

**Dr. Yasmin El Shazly:**

We are very pleased to have with us today Professor Betsy Bryan, who will be talking to us about kingship during the Egyptian New Kingdom. Professor Bryan is the Alexander Badawy professor of Egyptian art and archaeology at Johns Hopkins University. Her areas of specialization are art history, art and archaeology of the New kingdom. Her current fieldwork is on the temple complex of the goddess Mut at South Karnak. And Her research focuses on defining the earliest forms of Mut of Isheru

Thank you so much, Professor Bryan, for accepting our invitation today.

**Dr. Betsy Bryan**

Thank you so much for inviting me.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

I'll start with my first question. Most non specialists think of ancient Egyptian culture as static. It is true that it changed relatively little through the ages. However, changes did occur in all aspects of Egyptian culture and society, including royal ideology. What do you think are the distinguishing features of royal ideology during the New Kingdom?

**Betsy Bryan:**

Well, that's really a very big question, and certainly fundamental to understanding kingship in the New Kingdom. I think that it is less that the ideology of kingship express different ideas than that it emphasize the traditions of kingship somewhat differently than it had before. So, for example, the divine genealogy or divine birth of the king was a primary theme of royal ideology in the New Kingdom. Although the king had been the son of Re the sun God since the Fourth Dynasty, very, very early. And that was one of his titles, the son of Re, but kings and dynasties 18,19, and 20, were repeatedly given epithets, in addition to their titles that called them, the son of Amun Re, for example, and the son of Nut

all sorts of references to the king as the direct offspring of the gods. And the Kings then took this pedigree and equated themselves and their nuclear families with the gods themselves.

So, they were really promoting a view that they should be seen and understood as the earthly representations of gods, especially in themes such as Amun Re, his wife, Mut, and their offspring Khonsu, the moon God. In the north, they would be equated with the god Ptah at Memphis, his wife, Sekhmet, and their offspring Nefertum and likewise around the country, in each and every major, major cult place. So probably the one that we see the most plainly in the New Kingdom, it beyond the Theban example, is that at Abydos where Seti I is so plainly recognized as a god himself, who is the offspring of Osiris and Isis. So, I think that is in so much more emphasis than you have seen in periods before and the kings in a sense were quite successful in exploiting that particular aspect of their ideology. probably the second most important would be the roles of New Kingdom kings, as military leaders. It's impossible not to mention this because it is the period of their creating an empire, where they engaged troops from Nubia in the south, and troops from the north east, in, in the Levant. And as a result, they not only did they defeat these enemies, but as a result, they could prove to the gods that they were legitimate Pharaohs who were defeating the enemies of the gods, and they took the opportunity with the wealth that came from these victories to build enormous buildings, primarily temples, and to place on the outsides of those temples, scenes of themselves, killing their enemies in foreign countries. So that royal ideology of the king as military victor, who is not only protecting Egypt, but also expanding Egypt's territory is certainly major part of its ideology.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

That's very interesting. Thank you for a wonderful answer. My second question is well, Egyptologists believe that the Royal Ka was the divine royal essence that was passed on from one king to the other. Can you please talk to us about this concept and what it meant?

**Betsy Bryan:**

Yeah, well, there are almost as many views on royal Ka as there are Egyptologists walking the earth. And so I, I do feel like this is a bit of a difficult concept to try to convey. But when we put it into the context of kingship, it's important to think of the Ka as a divine aspect, and spirit that is a continuous existence has a continuous existence, and for kings moves with a new king, from perhaps the past rulers into the new ruler, I think that it would be an interesting question as to whether there is any definition of the size of Ka because it doesn't seem to eliminate Ka when it moves from a deceased King into a living King. And instead, it seems to be a force that is throughout existence but can be collected and moved into a king in order to pronounce him and show him that he is the designated ruler. A lot of times we talk about there at perhaps at Luxor temple being a temple associated with the Royal Ka, and a place where the Kings received the confirmation and bestowal of the Royal Kas upon and after their coronation, sort of in a yearly reaffirmation. And this may very well, it may very well be the case. But I think that it's important to note that we do not have enormous amounts of texts that really clarify what this process was from the ancient Egyptian point of view. Some things have been identified that suggests the presence of the Ka and one of those is a large ostrich feather fan, that can be used as a sort of protective device. And when it's included in a scene, it often seems to indicate the presence of the Royal Ka. And I think the other aspect that we need to bear in mind is that the Ka is a life force, and it has with it an ability to continue and rejuvenate. So, when it moves from the living, then when one dies, it does actually cease to operate for a while. So, a deceased King has to be rejuvenated, and then his Ka lives again. So, the Ka is obviously an important point. And only kings and a few gods have multiple Kas. They are when the king is created and by the gods or conceived, he should have not only his Ka but an additional double Ka. And then as a king, as a true king. He may have up to 14 of these Kas that each of them bringing specific and additional power to him. So, it's a multi-pronged concept, both people and gods, men and women also had Kas, not just kings and gods. But it does appear to us that the Royal Ka had special powers that actually demonstrated that this was the legitimate person to rule Egypt.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

Okay, so how does the usurper of the throne legitimize his rule?

**Betsy Bryan:**

Well, I think that the important point to remember is that it is an office, it's not a person and kingship was created that way from the very beginning. It's one of the reasons it has all of these titles associated with it. So that although someone may be identified as having been a ruler in the egg, as the ancient Egyptians might have written in many texts, that person could easily be a usurper. It's just that he was destined for that office. And no one knew it until the time it was exposed to the world and revealed. So actually, usurpers would not have had such a difficult time, I think it's actually probably the case that there are more usurpers out there than we are aware of, because the kingship as an office covers it up so well. In fact, there is a very famous literary text from ancient Egypt that specifically describes the kingship in this way, and says, "the kingship is a perfect office, it has no son, it has no brother, who can make its monuments and endure, though each man in nobles has successor, and each man acts on behalf of Him, who preceded him in hope that his action may be affirmed by another who comes after him". So that is how the Office of kingship actually operated it, it was dependent upon that constant continuity of the office that brings the Ka into it. So even a usurper will then have the Royal Ka bestowed upon him or sometimes her, who holds that office.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

I have always been fascinated by the idea of you know, the divinity of the king, how divine is he? Is he a real god, an actual god or an intermediary to the gods? And for example, you have, you know, the king was, we believe was an intermediary between humans and the gods. But we do have instances where kings had themselves to find them depicted worshiping their divine selves on their monuments, like I'm Amenhotep III and Ramesses II, for example. So, who do you believe was the target audience for such themes and what was the purpose behind them?

**Betsy Bryan:**

That's a great question. Who's the target audience for scenes of this nature? I think that almost any time that we have a temple scene, the target audience is a god and because they are the primary inhabitants of a temple and when you see Amenhotep III worshipping the god Nebmaatre at Soleb, in Nubia, it is very likely that he gives power, additional power to that god himself of himself and it is a god that represents him through his worship and through his offerings. So, every time that an offering is made to a god, there is a sense of it pumping up the importance and strength, then perhaps even material capability of that deity in the same way that you think of funerary offerings as being the way that you keep someone alive in the next life. So, I think that that is the primary target audience for these kings, in making such scenes. Those scenes are actually I would say the minority of the contexts in which we actually find these so called deified statues of rulers and I, I would like to, to throw in here that in most cases, what we are seeing even the scenes on walls, we are seeing representations of images of those deities not of the deities themselves. And it became quite common in the New Kingdom, for cult figures, figures that were worshipped to be created, that could be worshipped by a variety of people. And no one knows this better than you yourself, because this is what you wrote a wonderful book about; the king of the deceased King as intermediary for people. And I think that this operates in a larger context with kings such as Ramesses II and Amenhotep III who actually took something that had in a way been utilized for, for people in general, to access and have the help of an intermediary such as a deceased ruler, they took it and utilized it themselves as a means of creating enormous statues of themselves, that could actually be worshipped and prayed to as a divine force. And as an intermediary for anyone who wanted to access them. And, and I think that Ramesses II made it quite plain, because he even named the statues with very specific names, and Amenhotep III did name his statues, but not quite so many. It is a fascinating kind of way in, in which these kings could claim a form of deification. Both in a place like Nubia where they could simply be a god, because they were not recognized by the local population as being simply someone in between. But at home, the use of the statue cult meant that there is a divine power of the kingship in that statue that creates a form of deity. I am one of those

people who does not believe that kings were deified for real, I do not believe that Amenhotep III at any point became a god. But I do believe that he used every single other method, such as the statute called for projecting himself as closely as possible to that.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

We spoke about Ramesses II deifying himself, there's something else that Ramesses II did a lot of and that is usurping other monuments of his predecessors. Many kings did that some of them simply by adding their own names, while leaving the names of their predecessors intact, while others removed the names of their predecessors and replaced them with their own, and sometimes even alter the facial features to match their own like Ramesses II who did both.

Can you please explain why, like why would they sometimes just add their name and sometimes remove the name and alter the features?

**Betsy Bryan:**

Well, I Truthfully, I don't think we know the answer to that question. I mean, I, I think in some cases, it's expediency that you it's very quick to simply add your name, it's almost as quick to simply remove someone else's name and plaster in and carve your own. What takes time is to actually alter the features of an image, as well as to obviously, then change the inscriptional material. But I think that there is an impetus for all of those things to happen. And when I was working many, many, many years ago, on my dissertation, I worked with two statues that were in the shape of Osiris statues in mummy form, and they both had the name of Ramesses II on them that was replacing the name of King Thutmose IV, whom I was writing about for my thesis, and however, one of them had the original face of Thutmose IV and the other one had been completely recarved into an image of Ramesses II. And they both were from the same place. So, it's almost as if there is a decision that can be made, that the king makes clear his intent by doing a sort of complete changeover. And then the additional material that's nearby can be done in a much more limited fashion but have some of the same meaning

attached to it. I mean, that's, that's purely a sort of guess as to why you would have done that in in that particular in that particular instance. But I think it's important for us to note that Ramesses II's artists who did this work, were very sophisticated. And we don't know who gave them their marching orders exactly. But in many cases, there is more than one portrait style for this king. And sometimes when he did usurpations, and took over and re carved faces, they were deliberately styled to recall an earlier ruler, particularly Amenhotep III. But in other cases, they might choose a great king of the 12th dynasty, such as Senusert I. So, there's a very clear intent. And not to mention the fact that of course, kings are taking other people's statues and putting their name and their face where are a version of their face on it. They want a portion of that person's Ka, of that person's identity as royal Ka for themselves, in the same with taking over Senusert and any other ruler that they take over it is really meant that the king can partake of all of those kings and be all of them to the next group.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

So, also there's a desire to associate themselves with these past rulers, when they're not just taking their stuff, they want to associate themselves with them.

**Betsy Bryan:**

It does seem as if that is behind the choices made. I mean, I think that we need to be careful not to call usurpation a good thing, kings are indeed still taking someone else's monument. And when they don't just add their name and leave the other rulers name, there is a level at which you must call that usurpation. But I think it's important but what you've said, I think is exactly right, that what they want is to have a part in that legitimate continuity of kingship, and to particularly be seen in connection with kings such as Amenhotep III, Senusert III, Thutmose III, all of these rulers of the past whose monuments and whose deeds were well known to people.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

We've spoken about the divinity of the king. The Tomb of Tutankhamun, for example, testifies to the wealth of material that the typical royal tomb in the Valley of the Kings would have contained, however, most of the tombs were found empty, their contents having been robbed since the times of the ancient Egyptians themselves. So how would you reconcile this with the King's divine status? Like the idea that people from ancient Egypt robbed these tombs, the tombs of kings were considered divine?

**Betsy Bryan:**

Well, I guess I'm one of those people who really think that human need always conquers fear and superstition. So, I think that from the very first time that a bunch of people watched a Dynasty Zero King lowered into his burial shaft, they were planning some of them how to get down there and steal what had been buried despite the fact that this had been a living god through his time of being on the throne. They knew very well that these, amazingly, wealthy rulers inhabited a divine office. And I'm sure they didn't mostly understand the theology that we've been talking about here. But they understood that their stomach was rumbling, and their family needed things. And so, I don't think that there was a great deal of hesitancy about breaking into royal tombs. We have evidence for it from the very, very, very beginning.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

It just like, you know, in any religion today, people know it's wrong, but they still do it when they need the money.

**Betsy Bryan:**

Yeah. And is it wrong? I mean, there are, you know, there are a lot of anthropologists who would consider that burial goods is underground storage, and therefore, is simply waiting to be reused.



**Yasmin El Shazly:**

So, what happens to the power of the king towards the end of the New Kingdom, and why?

**Betsy Bryan:**

So, the thing that's fascinating, really about looking at the later part of the New Kingdom is, we see a country which begins to have a variety of problems, not just threats from outside, but a compilation of things and that begin to affect its economy very, very strongly. And by the time you get to the middle of the 20th dynasty, starting to see inflation take over, and the value and cost of grain rations with which people were paid. And as the dynasty wears on, we begin to see more and more strikes by people who are working for the state, whether that's in the Valley of the Kings, or it's in other temple locations. They're not getting paid and so they're not working. But this is all going on at the same time that Egypt is experiencing a crunch that resulted from great movement in the eastern Mediterranean and the mid Mediterranean during the particularly during the 12th century BCE, and peoples moved around, and peoples moved from parts of the Mediterranean into what is now Libya, into what is the Levant and then from there squeezed into Egypt from both directions. Ramesses III for example, had to fight two wars, with the Libyans to the west, and of course, the famous Sea Peoples battle, which came at him from the east. The aftermath of that is really what caused more and more problems, and that is that the eventually there is a true settlement of people from Libya from the west into Egypt's Delta. And they are culturally somewhat different. They have a major impact, and some of them because they do not have jobs are actually forming marauding bands that move around the country terrorizing people. You find that in the big cities such as Thebes, which is actually starting to become a backwater, but it's still a major religious city. The only safe place at the end of the 20th dynasty was the great temple of Medinet Habu, which is Ramesses III's funerary temple, but it had the largest enclosure wall and buildings, actual houses, etc. People moved inside of there, from Thebes itself to be protected from these marauding bands. And then you began to have wars that took place between the high priests of Amun, the people who were the rulers and Kush on behalf of the of Egypt in Nubia, the king son of Kush, and

at this point, the king is almost without power. And yet there is a determination which is fascinating to see that the line of Kings from Ramesses III onward is all one family down to Ramesses the 11th. And they're quite, they're on the throne for very short periods of time. And yet they really do follow very much a single family as if trying to keep a king on the throne recognizable to the country was a form of stability in itself. And when it collapsed, which it did, during the reign of Ramesses the 11th, then you have someone who actually declares himself a new form of rule over Egypt. And it's almost impossible to prevent, because, despite this fiction of a ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt, Egypt has fractured so badly. And there is now a powerful priesthood in the south in Thebes at the Temple of Amun. And they have family relationships up in the Delta. But there's really nothing holding between those two. And so any kind of pressure on it caused difficulties. So, all of these things came to bear at the same time, and with the poor economy and all of this internal warfare beginning this rule, this dynasty of Ramesside kings simply could not survive. And in fact, the 21st dynasty was actually pretty stable when once it got established, but it did herald a coming period, have far less continuity.

**Yasmine El Shazly:**

Well, unfortunately, we have come to the end of our discussion today. And it was really fascinating. Thank you so much, Professor Bryan, we really enjoyed, I really I personally really enjoyed the discussion today.

**Betsy Bryan:**

Well, thank you so much. I thoroughly enjoyed it too. And I hope that it's wonderful to see this podcast series going on and I know that people will look forward to more.

**Yasmin El Shazly:**

Thank you.

**Betsy Bryan:**

Thanks very much.