

Masculine iconography of 18th dynasty royal women and its influence on the perception of their role as queen

The role and significance of queenship during the New Kingdom is arguably the most prominent throughout ancient Egyptian history, exemplified particularly by the queens of the 18th dynasty. This essay will focus on the iconographic representations of two queens of the 18th dynasty – queens Tiye and Nefertiti – portraying traditionally masculine iconography (and more importantly, the symbolism behind the iconography) to the female form.¹ The main focus of study for the masculine iconographic representation of Tiye are the sphinx depictions of the queen, as can be seen in Sedeinga and most prominently in the symbolic form of trampling the enemy, found on Tiye's throne in the reliefs of the tomb of Kheruef (TT192). The focus of Nefertiti's masculine iconography will be the scenes of 'smiting the enemy' (MFA Boston 63.260), a *topos* of ancient Egyptian kingship. These representations, and the symbolism they hold, will be analysed in order to better understand the role of the queen during this period.

Queen Tiye is arguably one of the most influential characters of the 18th dynasty, especially regarding queenship. Of the royal women of the 18th dynasty, Tiye was the first queen to be depicted as a female sphinx, trampling the enemies of Egypt.² Before the depictions of Tiye in the form of a sphinx, Hatshepsut is portrayed in a similar fashion. Hatshepsut, however, is not depicted as female sphinx, but during her reign as pharaoh,

¹ Queens Tiye and Nefertiti are not the only examples of queens depicted with masculine iconography during the 18th dynasty. For example, Hatshepsut depicted herself in the masculine form during her reign as pharaoh, a title that was solely male, no matter the gender of the occupant. See: Roehrig, C. H. (Ed.). (2005). *Hatshepsut: From queen to pharaoh*; Smilgin, A. (2012). Sandstone sphinxes of Queen Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahari: preliminary remarks. *Polish Archeology in the Mediterranean* 21 (research 2009), 255–260; Robins, G. (1999). The names of Hatshepsut as king. *JEA* 85, 103–112; Cooney, K. (2014). *The woman who would be king: Hatshepsut's rise to power in ancient Egypt*; David, A. (2010). Hatshepsut and the image of kingship: ink bik. *GM* 224, 27–33.

² Schoske (1982), 170; Morkot (1986), 1.

shedding no light on the masculine iconography and symbolism of queenship (as could be interpreted from the depictions).³

The best attested examples in which queen Tiye is seen in the masculine iconographic form of a female sphinx come from firstly, her temple at Sedeinga, Nubia,⁴ and secondly from the side panel of her throne in the tomb of Kheruef (TT192).⁵

In the first example, queen Tiye can be seen twice in the form of a sphinx, wearing the tall, flat-topped crown (which will later be associated with the queen Nefertiti), which flank two emblems of the goddess Hathor, with which Tiye was associated.⁶ The crown of Tiye in this depiction has led to debate regarding its iconography and to which deity it is most associated. For example, in a similar depiction,⁷ queen Tiye wears a similar flat-topped crown, which has floral iconography, reminiscent of the goddess Anukis.⁸ Similarly, Tiye shares an association with Hathor, as does Nefertiti. The most compelling evidence for the iconography of Tiye's crown comes from Benkowski.⁹ She theorises that at Sedeinga, Tiye is represented as Tefnut in the form of a sphinx. Furthermore, the location of the temple in Nubia, along with stories of Tefnut, who flees to Nubia as a lioness, gives evidence to this theory. The crown's association with Tefnut portrays the hostile aspects of Tefnut, while the representation of the queen of a sphinx portrays an aggressive character.¹⁰ Again, further evidence to suggest the crown's association comes from the tomb of Apy during the reign of Akhenaten. Here, the king makes offerings of the Aten's cartouche while being flanked by

³ Zinn (2015), 46; Carney (2002), 33; Schoske (1982), 170.

⁴ Benkowski (2011), 79; Schoske (1982), 188. See appendix, figure 1.1.

⁵ Carney (2002), 33-4; Morkot (1986), 1. See appendix, figure 1.2.

⁶ Schoske (2008), 188.

⁷ See appendix, figure 1.3.

⁸ Johnson (2010-2011), 19-21. Tiye is identified by the cartouche that she holds, reading Nebmaatre, the praenomen of her husband Amenhotep III.

⁹ Benkowski (2011), 80.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Shu. Nefertiti also makes offerings next to a squatting figure, whose crown silhouette matches that of Nefertiti, representing Tefnut.¹¹

The second representation of queen Tiye in the form of a sphinx trampling the enemies of Egypt – seen in the tomb of Kheruef – as previously stated, is the first example of a queen being depicted in this traditionally kingly role. It is in this example that female captives (Asiatics and Nubians)¹² can be seen under the feet of the queen.¹³ Other examples can be seen from the tombs of Surer, Khaemet and Anen,¹⁴ in which Tiye is depicted standing on a prostrate enemy.¹⁵ Images of royal figures trampling the enemies of Egypt are traditionally reserved for the king only, but the military aspect of these images is demonstrative of the queen taking the role of kingship, restoring the concept of ma'at by destroying the foreign enemies of Egypt (chaos).¹⁶

Representations of queen Tiye in the masculine form of a sphinx start the trend of powerful female queens in iconographic representations. Tiye, as female sphinx, takes on the traditional role of the king. It is through this iconography that the power of the queen is elevated substantially, paralleling her with the king. The masculine iconography is used to demonstrate the power that the queen held in both political and religious contexts, a motif which is incorporated later into both the iconography and the roles of the queen Nefertiti.

The motif of smiting the enemy is one that can be traced back to the Naqada III Period, during the reign of Narmer, the unifier of Upper and Lower Egypt.¹⁷ Over the span of 3000 years, the scene of smiting the enemy has been quoted at least ninety times, thus making it one of the longest lasting iconographical motifs of ancient Egypt.¹⁸ The motif is indigenous

¹¹ Ibid.; Dodson (2009), 116; Morkot (1986), 3.

¹² Carney (2002), 33-4.

¹³ Ibid.; Morkot (1986), 1.

¹⁴ Morkot (1986), 1.

¹⁵ Carney (2002), 33-4; Morkot (1986), 2.

¹⁶ Carney (2002), 32.

¹⁷ Luiselli (2011), 15.

¹⁸ Ibid. 17.

to Egypt and considered to be rooted to the iconography of the Predynastic Period.¹⁹ It is from this period onwards that Egypt develops a sense of self, referring to the foreign neighbours of the country as a ‘collective other.’²⁰ The ‘collective other,’ to the Egyptians, presented a threat to the nation who viewed these peoples as the equivalent of wild animals.²¹ Both the Narmer Palette and an ivory sandal label of the slightly later king, Den,²² clearly depict the action of smiting the enemy. In both instances we see the king stood above the defeated foreign enemy, holding their hair with his left hand and wielding a mace with the right. It is this image of xenophobia and royal dominion over foreign lands (or in the concept of *ma’at*, chaos) that becomes a *topos* of Egyptian kingship until the Roman Period.

During the Amarna period, there is a significant evolution in the role of the royal family, especially the queen, during scenes of smiting the enemy. This change in queenship is most notable in the representation of the queen, Nefertiti, acting in the masculine, traditionally kingly role of smiting the enemy.²³ One of the only examples of this phenomenon can be seen on a talatat block from Hermopolis, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (63.260).²⁴

In this scene, Nefertiti, who is identifiable by her distinct, blue, flat-topped crown and female dress can be seen in the position of smiting the enemy.²⁵ To further evidence the character in the smiting scene as Nefertiti, the barge poles of the ship are topped with her

¹⁹ Wilkinson (2000), 29.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See appendix, figures 2.1 and 2.2 respectively.

²³ Zinn (2015), 46; Dodson (2009), 37; Ertman (2006), 61; Troy (2003) 100–101; Carney (2002), 34; Morkot (1986), 2; Schoske (1982), 170–1; Cooney (1965), 84. Dodson notes that Nefertiti appears in the pose of smiting the enemy before she is elevated to the role of kingship as Neferneferuaten. Although the purpose of this essay is not to explore the theories of Nefertiti’s actual kingship, or, a possible co-regency between Akhenaten and Nefertiti, these issues are still important to the overall understanding of the role Nefertiti held during the Amarna period with regards to kingship and queenship. See: Dodson (2009), 27–52; Van de Perre, A. (2013), Nefertiti’s last documented reference (for now). In F. Seyfried (Ed.), *In the light of Amarna: 100 years of the Nefertiti discovery*. 195–197.

²⁴ See appendix, figures 2.3. and 2.4. For as complete a contextualization of the scene as possible (including the surrounding talatat block which form a larger scene), see Cooney (1965), 82–86.

²⁵ Cooney (1965), 84.

head, again wearing the distinctive crown, signifying that the boat belongs to Nefertiti.²⁶ Under the rays of the Aten, she holds in the left hand the hair of a female enemy. In the right hand, she wields the xpS scimitar.²⁷

The second example in which Nefertiti is seen smiting the enemy can be seen on a talatat block from Luxor Temple.²⁸ The block depicts a construction of four shrines on a ship on which there are four depictions of the queen. Two of the images depict the queen under the rays of the Aten in the pose of smiting the enemy, one wearing the tall, blue, flat-topped crown (younger variant),²⁹ the other wearing the tripartite wig, double feather crown and sun disk on a modius (traditional variant).³⁰ The other two shrine scenes depict the queen, again, under the rays of the Aten, as a sphinx with a female head wearing the tripartite wig, double feather crown and sun disk on a modius, trampling the enemies of Egypt.³¹ It is important to acknowledge that these scenes of queen Nefertiti, both on the boat's cabin (Boston talatat) and on the four shrines (Luxor Temple talatat), are seen nowhere else other than through examples of kings or gods.³² This is demonstrative of one of the two symbols of military power and order that is incorporated by 18th dynasty queens, the other being that of the sphinx trampling the enemies of Egypt.³³ These scenes of Nefertiti smiting the enemy give evidence to the rise in female power during the 18th dynasty, particularly regarding political affairs,³⁴ but also in the cultic sphere. Cooney suggests that the scenes depicted in the Boston talatat portray Nefertiti as holding equal power to Akhenaten,³⁵ which, when considering the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Zinn (2015), 44.

²⁸ See appendix, figure 1.5.

²⁹ Zinn (2015), 45; Schoske (1982), 171; Tawfik (1975), 162.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Of the two depictions of Nefertiti as a sphinx trampling the enemies of Egypt, one is fragmentary. However, from what can still be seen, and the dual image nature of the whole scene, it can be ascertained that the fourth image is again Nefertiti in the form of a trampling sphinx.

³² Tawfik (1975). 162.

³³ Carney (2002), 33.

³⁴ Cooney (1986), 84.

³⁵ Ibid.

multitude of religious and political roles Nefertiti played during the Amarna period, is not a theory which could be disputed.³⁶ Nefertiti, as sole actor in the aforementioned scenes of smiting the enemy, takes the king's role, leading to theories of co-regency and the possibility of a sole rule.³⁷ The motif of smiting the enemy is representative of the domination of Egypt over all foreign enemies by the ruler.³⁸ Nefertiti conveys the message here that she is the supreme ruler of the Two Lands, an unprecedented feat to be carried out by a woman.

The iconography behind the blue, tall, flat-topped crown of Nefertiti is another important feature of the masculine iconography she incorporates into her image. The so-called platform crown is restricted solely to the iconography of both queen Tiye and queen Nefertiti (as is the *khat* headdress).³⁹ Aldred has suggested that the distinctive crown of Nefertiti is associated with representations of the goddess Tefnut in the form of a sphinx.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Benkowski attributes the iconography of the crown as a derivative of the crown worn by queen Tiye in depictions as a female sphinx,⁴¹ utilising the symbolism to enforce a more authoritative role as queen.⁴² It is this crown that Nefertiti is seen wearing in both examples of her smiting the enemy (Boston and Luxor Temple talatats).⁴³ Both the colour and surface of Nefertiti's crown seems to derive from the *xprS* crown of the king, thus instating a parallel between the political and cultural actions carried out by the king, which are not associated traditionally with queenship.⁴⁴ From the reign on Amenhotep III onwards, there is

³⁶ See: Assmann, J. (2013). A new state theology – the religion of light. In F. Seyfried (Ed.). *In the light of Amarna: 100 years of the Nefertiti discovery*; Hornung, E. (2001). (trans. David Lorton). *Akhenaten and the religion of light*; Assmann, J. (1995). *Egyptian solar religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and crisis of polytheism*; Aldred, C. (1973). *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*.

³⁷ Carney (2002), 34 & fn.46 for discussions on the theories.

³⁸ Ertman (2006), 61.

³⁹ Roth (2004), 3.

⁴⁰ Benkowski (2011), 79.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 80.

⁴² *Ibid.* See the earlier explanation of the iconographic symbolism of queen Tiye's crown.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

new duality in the ideology of queenship, from which the queen is equated with the king, if not depicted in a more prominent form.⁴⁵

The incorporation of kingship iconography into the crown of Nefertiti is one that elevates the status of the queen during this period. Combined with the scenes of smiting the enemy, we see that Nefertiti is acquiring attributes of, and, taking an active role in aspects of kingship, which, before this period were unknown. The elements of kingship that entered into the repertoire of Nefertiti's iconography suggest her presentation as queen-consort.⁴⁶

Of the multitude of iconographic symbolisms behind the motif of smiting the enemy, those of religion and cult play an integral role in understanding the role of queen Nefertiti. Queens played an important role in both cult and ritual activities. Typically (in the few representations that there are), the queen acted in a supportive role, following behind the king but, during the New Kingdom, Nefertiti is involved as the sole actor of the smiting of the enemy motif.⁴⁷ Due to fundamental changes in kingship and queenship ideology during this period, there is an increase in the political and cultic activity of its queens, through which Nefertiti is almost co-equal to Akhenaten.⁴⁸

The symbolism of smiting the enemy – the king uniting Upper and Lower Egypt and holding dominion over the enemies of Egypt – has a religious component. The smiting of the enemy scene invokes Assmann's theory of cultural memory in which Nefertiti, acting out the role of the king, recreates a mythical past.⁴⁹ By doing so, the ideology of queenship is entered into a realm, which before this period is solely a male domain. In effect, Nefertiti is manipulating the way in which the Egyptian view their own past, although such scenes of queens carrying out the role of smiting the enemy is almost non-existent post Akhenaten's

⁴⁵ Morkot (1986), 2.

⁴⁶ Troy (2003), 100.

⁴⁷ Roth (2009), 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 4.

⁴⁹ Zinn (2015), 47.

reign. Nefertiti's participation in the smiting of the enemy includes her in the mythical and everlasting concept of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt – creating order and upholding the concept of *ma'at*.⁵⁰

The iconography of Nefertiti's crown also holds significant symbolism regarding the cultic and religious sphere. Within the newly established religious cult of the Amarna period, Nefertiti, Akhenaten and Aten form the divine triad, whereas before this period, the divine triad consisted of Tefnut, Shu and Atum.⁵¹ Here parallels are drawn between the triads. Nefertiti is equated to Tefnut, Akhenaten to Shu and the Aten to Atum. It is through Nefertiti's crown symbolism (combining both the *xprS* crown of the king with the crown of Tiye, symbolic of the goddess Tefnut), that we see the masculine iconography's influence over the divine sphere in which Nefertiti is encapsulated. It is through the changing role of the queen in the theological concepts of the Amarna period, which provides one of the clearest indications of the active masculine role that was attributed to queenship.⁵² It could be argued that without her tall, blue, flat-topped crown, the iconography of Nefertiti would hold a significant amount less symbolism, especially with regards to her masculine portrayal. Again, Nefertiti's association with the crown of Tiye could exemplify a form of cultural memory in which she, Nefertiti, uses the memory of Tiye and the masculine power she held, in order to further her role of masculine power and association with the divine. It has even been suggested that during scenes of smiting the enemy, Nefertiti plays the role of a queen-goddess.⁵³

It is interesting to note that post Akhenaten's reign, the prominence of the role of the powerful queen seems to diminish. Royal women are no longer depicted in a military way,

⁵⁰ Ibid. 48.

⁵¹ Benkowski (2011), 80.

⁵² Schoske (1982), 171.

⁵³ Tawfik (1975), 163.

especially not in the scenes of smiting the enemy.⁵⁴ Examples of royal women of the New Kingdom, post Akhenaten's reign include Ankhesenamun standing behind Tutankhamun and Nefertari standing behind Ramesses II as they, the kings, respectively smite the enemy.⁵⁵ Similar examples in which the queen is seen smiting the enemy come from the Ptolemaic Period as well as from Meroitic culture,⁵⁶ a position held by sacred kingship.⁵⁷ It must be remembered that the motif of smiting the enemy is not ultimately Egyptian, and can be seen at the Lion Temple of Naga, on which the Kandake Amanitore is seen in the position of smiting the enemy.⁵⁸ According to the culture of Moroë however,⁵⁹ depictions of the queen smiting the enemy are not surprising.⁶⁰

When considering the role of queenship, the ideology of kingship must be taken into consideration. Queenship is parallel to kingship and, from this period onwards, queens are regarded as unequal equals to their male counterpart, the king.⁶¹ From the Old Kingdom onwards, queens were assimilated with the royal symbolism of kingship – incorporating the cartouche and uraeus, for example.⁶² The scene in which Nefertiti smites the enemy is one that is shocking, not because she is female but, because she is seen in a military image, which until this point was reserved solely for the king, invoking the concept of female rulership.⁶³

One of the epithets of Neferneferuaten is 'effective for her husband,' which is demonstrated clearly in the depictions of Nefertiti smiting the enemy,⁶⁴ in which she is seen

⁵⁴ Carney (2002), 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Zinn (2015), 45; Morkot (1986), 6.

⁵⁷ Schoske (1982), 171.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 4. See appendix figure 2.6.

⁵⁹ The iconography of the Kandake from the Meroitic culture shows that the queen, much like the king plays an equally masculine role. The best examples come from the king Natakamani and Kandake Amanitore, where Amanitore is seen holding the heads of a bunch of enemies, while holding a sword in the other hand, ready to strike. Wildung (2008), 200.

⁶⁰ Schoske (1982), 171.

⁶¹ Morkot (1986) 5.

⁶² Carney (2002), 37.

⁶³ Ibid. 38.

⁶⁴ Dodson (2009), 37.

carrying out the actions which are associated with the king. It is interesting to note that Nefertiti appears in the smiting the enemy scenes before she is elevated to king as Neferneferuaten.⁶⁵

The concept of divine kingship was an androgynous concept in which both a male and female model was needed. The inclusion of a female in kingly representation was a common occurrence, highlighting the aspect of duality which was imperative to the ancient Egyptian mind-set.⁶⁶ Reiterating the male and female aspects of kingship/queenship, it was necessary that there was an active incorporation of the female in order to include the authority associated with kingship.⁶⁷ The explicitly kingly role of upholding ma'at can also be seen through the queens of the 18th dynasty. Dated to the reign of Amenhotep III, in the tomb of Kheruef, a relief depicts the king, Hathor and queen Tiye in which an inscription regarding Tiye reads 'she is in the company of your majesty, like Ma'at accompanies Re.'⁶⁸ From this example, it can be seen that queen Tiye is parallel to Ma'at, taking part in the kingly role of maintaining the order of Egypt. Duality, a fundamental aspect of Egyptian thought is also seen from the examples of Nefertiti.

The Boston talatat relief depicts the boat of the queen as being equal to the king's boat.⁶⁹ This is demonstrative of the power of the queen during this period as an equal of the king. The representations of the female in the masculine form reiterates the power that that masculine has when applied to the role of queenship.

Queens of the 18th dynasty held an authoritative role in which the masculine iconography which was attributed to them, played a pivotal part in their representation, as seen most clearly from the examples of queens Tiye and Nefertiti. Queen Tiye is seen most

⁶⁵ Ibid. 116.

⁶⁶ Troy (2003), 93.

⁶⁷ Troy (2002), 2.

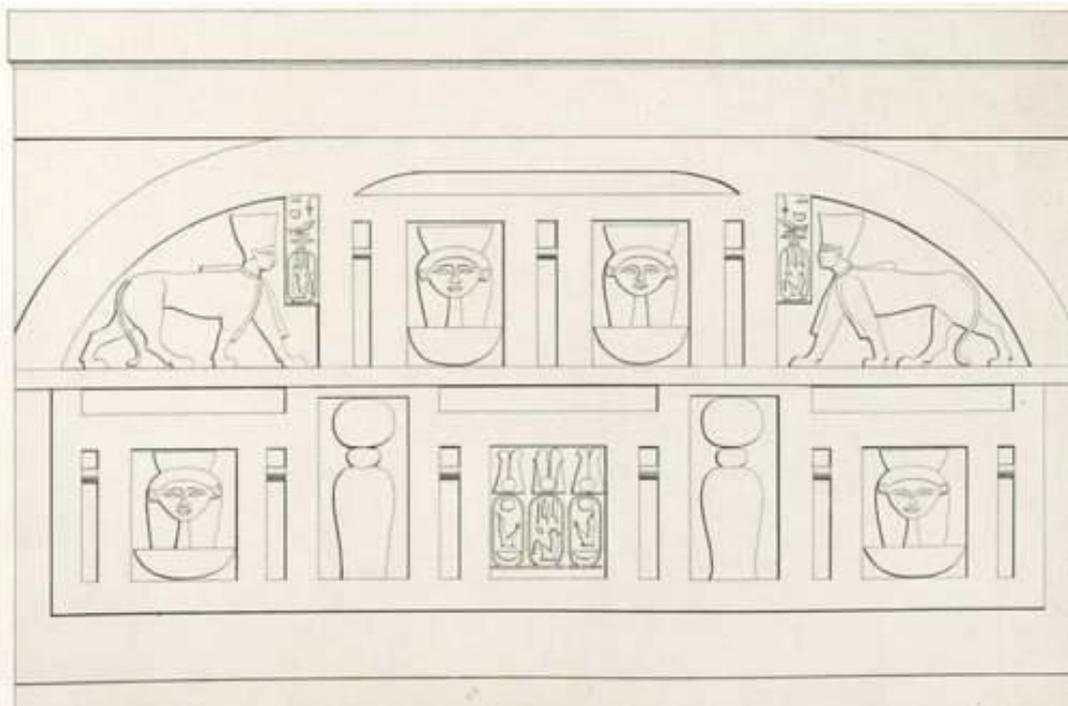
⁶⁸ Ibid. 21.

⁶⁹ Arnold (1996), 85.

prominently in the form of a sphinx,⁷⁰ trampling the enemies of Egypt, a motif that is solely attributed to the king. Nefertiti, also seen in the form of a trampling sphinx,⁷¹ replicates this same iconography and symbolism. The masculine iconography that Nefertiti incorporates into her image however, is far more prominent than that of Tiye. Her use of the smiting the enemy motif is one which further solidifies her position as a powerful queen, by using the traditionally masculine iconography; Nefertiti elevates the position of queenship that she holds. The symbolism behind the iconography of the scene has a multitude of levels, all of which influence the perception of the queen and the role that is held by her. It can be concluded that the role of queenship for both Tiye and Nefertiti is influenced heavily by their incorporation of masculine, royal iconography into their own depictions.

Appendix

Figure 1.1. Lepsius, Abt III, Band 5, Bl. 82. Tiye depicted twice as sphinx at Sedeinga.



⁷⁰ See appendix, figure 1.2.

⁷¹ See appendix, figure 2.5.

Figure 1.2. Epigraphic Survey, *The tomb of Kheruef*, 32. fig. 9. Tiye as a female sphinx trampling the enemies of Egypt. Panel on the side of Tiye's throne in TT192.



Figure 1.3. MMA 26.7.1342. Carved plaque from a bracelet. Depicts queen Tiye.



Figure 2.1. BM EA35714. Plaster cast of the Narmer Palette.



Figure 2.2. BM EA55586. Ivory sandal label of king Den.



Figure 2.3. MFA Boston 63.260. Close-up of the scene of Nefertiti smiting the enemy.

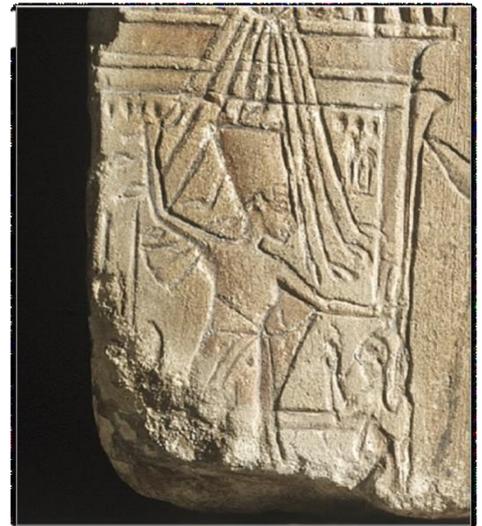


Figure 2.4. MFA Boston 63.260. Talatat: River scene with royal barges and tow boats.



Figure 2.5. Tawfik (1975), 165, fig. 1. Talatat block from Luxor Temple depicting Nefertiti smiting the enemy.

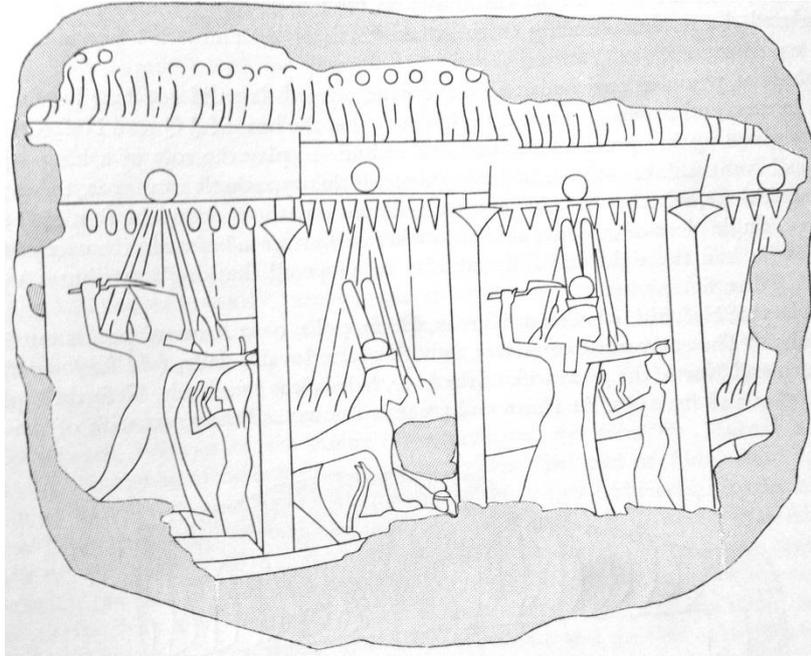
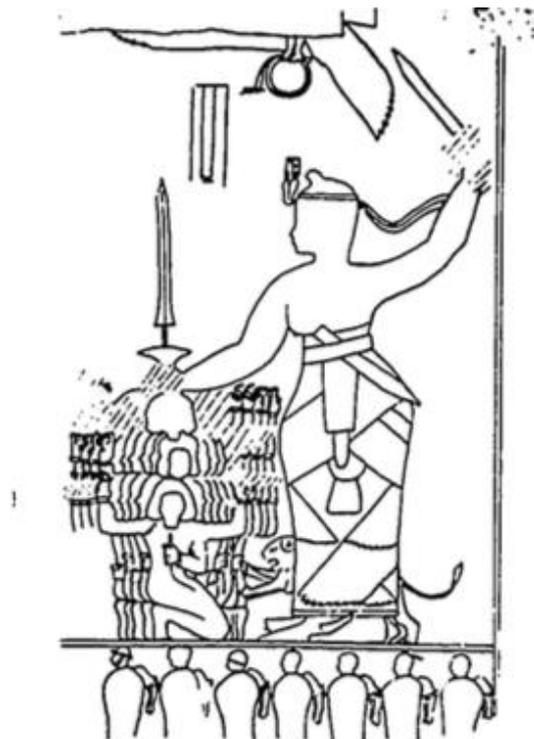


Figure 2.6. Schoske (1982), 4. Kandake Amanitore smiting the enemy. Naga Pylon, Lion Temple.



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Written for *Ancient Egyptian Queens (CLE342)*

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