



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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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

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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.
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- 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

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| <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. |
| MIFAO | 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. |
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| 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

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