Colossal Sphinx of Hatshepsut (1479-58 B.C.), granite and paint.

By JANET KUTNER
Art Critic

FORT WORTH — She's not as famous as Cleopatra, but Hatshepsut's rise to power in ancient Egypt has the makings of a movie. Add the fact that her name was effectively erased from history after a prosperous reign of 20 years, and this compelling saga takes on the aura of mystery.

The timing couldn't be better. The actual mummy of the world's first great female ruler was found during preparations for "Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh," a blockbuster show that opens today at the Kimbell Art Museum.

Hatshepsut ascended the throne about 1473 B.C., in a manner that would hardly be approved of nowadays. As the eldest daughter of King Thutmose I, she married her younger half-brother, Thutmose II, serving first as queen and then, following his death, as regent to her young nephew and stepson Thutmose III.

Several years into her reign, Hatshepsut discarded the title of queen for king, or pharaoh, assuming principal responsibilities for running the country. Thutmose III, who was well into his 20s when she died, appears to have accepted her authority. His rule lasted 33 years, but he waited nearly two decades before ordering the destruction of Hatshepsut's monuments, suggesting it was less an act of vengeance than a matter of political expediency.

Although no one knows whether Hatshepsut died a natural death or was...

Plan your life
"Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh" goes on view today at the Kimbell Art Museum, 3333 Camp Bowie Blvd, in Fort Worth. $12, with discounts for seniors, students and children. 817-332-8451; www.kimbellart.org.

ART REVIEW: Exhibition at Kimbell sheds light on the first great female ruler in history

Small Bowl with Lotuses and Figs (1479-58 B.C.), Egyptian faience, or earthenware

Egyptian Museum, Leipziger University
Hatshepsut reigns again at Kimbell

Detail of Hatshepsut as Female King (early 18th Dynasty), granite

Kimbell Art Museum

Headrest (late 17th Dynasty), acacia wood inlaid with ivory and East African ebony

Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

Relief Depicting Running Soldiers (early 18th Dynasty), painted limestone

Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, State Museum of Berlin

Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh" goes on view today and continues through Dec. 31 at the Kimbell Art Museum, 3333 Camp Bowie Blvd. in Fort Worth. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays, noon to 8 p.m. Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. $12 for adults, $10 for seniors and students, $8 for children 6 to 11. Half-price on Tuesdays and free to children younger than 6 and members. 817-332-8453, metro 817-654-1034, www.kimbellart.org.

daughters of rulers from Near Eastern nations such as the Hittites and kingdoms of Syria-Palestine was one way for Egyptian kings to cement ties with foreign countries, thus ensuring peace. Egypt's reach at this time was extensive, evident in vessels done in the Aegian and Cypriot styles, and in a sleek acacia wood headrest inlaid with ivory and East African ebony.

"This was the most international period of the ancient Mediterranean world until more than a thousand years later when you get the Greek and Roman traditions," Dr. Potts says. "International trade, diplomacy and military operations went far beyond the usual limits."

Monuments aside, the show is rich in smaller treasures. Other highlights include bright turquoise bowls in faience, the glazed earthenware at which the ancient Egyptians excelled, and luxury items such as a pair of gold sandals that appear totally useless.

The exhibition draws to a close with an imposing quartzite sarcophagus made for Hatshepsut, which she had reconfigured to hold the body of her father when she decided to move it from its original resting place so they could be buried together. Places where her name was etched out and that of her father's incised can be seen on the exterior. Inside crude sections have been chipped away from either end to make room for his taller figure.

E-mail jkutner@dallasnews.com

which the inscription representing her name was replaced with that of Thutmose II, reassigning the accompanying image to his husband.

Evidence points to Hatshepsut as a pious and traditional ruler, one who restored temples, built shrines for the gods and fostered religious festivals such as that depicted on a painted limestone relief of running soldiers carrying tree branches. But she, too, manipulated history.

Signaling divine power, she added the title "Hatshepsut as God's Wife," the inscription found on a jar for kohl, the black eyeliner ancient Egyptian women used to achieve a feline appearance. Eager to give a higher sense of her lineage, she leaped over the name of her father and claimed to be the descendant of Ahmose, her grandmother and founder of the New Kingdom.

The character who makes the strongest impression, other than Hatshepsut herself, is Senenmut, the high official who controlled the burgeoning economic territory of Karnak. A particularly beautiful statue of him kneeling is part of the Kimbell's own collection. But he also appears cradling Hatshepsut's young daughter Neferu, giving rise to speculation that he became the queen's significant other following the death of her husband and may have fathered the child.

Other items have political significance, such as royal gifts belonging to three foreign wives of Thutmose III. A canopic jar, or vessel used to store internal organs removed during mummification, has the head of an Egyptian-looking woman as the lid, but the body is inscribed with Manuwa, a Semitic name. Marriage to the...