

# World Leaders: Ramses the Great

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TOP: A statue of Ramses the Great. SECOND: View of the temple of Ramses II. This massive rock temple is at Abu Simbel, a village in Nubia, southern Egypt, near the border with Sudan. The four statues are 65 feet tall each and show Pharaoh Ramses II. The complex is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Nubian Monuments." Public domain

**Synopsis:** Ramses II ruled as pharaoh, or king, of ancient Egypt more than 3,000 years ago, from 1279 to 1213 B.C. He had the second-longest reign of any pharaoh in Egyptian history. Ramses was a highly popular ruler and under him, Egypt enjoyed great prosperity. In modern times, historians dubbed him "Ramses the Great," in part because of his abilities as a military leader. Ramses led military campaigns against the Hittites of Anatolia (now in Turkey), the Nubians and the Libyans. He is also known for building many temples and colossal statues of himself and his reign all across Egypt and Nubia.

## Background And Early Years Of Reign

Ramses' father was Seti I, who was king of Egypt from 1290 to 1279 B.C. Egyptian power in Asia had declined under earlier pharaohs. Seti I, and later Ramses, waged war to win back lands in Asia that Egypt had lost, including in Palestine and Syria.

During his reign, Seti gave the Crown Prince Ramses, who was the future Ramses II, a kingly household. The young prince also accompanied his father on his campaigns so he would have the experience of kingship and of war. Ramses was designated as the next king at an unusually young age and he was a captain of the army at 10 years old.

## **Military Campaigns**

Ramses' reputation as a great king rested largely on his fame as a soldier. In the fourth year of his reign, he led an army north to recover the lost provinces his father had been unable to conquer permanently.

The first expedition was to Syria, which would allow his armies to advance farther. He halted at Al-Kalb River near Beirut, Lebanon. There, he had an inscription carved into a rock wall to record the events of the campaign. Today, nothing remains of it except his name and the date as the rest has weathered away.

The next year the main expedition set out with an objective to capture the Hittite stronghold at the city of Kadesh in what is now Syria. Following the coastal road through Palestine and Lebanon, the army halted when it reached the south of the land of Amor.

Crossing the river from east to west at the ford of Shabtuna about 8 miles from Kadesh, the army passed through the woods to emerge on the plain in front of the city. Two captured Hittite spies gave Ramses the false information that the main Hittite army was at Aleppo, some distance to the north, so it seemed as if Ramses only had to face the army at Kadesh.

It was not until the army had begun to arrive at the camping site before Kadesh that Ramses learned that the main Hittite army was in fact concealed behind the city. The Hittites struck with a force of 2,500 chariots, greatly outnumbering the Egyptians. The leading Egyptian troops were taken entirely by surprise, so they fled, leaving Ramses and a small corps entirely surrounded and fighting desperately.

Fortunately for Ramses' troops, a task force of troops from Simyra arrived and saved them, and in the end, a truce was agreed to and the Egyptians returned home.

## **An Eventual Treaty**

The Battle of Kadesh is one of the very few from these times with real details, as pictures and accounts of the fight were carved on temple walls in Egypt and Nubia, and a poem on paper survived.

In the eighth or ninth year of his reign, he took a number of towns in Galilee and Amor, and the next year he was again on Al-Kalb River. It might have been in the 10th year that he broke through the Hittite defenses when Ramses conquered the Syrian cities of Katna and Tunip, where, in a surprise attack by the Hittites, he went into battle without his armor,

holding them long enough for a statue of himself to be erected in Tunip. In a further advance, he invaded Kode, perhaps the region between Alexandretta and Carchemish in what is now Turkey.

Nevertheless, like his father before him, Ramses found that he could not permanently hold territory so far from his base in Egypt against continual Hittite pressure. After 16 years of on-and-off fighting, the two sides signed a peace treaty in 1258 B.C. and the two nations established friendly ties. In 1245 B.C., Ramses contracted a marriage with the eldest daughter of the Hittite king, and it is thought that later he also married a second Hittite princess.

### **Egypt's Imperial Power Peaked**

One measure of Egypt's prosperity is the number of temples the kings could build. On that basis, the reign of Ramses II is the most notable in Egyptian history. Ramses embarked on the greatest building project since the pyramids had been built more than 1,500 years before. Temples built under his reign include his father's funerary temple along the Nile at Luxor and one he built for himself, which is now known as the Ramesseum. Nine kings of the 20th dynasty (1190 to 1075 B.C.) called themselves by his name to honor him.

Of Ramses' personal life nearly nothing is known. His first and perhaps favorite queen was Nefertari. A temple carved out of solid rock at Abu Simbel in Nubia was dedicated to her. She seems to have died early in his reign, and her tomb in the Valley of the Queens at Thebes is well-known. Other queens bore the king four sons, including Ramses' eventual successor. Ramses took pride in his great family of more than 100 children. His mummy is preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

The reign of Ramses II marks the last peak of Egypt's imperial power. Ramses II must have been a good soldier, a competent administrator and a popular king. He put his name and the record of his feats on the field of battle everywhere in Egypt and Nubia. After Ramses' rule ended, Egypt fell into steady decline.

## Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article BEST summarizes its central ideas?
- (A) Ramses was designated as the next king at an unusually young age and he was a captain of the army at 10 years old.
  - (B) The Battle of Kadesh is one of the very few from these times with real details, as pictures and accounts of the fight were carved on temple walls in Egypt and Nubia, and a poem on paper survived.
  - (C) Nevertheless, like his father before him, Ramses found that he could not permanently hold territory so far from his base in Egypt against continual Hittite pressure.
  - (D) Ramses II must have been a good soldier, a competent administrator and a popular king.

- 2 Read the sentence from the section "Egypt's Imperial Power Peaked."

*His first and perhaps favorite queen was Nefertari.*

Does this sentence support a CENTRAL idea of the article? Why or why not?

- (A) Yes, because it provides more information about Ramses' personal life.
  - (B) No, because the article does not focus on Ramses' personal life.
  - (C) Yes, because it explains why Ramses dedicated a temple to her.
  - (D) No, because Ramses could not have married Nefertari if he married a Hittite princess.
- 3 Read the last two paragraphs of the article.
- Why does the author choose to conclude the article with these paragraphs?
- (A) to emphasize how Ramses' reign influenced Egypt
  - (B) to let readers know where they can learn more about Ramses
  - (C) to advertise the Egyptian Museum in Cairo as a tourist attraction
  - (D) to criticize the Egyptian rulers who followed Ramses

4 Read the paragraphs from the article.

Which paragraph represents a major shift or transition in the article's development?

- (A) The first expedition was to Syria, which would allow his armies to advance farther. He halted at Al-Kalb River near Beirut, Lebanon. There, he had an inscription carved into a rock wall to record the events of the campaign. Today, nothing remains of it except his name and the date as the rest has weathered away.
- (B) It was not until the army had begun to arrive at the camping site before Kadesh that Ramses learned that the main Hittite army was in fact concealed behind the city. The Hittites struck with a force of 2,500 chariots, greatly outnumbering the Egyptians. The leading Egyptian troops were taken entirely by surprise, so they fled, leaving Ramses and a small corps entirely surrounded and fighting desperately.
- (C) In the eighth or ninth year of his reign, he took a number of towns in Galilee and Amor, and the next year he was again on Al-Kalb River. It might have been in the 10th year that he broke through the Hittite defenses when Ramses conquered the Syrian cities of Katna and Tunip, where, in a surprise attack by the Hittites, he went into battle without his armor, holding them long enough for a statue of himself to be erected in Tunip. In a further advance, he invaded Kode, perhaps the region between Alexandretta and Carchemish in what is now Turkey.
- (D) One measure of Egypt's prosperity is the number of temples the kings could build. On that basis, the reign of Ramses II is the most notable in Egyptian history. Ramses embarked on the greatest building project since the pyramids had been built more than 1,500 years before. Temples built under his reign include his father's funerary temple along the Nile at Luxor and one he built for himself, which is now known as the Ramesseum. Nine kings of the 20th dynasty (1190 to 1075 B.C.) called themselves by his name to honor him.