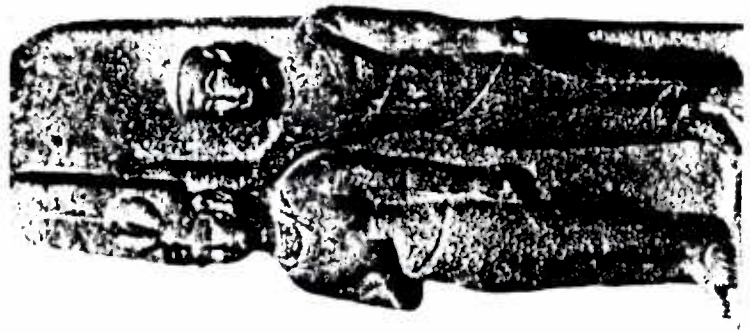


Figure 11. Shanakdakhete and her son. 2nd century B.C.

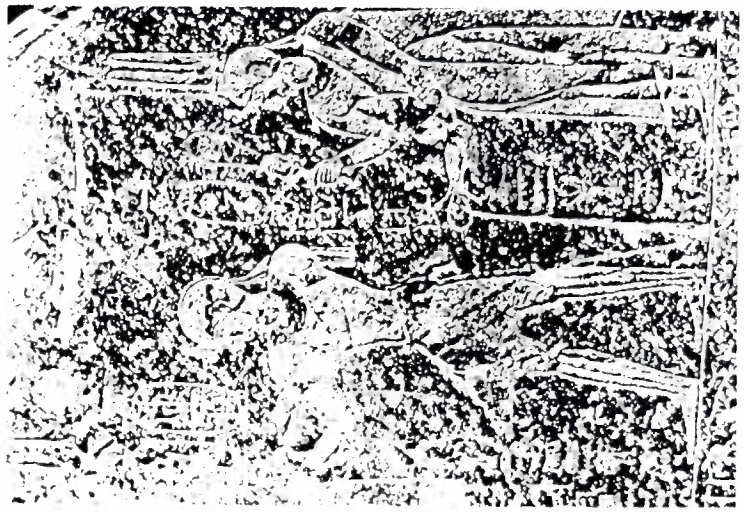


Figure 10. Nastasen and his mother. 4th century B.C. Stela of Nastasen.

come to the fore in the Meroitic period of Cushite history. We have noted how with the transfer of the capital from Napata to Meroe in 300 BC, Cush begins a phase of independent development. One manifestation of this is the enhancement of the power of the Kentakes. We have already mentioned Queen Shenakdakhete who appears to have been the first to win full possession of royal power and who reigned between 170-160 BC. That she was the sole ruler of Cush at this time can be inferred from the fact that she commanded the full prerogatives of royal burial which was reserved only for the sovereign. After her, at various stages, reigned the four Meroitic queens whom history knows as the Candaces: Amanirenas, Amanishakhete, Nawidemak, and Maleqereabar. There may have been other Candaces or sovereign Kentakes but as yet they have not been identified. Two things must be remembered: (1) the upper two-thirds of Cush have hardly been touched by the spades of archeology, and (2) the Meroitic script remains largely undeciphered. Thus, we are left with huge gaps in our knowledge of Cush and her institutions.

The Candaces were vigorous builders, erecting magnificent palaces and tombs for themselves as part of time-honored prerogatives. Particularly at Naga, south of the capitol, statues and edifices built by the Candaces are abundantly evident. One of the monuments of Shanakdakhete at Naga contain the earliest of the specifically Meroitic hieroglyphs. Indeed, the era of the Candaces seemed to have ushered in an architectural revival because some of Cush's finest monuments and buildings appear at this time. The building activities of Amanishakhete and Amanirenas especially, produced some of the finest examples of Meroitic art and architecture.

One of the most famous episodes in Cushite history is the military encounter between the legions of Augustus Caesar under Petronius and the armies of the reigning Candace, whom some think was Amanirenas. The most vivid account of these engagements is given by Strabo, writing in 7 AD, but Pliny also produced a version. The Romans, who in 30 BC had made themselves masters of all Egypt from Alexandria to Philae, almost immediately came into conflict with the Cushite Candace, particularly as the Romans seemed bent on establishing their rule over territory which traditionally belonged to Cush. Following Strabo's account, sometime between 29-24 BC, the Cushite army crossed the Egyptian border, attacked the towns of Philae, Syene, and Elephantine, routed the Roman garrisons there, and destroyed statues of Caesar. The Romans reacted swiftly: under the prefect Petronius, Roman legions invaded Cush, defeated her armies, sacked her towns, and razed Napata. However, the Candace evaded them and even offered to make restitution for the Cushite attack on Upper Egypt. Petronius chose to ignore these embassies but realizing that his position was precarious so far from his bases and that further penetration into Cush invited disaster, he retired. He fortified a Roman garrison at Premnis in Lower Nubia and returned to Alexandria. In the fashion of Cushite armies for 3,000 years, as soon as Petronius returned to Alexandria, the Candace gave the order to her army to march against Premnis. Petronius, when apprised of the situation, quickly returned with his legions to Premnis, actually arriving there before Candace. The two armies stood facing each other at a stand-off but an agreement was reached in which the Meroitic ambassadors were to negotiate with Augustus himself at Samos, in the Mediterranean, which they did. The outcome was that the Romans withdrew from their garrison at Premnis and renounced the tribute that they had tried to impose on the inhabitants of Lower Nubia in the domains of Candace. Strabo's account, told from the Roman point of view, depicts the Cushites under Candace getting the worst of the encounter.[31] However, Frank Snowden has a different view of the episode:

> The concessions of a Roman emperor to the Ethiopian Candace must have resulted from a different set of circumstances than those described by Strabo, who was apparently exaggerating the successes of Petronius . . . It is unfortunate that an inscription, considered to be an Ethiopian version of the campaign and of a victory for the Meroitic queen, is still largely untranslatable. Both Strabo and the *Monumentum Ancyranum* may have overdrawn Roman successes . . . In light of the difficulties the Romans later experienced in the same area . . . the concessions of Augustus at Samos probably reflected wisdom.[32]

Meroe, at this juncture in her history, was, and had been for some time, a world power. The above episode with its outcome largely in Meroe's favor testifies to this. Candace had ambassadors and consulates all over the Roman empire.[33] Moreover, it is likely, particularly as Candace controlled the trade in luxury goods from Africa—gold, ivory, ebony, incense, rare oils, semi-precious stones, animal skins—that she maintained diplomatic residences all over the known world. There are some who profess to see at Naga, for example—in the name "Naga" and in some of the religious iconography—evidence of an Indian influence in Cush. This is not that fanciful: the celebrated mystic Appolonius of Tyana visited a group of "Gymnosophists"—purported to be a group of Buddhist missionaries from India—in Cush in the early years of the Christian era.[34] It is fair to surmise that the Candaces ruled over an empire that could and did treat with the other great nations and empires of the world as an equal.

Modern scholars inform us that the first of the Kentakes to wield full sovereign power was Shanakdakhete in 170 BC. Yet Psuedo-Callistenes, in his *Alexander Romance* written in the 4th century BC, tells us that Alexander paid a friendly visit to "Candace, the black Queen of Meroe" who was reported to be a "wondrous beauty."[35] There are several reasons why this reference is significant: (1) it is perhaps the earliest reference to the Candaces in Graeco-Roman literature and therefore it shows (2) that even Alexander, certainly the most towering and dominating personality of his time, respected Cush and her queens enough to pay a personal, *friendly* visit (Solomon and Sheba in reverse), and fi-

nally (3) there may have been independent Kentakes some 150 years before Shenakdakhete and therefore the line of Candaces may go back significantly further than is generally admitted.

Finally, it is worth considering an unusual episode in the history of early Christianity that sheds an interesting light on that period. In the Acts of the Apostles, the very first Gentile convert to Christianity is the minister of the Queen of Ethiopia who encounters Phillip in Upper Egypt and is baptized by him.[36] In one sense, this minister of Candace can be regarded as the world's first

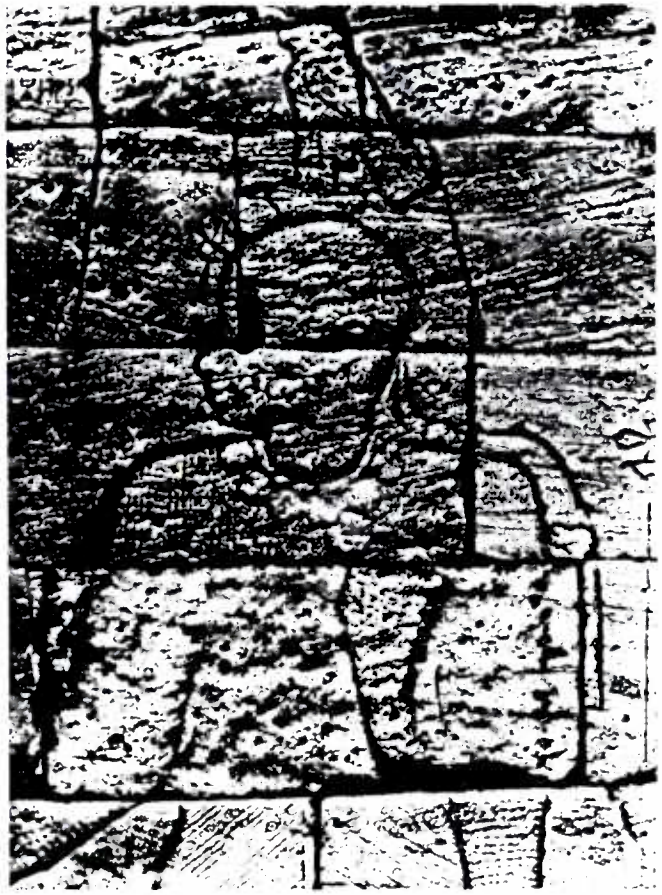


**Figure 12. "Negro goddess," probably an unidentified Meroitic queen. Late first century B.C. Lion Temple at Naga.**



Christian because up to the time of the conversion of the Gentiles, what was to become Christianity was nothing more than a reformist Jewish sect. Thus, from the court of Candace comes the world's first Christian.

We have only scratched the surface of what there is to know about the fabulous kingdom of Cush and the Kentakes who ruled it. Cush represents the next great frontier of African archeology and when the herculean task of rediscovery is undertaken, perhaps we will begin to truly understand the magnificence of the Kentakes.

## The Falasha Queen Judith

We must now turn to a brief consideration of a most unusual figure in Ethiopian history, the Falasha queen Judith. Unfortunately, the details of her life and history are exceedingly fragmentary but she is of interest to us because she was a bona-fide female conqueror. Other noted female military leaders in African history, like Candace and Nzingha, were defenders of their respective countries against invaders. But Judith appears to have actually started the war against the Axumite or Abyssinian Solomonid dynasty, carried it to a successful conclusion, and then reigned for 40 years unchallenged. The Solomonids remained out of power for some 300 years thereafter because after Judith came the dynasty of the Zagwes, circa 1000 AD, who may have been ethnically related to Judith.[37] Indeed, there is debate about Judith's ethnic origins or even whether her name was "Judith." Though some describe her as a pagan, it is generally accepted that she was of the Jewish religion either by birth or conversion. It is stated that she was of Agau origin who were said to be a branch of the Falasha Jews.[38] What is universally agreed upon is that she was an inveterate enemy of Christianity and the Solomonid kings of Axum. She proceeded to conquer Axum, seize the throne, and then systematically lay to waste all of the Christian churches, killing thousands of Christians in the process. In the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, mention is made of a letter from the Axumite king who pleaded with the Patriarch of Alexandria to send help against an unnamed warrior queen who was laying Axum to waste. No help was forthcoming because Judith succeeded in conquering all Axum, thus bringing to a close a 2000-year dynasty. This is about all we know of Judith. The official Ethiopian Chronicles, for the most part, pass over her reign in silence. What is remembered is her reported cruelties and depredations against Christians. There are still some Ethiopian historical manuscripts that have not been released to the world; if they ever are, perhaps we will learn more about this astonishing warrior-queen.[39]

## Epilogue

We hope that this survey will provide some insight into a phenomenon of African cultural history that has received scant attention. Almost nowhere has there

emerged a systematic and comprehensive treatment of the African queenship. African history is a mansion with many unopened rooms and never will we understand it properly until this most vital aspect of it—the role of the matriarchy and the queenship—is fully studied and comprehended.

## Notes

1. See Rashidi, R., *Cushite Case Studies*, (Los Angeles: private publication, 1983), for a fuller exposition of "Ethiopia" outside of Africa.

2. Hansberry, William Leo, *Pillars in Ethiopian History*, Vol. 1 of *African History Notebook*, edited by Joseph Harris (Washington, D.C.: Howar University Press, 1981), pp. 39-40.

3. Rashidi, op. cit., pp. 47-51.

4. See Mead, G.R.S., *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, Vol. 1 (London: Watkins, 1906, 1949), pp. 255-368 for an English-language version of Plutarch's treatise on Isis and Osiris.

5. See Massey, Gerald, *Book of Beginnings*, Vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881), passim.

6. See Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Books, 1955, 1977), pp. 237-245 and Snowden, Frank, *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 152-154 for discussions of the Ethiopian origins of Andromeda.

7. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by A. de Selincourt (New York: Penguin Books, 1952, 1979), p. 167.

8. Snowden, op. cit., pp. 155, 161. The inference here is that if Circe was a Black woman, and she is so represented artistically, then so must have been Medea, her niece.

9. Joseph E. Harris, editor of *Pillars in Ethiopian History* which is a compilation of the notes of William Leo Hansberry, has written, "The story of the Queen of Sheba is one of the most ubiquitous and compelling legends in history. It has been perpetuated in various parts of the world in literature, music, and paintings (Shakespeare's Henry VIII, poems by Lascelles Abercrombie, Rudyard Kipling and W.B. Yeats; musical pieces by Karl Goldmark, C.F. Gounod, and G.F. Handel; European and Persian paintings; and the Ethiopian Tableau which portrays the story in forty-four vivid pictures)."

10. John D. Baldwin, the antiquarian historian, writes in his book *Pre-Historic Nations*, "At one time, as the early Greeks say, the term Ethiopia was used to describe not only Arabia, but also Syria, Armenia, and the whole region between the Mediterranean, which means the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf," p. 61.

11. Shinnie, Margaret, *Ancient African Kingdoms* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, N.D.), p. 30. Also, the Hebrew-Israelite scholar, Rudolph Windsor writing of the populace of southern Arabia—including Axum—has written, "There were many Cushite tribes (Ethiopians) living in the northern, western, and southern sections of Arabia. The Arabians have had a long history of intercourse with the Ethiopians in the peninsula of Arabia and with the Ethiopians across the Red Sea in the continent of Africa . . . It is a known fact that there were Ethiopians inhabiting Arabia in the north, southwest, and the southeast. It is obvious that the Cushites inhabited vital parts of Arabia before the birth of the progenitors of the Arabs. Raamah, the son of Kush, was the father of the Kushite Sheba and Dedan (Gen. 10:7) about 2300 BC. The tribe of Raamah became remarkable merchants (Ezek. 27:22). The descendants of Raamah lived in Southwest Arabia, and the descendants of Havilah resided in southwest Arabia, which is Yemen. This Havilah was a son of Kush. Moreover, Cush was the patriarch of all the Ethiopian tribes in Babylon, Arabia, India, and on the Nile River." Windsor, Rudolph, *From Babylon to Timbuktu* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969), p. 37.

12. Baldwin, op. cit., p. 62.

13. There is other evidence of the remains of the trade network of the land of Sheba. Herbert Wendt, in his important work, *It Began in Babel* (p. 109), writes, "More reliable than these rather legendary accounts are the business relationships between the Sabaeans and the classical spice-lands of further India and Indonesia. Grecian explorers in Alexander's day found numerous Arabian bases along the coast of Spices, with names like Zabae, Sabana, and Sabara which indicate that these harbours and industries were founded by Sabaeans." Makeda was the queen of these Cushitic Sabaeans.



14. Clarke, John Henrik, "New Introduction," in *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, by C.A. Diop (Chicago: Third World Press, 1978), p. VI.

15. Baldwin, op. cit., p. 85.

16. Rogers, J.A., *World's Great Men of Color*, Vol. 1 (New York: Helga Rogers, 1946), p. 86.

17. Hakem, A.A., "The Civilization of Napata and Meroe," in the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, Chap. 11, Vol. 2, edited by G. Mokhtar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 298-325.

18. See Van Sertima, Ivan, *They Came Before Columbus* (New York: Random House, 1977) for arguments in favor of Egypto-Nubian voyages to Meso-America at the time of the 25th dynasty.

19. Leclant, Jean, "*The Empire of Kush: Napata and Meroe*," in Mokhtar, op. cit., p. 283.

20. Ibid.

21. Buttles, Janet, *The Queens of Egypt* (London: Longman and Green, 1908), p. 204.

22. Ibid., p. 207.

23. Leclant, Jean, "Kushites and Meroites: Iconography of the African Rulers in the Ancient Upper Nile," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Chap. 1, Vol. 1 (Switzerland: Menil Foundation, 1976), p. 115.

24. Ibid., p. 100.

25. Hakem, op. cit., p. 303.

26. Leclant, op. cit., p. 111.

27. Ibid., p. 100.

28. Budge, E.A. Wallis, *A History of Ethiopia*, Vol. 1 (London: Methuen & Co., 1928), p. 44.

29. Leclant, op. cit., p. 129.

30. Budge, op. cit., p. 87.

31. See Budge, ibid., pp. 58-61 for a fuller summary of Strabo's account.

32. Snowden, op. cit., p. 133.

33. Ibid., pp. 134-5.

34. See Mead, G.R.S., *Appolonius of Tyana* (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1966), pp. 99-105, for an account of Appolonius' sojourn with the "Gymnosophists" of Ethiopia.

35. See Snowden, op. cit., pp. 177-8 and Hansberry, William Leo, *Africa & Africans As Seen By Classical Writers*, Vol. 2 of the *African History Notebook*, edited by Joseph E. Harris (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1977), p. 144.

36. Snowden, op. cit., p. 206.

37. Budge, op. cit., pp. 213-15.

38. Kessler, David, *The Falashas* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), p. 79.

39. See Selassie, Sergew Hable, "The Problem of Gudit," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, January, 1972, pp. 113-124 for extracts from an unpublished Ethiopian Chronicle in Ge'ez that deals with Judith.

# THE FEMALE HORUSES AND GREAT WIVES OF KEMET

**By Diedre Wimby**

The foremost and most significant fact to bear in mind when dealing with the issue of women and leadership in ancient Kemet (Egypt) is simply that there was equality between men and women. The woman had political power as well as a general voice in the running of the country, as did her sisters in other parts of Africa. The woman had the opportunity to hold high office and was often very wealthy and prosperous. This was in contrast to the situation of her counterpart, the woman of the Near East and Asia.

Several women of ancient Kemet ruled the entire nation from time to time and, in addition, the royal line was determined through the female. Kemet is by far the best documented of the ancient African nations and its female citizens probably had more freedom than any other women in the ancient world. A question often raised is why the office of kingship could not have been randomly occupied by either the female or the male.

This article will give a brief account of the several female Horuses (Horus—a designation of a King, symbolized by a falcon) and attempt to answer this question by looking at the circumstances in which they reigned.

The rulership of Kemet (Egypt) was entrusted exclusively to the male; the very nature of kingship demanded this. The Egyptian social order was conceived as a preordained portion of the cosmic order. The king was endowed with divine powers and embodied the strength, vitality and authority of the Natures. In the harmonious Egyptian universe, the king had a well-defined role: it was he who possessed the most vital powers in all the kingdom. Only by holding such a position could he act as intermediary between man and the superior cosmic forces. His position and his person were therefore sacrosanct. Without his presence, chaos would reign in the midst of the ontological powers. According to this order of things, when the *vis vitalis* (life-force) of the king himself declined, he was obliged to undergo a ritual rejuvenation. Such was the meaning of the Sed Festival.

The nature of kingship is clearly expressed by the Royal Protocol. "The King was called: Horus; Strong-Bull-arisen-in-Thebes; Gold Horus; Mighty in Strength; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt; Lord of the Two Lands; Son of Re."[1]

Thus it was at all times preferable to have a man, rather than a woman, occupy the throne of Kemet. And we are not merely discussing here the occupying of a throne but the dynamics of rulership itself. In the Kemetic social order only the male was endowed with the requisite dynamism. However, the Kemetic concept of rulership cannot be understood by the Western concept since, with very few exceptions (e.g., Ikhnaton) the Kemetic sovereign's powers were more symbolic than actual. Yet he was no mere figurehead like the king one finds in the West today. We might say that his actual authority was more akin to that of a Western religious patriarch, than to that of a Western king, bearing in mind that this is not a perfect analogy.



Perhaps the following remarks will help to clear up this point.

Every nation is, in a sense, an extension of the family and home. Now women are particularly well suited to govern this institution, and thus could conceivably govern a nation as well. But this was not the kind of governing for which the Kemetic king was responsible. His sole concern was rather the maintenance of *Maat*, i.e. universal order (in terms of justice, etc.) through his divinely given ability to understand and, if necessary, control the vital forces of the cosmos in, and for, his nation and his land.

It appears then as though the Kemetic concept of rulership categorically denied this position to women. We should note, however, that the office of king underwent certain changes during Kemet's long history. There were, for example, a few particular circumstances under which it was more expedient to have a woman on the throne. If the Pharaoh died and left no male heir, then the queen would be allowed to rule until such time as a new dynasty could be initiated. Also, in cases where the king's only legal heir was too young to assume his deceased father's office, the queen consort was expected to rule until he attained maturity.

One might suggest that the rulership of Kemet was a balanced situation: the man was the personification of divine authority, the woman the source of his power. Many times descent in the royal family was reckoned according to the maternal line. Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop proposes that the queen was the guardian of the royal lineage.[2] And this is evidenced by the nature of the transition from the Third to the Fourth Dynasty. King Senefru married a certain Hetepheres, a princess who represented a direct inheritance of the royal blood; it was only by way of this union that he was able to acquire the throne. Such an occurrence seems to be explained by some law of matrilineal succession. This also may be why certain kings married their sisters. (Such consanguineous marriages will be discussed later on.)

The Palermo Stone lists the names of the mothers of the kings since it was through them that the dynasties originated.[3] Of even greater significance is the fact that the king's mother was said to have been impregnated by the Ntr in order that the Divine King may be brought forth, for this assured his divine nature. Thus was the mother called "God's wife" in the New Kingdom. She, too, was sacrosanct.

Mothers were often extolled by kings and nobles on their monuments, whereas

the father was seldom mentioned. This is perhaps a good indication of the truly matriarchal nature of Kemetic rulership. However, we cannot be certain whether or not the common people followed the nobility in this. Nonetheless, in this system, women must have wielded a great deal of power, had a definite voice in government and a direct influence on the king. But in addition to this, women did rule Kemet from time to time as sole sovereigns of the Two Lands.

### Female Horuses and Regents

The first attested queen-regent of Kemet was Neith-hetep (Nt-htp), which means "Neith is at peace," Neith being a female nzr venerated in the Delta region, particularly at Sais. She is considered the wife of Aha-menes, the illustrious first king of the First Dynasty.[4]

In the Nagada tomb of Aha-menes were discovered several tablets on which was written the name of Neith-hetep. Interestingly enough, her name is enclosed in a serek surmounted by the symbol of Neith, a shield with crossed arrows. Little, however, can be ascertained about the activities of this queen due to lack of information. Kaplong has suggested that she may have been queen-regent for Djer, her uncle, he being too young to assume kingship at that time.[5] It is of particular importance to us that this most significant period of Kemetic history boasts a woman regent. Yet she was not the only one to reign during this early dynastic period.

Perhaps the best known queen of the early dynastic age was Mer-Neith (mrt-Nt means "beloved of Neith"). Her name appears on the Palermo Stone as the mother of Den.[6] Kaplong suggests that Mer-Neith was the wife of Wadj, fourth king of the First Dynasty, and mother of Den. Gardiner, following Vandier, has suggested that Mer-Neith's marriage to this Thinite king was a diplomatic one, the object of which was to promote good relations with the inhabitants of the Delta.[7]

All evidence points to the fact that she indeed attained a very special position for a woman in this period. Just as the kings of the early dynasties each had two tombs (one at Abydos in the south and another at Saqqara in the north) surrounded by graves of retainers, so did Queen Mer-Neith. There is a great tomb at Abydos assigned to this queen, wherein was discovered a circular-top stele bearing her name inscribed in a serek.[8] There is also a great mastaba for Mer-Neith at Saqqara, wherein were discovered objects and jar sealings that bear her name. On the jar sealings the name of queen is written in a serek surmounted by a Horus.

In light of this fact, and considering the existence of the two royal tombs, north and south, and a circular-top stele for her, it appears that she may have indeed been a reigning Horus. For normally only a king has his name in a serek surmounted by a Horus (falcon). Edwards suggests that she served as regent,



perhaps while her son Den was still a minor, and died before relinquishing the office. Such a position, he says, could only have been held by a woman who was a queen as well.[9] He further calls attention to an inscription which alludes to her treasury, and rightly considers this to be further evidence of her sovereign status.

She must have been a very powerful woman commanding a great deal of respect: the wife of one king, the mother of another. One can perhaps detect something of her eminence from the action of Den's successor, Semerkhet, who, out of fear of her, had both her name and that of Den erased from their monuments. It is unfortunate we know no more about her. She is known only from a few inscribed objects. Whether or not she came to power in her own right as a legitimate Horus, rather than as a regent, cannot be ascertained from the available information alone. Yet Edwards' suggestion does have some merit, even though it is by no means the last word on the subject. The Horus falcon over her serek is the mark of legitimate sovereignty. She is the first known female Horus in Kemetic history.

The Sixth Dynasty saw a rise in power of the aristocracy. Local officials became less dependent on the king, these monarchs establishing their power in the various nomes. The second king of the Sixth Dynasty, Pepi I, ascended the throne as a child. The queen placed User-ka-re on the throne and co-reigned with him; but when Pepi attained majority, he ousted the queen and User-ka-re.

Pepi I married two sisters, both of whom were named Anchnesmerire. One was the mother of King Merenre, the other the mother of Neter-ka-re (Pepi II). The latter served as regent for her son.[10]

Pepi II reigned ninety years but at the end of his reign the administration slipped away from him, greater authority passing into the hands of the monarchs.

The Sixth Dynasty ended with a wave of Asiatic aggression which overwhelmed Kemet. There were social and political upheavals, especially in the north. It was in this milieu that the last two sovereigns inherited the throne: these were Merenre II and Nitocris-men-ka-re.[11] Queen Nitocris is listed in the Turin Canon as Nsw-hbity Nt-jqrty.[12] Manetho says of this queen: "She was the noblest and loveliest of the women of her time . . ."

He gives her a reign of 12 years, while another Greek, Eratosthenes, gives her only a seven year reign.[13]

Herodotus, in his *History*, Book II, gives an account of a certain Nitocris. She is the only queen mentioned by him as following Menes.[14]

Now, even though the Turin Canon lists her as a *nswt bity*, there is no evidence, archaeological or otherwise, of her having had a Horus title. (*Nswt bity*—literally, the one of the sledge and the bee. The sledge symbolizes Upper Kemet and the bee Lower Kemet, thus indicating the king of Upper and Lower Kemet.) Given the fact that she had the *nswt bity* title, it appears she ruled legitimately as a king. Although the title alone should not be our sole verification of this (for we cannot presently ascertain whether the significance of this title is the

Queen Ankhenesmerire. 6th dynasty.



same when applied to a woman) only a study of the titulary of queens can enable us to know this for certain. It is known that queens often had the titles, *itj.t* and *nswj.t*, feminine forms of *itj* and *nswt* ("king," "ruler"). The statements of the Greeks do tend, therefore, to verify her sovereignty.

Manetho further states that she had the third pyramid at Geza constructed, although, by Manetho's time, oral tradition had probably confused Nitocris with a certain Rhodopis, to whom Greek tradition attributed the building of that pyramid.[15]

An important phenomenon manifesting itself during this period was consanguineous marriage in the royal family. This type of union has been studied by several scholars, who discovered it to be in evidence only among the nobility and not among the common people (although the majority of the sources have been concerned only with the nobility). Jaroslav Černy found only one instance of this practice outside the nobility, and that was from the Twenty-Second Dynasty.[16]

Since this appears to be a custom practiced virtually only by the nobility, one wonders what this says for the nobility: is it a vestige of an old indigenous order, or an expression of a new one? First of all, let us note that the practice *has nothing to do with matriarchy or matrilineage*. We are confronted here with three different concepts. Consanguinity is marriage between blood relations for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the kinship system.[17] It may be based on either a matrilineal or patrilineal system. In Kemet it happened to be based on the former.

One view of the matter is that, since the woman is considered the true guardian of the royal lineage, she would then marry her brother or half-brother. It is she who transmits the crown to her spouse, who is actually only her executor-agent.[18]

Since the woman is the carrier of the royal blood, why *consanguinity* (filiation from the same ancestor, blood relationship) than simple *matrilineage* (designating filiation through the mother)? Something very critical was at stake here, forcing the royalty to interbreed. Our suggestion is that there may have been a religious fear of corrupting the "solar blood," the divine essence of the Horuses. Conceiving of themselves as bearers of godhood, representatives of the divine, Pharaonic families might have developed an obsessive fear of contamination from the masses, the non-sacrosanct elements of society, believing that the maintenance of divinity depended upon absolute purity of the ruling group. This fear of degeneracy through contamination might have taken on other forms[19] and extended in varying degrees to the nobility.

Manetho speaks of an armed invasion from Palestine that overthrew the indigenous regime and established foreign rule and occupied parts of the country. The foreigners to whom he refers were called the Hyksos. King Seqenere Tao II initiated a move against the Hyksos occupation. He died soon afterward, probably in an armed engagement with these invaders. His son Kamose, indignant over having to share his power with Asiatics and Nubians, continued the strug-

gle. It is conjectured that Kamose, too, died in battle with the Hyksos King Apopis.

Kamose was succeeded by Ahmose, probably his own brother. When his father died, Kamose appears to have been an only child, his mother, Queen Ahotep, ruling as regent until he reached majority. Ahotep was the daughter of Seqenere Tao I and Queen Tetisheri, sister and wife of Seqenere Tao II, mother of Kamose, and more likely, Ahmose and Nefer-to-re.[20] Little is known of the interregnum when she was regent, except that, after her husband's death, she kept up the revolutionary struggle against the Hyksos. In an Eighteenth Dynasty inscription appears the following:

> The king's wife, the noble lady, who knew everything
> Assembled Kemet. She looked after what her Sovereign
> Had established. She guarded it.
> She assembled her fugitives.
> She brought together her deserters.
> She pacified her Upper Egyptians.
> She subdued her rebels.
> The king's wife Ahotep given life.[21]

It was under Ahmose that Avaris, the Hyksos capital, was seized and taken, an event followed by a campaign into Asia. Thus it was he who finally drove out the Hyksos from Kemet. Ahmose's queen and sister, Ahmose-Nefetere, played an important part in the reconstruction of the country after its rescue from the conquest.

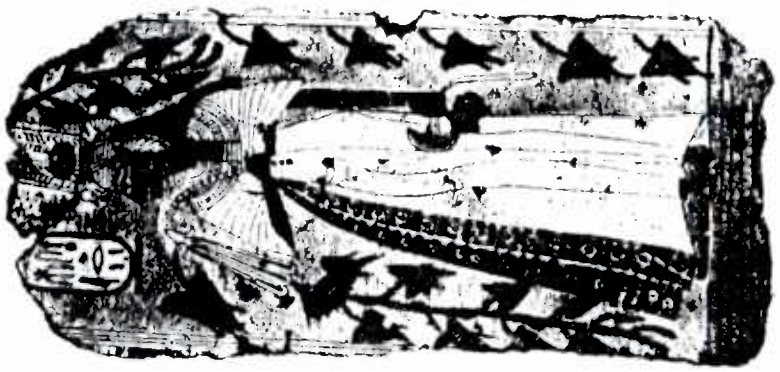
One important office she is known to have held was that of Second Prophet of Amun. A Karnak stele commemorates her initiation into the office, which her husband bestowed on her. She is the first woman known to have held this post. It was one of the highest and most important offices in the land. The Second Prophet was responsible for civil as well as religious functions. Though he was subordinate to the First Prophet, he sometimes acted in that capacity. The duties of the two prophets often took them outside of the temple. The Second Prophet was in charge of the workers of the temple fields (the temple controlled vast tracts of land in Kemet). He also collected the divine offerings.[22]

The Amun priesthood wielded great power. Hence, for Ahmose, the appointment of his wife to this office might have been a chance for him to extend his control into the religious sphere. Being in charge of the divine offerings put her in control of a large amount of resources. The office is perhaps comparable to the finance department of a modern country.

In this position she also bore the title of Divine Wife, a title that she was the first to have.

Second Prophet Divine Wife Ahmose-Nefertere had special quarters built for her where she maintained a college of priestesses who ministered to the Divine Wife. Numerous functionaries were a part of her domain, including a chief of





Queen Ahmose-Nefertare. 17th dynasty.

Queen Ahotep. 17th dynasty.

troops, a majordomo, a purification priest, scribes, servants, etc. All these individuals were at her disposal. As overseer of the fieldworkers, she is credited with reorganizing the necropolis at Der el Medina.[23]

It has been suggested that she exercised regency during the minority of her son Amenhotep I. Not much is known of the activities of this queen during the period in question, except for certain building projects.

Hatshepsut is perhaps the most unique of the female Horuses, and also the one about whom the most is known. She came to power after a long line of warrior kings. Thutmose I, her father, did a thing never done before him. Namely, he campaigned into Asia up to the Euphrates, as a display of Kemet's power to the rising nations abroad. For in the Fifteenth Century B.C. the spirit of imperialism was on the prowl, a spirit which had long prevailed in Western Asia among the Three Great Powers, who were at that time contending for land and control of the trade routes. This fierce competition had brought these nations to the borders of Kemet. Kemet had only recently thrown off the yoke of the Hyksos. The martial spirit, aroused during the time of Ahmose, was still high. Thutmose I also campaigned in Nubia, and occupied it.

He was succeeded by his son Thutmose II, who had as his queen his half-sister Hatshepsut. Upon the death of Thutmose II, the succession was left in a rather precarious position since the male heir was still a child. According to custom, the young prince was declared heir apparent and his aunt Hatshepsut was appointed regent for him.

While queen-regent, Hatshepsut began to exert her will, perhaps prompted by a rightful claim to the throne based on her legitimate descent from Thutmose I. She deposed the young heir. She was probably able to amass enough support from a section of the nobility to secure the throne and declare herself Queen or it was the nobles who urged her to assume this position. Two of the noted men behind this move were Senmut and Hapusened. But what was their motivation? Was it that she and her supporters were opposed to the imperialistic policies of Thutmose's regime? We can only conjecture.

Her own reign was of a different nature, marked by a complete cessation of foreign campaigns and a concentration on domestic affairs. The queen did much building, including her own mortuary temple at Der el Bahari. She organized commercial expeditions, the most celebrated one being the Punt expedition, the purpose of which was to acquire goods and produce from that rich market. She also carried out policing activities in the occupied Nubian territory.

From her accession on, there seems to have been much opposition to her. It may be that her opponents were not so much opposed to her being a woman, but to her philosophy of *non-aggression*. Her antagonists were the pro-imperialist supporters of Thutmose's policies of aggressive warfare and military conquest. However, her abandonment of the Asian campaigns simply gave the Asians time to organize and build up forces and morale. Her policies would, in fact, have culminated in tragedy for Kemet, had Thutmose III not succeeded in deposing



Queen Hatshepsut. 18th dynasty.

Queen Ahmes. 18th dynasty.

her and reinstating the policies of his father. He had temporarily established Kemet as a world power.

Hatshepsut's ideas were, unfortunately, not the best for Kemet at the time since there were definitely nations interested in conquering the land. They had been simply biding their time.

Nonetheless, Hatshepsut became, in a manner of speaking, a true Horus, i.e. she aspired to the Horus consciousness by spiritually, intellectually and physically assuming all the ritual apparatus of the male-oriented kingship. She adopted the spirit of Horus by taking responsibility for Maat (order), which included much new construction, eliminating the undesirables from the land, etc. Among her inscriptions are to be found the following statements: "I have restored that which was in ruins; I have raised up that which was unfinished." And, "I came as Horus, darting fire against my enemies."

In addition, and unlike her predecessors, Hatshepsut physically became a Horus as well. In effect, she created a new science of rulership, the essence of which was the female manifesting male attributes (or, as the Chinese would express it, the yin taking on the yang).

She donned male attire, had herself depicted with a king's beard. In her inscriptions she often applied and used the masculine third person pronoun for herself, thus ensuring that she would later be referred to as He rather than She.

It can be said that the kingship was a position suited especially to the male, which is borne out by the fact that, in assuming the throne, Hatshepsut considered it necessary to adopt as many masculine characteristics as possible. She paved the way thus for many others.

Another woman occupied the office in the latter half of the Eighteenth Dynasty. This was Mutemwia, who was regent for her son Amenophis III.

After the Eighteenth Dynasty, women continued to play a strong role in the governing of the country. The glorious Nineteenth Dynasty—a period in which Kemet became well established as a great world power—ended with the reign of several ephemeral princes, e.g. Amenmesses, Sethos II and Sitptah with his Queen Ta-wsret. During this time Kemet experienced many internal problems.

Sitptah deposed Amenmesses, legitimatizing his rule by marrying Ta-wsret, a princess of the old royal family. After his death Ta-wsret actually reigned as sovereign for a period of perhaps eight years (according to Manetho). It has been conjectured that a certain chancellor called Bay exercised a great deal of influence on Sitptah and Ta-wsret. His full title was Great Chancellor of the Entire Land, and he was more than likely a Syrian. He may even have been the real power behind the throne.

Ta-wsret was the last known Kemetic woman to occupy the office of sovereign of the land.

## Conclusion

The King's List and archeological sources reveal the names of the following queens, although these sources should not be considered the final word in the matter. Our information concerning Kemet is rather one-sided, mostly deriving from royal inscriptions, etc. And just as we know that certain kings were excluded from the King's List for various reasons, so, too, perhaps some or all of the queens have been excluded, since only Manetho mentions the queen-regents who ruled at the end of certain dynasties. If this is so, then even what is presented here will ultimately have to be reevaluated. One must always bear in mind the source and, in this case, the picture is presented only from the side of the nobility. The theories of kingship expressed here are thus based upon very limited sources. Other factors may have been at work in the Kemetic society at large. The customs ascribed to the nobility may not have been general among the Kemetic people.



Yet, be that as it may, we can ascertain that of the female Horuses and queen-regents of Kemet, the latter only held the proper position for a woman in relation to the throne. There were a few exceptional cases: Mer-Neith, Nitocris, Sobeknofru and Hatshepsut. With the exception of Hatshepsut, their reigns were probably very short and, occurred near to, or at the end of, a given dynasty. The regents, on the other hand, occur within a dynastic period. And Mer-Neith and Hatshepsut, it must be remembered, first occupied the throne as regents.

The regency has its origin in the matrilineal system. Political rights were also transmitted by the mother: thus when a man marries his sister, he becomes his son's uncle, thereby establishing the right of succession for his son. This custom of hereditary rulership is found elsewhere on the African continent, though it is not widespread.

### The Queens of Kemet

| | |
|---|---|
| Neith-hotep | regent, I Dyn. |
| Mer-Neith | Horus/regent, I Dyn. |
| Anchnesmerir | regent, VI Dyn. |
| Nitocris | Horus, VI Dyn. |
| Sobeknofru | Horus, XII Dyn. |
| Ahotep | regent, XVII Dyn. |
| Ahmose-Nefetere | regent, XVII Dyn. |
| Hatshepsut | Horus/regent, XVIII Dyn. |
| Mutemwia | regent, XVIII Dyn. |
| Ta-wsret | regent, XIX Dyn. |

*Explanatory note:* In the transliteration of Egyptian names to English sounds the transliterator has a choice of vowels. This accounts for the variation in the spelling of the names of queens.

## Notes

1. For discussion, see Gardiner, A.H. *Egyptian Grammar*.
2. Diop, Sheikh Anta, "Civilization ou barbarie," *Presence Africaine* (1981), p. 134.
3. The concept of dynasty, i.e., genealogical filiation, is derived from Manetho; the Kemetic King's List does not designate individual dynasties.
4. Gardiner, *History*, p. 411.
5. Kaplong, *Inschriften III*, Tf. 54; Abb. 201.
6. To be restored (Mrt (Nt)—BAR I, p. 103.
7. Vandier, *History*, p. 140; Gardiner, *History*, p. 112.
8. Vandier, op. cit., p. 140; Mer-Neith firent longtemps considére, etc.
9. Cambridge, Edwards, E.D.E., pp. 20-21.
10. ZAS, 79, (1954), 95.
11. Newberry, in JEA, 29 (1943), 51, suggests identifying this queen with the Men-ke-re of the Abydos King's List.
12. Papyrus royal de Turin, frag. 43; Lepsius, *Auswahl*, Taf. IV, col. 5.
13. Eratosthenes.
14. Herodotus, *History*, Bk. II, 100.
15. Coche-Zivie, BIFAO, 72 (1972), p. 137.
16. Mariette, Le Serapeum de Memphis III, pl. 24; Černy, J.
17. For discussion of these terms, see Henry Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society*.
18. Diop, Sheikh Anta, op. cit., p. 134.
19. UK IV, 14-24.
20. Winlock, JEA, 10 (1924), 217 ff.
21. UK IV, 10-16.
22. Harari: ASAE, 56, 139-201.
23. Sauneron, S. *The Priest of Ancient Egypt*. Grove Press, 1960.

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# NEFERTITI: QUEEN TO A SACRED MISSION

By Sonia Sanchez

From the inception of the human conception of civilization, the world possessed two minds: two versions were vying to explain the aim and purpose of men and women and the nature of human happiness.

The first version (and we find modules among ancient Blacks of Egypt, India and the Sinai Peninsula) saw the raison d'etre of human civilization as the bringing of Divine life into human life or the transmigration of Divine mentality into human society. Under this conception of a blueprint for human civilization, civilizations were theocentric: governments were theocentric institutions presided over by a royal priesthood, religious ruler or Pharaoh ("house" of Divine). The term MAN, which conceived in its scope the male and female in one breath, defined a spiritual being incarnate in pursuit on earth of a reunion with his Divine source.

The fact that women as spiritual beings were considered full partners in civilization-building was reflected historically in Egyptian society by records kept on women-pharaohs and indicated a widespread belief that women also housed the Divine. Moreover, the first version held that women were the repositories of civilization, the keepers of the secrets of society, the mothers of gods, the manifestations of a universal "feminine" principle which saw the universe, the earth and subconscious as a "womb" for the expression of Divine will.

While these ideas on the nature of human life were developing in the soil of ancient Black civilization, another was emerging, one which considered man primarily a material entity, whose happiness was measured by his ability to acquire and maintain a material heaven (wealth and pleasure).

In that heaven, women were not principals that predicted or participated in social policy, but were objects of sensuality or objects to be used by men. Moreover, it was held that women were to be kept from principal positions because they would be luxuries acquired by men and they would not have the strength to protect the accumulation of material wealth.

The materialist theory held that the material heaven was the basis of man's paradise and that women, as weaker members of that paradise, were to be objects of and not participants in the building of that material paradise. It might be interesting to note here that the materialist theory of civilization did not deny the Divine element. It simply conscripted the Divine and placed it in the service of the materialist aim.

According to a parable on the early religious literature of pharaonic Egypt, the great dark god Osiris, the original godking who taught *Ma'at* (justice, truth,

righteousness) the science of agriculture and the art of civilization, was in the womb of the divine with his wife Isis. Together they ruled Egypt "making it a land of delight."

When Osiris left Egypt to civilize foreign countries, we are told that Isis ruled Egypt wisely "in dignity and truth" during her husband's absence. Upon Osiris's return to Egypt he was slain by his brother, the red-haired Set (who represented the forces of destruction) and cut into fourteen pieces and scattered throughout the earth. Isis found the pieces, put them together save for one missing part, and then taught her son Horus the secrets of his father so that Osiris could be avenged and *Ma'at* (truth, justice and righteousness) restored. To the ancient Blacks of Egypt, this religious parable acted as a social charter, an ideal for the correct attitude toward women. Thus women, like men, were considered divine beings. Under these favorable conditions, "the goddesses retained their prestige in becoming wives: the couple was the religious and social unit: woman seemed to be allied with and complementary to man: woman had the same rights as man, the same powers in court: she inherited, she owned property." Above all, women wore names that were the divine attributes of God. The place from which women participated in ancient Egyptian civilization may be summed up in the advice of Vizer'Ptah-hotep (circa 2450 B.C.) to his son: "Be unstinting in lavishing attentions on your wife because she is the foundation of your family."

Amunhotep IV ascended to the Egyptian throne around 1365 B.C. He had served as co-regent with his father, Amunhotep III, and was a brilliant young philosopher/poet. He chose Nefertiti to be his great royal wife. She was to be the foundation of his family. Nefertiti was not some harem girl randomly selected for wedlock. No. She was perhaps the most admired woman of her day. Her beauty had elevated her to a status well beyond the typical royalty of the day. The union of these giants was both problematic and prophetic.

At the time of the young King's ascension, Egypt was in a period of transition. For many generations, the society was undergoing gradual changes in life-style and ideas. During these same years the Egyptian empire was expanding, through conquest, to encompass new boundaries, new horizons, and new wealth. The royal family was traditionally counselled by the various priesthoods which controlled the temples and the coffers in the provinces. There was wealth aplenty for this priestly class. Gold was as available as dust. Egypt was the center of most of the world's trade. It was this prosperity which created problems for the visionary royal family.

The prosperity of Egypt was premised on the continued conquest of other lands, the dominion of the priesthood over society, and the rationalization of these materialist gains by the prevailing religious views of the day. But Amunhotep IV envisioned a different world and a more refined ordering of religious life. Nefertiti, too, was not planning to perpetuate the old order. She could not relegate herself to the traditional role of subservient-queen. She envisioned an active role for herself in reshaping civilization.



The stage was set. The priests, the holy men in the Amun worship, were the most powerful organized sector of society; their wealth exceeded all others; they dominated the high governmental offices. They were entrenched in the materialist world and their religion dominated all. In this religious arena women were incapable of divinity.

We do not know the complete details of the struggle that ensued. It is supposed that a revolt of Amun priests occurred in the fourth year of Amunhotep's reign. The royal couple countered the revolt with a move against the priests, gods, tombs, and temples. In the same year, they decided to build a city of beautiful dreams in Amarna. Amarna. A city surrounded by rocky mountains to the east and the Nile to the west. The royal city for a Divine couple would be called Akhetaten ("horizon of the Aten").

Three years later in 1357 B.C. Akhetaten, the new capital of Egypt, was formally dedicated. Akhnaton (Amunhotep had officially changed his name) and Nefertiti had their City of Dreams. This Akhetaten. A new capital of Egypt for a new god. This Akhetaten. A city where the arts could flourish, where man/womankind would stand in beauty, peace and happiness. This Akhetaten. The first city to have been designed "on the drawing board." Akhetaten. A city of the sun. In this new city, Akhnaton and Nefertiti could give birth to their sacred mission: a mission in pursuit of Divine life.

Having synthesized the various cultish views of the time, Akhnaton forced a universal humanist vision onto the local religious views. In this new "religion," or rather in this assimilation of new doctrines of the priesthood of Re, the sun's disc visible in the sky became the sole god. The nature of this "new" religion can be discerned in Akhnaton's great Hymn of praise to the sun in which the Aton is called the sole god and the creator of all life:

> Thou appearest so beautifully in the horizon of heaven,
> O living Aton, thou who wert the first to live.
> Thou hast risen in the eastern horizon, and thou hast
> filled every land with thy beauty.
> Thou art beautiful, great, dazzling, and exalted over
> every land.
> Thy rays embrace the lands to the outermost limits of
> all that thou hast made.
> When thou appearest again at dawn and shinest as the
> orb of day,
> Thou dispellest the darkness and pourest forth thy rays:
> The Two Lands are in festival, men awake and rise, for
> Thou hast raised them up.
> They wash their limbs and put on their clothing.
> Their arms are lifted in praise, for Thou hast risen.
> The whole land goeth about its tasks:
> All the beasts rest then in the meadows.
> Trees and plants are green.
> Birds flutter from their nests, and their wings do praise thee.

Nefertiti—side view.

Queen Nefertiti.



Every wild creature springeth forth on its feet,
Everything that riseth on wings to fly doth live,
When thou hast poured thy light once more upon them.

Thou formest children in women and createst the seed in man;
Thou animatest the son in the body of his mother
and quietest him with that which endeth his tears;
When on the day of his birth he cometh forth from the
womb to breath,
then openest Thou his mouth completely and Thou providest
for all his wants.

Thou hast made the earth according to thy will when Thou
wert alone:
Mankind, cattle, and all other beasts, everything on
earth that walketh on feet,
and everything lifted on their wings in flight,
the foreign lands of Syria and Kush, and the land of Egypt.
Thou settest each man in his own place and Thou carest
for his wants;
Each hath his sustenance so long as his time is reckoned.
The tongues of men are distinguished by their speech
And their appearance also by the color of their skin—
So hast Thou distinguished the Nations.
Thou didst create the Nile in the Netherworld
And broughtest it forth according to thy desire
To maintain the people, even as Thou hast made
them for thyself, their universal lord. . . .
As for every distant land, Thou hast provided their living:
Thou causeth the Nile from heaven to descend upon them,
It maketh a flood on the mountains like the waves of the sea,
It watereth their fields and bringeth forth what they require
Thou madest the faraway sky that Thou mightest shine in it
And look upon all that which Thou madest alone,
As Thou shinest in thy form as the living Aton,
Gleaming and dazzling, far away yet near at hand.
Thou makest millions of forms from thyself alone:
Cities, villages, fields, the road and the river;
Every eye beholdeth Thee before him, O orb of day, as
Thou shinest over the earth.
Thou art in my heart, no other one knoweth Thee save
Akhnaton, thy son, to whom Thou hast granted understanding
to fathom thy might and design, when with raising thy
hand, the earth came to be.
When thou risest men live, when thou settest they die.
Thou art lifetime thyself, and men live in Thee.
Eyes gaze on thy beauty until Thou hast set
All labour is stopped when Thou seekest the West.
When Thou riseth all work for the King moves apace.
All men who run upon feet hast Thou raised
For Thy son, Lord of Diadems, Lord of the Two Lands,

Who liveth on truth, son of Re, Akhnaton,
And for her whom he loveth, the great royal consort,
The mistress of Two Lands, Queen Nefertiti,
Who liveth and is you for ever and ever.

This new religion announced the Aton as creator and ruler of the whole world. This was no parochial god: He was the Lord of the Universe. Thus the Aton became: "Re lives, the ruler of the horizon who rejoices in the horizon in his name, father of Re who has returned as Aton." There was also a distinct break with the old tradition of worship: No representation of the god in human form was allowed; all worship was focused on the radiant orb of the sun. There was, too, a radical change in the pictures that adorned the walls of the tombs at Amarna. For the first time we are privy to the personal life of the pharaoh and queen: we see the innermost rooms of the royal palace where Akhnaton and Nefertiti romp and caress their daughters; we see the king and queen standing at the Window of Appearance waving to the populace. In these Amarna tomb reliefs, we greet the Son and Daughter of Re acting as a man and woman among men and women.

As an active participant in this reformation of society, Nefertiti gave birth to six daughters (which may or may not have symbolic significance), and, as portrayed in the sandstone pictures or *talatat*, began to expand on traditional views of woman's relationship to the sun-god, Aton.

Akhnaton usually lead the homage to Aton. But, Nefertiti made homages alone or with a daughter. It has been suggested that this separate worship illustrates Nefertiti's claim of right to worship Aton without a man as mediator. There are other accounts of Nefertiti sharing a chariot with her husband during a major ritual, thrusting a sword toward an enemy, sitting on the knee of Akhnaton and kissing him in public. The realistic depiction of Nefertiti and Akhnaton by the artists of the day also suggests that Nefertiti wanted the Aton worshippers to appreciate her as a human repositor of Divine life. She became the Divine female partner to Akhnaton.

Most of the pictures, busts, and statues of Nefertiti have been disfigured in some way. Some of the disfigurement was caused by erosion and excavation. But, it is apparent that the priests, who assumed control after the death of Akhnaton, systematically mutilated the name and image of Nefertiti. Unlike Atonism, which would wane in significance without Akhnaton to defend it, the so-called heresy of Nefertiti posed a far greater threat to the materialist vision of the priests. The idea of women bypassing the male priesthood via a mother-goddess to worship the Divine was unacceptable (and may still be unacceptable today).

Nefertiti was very clear as to her mission. After the death of Akhnaton in 1353 B.C., she held Egypt in check to Aton. It was not an easy game that she played. The Amun priests hated her. She had at her disposal, however, a young king named Tutankhaten (King Tut). She had reared him as one of her own in Amarna. He became the new king in 1352 B.C. She knew that as long as this boy-king lived in Amarna the memory and mission of Akhnaton and Aton would not die. Like Isis before her, Nefertiti did what she could to maintain the dominance of *Ma'at* (truth, justice and righteousness) and Aton. She played the game well, but lost.



King Tut and his wife would leave Amarna for Thebes. Nefertiti remained in Amarna until her death.

It is not by chance that centuries later her face appeared out of the ruins of Amarna. A face of beauty and intellect. A face of destiny.

Nefertiti. The beautiful one has come again for us all to see.

# TIYE: NUBIAN QUEEN OF EGYPT

By Virginia Spottswood Simon

Recent excavations in Egypt and the Sudan have shed more light on the role of a powerful African queen who ruled before Cleopatra and Nefertiti. Queen Tiye (ca. 1415-1340 B.C.), Great Royal spouse of Amenhotep III, reigned as queen consort and queen mother of Egypt for half a century, enjoying an unusual position as confidante to her husband and as publicly cherished wife.

Was it merely power politics that propelled a woman of Nubia-Kush to the position of pharaoh's Great Royal Spouse? Or was it her beauty and charm, a dazzling quality of personality, that set Tiye apart?

Mother of pharaohs Tutankhamen and Akhenaten and mother-in-law of the beauteous Nefertiti, this woman of the South also became a strong national influence in Egypt's domestic and foreign policy.

Ancient Eygptians called Tiye's ancestral homeland Nubia (land of gold). This was the northern portion of the Nubian-Kushite stronghold on the Nile. Today, situated two-thirds in the Sudan and one-third in Egypt, the area is on a geographical parallel with Ethiopia, Chad, Niger, Mali and Senegal. Passengers sailing upstream on Egypt's broad, majestic stretch of the Nile would approach the perilous cataracts of Nubia-Kush after about 500 miles. Nubia-Kush was a slender land, hemmed in by desert and mountains and dependent on the Nile for life. Although handicapped by hostile natural conditions and invaded and exploited for gold, labor and cattle by Egypt over the centuries, these black people maintained cultural and political vitality for the best part of 5000 years, not surrendering it finally until the time of Columbus when they were overrun by Muslim invaders.

Tiye's era, the 14the century B.C., was one of Nubia's rare periods of dependence. Egypt's armies, with their system of more than a dozen incredibly massive forts, had finally reduced these people to colonial status. But rebellion was rife and Kushites never acquiesced to second-class status. To lessen the frequency of revolt and to attempt to solidify relations, Egypt had a well thought out program of pacification.

Pharaohs erected superb temples in Nubia-Kush honoring her gods. Captured Nubian princes were educated in pharaoh's palace schools in Thebes, and then, thoroughly Egyptianized, they were appointed as deputy viceroys to their own country. Gradually Nubia's upper classes, avid for imported novelties and status symbols, were won over to Egypt's material culture and life-style, dressing themselves in her fashions, speaking her language and even burying themselves in pyramids, rather than in the tumulus graves of their forefathers. Nubians who



migrated voluntarily into Egypt were often advanced without prejudice to posts of influence. Even those who had come originally as low-status laborers found social and economic mobility possible.

Yuya and Thuya, the parents of Tiye, were such assertive and ambitious Nubians. High priests in the service of the ram god Amun and of the fertility god Min, they presided over the care of sleek Nubian oxen which, with their decorated horns, were essential to every royal festival and jubilee. A son, Aanen, was a priest of Heliopolis, attaining the status of Second Prophet of Amun.

Their daughter, Tiye, was born about 1415 B.C. In Tiye, dark brown skin graced wide-arched brows, high cheekbones and a nose with delicately flared nostrils. Full lips curved above a slightly jutting jaw. And, if she met Nubia's physical ideal of feminine beauty, she was broadhipped as well.

It was customary for a pharaoh assuming the throne to marry a daughter of pharaoh. Such a "daughter" might be a full sister, a half sister—even one's own daughter. By this device the dynasty continuously reinfused itself with its own royal blood, a line which the priests declared was directly descended from the god Amun. But the young ruler, Amenhotep III, defied the priests and arrogantly proclaimed his highly irregular marriage. Thus a Nubian commoner became Great Royal Spouse, and her children, heirs to Egypt's throne with fully royal and fully divine inheritances.

Certainly the young pharaoh saw in marriage to a Nubian woman a powerful instrument by which to pacify the independent-minded nation on his southern border. For 2000 years Nubia had resisted, sturdily and implacably, Egypt's attempts to exploit her own wealth and her access to Central Africa's riches in big game products and fine woods. Like his father and grandfather, Amenhotep III could expect to have to quell many well-organized revolts and to take defeated Kushites captive. But if this had been a purely diplomatic marriage, the king's treatment of Tiye denied it. The records reveal a transcendent love affair. In an unusually personal expression, he proclaimed his Nubian bride:

> . . . the Princess, the most praised, the lady of grace, sweet in her love, who fills the palace with her beauty, the Regent of the North and South, the Great Wife of the King who loves her, the lady of both lands, Tiye . . .

In the earliest days of the marriage he conceded to custom and appeared on state occasions in Thebes with his mother, a princess of the blood. But he soon tired of the formality, relegating his mother to a quiet old age, and Tiye became his constant public companion. From this moment on, he and Tiye became loving husband-wife role models for their children and especially for their son, Akhenaten, and his wife, Nefertiti, who, in an even franker display of affection, would kiss and embrace publicly.

Wedded to her pharaoh when barely 13, Tiye bore him at least four daughters and three sons, the last of whom, Tutankhamen, was born to the healthy Nubian

queen when she was almost 50. Three of her sons reigned as pharaohs of Egypt. She passed her full dark Africoid looks down to her children, notably to Tutankhamen, her youngest. The very fleshy lips and jutting jaw of her elder son, Akhenaten, have elicited every explanation except the obvious. Granddaughter Ankhesenamun, child of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, who became Tutankhamen's wife, has an even more Central African look than either.

Constantly and in many ways, Pharaoh Amenhotep III expressed love for his black queen. The gifts he lavished on her made Tiye wealthy in her own right. An ornamental lake, a mile long and a fifth of a mile wide, designed for pleasure excursions in the royal barge, was dug and named Lake of Tiye. Her palaces rose everywhere, elegant with frescoed walls depicting the Nile valley world of plants, birds and animals. Fish pools brought Nile waters into the pillared courtyards of her estates. The King ordered one such massive-gated palace built for her in her hometown of Akhmim even after the arrival, for his harem, of a lovely young princess from an Asian colony.

A most significant gesture was the erection in Nubia, land of her ancestors, of a fine white sandstone temple in Tiye's honor. Pharaoh had already built his own magnificent temple there, honoring Amun, the ram god whose worship originated in Nubia and spread to Egypt. Under Tiye's spell he caused a separate sanctuary to be built in the city of Sedeinga, 10 miles from his own. It was the first time a queen consort had been so honored. This unique action—half love, half politics—could only have had a positive effect on Nubian loyalty.

As she was his equal in life, so would she be in death. In the thirty-first year of his reign, Amenhotep decreed her burial beside him within his own royal tomb. The colossal group sculpture ordered for their joint funerary temple portrays the pair as co-equal monarchs. Although artistic canons of the priests required that a queen be depicted as an adoring possession only knee-high to the king, the great ruler brushed aside the stricture and ordered that Tiye be portrayed as equal. Broad, blunt faces rise from massive granite bodies radiating serenity and majesty. Possessively, affectionately Tiye embraces her spouse with her right arm.

More than a lover though, Tiye was a capable, educated woman. Her library of papyrus scrolls contained religious, historical and scientific texts, poetry and stories. She must have mastered much of their contents. For her opinions commanded respect, and she exerted informed political influence throughout her half-century as queen consort and queen mother of the most powerful nation of her day.

During three critical periods of the 18th dynasty the black queen was the intelligent, stabilizing force in the nation: the years when her husband's health was declining; the years when Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), her religiously innovative son, neglected Egypt's foreign affairs and defense; and the years when her two youngest sons, Smenkhare and the young Tutankhamen, reigned.



Figure 1. Queen Tiye and Amenhotep III are co-equal monarchs in this joint funerary sculpture.

At 50, Tiye was full of vigor as her husband lapsed into sickness and debility. By this time Prince Akhenaten was co-regent with his father and had established, and taken residence in, the new city and religious capital, Akhetaton, 160 miles north of Thebes. Traveling between the widely separated palaces of her husband and son, Tiye coordinated state policies. When Amenhotep's final illness came, the Asian outposts of Egypt's empire were under frequent attack by Hapiru and Hittites; Egypt's client states in the North now feared for their very survival. But they pleaded in vain for help from the dying pharaoh. Court officials, knowing the queen's influence with her husband, and confident about her judgment, relied on Tiye to persuade the old man to turn over the direction of foreign affairs to his co-regent, Prince Akhenaten.

After his father's death, Akhenaten was crowned pharaoh. But as a pharaoh he was a disappointment to the politically-minded queen mother. Egypt's military might deteriorated to such a point of danger under him that her Asian allies became more fearful than ever. And even though Akhenaten and Nefertiti entertained Tiye at extravagant banquets and built a temple to Aton in her honor, Tiye assessed her son's conduct of foreign affairs realistically. She moved into the vacuum created by his concentration on religious reform and acted for him as Secretary of State. Kings of the Asian client states bypassed him to correspond directly with Tiye to plead for protection. Kings like Tushratta of Mitanni, who had sent his own beautiful daughter to Amenhotep in token of submission, now sent gifts to the queen mother to reaffirm their wish to continue under Egypt's military protectorate.

Tiye also influenced Egyptian arts and fashion. Large, elaborate wigs worn over natural hair, cut close to the scalp, had previously been the style. But for a time, the vogue was short, round wigs based on those favored by Tiye and her daughters. A style of earring worn by Nubian young people before and during puberty became current in the court as well. From a thick gold ear-stud dangled a large, intricately crafted medallion of gold which carried three to six swinging tassels. Each long tassel was a string on which gold beads alternated with beads of semi-precious stones. Tutankhamen and other royal youths of this era wore such Nubian fashions proudly.

The Nubian queen's influence made itself most powerfully felt, however, in a radical new attitude toward royal women. Amenhotep III and, later, his son who married Nefertiti broke tradition by marrying women who were not "daughters of pharaoh." However, even though such a marriage was essential in order to legitimize the pharaoh's claim to the throne and to the property of the dynasty, the women who transmitted that royal Egyptian inheritance were never exalted as the key persons they were. With Tiye's accession to the queenship of Egypt, matters changed. Not only was a commoner proclaimed of equal status with the king, her name and lineage being always published in conjunction with his, but the male heirs of this dynasty were almost totally eclipsed in the light of publicity



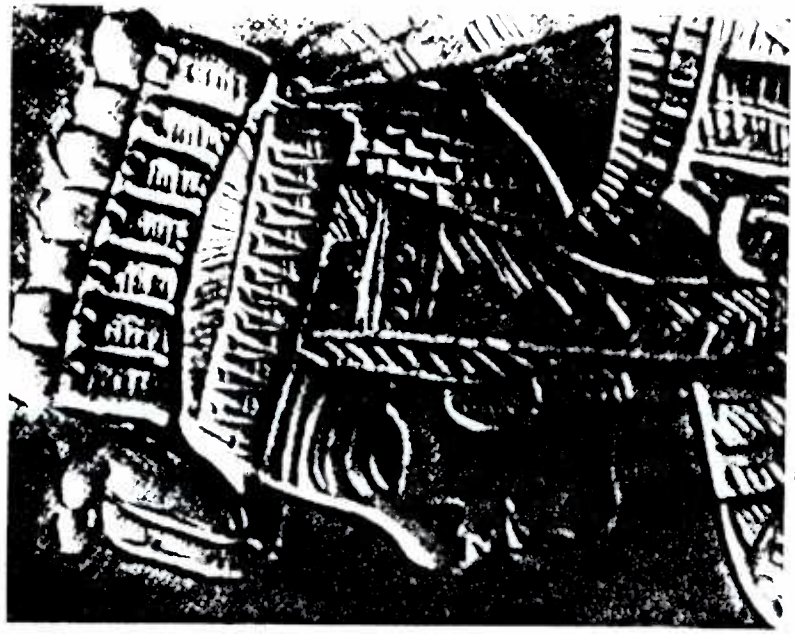

Figure 3. Ankhesenamun, Tiye's granddaughter, wearing tasseled Nubian-style earrings.

Figure 2. Nubian queen Tiye, great royal spouse of Amenhotep III, wears short Nubian-style wig.

and honor dispensed to the princesses. Had there been no princes, this would have been understandable. But there were *three* princes, all of whom succeeded their father as pharaohs.

Why, then, were they kept in the background? An explanation of this innovation as well as that of the equal rank accorded Queen Tiye must lie in the Central African tradition of matrilineal succession. A Nubian-Kushite king generally yielded power to a son of his *sister*—not to his own son. Throughout Tiye's long tenure as queen consort and queen mother the Nubian-Kushite theory of royal genealogy permeated palace thinking and practice, giving the princesses a specially venerated status. This concept of the importance of the female in the royal family, so characteristic of the reigns of Tiye's spouse, Amenhotep III, and of her son, Akhenaten, can only have represented a Nubian influence.

Tiye upset, disturbed and even angered those who guarded Egypt's royal and religious traditions. On the other hand, her half-century queenship was a most important factor guaranteeing to Egypt a peaceful colonial association with Nubia. Egypt needed this peace. Egypt's "glorious" 18th dynasty period would have been poor but for the military and domestic manpower; the gold, ivory and fine woods; and the cattle and rich harvests she took annually from Nubia-Kush. Toward the end of that era when Egypt's influence in Asia was diminishing and was challenged by aggressive Assyrian armies, the loyalty of Nubians to Egypt, assured and warranted by Tiye's ethnicity and statesmanship, was an asset beyond compare.

Tiye, as a new bride, barely aware politically, had reluctantly seen her husband depart for Nubia-Kush to fight against rebels of her own race. Perhaps it was she who had later encouraged Amenhotep III to embark on his ambitious program of Nubian pacification as a way of saving her people from a gradual decimation. Whatever the truth of the matter, pharaoh had found this woman of the South compatible and healthy, intelligent and strong-minded, as well as beautiful. And because he had found her so, Egypt's history and that of Nubia-Kush would be changed forever.

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# EGYPT'S ISIS: THE ORIGINAL BLACK MADONNA

**By Eloise McKinney-Johnson**

The great goddess Isis, "The Lady of a Thousand Titles" is, like Cleopatra, her most illustrious devotee, a "Great Enchantress" of infinite varieties. Some of her other titles are: "Lady of Heaven," "Womanly Tenderness," "Sisterly Love," "Mistress of Magic," "Lady of Light," "Chamber-of-the-Birth-of-a-God," "Lady of the Sunrise," "The Beautiful and the Beloved," "Lady of Abundance," "Queen of the South," "Queen Bee: Maker of Honey," "The Lady Bountiful Who Fills the Fields with Crops and Egyptian Cradles with Newborn Sons," and also "She Who Weeps."

In worshipping her as "She Who Weeps," the ancient Egyptians acknowledged Isis as the source of their prosperity. Indeed, as Herodotus has recorded, "Egypt is the gift of the Nile." The Egyptians believed that the Nile began with Isis' tears splashing from the heavens as she mourned her murdered husband Osiris. They believed, too, that she resurrected him at great sacrifice and, thus, initiated the whole concept of resurrection. Osiris is, indeed, the *first* of a long line of resurrected gods: Tamuz (Babylonian and Assyrian), Mithras (Persian), Balder (Norwegian), Dionysius (Greek), Bacchus (Roman), and Christ. The Egyptians also believed that Isis' tears became more profuse in certain seasons, causing the Nile to overflow and nourish the soil. So important was her first tear in creating the river that, even today, Egypt observes a holiday in mid-June, "The Night of the Drop."

The ancient Egyptians believed that Isis taught women how to comb and curl their hair and that she taught them the pleasures and powers of perfume, and of cosmetics in general. To Isis they attributed the custom of wearing wedding veils and wedding rings. They said that she introduced fragrances to soothe the living and embalming procedures (with wax and spices) to preserve the dead. They believed, too, that she sent dreams as mysterious messengers to warn and to counsel them.

The Egyptians revered Isis as a moon goddess and as an embodiment of all the feminine qualities which render women desirable. Legends about Isis and the moon embrace both *realism*—effects of barometric pressures on physical nature (tidewaters) as well as on human nature, and *surrealism*—universal interpretations of dreams.

Isis was Egypt's quintessential sweetheart, wife, and mother, and was worshipped as the sister-wife of Osiris, the "King of the Dead," and mother of Horus (later called Apollo), their "King of the Living."



The wings of Isis denoted her divinity:

> There was a tradition that she protected the dead Osiris with long feathery wings that, as the Great Enchantress, she was able to grow. Another says that it was with her wings that she attempted to transmit to him the breath of life. Inevitably, she was adopted as one of the protector goddesses in funeral rites and frequently depicted with her sister Nepthys, similarly winged, their plumaged arms entwined.[1]

The protecting wings of Isis and of her sister Nepthys, sometimes designated as the wings of a vulture, appear often in the royal art of ancient Egypt. The vulture and the cobra (the Uraeus) are special protectors of the Pharaohs and their queens. They are, also, symbols of the all important unification of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Isis, her husband Osiris, and their son Horus, originated in Ethiopia. Lionel Casson states:

> Osiris was a god-king—perhaps a legendary outgrowth of a real ruler, perhaps a primitive god of fertility—who was believed to have given Egypt civilization. He had an evil brother, Seth, who was jealous of the devotion of his brother's subjects and slew Osiris. At length the slain King was resurrected through the perseverance of his wife, Isis, who roamed the earth in search of the dismembered parts of his body until she collected them all. Their son, Horus, later avenged his father's murder by vanquishing Seth and winning from him the rule of the earth. When he died, he became Osiris and ruled the underworld. His son, the new Pharaoh, took up the rule on earth as Horus.[2]

Roger Lancelyn Green reports that "Isis made the first cobra, the Uraeus, which became the sacred serpent of Egypt"[3] and that it was her device for dethroning the god Ra so that her husband, Osiris, could become Pharaoh of Egypt.

Lucius Apuleius, a Roman philosopher of the second century A.D., affirms the Ethiopian/Egyptian origin of Isis and her family in his classic work, *The Golden Ass*. Here, Isis says to Apuleius:

> Both races of Aethiopians, whose lands the morning sun first shines upon, and the Egyptians, who excel in ancient learning and worship me with ceremonies proper to my godhead, call me by my true name, namely, *Queen Isis*.[4]

Earlier, Apuleius hears Isis proclaim herself the original earth mother goddess when she tells him:

> The primeval Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, Mother of the gods, the Athenians . . . call me Cecropian Artemis; for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Aphrodite; for the archers of Crete I am Dictynna; for trilingual Sici-

> lians, Stygian Proserpine; and for the Eleusinians their ancient Mother of Corn.
>
> Some know me as Juno, some as Bellona of the Battles; others as Hecate, others again as Rhamnubia . . .[5]

So appealing was the goddess Isis that over 3,000 years after her name appeared in Egypt, her worshippers were building temples to honor her in Europe, temples all the way up to the Rhine and Danube Rivers in Germany and as far north as Britain.

Philae in ancient Egypt was the great center for the worship of Isis, as William MacQuitty attests:

> The cult of Isis continued when the other gods and goddesses of antiquity had been forgotten. Pilgrims from Greece and the Roman empire came to worship her, heaping her shrine at Philae with offerings as late as the fifth century A.D.[6]

Worshippers of Isis voiced their praises of her in a hymn, recorded at Philae, in the words of Isis herself:

> I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below.[7]

Frank Snowden notes that since Ethiopians regarded Isis highly, whether in their native land or in Egypt, those who had settled elsewhere continued their interest in her cult:

> A substantial Ethiopian influence on Isis worship in Greece and in Italy is strongly suggested, if not proved, by the tradition of Ethiopian association with the cult, by the Negroes depicted in Isiac ritual . . .[8]

Isis had temples through the Roman Empire:

> In the spread of Isiac worship during the Empire, Ethiopians played a substantial role. In their native Ethiopia, Isis was one of four deities whom the people in the vicinity of Meroë worshipped because they believed that these particular divinities had been benefactors of the human race.[9]

William MacQuitty once again affirms the influence of Isis throughout the world when he states:

> It was, incidentally, from Alexandria that Horus and Isis entered the legend that surrounded Buddha in Gandhara in northern India, and thence travelled to China, where the goddess Isis resembled the Chinese Queen of Heaven, Kwan-Yin, who, like Isis, was also Queen of the Seas. In Japan she was called Kwannon.[10]



Isis possessed magic powers which transcended those of all other Egyptian deities. The Greeks called her rites the *Eleusianian Mysteries*, and each of her worshippers wore a silver key, symbolic of her mystery. They decorated their garments with an Isiac key design, a *fret motif* that is still popular in painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Because ancient Egypt was a matrilineal culture, as are many African cultures of today, Isis often appears in art with her son, Horus, on her lap. She is, thus, the prototype for similar depictions of the Christian Madonna and her Christ child. She is, also, the original *pieta*, or suffering mother.

Discussing "Isis and the Virgin Mary," Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, late keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum, assures us that the early Christians bestowed some of Isis' attributes upon the Virgin. He says, for example:

> There is little doubt that in her character of the loving and protecting mother she appealed strongly to the imagination of all the . . . peoples among her cult . . . and that the pictures and sculptures wherein she is represented in the act of suckling Horus formed the foundation for the Christian paintings of the Madonna and Child.
>
> Several of the incidents of the wanderings of the Virgin with the Child in Egypt as recorded in the Apocryphal Gospels reflect scenes in the life of Isis . . . and many of the attributes of Isis, the God-mother, the mother of Horus . . . are identical with those of Mary the Mother of Christ.[11]

Further stressing the significance of Isis with regard to the Virgin Mary, Budge says:

> The writers of the Apocryphal Gospels intended to pay additional honour to Mary the Virgin by ascribing to her the attributes which up to the time of the advent of Christianity they had regarded as the peculiar property of Isis . . . The doctrine of partheno-genesis (virgin birth) was well known in Egypt . . . and the belief in the conception of Horus by Isis through the power given her by Thoth, the Intelligence of Mind of the God of the Universe, and in the resurrection of the body and of everlasting life, is coeval with the beginnings of history in Egypt.[12]

Isis' profound influence upon major concepts of the Virgin Mary and her Christ child continues today in the many portrayals of the Black Madonna, particularly those in early Christian art and those in icons of the Byzantine tradition.

Depictions of Isis vary. In ancient Egyptian art she usually appears wearing her thick black hair in braids that fall across her shoulders in two long plaits, and she wears a simple linen sheath to enhance her dark complexion. Often she

stands behind her husband, Osiris, and holds in her hand the *ankh*, an ansate cross with a loop at the top, the Egyptian symbol of life and immortality. Apuleius describes her as follows:

> Her long thick hair fell in tapering ringlets on her lovely neck, and was crowned with an intricate chaplet in which was woven every kind of flower. Just above her brow shone a round disc, like a mirror, or like the bright face of the moon, which told me who she was. Vipers rising from the left hand and right partings of her hair supported this disc, with ears of corn bristling beside them. Her many-coloured robe was of finest linen; part was glistening white, part crocus-yellow, part glowing red, and along the enrite hem a woven bordure of flowers and fruit clung swaying in the breeze. But what caught and held my eye more than anything else was the deep black lustre of her mantle. She wore it slung across her body from the right hip to the left shoulder, where it was caught in a knot resembling the boss of a shield; but part of it hung in innumerable folds, the tasselled fringe quivering. It was embroidered with glittering stars on the hem and everywhere else, and in the middle beamed a full and fiery moon.[13]

Plutarch says of her robes:

> Those of Isis are variegated in their colours: for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end . . . the robes of Isis they use many times over; for in use those things that are perceptible and ready at hand afford many disclosures of themselves and opportunities to view them as they are changed about in various ways.[14]

Of special interest in many of Isis' portrayals is her headdress. In what appears to be her earliest Ethiopian, or Sudanese, portrayal, she wears the head of a small elephant with tusks. At times Isis wears on her head a throne-shaped ideogram to symbolize her name as meaning "throne" or "queen." Erich Neumann interprets this throne:

> As mother and earth woman, the Great Mother is the "throne" pure and simple, and, characteristically, the woman's motherliness resides not only in the womb but also in the seated woman's broad expanse of thigh, her lap on which the newborn child sits enthroned. To be taken on the lap is, like being taken to the breast, a symbolic expression for adoption of the child, and also of the man, by the Feminine. It is no accident that the greatest Mother Goddess of the early cults was named Isis, "the seat," "the throne," the symbol of which she bears on her head; and the king who "takes posession" of the earth, the Mother Goddess, does so by sitting on her in the literal sense of the word.[15]

Isis appears in art with and without her wings and with and without her son, Horus, at her breast. In later periods, however, she nearly always wears a regal cobra headpiece which depicts the full moon between curved horns and has the



Figure 1. Postcard picture: *Osiris and Isis.*

Figure 2. Isis suckling Horus.



shape of the sistrum, the musical instrument that the Egyptians played in her honor.

Ivan Van Sertima affirms in *They Came Before Columbus*[16] that Isis' sistrum, a kind of rattle, originated among the ancient Nubians; and Plutarch states that its purpose was to assure that "all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about . . . to be agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid."[17]

The Thet, variously interpreted as a buckle, a girdle, or a knot, is another important symbol of Isis. Mercatante says that Isis' Thet "may have been a conventional representation of the uterus, with its ligatures, and the vagina. The Thet was often made of carnelian, red jasper, red glass, or some other red substance, perhaps to indicate blood. There are also Thet amulets of gold (the blood of the gods)."[18]

In keeping with their creation of the concept of the divine rights of royalty, the ancient Egyptians deemed their queens to be incarnations of Isis—a policy which expanded their international influence. For this reason, statues of Isis always bore the faces of the queens who commissioned them.

Isis, her husband, Osiris, and their son, Horus, a divine Black family of Afro-Ethiopian/Afro-Egyptian origin, have exerted an outstanding positive influence upon world history and world civilization.

## Notes

1. Richard Patrick, *Egyptian Mythology* (London: Octopus Books, 1972).
2. Lionel Casson, *Ancient Egypt* (Alexandria: Time Life Books, 1965) p. 72.
3. Roger Lancelyn Green, *Tales of Ancient Egypt* (London: Puffin Books, 1970) p. 26.
4. Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. R. Graves (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951).
5. Ibid.
6. William MacQuitty, *Island of Isis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976) p. 90.
7. Apuleius, op. cit., p. 264.
8. Frank Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) p. 191.
9. Ibid., p. 189.
10. MacQuitty, op. cit., p. 59.
11. Ernest A.W. Budge, *The Gods of The Egyptians* (New York: Dover, 1969) p. 220.
12. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
13. Apuleius, op. cit., 263.
14. Plutarch, *Moralia* v. 5, trans. F.C. Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) p. 181.
15. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother. An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. R. Mahheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) pp. 98-99.
16. Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York: Random House, 1976) p. 269.
17. Plutarch, op. cit., 149.
18. Anthony S. Mercatante, *Who's Who in Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1978) p. 75.

# AFRICAN GODDESSES: MOTHERS OF CIVILIZATION

By Runoko Rashidi

Of the goddesses of the major civilizations of early Africa outside of the Nile Valley, little is currently known, with the exception of Carthage. The West African high-culture complex including Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and Kanem-Bornu, came into prominence, to a very large extent, after the advent of Islam and here of course the only god is Allah. The very early history of these nations, particularly that of Ghana, whose civilization had already blossomed when the religion of the Prophet was thrust upon it, will have to be studied in meticulous detail to find evidence of the role of the female deity. Similarly, the goddesses of Punt, Axum, Numidia, Munhu Mutapa, etc., must remain, unfortunately, the basis of a future paper.

The extant data on Carthage (Khart-Haddas, northern Algeria and Tunisia) informs us that the supreme deity was Tanit, apparently a manifestation of the Egyptian Neith, as was the Kanaanite Anatha and the Akan Ngame.[1] Tanit was a fertility goddess who rose to national prominence in the fifth century B.C. It was in this period that the Phoenician deities Melkarth and Astarte gave way to Baal and the Lady Tanit. On a limestone stelae in the precinct of Tanit at Salambo are recorded seventeen generations of her priests.[2]

Millenia before Carthage, however, in the valley of the Nile, the Africans had strongly developed religious concepts in which the female deity played a tremendously important part. Indeed, in the earliest times, she had an all-encompassing influence and was universally acknowledged as the greatest and ultimate seat of power. She was both the giver and sustainer of life. These religious concepts, still powerful today, originated not in the Nile Valley, strange as it may seem, but in the Great Lakes region of East/Central Africa, the continental cradleland. Here, in this primordial center, occurred the molding and forming of the religious and philosophical ideas that were to critically shape the world. The earliest humanity, undeniably Black, took these seminal ideas wherever they went, and in the course of their farflung migrations carried them to the distant corners of the earth.

While recognizing the inner African origin of religious mythos, we must agree that it is in Egypt, the greatest nation of antiquity, that we find the most substantial documentation for the goddess as an integral part of a major African civilization. As Gerald Massey stated so well, "Africa the birthplace and Egypt the mouthpiece."[3] Egypt has such an abundance of extant data, in fact, that one must



seriously narrow the focus of the research. The religious texts of the Two Lands, for example, mention many powerful goddesses: Bast, Selket, Nepthys, Mut, Maat, and a host of others. Acknowledging our limitations and our need for brevity, we will concentrate here on the three goddesses who, in historical times, seem to have exerted the largest influence.

## Neith

Neith (Neit, Nit) was one of the earliest of the North African goddesses and can be traced back to at least 4000 B.C. She is called the "oldest of all the gods, who was already born when nothing else existed." Like Ptah, she was self-begotten and self-produced. She is an early example of the great mother, who in the form of a white vulture, pierced her own thigh to bring forth the blood needed to nurse and sustain her young.[4] In the form of a vulture she was impregnated by the wind. In her anthropomorphic manifestation Neith appears as an adult female with a red crown. The red crown was the royal headgear of Lower Egypt, for although she may have originated in the south, she was by the beginning of dynastic Egypt firmly entrenched in the north and particularly at Sais in the western delta. Sais would remain the major center for her adoration through the length of dynastic Egypt.

Neith appears to have been dominant not only in Lower Egypt, but in the north of Libya as well, so much so that her roots have often been traced there.

> But who, now, were the Libyans? They were, first of all, Western Ethiopians, then heavily Berber, Mongolian Arab, a sprinkling of Hebrews and other Asiatic peoples, and then, of course, resulting Afro-Asians. The ethnic composition of Libya was about the same as that of early Egypt, with the exception that there were fewer Europeans and more Mongolians. Libya was once so nearly all Black that to be called a Libyan meant Black.[5]

The Pelasgians, the neolithic inhabitants of Hellas, identified Neith with Pallas Athena, by far the most powerful goddess in Greek mythology, and maintained that she was born beside Lake Tritonis in Libya.[6] Plato is of the same opinion,[7] and Herodotus, who actually travelled to North Africa, wrote that "the Greeks took the 'aegis' with which they adorn the statues of Athene, from the dress of Libyan women, for except that the latter is of leather and has fringes of leather thongs instead of snakes, there is no other point of difference."[8]

The Aegean island of Crete must have been a principal link between North Africa and Europe, to which African religious ideas were introduced, and re-introduced, over and over again.

> Pottery finds suggest a Libyan immigration to Crete as early as 4000 B.C.; and large number of goddess-worshipping Libyan refugees, from the western

> Delta, seem to have arrived there when Upper and Lower Egypt were forcibly united under the First Dynasty about the year 3000 B.C. The First Minoan Age began soon afterwards and Cretan culture spread to Thrace and Early Helladic Greece.[9]

H.R. Hall goes on to add that "very ancient relations between Crete and Egypt are suggested not only by resemblances in the material culture of both countries in the early period . . . but by a study of Egyptian and Minoan religion, chiefly in respect to cults of the Delta, where among other things the double axe appears as a religious emblem, and the characteristic Cretan figure-of-eight shield is the same as the shield of the goddess Neith of Sais, which probably goes back to early neolithic days."[10]

The adoration of Neith, or, more specifically, the elemental powers, forces and concepts she represented, is but one example, albeit an important one, of the tremendously high regard for the feminine character as found in both mortal woman and illustrious goddess. This seems to have been the case continent-wide and throughout the African cultural sphere. Crete for example:

> long retained traces of the matriarchal system witness the pre-eminence of a goddess, almost to the exclusion of male divinities, and the prominent place held by women in Minoan Crete, is evidenced by their apartments at Knossos and by the many representations of their daily life in their wall paintings.[11]

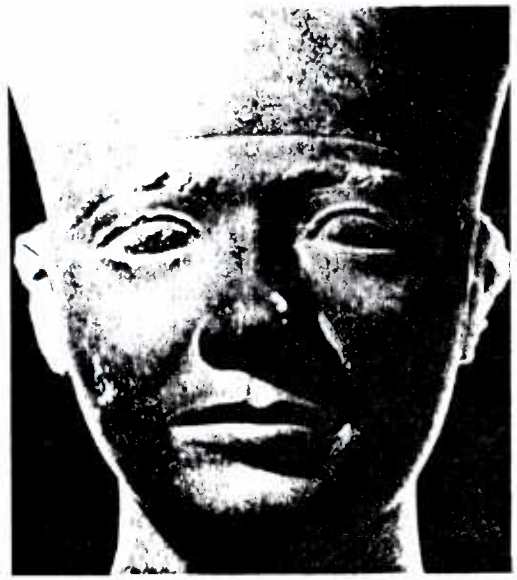

**Figure 1. Colossal bust of the goddess Neith. Dynasty V.**



Godfrey Higgins, the distinguished nineteenth century antiquarian, made an attempt to correlate the deities of the British Isles, and particularly Ireland, with the deities of the Mediterranean, especially early Greece, or Hellas, and Phoenicia. In this case, Neith was identified with an Irish goddess called Nath.[12] This is not as far fetched as it may sound, and there is firm reason to suggest an African presence in ancient Ireland. We have, for example, the legend of the "African sea-rovers, the Fomorians, who had a stronghold on Torrey Island, off the Northwest Coast."[13] The Fomorians, shrouded deep in mystery, are held to be the "sinister forces" in Irish mythology who intermingled with, and later fought, the Tautha De Danaan. The struggle was for the possession of Ireland itself, with the Africans apparently coming out on the losing side. Whatever the case, in the religious mythos of the land we find the goddess Anu, one of Ireland's great ancestor deities. Anu may have been the same as Aine, an early sun-goddess, or Danu, the greatest of the goddesses of Irish antiquity and the ruler of the Tautha De Danaan.[14] At any rate, the Irish Anu was a force of prosperity and abundance—so much so that two breast-shaped mountains in western Ireland are called, in her name, the "paps of Anu."[15]

Now, the Egyptians of the historic epoch called their immediate predecessors the Anu, "of which the Anu Seti were the inhabitants of Nubia who lived on the banks of the Nile."[16] It should be noted also that the term "Anu" was generally applied to the early inhabitants of Libya, who were called the Anu-Tehennu. The Egyptians titled two of their most important cities Annu: Hermonthis, in the south, and Heliopolis/On, in the north, where Re was the most important deity, and where the best educated of the Egyptians received their instruction. The fragments of Manetho say that Osarseph himself, who later changed his name to Moses, was a native of Northern Annu.[17] In the Egyptian eschatology, Anu was the abode of the resurrected spirit of the physical dead.

Neithotep, the wife and chief queen of Narmer, and the mother of Aha-Menes, the first documented ruler of the unified Egyptian state, took her name, obviously, from Neith. Perhaps as a goodwill gesture toward the conquered Lower Egyptians, Aha Menes built a temple, the House of Neith, at Sais. Sixteen of the seventy stelae around the mastaba of Zer, Egypt's second king, bore names compounded with the goddess.[18] Meryetneit, whose chronological position is uncertain, but believed by Emery to have been Egypt's third monarch, took her name also from the goddess.[19] On the jar sealings of the Horus Den, the fifth ruler of Dynasty I, we find mention of a seal-bearer of the king with a name compounded with Neith, and, generally, the ladies of high position in archaic Egypt prided themselves as "Prophetess of Neith."[20]

In the Pyramid Texts, which are traced back to the Dynasty V reign of Unas, Neith is regarded as the mother of Sebek, the ancient deity whose zootype was the Nile Crocodile, and whose history stretches back into the far distant past. Sebek was also identified with Re, the noonday sun.

Nitocris, c. 2275 B.C.E., the daughter of Pepi I, and the half-sister of Merenre

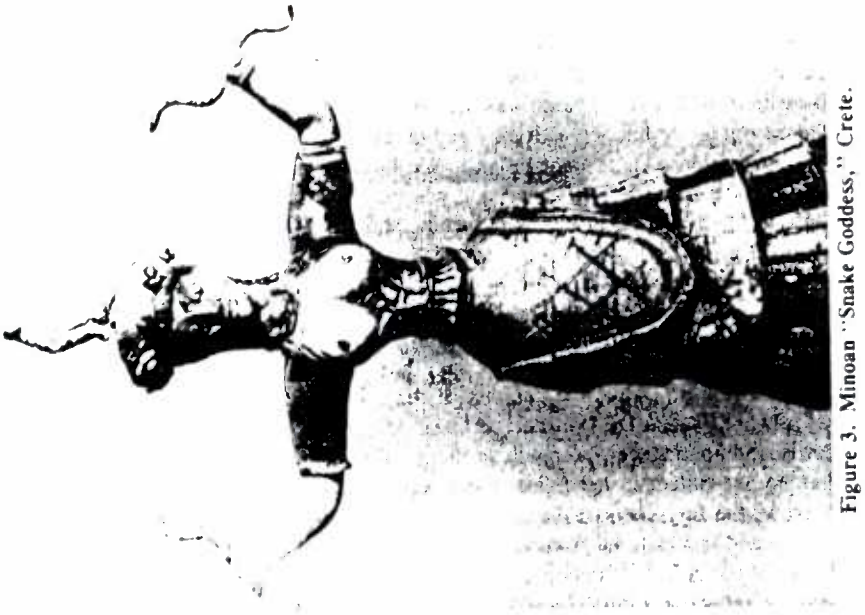

Figure 3. Minoan "Snake Goddess," Crete.

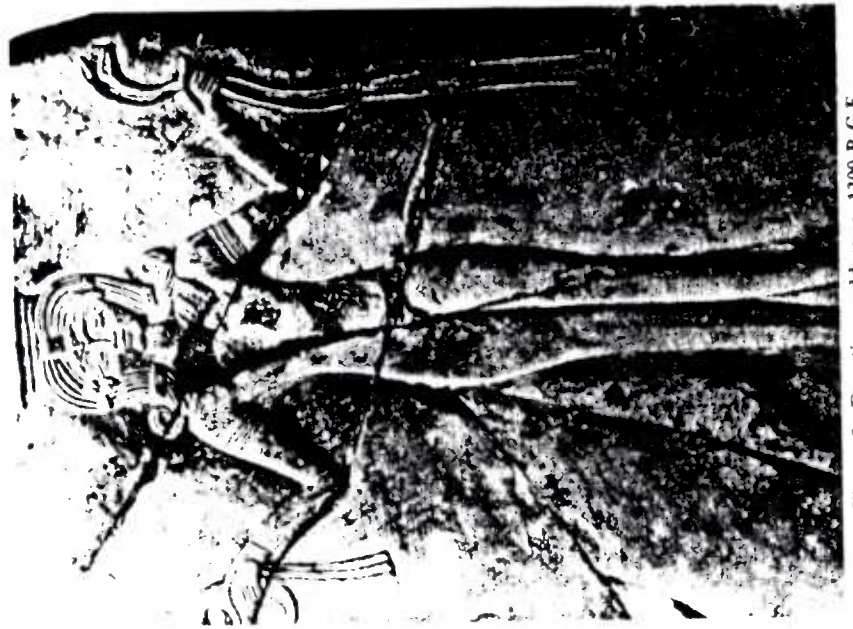

Figure 2. Egyptian goddess, c. 1300 B.C.E.



and Pepi II, was apparently a devotee of Neith.[21] Nitocris was regent of the Two Lands, and is credited by Manetho, the Egyptian historian/priest, with having reigned twelve years and constructing a pyramid.[22] Herodotus also mentions this extraordinary woman, and she is further recorded in the Turin Papyrus. Pepi II, the last major ruler of Dynasty VI, had a queen named Neith.

In Dynasty XVIII Neith, along with Isis, Nepthys and Selkit, is a protector goddess of the canopic jars which held the internal organs of the physical dead. Each of the jars was representative of the four directions and represented one of the sons of Horus. Neith protected Duamutef and states that she will "encircle with my arms that which is in me."[23] On a red granite obelisk, once one of the largest in Egypt, erected in year 33 of his reign, Thutmose III refers to Neith as his "Divine Mother."[24]

It is in the Egyptian renaissance of Dynasty XXVI that the kings of Egypt are called the "Sons of Neith." Sais experienced an era of great prosperity and an inscription at the House of Neith read, "I am whatever was, or is, or will be; and my veil no mortal has ever took up."[25]

The daughter of Psametik I, Nitocris, was sacerdotal princess of Thebes, an extremely powerful position. Psametik II rebuilt the House of Neith and commanded that "the tithe of gold and silver, of the timber and the worked wood produced . . . on the banks of the Anu, and which are reckoned in the King's domain, be a temple-endowment of my mother Neith for all time, in excess of what existed formerly . . . for she is Mistress of the Ocean, and it is she who bestows its bounty."[26]

It was in the house of Neith that Solon, according to Plato, learned from an Egyptian priest the story of the lost continent of Atlantis,[27] and King Apries erected here a pair of five-ton, seventeen-foot obelisks dedicated to Neith and Tum. Amasis, on the authority of Herodotus, added "a spacious court or entry to the temple of the goddess, through which the worshippers passed into an avenue flanked by obelisks, statues and sphinxes into the great hall. Nor was this court the king's only tribute to Neith. On Elephantine Island he had cut from the solid rock a chamber made of a single block, that required the labor of 2,000 boatmen and three years of unremitting labor to transport to Sais."[27] This was the sunset of dynastic Egypt, one of her last bright moments.

The Persian invasion of 525 B.C.E., under the leadership of Cambyses, was instrumental in dimming the light of the world. Cambyses' record of cruelty in respect to the destruction of the Egyptians and their monuments is clearly detailed in other places and need not be gone into here. Much to his credit, however, Cambyses journeyed to Sais, observed the rituals, ordered the temple, which has fallen into distrepair, cleansed, and he restored its revenues and sacred festivals, establishing the offering accorded by the kings of Egypt before him. This was just prior to his decision to invade Ethiopia which resulted in his timely demise.

## Hathor

Few of the goddesses of ancient Egypt so excited the imagination, or had so enduring an influence as Hathor, the House of Horus. In her multiple aspects she was fertility figure, sacred cow in both the north and south, self-begetting goddess, and anthropomorphic goddess in close connection to the Egyptian king, who was the living Horus. She was a contemporary of Neith and seems to have succeeded her in so many of her roles that it is difficult to separate one goddess from the other. Hathor was simultaneously guardian of the Nile Delta, of the marriage bed, and of the necropolis of Thebes. She was both the donor of life and the protector of the dead, and bequeathed to humankind the joys of life and the powers of love. She was also regarded as the goddess of sensuality, was strongly linked with dance, song and music, and is identified with the sistrum, a musical instrument popular in Egypt.

**Figure 4. Rock crystal ball with gold Hathor head. From the tomb of an unknown wife of King Piankhi, Dynasty XXV.**



Hathor was the moon goddess, and as the primary lunar deity of her epoch, took the place of Kept and Apt, who had occupied the position in an earlier era. She was also the "Lady of the Tree," and particularly the Sycamore, from which was derived not only physical sustenance, but, according to Churchward, a divine drink used in the Egyptian Mysteries.[28] The fact that the sycamore was imported from the south supports Hathor's inner African origins. This is a critical point, for the available evidence makes it clear that the religion of Pharaonic Egypt originated in the African interior and subquently spread to the rest of the Black continent, thence to Asia and Europe.

Budge regards Hathor, and a host of Egyptian deities, including Tehuti (Thoth/Hermes/Mercury), Shu and Tefnut, as Sudanic in origin,[29] while Montet stressed that "tradition brings Hathor and the great gods from 'God's Land,' Ta-Neter, which lay south and east of Egypt. This land of legend appears to have included Arabia and the country the Egyptians called Punt, the modern coast of Eritrea and Somalia."[30] Ta-Neter, Punt, was far from legendary and the annals of the Egyptian nations mention it frequently. We have knowledge of at least five major Egyptian expeditions to this sacred land in quest of her prized incense and ebony. Perhaps as more information becomes available on what is probably the most archeologically neglected area of antiquity, the mysterious land of Punt will cease to be a missing link in Black history and be fully included in the great gallery of ancient African civilizations.

Hathor's most characteristic zootype is the cow, either the wild cow of the Lower Egyptian delta, or the milch cow who sustained the nation. In the former aspect she was "Queen of the West." In the latter aspect she was the supreme fertility figure, the mother goddess par excellence. The cow worship of Hathor was so ancient, certainly going well back into the predynastic period, that she must have been a prototype for later fertility or cow goddesses such as Hera, Astarte, Io, and Isis (Ast) herself, who would eventually become the most prominent female deity in Africa, if not the entire world, and assume most of the attributes of Hathor and her sister deities. In Palestine, horned altars and the golden calf survived the dethronement of Hathor as evidenced in the Hebrew literature. Once again, the Africans did not worship animals, vegetation, etc., but they did esteem certain attributes embodied in the various zootypes.

Hathor, the sacred milch cow, was the ultimate provider to the family, community, nation. Hathor was suckler to the king, who was the living Horus, perhaps the most consistently powerful masculine deity in the entire history of ancient Egypt. It is not surprising then that she should be prominently featured, no less than four times, on the palette of Narmer, which records the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. In the White Wall, Egypt's new administrative capital, constructed in the reign of Aha-Menes, Hathor was venerated as the "Mistress of the Southern Sycamore." It may be added that here the reverence of Hathor was second only to that of Ptah, the Master Craftsman and patron deity of the city.

Throughout the Old Kingdom Hathor was served by the ladies of the court who

Figure 5. Hathor on left, Menkaura (Dynasty IV) center, Nome goddess on right.



were, in effect, her priestesses, and it was in Dynasty IV that Khufu, the builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza, began the construction of Hathor's temple at Denderah, in the south, for Hathor was principal deity in both nomes VI and XXII in Upper Egypt. Her actual cult centers are too numerous to list. At Denderah, where the construction continued through the Ptolemaic period, seven Hathors were represented as young and beautiful women with cow's horns, solar disks and vulture head-dresses. They comprised the Hathors of hundred-gated Thebes, Northern Anu, Aphroditopolis, Sinai, the White Wall, Nen Nysut, and Keset. Hathor is featured prominently in the mortuary statues of King Menkaura, also of Dynasty IV.

The Dynasty V kings allotted extensive tracts of land to the priesthood of Hathor at Northern Anu, and among the titles of Princess Ne-Sedjer-Kai at Giza are "Royal Daughter, Royal Ornament, Priestess of Hathor."[31] The same titles may be observed on the Dynasty VI stelae of Ni-Hebsed-Pepi at Naqada.[32] Pepi I, who ruled Egypt for 51 years, declared himself a "Son of Hathor" and continued the work on the temple of the goddess at Denderah.

In Dynasty VIII we find honorific titles, almost identical to those of the Old Kingdom, in relationship to Hathor at both This, the ancient city just north of Abydos, and Edfu, in the deep south near the Nubian border.[33] The fact that these titles are found from Giza to Edfu demonstrate Hathor's national recognition.

In Dynasty X, on the funerary stelae of Wahankh Intef II at Thebes, we find again honorific praises to Hathor but these emphasize her role as the guardian of the Theban necropolis.[34] Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II, under whose reign Egypt was united for the second time, built a large shrine to Hathor in his Theban mortuary temple. Surrounding the central platform of the structure were several burial vaults, each excavated twelve to fifteen feet below the surface. These tombs had been constructed for several women, all of whom bore the titles "Royal Favourite, the Only One, the Priestess of Hathor." In addition to a well preserved sculpture of the goddess, each tomb contained a skeleton of a cow, the animal most sacred to she whose shrine the women had served.[35]

We see the goddess again in Dynasty XII, as very recent research has led to the discovery on the Red Sea coast, north of Al Qusayr at the mouth of the Wadi Gasus, of inscriptions which read, "Son of Re, Sesostris beloved of Hathor, mistress of Pwenet (Punt)."[36] Interestingly enough, Flinders Petrie has traced the family of Sesostris to the Uaka clan of ancient Somalia. We can only assume that the Egyptian travellers built a Hathor shrine, if such a structure was not there already. Other recent finds include fragments of faience statuette-amulets of both Hathor and Ptah in the Axumite region of Ethiopia.[37]

Amenemhet II, the son and successor of Sesostris I, was responsible for a shrine to Hathor in Sinai, for Hathor is also known as the "Mistress of Mines." Sinai was, generally, an extension of Egypt, and the semi-precious stones excavated there figured prominently in the works of Egyptian artists and master craftsmen.

**Figure 6. Close-up of Hathor pendant found in Sinai.**

Hathor also had a shrine in the Phoenician city of Byblos. She was the chief deity here and was widely known as the "Lady of Byblos." This data is indicative of the extremely close Egypto/Phoenician relationship. When one considers the early history of Palestine and Lebanon, however, the actual blood ties of the early inhabitants of this region emerge. The Natufians are regarded as Palestine's early dwellers. The Natufians, Arthur Keith calls them the Shukbah people, were "a dolichocephalic folk; their type may be described as Mediterranean, but with distinct bias towards the African variety of that stock represented by the predynastic people of Egypt."[38] Keith adds that "the later cave dwellers of Shukbah practiced a rite which is still observed by many negro tribes of Africa. They removed one or both upper central incisors in youth, which resulted in atrophy of the corresponding alveolar part of the upper jaw."[39]

The Kanaanites seem to have been the successors of the Natufians. Robert Graves suggests that they "may have originally come to Lower Egypt from Uganda" on their way to Palestine.[40] Of course the biblical genealogy makes Kanaan a son of Ham and brother of Mizraim (Egypt) and Kush (Ethiopia), so it is only natural for them to have had strong bonds with the Egyptians, and the Ethiopians, in respect to cultural traditions.[41] The kings of the Phoenician city-states were regarded as Egyptian princes and were relied upon as some of her strongest allies.

Amenemhet III, perhaps the greatest ruler of Dynasty XII and builder of the



**Figure 7. Hathor, cow goddess, suckler of the King.**

great Labyrinth, is shown in a famous piece of sculpture, lying underneath Hathor being suckled by her.

The prominence of Hathor continued unabated through the New Kingdom, with her role as guardian of the Theban necropolis never stronger. Senmut, the brilliant architect of the Dynasty XVIII ruler Hatshepsut, embellished great care on Hathor's shrine inside his Pharoah's mortuary temple. Its spatial area exceeded that of any other part of the temple. It was in one of these periods of Egyptian imperialism, such as Dynasty XVIII, and later in history when she was in turn invaded, that the influence of Hathor and other deities spread to distant lands. Of course we know that the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus were but pale reflections of Hathor, but what of the early goddesses of western Asia? Undoubtedly they too must have been either copies of the original, or at the least, recipients of her strong cultural influence, as introduced and reinforced by the numerous waves of Blacks who moved over the Asian continent in historic and prehistoric times. Such was the case with Ishtar of Babylonia. Diop places ancient Mesopotamia, and rightfully so, in the zone of confluence where the north-

ern (Indo-European) and southern (African) peoples and cultures overlapped and intermingled.[42] Ishtar is at times the daughter of Anu, and again the daughter of Bel or Sin. She is the goddess supreme, which is quite interesting, given the general lack of prominence accorded to the woman in the northern cultural millieu. Other goddesses are no more than minor reflections of dominant male figures; not so Ishtar. This goddess stands quite alone. She is the great mother goddess and the queen of heaven. She is the goddess of both life and vegetation. Even before Babylonia we find, in Sumer, the goddess Inanna, also the daughter of Anu. In Elam, with its Kushite heartland of Susa, the home of the great black warrior-king Memnon, the female deity reigned unchallenged through the second millenium B.C. Elam, we might add, was the forerunner of Persian civilization.[43]

In New Kingdom Egypt, in addition to her other roles, Hathor was called the "Queen of Heaven" and the "Golden One." Her character as the wild cow was transformed and she became the tutelary deity of love. In the Ptolemaic period she was the patroness of women, who became Hathors after their death just as men became Osiris.

## Isis

Isis (Ast) was, by practically all accounts, the most dominant goddess of ancient Egypt. Her influence grew as the dynasties waned, and the suppression of the worship of this greatest of goddesses was the concluding chapter of the ancient Egyptian religion in which the great mother in one form or another had to be seriously reckoned with.

Isis was, on the authority of Plutarch, the daughter of the sky-goddess Nut and the earth-god Seb. She was born on the fourth day, after her brothers: Osiris (Asar, the lord of all and Isis' husband), the elder Horus, and the evil Sut. Isis' sister Nepthys was born on the fifth day. The story, among other things, apparently reflects the evolution of human consciousness in its stellar, lunar and solar phases. Osiris, the personification of all that was good and moral, left the company of Egypt's gods to bring civilization to the world of mortals. Isis aided him by providing the knowledge of agriculture, which the compassionate god promptly bestowed upon mankind. In the meantime Sut was not pleased with his brother's popularity and, seizing the opportunity, conspired to kill him, casting his body, which was enclosed in a wooden chest, into the Nile.[44] Here we seem to have a prototype for the story of Cain and Abel. Sut was also the model for the Hebrew Satan, as is well known.

The wifely devotion which Isis displayed in her relentless search for the body of Osiris won her the sympathy of the masses. Anyone who had lost a loved one could identify with her passion. She eventually located the body of Osiris and, with the help of powerful Egyptian gods, restored its life. Before this, however,



Isis conceived a child who was to avenge his father's murder. Here, in this brief narrative, we have two more of the major stories of the Christian religion, i.e., the resurrected saviour, and the immaculate conception. The idea of resurrection, however, was a very old and integral part of the African psyche. As Durant put it, "If Osiris, the Nile, and all vegetation, might rise again, so might man."[45] Man could rise, like Osiris, but only if he made God's word, which was truth, justice and righteousness, manifest on earth. There was no death in the African way of thinking, only gradual decay and periodic renewal.

In respect to virgin births, Kersey Graves lists sixteen such events, before Jesus and Mary.[46] Edward Carpenter adds further insight.

> Finally, we have the curiously large number of black virgin mothers who are or have been worshipped. Not only cases like Devaki the Indian goddess, or Isis the Egyptian, who would naturally appear black-skinned or dark, but the large number of images and paintings of the same kind yet extant—especially in the Italian churches—and passing for representations of Mary and the infant Jesus. Such are the well-known images in the chapel at Genoa, Pisa, Padua, Munich and other places. . . . At Paris, far on into Christian times there was, it is said, on the site of the present Cathedral of Notre Dame, a Temple dedicated to "our lady" Isis, and images belonging to the earlier shrine would in all probability be preserved with altered names in the latter.[47]

Figure 8. Old Kingdom statue of Isis suckling Horus.

One of the most important, and last centers for the worship of Isis was on the island of Philae in the far south of Egypt, near Aswan. Isis' widespread popularity made Philae a meeting place of many cultures and the dissemination of powerful ideas. The numerous inscriptions left by pilgrims here even indicate that the Kings of Meroe, and presumably Kandakes, were major sponsors of the temple of the goddess.

Even after the advent of Christianity, and irrespective of the Roman overseers, the Blacks of the Upper Nile continued to visit the sanctuary of Isis at Philae, and for certain feasts were allowed to borrow the statue of the goddess.

The Roman occupiers of Egypt was ambivalent to the worship of Isis. It had widespread popular support in Italy, but met fluctuating official resistance. The worship of Isis, in Italy itself, can be traced back to the second century B.C. A college of her priests was founded at Rome in the time of Sulla, c. 90 B.C. It is interesting to note that more than a third of the followers of Isis in early Italy, indicated by the inscriptions, were women.[48] On five occasions during the Republic the shrines were ordered torn down. In 28 B.C. Augustus outlawed the building of Temples of Isis in Rome, and Tiberius persecuted her priests. Caligulia, shrewder than his predecessors, properly measuring popular opinion, built a temple for the African goddess in the Campus Martius. Most of the successive Roman emperors followed his example and by the second century A.D. Isis was a solid fixture among Rome's high officials. Two Egyptian obelisks, at least one

**Figure 9. Black madonna from Spain.**



of which was built during the reign of Ramses II, c. 1260 B.C., were erected outside Isis' temple in the Campus Martius.[49]

In the sixth century A.D. the Christian religion triumphed in North Africa, and especially the Nile Valley. Justinian, ruler of the crumbling Roman Empire, had ordered the reconquest of North West Africa in 533 A.D. Three years later, by his imperial edict, the temple of Isis at Philae permanently closed, in spite of the armed intervention of her Black patrons. The great civilizations of North Africa were rolled back, resulting, shortly thereafter, in a new epoch of squalor and ignorance throughout Europe. Europe had suppressed its light and found itself wallowing in its own decadence. As Massey so simply but eloquently penned, "The wisdom of the ancients was the wisdom of Egypt."[50]

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# FEMALE STYLE AND BEAUTY IN ANCIENT AFRICA: A PHOTO ESSAY

By Camille Yarbrough

In traditional African societies it was believed that the mixture of correct elements could be used to inspire and maintain the favorable disposition of the seen and the unseen forces (the gods) that surround and work within the individual and the community. If a ceremonial dance had all the correct component parts: the correct entreaty to the Gods for favorable intercession, the correct dance movements, rhythms, dress, attitude, correct closing and purpose, then that dance was considered to be life-giving and therefore good and beautiful. *Beauty is as beauty does*.

This management of forces to achieve positive or negative ends is the traditional African concept of magic. Since the most ancient of times, African priestesses, priests and the common people believed in and used magic, medicine and religion to protect themselves from evil forces and to attract good ones. The use of magic, medicine and religion to achieve good/beauty, coupled with an evolving aesthetic sense was the starting point in the development of the concept of style and beauty in ancient Africa.

"At a distance it looked as if their bodies were carved. . . . Like flowers on silk wrought in handkerchiefs [that] never wears off, like flowered damask, flowered satin which has a pretty look." These are some of the impressions recalled by the fifteenth and sixteenth century explorers on first seeing patterned and textured markings on the bodies of the African women whom they encountered in their travels through Africa. They were referring to the body adornment that we today call Scarification or Cicatrization. It is not known exactly where or when other forms of body decoration came into being but we do know that Scarification is very ancient.

African body adornment is complex and most often is more than a simple act of beautification. Those African women seen for the first time by European explorers were proud of the floral and geometric designs that decorated their bodies. The markings were a language clearly understood by those who could read their symbolic meanings. They were an indication of social status. The markings varied according to cultural group but would generally tell the following story;

"See the design on my breasts, arms and back? I have had my first menses. I have come of age. Give me honor. See the design on my abdomen? I carry my

first child. Give me honor. Or, see the design on my face? I am a married woman. Give me honor. You can read my achievement and the strength of my character when you see the art and accumulation of my adornment. Read me and behave accordingly."

This is as it has been for centuries. In Leni Riefenstahl's book *Nuba* she gives us the following information:

> According to the Kudjur medicine men, cicatrization derives from a practical, medicinal purpose: it is an ancient custom among primitive people, dating back several millennia, intended to immunize the body against a number of infectious diseases, just as modern vaccinations do.

By cutting and plucking their skin with sharp stones, twigs, thorns, crystal splinters or knives and then sprinkling the open wounds with *ask*, Ancient Africans stimulated their bodies to create protective anti-bodies and to resist disease. The cutting and plucking of the skin was done in patterns and designs and the scars produced raised ridges and dots, and depressed levels of skin darker or lighter than the surrounding skin. A display of silent courage in the face of the pain experienced when receiving the markings was the price paid for the right of passage from one station in life to the next. When done by specialists the practice became an art form, a form of style and beauty.

Developing from the simplest of styles, hair braiding also became an art form in Africa. Approximately five thousand years ago in the Sahara, on the stone walls of the Tassili plateau, about 900 miles southeast of Algiers, a stone age artist drew a picture of a woman sitting and breast-feeding a child. The woman is wearing the braided hair style that African-Americans call "Cornrows," a classic style for the texture of African hair. Over a period of thousands of years the simple braided hair styles became more elaborate and symbolic of social status;

> You could tell the clan, the village,
> by the style of hair they wore . . .
> Then the Yoruba people
> were wearin' thirty braids and more
> You would know the princess, queen and bride
> by number of the braid. . . .
> You would know the Gods they worshipped
> by the pattern that they made.

There is little evidence to show that Egyptian women wore their hair in the "cornrow" style, but they did wear braids and twists in short layers and in long, heavy, down-to-the-shoulder, cascades. Wigs of all styles were worn by all classes of Egyptian and Nubian women for social and ceremonial events. They were made of natural hair, kinky and straight, sheep's wool and plant fibers. Wigs may have been created to protect the head against the rays of the sun. For religious, social and hygenic purposes, African women have, since ancient times,



shaved their heads or kept their hair very short. Especially in Egypt, wigs were worn over the short hair or bald scalp. A bull's blood cooked in oil and applied to the hair was an Egyptian formula for darkening greying hair. Eye make-up began as medicine and magic. During the time of the annual innundation of the Nile, the strong rays of the sun from above and its reflected glare on the waters flooding the lands of Egypt and Nubia were damaging to the eyes of those ancient people. African doctors discovered that, by applying soothing salves to the eye lids and brows and then dusting the eyelids with powdered lead, copper, antimony or any substance that acted as an astringent, they could relieve the strain on the eyes and ease the pain. The paint was also applied to the lashes. The Egyptians wrote of the paint as being magic because of the relief it gave but the women soon discovered something else about it. The color of the eye-paint added allure, a drawing power to their faces, attracting the attention of admiring males. The paint was truly magic and every sister who had eyes also had a small stone pallet on which she crushed and mixed the colored minerals. They applied this magic/medicine make-up to the eye lids with a finger or a short stick made of bone, wood, ivory or stone.

Only concubines painted their lips red. But it was the fashion for all women to stain their finger nails and toe nails with the juice of the henna plant. For sweet

**1**
**An alabaster Canopic jarlid from the Eighteenth Dynasty, approximately 1350 B.C. Found in the main chamber of the tomb of Akhenaten in the Valley of the Kings in Western Thebes. Thought to be a likeness of princess Meryt-Aten, daughter of Akhnaten. Note the protective eye-paint outlining the eyes and lining the eye brows. She is wearing a short military wig and a broad collar, probably of amulets.**

breath, small pellets of mixed spices, honey and anti-gum were held in the mouth. The rich sisters and the poor annointed their hair and bodies with domestic or imported scented pomades and oils, believing that they had magic and medicinal powers. They perfumed themselves by sitting over or near burning pots of sandlewood or other aromatic substances, lingering there to admire their reflection in round or oval copper mirrors, polished on both sides. On their feet they wore sandals of papyrus or leather or wood. Whether they wore shoes or not was determined by their age and class.

In the earliest of times they wore stones, rocks, bones, feathers and flowers on their bodies for magic protection. As their cultures developed and became more prosperous, amulets of turquoise, amethyst, dard, carniliana, lapis lazuli and red, yellow and black jasper were shaped, polished and set into gold, flint and glazed porcelain necklaces, collars, bracelets, anklets, pectorals, ear plugs and rings . . . eventually becoming jewelry. Scarabs were first buried with the dead to protect their hearts. As time passed they became jewelry to be worn to protect the hearts of the living. Egyptian women wore them in profusion. The Eye of Horus was worn as an amulet. It was believed to magically bring the blessings of strength, vigor and good health to the wearer. Centuries before, however, it was the cowrie shell which, because of its opening, resembled the opening of the human eye and was worn as a protection against the evil eye. Princesses and concubines wore cowrie shells of gold in the form of necklaces, girdles and bracelets. The Ankh was worn as a symbol of life. Cultures to the south brought earrings into Egypt. The women of the southern nations wore earrings and earplugs of great variety, some of which stretched their ear lobes into the thinness and flexibility of string.

New discoveries have been made in the lands to the south of Egypt and we will soon be in possession of much more information on style and beauty in other lands of ancient Africa.

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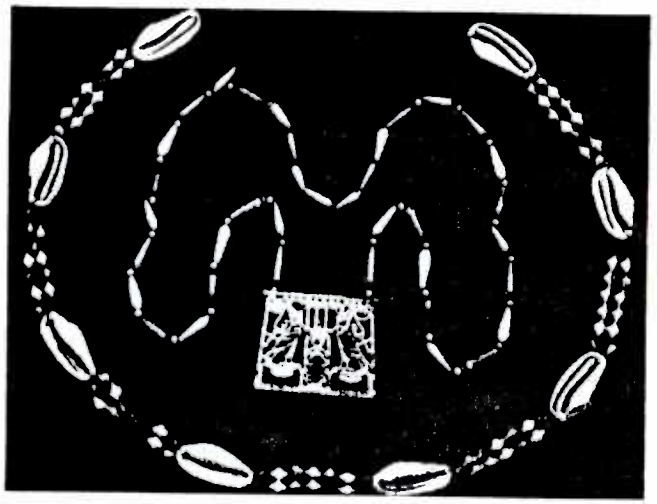
2
**Limestone, sunk relief from the middle to late period Egyptian. Queen Nefertiti kissing her daughter. Both the queen and princess are wearing large ear-plugs. The child is wearing her hair in a long plaited sidelock. Found at Hermopolis. The daughter is either Meryt-Aten or Neferneferu-Aten-tasherit.**



3
**Cowrie shell girdle of Princess Set-Hathor, daughter of Egyptian pharaoh Sesostris II. Made of gold, lapis lazuli, green felspar. Some of its parts were stolen and, as a result, it is shorter then it originally was. Cowrie shells were worn as protection against the evil eye. A pectoral containing two Ankhs (the symbol of life), a scarab to protect the heart and two falcons wearing the double crown, symbolizing the victory of Horus over Set, the God of violence.**

4
Starting in 1956 French explorer/ethnologist, Henri Lhote and a team of artists worked for sixteen months to make eight hundred copies, only a small portion of the fifteen thousand rock paintings on the walls of the Tassili plateau. One of the drawings was of a mother feeding a child. The drawing shows the mother wearing a braided hair style that we today call "Cornrows." The drawing has been dated 3500 BC.

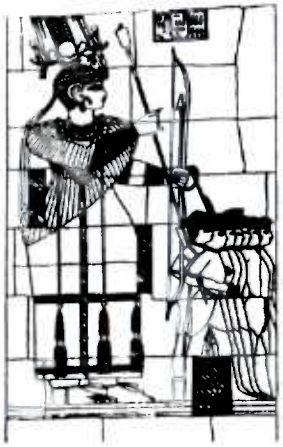
5
From a mural painting found in the tomb of Huy in Western Thebes showing Nubian women leading children. The woman in the foreground is wearing a wrap skirt with vertical stripes, bracelets on her wrists and upper arms, and large circular earrings. Her hair appears to be styled in short twists or braids. At that same site is a painting of a Nubian princess riding in a chariot. Her hair style resembles the short "Natural" style worn today. Bracelets are on both of her arms and long earrings reach from her ears down to the broad collar of her dress, which is of pleated linen. About 1340 BC.



6
From the Twentieth Dynasty. A painted limestone ostracon in Deir el Medine, showing a new mother nursing a child while sequestered in a maternity bower. Her hair is worn in a style given to soon-to-be mothers during a period of purification. About 1200-1100 BC, Egypt.

7
Nubian women in Egypt during the time of Thothmes III, 1490-1436 BC, wearing wrap skirts, one plain with a border, the other with horizontal stripes. Their heads are shaven clean. They wear hoop earrings that seem to circle the ear rather than dangle from them. One of the women is wearing a necklace that falls into a V shape on her chest. There is no indication of make-up, tatooing, scarification or body painting.

8
From a wall painting in a pyramid chapel at Meroë. The first Meroitic queen is wearing protective eye paint on her eyes and eye brows. She is wearing a close fitting helmet-like head piece, held in place by a chin strap and a head band that hangs down ribbon-like, extending below her shoulder. Her helmet-like hat supports a diadem. Only the thumbnails of her hands are colored. Her finger nails are free of color. Her blouse is pleated linen and her skirt is a wrap-around with a border at the bottom and at the end. She is wearing sandals. No indication of tatooing, scarification or body paint.



9
The second Meroitic queen depicted on the wall painting in the chapel at Meroë is dressed in a bordered wrap-around skirt. Her blouse is also made of pleated linen. She is wearing protective eye make-up. An elaborate diadem is supported by a helmet-like hat or hair piece. A double-strand necklace extends to her waist. Earrings dangle from her ears which appear to be encircled by a large ear ornament.



10
From a bas-relief at Nagaa. A Meroitic queen wearing a wrap skirt that extends from just below the breasts down to her ankles. She is wearing cuffs and arm bands. A waist-long string of large ball-shaped beads hangs from her neck. Her skirt is of a bird-wing design. None of her finger nails are painted. Her hair is cut short and on top of her head she wears a skull cap-like diadem with ribbons trailing from the back. The sheath for her sword is tucked into her waistband. She also wears the extended eye paint on her eyes and eyebrows.

11
From a bas-relief at Nagaa. A Meroitic queen wearing a kilt-like skirt with a pleated, ornamented and tasseled apron over it. Her cuffs are elaborate and her sandals appear to be made of leather. She is wearing a short hair cut or a helmet-like hat/hairdo, with a double ribbon trailing in the back. A necklace of large beads extends from her neck to her waist.

# THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN AFRICAN CAVE ART

**By Rosalind Jeffries**

The image conveyed by the term "prehistoric man" or "caveman" has led us to envision ancient man as so threatening in his masculinity as to overpower, or reduce to diminutive status, ancient woman. This is a false view of the earliest human family, especially of the earliest woman, the Black Woman. For, in examining the thousands of cave etchings, and paintings in hundreds of sites throughout the African continent, we note that women, though less frequently painted than men, are painted in a startling variety of styles and actively assume very significant roles.

The art of the rocks is found in *North Africa*: the Atlas Mountains, the desert east of the Nile River just below the Delta, the central Sahara region (Jabbaren, Sefar, Tassili, Tibetsi, Ennedi, etc.); *East Africa*: Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia; *West Africa*: western Sudan, Mali, Cameroons, both sides of the Niger river; *Central Africa*: Zaire, Zimbabwe; and *South Africa*: Brandberg, Limpopo, Salisbury, and other sites not here mentioned.[1]

Women are depicted wearing masks, both partial and fullface coverings, in carved wood or woven fibers. Her face and body is striated, painted and cicatrized. She is depicted in leadership roles, as head of community activities, as leader of ritual ceremonies for women, for healing, and other activities. Besides the usual maternal and domestic roles, she too was cattle-rearer as well as gatherer of roots, herbs, vegetables and fruits. Cave paintings show the warrior-woman with weapons and the craftswoman making pottery or playing drums.

Prehistoric woman was both passive and aggressive, assertive and forthright on her own, sometimes wielding the power of a god, even as she stood as a reticent supporter behind or at the side of man. Some works show her as Primal Mother Creator, with fertilizing and nurturing powers which extended from the firmaments down into the earth below. Her powers of fertility in the universe were not confined to human beings but could be magnified to affect vegetation, animal husbandry, and the atmosphere. Because of her contact with the atmosphere, she too was Rainmaker. In times of severe crisis, such as extremes of drought, it was the female, a virgin, who was sacrificed, because her fertilizing capacity was thought to be potent enough to bring down showers to slake the thirst of humanity. Woman was the "Giver of Life." She was also the "Mother Killer," associated with the symbol of the vulture, thus equipped to scavenge whatever was necessary for the race to survive.



## The Primal Mother in Cave Painting

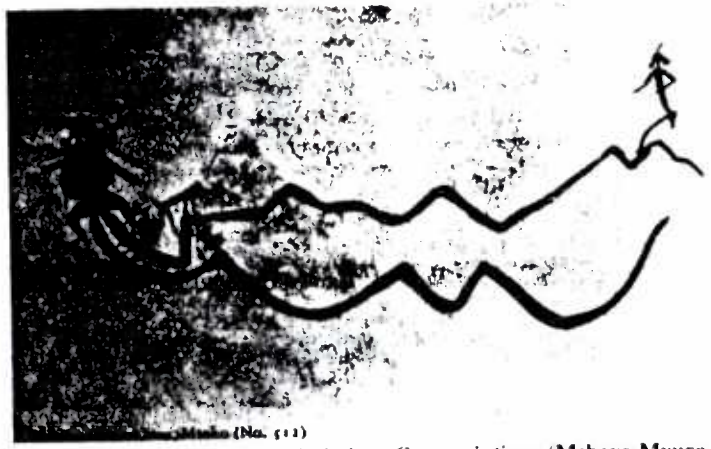
The image of the primal mother goes back to early antiquity. She is seen in several of the styles which distinguish the cavepaintings of Mashonaland, Zimbabwe, in the Mshaya Mvura cave, Mtoko. She is painted in beautiful protuberant curves. Her entire body posture is symbolic. The arms and legs are akimbo, bent at the joints and flattened out to the sides of the body in strict frontal symmetry like the Kanaga sign of the Dogon peoples of Mali. The headshape of the Zimbabwe mother is narrow and long, has a bulging forehead with a prominent eyebrow ridge and wide cheeks, the jaws protruding. The hairstyle or hat is elaborate and has long streamers hanging on each side, which strongly resemble those found on Bambara female sculpture. The hat and streamers also resemble those worn by Senufo women in initiation ceremonies. The most magnetic feature of the primal mother is her extremely enormous belly and two distinctive flowing lines that pass from the pregnant form through the vaginal opening and connect to become geographical lines which delineate the great curves of the terrain. These two lines are metaphorical references to mother nature whose bulbous fruitfulness stimulates its likeness in rivers, streams, hills, and mountains. Two men are drawn walking upon the mountains, paths which connect to her womb.

Another image of Primal Mother is found at the Mrewa Cave. It shows eight people, men and women, and a hooted animal surrounding her. One man addresses her, another applauds, two other men are drawn upside down with the stream flowing between them. Their awkward posture is perhaps suggestive of the fact that they are dead, and are therefore figures in the ancestral domain. Thus fertility extends from Primal Mother to earth, rivers, plant-human-animal kingdoms and likewise the ancestors.

Curator Elizabeth Goodall, member of the Southern Rhodesian Monuments Commission,[2] briefly compares Primal Mother of Zimbabwe to the complex of protuberant feminine Paleolithic sculptures in bone and stone found in Europe, which have often been referred to as "goddesses of fertility."[3] An example is the noted Venus de Willendorf. Similar Venuses of the Aurignacian period in Europe, in sites where the Aficoid Grimaldi type has been found, show thick matted hair or a wig, which only stretches to the shoulders. They are not long, with streamers, as in Primal Mother of Zimbabwe or primal mother figures later appearing among the Senufo or Bambara or the paintings of the Kun Bushmen. The type in Europe has marked Bantu features.[4]

## The Primal Mother in Sculpture

Small-size clay figurines of women were recovered from graves in Nubia, 3,500 B.C. and also Badarian graves in predynastic Egypt, Nakada I period.



1. *Image of the Primal Mother-1.* **Zimbabwe Cave paintings (Mshaya Mvura Cave, Mtoke). Most magnetic feature is her extremely enormous belly and the two distinctive flowing lines that pass from the pregnant form through the vaginal opening and connect to become geographical lines that delineate the curves of the terrain.**

2. *Image of the Primal Mother-2.* **Zimbabwe cave paintings (Mrewa Cave). It shows eight people, men and women, and a hoofed animal surrounding the mother figure.**



Fertility is personified as woman with voluptuous curves, tremendous buttocks and thighs, small waist and legs, large breasts, the padded aesthetics of steatopygia. Some had extensive scarification designs on the body. Some added zoomorphic abstractions upon anthropomorphic form: the face comes to a point at the mouth and the arms are transformed into wings. Skeletal remains uncovered were also of women. Bumgartel notes some of them were distinguished women, the grave of a princess or priestess littered with beads, cloth, jewelery, combs, etc., and beside these objects the clay figurines of women.

What was the purpose of burying figurines of women in predynastic graves? The most likely reason is that they were "letters to the dead." The soul of the deceased was to take a journey, she could act as messenger informing the gods of wishes for children of the living.[5] In the Berlin Museum one can find the statuette of a woman from the First Intermediate Period holding a child, upon whom she has written her wish. Female figurines were also found in a man's grave and likewise were requests for offspring from the Great Mother. The man's subjugation to the Great Mother was a realization that she had a male deity as companion, her lover and son. This emphasized the idiomatic expression in Egypt, *Ka-mwt,* which means "the bull of his mother."

The roots of predynastic Egypt and Nubia and the prehistoric Sahara strike deep into Africa, and it is these roots that have transmitted to later periods and other locations a specific mental orientation proper to cave paintings and sculptures. In some cases there is strong similarity of form but different meanings, and vice versa—different styles but similar mental orientation and function. The symbols and forms of prehistoric Sahara are found in continuity elsewhere—east, west and south. Libyan folklore, like that of pre-dynastic Egyptian, speaks of the primordial goddess Tefnut, the personification of the moisture of the sky, and her twin brother, Shu, who personified the heat and dryness of sunlight with the dry atmosphere thought to exist between earth and sky. Tefnut is represented in the form of a woman, with lioness head and mane upon which is the solar disk and uraeus. The bushy mane is made to look like a woman's wig, the hair texture kinky with twirls. She holds a hand sceptre and ankh.

Shu and Tefnut were the parents of Isis. Isis eventually absorbed the attributes of her predecessors who form the great pre-dynastic pantheon, Nekhebet, Uatchet, Net, Bast, Hathor and others. She was even identified as the female counterpart of the primeval abyss of water from which sprang all life. She shared with her male companion Osiris the attribute of "Giver of Life" and provided food for the dead and the living. As Ament she even became the mother of Ra. She possessed the powers of a water goddess, an earth goddess, a corn goddess, a star goddess, and a queen of the underworld." The vulture and horns associated with her, are associated with other women in cave paintings and later sculpture in other parts of the continent.

The cult of Isis later spread to Western Europe and she was identified with Persephone, Tethys, Athene etc. The Greek god of wisdom was Athene, an African

3. Clay figurines of women recovered from graves in pre-dynastic Egypt (c. 3000 B.C.). The head comes to a point and the arms are transformed into wings (from *Cultures in Prehistoric Egypt* by Beaumgartel).

4. Clay figurine of woman from grave in Nubia (c. 3,500 B.C.). Tremendous buttocks and thighs, small waist and legs . . . the padded aesthetics of steatopygia (from *Africa in Antiquity*).



woman, who entered the mind of the major god Zeus while he was in Libya. Mythology says she was born from his head. Budge says that an earlier form of the name Isis is As or Ast and the name was originally a Libyan name of the prehistoric Saharan period.[7] A larger number of predynastic graves were of women and these were larger in size than those graves of men, and had female figurines in them. "We therefore have to ask, whether the *nswt* ['Ruler of the Two Lords'] was perhaps originally a woman?"[8]

## Akan, Benin, Mother Creator

Nyame is the name of the Supreme god amongst the Akan and he is thought to be strong enough to encompass both genders, male and female, or else conceived of as beyond the abstract idea of sexual identity. However, older than this of Nyame and the belief in masculine dominance is the Akan belief in a Supreme Mother.[9] Her name was Atoapoma and she was said by them to be self-begotten, self-produced and self-born, eternal and infinite. She created the firmament with its stars and sun and she did so without the help of a male partner. She is personified as the moon. Her titles include the term "the Ever Ready Shooter" because she gave life by shooting the life-giving rays of the moon, fire, into men and beasts. (We shall later consider the symbolic image of woman-archer in ritual.) Life-blood itself is Atoapoma's fire, a lunar fire called *kra*. She was venerated not only as "the Giver of Life" but also "the Giver of Death." She was Odiawuono, literally "the Mother Killer," mother of the living, mother of the dead, the sky and earth. Her underworld reference was envisioned as the barren soil in which the dead lay buried.[10]

Not only the Akan but the Fon of Benin (Dahomey) likewise believed in an original mother creator as supreme. Her name was Nana-Daho and her symbol of recognition was called Tokpodoun, breasts multiplied. Relief plaques of breasts alone with scarification marks are found in ancient Nubia and also in Chad. Akan drums may have from one to seven breasts, in relief. Another name for Nana-Daho is Minonna, she who created primordial twins; and, like the Akan mother Atoapoma, these were the moon (female) and the sun (male). The twins gave birth to seven pairs of twins who were the deified ancestors of the Fon. In Benin, Nigeria, 14th-18th century, the Oba, during the "Ugie Iye Oba" commemorative rites for his deceased mother, wore around his waist the ivory portrait of his mother. She was thus a mother of the state.[11]

## Queen Mother of the State

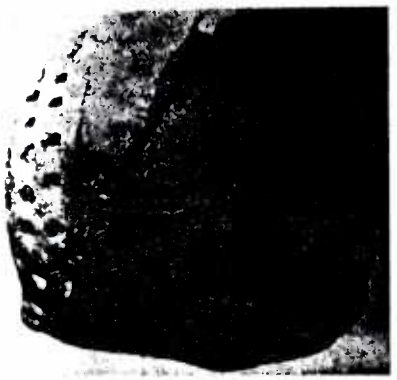
The role of the Queen mother or clan leader was also important amongst the Akan. The state of the Elder Woman was a confederation of seven clans, each one owning a city and a number of villages. The Elder Woman became the

Ohemmaa, literally "female king" and she owned the state as a "mother owns a child." She later was known by the title Queen Mother and as before she was considered divine, a founder of the state able "to give life" and maintain life in her state. In "Des Clans Aux Empires" by Moret he says:

> Originally it would seem that the city states were each ruled by a divine woman or queen mother and a *Saru*, a council of men, headed by an elder whose office may have been in many ways similar to that of the Korontihene of the Akan. The Korontihene in the past was the ruler of the men and the administrator of the state; he was not divine as he had not the life-giving power of the queen mother, who may or may not have shared her office with a lifegiving priest-chief, her brother, or son, but who had originally no secular power".[12]

The Queen Mother's ancient sceptre was called Nyansa Pow, a staff with a "wisdom knot" tied in its center. These are seen today on older goldweights. It is interesting that the Greek goddess Athene was the goddess of wisdom and she too was born on African soil and a knot was associated with her wisdom. The Libyan goddess of wisdom has her hands symbolically veiled and the cloth drawn up into a knot with long strands flowing from the knot. The Tuareg women and some descendants of the Garamantes continued the custom of veiling the hands with knotted cloth at marriage ceremonies where they sing for the newly wed bound or knotted in matrimony.[13]

**5a. Compare woman's head from sacred grave site of the Akan (from *Clay figures used in funeral ceremonies*) with one at 5b.**



**5b. Small female head of fired clay from grave site in Nubia—C-group, 1900-1550 B.C.**



The Akan Queen Mother was often depicted in sculpture seated upon a royal stool. Mother and child figures followed the same stylistic aesthetic. Women in antiquity made funerary terracotta pottery called Abusua Kuruwa,[14] a vessel used on graves, in shrines, to hold medicines, pour libations, etc. A python, often shown encircling the vessel's neck is a possible reference to the proverb "the rainbow of death encircles every man's neck."[15] Amongst the Senufo of the Ivory Coast the python is a symbol of the woman of powers who maintains it by great faithfulness, absolute sexual purity.[16] Besides the python, the Akan would include other creatures of earth on the pottery: snails, lizards, frogs, and crocodiles. Creatures of earth inscribed on earthern pottery would greet the deceased, who eventually enters mother earth, the domain of Odiarouono, "the mother killer." They have not yet left the domain of Atoapoma, "the giver of life." The sacred grave site of the ancient Akan was called an *asensie* "place of pots." The tops to numerous pots placed on the ground were moulded in the likeness of political leaders or family personages or they maintained abstract concepts. The Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana has a sculpted head from Kwahu, and it is said to be an actual portrait of Adua Adwesawa, the Queen Mother of Asakraka village. The date is early or middle 18th century.[17] This head is a flattened disque, others are more round as the heads of Fomena.[18]

The flattened disque shape is found not only on sculpture of the Queen Mother enstooled and funerary pots but also on the noted wooden Aqua'ba doll which resembles in shape the Egyptian ankh, both being a cross surmounted by an oval form. The Aqua'ba doll and the funerary sculpture elevate Akan sense of ideal beauty—earrings, hairstyle, breasts, beard, long neck, fat rings to indicate prosperity. Sieber relates the disque shape head on these vessels and the Ashanti Aqua'ba doll to the most desirable Akan headshape. "After birth the heads of Kwahu infants are massaged at dawn for three days to assure a high, flattened receding forehead."[19] The head shape of women during 18th Dynasty Egypt and that of the daughters of Akhenaten was of similar moulding. My theory is that, since the abstract disque head on Akan sculptures alternate in ranges of convex and concave, its function is probably similar to Bakota funerary sculpture. These funerary relics both reflect the power of the moon, which is the personification of Akan Atoapoma. Atoapoma is also Odiarouono, giver and taker of life force.

Bleek has recorded how Kun women make pottery,[20] and Stow points to paintings of pottery in domestic settings with grinding stones, clothing, and other household items.[21] Older works showing pottery in Sefar in the Sahara, exist.[22]

## Female with Horns and Masks

One of the most widely reproduced images from prehistoric Sahara, 8,000-6,000 B.C. is from Aouanrhet and is called "The Horned Goddess" or "The White Lady." She is called white because of the extensive shower of light grains of wheat which offset her dark skin.[23] These grains falling from above form a

mass of dots, a scattered pattern which is in beautiful contrast to the more permanent scarification dots in long rows of three and four on the woman's skin, on her shoulders, her breasts, in a long band extending on the sides of her body encircling her lower abdomen and also on her legs below her knees. She is agile and graceful, depicted in active running strides (an arched rainbow between her legs). She wears long horns on her head surmounted by a pot-shaped hat that has short, barely visible, fringes. (The primal mother painted with streamers coming from the head was already discussed.) Her short skirt and armlets are also made of fringes. Much more elaborate fringes, tassels, and knots are fashionable highlights in court attire of 25th Dynasty Nubia. This Aouanrhet Saharan goddess, like the Libyan Athene, has both hands veiled in cloth that terminates in knots with long streamers. Her hat is so basic, yet it resembles the upside down pot-shaped hats of the Mende Bundu helmet masks. These masks are worn by women of the powerful Sande Society. They have high fasion hairstyles, and if an upside down pot-shape is seen upon the hairstyle it is a reference to harvest offerings, a vessel overturned in offering sacrifice to ancestors, in Sierre Leone. The horns on

**6. The Horned Goddess—8000-6000 B.C. (from *Tassili Frescoes*). Note the wheat grains falling from above forming a mass of dots, a scattered pattern which is in beautiful contrast to the more permanent scarification dots in long rows of three or four on the woman's skin.**



**7. *Dancers* (from *Tassili Frescoes*). Note horn on woman at extreme left and wheat grains in horn.**

**8. Woman with tattoed breasts (from *Tassili Frescoes*). Note once again the dotted grains at the right of the picture.**

a b

Figure 9a–d. Great god, surrounded by praying women, veiled and masked.



c d

the cave painting of Aouanrhet are alike in concept to horns on the image of Hathor and Isis, goddesses of vegetation, agriculture, and fertility (in relation to animal husbandry).

The legendary epic of ancient Mali speaks of the symbolic power of horns in calling together a nation and the role of women in such an act. Horns were given to the founder, Sundiata, by a mother goddess during a period of drought. Sundiata, the hunter, was tired and famished on the dry planes of Doe. He sat down to eat his last precious morsel and was startled by the ancient form of an old woman who appeared, asking him to sacrifice the last bit of food to her. Out of homage to elders, he "gave" it to her. The leather-skinned elder transformed herself into a young beautiful woman, then into a bull, and told Sundiata to chase after her, shoot her with his arrows, and use the meat but to save the horn because the power of the horns could call together a great nation. He did so and became founder of the Mali Empire, whose impact spread coast to coast from the eastern Sudan to the western Sudan, its culture carried into medieval Europe by the Moors.

The concept of a woman changing herself into a cow or bull predates the legend of Sundiata. Isis outwitted her adversary Seth after her husband's death by transforming herself into a cow.[24] During the period of the original drying of the Sahara about 8,000 B.C. and centuries afterward, it was the general folk belief that a goddess could reveal herself through various animals, utilizing the temperament and power of the creature to help people. For example, during a food shortage, as we have just noted with Sundiata, or when water could not be found or when one had to flee from enemies, then an antelope, a wild boar, a falcon, a leopard, a lion, or a bull would lead them to safety by taking them across a river or to a cave where they could hide or live. Such a cave became a sacred place, rites were performed there, paintings done on the walls and spirits would reside there. The animal which the goddess used to reveal herself to her people is called the Akyeneboa (Akan) and was venerated as divine for it "masked" the goddess.[25] Thus we find today cave paintings in north and south Africa with women in masks. The mask enables one to seek identification with the goddess and consequently with the characteristics of the particular animal she became. One thus becomes Aboboa, "the beast within oneself." The leopard was power or agression, a sheep was humility or gentility (Bushmen paintings depict women in sheep skins in ritual), a falcon was patience and endurance.

Horns, besides suggesting the power to summon and stir nations, and call for help from the clan or gods, related also to medicinal herbs since they were containers for these. Also, there was an association of horns with death or life in the hereafter. The Kun (Bushmen) had no real concept of death as we know it. They thought of it as a form of sleep. Thus there were no elaborate burials for the ordinary person. The body was left for animals. This fortified their belief that the souls of the dead were lodged in the bodies of the totem animals and these could visit relatives alive in this form.[26] A wealthy Bushman, unlike most hunters and



gatherers in transit, could own a Kraal. He was buried in the kraal so he could be happy amongst his own beloved cattle.[27]

Bushmen paintings at a cave near a waterfall on a farm in Pietersberg, Genaadeberg, depict women wearing masks. One of them shows her as medicine woman. She is a figure with animal's head, said to be the female Mantis, and in the ceremony she is surrounded by men and women. Another very significant South African painting shows many people assembled, the women in white face masks. Other paintings show the vulture headdress and women who parade the voluptousness of animated steatopygia. Skin color variations magnify Bushmen fondness for body and face cosmetics. Red or white or ochre was mixed with animal fat or oils and rubbed on the body, head and face. These cosmetics were both a sign of beauty and provided protection for the skin against the harshness of weathering.[28]

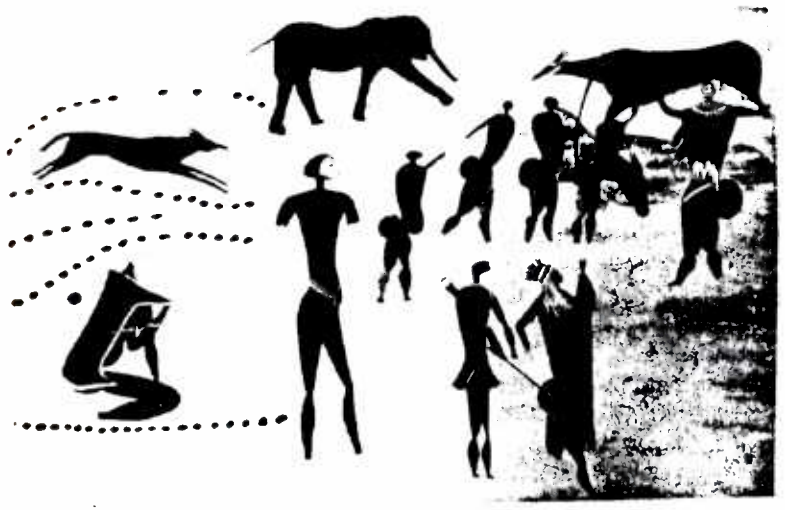
Masks worn by women in Tassili cave paintings are also red and white, emphasized by olive green.[29] White face masks representing female spirits amongst the Ibo, Mmaw, are worn by men and the white itself signifies the spirit world. Bushmen paintings likewise not only show women wearing women's masks but show men wearing women's masks, as in "The White Lady of Brandberg" in Tsisab Gorge, South West Africa.[30] Bushmen paintings are not as old as those of the Tassili region nor the paintings of Zimbabwe but it is important to note their history, which suggests they once lived in the north of the continent and over an extensive period of time migrated continually south, acquiring a culture of transition as hunters and gatherers of wild roots.

### Warrior Huntress with Weapons

Henri Lhote at Sefar Tassili discovered a series of paintings of women in military combat, action figures armed with bow and arrows. The surprising feature was that each warrior woman displayed only one breast.[31] Here is the archetype for warrior archers in the kingdom of Dahomey who cut off their right breast so as not to be hampered from achieving a faster and more powerful draw of their arrows in military campaigns. These were the 18th century Amazons at the service of the Fon kings, their fierceness making them a formidable vanguard when the male corp had become depleted. In a battle with Oyo Yorubas at Abeokuta there were 6,000 Amazons in the front line among 16,000 soldiers and the women were victorious.[32] In recent decades women have fought alongside of men in Liberation Movements to defeat the forces of colonialism.

There is a Benin bronze sculpture of the early 15th century displayed in the Museum of Ethnography, Berlin, which is the patron goddess of hunters. She is posed standing above a bow and arrow, with both arms raised in action as if to bless with power or utilize the same for destruction. The scarification marks on her abdomen signify royal lineage.

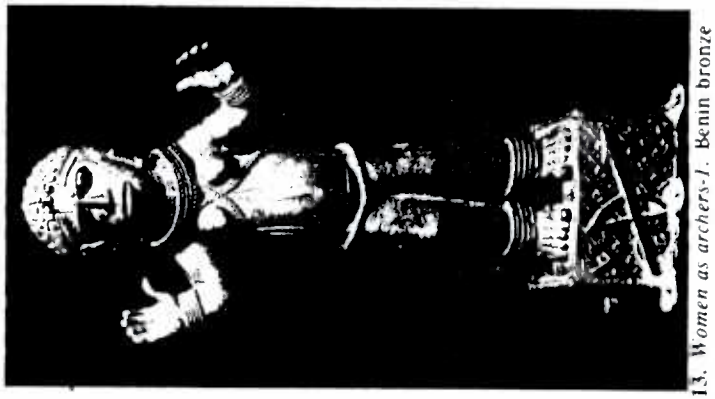
In ancient Egypt and Nubia there were two ceremonial occasions when the



10. Kun (Bushman) painting of women in masks, one or two with vulture headdress (from *Rockpainting in South Africa* by George W. Stow).

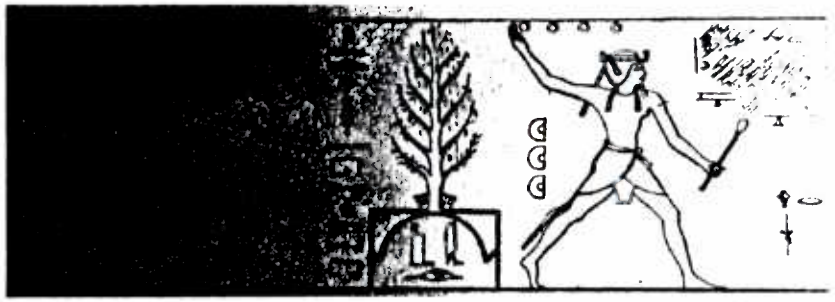
11. Kun (Bushman) painting of women with vulture headdress. The vulture is a favorite theme in Kun paintings. This shows women in dance, dressed in karosses and birds' heads and feathers (from *Rockpainting in South Africa*).





13. *Women as archers-1.* Benin bronze of early 15th century—patron goddess of hunters. She stands above a bow and arrow with both arms raised as if to bless with her power or use it for destruction (from *2000 years of Nigerian Art* by Ekpo Eyo).

12. *Women in military combat,* armed with bow and arrows. Each warrior woman displays only one breast. Here is the archetype for warrior archers in the kingdom of Dahomey, who cut off their right breast so as not to be hampered from achieving a faster and more powerful draw of their arrows in military campaigns (from Jean-Dominique Lajoux *Merveilles du Tassili n' Ajer*).



14. *Women as archers-2.* **Taharka and his queen, *Sed* ceremony. Taharka's queen can be compared with Benin goddess of hunters, in that both of them ritually command the bow and arrow. Also, Benin goddess is prototype for Yoruba and later Brazilian *orisha* Oshossi, goddess of ritual hunting.**

**Figure 15. Peul women at Jabbaren, showing one breast extended (from *Tassili Frescoes*).**



Queen (and sometimes the male Pharaoh) would ritually shoot arrows towards each of the four cardinal points as a sign of national might and divine kingship or theocracy. These two occasions were the *sed* festival and the *coronation* ceremony. The ruler's life itself was thought to be connected with the welfare of the nation and corresponded directly to fertility of the crops and vegetation. If the life of the king and queen became weak then the fertility of agriculture and animal husbandry was in subsequent danger. The only certain documentation of the shooting at the *sed* festival that has survived is from Dynasty XXV (712-633 B.C.). It is found at Karnak and depicts Pharaoh Taharka wearing a bull's tail and in a posture that suggests he is subduing his enemies. He has a mace in hand. His queen is the one engaged in the shooting of the arrows. Only one of her breasts is emphasized, only one exposed, a style seen in both early dynastic Egyptian art (Neith), as well as prehistoric Sahara cave paintings. We see this among "Peul" women in the Bovidian period at Jabbaren.[33] Taharka's queen can be compared to the Benin 15th century goddess of hunters in that both of them royally command the bow and arrow. The Benin huntress is probably a prototype for the Yoruba/Brazilian Orisha Oshossi, goddess of ritual hunting.[34]

## Ancient Women Levitated: Inspired by Birds and the Firmament

Some women goddesses were connected not only with vegetation and hunting but, in a broader aspect, they were connected with the firmament. We have already observed Tefnut in Egyptian cosmology and Atoapoma whose title is the "every-ready-shooter" with lunar powers—Akan. It should not be surprising therefore to find that women were rain goddesses in antiquity as well as men, since their domain too was the primal moisture and the firmament. Bushmen lore does not only speak of the sun, moon, and stars but describes a most specific raincow, which is a woman. Analyzing Bushmen paintings Stow used the Kun term "She Rain" for such an animal, which usually has a rainbow painted over it. In legend, girls could transform themselves into aquatic creatures related to rain, such as frogs.

Legend also tells of a custom now lost in antiquity, of sacrificing a virgin because she was the principal one who could save her community in times of drought, the women being connected with moisture and water. Her spirit was the giver of rain.[35] The same theme occurs in the cave paintings of Zimbabwe. Out of the body of the sacrificed virgin grows a "tree of life." A painting at Waltondale Farm, Marandellas, shows priests over the body of the virgin, the tree of life emerging from her and supporting many who climb it. As the tall straight tree reaches the region of the clouds it becomes convoluted or serpentine and terminates with a head that has long ears. The largest figure in the painting is a rain goddess in the sky. She bends over the top of the tree with a wand in hand, her bent posture with hanging breasts the symbol of the creative source, as though

from these vessels she pours out the desired rain. The body of the goddess in the sky is far more mature in its voluptuous curves than the young virgin and one cannot but see a parallel to the African "Venuses" in early Europe, etched in their protuberant splendor. Some Kun paintings show both the "she-cow" with rainbow and also the full-bodied primal mother in Kanaga posture, with long streamers hanging from an elaborate hairstyle.

One of the oldest symbols associated with women is the symbol of the vulture, the scavenger bird who lives off decayed or dying matter. The vulture is a favorite theme in Kun (Bushmen) paintings. One of these shows women in dance, dressed in karosses and birds' heads and feathers. Some works illustrate vulture stories such as "The Vultures, Their Elder Sister, and her Husband," which tell how some vultures (who were also girls) made a woman of their elder sister. There is in this some indication of women-girl rites. The vultures ate with the girls and women but if a husband would approach the birds would fly off, an indication of the exclusive female domain. Predynastic pottery at Qustul, Nubia show the vulture in victorious attack.[36] The Narmer mace-head at Hierakonpolis in Egypt shows the vulture hovering over the Pharaoh enthroned, a sign of royal protection.[37] Isis often wore the vulture headdress. The symbol for Ptah was a scarab and a vulture, and those for Athena (Neith of Sais) were a vulture and a scarab. These two figures of the pantheon incorporated both the male and female elements, not just in combination but each, in and by itself. Neith was associated with parthenogenesis, a virgin that gives birth.[38] No wonder the bird face was found on fertility figurines of prehistoric graves. Amongst the Akan the scarab and the vulture symbolized self-begetting, self creation and self birth. The Akan maxim says of Odomankoma: "The animal that symbolizes Odomankoma who created the world is the vulture." (*Odomankoma a oboadee, ne kyeneboa ne opete*).[39] According to Budge, all vultures in predynastic Egypt were female and no male was ever known." To obtain young they turn their backs to the south, or south-east wind, which fecundates them, and they bring forth young after three years." Engraved on early monuments were the oldest titles of Pharaohs of Egypt: "Lord of the City of the Vulture." Nekhebet, the city named after the goddess by the same name and whose symbol was like that of Neith and Mut, was the vulture.[40]

The vulture is the symbol of "the mothers" in Benin and Yoruba art of Nigeria. It is seen on large metal rings like those on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The vulture is the elder woman who has acquired special hidden powers without which mortuary and installation rites for kings could not be completed.[41] The bird was also a messenger, could fly high up to carry sacrifices to the heavenly realm.



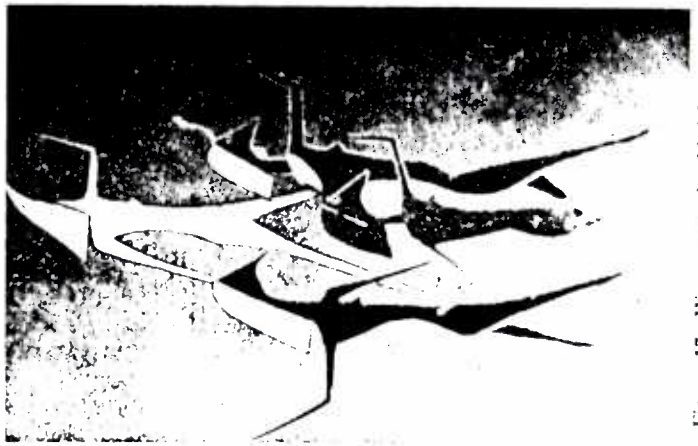


Figure 17. Women wearing bird faces and headdresses with Egyptian-type uraeus.

Figure 16. Seventeenth-century Chad. Compare round-head abstraction and extended vaginal tissue with Figure 9c.




CAPTIONS FOR DIAGRAM
THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN MASKS
Artist: Rosalind Jeffries

1. Lajoux, prehistoric Sahara from Tin Tazarift, feline woman power.

2. Lajoux, prehistoric Sahara from Sefar, partial covering face mask.

3-6. Lhote, figure 48, prehistoric Sahara from Tin Tazarift.

7-9. Lhote, prehistoric Sahara, round head period.

10. Stow, plate 7, Kun (Bushman) painting, round head woman compares to round head women of prehistoric Sahara paintings.

11. Stow, plate 45, Kun (Bushman) frog masquerade, water rites.

12. Stow, plate 58, Kun (Bushman) woman dressed as Primal Mother. She compares to Primal Mother of Zimbabwe cave paintings in body posture and size, also in head treatment with long streamers.

13. Stow, plate 7, woman in white face mask, full face covering.

14. Brentjes, plate 10, Tsisab Gorge, South-west Africa (man in woman's mask).

15. Stow, plate 50, the "Mantis" woman.

16. Stow, plate 58, bird prancing woman with wings, compares in form to predynastic Egyptian sculpture of bird women.

17. Stow, plate 45, woman painted with long bird beak and feather top head outfit.

18-19. Stow, plates 6 & 7, hornbills and vulture masquerades for women for power and protection.

## Summary

For the purposes of analysis of the image of woman in ancient African art, we have looked at the goddess aspects of woman from the state of virginity through to the higher statuses of mother and elder. To fully appreciate the way the woman is regarded in Africa, however, we must see her within an African socio-political religious system. This system has a supreme God at the apex who is masculine, yet has the capacity of vision to identify simultaneously with both man and woman, to transcend the limitations of gender, to perceive truths that are not partial to the male or female. So that although the Akan of Ghana speak of the goddess Atoapoma, "Giver of Life" and the same person, Odiawuono, "mother killer," destroyer of life, this female being is under the supreme Nyame, who embraces both male and female, though he is sometimes called Nana Nyankopon (Grandfather Nyame, the Great One). *Nane* could be a term for both male and female attributes.[42]

The Hebrew analogy is found in the Genesis account. The name Eve translates "Giver of Life" or "Mother of All Living," the same as Atoapoma and the Egyptian Isis. Eve was also responsible for the destruction of the life force, for the serpent destroyer "mother killer." This corresponds to the vulture form of Isis, who scavenges in the drought for whatever is necessary to help the race to survive. God Supreme is above Adam and Eve. The real names of God were not even revealed until later (Exodus 3:14). God told Moses His name was "I AM", which translates as Jahveh in Hebrew. Danquah makes a significant point in this connection:

> Now the Akan word for *I AM* is *Eye me*, or *Meme me*, and it is quite impossible for us to say here whether, like the Hebrews, the Akan people turned *Eyeme* into *Nyame*.[43]

The attributes of God Almighty embrace the masculine and the feminine. Like the female he nurtures humankind as a mother suckles a child at its breast. This female function is given a precise term when Jehovah is called El Shaddai (Genesis 17). Jesus too in the New Testament reflects this dual aspect of godhood. As Son of Man he is masculine but he nourishes humankind with "the milk of the word." St. Peter speaks of this female function (1 Peter 2:1) although one should be careful to point out that he is not bisexual and should not be confused in his mortal or flesh-plane as being both man and woman. It is to be noted that Jesus, by sacrificing himself to save humanity, made obsolete the sacrifice of the virgin for the procurement of rain. He became the well of living water (John 4:13-15) and the last and final need for human blood sacrifice. He mounts up with the wings of the eagle (a scavenger bird) and is guarded by cherubims, who, like the sphinxes, are zoomorphic symbols of power.

In our review of cave-art, we have observed the woman in a great variety of



styles and roles—the woman as primal mother, as giver of life, as virgin, symbol of purity, yet as destroyer, serpent and vulture, blessed rainmaker, herbalist and healer, warrior of Amazonic fierceness and power, protector of man, huntress and dancer, ringed and horned, wigged and hatted, veiled and masked. The African woman portrayed in cave art indicates that, although her role is often distinctive from that of man and very various, it is a diversity flowing within a very structured communal system, and the woman is never isolated in a vacuum, removed from man or god.

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# AFRICAN WARRIOR QUEENS

**By John Henrik Clarke**

Before going directly to the subject, "African Warrior Queens," I feel that there is a need to call attention to the historical status of African women and their contribution to the development of African societies, in order for them to be better understood as Warrior Queens in defense of their respective nations. The Senegalese writer Cheikh Anta Diop has shown new insight into this subject in his book *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*.[1]

He observed that most non-European societies are, mainly, matrilineal, the line of descent being traced through the mother. Dr. Diop extends the explanation this way: "It is matrilineal and it is the man who brings the dowry to the woman." This proves, if proof is needed, that the women in these old societies had respected rights. Most of these societies developed before Europe was born.

In Africa the woman's "place" was not only with her family; she often ruled nations with unquestionable authority. Many African women were great militarists and on occasion led their armies in battle. Long before they knew of the existence of Europe the Africans had produced a way of life where men were secure enough to let women advance as far as their talent would take them.[2]

During the rise of great dynasties in Egypt, Kush and Ethiopia, the African women made impressive strides and some became heads of state. Dr. Diop writes that during the entire period of Egypt of the Pharaohs African women enjoyed complete freedom, as opposed to the condition of segregation experienced by European women of the classical periods, whether she was Greek or Roman. He further informs us that "no evidence can be found either in literature or in historical records—Egyptian or otherwise—relating to the systematic ill-treatment of African women by their men." They were respected and went about freely unveiled unlike certain Asian women. Affection for one's mother and especially the respect with which it was necessary to surround her were the most sacred of duties. In these early African societies women played a major role without demeaning any man or making their place in society less important.[3] This is where we begin the examination of African Warrior Queens.

During the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (1505-1485 B.C.), about 1,500 years before the birth of Christ, the first Warrior Queen in African history is clearly seen. Her father, Thothmes I, had fought to drive the last East Asian invaders from African soil. At an early age he began to train his daughter to be the ruler of Egypt. This launched a new era in History. Her reign was one of the most outstanding in the 18th Dynasty of Egypt, proving that a woman can be a strong and

effective ruler. She was, according to Egyptologist James Henry Breasted, "the first great woman in history of whom we are informed."[4]

The African-American writer J.A. Rogers said in 1947:

> Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt was the greatest female ruler of all time. . . . She is also said to have been the first woman in history to challenge the supremacy of the male, though arrayed against her were more than three thousand years of masculine tradition. There was no word for 'queen' or empress in the language of her day—but she fought her way to power and held the throne of the world's then leading empire for thirty-three years.[5]

The story of the great Queen Hatshepsut began in tragedy. Her father, Thothmes I, had four children by his Great Royal Wife. All died in childhood except the little Princess Hatshepsut. King Thothmes was later stricken with paralysis and Hatshepsut became his chief aide. With her father she managed state matters, and became, in fact, co-ruler of Egypt. This fired her ambition to dominate Egypt and its empire. When her father was sure that he did not have long to live, he married Hatsheput to her half-brother, his son by a secondary wife.

When Thothmes died, this young man ascended the throne as Thothmes II and Hatshepsut became Queen of Egypt. Shortly thereafter, the court physicians told Thothmes II that he had not long to live. Since the royal family was again without a crown prince, Thothmes married his tiny daughter to his son by a harem girl. Upon the death of Thothmes II this sturdy boy became Pharaoh. Now in her early twenties, Hatshepsut was relegated to the role of Dowager Queen Mother, and named one of a group of regents to govern Egypt until Thothmes III was old enough to rule alone. But it was not enough for her to govern Egypt in the name of the young Thothmes III; she wanted more and she schemed for it.

After her plans were formulated, Hatshepsut dressed herself in the most sacred of the Pharaohs' official costumes, and, with the royal scepter in one hand and the sacred crook in the other, she mounted the throne and proclaimed herself Pharaoh of Egypt. And thus the first, and perhaps the greatest, female ruler of all time came to power in Egypt.

The Nile Valley was now her domain, and she began to put Egypt's house in order. Strengthened by her fierce family pride, she reminded her court and the people of Egypt that her father had been the mighty Thothmes I and that her great-grandfather, Ahmase the Liberator, had driven the Hyksos invaders from Egypt and founded the 18th Dynasty. For good measure she stated that the contender for the throne of Egypt, Thothmes III, was the son of a harem woman and was not directly related to the great achievements of her family. The years of the Hyksos domination had made her distrustful of foreign entanglements. Except for trading expeditions, she wanted to let what she referred to as "the wretched foreigners" go their own quarrelsome way. Many of the tradition-bound nobles and the High Priest of Amon supported her.



Thothmes III, by now a hostile adolescent, was banished to the gloomy interior of the temple of Amon as an apprentice priest. From this seclusion he never stopped plotting against Hatshepsut. His strongest support came from lesser members of the Amon priesthood, who saw in foreign conquest a chance to enrich their temple and make Amon a more powerful god. He drew support also from the army, with its vested interest in war. In spite of this opposition, Hatshepsut began disengaging her country from foreign entanglements and wars of conquest.[6] She also moved to strengthen the position of Egypt within Africa by making peace with the people of Kush (or Nubia) and sending missions to the nations along the East African coast, as far south as Punt (present-day Somalia). One of her crowning achievements was dispatching a mission to a kingdom in Asia (now India).

Hatshepsut ruled Egypt for 21 years. And she ruled it well. In spite of the enmity and intrigue of her step-son and his adherents, her reign was a calm interlude between the old Nile-Valley-bound Egypt, which kept peace with her neighbors, and the new and mightier Egypt of war and conquest that was still to come.

The Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop refers to Hatshepsut as "the first queen in the history of humanity." This fact in itself, he states, "merits attaching particular importance to the circumstances which surrounded her ascension to the throne."[7]

According to Gaston Maspero, in his book *The Dawn of Civilization*, Queen Hatshepsut derived from her mother, Ahmosis, and her grandmother, Akhotpou, rights of succession that took precedence not only over her husband and brother, Thothmes II, but over that of her father, Thothmes I, the reigning Pharaoh. Matriarchy reigned in the Egypt of her day. Maspero affirms that, according to the customs of the Egyptian nation, Hatshepsut was the legitimate heiress of the ancient dynasties.

Hatshepsut's demise came abruptly and mysteriously. She may have died a natural death, but some historians believe that Thothmes III had her murdered. After her death, he tried to destroy all memory of her in Egypt. He defiled all the statues of her that he found. Fortunately, he did not discover them all, and Hatshepsut comes down to us as one of the outstanding women of all time.

Egypt's Golden Age gradually waned, and the pride and splendor that had marked the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties gave way to internal strife and confusion. Wars of conquest and colonization had drained much of her military and economic strength. In the meantime, as the nations to the south grew more powerful, they became predatory toward Egypt, which had once been their master.

The nation that is now called Ethiopia came back to the center stage of world history around 960 B.C. before Europe emerged as a factor in world power. Ethiopia was then ruled by a Queen, who in some books is referred to as Makeda

and in others as Belkis. She is better known as the Queen of Sheba. There are conflicting interpretations of her life in many books. Her story is told in the *Bible*, the *Talmud*, the *Koran* and the legends of Syria, Israel, Egypt and Ethiopia. As one of Africa's Warrior Queens, her fight was more *diplomatic* than military.[8]

In his book *World's Great Men of Color*, J.A. Rogers gives this description: "Out of the mists of three thousand years emerges this beautiful love story of a black queen, who, attracted by the fame of a Judean monarch, made a long journey to see him."

In *Ethiopia, A Cultural History*, Sylvia Pankhurst tells the story of this journey: "The history of the Queen of the South, who undertook a long and arduous journey to Jerusalem, in order to learn of the wisdom of King Solomon, is deeply cherished in Ethiopia, as part of the national heritage, for she is claimed as an Ethiopian Queen, Makeda, 'a woman of splendid beauty,' who introduced the religion and culture of Israel to her own land."

The story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is quite well known. Dr. Post Wheeler, in his book *Golden Legend of Ethiopia*, maintains that the Queen of the South was called the Queen of Sheba and Axum, and that she reigned over Sheba and Arabia, as well as Ethiopia. Another valuable old Ethiopian work, *The Book of Aksum*, states that when Queen Makeda came to the throne she built the capital in the Ethiopian district of Azeba. *The Keber Nagast*, an ancient Ethiopian chronology, tells us that "the Queen of Sheba's capital was Debra Makeda" (or Mount Makeda) which the Queen built and named for herself. Debra Makeda later became a meeting place for the early Christians of Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia's church of Axum, there is a copy of what is said to be one of the Tables of Law that Solomon gave to Menelik, his son by the Queen of Sheba. (Menelik had gone from Ethiopia to visit his father in Judea.)

The Greeks spoke of her as "The Black Minerva" and "The Ethiopian Diana."

The well-known *Song of Solomon*, in which she is supposed to have said, "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem" is probably fiction, written long after she was dead. She lived at a time when color was not a factor in human relationships. No one boasted about color during her time and no one apologized for it.

More nonsense has been written about Cleopatra than about any other African queen, mainly because it has been the desire of many writers to paint her white. She was not a white woman, she was not a Greek. Let us dispose of this matter before explaining the more important aspects of her life. Until the emergence of the doctrine of white superiority, Cleopatra was generally pictured as a distinctly African woman, dark in color. Shakespeare in the opening line of *Antony and Cleopatra* calls her "tawny." In his day, mulattos were called "tawny Moors." The word "Moor" came into the European languages meaning black or blackamoor. In the *Book of Acts*, Cleopatra describes herself as "black."



Born in 69 B.C., Cleopatra came to the throne that she shared with her brother, Ptolemy XIII, when she was 18 years old. Egypt, now a Roman protectorate, was beset with internal strife and intrigue. Cleopatra aligned herself with Julius Caesar, who reinforced her power. Their political and sexual relationship was a maneuver to save Egypt from the worst aspects of Roman domination. After Julius Caesar was murdered, Cleopatra, still in her early twenties, met Mark Antony and a love affair, strongly motivated by politics, began.

Her effect on Mark Antony was profound. This noble Roman turned traitor to his own people when he attempted to save the country of this fascinating black queen from Roman domination. After Antony's death, the victor, Octavius, assumed full control of Egypt, and Cleopatra, now without a protector or champion, committed suicide.

**Figure 1.** ***Cleopatra.*** **Painting by Earl Sweeney. This famous queen of Egypt was an African woman. Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy XII, was an illegitimate offspring of Ptolemy XI (Soter II). The legitimate line ended with Ptolemy XII. Those who say that Cleopatra was "pure" Greek evidently forget this fact (see J.A. Rogers *World's Great Men of Color*, Vol. 1). Robert Ripley, who says he has proof of all his facts, calls Cleopatra "fat and black" (see *Believe It or Not*, page 82, sixth printing, 1934). Pierre Louys says Cleopatra's mother came from an inferior race, a Nubian woman (see "Aphrodite" by Pierre Louys).**

Contrary to popular belief, Cleopatra did not commit suicide over the loss of Mark Antony. Her great love was Egypt. She was a shrewd politician and an Egyptian nationalist. She committed suicide when she lost control of Egypt.

After Cleopatra's death, Egypt became a Roman colony and the harsher aspects of Roman rule settled over Egypt and the Middle East. To the south, in the lands untouched by Rome, new proud civilizations were rising. And in the centuries that followed, black women once again began to play major roles in the theatre of history.

The Warrior Queens of Ethiopia and the nations to the south are not well-known to history; nonetheless, they were as remarkable as the Queens of Egypt. The Queens of Ethiopia or Nubia who had the name Candace were noted for their fight against foreign rulers. After the death of Cleopatra, Roman power tried to take the Nile Valley. The strongest opposition came from a Queen named Candace. Of the various Queens who had the name Candace, five are known: the Candace who opposed the southward movement of the armies of Alexander the Great; the Candace who warred on the Roman Governor of Egypt, Patronius; the Candace mentioned in the *Bible* in *Acts*, 8th chapter, 27th verse; and the Candace who warred on the Roman, Nero. There is another Candace who left no dependable record. The word Candace is probably equivalent to the Ethiopian word for ruler or Governor, when applied to a female.[9]

The politicalization of the Christian church, and the growing dissatisfaction with Roman rule in North Africa and in the Middle East helped to facilitate the rise of Islam. While some North Africans welcomed this new religion, others resisted it. Resistance was put up by Kuseila, a general in Mauritania and his relative, Queen Dahia-al Kahina. Many North Africans rallied under the banner of Kuseila and were defeated in 682. He continued to rule Mauritania for five years, but in 688 was defeated and killed by a new contingent of Arab troops. His position as leader of African resistance was taken by Queen Dahia-al Kahina. Under her leadership the Africans fought back fiercely and drove the Arab army northward into Tripolitania. The fierce counter-attacks of the Africans under the leadership of Kahina made some of the Arab governors doubt that Africa could be conquered.[10]

After the Arab general, Hassan-ben-Numan captured Carthage in 698, his victory proved to be short-lived. Queen Kahina soon rallied her forces and drove him from the city. When Kahina's position became desperate she ordered that the fertile districts be laid waste so that the lack of food and shelter would discourage the Arabs from returning. The ruinous effect on the soil of southern Tunisia can be seen to this day.

Queen Kahina was of the Hebrew faith and she never abandoned her religion. Her opposition then, was purely nationalistic, since she favored neither the Christians nor the Moslems. Kahina was finally defeated and slain by Hassan-ben-Numan in 705. Her death ended one of the most violent attempts to save Africa for the Africans. She stood astride the path of Islam and prevented its southward spread into the Western Sudan. After her death the Arabs began to change their strategy in advancing their faith and their power in Africa.



The southward spread of Islam in Africa had its problems. A large number of Africans resisted this new religion. Some others joined it, and became soldiers in its armies. North African Arabs, Berbers and some Africans converted to Islam, did not resist the temptation to invade the countries to the south. To show their objection to these invasions, and to Islam in general, some of the wives of the African kings committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of the Berbers and Arabs who showed no mercy to the people who would not be converted to Islam.[11]

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese stake in the slave trade was threatened by England and France. This caused the Portuguese to transfer their slave-trading activities southward to the Congo and South West Africa. Their most stubborn opposition, as they entered the final phase of the conquest of Angola, came from a queen who was a great head of state and a military leader with few peers in her time. The important facts about her life are delineated in the forthcoming book *Queen Nzingha and the Mbundu Resistance to the Portuguese Slave Trade*, by Professor Roy A. Glasgow of Boston University.

Her extraordinary story begins in 1583, the year of her birth. She is known as Jinga, or Ginga, but more often as Nzingha, and she was the sister of the then-reigning King of Ndongo, Ngoli Bbondi, whose country was later called Angola. Nzingha belonged to an ethnic group called the Jagas. The Jagas were an extremely militant group who formed a human shield against the Portuguese slave traders. Nzingha never accepted the Portuguese conquest of her country and was always on the military offensive. As part of her excellent strategy against the invaders, she formed an alliance with the Dutch, whom she intended to use to defeat the Portuguese slave traders. At her request, she was given a body of Dutch soldiers; the officer commanding this detachment in 1646 said this of her:

> A cunning and prudent virago, so much addicted to arms that she hardly uses other exercises and withal so generously valiant that she never hurt a Portuguese after quarter was given and commanded all her servants and soldiers alike.

She believed that, after defeating the Portuguese, it would be easy to surprise the Dutch and expel them from her country. Consequently, she continued to maintain an amicable relationship with them and patiently waited for the appropriate time to turn against them. Her ultimate ambitions extended beyond the aim of freeing her country from European control. In addition to retaining personal control of Ndonga, she hoped to expand her domain from Matamba in the east to the Atlantic Ocean. To this end she made herself an astute agitator-propagandist who could easily summon large groups of her fellow countrymen to listen to her. In convincing her people of the pernicious influences of the Portuguese, she would single out slaves and "slave-soldiers" who were under Portuguese control

and direct intensive political and patriotic messages their way, appealing to their pride in being Africans. She offered them land and freedom. This resulted in the desertion of thousands of these "slave-soldiers," who joined her forces, forming a serious security problem for the Portuguese. A visionary political leader, competent, self-sacrificing, and devoted to the resistance movement, Nzingha attempted to attract to her cause as many kings and heads of families as possible so that with the allegiance of their people, she could gain new recruits for the defense of her country against the occupation of the Portuguese.

In 1623, at the age of forty-one, Nzingha became Queen of Ndongo, and she began at once to strengthen her position of power. She forbade her subjects to call her Queen. She preferred to be called King and, when leading her army in battle, dressed in men's clothing.

Her most enduring weapon was her personality. She was astute and successful in consolidating power. She was particularly good at safeguarding her position by ruthlessly dealing with her foes and graciously rewarding her friends. She possessed both masculine hardness and feminine charm, which she readily used, depending on the need and the occasion. Because of these attributes, her leadership was never seriously challenged.

The Portuguese began to have second thoughts about her. Their priests were disappointed because they had seemingly lost the battle to convert her to Catholicism. In point of fact, this was not the case. She would later choose her own time and reason to join their church and use this liaison for her own purposes.

In 1645, and again in 1646, she suffered a series of setbacks in her campaign to drive the Portuguese out of Angola. Her sister, Fungi, was taken as a prisoner of war. The Portuguese beheaded her and threw her body in a river. Nzingha began to weigh the merits of her own god, Tem-Bon-Dumba, as compared to the god of the Portuguese. Was it possible, she asked, that the Catholic God was stronger? She had heard the Jesuits maintain that the Christian God was just and an enemy of all suffering. Why, then, did he assist the invaders of her country? Why were the Portuguese building forts in her country without her consent? With her questions still unresolved, she decided to join this religion and test its strength in her favor. And for the remainder of her life she used this religion as a political tool, when it suited her.

In 1659, she signed a treaty with the Portuguese that brought her no feeling of triumph. Now more than seventy-five years old, she had resisted the Portuguese for most of her adult life. Some of her faithful assistants and followers had died or given up the long fight.

On December 17, 1663, this great African woman died. With her death, the Portuguese occupation of the interior of South West Africa began. The massive expansion of the Portuguese slave trade followed this event.

In the concluding chapter of his book about Nzingha's life and struggles Professor Glasgow has this to say:




Figure 2. Queen Nzingha.

> Queen Nzingha symbolized the quintessence of early Mbundu resistance. She was from 1620 until her death in 1663 . . . the most important personality in Angola. Nzingha failed in her mission to expel the Portuguese and become Queen of Ethiopia, embracing Matamba (eastern Ndongo) and Ndongo. However, her historic importance transcends this failure as she awakened and encouraged the first known stirring of nationalism in West Central Africa by organizing the national and international (the Moni-Kongo) assistance in her total opposition to European domination.

In the resistance to the slave trade and the colonial system that followed the death of the Queen, African women, along with their men, helped to mount offensives all over Africa. Among the most outstanding were: Madame Tinubu of Nigeria; Nandi, the mother of the great Zulu warrior Chaka; Kaipkire of the Herero people of South West Africa; and the female army that followed the great Dahomian King, Behanzin Bowelle.[12]

In the country south of Angola-Namibia, that the Europeans called South West Africa, another struggle against the Europeans developed in the nineteenth century and lasted until 1919. During this time the country was plunged into a prolonged struggle against one of the strongest colonial powers of that time. German soldiers were mobilized with all modern armaments against the Herero people of South West Africa. This was one of the most costly colonial wars in history. The Herero women, in spite of their lack of modern equipment, took on responsibilities in this war equal to their men and waged a war against the Germans that resulted in a stalemate.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the British, in their attempt to take over the hinterlands of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), exiled King Prempeh in 1896. In 1900, still not having succeeded in gaining control of this part of Ghana, the British sent a governor to Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti, to demand the Golden Stool, the Ark of the Covenant of the Ashanti people.[13]

The Golden Stool was the supreme symbol of the sovereignty and independence of the Ashantis— a fierce and warlike people who inhabit the dense rain forests of what is now the central portion of Ghana.

On March 28, 1900, the Governor, Lord Hodgson, called a meeting of all the kings in and around the city of Kumasi. He informed the people that their exiled King Prempeh would not be permitted to return. He reminded them that the indemnity that the British had demanded before the exile of King Prempeh had not been paid. Further, he demanded that the Ashanti surrender the Golden Stool.

The demand was a terrible blunder and an insult to the Ashanti people, who were still angry with the British for exiling their King Prempeh. The governor in no way understood the sacred significance of the Stool, which, according to tradition, contained the soul of the Ashanti.

The Ashanti heard the governor's speech and showed no reaction except silence. The meeting broke up quietly and the men went home to prepare for war.



The inspiring force behind the Ashanti people at this time was Yaa Asantewa, the Queen Mother of Ejisu. The war that followed bears her name—the Yaa Asantewa War.

The story of Yaa Asantewa is woven throughout the history of modern Ghana. The following story of the Great Queen and her war is taken from the book *Ghana, A History for Primary Schools*, by E.A. Addy:

> In the evening the chiefs held a secret meeting at Kumasi. Yaa Asantewa, the Queen Mother of Ejisu, was at the meeting. The chiefs were discussing how they should make war on the white men and force them to bring back the Asantehene. Yaa Asantewa saw that some of the chiefs were afraid. Some said that there should be no war. They should rather go to beg the Governor to bring back the Asantehene King Prempeh.
>
> Then suddenly Yaa Asantewa stood up and spoke. This was what she said: "Now I have seen that some of you fear to go forward to fight for our King. If it were in the brave days of old, the days of Osei Tutu, Okomfo Anokye, and Opolu Ware, chiefs would not sit down to see their King taken away without firing a shot. No white man could have dared to speak to chiefs of the Ashanti in the way the Governor spoke to you chiefs this morning. Is it true that the bravery of Ashanti is no more? I cannot believe it. Yea, it cannot be! I must say this: if you the men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight the white men. We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefields."
>
> This speech stirred up the chiefs, and at once the meeting swore the great oath of Ashanti to fight the white men until they released the Asantehene. Yaa Asantewa was the leader in this war. Then the Ashantis cut telegraph wires and surrounded Kumasi. The Governor and his party kept themselves in the fort, where they suffered from disease and hunger. For many months, the Ashantis led by Yaa Asantewa fought very bravely and kept the white men in the fort.
>
> Then an officer, Colonel Willcocks, was sent with 1,400 soldiers to Kumasi. He brought very big guns. Yaa Asantewa and the other Ashanti leaders were captured. They were deported and the war came to an end . . . Yaa Asantewa's name and her bravery are always remembered.

After this war Yaa Asantewa and some of the other leaders were sent into exile. The Ashanti war against the British had started in 1805 and had lasted for nearly a hundred years. With the end of these wars the British gained control over the hinterland of Ghana. Yaa Asantewa's War was the last of the major wars in Africa led by a woman.

But Yaa Asantewa only added to that long line of African Warrior Queens that began with Hatshepsut fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ. Because her agitation for the return of Prempeh was converted into the stirring demands for independence, it is safe to say that she helped to create part of the theoretical basis for the political emergence of modern Africa.

## Notes

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2. *The Black Woman: A Figure in World History*, by John Henrik Clarke. *Essence* magazine. May, 1971. p. 29.
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4. *A History of Egypt*, by James Henry Breasted. Bantam Books. New York 1967. Pp. 220-268.
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10. *African Glory*, by J.C. DeGraft-Johnson. Walter and Co. New York 1954. Pp. 68-76.
11. *African Empires and Civilizations* by Raymond Michelet. Socialist Book Center. London.
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13. *A Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities*, by Dr. I. S. Ephson. Ilen Publications, Ltd. Accra, Ghana. 1969. Pp. 74-76. *The Golden Stool: Ashanti 1900*, by Frederick Myatt.

# AFRICAN WOMEN IN EARLY EUROPE

**By Edward Scobie**

For this work, and any other study of such nature, Britain must be included since, culturally and historically, that country belongs to the European continent. It has been through cultural changes that bear certain similarities to those geographically located on the European land mass. As far as African women are concerned, then, the history of Britain, like that of the other European countries, is replete with the full measure of their presence. Evidence of this presence, however, has almost never found its way into the pages of Western European scholarship. And the odd times when it has, it has always been tinted by pens dipped in racism.

In the age of the Crusades, Europe began to develop consciousness as a geopolitical entity and at the same time to be dimly conversant of Africans as a separate race in the human community. Early contacts (1000-1450) through Spain were made with Africans as "humble slaves and wild warriors." In the Middle Ages, although the world of Islam was wedged in between Christendom and the land of Africa, contact between the two continents was made on three spots: in Spain from Morocco-Sudan; from and in Italy through Sicily, Tunis and Cyrenaica; and through Jerusalem from the lands of the Nile (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan). It is out of these countries that emerged the European's medieval image of the African. In Spain there were African soldiers and officers as well as servants among the Moslem conquerors ever since Tarik invaded the Iberian peninsula in 711 A.D.

Professor Verlinden of Ghent University has made what he describes as a careful study about African slaves in Moslem as well as Christian Iberia. He states that in the 11th and 12th centuries, there was a substantial increase in African slaves in Moslem Spain as well as in North Africa. The increase in African slaves in the 11th and 12th centuries can be attributed to the Almoravid conquest of Spain. History has shown that the politico-religious movement of the Almoravids had its origins on the western fringes of the Sahara and it fanned out with their conquest of the famous African kingdom of Ghana in the Sudan by 1086. It was the plundered gold of ancient Ghana and the bravery of the Sudanese soldiers that helped to conquer Spain. A sizeable number of Africans fought in the Moslem armies of the peninsula and they literally frightened the Christians with their acts of daring. That is why the African presence in Moslem Spain made a profound mark on the art and literature of the times. The European viewed the African as exotic and different in this first attempt to integrate the Af-

rican into European cultural awareness. At this time miscegenation took place on an ever widening scale, accounting for a very large percentage of African blood in the Spanish people. The Spaniards took the African strain further into Europe, to France and the former Netherlands. When they were driven out of these lands, roughly 3000 of them settled in Hamburg, and many a Hamburg citizen bears a striking resemblance to the Spanish, with his or her black wavy, curly hair and swarthy skin.

But the evidence of Blacks in Germany has been claimed to date back to the Neanderthal skull, the oldest African type in Europe discovered in Dusseldorf in 1856, and said to belong to the Old Stone Age. The Grimaldis, an African race, lived in Europe even before the appearance of the Cro-Magnon or Caucasoid type. Evidence of their presence and culture has been unearthed in Southern and Central Europe. Two complete Grimaldi skeletons of the *Grotte des Enfants* are in a complete state of preservation in the Museum of Monaco, near Monte Carlo.

Julius Caesar brought Black legions into Germany and Britain. The skull of an ancient African was found at Cologne, that of a Christian martyr whose head has been pierced by a nail. The Huns, a dark Mongolian people, overran Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries and contributed much to the present stock of German people. This makes mockery of the myth of a pure-bred Aryan German race about whom Adolf Hitler fantasized in his racist work *Mein Kampf*.

Portugal itself has been described by historians, particularly Brunold Springer, as "the first example of a Negrito (African) republic in Europe." He went on to write in his book *Racial Mixture as the Basic Principle of Life*:

> In the Portuguese runs a deep current of Negro blood, and there the Negro has often risen to the caste of the nobility. Napoleon's army had many small black Portuguese soldiers. . . . Sicily, of course, is also profoundly Africanised. All of this is ancient history. The Romans brought Negro troops to the Rhine and over the Donau. Later merchants purchased the young Negroes as servants; in all large cities of commerce there were several hundred blacks, and many a house was known simply as "at the Moors." In one circle of pople whose members belong to the Russian, English and German nobility there is much Negro blood, inherited from an ancestor who lived at the end of the eighteenth century, and who was the great grandfather of one of the greatest poets of all lands and of all times, Alexander Sergeivitch Pushkin.

One of the well-known examples of a member of royalty with the blood of Africa coursing in her veins was Queen Charlotte Sophia, German-born consort of the English King George III (1760-1820). She had the broad nostrils and heavy lips of the blond Negroid type mentioned by Brunold Springer. This blond Negroid type is not uncommon even in Nordic Europe where intermixing, as mentioned previously, has been taking place from the earliest antiquity. These facts of history have never been given exposure in the writings of Europeans for obvious racist reasons.



CHARLOTTE SOPHIA
Queen of England
consort of George III
great-great grandmother of Queen
mother of George VI
(see Notes on Illustrations
RACE.)

**Queen Charlotte Sophia, wife of George III of England, and grandmother of Queen Victoria. This German Princess has been said by eminent historians and anthropologists to be of the early blond Nordic Negroid type, much in evidence in Germany.**

Another royal queen with the blood of Africa in her veins is the Duchess of Alafoes. She was described as the most beautiful woman at the court of John VI of Portugal in the 1800's by a noble French authoress. Voicing paeans about the beauty of the Duchess, she exclaimed: "The Duchess is brown but comely." The Duchess was the King's aunt. At that time fully one-third of Portugal was Black (African). Hence this question of pure race among Europeans was nothing but a myth in order to perpetuate the fantasy of a "superior" race. H.G. Wells, the English writer and historian, wrote: "Everyone alive is, I am convinced, of mixed ancestry, but some of us are more white, some of us more Negro, some of us more Chinese."

The sex relations between white and black go back to prehistoric times and on all continents. In that respect Europe was well ahead of the others in those distant times.

There can be no denying that the African woman in Europe was viewed in different lights, the dominant one being that of a desirable physical object, either as a sex goddess or courtesan, a wife, a concubine or a prostitute, or all these molded into one beautiful black body. At the other extreme, she was likened to a Madonna, the mother of Jesus. It was the opposite side of the same coin. Hence the cult of the Black Madonna and Child that has dominated the Catholic world, particularly Europe. One of the most devoted pilgrims at the shrine of the Black Madonna is the present Pope, John Paul II. Two of the oldest Black Madonnas of Europe are those of Loretto, Italy and of Nuria, Spain. The first has been listed as the original of all the Black Madonnas. It was destroyed by fire around 1930 and restored by Pope Pius XI, who according to Father Hedit, insisted that the color be preserved. The Black Madonna of Nuria is known as "The Queen of the Pyrenees."

One of the very earliest manifestations of the Black Goddess syndrome was the Venus of Willendorf (15,000-10,000 B.C.) found near Vienna, Austria. It was carved by Blacks of the Grimaldi race living in Europe, and is the oldest known representation of the human body. It is now in the Vienna Museum. We find this theme of the Black Goddess, the Black Venus carried from century to century in Europe right down to the years of the slave trade and slavery.

The Oracle of Dodona in Greece, the place where the gods were consulted, was founded by two Black women. Herodotus stated:

> Two black doves had come flying from Thebes . . . one to Libya and one to Dodona. . . . She taught divination, as soon as she understood the Greek language. . . . These women were called "doves" by the people of Dodona because they spoke a strange language, and the people thought it like the cries of birds (only certain African languages have this sound). . . . The tale that the dove was black signifies that the women were Egyptian.

As the story of the African woman in Europe travels through the centuries, several cases of the conflicting attitudes of Europeans will come to the fore. The same thing applies to the British in their relationship with Blacks. A look at Britain from Shakespearean times will fully illustrate the foregoing point.

The Gray's Inn Revels were different in the Christmas of 1594. But the idea was still the same: entertainments to parody the affairs and ceremonies of the English court. The Revels would start on Halloween and last until Candlemas. A Prince of Purpool was installed on December 20th. He was two characters in one--Purpool and the Lord of Misrule. By the 28th there were so many spectators that Gray's Inn Hall became too packed for anyone to enter. That evening the actors put on *The Comedy of Errors*. Six days later the Revels were in full swing. Among those present were Lord Burleigh, the Earl of Essex, the Lord Keeper, Sir Robert Cecil and the Earls of Shrewsbury, Cumberland, Northumberland, and Southampton. The amusements began with a symbolic piece of the restoration of amity between Graius and Templarius. After that the Prince of



Purpool held court. To pay homage to him came the Abbess of Clerkenwell, holder of the Nunnery and Lands and Privileges of Clerkenwell, "with a choir of Nuns, with burning lamps, to chaunt Placebo to the gentlemen of the Prince's Privy-Chamber, on the Day of His Excellency's Coronation."

It was the Abbess who made the difference in that year's Revels. For she was not a lady of court but a courtesan from Clerkenwell. She was tall, statuesque and haughty. Her name was Lucy Negro and she was in fact Black and an African.

This Lucy Negro was not the only Black courtesan around Clerkenwell. There were several in the district at the time, especially around "The Swan, a Dane's beershop in Turnbull Street." Here, fashionable gentlemen of the Inns of Court used to frolic. Dr. George Bagshawe Harrison, authority on Shakespeare, claims that the Bard of Avon fell in love with Lucy Negro, the most famous courtesan of them all, only to lose her later to the Earl of Southampton. Dr. Harrison makes a further more startling statement: "This Lucy Negro I would identify as the Dark Lady of the Sonnets."

Dr. Leslie Hotson, another renowned Shakespearean scholar who has done exhaustive research on tracing the origin of the Dark Lady whom Shakespeare eulogizes in his sonnets, throws further and clearer light on the issue:

> We arrive at a beautiful harlot, black as hell, notorious in 1588 or 1589, named Lucy or Luce. . . . This at once takes our mind five or six years onwards to the *Gesta Grayorum*—the chronicle of Henry Prince of Purpool's reign in 1594-95, and to the unsavoury list of the Prince's feodaries, in which we read that a Bawd named Lucy Negro "Abbess de Clerkenwell, holdeth the nunnery of Clerkenwell . . ."
>
> By this time, then, some five or six years after the Sonnets Black Lucy or Luce has set up as the "madam" of a house in Clerkenwell. Her name was Morgan . . . I have been at some pains to collect facts and reports about Luce Morgan. My reward is the discovery of a series of documents indicating that some years before she charmed Shakespeare she had first charmed Queen Elizabeth.

Many Shakespearean scholars, in spite of evidence supplied by the lines of the Sonnets, make the wildest claims about the identity of Shakespeare's Dark Lady love. Some very eminent British historians, blinded with bigotry, identify the Dark Lady as a Brunette, an Italian in the Court of Elizabeth I. Other claims, perched tenuously on the flimsiest threads of evidence, made other more preposterous assertions: any other woman, except an African. Yet Shakespeare's poetic words can leave no doubt, even in the mind of the most simple-minded. He begins his Sonnets to the Dark Lady by defending her color. In Sonnet 127 Shakespeare writes:

> In the old age black was not counted fair,
> Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name,
> But now is black beauty's successive heir,

So that there shall be no doubts as to the racial origin of his Dark Lady, Shakespeare gives this description of her in Sonnet 130:

> If hair be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damask'd red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks.

These descriptions are clear as a bell and speak for themselves. It is generally accepted in academic circles that the Sonnets were written around 1597 and 1598. At that point in time London was teeming with Africans, and African women lived in large numbers particularly in the Clerkenwell area of the city. They were much courted by the young better-class men around town—lawyers, actors, musicians, writers, the nobility. In a letter dated 1602 one Dennis Edwards writes to Thomas Lankford, secretary to the Earl of Hertford, asking: "Pray enquire and secure my negress" and went on to give the address where his lady love was to be found.

Situations of this nature, in which African women were being seen as highly desirable sex symbols, existed elsewhere in Europe from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onwards, in Germany, Italy, France through to Spain and Portugal. The case of Isabeau, an African, born in the motherland, carried in slave chains to the Caribbean, and taken out of the plantations of Haiti to Paris, was a classic one. She caused a tremendous sensation in France during the reign of Louis XV (known as the Boy King in the early years of the eighteenth century). With her beauty, her taste in dress and the wealth she acquired as a result of her exotic charm and superb physical beauty, she became the most sought after woman in France. French aristocrats fell at the feet of this Black goddess. Among those under her spell was the Comte d'Artois, later to become the King of France. Madame du Barry, herself a beauty and favorite of the King, Louis XV, though jealous of Isabeau, was forced to admit, and very grudgingly at that:

> Isabeau was proclaimed a charming creature and more than one grand personage of the Court, more than one financier placed his heart and his purse at her feet. Rare and magnificent adornments; great luxury; jewels and precious stones; a natural taste in dress; an accent, piquant because of its strangeness; numerous servants; great sums of money to spend, helped to decide the success of Isabeau. Whenever she came to Versailles to see the King at dinner, there was a great crowd to see her.

The high point of her love life was her rendezvous with the Prince, the Comte d'Artois at his retreat at Bagatelle. Du Barry and Isabeau became fast friends, the two most beautiful women in France, one white and the other Black. In her memoirs, Madame du Barry devoted a whole chapter to her African friend. Even though some of the writing is clouded by a snide remark about Isabeau's color, the impression conveyed is that Isabeau was a beautiful African ancestor:



> That African woman was charming. Imagine her: tall, supple, but voluptuous, with a walk that was elegance itself. Her well-shaped eyes were alive; her mouth admirably formed; her skin was something between satin and velvet; and the most beautiful ears that one could see. Indeed, I must admit, that she merited her reputation.

Isabeau was by no means the only favorite in royal circles in France. It was the vogue in Europe of the day for high and wealthy personages to have African mistresses. Francis I of France had one; so did Louis XV. She was Mademoiselle St. Hilaire from the Caribbean. There was a son from this union who claimed the throne of France. From a royal brothel, run like a harem, and called the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, Louis XVI always chose an African beauty to be his current amour. The first lover of Louis XIV, (1643-1715), the Sun King, stated historian J. Michelet, was an African woman named Jeanne. His wife, Queen Marie Theresa of Spain, was to pay him back in his own coin when she took an African lover, Nabo, with serious consequences.

This licence was extended to African men, as well, whose sexual favors were sought even in the bedchambers of Queens. The case of Marie Theresa, Louis XIV's queen caused the most concern. It became one of the best-known scandals to travel down through the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' lanes of history, and to find exposure even in the remaining few years of the twentieth century. Naturally, excuses were bandied about to save the honor of the Queen. But none stuck and the real story was whispered in the corridors of Versailles, and spoken out loudly and openly in the salons and streets of Paris, the town and village lanes, and the byways and highways of the French countryside. The accepted version of what actually happened between Queen Marie Theresa and her attendant, Nabo, reads as follows:

Nabo who came from Dahomey was given to the Queen Marie-Theresa as a gift by M. de Beaufort, as was the custom in those days. The black teenage young man was dwarfish in height but very well-proportioned. The Queen had him to attend her in her bedchamber, growing very fond of him. She kissed, cuddled and fondled him. A lonely woman left to her own devices by the philandering of her royal consort, the plain rather plump Marie-Theresa sought solace and comfort in the very amusing and considerate Nabo. He danced attendance on every whim and caprice of his royal mistress. An intimate and strange relationship grew out of the loneliness of the lives of these two unwanted souls; a relationship which brought about a scandal that was to rock the whole of France, and indeed the rest of Europe.

Marie-Theresa was about to become a mother again but this time she became more and more restless and worried. She kept repeating: "I no longer recognise myself. I experience strange disgusts and caprices such as never happened before. If I were to do as I wanted to, I would be cutting somersaults on the carpet, like my little Negro."

The King replied: "Ah, Madame, you make me shiver. Forget your foolish fancies or you will have a child, bizarre and unnatural."

The King was right. When the baby was born in 1656 it was of a dark brown African color. The King became almost hysterical with rage and began stamping and storming about the rooms of the palace. The Queen, as was to be expected, kept swearing her innocence. Doctors tried their level best to pacify the King and assured him that the baby was atavistic, a throw-back. The King was on the point of accepting this biologically impossible story when someone mentioned the Queen's attendant, Nabo. "Why," exclaimed one of the doctors, "the color of the child might have been caused by the black man's looking at the Queen."

"A look!" shouted the King. "It must have been a very penetrating look." Then, he ordered Nabo to be brought in his presence. Someone declared, "He is dead, your Majesty." Actually, Nabo had been spirited away some little while before this occasion of the birth. The story was told that he died suddenly, and very soon after the Queen gave birth to his daughter, a daughter who was named Louise-Marie, a name compounded out of the name of both the King and Queen. The sudden death of Nabo, an otherwise healthy young African in the prime of a life that had decades of years ahead, remained an unexplained mystery, like the life of his daughter Louise-Marie. It is not too fanciful to surmise that Nabo's death was not of natural causes.

Someone intimate in court circles, the King's cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensir, gave a first-hand account of what actually did take place at the birth of the child:

> The Dauphin told me of the trouble they had with the illness of the Queen and the crowds that were there when the King arrived; how the Bishop of Gardes, his first almoner, now Bishop of Langres, almost fainted with sorrow because the Prince and everybody laughed; that the Queen had been angry, and that the royal infant that had just been born, resembled a little Negro Dwarf that M. de Beaufort had brought her from foreign lands—a little Negro that the Queen always had with her . . .; that the child would not live and that I should not mention it to the Queen. When the Queen was a little better I went every day to the Louvre to see her. She told me that everyone had laughed at seeing the child, and the great pain their laughter had caused her.

The child lived and as mentioned elsewhere was named Louise-Marie. So as not to cause further embarrassment to the King and Queen and to the country, Louise-Marie was whisked away secretly to the distant convent of Moret, and placed in the care of the Mother Superior and her Nuns. Absolute secrecy was demanded of them by the King. The child was kept a virtual prisoner and not allowed to go out. She grew up in the convent and became a Nun. However, she still pined for her freedom and restoration to what she knew (for she had learnt the secret of her birth) was her rank. One day, the story goes, when the Dauphin,



**Louise-Marie, illegitimate daughter of Queen Marie-Theresa, wife of the King of France, Louis XIV, became known as the Black Nun of Moret.**

heir to the throne of France, was hunting in a nearby forest, and she learnt who it was, she burst into tears and said: "It is my brother."

Of this period in the life of Louise-Marie, who became known as The Black Nun, the Duke of St. Simon, statesman and one of the top figures in the King's Court, wrote:

> Speaking of the secrets of the King, it is necessary to make amends for something else I had forgotten. Everyone was astonished at Fontainebleau this year, to see that hardly had the princess arrived than Mme. de Maintenon took her to the little convent of Moret, where there were likely to be no amusements or persons of her acquaintance. She returned there several times, which awoke curiosity and rumors—Mme. Maintenon went often to Fontainebleau and finally one got accustomed to seeing her go there.
>
> In the convent was a professed nun, a Negro woman, unknown to everyone and who never showed herself to anyone.

> Bontemps, first valet to the King and governor of Versailles, to whom I have spoken and to whom the domestic secrets are known, had placed her there quite young after paying a large sum, and a regular pension. He took great care that everything that could add to her comfort was provided. The Queen went often to Fontainebleau to see her, and after her, Mme. de Maintenon.
>
> The Dauphin went there several times, and the princess and the children, and all asked for this Negro woman and treated her with kindness. She was receiving more marks of distinction than the best known or most distinguished person there.

Legends began to grow around the Black Nun. She was honored "as one of those Black Madonnas attributed to St. Luke, who performed miracles and attracted pilgrims." But there was another more colorful aspect to her fascinating mysterious life. She was involved in one of the most romantic love stories of later years. It was claimed that the King's nephew, the Duke of Chartres, fell violently in love with her during a visit to the convent, and he spirited her away. When the King refused to give his consent to a marriage, the Duke was compelled to take her back to the convent at Moret where she remained until her death in 1732.

Many were the stories and legends which grew around The Black Nun, Louise-Marie, daughter of Queen Marie-Theresa, wife of the Sun King Louis XIV, and her African lover, Nabo. Her portrait was hung in the art gallery of the Library of St. Genevieve in the Latin Quarter of Paris. It shows Louise-Marie to be a beautiful Black woman (prettier than her mother, the Queen) with bright black eyes, a prominent nose, thick lips and a long chin. The lower part of her face is unmistakably Africoid. Specimens of her handwriting have been preserved. The original documents detailing her birth and background disappeared as silently and mysteriously as her African father, Nabo. All that was rescued from isolation and is at the Library of St. Genevieve was the cover in which the documents were kept.

It bears the title: "Documents concerning The Princess Louise-Marie, daughter of Louis XIV and Marie-Theresa." Thus history records that Louis XIV, a white King of France, in sexual union with his white Queen, Marie-Theresa, fathered an African daughter! These are the sins of omission and perjury which Africans have had to contend with from time immemorial when Europeans write on matters concerning them.

But even going further back into the years of antiquity, from as far back as 1000 A.D., and even further, right up to 1450, the century before Shakespeare, we discern the presence of African women playing a most striking role on the European scene. And when we talk about Europe in that slot of time we must be precise as to which areas we are referring. Also, we must define and categorize the racial intermixing that took place in Europe from earliest times. Many people do not realize how recently the concept of "Europe" came into being. Historians R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton in their book *A History of the Modern World* wrote:



> There was really no Europe in ancient times. In the Roman Empire we may see a Mediterranean world or even a West and an East in the Latin- and Greek-speaking portions. But the West included parts of Africa as well as of Europe, and Europe as we know it was divided by the Rhine-Danube frontier, south and west of which lay the civilized provinces of the Empire, and north and east the "barbarians" of whom the civilized world knew almost nothing.

In fact, Palmer and Colton maintain in their study that the word "Europe," since it meant little, was scarcely ever used by the Romans, at all. So, in very earliest times when we say "Europe" we are really referring to the Graeco-Roman areas of civilization since the north and east had produced nothing in the field of enlightenment except that the area was the habitat of "barbarians." In the interest of truth it is imperative to remove the European mystique around the Graeco-Roman Empire in those ancient times. Europe gets the credit for culture, civilization and enlightenment of this Empire when, in historical fact, that was not the case. Europe, as the world was wrongly led to perceive it, just was not in existence as the home base of culture and civilization. In the words of the Ugandan scholar, Professor Ali A. Mazrui of Makerere University:

> It is at any rate time that it was more openly conceded not only that ancient Egypt made a contribution to the Greek miracle, but also that she in turn had been influenced by the Africa which was to the south of her. To grant all this is, in a sense, to universalize the Greek heritage. It is to break the European monopoly of identification with ancient Greece.

The logic of this statement by Professor Mazrui remains quite obvious: that ancient Greece was not in a real sense European since it owed most of its cultural heritage to the Africanness of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. Take, for instance, Sappho, the sixth-century B.C. poet who has been accepted as the best lyric poet of Greece. The Greeks admired her poetry to such an extent that she was called "the Tenth Muse." She described herself as Black, an African.

Greek Gods and Goddesses, and much of what is known as Greek Mythology, have been borrowed or, to be more explicit, stolen from Egypt, and other Nile Valley countries. In fact, much more that was later credited to the Greeks—many aspects of their philosophy, mathematics, physics, medicine, law, etc.—have had their roots dug out of the Nile Valley civilization and culture. Most of the Gods and Goddesses of Greece were of ancient Egyptian (that is, African) origin. The muses have described Egypt as the daughter of Ethiopia. To reinforce this claim, the Greek historian Herodotus has stated that "almost all of the names of gods came into Greece from Egypt."

Zeus, known as the father of all the gods, was of Ethiopian ancestry. He sired a son named Epaphus. The great Aeschylus, tragic Greek poet, said of Zeus, "And thou shalt bring forth Black Epaphus, thus named from the manner of Zeus engendering." One of the titles of Zeus was Ethiop, signifying Black (Africa).

Among the Greek Goddesses, Diana of Attica was Black and an Ethiopian. It was Apollo who took her away from her country. Not only did the Greeks claim African Gods and Goddesses but they worshipped them, and paid homage to them, as beings of a higher level, higher than the ordinary mortality of men and women: beings who were capable of acts above the capability of man born out of woman. In other words, their hero-and-heroine image and role models from antiquity up to today have been out of the image of Africans. African women, as a result, were more favored among the Greeks than their own. They were viewed in a variety of ways with the sex motif almost always a factor. It ruled the passions and attitudes of Greek men in the arts, literature, and in their social behavior. It was in the Greek city of Corinth where a Black Venus was adored and glorified, for her beauty and charm, as a symbol of love. One of the best-known Venus figures in Europe is that of the Black Venus by the Italian artist Alessandro Vittoria (1525-1608). Incidentally, the Goddess-image of Venus or Aphrodite was taken from the Egyptian goddess Hathor. So when Europeans speak of a Black Venus, they are making a statement that is chronologically incorrect. In fact, in their mythology, the most famous female magician of all time was Circe, who played a great role in Homer's *Odyssey*. Ancient Greek drawings depict her as a beautiful African woman. To her was attributed the power of turning human beings into lower animals. She, it was, who changed the companions of Ulysses, the Greek hero-warrior, into hogs. It was evident that African women were the favorites of Greek poets. One poet wrote praising them to the skies, saying: "With her charms Didymee has ravished my heart. Alas I melt as wax at the sight of her beauty. She is Black, it is true, but what matters? Coals are black; but when they are alight they glow like rose cups." Such praise was commonplace among Greek poets.

But Greek lovers of the African woman did not restrict their worship only to the love-sex vision. There were contradictions. The Greeks saw other virtues in African women, virtues not directly related to the passions of the flesh which the Black female body incited in them. For instance, their Goddess of Chastity, Artemis, was Black. The Greeks chose an African princess, Minerva, to represent their Goddess of Wisdom; thus placing the African woman, not only as a desirable object of sex, but as a virtuous, spiritual and intellectual being capable of elevating man to loftier heights.

Following in that tradition through the centuries, we find some African women who were deeply religious and endowed with mystical powers. For instance, in Spain, in the 1700s, an African girl from Guinea named Chicava became one of the leading religious figures. Adopted by the Emperor Charles II at the age of nine she was christened Teresa Juliana. She was put in the care of the Marquis Marrera and his wife who brought the girl up as their daughter. When her uncle, the King of Nina Baja, tried to force her hand in marriage she entered the Convent of La Penitencia, Salamanca. As a nun she became famous for her spiritual



**Many Goddesses of Greek Mythology were conceived as Africans. One of them is Artemis, Goddess of Chastity.**

work, showing that she had miraculous powers. Teresa Juliana died in 1748. Her memory and her relics are still esteemed with veneration. In 1757 an epic poem was written about her life and works. Up to today she is remembered in Spain and other Catholic countries as *La Santa Negrita*—The Black Saint.

While there were African women who were mistresses of the highborn in Europe—there were those who were darlings of royalty in other less carnal relationships. For instance in 1504 two "blackamoor" girls were taken to Scotland to the Royal Court where they were baptized and educated. They were named Elen and Margaret and waited on the Queen, Margaret of Scotland, as her personal and favorite attendants. Their popularity rose to such heights that in June 1507 a tournament was held in honor of the Queen's black lady, Elen Moore, which was conducted with the greatest splendour. The highborn white ladies at court could scarcely contain their jealousy.

**Part of a magnificent jewelled candle-holder in the Louvre, presented to Marie dei Medici by the City of Venice on her marriage to Henry IV of France. In the center is the head of an African woman superimposed on the head of a white queen. That woman is Anna, mother of Alessandro dei Medici, first Duke of Florence. Marie dei Medici was a blood relation of Alessandro, known in Italian history as The Moor.**

In the 1850s one of Queen Isabella of Spain's most cherished favorites was an African beauty and guitarist named Maria Marline.

A celebrated case of a royal darling was that of Ismeria, an African woman from the Sudan whom Robert d'Eppes, son of William II of France married. There was a son by that marriage named Jean, who became a companion of St. Louis, King of France during the period of the Crusades. In a chart of 1236, Jean is described as the "son of the Negro woman." Ismeria, herself, was a notable person and achieved lasting recognition. At her death she was make a Black Madonna. While in the Sudan, she had saved many Christian knights from death. Her fame had reached such esteemed proportions that a town sprang up near her shrine, and pilgrims from all parts of France came to pay homage to her, with rich presents. Among those who came to worship at her shrine were Joan of Arc, Louis XI and Francis I. She is remembered as *Notre Dame de Liesse*.

Black women were the most talked about, sought after and courted women in Europe from the time Europe made contact with Africa. European men of all ranks could not resist their charm; a charm that was mysterious, spiritual, yet with that spark or flicker of sensuality that ignited the passions of European men and made them pay homage to both a physical and a spiritual quality. Anselme



d'Ysaguirr, a French nobleman and member of Parliament in Toulouse, France, in 1413 fell deeply in love with Salam-Casais from Gao, Songhay, the beautiful 20-year-old daughter of a chief. Salem-Casais gave birth to a lovely daughter named Martha. When the child grew up she became the belle of Toulouse. Their descendants married into some of the leading families in Toulouse; families that have grown through the centuries and are in existence up until this present time. Traces of Africa have disappeared in this and literally hundreds of thousands of such families in Europe and also in Britain. This is a historical fact which should be made known to those hordes of misguided whites who are forever shouting off their unlettered mouths about a pure white race. In the words of more sensible white scholars, such a condition does not exist, never did, and never will.

One of the most celebrated cases of an African woman who won the attention of a venerated member of Italian society was Anna. She was to enter into the service of Alfonsina Orsini, a near relative of Cardinal dei Medici, who became Pope Clement VII. Out of this association with the Medicis a son was born in 1511 named Alessandro dei Medici, Duke of Florence. All the writers of the period agree that Alessandro was of African origin and his portrait by Bronzino reflects this fact. Alessandro married Margaret, daughter of Charles V, emperor of Germany, Spain and Austria in 1536. His mother, Anna, was so beautiful that she was called the Italian Cleopatra.

The vogue for African women was most manifest in the works of writers, poets and artists. It was always fashionable for artists to paint or sculpt the African woman in all her beauty and glory. In fact, the presence of the African woman in Europe was to impact visibly on all sectors of the society. From the Renaissance painters to the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century artists, the African woman in Europe was a favorite. African children and men were also very popular and were frequently painted by some of the most celebrated painters: Rubens, Hogarth, Zoffany, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Watteau, and many others. Qualities most evident in many of the paintings of African women are sensuality and sex. For instance, William Hogarth (1697-1764) the prolific British artist, in one of his pictures entitled "An Unpleasant Discovery" shows the friends of an English dandy discovering that he has a Black woman in his luxurious bed. Incidentally, this picture is omitted from most editions of Hogarth. However, a copy appears in Iwan Bloch's *Sex Life in England*. In one of his other pictures titled *The Rake's Progress* Hogarth paints an African girl witnessing a scene of profligacy. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), in one of his famous portraits in private possession at Woburn Abbey, has a full-bosomed African woman contrasting her natural beauty with the "noble" beauty of the marchioness, Lady Elizabeth Keppel. In one of his best portraits, titled "Negress Mounting a Horse," the French eighteenth-century artist Robert Auguste shows a sensual, physical study of a nude African woman about to mount a stallion. The symbolic meaning and interpretation of his study is quite clear.

One of the most shocking and degrading pictures about the African woman to

*Woman Mounting a Horse*. Private collection. Jules Robert Auguste.



The Black Venûs by Alessandro Vittoria (1525-1608). It was the vogue for European artists, writers, and poets to conceptualize the African Woman as a Black Madonna.

come out of seventeenth-century Europe was painted in 1632 by Christian van Couwenbergh. Titled *The Rape of the Negro Woman*, it shows three white men in a bedchamber having overpowered and stripped an African woman and about to rape her. She is struggling to get free. This picture was described by the Swiss historian, Hans Werner Debrunner, as "revoltingly honest." He went on to say that "in a dramatic way, the painter accuses Europeans of brutal abuse of Africans." Debrunner, after looking at the paintings of African women by European artists, gives his interpretation and summary of attitudes. He states that

> The African woman belongs to the dream-world of primal psychological conceptions. . . . All these representations and descriptions of African women show a common tendency: to imagine in the African woman a being sometimes dangerous, sometimes amusing, always different and possibly even doomed to perdition.

While this may well be the sum total of the European artists' conception of the African woman in Debrunner's view, it still omits another aspect of the African woman brought out by many European artists: the spiritual, madonna-like qualities and the Black Venus and Black Goddess image which have remained. This other conception of those European artists cannot be used as a yardstick to judge with any accuracy the realities of the situation of the African woman in European society. She was mistress, mother, lover, wife in that continent. More than that, she was vested with spiritual qualities: chaste, holy, pure, miraculous. In European society she was certainly not "doomed to perdition." She was a woman who often inspired, and whose physical and spiritual attributes shook, the thrones of Europe and caused not ripples, but waves, among the most powerful, the most religious, the most artistic.

It is in the poetry of Europe, of Britain, of the world, that the African woman has most frequently and liberally been portrayed. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to state that no other race of woman has been eulogized in the poetry of the world of Europe, America and elsewhere as the African woman. Poets have left her lasting immortal image: Black Madonna, Black Mother, Black Goddess, Black Venus. When we cast our minds back into the antiquity of Europe, these are the images that appear before us. The rest pales into insignificance. Even during the years of the African slave trade, when extremes of humiliation were heaped upon captured Africans, taken to the plantation prisons of the Caribbean and North America, Europeans were penning panegyrics about the Black Venus. European artists, too, used the image of a Black Venus to symbolize the journey from Africa across the Middle Passage to the slave plantations of the Americas and the Caribbean. In 1818, T. Stothard painted a symbolic canvas entitled *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola, West Africa, to the West Indies, escorted by a White Neptune and a Nimbus of White Cupids*. This portrait gave poetic expression to the fact that "fanciers of fair black femininity from Boston,



**The voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola, West Africa, to the West Indies, escorted by a white Neptune and a nimbus of white cupids. Painted by T. Stothard, 1818.**

Mass., to Buenos Aires used to await the slave-ships for the arrival of these black Venuses''—to use the words of J.A. Rogers. A member of the British Parliament, after seeing Stothard's great painting ''The Black Venus'' wrote these ecstatic lines:

> Her skin excelled the raven's plume
> Her breath the fragrant orange bloom
> Her eyes the tropic beam.
> Soft was her lip of silken down
> And mild her look as evening sun
> That gild the cobre stream.

And so the image of the African woman remains enshrined in Europe for all time. She cannot be erased from their history or indeed from the history of the world. She is there forever, not only as the Black Madonna to be worshiped by Pope John Paul II and millions of other Catholics; but also as the Black Venus, desirable, unattainable; as the beautiful fruit of creation, holding magnetic attraction for European man. Most important of all, she unmasks the pretense of strength and power in the European man and shows that, beneath that veneer of sophistication and might, he holds no control over the weakness of his flesh; so that he, too, will always pay homage to her—to the *Black Venus–the African Goddess of the earth–our queen*.

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## YARBROUGH, Camille

Camille Yarbrough is the author of two books for children—the recently published *The Little Tree Growing in the Shade* and the best-selling, award-winning *Cornrows*. Both books were published by Putnam. Her article "Today I Feel Like I Am Somebody" was published in the drama section of the *New York*



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