

THE DISCOVERY OF QUEEN HATSHEPSUT'S MUMMY: FACT OR FICTION?

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*This article focuses on the mindset, imagination, and methodology of Dr. Zahi Hawass in his quest for the discovery of "Queen Hatshepsut," and other related mummies and tombs.



The search for knowledge about Queen Hatshepsut continues to grow in the 21st century, despite the fact that she lived 3,500 years ago. Hatshepsut is without question one of the most important and powerful women in the history of Africa. She represents a significant example of the prominent role of women in ancient African social and political organization, and thus the focus on her life and physical remains continue. In this essay, I will give some brief background on the Hatshepsut mania from the past two

years, and then discuss the recent claims by Dr. Zahi Hawass, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), concerning the discovery of tomb KV-63, and the identification of the "Hatshepsut mummy."

HATSHEPSUT EXHIBIT

From October 15, 2005 to February 5, 2006, the de Young Museum in San Francisco organized a major exhibit, "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh." This important exhibit contained over 300 artifacts related to the rulership and times of Queen Hatshepsut, who was the fourth and most powerful of Egypt's five female pharaohs. I had two responses to this 3½ month exhibit.

In my first response, I led seven museum tours totaling about 250 people. One additional student group tour was cancelled because of a museum power outage on the day of the tour. My initial goal was to simply lead one or two small private groups, but the local community's interest in attending an in-depth guided tour of this Hatshepsut exhibit was so overwhelming that we had to organize public tours. I received numerous phone calls, emails, and personal contact from people who wanted me to lead tours of the exhibit, so I asked Brother Robert Huffman to help organize these guided tours. The response was so huge that we had to literally close the registration for these tours and turn people away, because of a lack of museum space. A few people were angry at Robert for not allowing them to register and join our already crowded tour!

As our groups of 45-50 African Americans packed the museum gallery, we were often joined by dozens of museum visitors, from all racial backgrounds, who would follow our group through the exhibit and listen to my explanation of the artifacts, rather than continue listening to their audio headset guided tour. Among these visitors and followers were exhibit guards and even museum docents. Many of these people were so interested in learning about Hatshepsut that they would boldly stand directly in front of the artifact that I was discussing with my group and even ask questions. I did not mind their participation as long as they were sincere and respectful of the fact they had joined a guided-tour program. Nevertheless, I am convinced that had the exhibit remained at the de Young there would have continued to be unprecedented enthusiasm and interest.

My second response to this exhibit was to write a review in the *San Francisco Bay View* newspaper regarding the misinformation presented in the exhibit, including Queen Hatshepsut falsely being presented as taking an “unprecedented” step of ascending to the throne as a female ruler [Ampim, 2006]. Both the exhibit descriptions and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which ran a series of news articles before and during the exhibit, misinformed the public about Hatshepsut’s rule and the relationship between ancient Egypt and Nubia.

DNA TESTING & CT SCANS

In 2007, there is now a renewed focus on Hatshepsut. In the recent June/July issue of *Horus Magazine* Dr. Zahi Hawass states that 2007 will be an important year for archaeology. He wrote about “magnificent mummies and the thrill of discoveries to come.” Hawass indicates that in 2006 the Discovery Channel invited him to participate in a documentary to search for Hatshepsut’s mummy. According to Nevine El-Aref of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Hawass made a deal with the Discovery Channel to establish a DNA lab in the Cairo Museum. Egypt now has a \$5 million budget to do its own DNA testing in the museum. Hawass wants to perform DNA tests on all of the royal mummies to determine their identity. I learned back in 2005 from another member of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) that Hawass has contracts and financial arrangements with the Discovery Channel and National Geographic, which certainly explains why he works so closely with these organizations.

In late June 2007, Dr. Hawass claimed to have found the mummy of Queen Hatshepsut based mainly on CT scan results from a missing tooth. He has stated that he is “100% certain” the mummy in question (KV-60A) is Hatshepsut. However, in the past year he has been consistently wrong on his identification of royal mummies and tombs. Unfortunately, Hawass’ approach has been to make sweeping claims and announcements before having any concrete evidence to support his statements. His process of identifying mummies and tombs has been to make announcements before examining the evidence, and then change his position as new evidence is found, or until he is made aware that his position is contradicted by existing facts.

HAWASS AND TOMB KV-63

For example, since the February 10, 2006 official announcement of the discovery of King’s Valley tomb 63 by the University of Memphis team led by Dr. Otto Schaden, Hawass has already changed his conclusions three times. The structure was first announced by Hawass as a tomb containing important burials, then a month later he claimed that the structure was not a “tomb,” but was simply a storage chamber containing burial and embalming equipment. Here is how the BBCnews.co.uk (3 March 2006) reported on the Hawass contradictions:

“Last month, Egypt's head of antiquities, Zahi Hawass, speculated that the coffins belonged ‘to royals or nobles’ moved from ‘original graves to protect them from grave robbers’. But further examination has revealed that the area was in fact an embalmers workshop.”

In his own words Hawass admits his error, “This... is not a tomb for nobles or relatives of a king, as had been thought upon its discovery, but rather a room for mummification.”

Hawass’ third position is now that KV-63 was a royal tomb for King Tutankhamen’s mother Kiya, because he wanted to be buried near his mother. However, there are obvious problems with Hawass’ ideas. First, it is not known who was King Tut’s mother, and second there are no inscriptions, mummies, or tomb artifacts which give any names or specific evidence regarding for whom the chamber was made. In a USA Today.com article (9 July 2006), the dig director Otto Schaden addresses the confusion created by Hawass and the fact that there is no evidence to assign the “tomb” to anyone. In reference to one of the seven coffins discovered in the structure Schaden states,

“The coffin has absolutely no royal insignia, so it's very unlikely it belongs to a queen. ...As head of the antiquities, (Hawass is) in a position to draw whatever conclusions he wishes. I can't say he's wrong because I can't say whose tomb it was meant to be.”

Schaden has made it clear that there are too many uncertainties about KV-63 to draw any conclusions. He stated in a May 26, 2006 MSNBC interview, “Until we examine each coffin to some extent, we can’t draw a conclusion. We can draw one, but it might be wrong.”

HAWASS: A MEDIA STAR



Dr. Zahi Hawass’ endless speculation and public misinformation about KV-63 has nothing to do with science and careful scholarship, but is more focused on publicity and income derived from exclusive film rights given to the Discovery Channel, which aired “King Tut’s Mystery Tomb Opened” in 2006 and again in July 2007. Many have questioned the relationship between Hawass and the Discovery Channel, particularly this network’s conflict of interest in both financing and have exclusive film rights to broadcast the KV-63 excavation. The ratings and viewing numbers for these Discovery Channel specials have become a major source of exposure and income for the network in recent years, ironically coinciding with Hawass’ tenure as the head of the SCA in 2002.

For example, in October 2006 the Discovery Channel Canada reported that the KV-63 program attracted more viewers than any program in the history of the channel, as there were a total of 407,000 viewers in one record-breaking time slot, followed by 314,000 viewers in another slot. The previous Discovery Channel Canada record was the 371,000 viewers who watched “Nefertiti Revealed” in August 2003. The more viewers equals more revenue. Hawass on the other hand has stated that he used the Discovery Channel and other companies such as National Geographic and Siemens to bring in revenue for Egypt and help carry out local projects.

While these TV docu-dramas are being presented to the public in a high-stakes financial and marketing game, where is the concern for truth and historical accuracy? The search for the glitter of gold and famous kings has now turned to an unprecedented focus on TV ratings and revenue. Therefore, we should not be too

surprised that in September 2006 Dr. Hawass became the first archaeologist in history to receive an Emmy Award! This is the first time in its 50-plus year history that this prominent award was given to someone who was not working in the media.

MIS-IDENTIFICATION OF HATSHEPSUT'S FATHER

Recently, Zahi Hawass was wrong in claiming that a mummy in the Cairo Museum was Pharaoh Thutmose I, the father of Queen Hatshepsut. In June 2007, Hawass directed DNA tests which show that the mummy is not Thutmose I, and that he was wrong in his earlier identification. He stated in a CNN.com article (July 13, 2007), "I am now questioning all the mummies. We have to check them all again." True, the identity of all the royal mummies in the Cairo Museum have to be re-examined, but what Hawass ignores is that credible anthropologists decades ago had already indicated that the mummy thought to be "Thutmose I" was highly unlikely to be him, because the mummy in question was a young man who died before the age of 20. Whereas, it is known from the historical record that Thutmose I lived to about 50 years. For example, Harris & Weeks wrote in 1973 that their x-rays of the 18th dynasty mummies "have cast considerable doubt on the generally accepted reconstruction of New Kingdom history." (Harris/Weeks, p. 132.)

If the skepticism indicated by Harris & Weeks and the much earlier doubts expressed by Elliott Smith (1912) concerning the identification of the "Thutmose I mummy" were considered by Hawass, then he would have been more tentative in his naming of this mummy, rather than have to later admit his identification error. In this instance and elsewhere, Hawass seems to conveniently ignore any evidence that does not fit his preconceived ideas. It will be shown below that he conveniently changes or invents the relevant categories of evidence in order to fit his theories, which allows him to often leap to unfounded conclusions.

THE "HATSHEPSUT MUMMY"

The search for Queen Hatshepsut's mummy began in 1903 when tomb KV-60 was found by British archaeologist Howard Carter. In KV-60, Carter found the bodies of two elderly women, one mummy was lying on the floor uncoffined (mummy KV-60A), and the other in a coffin labeled with the name and title of the Great Royal Nurse, *In*. (It is thought by some to be the same Sit-Re, thus *Sit-Re In*).

In 1966, American Egyptologist Elizabeth Thomas (1907-1986) speculated that the anonymous, uncoffined mummy in KV-60 was Hatshepsut because of the right arm positioned across her chest suggesting royalty. In an undated 2006 article on his website ("Quest for the Mummy of Hatshepsut"), however, Hawass commented, "I do not believe that this mummy is Hatshepsut. She has a very large, fat body with huge pendulous breasts; and the position of her arm is not convincing evidence of royalty." Hawass has elsewhere repeated the assertion that the mummy was not Hatshepsut because of the "large breasts" and that therefore this mummy had to be the wet-nurse, Sit-Re In. This is a case where Dr. Hawass has invented a new category for royalty, the size of the breasts! Contrary to his remarks, there is absolutely no evidence that a woman's breast size had anything to do with her political position. This is an example of what was stated above of how Dr. Hawass invents new categories of analysis to fit his ideas and theories.

Also, on the one hand Hawass stated in recent interviews that the arm position of a mummy does not by itself determine royalty, yet in the spectacular made-for-tv Discovery Channel program ("Secrets of Egypt's Lost Queen," which aired July 15, 2007) Hawass and his team ruled out one mummy (Unknown Woman B) as being Hatshepsut *specifically because of the position of the arms down to her side as opposed to the "royal arm position" placed across the chest*. The problem with this "royal arm position" across the chest assertion

is that it is in direct contradiction to Hawass' statements in recent interviews. For example, on the "Charlie Rose" television show (July 9, 2007), which aired less than a week before the Discovery Channel program, Hawass emphatically stated that the arm position of royal mummies could be in any arrangement and thus this issue was not really a factor in the identification of mummies. Thus, Hawass' contradictions and lack of credibility on identifying mummies could not be more obvious.

Hawass initially argued against the uncoffined, anonymous mummy (KV-60A) in the tomb being Hatshepsut because of the arm position and breasts, yet he now admits, "I was wrong." [Telegraph.co.uk, 27 June 2007]. Hawass now claims that he is "100% certain" this mummy *is* Hatshepsut. Although the important DNA test results are still not completed, Hawass and his team have used a CT scan on a wooden box (found in 1881 in a cache of royal mummies) which contained mummified remains and a broken tooth, inscribed with Hatshepsut's royal seal. The team claims that the recent CT scan revealed a tooth that almost perfectly matches a missing upper molar in the mummy that was suspected to be Hatshepsut by Elizabeth Thomas. The team's main evidence in the identification of "Hatshepsut" is the missing tooth. When asked why he did not wait for the completed DNA results, Dr. Hawass stated that it is not necessary because the tooth solves the case of the "Hatshepsut mummy." However, as a result of this case lacking DNA evidence and with Hawass' history of errors and contradictions in the recent past, the public should view the "Hatshepsut" identification as tentative at best.

The new DNA testing facility at the Cairo Museum has been set up to extract and compare DNA of the royal mummies, and Hawass has stated that preliminary DNA results show "similarities" between the KV-60A mummy (prematurely labeled as the "Mummy of Hatshepsut" in the Cairo Museum royal mummy room) and Ahmose Nefertari, the grandmother of Hatshepsut. The museum has a group of mummies from Hatshepsut's family (both her immediate ancestors and descendants) that have undergone DNA testing, so there is no reason for Hawass to rush to conclusions about the so-called Hatshepsut mummy until the test results are completed, which will take months. While he has admitted that there are many questions about the identification of the royal mummies in the Cairo Museum and that they all have to be retested, yet he was not willing to wait for the test results before announcing to the world that the Hatshepsut case is solved. It is a wonder that any reasonable person would take Hawass serious.

It is also amazing that a trained scholar such as Dr. Hawass would dismiss DNA tests before the results are finalized. What are his motives? This is the same unscholarly and haphazard approach that has caused him to be known as someone who puts his personal opinion above evidence, and who changes his position whenever the situation calls for it. Hawass seems to be more concerned with what is useful rather than what is truthful. The fact is that there are different possibilities for the identities of the two female mummies found in KV 60, and thus the grand pronouncements from Hawass that these cases are now solved is not convincing, particularly given his recent history of errors. Certainly, many scholars are not at all convinced that these two identity cases are closed, particularly the one concerning Hatshepsut.

Several lingering questions remain:

- Why is the DNA from the Ahmose Nefertari mummy the only such data mentioned thus far in connection to the KV-60A mummy ("Hatshepsut")? What about the DNA from other Hatshepsut family members, such as Seqenenre Tao, Amenhotep I, and the group of Thutmose kings?

-- Why is the so-called Thutmose I mummy now said not to be him, is it because of the young age of this mummified person, or is it simply because his DNA does not match "Hatshepsut's" and thus the Hawass identification case would fall apart?

-- Will the tooth analysis details and DNA results be made public and available to interested scholars, or will we have to rely on the information presented in the edited Discovery Channel program?

Finally, the public should be aware that Dr. Zahi Hawass will soon make another great announcement, concerning the discovery of an important tomb that may belong to "Alexander the Great," but he states that he hopes "it is for Cleopatra and Mark Anthony." Whoever this tomb may belong to, it is certain that Hawass, National Geographic, and Discovery Channel will continue to focus on finding famous historical figures while it is still a hot entertainment topic, even if this effort has little to do with historical accuracy and scholarship. Beware!

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NOTES:

[1] In February 2005, Hawass directed CT scans on the mummy of King Tutankhamen and had three forensic teams produce images of how King Tut "really looked." The June 2005 issue of *National Geographic* Magazine (NG) published on its front cover the forensic image of the French team, and this produced an international outcry because of the bogus modern Caucasoid-looking King Tut. Hawass granted NG exclusive access to record and document the CT scan process.

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