

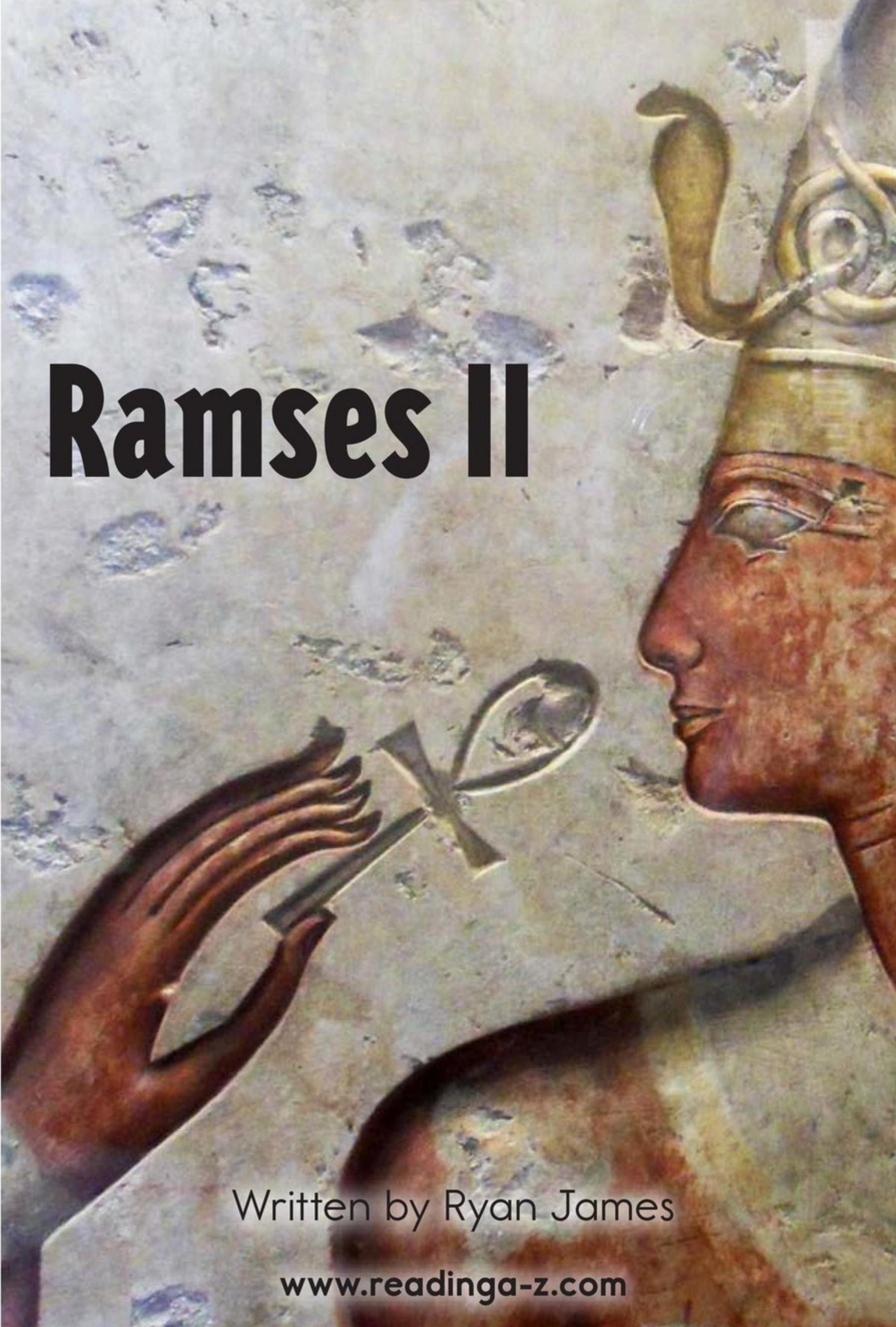
LEVELED Book • X

Ramses II



Written by Ryan James

www.readinga-z.com



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Focus Question

Why is Ramses II one of the most famous pharaohs of ancient times?

Words to Know

ambush
campaigns
diplomacy
dynasty
legacy
mortuary

pharaohs
propaganda
rebellion
reigned
successor
truce

Front cover: A close-up of the face of a giant statue of Ramses II in Egypt.

Title page: An image of Ramses II hangs in a museum in Paris, France.

Page 3: A temple carving in Egypt shows Ramses II.

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World Leaders
Level X Leveled Book
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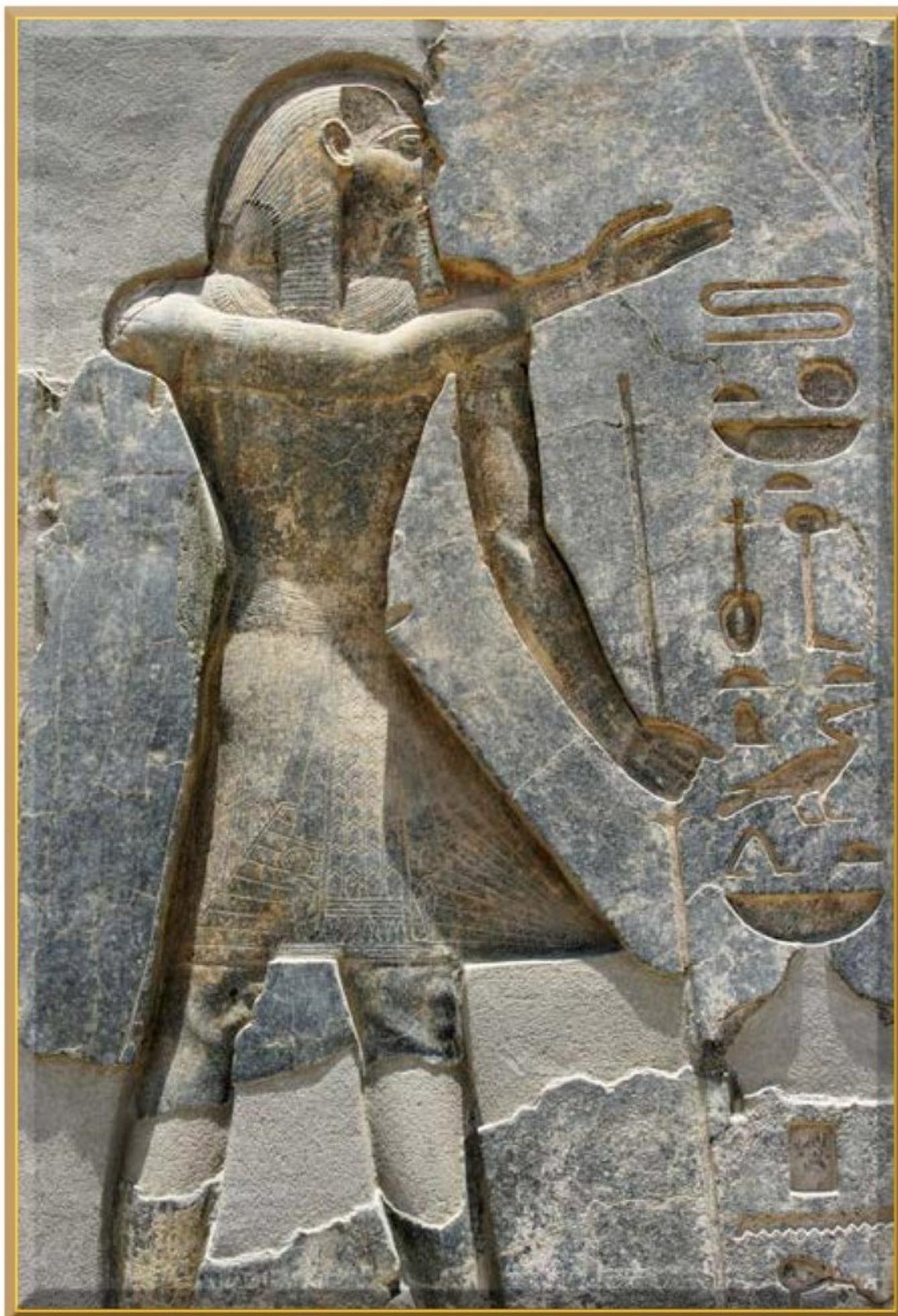


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A huge statue of Ramses II in the British Museum weighs 6.58 mt (7.25 t.).

Egypt's Famous Pharaoh

King Ramses II (also written Ramesses II) **reigned** during the New Kingdom, a five-hundred-year period considered the golden age of ancient Egypt. He was the third king of the Nineteenth **Dynasty**, reigning from 1279 to 1213 BC. His sixty-six-year rule was unusually long in a time when most people died before age forty-five.

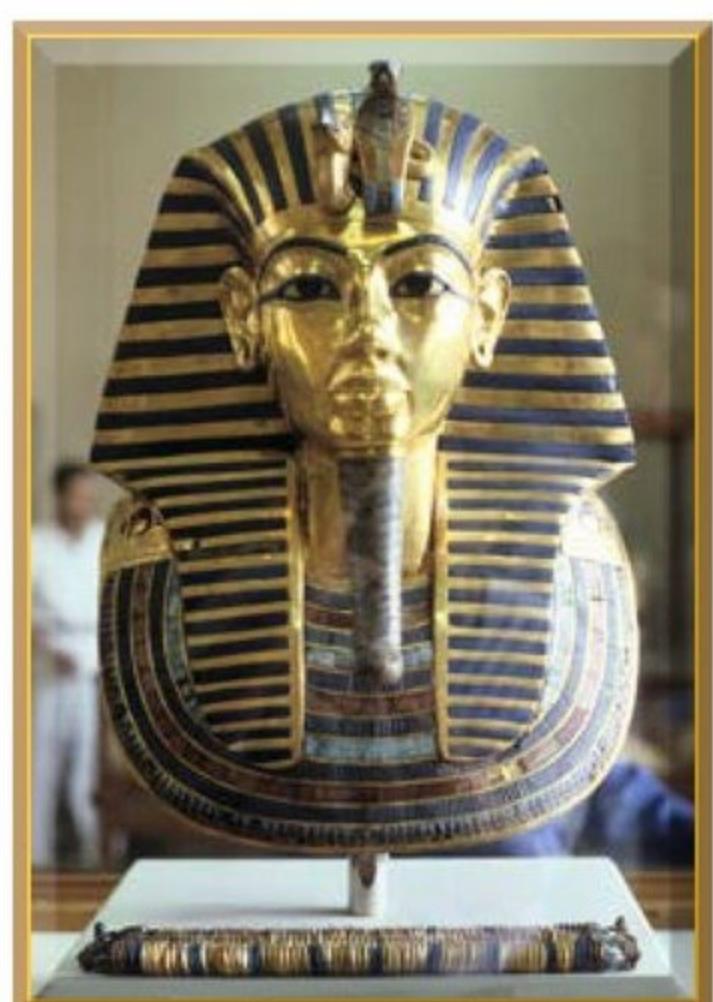
During these years, Ramses II would become one of Egypt's most powerful **pharaohs**, or rulers and earn him the title of Ramses the Great. Ramses was almost certainly the most famous pharaoh in ancient times.

A Royal Surprise

Ramses II was born around 1303 BC to the military commander Seti I and his wife, Mut-Tuy (MOOT TOO-ee). Experts believe he had at least one older sister named Tia and may have had another sister named Henutmire (he-nuht-MEE-ray).

Ramses's parents probably didn't expect Ramses to become pharaoh. They weren't even members of the royal family. However, King Tutankhamun died without an heir. One of Tutankhamun's officers briefly took over as pharaoh. He was replaced by Horemheb, Tutankhamun's commander of the army, a few years later.

Ramses II's grandfather was an army general named Paramessu who had served with Horemheb. When Horemheb became pharaoh, he appointed Paramessu to be his heir. Paramessu became pharaoh several years later. He changed his name to Ramses I and established his family as the new royal line. Ramses's father, Seti I, became pharaoh just a few years later, which put Ramses in line for the throne.



Tutankhamun's funeral mask

Egypt During Ramses II's Reign (1279–1213 BC)



Growing Up to Be Pharaoh

What we know of Ramses's early life comes from artwork and carvings discovered in the structures he built. Ramses II was named Seti I's **successor** at an early age. As a result, much of Ramses's education was obtained by accompanying his father and observing him as he performed the work of a pharaoh. Artwork shows Ramses II performing religious duties with his father by offering a gift of wild birds to the god Amun.



Carvings show Ramses and Seti I roping a bull (top) and making an offering to the god Amun (bottom).



Another scene shows Ramses and his father roping a bull. As crown prince, Ramses would someday lead Egypt's army into battle. He needed to develop physical strength and endurance, so he probably began training while still a young child. Physical challenges, like roping bulls and riding wild horses, were meant to prepare him for the demands of fighting.

At an early age, Ramses was named a captain in the army, a position that may have been in name only. By giving young Ramses a title and authority, Seti I helped prepare the nation for Ramses's rule.

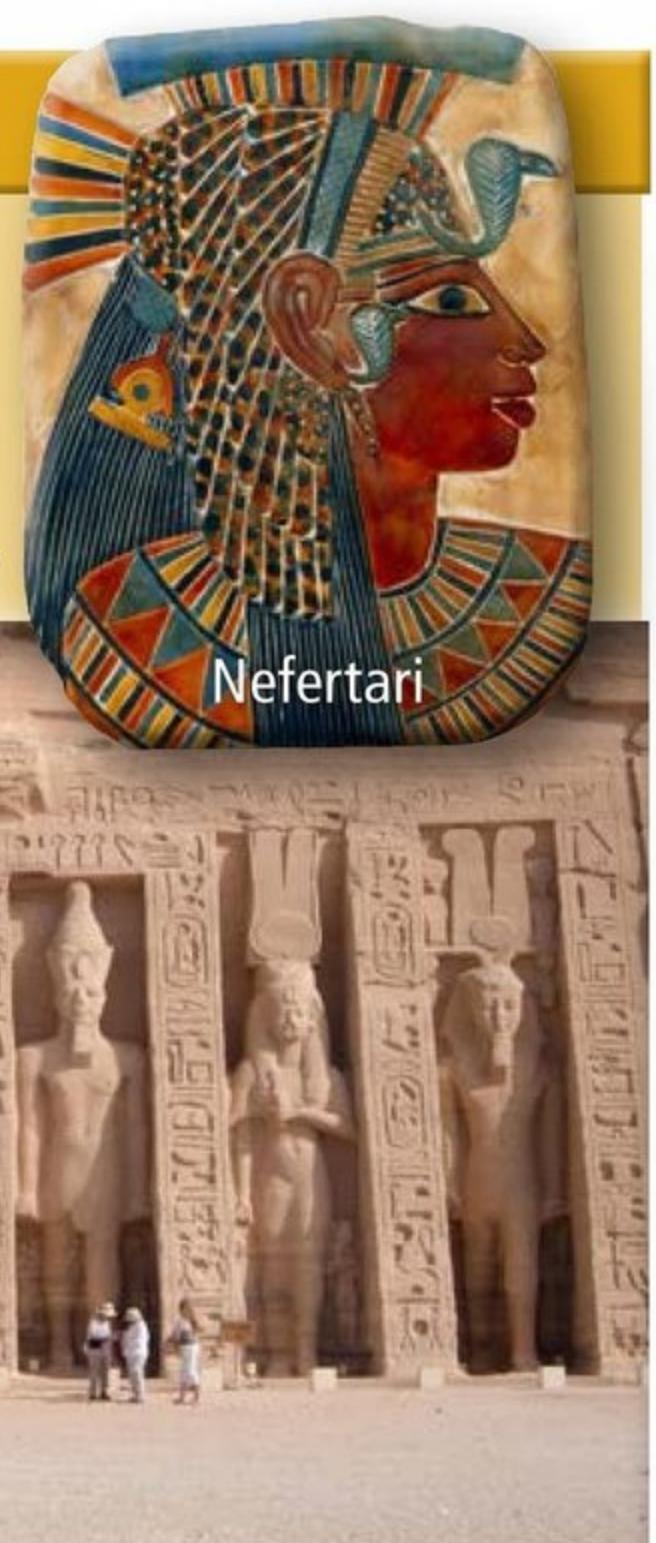
As a teenager, Ramses was considered an adult. He accompanied his father on military campaigns to gain experience with diplomacy and war that would prepare him to be pharaoh. He also had his own household. He married his first wife, Nefertari, when he was about fifteen.

At the time, it was common for rulers to have many wives, and Ramses was no exception. Historians think Ramses married eight or more royal wives as well as several “minor wives,” but Nefertari was his favorite. “My love is unique,” Ramses wrote of her. “No one can rival her, for she is the most beautiful woman alive.” Nefertari remained Ramses’s chief wife until her death.

Queen Nefertari

When Nefertari died, Ramses dedicated an elaborate temple to her at Abu Simbel. He decorated it with colossal statues of Nefertari, himself, and their children. Usually, the pharaoh’s image is larger than others, but Nefertari’s statue was the same size as Ramses’s statue.

Nefertari’s temple was carved out of solid sandstone.

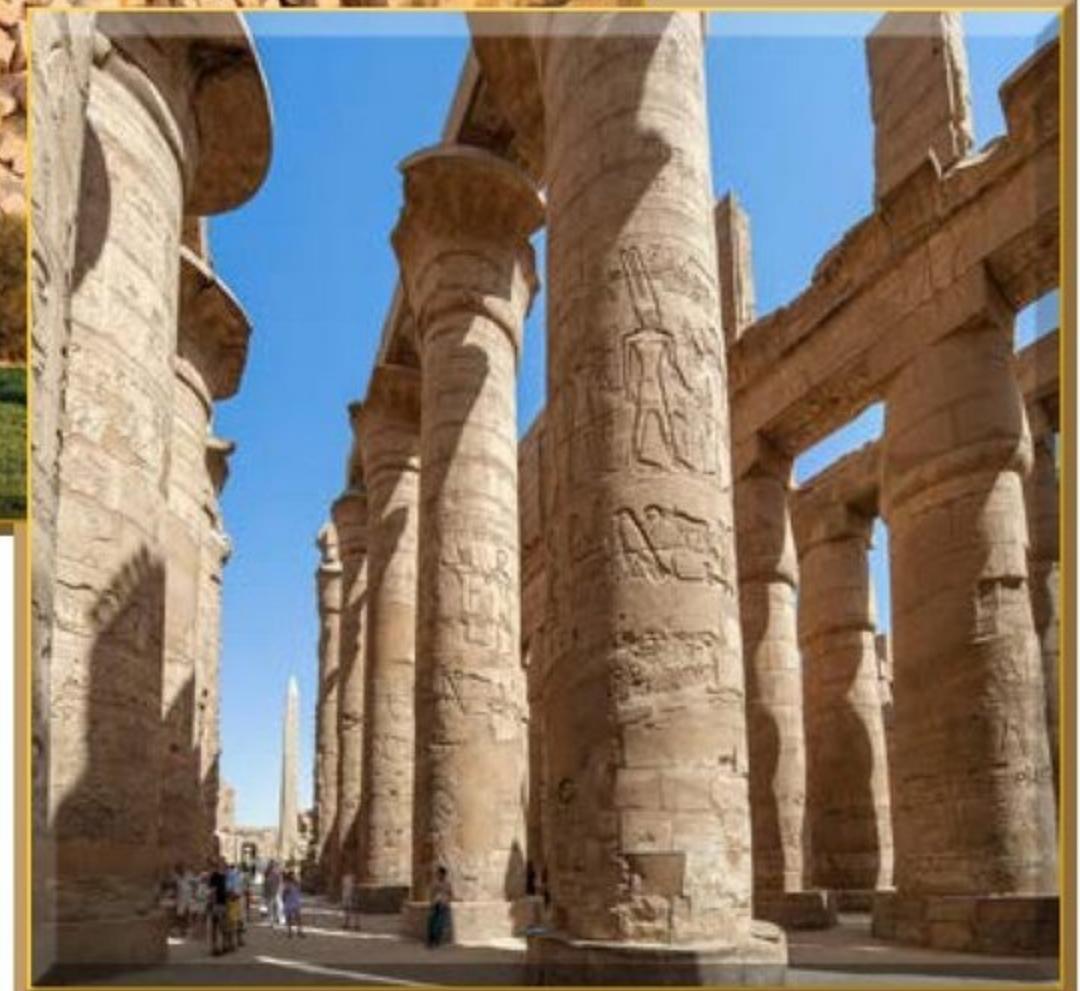
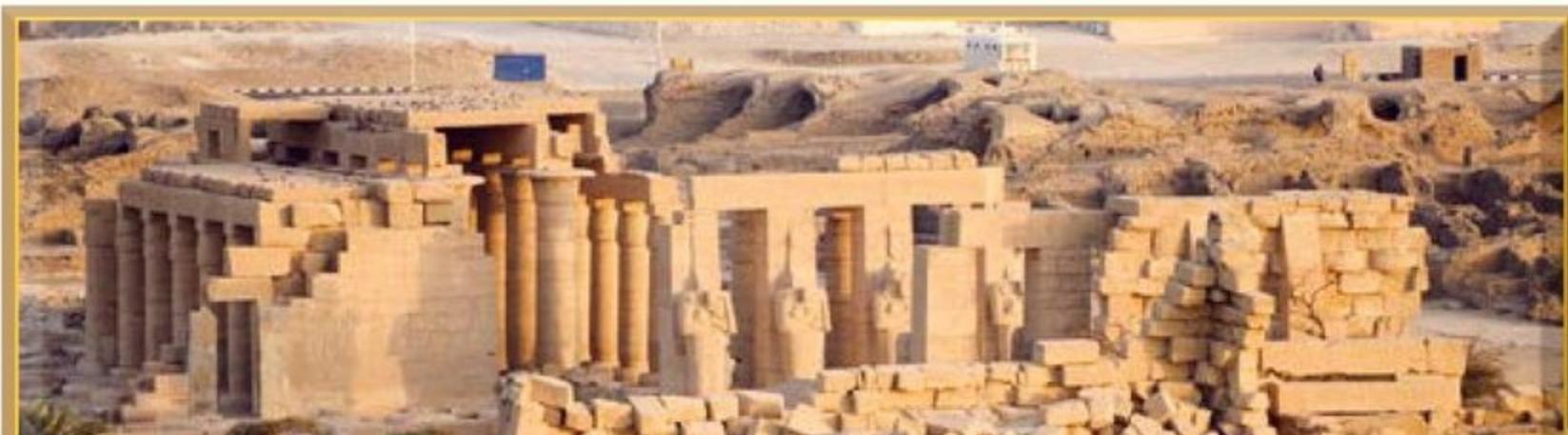




A Warrior Becomes King

Ramses played an important role during much of his father's reign. He was in charge of military campaigns and became known as a courageous warrior. Artwork shows Ramses charging into battle with his two oldest sons. Historians think this battle took place during a **rebellion** in Nubia, a country located south of Egypt. Nubia was a source of gold and riches. Egyptians and Nubians fought for its control.

Seti I ruled for thirteen years. Ramses was about twenty-five when Seti I died, which made Ramses pharaoh. Early in his reign, Ramses restarted work on several of his father's building projects. Seti I had ordered stoneworkers and artisans to build an immense hall at Karnak containing 134 tall columns. Walls were decorated with raised relief, or *bas-relief*—a process in which a scene's background is carved away, leaving behind raised images.



The Ramesseum (top) was designed to honor Ramses II and keep the memory of him alive for eternity. The Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak (right) covers 5,000 square meters (53,820 sq. ft.).

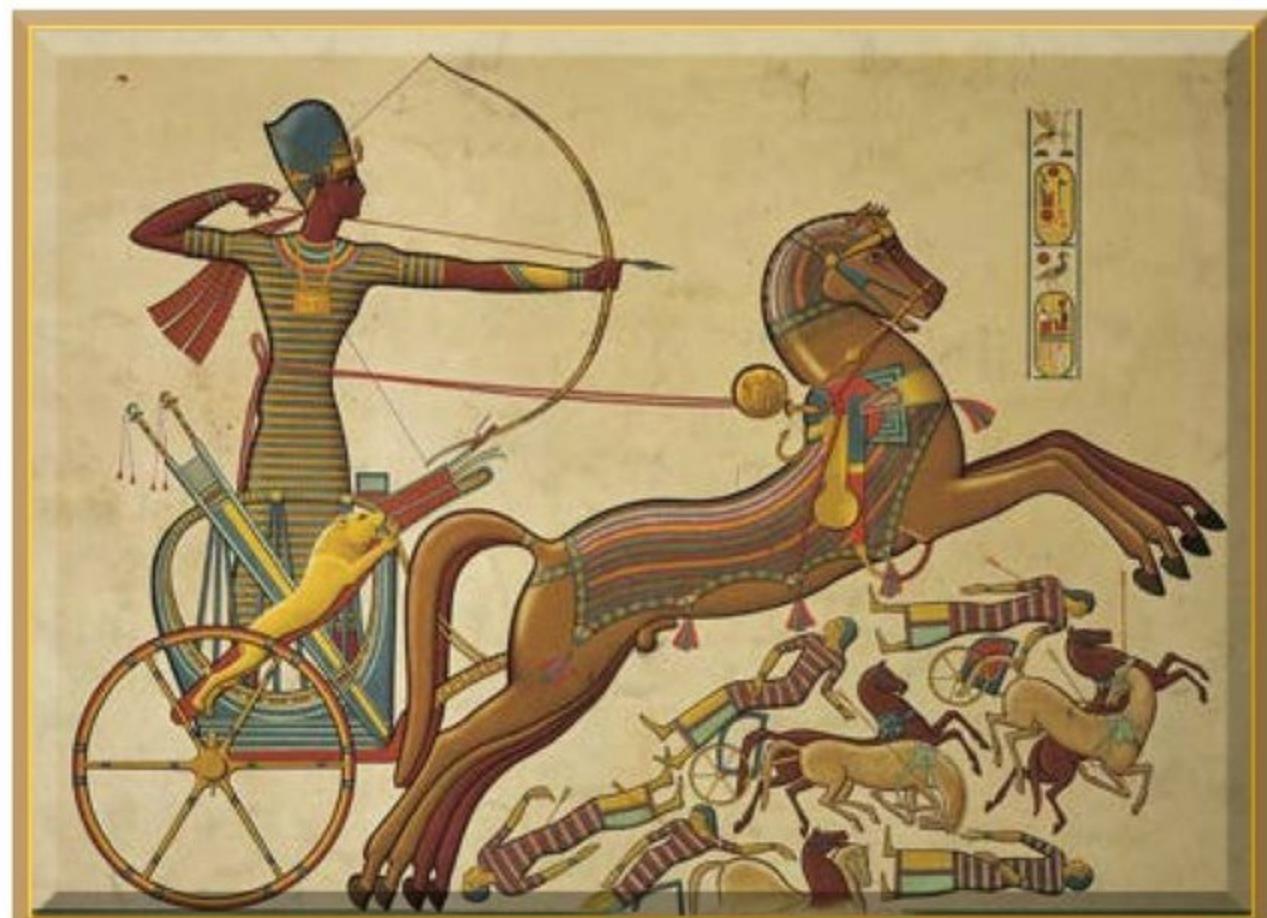
However, Ramses soon directed workers to carve images directly into the stone. The faster technique resulted in less detailed images known as *sunk relief*. He doubled the previous rate of temple building and ended up building more temples than any other pharaoh.

Ramses II commissioned many new building projects, including a second, larger temple at Abu Simbel, his **mortuary** temple—the Ramesseum, in Thebes—and a new capital city. He named the new city Pi-Ramesse, which could be loosely translated “Ramsesopolis.” Pi-Ramesse allowed Ramses to move closer to Egypt’s long-standing enemies, the Hittites, who lived east of Egypt in a region that is now Syria.

Battles

Ramses successfully battled Hittites and reclaimed many small provinces taken by them. Some were those his father was unsuccessful at reclaiming. Hittites attacked and captured Kadesh, an important trade city, soon after Ramses II became pharaoh. Ramses led about twenty thousand soldiers to retake the city during the fifth year of his reign. This battle became one of the most famous events from Ramses II's reign. Including the Hittite chariots, it holds the record as the world's largest-ever chariot battle with about 4,500 chariots. The battle also involved the first recorded military **ambush**.

The battle of Kadesh is especially famous because Ramses had its story illustrated on temple walls across Egypt and Nubia. Artwork shows Ramses, larger than all the other figures in the battle, soundly defeating the enemy.



One of many similar images shows a large Ramses II defeating the Hittites.

It turns out that the battle wasn't quite the victory that Ramses wanted people to think it was. In fact, Ramses was nearly killed. The battle itself was more a draw than a clear Egyptian victory.

From Egyptian and Hittite records of the battle, scholars have concluded that Ramses's army separated as it approached Kadesh. Ramses's division scouted ahead, and another division followed a day behind. A third group circled around to attack from the far side.

Two locals reported to Ramses that the Hittite army was still many miles north. However, Ramses soon learned that the Hittite army was much closer and was already preparing to attack.

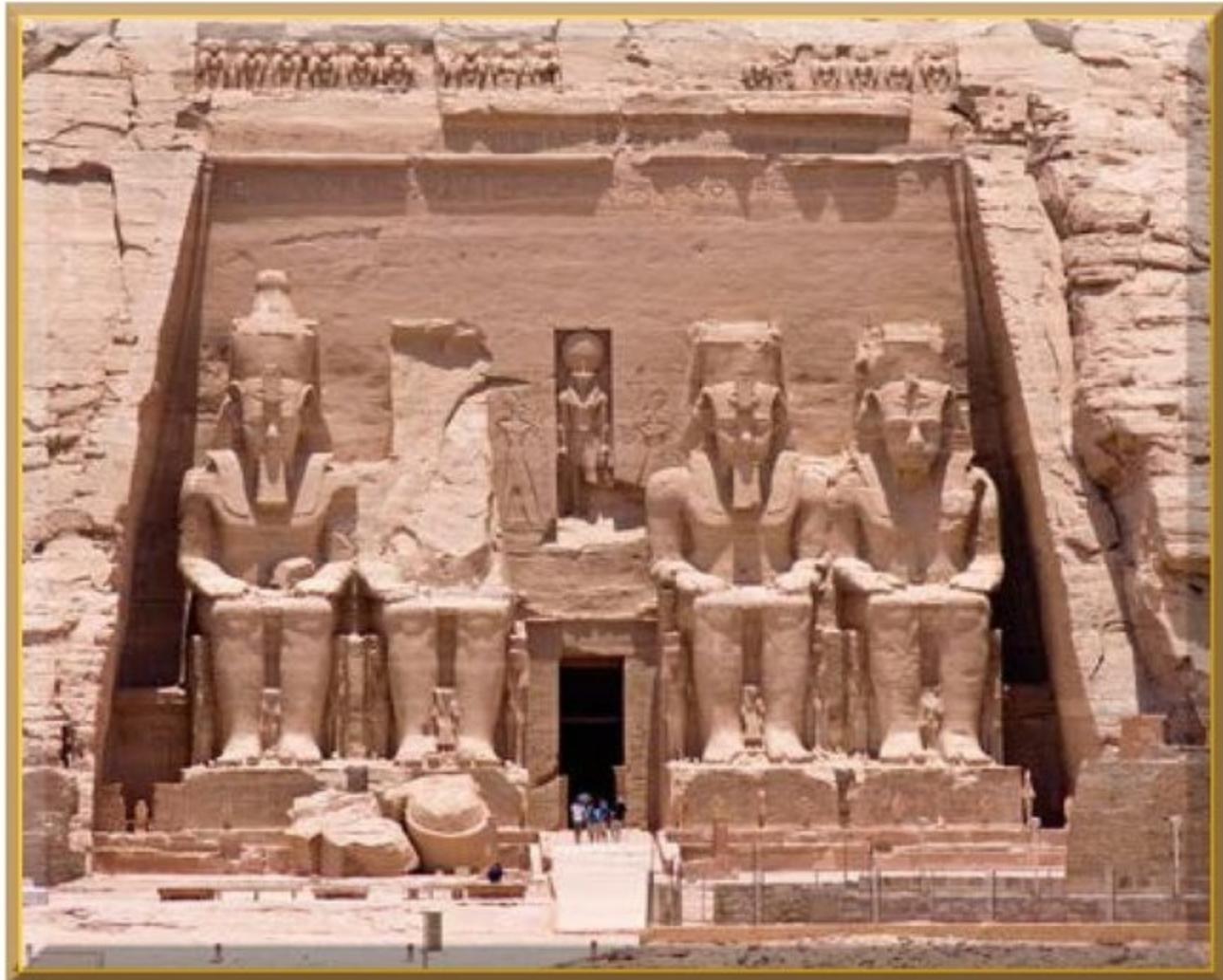


Ramses II riding in his chariot at the Battle of Kadesh. The Hittite army had around 2,500 chariots with three men in each.

Ramses sent word to his other divisions, but a Hittite ambush of 2,500 chariots overran his would-be reinforcements. The Hittites then attacked Ramses's small advance force. According to Ramses, he held off the enemy single-handedly while the rest of his army fled. According to other records, an elite division of Ramses's army, called the Ne'arin, arrived just in time to save the pharaoh. After heavy losses on both sides, though, the two leaders declared a truce. Ramses withdrew his forces back to Egypt.

Over the following year, Ramses commissioned many poems and wall carvings to tell the story of the battle. All of them described him as a hero. According to some experts, he'd begun history's first **propaganda** campaign.

Fifteen years later, the two nations were again on the verge of war, but fighting so far from Ramses's base was difficult. Instead of fighting each other, Ramses II and the Hittite king united to create a peace treaty. It included clauses still used in modern peace treaties, such as an agreement not to attack one another's territories. It also ensured that the two nations would be allies for years to come. A copy of this treaty now hangs on the wall of the United Nations General Assembly building.



Giant sculptures of Ramses II are on either side of the entrance to the larger of two sandstone temples at Abu Simbel.

Ramses the Great

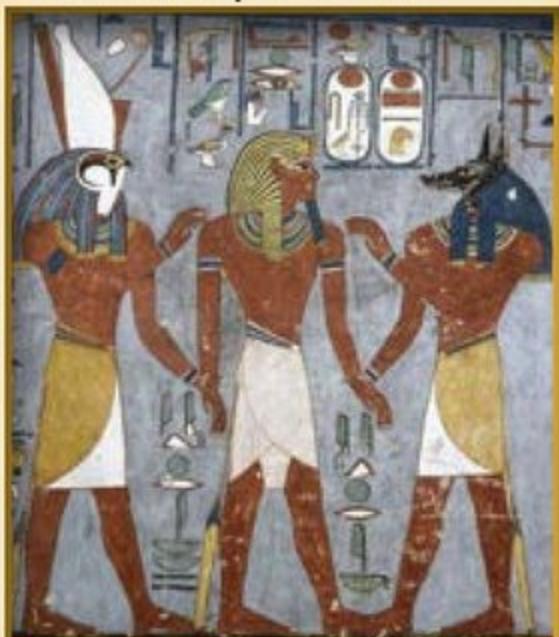
Ramses II ruled until 1213 BC before dying of natural causes at the age of ninety-one. He outlived his oldest son and original heir as well as the next eleven sons in line for the throne.

His thirteenth son became pharaoh after him, but the dynasty soon began to decline. One hundred fifty years after Ramses's death, the New Kingdom came to an end.

Ramses II was so famous in ancient Egypt that at least nine later pharaohs were named after him. Today, Ramses II is known as Ramses the Great. He built more monuments and temples than any other pharaoh in history. As a result, he left behind a legacy of art, architecture, and historical records that allows us to better understand the people and culture of his time.

Ramses II

1298 BC: Ramses I becomes pharaoh

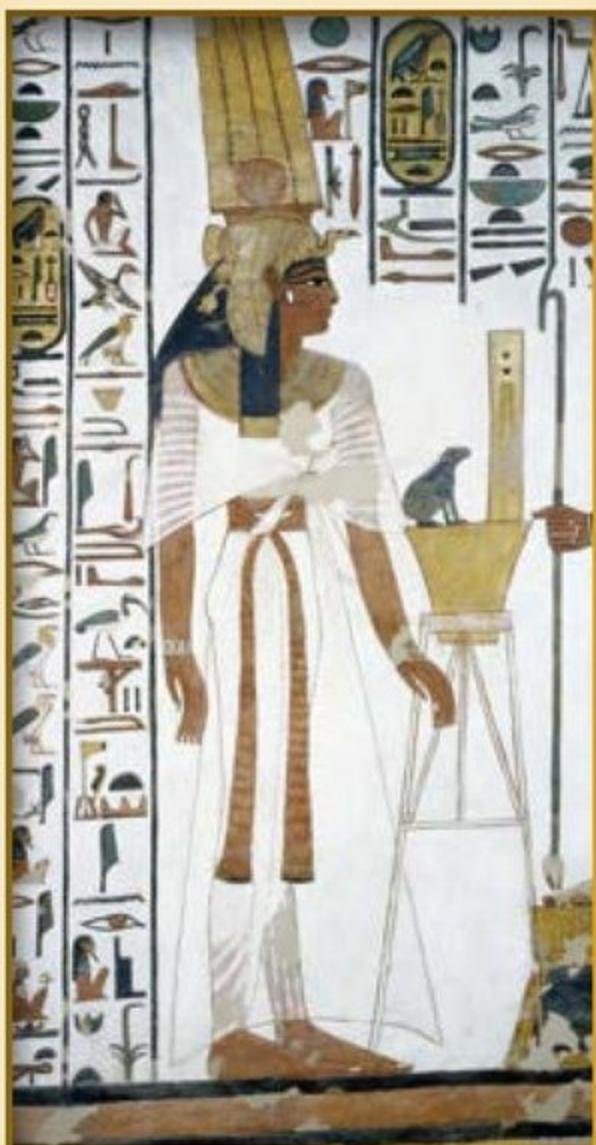


1289 BC: Ramses II marries his first two wives

1281 BC: Ramses II puts down revolt in Nubia, taking his two oldest sons into battle

1259 BC: The Ramesseum is completed

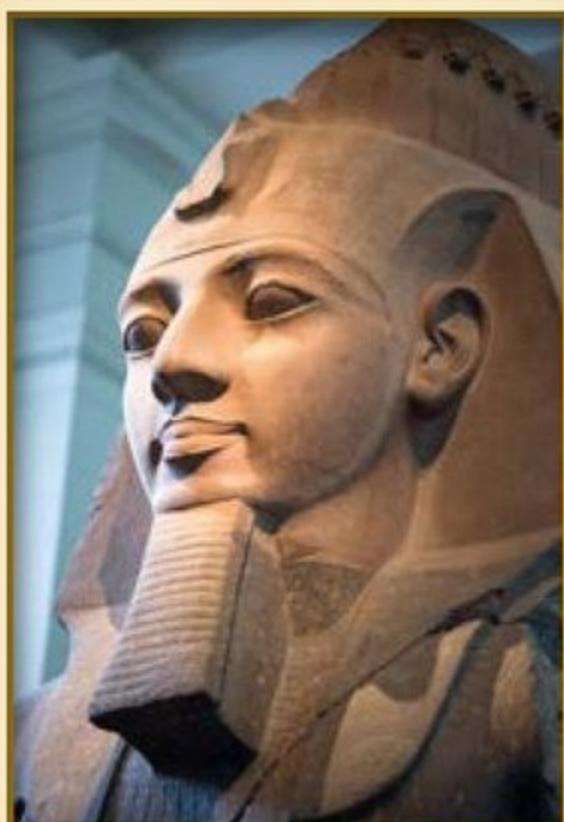
1252 BC: Nefertari dies



1303 BC: Ramses II born

1291 BC: Seti I becomes pharaoh

1279 BC: Ramses II becomes pharaoh; construction of Ramesseum starts around this time



1274 BC: Battle at Kadesh

1264 BC: Construction of Abu Simbel begins around this time

1258 BC: Peace treaty with Hittites

1244 BC: Isetnofret (second wife) dies; Ramses II marries first Hittite princess; construction at Abu Simbel is completed around this time

1231 BC: Marries second Hittite princess

1213 BC: Ramses II dies at age ninety-one

Glossary

ambush (<i>n.</i>)	a surprise attack conducted from a hidden position (p. 11)
campaigns (<i>n.</i>)	planned series of actions designed to reach certain goals (p. 8)
diplomacy (<i>n.</i>)	the skill or practice of negotiating between representatives of different countries (p. 8)
dynasty (<i>n.</i>)	a series of rulers from the same family in a country (p. 4)
legacy (<i>n.</i>)	something handed down from the past to the present (p. 14)
mortuary (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to burial (p. 10)
pharaohs (<i>n.</i>)	rulers in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
propaganda (<i>n.</i>)	news, arts, or other media that often use false or exaggerated information to influence people (p. 13)
rebellion (<i>n.</i>)	a fight against authority or power; an uprising (p. 9)
reigned (<i>v.</i>)	ruled an area as the most important or powerful person (p. 4)
successor (<i>n.</i>)	a person who follows another in a job or elected position (p. 6)
truce (<i>n.</i>)	an agreement not to fight (p. 13)

Ramses II

A *Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book*

Word Count: 1,343

Connections

Writing

Choose another famous pharaoh from Egypt's history. Write an essay comparing Ramses II and the other pharaoh, including their personal and political accomplishments.

Social Studies and Art

Research and illustrate the battle of Kadesh to show a more accurate portrayal. Compare your illustrations with the illustrations that were on temple walls across ancient Egypt and Nubia at the time of Ramses II.

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