



RAMESSES II,

Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh

Peter J. Brand

Ψ LOCKWOOD PRESS

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FRONTISPIECE: Ramesses II. Turin, Museo Egizio 1380. Courtesy Museo Egizio, Turin.

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Contents

Preface	ix
List of Figures	xiii
Abbreviations	xxv
Chronology	xxviii
Ancient Dates and Chronology	xxxix
Map of Egypt and Nubia	xxxiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Rise of the Ramessides: The Reigns of Ramesses I and Sety I	19
Chapter 3: Crown Prince Ramesses and His Career under Sety I	47
Chapter 4: The Early Reign of Ramesses II	71
Chapter 5: The Battle of Kadesh	115
Chapter 6: Great of Victories: Ramesses II's Later Wars	181
Chapter 7: All the King's Wives: Ramesses II's Royal Women	203
Chapter 8: The Royal Children and their Ideological Role	249
Chapter 9: The Path to Peace: International Diplomacy and the End of the Egyptian-Hittite Conflict	285
Chapter 10: The Silver Treaty: The Egyptian-Hittite Peace Accords	301
Chapter 11: Peace and Brotherhood: Diplomatic Relations between the Egyptian and Hittite Courts	319
Chapter 12: A Time of Wonders: The Earliest Royal Jubilees of Ramesses II and the First Hittite Marriage Alliance	347
Chapter 13: Ramesses the Great God	381
Chapter 14: Rich in Years: Monumental Construction and Hittite Relations during the Jubilee Period	407
Chapter 15: Twilight of the Great God: Ramesses II's Last Years and His Descendants	435
Chapter 16: Afterlife: The Legacy of Ramesses II	465
Glossary	497
Bibliography	509
Index	551

PREFACE

Ramesses II was Egypt's most magnificent, iconic pharaoh. His reign, monumental in every way, served as a model for future Egyptian rulers. Indeed, the very name "Ramesses" would become synonymous with "Pharaoh," just as "Caesar" meant "Emperor" in Rome. Forty years after Kenneth Kitchen's seminal *Pharaoh Triumphant*, we have a great deal of new information about the reign of Ramesses II. His revealing, sometimes shocking correspondence with the formidable Hittite queen Puduhepa is just one example. New books appear frequently about Tutankhamun, Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and other Egyptian royalty. The time is ripe for a fresh look at Egypt's ultimate pharaoh.

This book provides both general readers and scholars with a readable, up-to-date survey of Ramesses II. It offers a reassessment of the Nineteenth Dynasty and Egypt's relations with the Hittite Empire, drawing on the latest scholarship and archaeological data. While the focus is on Ramesses himself, we will also meet his royal wives and children, his high officials, and contemporaries. Several foreign rulers, especially the Hittite kings Urhi-Teshub and Hattusili III, and the latter's consort Puduhepa, also share the stage. For readers unfamiliar with all the names of ancient kings, gods, places, and things, there is a handy glossary at the back of this book.

Here we will also "dig deeper" into Egyptian archeology, looking at history's actual sources, often eroded and fragmentary, and doing some detective work to see what they have to tell us. We will examine key royal monuments—temples, tombs, statuary, and stelae. The most iconic and unique are the temples of Abu Simbel, salvaged in the world's greatest archeological rescue operation. The larger temple, with its bold architectural vision, towering colossi, and elaborate relief decoration, is the perfect symbol of Ramesses II. It neatly encapsulates the key events and themes of his remarkable reign.

A Word on Egyptian Dates

The Egyptian calendar consisted of twelve months, each thirty days long, to which they added five "extra days," said to be the birthdays of the gods, to make 365. The twelve months were grouped into three seasons: "Inundation Season," called *Akhet* in Egyptian; the "Season of Emergence," or *Proyet*; and "Harvest Season," called *Shomu*. ("Inundation" referred to the annual flooding of the Nile. "Emergence" referred to the sprouting of new crops.)

Years were numbered by a pharaoh's "regnal year." The first year of Ramesses's reign was "regnal year 1," his last "regnal year 67." A new pharaoh's reign began the day after the death of the previous pharaoh. Historical events are cited by the year of the pharaoh at that time. Due to gaps in the historical record, matching Egyptian

regnal years with our Western dating system must be approximate at best. For more on ancient dates and chronology, see p. xxxiii.






 <i>Akhet (3ht)</i>				 <i>Proyet (prt)</i>				 <i>Shomu (šmw)</i>				5 extra days
I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	
30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	
 Civil New Year's Day I <i>Akhet</i> 1				 Accession of Ramesses II III <i>Shomu</i> 27								

Diagram of the ancient Egyptian calendar showing the civil New Year's day and Ramesses II's accession day. Each month has 30 days, with five "extra days" added at the end of the civil calendar representing the birthdays of the gods.

In this book I have attempted to walk the line between offering a lively, accessible account of Ramesses II and providing scholars with an up-to-date assessment. Egyptologists and ancient historians will find in my notes the scholarly citations and commentary they require. Since the special characters Egyptologists use to transcribe the ancient language would baffle many readers, I have anglicized key Egyptian words and phrases in the main text, but my notes have the Egyptian and Akkadian transliterations familiar to experts.

Ancient texts are usually damaged in some way; seldom are they perfectly intact. Reconstructing them can be as much an art as a science. Where a text is damaged, it is customary to insert brackets []. Words or parts of words within these brackets are damaged or destroyed in the original, but may be restored with various levels of confidence. For passages that cannot be restored the reader will see an ellipsis [...]. In my translations, words in parentheses () are not found in the ancient text, but are added to assist the reader in comprehending the meaning or context of the passage. Most of the translations of ancient Egyptian texts in this book are my own, especially those from the Ramesside period. For cuneiform texts in the Akkadian and Hittite languages, including the diplomatic letters Ramesses II exchanged with the Hittite court, I have relied on published translations by cuneiform specialists.

As a mentor once told me, good history writing should be fine literature. While striving to present a balanced and thoughtful analysis of Ramesses II, I do take the liberty of recreating three scenes from a participant's point of view, in the introduction and chapters five and nine. Hopefully this will enliven the book for most readers without trying the patience of my colleagues in Egyptology.

Ancient history is a messy, uncertain enterprise. We cannot claim to be revealing the definitive, objective truth about the past. Rather, as my graduate mentor Bill Murnane told me, we are having an ongoing conversation, offering up a "best guess"

about what may have been and how it might have occurred. We must accept that most of the distant past is lost to us, and be thankful for what we have.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to friends and colleagues who have aided me in this project over the past several years. If I omit anyone due to lapse of memory, I am sorry. I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Memphis, Joshua Roberson, Chrystal Goudsouzian, and Bradford Pendley, as well as current and former graduate students including Erika Feleg, Dennys O'Connor, Cristina Rose, Mark Janzen, Katie Fincher, Rebekah Vogel, Amr Shahat, Roy Hopper, Kevin Johnson, and David Larson.

A warm thank you goes to Ray Johnson and Brett McClain at Chicago House. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Jean Revez, codirector of the Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project, for his invaluable collaboration, unparalleled collegiality, and an abiding friendship for many years. My research and fieldwork at Karnak have been greatly facilitated by the former and current directors of the Franco-Egyptian Center at Karnak, François Larché, Emmanuel Laroze, Christophe Thiers, and Luc Gabolde, to all of whom I express my thanks. Thanks go to colleagues in North America, the UK, and Europe including Ron Leprohon, Benoît Lurson, James Hoffmeier, Benedict Davies, Heather McCarthy, Jana Mynářová, Dana Bělohoubková, Katja Goebis, Ogden Golet, Sameh Iskander, Hourig Sourouzian, Aidan Dodson, and in the southern hemisphere to Boyo Ockinga in Sydney and Jennifer Hellum in Auckland. I wish to express my sincere thanks to my Egyptian colleagues including the Minister of State for Antiquities Dr. Khaled El-Anany and the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Antiquities Dr. Mostafa Waziri. Thanks go also to Mohammed Rafat Abbas, Adel Kelany, Hazem Shared, and Mariam Ayad. For their insights into matters Hittite, I am grateful to Gary Beckman and Trevor Bryce.

A special callout goes to Anthony Spalinger in Auckland. I have benefited immensely from his friendship and consultation. His research has had a profound influence on my own thinking since I first encountered his writings in my undergraduate days in the mid-1980s. As my notes will attest, his seminal work on all aspects of Ramesside history is indispensable. To him I owe countless references and crucial observations through an ongoing correspondence and face to face visits in Auckland, Memphis, and elsewhere for the past two decades.

Writing and editing this book has profited immeasurably from friends and colleagues who are not Egyptologists, but who are well versed in the craft of good historical writing and who have generously offered their editorial advice and assistance. Thanks go to Jan Sherman, Aram Goudsouzian, Roger Long, Dan Veach, and most especially to Carol Conaway, for her tireless efforts in helping me refine multiple chapter drafts. For his love and emotional support, I thank my spouse Glenn Forsythe. Finally, I am most grateful to my editor Billie Jean Collins for her editorial expertise and patience for supporting me in this project for several years. As Tolkien observed, the tale grew in the telling, and I am profoundly grateful that she has helped me reach the end of this quest.

A final expression of profound gratitude goes to two men whose prodigious and meticulous scholarship and personal kindness and generosity have inspired me deeply and served as paragons of the historian's craft to which I aspire. The late Bill Murnane (1945-2000) was my mentor and dear friend. He tutored me in the craft of field epigraphy at Karnak Temple in the 1990s. As a mentor, he trained me in the methods of rigorous historical analysis, which his own work exemplified. Professor Kenneth A. Kitchen through his lifetime of prolific and exacting scholarship made it possible for all Egyptologists to delve into the history and culture of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties through his *Ramesside Inscriptions* series, a monumental sequence of volumes of hand copies, translations, and analysis of all the hieroglyphic inscriptions of this era. His interpretive work overflows in countless books and articles he penned over the course of more than sixty years. Kitchen's engaging prose shines through in his captivating biography of Ramesses II, *Pharaoh Triumphant*. I stand on the shoulders of these two colossi. To them I dedicated this book.

Peter J. Brand
Memphis, Tennessee
August 2022

List of Figures

Ramesses II. Turin, Museo Egizio 1380. Courtesy Museo Egizio, Turin.	frontispiece
Diagram of the ancient Egyptian calendar showing the civil New Year's Day and Ramesses II's accession day.	x
Map of Egypt and Nubia.	xxxiii
 Chapter One	
1.1. Cartouches of Ramesses II containing his royal names and titles. From Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand.	3
1.2. Statue of Thutmose III. Luxor Museum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	4
1.3. Statue of Amenhotep III. Luxor Museum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	4
1.4. Colossal bust of Akhenaten. Luxor Museum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	5
1.5. The ancient Near East in the Late Bronze Age. Map by Tina Ross.	7
1.6. Syria in the Ramesside period (ca. 1300–1100 BCE).	8
1.7. Relief of Tutankhamun from the Colonnade Hall of Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand.	9
1.8. Statue of Horemheb as Vizier and Great General of the Army under Tutankhamun and Ay. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.	11
 Chapter Two	
2.1. Horemheb offering wine to Amun-Re in a scene from the gate of the Tenth Pylon at Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	20
2.2. Statue of the Vizier Pramesseu. Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 44861. Alamy.	21
2.3. Ramesses II's "Four Hundred Year Stela." Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 6039. Photograph courtesy of Erika Feleg.	22
2.4. Ramesses I offering ointment to Seth. Stela from ancient Tcharu (Hebua). Cairo JdE 100012. Photograph by Peter Brand.	23
2.5. Ramesses I. Relief from the Second Pylon at Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	23
2.6. Sety I anointing Ramesses I in the guise of Osiris. Chapel of Ramesses I in Sety I's Gurnah Temple in Western Thebes. Photograph by Peter Brand.	25
2.7. Ramesses I before Anubis from his tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 16). Alamy.	27
2.8. Restored image of Amun-Re on one of Hatshepsut's obelisks at Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	29
2.9. Eighteenth Dynasty images of the gods defaced by Akhenaten. North face of the Eighth Pylon, Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	30
2.10. Map of North Sinai and the Levant in the early Nineteenth Dynasty (1305–1212 BCE). Map by Tina Ross.	31
2.11. Schematic diagram of Sety I's Karnak war monument. North exterior wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak. Drawing by Peter Brand.	32–33
2.12. Sety I fighting Libyans. Karnak war monument. Photograph by Peter Brand.	33
2.13. Sety I assaulting Kadesh. Karnak war monument. Photograph by Peter Brand.	34
2.14. Battered victory stela of Sety I found in the ruins of Kadesh (Tell Nebi Mend). Drawing by Peter Brand.	34

2.15.	Sety I offering incense to the Bark of Amun-Re. Abydos temple of Sety I. Photograph courtesy of Paul Smit.	35
2.16.	Aerial view of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. Courtesy of the Franco-Egyptian Center, Karnak.	36
2.17.	Central colonnade and clerestory windows in the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. Alamy.	36
2.18.	Sety I kneeling to receive symbols of jubilees and many years from the sun god Re-Horakhty (right) and the goddess Weret-Hekau (left). North wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	38
2.19.	Sety I offering a symbol of Maat to Amun-Re and Isis. Unrolled image from column 97 of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. Courtesy of Owen Murray/Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project.	39
2.20.	The <i>Iuwnmutef</i> -Priest (center) and Isis (left) offering to the deified Sety I in the guise of Osiris (right). Abydos temple of Sety I. Photograph courtesy Paul Smit.	40

Chapter Three

3.1.	Quban stela of Ramesses II from his fourth regnal year. Grenoble Archaeological Museum MG 1937-1969-3565. Courtesy Grenoble Archaeological Museum.	48
3.2.	Enhanced photograph of the larger Year Nine Stela of Sety I from Aswan recording the opening of granite quarries to produce colossal statues and obelisks. Image by Peter Brand.	51
3.3.	Enhanced image of a rock inscription from the small island of Hassawanarti depicting Sety I offering to Khnum. Image by Peter Brand, after Seidlmayer 1999, 141.	52
3.4.	Figure of Prince Ramesses superimposed over the commander of archers, named Mehy, from Sety I's Karnak war monument. Photograph by Peter Brand.	53
3.5.	Sety I and Prince Ramesses before the King List in Sety's Abydos temple. Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	57
3.6.	Prince Ramesses wearing side-lock of youth from the Gallery of the Kings in Sety I's Abydos Temple. Drawing by Peter Brand.	58
3.7.	Ramesses as Crown Prince in the Gallery of the Kings in Sety I's Abydos temple. Nineteenth Century drawing by A. Mariette. Inset photograph by Peter Brand.	58
3.8.	Ramesses II and Prince Amunhirkhopeshef offering ducks. From the Corridor of the Bull in Sety I's Abydos temple. Courtesy of the Griffith Institute.	59
3.9.	Ramesses II and Prince Amunhirkhopeshef lassoing a bull from the Corridor of the Bull in Sety I's Abydos temple. Alamy.	60
3.10.	Stela of Amenwahsu and Tia adoring Sety I and Crown Prince Ramesses. Chicago, Oriental Institute Museum 10507. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.	61
3.11.	Ramesses II offering incense and libation to the deified Sety I on the south wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	62
3.12.	Mummy of Sety I. Egyptian Museum, Cairo. © akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss.	63

FIGURES

Chapter Four

4.1.	Idealized scene of Ramesses II's "coronation" by the gods. Photograph by Peter Brand.	72
4.2.	Map of Thebes (modern Luxor) showing the locations of the major New Kingdom monuments.	73
4.3.	View of the Valley of the Kings (KV). Alamy.	74
4.4.	Ramesses II offering incense to Amun-Re's sacred bark carried by priests wearing falcon and jackal masks. Courtesy Franco-Egyptian Center of Karnak.	75
4.5.	The great river barge of Amun-Re called <i>Amun-Userhet</i> , meaning "Amun is Mighty of Prow." Drawing by Peter Brand.	76
4.6.	The five-fold titulary of Ramesses II. Diagram by Erika Feleg.	77
4.7.	Ramesses II offers to Amun-Re, Mut, Khonsu, and his deified grandfather Ramesses I. Nineteenth century drawing by Champollion. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	83
4.8.	Idealized scene of Ramesses II receiving crowns and regalia from Amun-Re, Khonsu, and Mut in the presence of the deified Sety I. Photograph by Peter Brand.	83
4.9.	The so-called Abydos helicopter inscription. Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo. Hieroglyphic diagram by Peter Brand.	84
4.10.	Variant forms and writings of Ramesses II's prenomen cartouche. Diagram by Erika Feleg.	86
4.11.	Variant writings of the three elements of Ramesses II's nomen cartouche. Diagram by Erika Feleg.	86
4.12.	Variant writings of Ramesses II's cartouches. Photograph by Peter Brand.	87
4.13.	Variant forms and writings of Ramesses II's nomen cartouche. Diagram by Erika Feleg.	88
4.14.	Rock inscription dating to regnal year one from Gebel Silsila East showing the transportation of sandstone from the quarries by ships. Drawing by Peter Brand after Martinez 2009, 163.	91
4.15.	Left: Scene from the entrance of Ramesses II's tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 7). Drawing by Peter Brand after Leblanc 2009b, 202. Right: facsimile drawings of unusual writings of Ramesses's cartouches.	91
4.16.	View of Ramesses II's pylon gateway with colossal statues and obelisks at Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand.	92
4.17.	Enhanced image of a relief from Luxor Temple depicting Ramesses II's pylon gateway with colossal statues and obelisks. Photograph by Peter Brand.	93
4.18.	Black granodiorite colossus of Ramesses II from the Luxor Temple forecourt named "Ramesses, the Re of Rulers." Photograph by Peter Brand.	94
4.19.	Bicolor black granodiorite statue of Ramesses II dating to his first regnal year. Luxor Museum. Head: formerly Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 824. Photograph by Peter Brand.	94
4.20.	Ancient method for erecting an obelisk using a mud-brick ramp and sand funnel. After Golvin and Goyon, 1987, 132–33.	96
4.21.	Stela of Ramesses from Manshiyet es-Sadr describing quarry work in the siliceous sandstone quarries at "the Red Mountain" (Gebel Ahmar) near Cairo. Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 34503. © akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss.	98

4.22.	Lepsius's drawing of the year four stela of Ramesses II at the "Dog River" (Nahr el-Kelb) north of Beirut in Lebanon. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	103
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Chapter Five

5.1.	The ancient mound at Tell Nebi Mend (ancient Kadesh) in the Homs region of Syria. Courtesy Sally Pei.	116
5.2.	Kadesh citadel in a relief from the first court of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	116
5.3.	Ramesses defeats the Hittites single-handedly in his chariot. Prisse d'Avennes's facsimile of a scene from the first court of the Ramesseum showing the color still preserved in the early nineteenth century. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	117
5.4.	Text of the Bulletin above part of the camp scene from Champollion's facsimile of the Kadesh reliefs in the great temple of Abu Simbel, showing the original colors as they appeared in the early nineteenth century. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	119
5.5.	The Battle of Kadesh camp scene on the pylon of Luxor Temple, west tower. Drawing after Rosellini. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	121
5.6.	Ramesses II fighting the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh on the pylon of Luxor Temple, east tower. Drawing after Champollion. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	121
5.7.	Egyptian infantrymen with their shields slung over their shoulders. Part of a scene from the pylon of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	123
5.8.	Enemies entangled in the royal chariot wheel. Detail of a scene depicting the Battle of Dapur from the first hypostyle hall of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	123
5.9.	Egyptian chariots with two-man crews. Relief from the temple of Ramesses II at Abydos. Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	124
5.10.	Hittite and allied chariots with three-man crews. From Ramesses II's Abydos temple. Photograph courtesy of Ogden Goelet.	124
5.11.	Modern replica of a New Kingdom Egyptian war chariot, based on examples from Tutankhamun's tomb. Courtesy Romer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim.	125
5.12.	Map showing the route Ramesses II and his four divisions took to reach Kadesh from northern Canaan and through the Beqaa Valley. Map by Tina Ross after Obsomer 2016, 159, fig. 15.	128
5.13.	Map of the environs of Kadesh.	131
5.14.	View of the Orontes River from the mound at Tell Nebi Mend (Kadesh) taken in March. Courtesy www.holylandphotos.org .	131
5.15.	Hatti's Syrian allies. Map by Tina Ross.	133
5.16.	Ramesses II enthroned in the Camp of Amun takes counsel with the vizier and other officials. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	135
5.17.	Lepsius's facsimile of the camp scene on the Ramesseum pylon. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	137
5.18.	Detail the Camp of Amun with oxen and supply carts (right), unharnessed war chariots (center), and patrolling soldiers and a donkey (left). From the pylon of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	138

FIGURES

5.19.	Detail of Lepsius's facsimile of the camp scene from the Ramesseum pylon, including Ramesses II's pet lion. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	138
5.20.	Ramesses II's pet lion from the pylon of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	139
5.21.	Phase 1 of the Battle of Kadesh.	140
5.22.	A group of 18,000 Hittite <i>Teher</i> -warriors from the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	140
5.23.	Phase 2 of the Battle of Kadesh.	142
5.24.	Formation of Egyptian chariotry and infantry from Ramesses II's Abydos temple. Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	144
5.25.	Phase 3 of the Battle of Kadesh.	145
5.26.	Phase 4 of the Battle of Kadesh.	147
5.27.	Orderly ranks of the <i>Na'arin</i> -force (left) engage a chaotic mass of Hittite chariots. Rosellini's facsimile of a relief from Abu Simbel. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	150
5.28.	Hittite dead in Orontes with hieroglyphic labels naming high-ranking enemy casualties. First court of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	151
5.29.	Lepsius's facsimile of Hittite casualties in the Orontes. First court of the Ramesseum. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	152
5.30.	Hittite troops holding the king of Aleppo upside down to empty him of water. First court of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	153
5.31.	An ideological representation of Hittite king (center) surrounded by his <i>Teher</i> -infantry, as he supposedly avoided combat. Lepsius's facsimile of a scene from the Ramesseum pylon, south tower. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	156
5.32.	After the battle, several princes lead Hittite and Syrian captives before their father Ramesses II who reviews the spectacle from his chariot. From Abu Simbel. Drawing after Desroches-Noblecourt et al. 1971.	158
5.33.	Palimpsest relief of an unfinished image of Ramesses II in his chariot. Photograph by Peter Brand.	160

Chapter Six

6.1.	Lepsius's drawing of a scene from the pylon of the Ramesseum with a pictorial list of Canaanite and Syrian towns Ramesses II captured in his eighth regnal year. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	187
6.2.	A prince drives Syrian and Canaanite prisoners from one of the towns captured in year eight. Photograph by Peter Brand.	187
6.3.	Hypothetical reconstruction of the north exterior wall of the Ramesseum. Drawing by Peter Brand.	188
6.4.	Ramesses II assaults Dapur on foot. Scene from the west exterior wall of the Ramesside forecourt at Luxor Temple. Courtesy Erika Feleg.	189
6.5.	Ramesses II assaults Dapur in his chariot. Scene from the first hypostyle hall of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	190
6.6.	Detail of the Battle of Dapur from the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	191
6.7.	Prince Amunhirhopeshef leads Moabite prisoners before Ramesses II in a scene from the east exterior wall of the Ramesside forecourt of Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand.	193

- 6.8. Upper part of a victory stela of Ramesses II from Tyre, Lebanon. Wikimedia Commons. 194

Chapter Seven

- 7.1. Nefertari from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 66). Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo. 204
- 7.2. *Ramses in His Harem* (1886) by Jean Jules Antoine Lecompte Du Noüy. Courtesy Stéphane Mahot. 205
- 7.3. Relief depicting Ramesses II and his mother Tuya. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum Inv. 5091. © akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss. 211
- 7.4. Statue of Tuya originally made for Amenhotep III's wife Tiy. Vatican Museum. Alamy. 212
- 7.5. Left: relief depicting Tuya from the Ramesseum. Right: her names and titles from Abu Simbel. Photograph by Peter Brand. 213
- 7.6. Calcite canopic jar stopper of Tuya from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, now in the Luxor Museum. Photograph by Peter Brand. 215
- 7.7. Glazed knob from a chest inscribed with the name of Ay found in the tomb of Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens. Turin, Museo Egizio S 5162. Courtesy Turin, Museo Egizio. 215
- 7.8. Amunhirhopeshef (left) and Nefertari (right) on the Turin statue of Ramesses II. Turin, Museo Egizio 1380. Courtesy Museo Egizio, Turin. 217
- 7.9. Nefertari playing the sistra in two scenes from the eastern pylon of Luxor Temple. Photographs courtesy of Erika Feleg. 219
- 7.10. Statue of Nefertari attached to a colossus of Ramesses II in the forecourt of Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand. 220
- 7.11. Statue of Nefertari attached to a colossus of Ramesses II in the forecourt of Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand. 221
- 7.12. Nefertari wearing a vulture headdress and enveloping wig offering wine to Hathor from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 66). Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo. 221
- 7.13. Gilt wood *Djed*-pillar amulet inlaid with blue glass from the tomb of Nefertari. Turin Egyptian Museum 5163. Courtesy Turin Egyptian Museum. 222
- 7.14. Bust of a small statue of Isetnofret. Brussels Inv. E 5924. Courtesy Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire. 223
- 7.15. Reinforced photo of Prince Khaemwaset's "family stela" from the shrine of Horemheb at Gebel es-Silsila. Photograph by Peter Brand. 224
- 7.16. Relief from Saqqara depicting the Great Royal Wife Isetnofret. Drawing by Peter Brand. 225
- 7.17. Diagram of the façade of the great temple of Abu Simbel showing the members of the royal family and the names of the four colossal statues of Ramesses II. Drawing by Peter Brand. 227
- 7.18. Bintanath and an anonymous "king's daughter" from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 71). Drawing by Peter Brand. 228
- 7.19. Relief depicting Merytamun as a daughter-wife. Reinforced photograph by Peter Brand. 229
- 7.20. Limestone Colossus of Merytamun as a queen from the temple of Min in Akhmim. Alamy. 231

FIGURES

7.21.	A color facsimile of an image of Nebettawy from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 60) by Prisse d’Avennes. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	232
7.22.	Relief of Henutmire as daughter-wife, from a granite colossus of Ramesses II, now in the Sohag Museum. Courtesy of Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	232
7.23.	Map of the eight grand tombs Ramesses II constructed for his most favored female relatives in the Valley of the Queens. Drawing by Daniel Warne.	233
7.24.	Nefertari offering wine to Isis from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 66). Courtesy Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	235
7.25.	Horus leading Nefertari from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens (QV 66). Courtesy of Manna Nader Gabana Studios Cairo.	235

Chapter Eight

8.1.	Procession of Ramesses II’s sons from the Ramesside Forecourt of Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand.	250
8.2.	Procession of Ramesses II’s daughters from the temple of Sety I at Abydos. Photograph by Peter Brand.	250
8.3.	Typical costume of a Ramesside prince and princess. Drawings by Rosellini. Public domain.	251
8.4.	Lepsius’s drawing of the four eldest sons of Ramesses II with their names and titles. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	252
8.5.	A daughter of Ramesses II. Relief from the temple of Sety I at Abydos. Photograph courtesy of Paul Smit.	253
8.6.	One of two sarcophagi of Prince Ramesses-Nebweben that was originally made for his great grandfather Pramesseu before he became Ramesses I. Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 77203. Photo and enhanced image of texts by Peter Brand.	256
8.7.	Prehirwenemef (right) and an unknown brother (left) escape from the camp of Amun at the Battle of Kadesh. Lepsius’s drawing of a scene from the pylon of the Ramesseum. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	259
8.8.	Rosellini’s color facsimile of Princes Amunhirkhopeshef, Ramesses “Junior,” and Prehirwenemef in their chariots, from the outer hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Public domain.	259
8.9.	Princes Khaemwaset (left) and Monthuhirkhopeshef (right) slay Hittite enemies at the siege of Dapur in a scene from the first hypostyle hall of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	260
8.10.	Two unnamed princes scale a ladder at the siege of Dapur in a scene from the first hypostyle hall of the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	260
8.11.	Procession of royal sons from the Ramesseum. Photograph by Peter Brand.	262
8.12.	Image of Prince “Usermaatre,” an alias of Amunhirkhopeshef, on a schist statue of Ramesses II dating to his first regnal year. Cairo Museum CG 42140. Photograph by Peter Brand.	263
8.13.	Members of the royal family beside the legs of Ramesses II’s colossal statues on the façade of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Photograph by Peter Brand.	265
8.14.	Over life-sized statue of Prince Khaemwaset. British Museum EA 947. Photograph by Peter Brand.	266
8.15.	Prince Khaemwaset’s “Family Stela” from Aswan. Drawing by Peter Brand.	266

- 8.16. A restoration inscription that Prince Khaemwaset left in his father's name on the pyramid of the Fifth Dynasty King Unas at Saqqara. Photograph by Peter Brand. 267
- 8.17. An *ushabt* of Prince Khaemwaset found in the Serapeum in Saqqara. Paris, Louvre Museum N 461A. Photograph by Peter Brand. 269
- 8.18. Plan of KV 5, the tomb of Ramesses II's royal children. Wikimedia Commons. 271
- 8.19. Skeleton of an anonymous son of Ramesses II found in a pit near the entrance of the tomb of the royal children in the Valley of the Kings (KV 5). Alamy. 272

Chapter Nine

- 9.1. The Great Kingdoms of the ancient Near East, ca. 1250 BCE. Map by Tina Ross. 286
- 9.2. The royal seal of Mursilli III, better known as Urhi-Teshup. From Hethitologie Portal Mainz, redrawn by Peter Brand. 287
- 9.3. Relief of Hattusili III from Fraktin, Turkey. Courtesy Tayfun Bilgin www.hittitemonuments.com. 289
- 9.4. "Saving face": Workers reconstruct a colossus of Ramesses II from the great temple of Abu Simbel in the 1960s. Getty Images. 295

Chapter Ten

- 10.1. Main fragments of the cuneiform text of the Egyptian Hittite Peace Treaty. Wikimedia Commons. 302
- 10.2. Ramesses II's Hittite Peace Treaty stela from Karnak Temple. Courtesy Mark Janzen. 304
- 10.3. Artist's conception of the Silver Treaty tablet Hattusili III sent to Ramesses II. Artwork by Peter Brand. 306

Chapter Eleven

- 11.1. Artist's reconstruction of the arrival of Hittite ambassadors in the throne room of Ramesses II's palace in Pirameses. Alamy. 320
- 11.2. Puduhepa (right) worshipping the Hittite Sun Goddess. Relief from Fraktin, Turkey. Courtesy Tayfun Bilgin, www.hittitemonuments.com. 321
- 11.3. Two fragments of a gold cup Ramesses II sent to the Hittite king. Photo © Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München; ÄS 7208, 7209. Hieroglyphic script by Erika Feleg. 322
- 11.4. Drawing of a relief fragment with an Egyptian "portrait" of the Hittite king from the Ramesseum. Drawing by Peter Brand after Leblanc 2019, pl. 15. 325

Chapter Twelve

- 12.1. Ebony label of the First Dynasty king Den commemorating his *Sed*-festival. London, British Museum EA 32650. Wikimedia Commons. 348
- 12.2. Ramesses II running a ritual race with a bull loping alongside him in the presence of Amun-Re. Photograph by Peter Brand. 349
- 12.3. A rock inscription from Aswan of Prince Khaemwaset commemorating his father's first three *Sed*-festivals. Enhanced photograph by Peter Brand. 352
- 12.4. Vizier Khay's announcement of Ramesses II's sixth *Sed*-festival in Regnal Year 45. Champollion's drawing of a stela from the shrine of Horemheb at Gebel es-Silsila. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. 354

FIGURES

- 12.5. Queen Puduhepa’s letter to Ramesses II responding to his complaints about delays in negotiations for his marriage to her daughter. KUB 21.38 (CTH 176). Alamy. 361
- 12.6. Ramesses II’s First Hittite Marriage Stela, Abu Simbel. Photograph by Peter Brand. 365
- 12.7. Lepsius’s drawing of the scene from the First Hittite Marriage Stela scene on the stela from Abu Simbel. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. 366
- 12.8. Colossal granite statue of Ramesses and Ptah-Tatchenen. Ny Carlsberg Museum Copenhagen ÆIN 1483. Alamy. 371
- 12.9. Siliceous sandstone colossus of Ramesses II originally from Piramesses but now in Tanis. Photograph by Peter Brand. 372
- 12.10. A glazed plaque inscribed on one side with names and titles of Maahorneferure (left) and Ramesses II’s cartouches on the other (right). London, Petrie Museum, University College London 61296. Courtesy Petrie Museum. 372
- 12.11. A papyrus fragment from the residential palace at Medinet Ghurob naming Maahorneferure. Wikimedia Commons. 373

Chapter Thirteen

- 13.1. Ramesses II before Re-Horakhty, the lion-headed goddess Iwasas, and his divine alter ego. Courtesy UK National Trust. 382
- 13.2. Ramesses II offers incense to the falcon-headed moon god “Usermaatre-Setepenre-who Resides in the Domain of Ramesses-Meramun.” From the main hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Drawing by Peter Brand. 384
- 13.3. A. Ricci’s watercolor of the Divine Ramesses II inserted between Amun and Isis. Relief from the inner hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Courtesy UK National Trust. 386
- 13.4. A. Ricci’s watercolor of the bark of the divine Ramesses II in the temple of Wadi es-Sebua, entitled “the sacred bark of Ramesses-Meramun in the Domain of Amun.” Courtesy UK National Trust. 387
- 13.5. Three manifestations of the deified Ramesses II in the treasury chambers of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Photograph by Peter Brand. 388
- 13.6. Ramesses II offers to his divine aspect named “Ramesses-Meramun in the Domain of Amun” who sits enthroned between Shu (right), Tefnut (center), and Nekhbet (left). From the temple of Wadi es-Sebua. Alamy. 389
- 13.7. The divine Ramesses II as image of his own prenomen Usermaatre. Drawing by Peter Brand. 389
- 13.8. Ramesses II offers four *meret*-chests to Amun-of-Ramesses II in a relief from the enclosure wall of Karnak Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand. 392
- 13.9. Lepsius’s reconstruction of one of the standing colossi in the main hall of the great temple at Abu Simbel with its original colors, which were still visible in the nineteenth century. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. 393
- 13.10. Rebus inscription of the name of the colossus “Ramesses-Meramun the Re of Rulers” from the Ramesside forecourt in Luxor Temple. Photograph by Peter Brand. 394
- 13.11. Votive stela from Piramesses with images of two royal colossi: “Usermaatre-Setepenre-Beloved of Atum” (left) and “Ramesses-Meramun the God”

- (right). Hildesheim, Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Inv. Nr. 410. Courtesy Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim. 395
- 13.12. Stela of the chantress Isis offering to the colossus “Usermaatre-Setepenre-is Monthu in the Two Lands.” Hildesheim, Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Inv. Nr. PM 380. © akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss. 395
- 13.13. Votive stela of the soldier Anya. Paris, Louvre Museum E 27222. Photograph by Peter Brand. 396
- 13.14. Stela of the soldier Mose from Piramesses. Hildesheim, Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Inv. Nr. 374. Courtesy Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim. 397
- 13.15. Stela of the Vizier Rahotep from Piramesses. Munich, Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst; AS Gl 287. Drawing by Peter Brand. 398

Chapter Fourteen

- 14.1. Ruins of Tanis strewn with blocks from Ramesses II's monuments that the Bubastite pharaohs transferred from the abandoned city of Piramesses. Photograph by Peter Brand. 408
- 14.2. Arial view of a digital reconstruction of Piramesses based on magnetometer scans of the ruins of the city lying beneath the modern village of Qantir. Digital image courtesy Artefacts-Berlin: www.artefacts-berlin.de. 409
- 14.3. Pyramidion of an obelisk of Ramesses II, originally from Piramesses and now in the garden of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Photograph by Peter Brand. 410
- 14.4. Relief from the enclosure wall of Karnak Temple showing Ramesses II wearing the *shebyu*-necklace. Photograph by Peter Brand. 411
- 14.5. Siliceous sandstone lintel from Piramesses, now in Tanis, depicting Ramesses II running in the presence of Re-Horakhty. Photograph by Peter Brand. 412
- 14.6. Statue of Ramesses II bearing divine standards. Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 44668. Photograph by Peter Brand. 414
- 14.7. A colossal granite statue of the Twelfth Dynasty king Senwosret I, from ancient Memphis. Photograph by Peter Brand. 414
- 14.8. A palimpsest inscription from the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak Temple showing the prenomen cartouche of Ramesses II superimposed over that of Sety I. J. Karkowski/Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project. 416
- 14.9. The façade of the great temple of Abu Simbel with its four seated colossi. Alamy. 417
- 14.10. Niche on the façade of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Wikimedia Commons. 419
- 14.11. A cryptographic inscription on the left side of the main gateway of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Photograph by Peter Brand. 419
- 14.12. A. Ricci's watercolor sketch depicting Ramesses II and Nefertari offering to the sacred bark of Amun-Re carried by priests. South wall of the pillared hall of the the great temple at Abu Simbel. Courtesy UK National Trust. 420
- 14.13. One of the treasury chambers added to the great temple of Abu Simbel in the later years of Ramesses II's reign. Alamy. 420
- 14.14. A. Ricci's watercolor sketch of two scenes from the main hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Courtesy UK National Trust. 421
- 14.15. Rosellini's color facsimile of Ramesses II charging in his chariot from the main hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. 422

FIGURES

14.16.	The façade of the temple of Nefertari at Abu Simbel. Four colossal images of Ramesses II flank two of Nefertari. Alamy.	423
14.17.	Nefertari crowned by Isis and Hathor, relief from her temple at Abu Simbel. Alamy.	424
14.18.	View of the Wadi es-Sebua temple of Ramesses II with its avenue of lion- and falcon-headed sphinxes. Photograph by Peter Brand.	425
14.19.	A falcon-headed sphinx from Wadi es-Sebua representing Ramesses II as the incarnation of Re-Horakhty. Photograph by Peter Brand.	426
14.20.	Nineteenth century painting of the interior of Gerf Hussein by David Roberts. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	426
14.21.	Two nomen cartouches of Ramesses II from a dedicatory text on the enclosure wall of the main temple of Karnak showing the epithet “God and Ruler of Heliopolis” current in the 40s and 50s of his reign. Photograph by Peter Brand.	428

Chapter Fifteen

15.1.	The mummy of Ramesses II. © akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss.	435
15.2.	The sun god bent over in old age and leaning on his staff. Rosellini’s drawing of a scene from the tomb of Sety I. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	437
15.3.	A stela depicting Merenptah as Crown Prince adoring the Apis bull dating to the last decade of his father’s reign. Paris, Louvre N 412. Photograph by Peter Brand.	439
15.4.	Tomb of Ramesses II. Wikimedia Commons.	441
15.5.	A gold bracelet inlaid with lapis lazuli inscribed for Ramesses II and discovered in Bubastis. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 52576. Alamy.	444
15.6.	The coffin of Ramesses II from the royal cache tomb. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 61020. Photo © National Geographic, by permission.	445
15.7.	An ink docket on the coffin of Ramesses II. Wikimedia Commons.	446
15.8.	Statue of Merenptah as king. Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 607. Alamy.	447
15.9.	Rosellini’s color facsimile of a scene from the tomb of Merenptah in the Valley of the Kings. NYPL digital collections. Public domain.	448
15.10.	Relief from the Court of the Seventh Pylon at Karnak showing Merenptah protected by Amun-Re in the form of a ram-headed sphinx. Photograph by Peter Brand.	448
15.11.	Merenptah slaying Libyan captives. Triumphal scene from Karnak beside his Great Libyan Inscription in the court of the Seventh Pylon. Photograph by Peter Brand.	449
15.12.	The Libyan Triumph Stela of Merenptah, also known as the “Israel Stela.” Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 34025. Alamy.	450
15.13.	The name of “Israel” on the Stela of Merenptah. Diagram by Peter Brand.	451
15.14.	Colossal siliceous sandstone statue of Amenmesse reinscribed for Sety II. Turin 1383. Courtesy Egyptian Museum, Turin.	452
15.15.	Ramesses III fighting the Sea Peoples. Scene from the north exterior wall of his temple at Medinet Habu. Photograph by Peter Brand.	455
15.16.	Naval battle against the Sea Peoples from Ramesses III’s temple at Medinet Habu. Photograph by Peter Brand.	456
15.17.	Ramesses IV offers his prenomen to Khonsu with Isis in attendance. From the Khonsu Temple at Karnak. Photograph by Peter Brand.	458

Chapter Sixteen

- | | | |
|--------|--|-----|
| 16.1. | Scene at the top of the Bentresh Stela. Paris, Louvre C 284. Photograph by Peter Brand. | 467 |
| 16.2. | Abu Simbel from a nineteenth century painting by Hubert Sattler. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons. | 471 |
| 16.3. | Rosellini's color facsimile of Ramesses II parading in his chariot with a lion and bodyguard in a scene from the main hall of the great temple of Abu Simbel. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. | 472 |
| 16.4. | The Young Memnon bust from an 1834 publication of Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum. Public domain. | 473 |
| 16.5. | Belzoni's painting depicting his removal of the Younger Memnon colossal bust from the Ramesseum. NYPL digital collections. Public domain. | 473 |
| 16.6. | Moses and Aaron before the pharaoh of the exodus. Nineteenth-century illustration. Public domain. | 475 |
| 16.7. | The British artist Edward Poynter's 1867 masterpiece "Israel in Egypt." Alamy. | 475 |
| 16.8. | Engraving of <i>The Sadness of Pharaoh</i> (1901) by Jean Jules Antoine Lecompte Du Noüy. Public domain. | 477 |
| 16.9. | Yul Brynner and Anne Baxter as Ramesses II and Nefertari from Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 epic film <i>The Ten Commandments</i> . Alamy. | 479 |
| 16.10. | Yul Brynner as Ramesses II in <i>The Ten Commandments</i> . Alamy. | 479 |
| 16.11. | Colossus of Ramesses II from ancient Memphis, formerly in Ramses Square in Cairo and now installed in the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Cairo. Alamy. | 481 |
| 16.12. | Nigerian stamps commemorating the 1960s UNESCO campaign to salvage Abu Simbel. | 481 |
| 16.13. | The UNESCO salvage of the great temple of Abu Simbel during the 1960s. Getty Images. | 482 |
| 16.14. | Egyptian President Anwar Sadat gazes at Ramesses II's mummy during its visit to Paris in 1976. Getty Images. | 486 |
| 16.15. | Package of Ramses brand condoms from the 1920s. | 487 |
| 16.16. | Coke and Pepsi bottles from the Ramesses II exhibit in Charlotte, North Carolina and Memphis, Tennessee in the 1980s. | 487 |
| 16.17. | A 1920s era advertisement for Rameses brand cigarettes. | 488 |

Abbreviations

GENERAL

B	Bulletin (Battle of Kadesh)
BM	British Museum (London)
ca.	circa, “approximately”
cat.	catalog
cf.	<i>confer</i>
EA	Designated numbering of the Amarna Letters as translated in Moran, William L. 1992. <i>The Amarna Letters</i> . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and Rainey, Anson F. 2015. <i>The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets</i> . Edited by William M. Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill.
fig(s).	figure(s)
KV	King’s Valley (tomb number)
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)
n(n).	note(s)
no(s).	number(s)
O.	ostrakon
P	Poem (Battle of Kadesh)
P.	papyrus
QV	Queen’s Valley (tomb number)
R	Reliefs (Battle of Kadesh)
TT	Theban Tomb (number)
vol(s).	volume(s)

BIBLIOGRAPHIC

ÄA	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
A&L	<i>Ägypten und Levante</i>
ÄHK	Edel, Elmar. <i>Die Ägyptisch-Hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi in Babylonischer und Hethitischer Sprache</i> . 2 vols. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994.
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ASAE	<i>Annales Du Service Des Antiquités de l’Égypte</i>
BÄBA	Beiträge zur ägyptischen Bauforschung und Altertumskunde
BACE	<i>The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BES	<i>Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar</i>
BiÉtud	Bibliothèque d’Étude
BIFAO	Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale
BiOr	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BMSAES	<i>British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan</i>
BSFÉ	<i>Bulletin de la société française d’égyptologie</i>
CdÉ	<i>Chronique d’Égypte</i>
CEDAE	Centre d’Étude et de documentation sur l’ancienne égypte

- CG Catalogue générale des antiquités du musée du Caire
- Champollion, *Monuments* Champollion, Jean-François. *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie: D'après les dessins exécutés sur les lieux sous la dir. de Champollion le-jeune, et les descriptions autographes qu'il en a rédigées*. 4 vols. Paris: Didot, 1835–1845.
- CHANE Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
- COS Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger, eds. *The Context of Scripture*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2001, 2002.
- CRIPEL *Cahiers de recherches de l'institut de papyrologie et d'égyptologie de Lille*
- Description de l'Égypte *Description de l'Égypte: Ou, Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française*. Paris: Imprimerie Impériale.
- EES Egypt Exploration Society
- GM *Göttinger Miszellen: Beiträge zur ägyptologische Diskussion*
- HÄB Hildesheimer ägyptologische Beiträge
- IEJ *Israel Exploration Journal*
- JAEI *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*
- JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JARCE *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
- JCS *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JdE Journal d'Égypte (register of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo)
- JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
- JEH *Journal of Egyptian History*
- JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JSEA *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
- KBo Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi
- KRI I–IX Kitchen, Kenneth A., and Joshua Roberson. *Ramesseum Inscriptions, Historical and Biographical*. 9 vols. Oxford: WileyBlackwell; Wallasey: Abercromby, 1969–2018.
- KUB Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi
- KV King's Valley (tomb number)
- LD Lepsius, Carl Richard. *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*. 12 vols. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1849–1859.
- Le Ramesseum I* Goyon, Jean-Claude, and H. el-Achirie. *Le Ramesseum I: Hypostyle N (travée centrale)*. Collection scientifique 30. Cairo: Centre de documentation et d'études sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1973.
- Le Ramesseum IV* Youssef, A. A.-H., Ch. Leblanc, and M. Maher. *Le Ramesseum IV: Les Batailles de Tunip et de Dapour*. Cairo: Centre d'études et de documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1977.
- Le Ramesseum VI* Goyon, Jean-Claude, and H. el-Achirie. *Le Ramesseum VI: La salle des litanies*. Collection scientifique 32. Cairo: Centre de documentation et d'études sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1974.
- Le Ramesseum IX-2* Leblanc, Ch., and S. el-Sayed Ismaïl. *Le Ramesseum IX-2: Les piliers "osiriaques"*. Collection scientifique 34. Cairo: Centre d'étude et de documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1988.
- Le Ramesseum IX-1* Leblanc, Ch. *Le Ramesseum IX-1: Les piliers "osiriaques"*. Collection scientifique 33. Cairo: Centre d'étude et de documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1980.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Le Ramesseum X</i>	Desroches Noblecourt, Ch., G. Moukhtar, Ch. Adam, Ch. Leblanc, M. Nelson, H. el-Achirie, B. Fonquernie, G. Thorel, J.-Cl. Goyon, F. Hassanein, A. Sayed Youssef, and R. Schumann-Antelme. <i>Le Ramesseum X: Les annexes nord-ouest I; Architecture - archéologie - essai d'interprétation</i> . Collection scientifique 35. Cairo: Centre d'études et de documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1976.
<i>Le Ramesseum XI</i>	Maher-Taha, M., and A.-M. Loyrette. <i>Le Ramesseum XI: Les fêtes du dieu Min</i> . Collection scientifique 36. Cairo: Centre d'étude et de documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1979.
MÄS	Münchener ägyptologische Studien
<i>Medinet Habu II</i>	Epigraphic Survey, <i>Medinet Habu</i> , vol. II, <i>Later Historical Records of Ramses III</i> . OIP 9. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932.
<i>Medinet Habu VIII</i>	Epigraphic Survey, <i>Medinet Habu</i> , vol. VIII, <i>The Eastern High Gate, with Translations of Texts</i> . OIP 94. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1970.
MIFA O	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale
MDAIK	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologische Studien
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>NeHeT</i>	<i>NeHeT: Revue numérique d'Égyptologie</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i> N.S.
PdÄ	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PIHANS	Publication de l'institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
PM I-VIII	Porter, Bertha, Rosalind L. B. Moss, and Jarimir Malek. <i>Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings</i> . 8 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927–2012.
<i>RdÉ</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie</i>
RITA	Kitchen, Kenneth A., and Benedict G. Davies. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated: Translations</i> . 7 vols. Oxford: WileyBlackwell; Wallasey: Abercromby, 1993–2020.
RITANC	Kitchen, Kenneth A., and Davies, Benedict G. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated: Notes and Comments</i> . 4 vols. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993–2014.
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SAK	<i>Studien zur Altägyptische Kultur</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>Urk. IV</i>	Sethe, Kurt, and Wolfgang Helck. <i>Urkunden der 18. Dynastie</i> , vol. IV of <i>Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums</i> . Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1955–1958.
YES	Yale Egyptological Studies
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Chronology

Note: All dates before 690 BCE are approximate. Dates prior to the Roman period are BCE. Some dates are concurrent due to multiple kings or even dynasties ruling at the same time. Dates adapted from Hornung et al. 2006. Foreign contemporaries of New Kingdom pharaohs are from Assyria, Babylonia, Hatti, and Mitanni.

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD

First Dynasty (2900–2730)

Second Dynasty (2730–2590)

OLD KINGDOM

Third Dynasty (2590–2544)

Fourth Dynasty (2543–2436)

Fifth Dynasty (2435–2306)

Sixth Dynasty (2305–2118)

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

Seventh and Eighth Dynasties (2150–2118)

Ninth and Tenth Dynasties (2118–1980)

Eleventh Dynasty (earlier) (1989–2009)

MIDDLE KINGDOM

Eleventh Dynasty (Nebhepetre Monthuhotep II onward) (2009–1940)

Twelfth Dynasty (1939–1760)

Thirteenth Dynasty (1759–1659)

SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Dynasties (? – 1540)

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Dynasties (? – 1540)

NEW KINGDOM

Foreign Contemporaries

Eighteenth Dynasty (1539–1290)

Ahmose

Amenhotep I

Thutmose I

Thutmose II

Hatshepsut

Thutmose III

CHRONOLOGY

Amenhotep II
Thutmose IV
Amenhotep III

Artatama I (Mitanni)
Kadashman-Enlil I (Babylon);
Tushratta (Mitanni)

Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten

Suppiluliuma I (Hatti);
Tushratta (Mitanni)

Smenkhkare
Neferneferuaten
Tutankhamun
Ay
Horemheb

Suppiluliuma I (Hatti)

Mursili II (Hatti); Muwatalli II
(Hatti)

Nineteenth Dynasty (1292–1191)

Ramesses I (1292–1290)
Sety I (1290–1279)
Ramesses II (1279–1213)

Muwatalli II (Hatti)
Adad-Nirari I (Assyria);
Kadashman-Turgu (Babylon);
Kadashman-Enlil II (Babylon);
Muwatalli II (Hatti);
Urhi-Teshub (Hatti);
Hattusili III (Hatti);
Tudhaliya IV (Hatti)

Merenptah
Sety II
Amenmesse
Siptah
Twoseret

Twentieth Dynasty (1190–1077)

Sethnakhte
Ramesses III
Ramesses IV
Ramesses V
Ramesses VI
Ramesses VII
Ramesses VIII
Ramesses IX
Ramesses X
Ramesses IX

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

- Twenty-First Dynasty (1076–944)
- Twenty-Second Dynasty (943–746)
- Twenty-Third Dynasty (845–812)
- Twenty-Fourth Dynasty (736–723)
- Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (722–655)

SAITE and LATE PERIOD

- Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (664–525)
- Twenty-Seventh Dynasty (Persian) (525–404)
- Twenty-Eighth Dynasty (404–399)
- Twenty-Ninth Dynasty (399–380)
- Thirtieth Dynasty (380–343)
- Thirty-First Dynasty (342–332)

HELLENISTIC PERIOD (332–30)

ROMAN PERIOD (30 BCE–395 CE)

Ancient Dates and Chronology

Students of ancient Egypt are faced with the uncertainties and complexities of two different but related dating systems, each with their chronological problems. The first is the system of date keeping the Egyptians themselves used. The Egyptian civil calendar consisted of twelve months, each thirty days long, to which they added five “extra days,” said to be the birthdays of the gods. The twelve months were grouped into three seasons, “Inundation Season,” called *Akhet* in Egyptian, the “Season of Emergence,” or *Proyet*, and “Harvest Season,” called *Shomu*.

Since the Egyptians did not account for the fact that a solar year lasts 365.24 days, which the Julian and Gregorian calendars allow for, the Egyptian New Year, called “Opening of the Year,” which fell on the first day of the first month of the Inundation Season (*Akhet*), gradually drifted backward through the year relative to the true solar year. At the beginning of Ramesses II’s reign (ca. 1279 BCE), the New Year began on June 28. By his death in 1213 BCE, it had receded to June 22.

There was no system for counting the years from a key event like the birth of Christ. Instead, the Egyptians chronicled the sum total of all the years every king reigned for as far back as they had records. Each new ruler who came to the throne began a new count of his years of rule, which we call “regnal years.” The first year of Ramesses II’s reign was therefore “regnal year one” and his last came in “regnal year sixty-seven.” His successor Merenptah started his own “regnal year one” and so on until his death. In the New Kingdom, the first day of a new king’s reign, called his “accession date,” came the day after his predecessor had died. Ramesses II’s accession date was on the 27th day of the third month of the Harvest Season (*Shomu*), hence III *Shomu 27*.

To compile a full chronology of ancient Egyptian history, it is necessary to know the number of years each king reigned as well as the date each ruler ascended the throne according to the Egyptian civil calendar. But many dates are lost to us and we are unsure of the accession dates of some kings (like Ramesses I), while for others we are not certain of the total number of years they reigned (including Horemheb and Sety I).

A final chronological challenge is determining precisely when these ancient kings ruled by our own system of dating based on the Gregorian calendar. This is called “absolute chronology” and is an ongoing and fiercely debated field of study among scholars of antiquity. Prior to the eighth century BCE, pinning down absolute dates for key events is problematic. What year, for example, did Ramesses II come to the throne? In what year did the Battle of Kadesh occur? Inscriptions tell us the battle took place in his fifth regnal year. An ancient document records an astronomical observation of the moon that allow us to narrow down the the absolute date for Ramesses II’s accession to three possibilities: 1305, 1290, and 1279 BCE. For decades Egyptologists have argued vigorously among themselves over which is the correct year. There is still no consensus, although the most widely accepted date is

1279, which I have used here mainly for convenience. But this should not be taken as definitive.

As one of my professors, Ron Leprohon, told his students: "In Egyptology dates are like prices, they are subject to change." Nor should the reader place too much faith in absolute dates for earlier pharaohs since the lengths of some of their reigns is unclear. The farther back we recede from Ramesses II's accession, the more unreliable they become, so that fixing the date of, say, Amenhotep III's reign a few generations earlier is hazardous. Even more tricky is establishing precise chronological synchronisms between Egyptian kings and their Assyrian, Babylonian, and Hittite contemporaries.



Map of Egypt and Nubia