

A Queen's Promise

by Hatshepsut, 1500 B.C.

One of ancient Egypt's best-known rulers was Queen Hatshepsut (hat shep' siit) (1520-1482 B.C.), the first woman ruler known to history. During her reign, from about 1503 to 1482 B.C., Egypt enjoyed peace and prosperity and expanded its trade with East Africa and Asia. Like other Egyptian rulers, Hatshepsut ordered the building of gigantic monuments and temples. One of them was a huge stone obelisk, a tall four-sided pillar. Hatshepsut's obelisk is made of a single piece of red granite and still stands today. Like most Egyptian monuments, it is carved with hieroglyphics. Thanks in part to the Rosetta Stone, which you can read about on pages 104-105, historians have been able to translate Hatshepsut's obelisk. As you read part of the obelisk below, notice that Hatshepsut connects herself to the gods. In what ways does she claim to be a powerful ruler?



Now my heart turns to and fro,
In thinking what will the people say,
They who shall see my monument in after years,
And shall speak of what I have done. . . .
In order that my name may endure in this temple,
For eternity and everlastingness,
They are each of one block of hard granite,
Without seam, without joining together! . . .
Lo, the god knows me well,
Amun, Lord of ~~Thrones-of-the-Two-Lands~~;
He made me rule **Black Land** and **Red Land** as reward,
No one rebels against me in all lands.
All foreign lands are my subjects,
He placed my border at the limits of heaven,
What **Aten** encircles labors for me.
He gave it to him who came from him,
Knowing I would rule it for him.
I am his daughter in very truth,
Who serves him, who knows what he **ordains**.
My reward from my father is **life-stability-rule** . . .
eternally like **Re**.

to and fro: back and forth

~~Thrones-of-the-Two-Lands~~: Upper and Lower Egypt
Black Land: the Nile Valley
Red Land: the desert
Aten: the sun

ordains: orders
life-stability-rule: rule for life

Re: the sun god

After Queen Hatshepsut's death her stepson, Thutmose III, became ruler of Egypt. Because he had long been her rival for power, he tried to destroy everything Hatshepsut had built. However, because she had built so many temples and monuments, many survived untouched.

Source: Joanna Bankier and Deirdre Lashgari, eds., *Women Poets of the World*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1983.