

Tausret; Forgotten Queen and Pharaoh of Egypt

Wilkinson R.H. (Ed): 2012

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Review by Charlotte Booth MA

This was a relatively quick read comprising five articles written by various scholars on different aspects of the life of Tausret, wife of Sety II. As the information available about her is scarce or inconclusive there were some contradicting ideas presented throughout the volume. For example Callender (chapter 2) believes Tausret was possibly younger than Sety II when he died, in her twenties or younger, whereas Roehrig (chapter 3) believes she may have been ten to fifteen years older than Sety II indicating the evidence is not compelling either way.

The book contains a large note section, a bibliography and a short index. There are eight colour plates and a number of line drawings rather bizarrely of statues which would be better presented by photographs. For what is an academically written trade-book the text-boxes were a little intrusive, as they are better suited for a coffee-table book rather than one of straight narrative.

The 'Introduction' provided by Wilkinson gave background information on the ideology of kingship and therefore why female pharaohs were against the norm. The historical importance of Tausret is explained although evidence regarding her reign is scarce. The first chapter by Tyldesley provides a chronology of powerful queens and female pharaohs and the difference between the two. As expected the lives of Hatshepsut and Tiye are described in more detail than the others. Tausret is placed within her historical context although no information is provided about her life until Callender's chapter. '*The Life and Reign of Tausret*' provides a detailed political background leading to Tausret's reign at the death of Siptah, her co-ruler. Her reign is described in the context of her five-fold titulary, surviving monuments and statues with an analysis of the political situation leading to the end of her reign which Callender suggests was an Asiatic conspiracy resulting in Tausret's death in battle.

Chapter 3 by Roehrig is a further description of the monuments of Tausret, including her tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV14), funerary temple, sarcophagus in KV13, some inscriptions from the temple of Amada, two fragmentary statues, inscriptions from Jordon and the Lebanon showing the giving of diplomatic gifts and jewellery found in KV56 which may have been a clean-up after a robbery. The information provided by these monuments is enough to indicate she truly was a king rather than a powerful queen. As king she instigated building works and maintained foreign relations but did not embrace the kingship role choosing to keep a queenly rather than kingly sarcophagus. The final two chapters, Altenmüller's and Wilkinson's focus on the Valley tomb and the funerary temple on the west bank at Thebes. There are detailed discussions on the architecture and decoration of both including a break-down of the different building stages of the Valley tomb in an attempt to unravel the unusual layout. The discussion on the funerary temple emphasises the importance of returning to sites 'excavated' in the past as the site had been dismissed by Petrie as containing little of value. It appears Petrie may not even have been on site for the excavation relying on the reports of his

workmen. The temple is far more extensive than Petrie would have us believe and a foundation block indicates it was started in year 8 of her reign, extending the length of her reign substantially.

The 'Afterward' written by Wilkinson and Roehrig is a final summary of the gaps in the story of Tausret, for instance, the end of her reign, her missing mummy and a lack of texts from the period. Despite these gaps the authors emphasise that only a few years ago Tausret was a semi-mythical figure in romance novels known as Tahoser, whereas following the excavation of the temple and tomb we are able to identify much more about this interesting woman.

If you are expecting a full biography of the queen then this book will disappoint but if you are interested in a 'work in progress' and a reflection of the Egyptological process in piecing together the details about an important figure then this book is useful and a must-read. However the price is expensive for the size and quality of the book, and I am not sure it would be worth spending the full RRP. However from reading this book my knowledge of Tausret has expanded and I wait in anticipation for any further evidence which will add to her story.