



RAMESSES II,

Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh

Peter J. Brand

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Egyptomania Is Back!

Egyptomania is back, and Ramesses, Egypt's most powerful pharaoh, is the star of the show! The blockbuster immersive exhibit *Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs* is touring America and Europe to sold-out crowds now through 2025. His colossal eighty-ton statue is the centerpiece of Giza's new Grand Egyptian Museum. Ramesses hasn't been this big since he starred in Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments*!

The world is also celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the discovery of King Tut's tomb. National Geographic is already touring its *Beyond King Tut* immersive experience in major cities across America. Now readers, libraries, museums, and public media can access the latest discoveries and insights into Ramesses and this wildly popular period of history.

Rameses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh, is the definitive story of Rameses the Great, the most powerful ruler in Egyptian history. It has been forty years since the last major work on Ramesses. With newly discovered documents and painstaking detective work, Egyptologist Peter J. Brand takes us behind the façade that Ramesses presented to the public—the most monumental PR job in history—to meet the real man, his wives and children, and his rival kings and queens. Especially delightful are his letters with Queen Puduhepa of the Hittites, who scolds the greatest king on earth as if he were a schoolboy. As never before, Peter Brand cracks the stone mask of Egyptian history to reveal its true and human face.

About *Rameses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh*

Rameses II was the most magnificent and iconic pharaoh in Egyptian history. His reign was the longest, the most “monumental” in buildings and artwork, the most innovative in diplomacy, and even the most procreative, with over one hundred royal offspring. Drawing on the latest research, Peter J. Brand digs deep into Egyptian culture and archeology, revealing the mindset and motivations of Rameses II. We find what his grand monuments reveal, and equally what they conceal. On the international scene, we peruse the diplomatic letters—often surprising, sometimes amusing—between Pharaoh and the kings of Babylon, Assyria, and the Hittite Empire. A courageous warrior in his prime, Rameses was also a wise and visionary statesman. He ended six decades of war with the Hittite Empire by signing the first peace treaty in recorded history. In his later years Rameses II became a living god, and finally an immortal legend. Forty years after Kenneth Kitchen's *Pharaoh Triumphant*, here at last is a fresh, engaging look at Rameses II, Egypt's ultimate pharaoh.



Dr. Peter J. Brand (PhD, University of Toronto, 1998) is a professor in the Department of History at the University of Memphis. An ancient historian and Egyptologist, he specializes in the history and culture of ancient Egypt during its imperial age (ca. 1550–1100 BCE). He is author of *The Monuments of Seti I and Their Historical Significance: Epigraphic, Historical, and Art-Historical Analysis* (Brill, 2000), and has written numerous articles on Egyptian kingship, monumental art and construction, history, popular religion, warfare, and diplomacy during the late Eighteenth Dynasty and Ramesside period. *Ramesses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh* is his fourth book. Since 2001, Brand has served as director of the Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project, which is recording, conserving, and interpreting hundreds of scenes and hieroglyphic texts carved on the walls and columns of the Great Hypostyle Hall. The project uses cutting-edge technology to model and reveal the inscriptions on this forest of 134 giant columns. Brand has appeared in over twenty documentaries for the History Channel, Discovery, and National Geographic.

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Praise for *Ramesses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh*

Interesting, informative, extremely well written. Obviously created from a wellspring of both expertise and emotion, this is a joy to read. Kudos to the author!

– Eric Cline

An evocative and up-to-date account of the life and times of the man whose shadow—for better or worse—dominated the image of pharaonic kingship over three millennia.

– Aidan Dodson

This book is not merely yet another foray into an attempted biography of a bygone ruler of the Nile Valley. Quite to the contrary, I believe that what Brand has achieved is a marvel. This scholarly work is a new stepping stone in the now two-full-centuries-long history of Egyptology not only owing to its in-depth critical approach, but also as Brand provides a perceptive secondary, or higher-level analysis of historical investigation. Brand's volume is equally significant as it is a major advance in the field of Egyptology, especially in historical studies of the ancient world. He connects many sources together, all reflecting a disparate aspect and nature such as archaeology, inscriptions, visual panoramas and tableaux, not to mention "lowly" objects such as coffers or jewels and the like, into a coherent and stimulating whole. It is my firm position that Brand's *Ramesses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh*, will be seen not only as reconfirming the ruler's importance in world history, but equally as a paradigm for historical studies of the ancient world. The book will become a milestone in historical writing on pharaonic Egypt.

– Anthony Spalinger

No Egyptian pharaoh had arguably as great an impact on Egypt than Ramesses II. Professor Peter Brand's study provides more than a history of an eventful reign; it looks beyond the image of Ramesses as a great warrior and builder and puts him in a broader context of Egypt, the Levant, and Nubia. The narrative shows how Egypt's place in the Late Bronze Age was maintained not just by war, but by judicious diplomacy as well. Especially interesting is the description of the negotiations between the Ramesses and the Hittite royal house that led to the peace treaty between the two empires in his twenty-first regnal year and the first diplomatic marriage to a Hittite princess in his thirty-fourth. Specialists and nonspecialists alike will welcome the balanced approach to the critical and controversial issues of his reign: a possible coregency with his father; the Battle of Kadesh; his complex family and many sons; the role of his queens and other royal women; Egyptian exploitation of Nubia and its gold mines; and, finally, his legacy in Egyptian and world history. The even-handed presentation allows a general readership to follow critical issues of the reign, while providing endnotes and an extensive bibliography that add solid scholarly support to discussions. A generous number of illustrations and maps are well deployed and particularly helpful in describing the ambitious building program throughout Egypt and Nubia that marked Ramesses's reign.

– Ogden Goelet

A Sneak Peak at *Ramesses II, Egypt's Ultimate Pharaoh*



FIGURE 5.26. Phase 4 of the Battle of Kadesh. The Hittite attack loses momentum as the *Narairis*-force, Ramesses II, and troops from the Army of Amun seize the initiative. The flagging Hittite chariots retreat eastward to the Orontes.

amid the enemy. See, the infantry and the chariotry have abandoned us. Why do you stand to rescue them? Let us get clear (away)! Save us O Usermaatre-Setepenre!

Then His Person said to his shield-bearer: "Be at your heart O my shield-bearer. I will enter among of a falcon as I slay, slaughter, and fell (them) to the these (effeminate) back-turners to your mind!"²⁵³ My concern me.

Then His Person galloped off quickly. He swiftly entered of the enemy for the sixth time of entering among them in pursuit of them in the moment of his power. I won them and I could not let up!"²⁵⁴

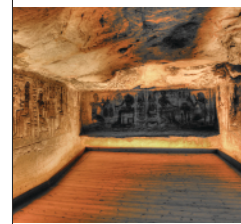
What should we make of Ramesses II's claim to have thick of the Hittite chariots six times? We might doubt, although six is not a particularly symbolic number, what sense did it make for Pharaoh and his sons and bodyguards to expose themselves to on of enemy chariots? According to the text, four groups



FIGURE 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.

When Europeans rediscovered Abu Simbel in the early nineteenth century, vast drifts of sand choked its mighty façade. These dunes sealed its inner chambers, preserving their delicate painted plaster. An Italian explorer named Giovanni Belzoni cleared much of this sand in 1817, revealing Abu Simbel's spectacular interior to human eyes for the first time since antiquity.⁴¹

Inside the grotto, Victorian travelers and early Egyptologists were astonished to discover exquisite colored plaster clinging to its interior walls and statues (fig. 14.14 and fig. 13.9). Pharaoh's artisans tinted every figure and hieroglyph in lavish detail. Early copyists documented some of these paintings in colored engravings that they published in massive folio volumes (fig. 14.15).⁴² These precious illustrations their own right, revealing the former splendor of



CHAPTER FIFTEEN TWILIGHT OF THE GREAT GOD: RAMESSES II'S LAST YEARS AND HIS DESCENDANTS

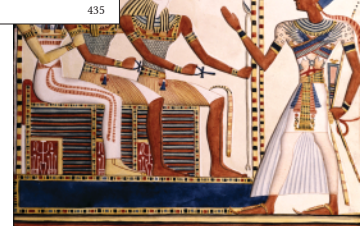
Ramesses II in Old Age

Increasingly during the long, languid afternoon of his seven decades as Lord of the Two Lands, Ramesses II suffered from the ill effects of advanced old age. At the apogee of his rule, in regnal year 33/34, he was already in his fifties. Once he reached his sixties, to say nothing of his seventies or eighties, he was exceedingly old by ancient standards.¹ Possessing a tenacious will to live, excellent genes, and good fortune, Ramesses survived into his mid-eighties or early nineties.²

Unlike most of Egypt's ancient rulers, or indeed most significant figures in world history, we possess Ramesses II's mummified body as an artifact of his legendary reign (fig. 15.1). A century after his death, tomb robbers despoiled his burial and stripped him of his golden treasures. Fortunately they spared his mortal remains from destruction. The High Priests of Amun rewrapped and reburied it, in an extraordinary secret cache of royal mummies on the west bank of ancient Thebes.³ Here many of Egypt's New Kingdom pharaohs escaped the worst catastro-



FIGURE 15.1. The mummy of Ramesses II. © alg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / W. Buss.



Living up to this sentiment, his artists sculpted immense quantities of statuary during his Jubilee period, including dyads and triads depicting him alongside various deities.⁴ In Egypt, divine kingship was an ancient institution that ebbed and flowed for more than three millennia. But how did Ramesses II stand out in this lineage of god-kings?

Divine Kingship in the New Kingdom

Traditions of pharaonic godhood stretched back two millennia before the time of Ramesses II. Even before written records first surface, around 3300 BCE, Egyptians believed their monarchs possessed supernatural qualities. Among sacred kingship's oldest relics were mud-brick tombs the early kings built at Abydos and Saqqara during the First and Second Dynasties. Early in the Old Kingdom, King Djoser



FIGURE 2.16. Aerial view of the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak Temple. Courtesy of the Franco-Egyptian Center, Karnak.

FIGURE 2.17. Central colonnade and clerestory windows in the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak. The great papyrus columns of the central aisle reach heights of 70 feet (21 meters). Alamy.





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