

# Ramses II: Ramses The Great

Ramses II was one of the greatest Ancient Egyptian pharaohs who reigned in the 19th Dynasty. This pharaoh is sometimes referred to as “Ramses the Great” due to his great accomplishments and to his long reign over Egypt; his reign lasted over 90 years. He was born a son of a pharaoh; thereby, receiving the throne after his father’s death. Ramses II went on to accomplish much more than his father or other pharaohs had done before or after him.

Ramses II is known not only as “Ramses the Great,” but also as a great warrior, builder, family and religious man. In all these categories he seemed to excel. We know this due to the many temples that are still standing today. The hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt capture and list the various accomplishments during his lifetime and give us a snapshot of his life journey and undertakings throughout his life. Due to the hard work and diligence of many Archeologists and Egyptologists over time, we have come to discover even more about this great king. Just recently, the discovery of his mummy has given us more information on the physical being that ruled from 1279 BC to 1213 BC. It has helped to further close the gap on how he may have lived and looked.

We know of the volatile political climate that existed during his reign due to the many writings that have survived the test of time. These writings have given us insight into the man as a political being and how he controlled his kingdom and how he managed to outsmart many of his enemies. It is these writings that have also given us insight into the many great monuments that he left behind and were constructed under his reign. The standing monuments that he left behind attest to the greatness of the man and his ability to carry forth such feats during a time of political unrest and attacks and yet managed to hold his power over such a great territory.

In addition to the many political and asset building attributes his empire acquired during his reign, he fathered over 100 children and had many wives; his chief wife was Nefertari. Today, we know that he outlived at least 12 of his sons and most probably countless wives and grandchildren during his lifetime.

Read further to learn more details about this great pharaoh and how he came to be known as one of the great pharaohs of the Ancient Egyptian world.

## Introduction of Ramses II

Ramses II was the third ruler in the 19th Dynasty (also known as the New Kingdom Period) and was born in 1303 BC. This pharaoh is many times referred to as Ramses the Great. Some alternative spellings for this Ancient Egyptian pharaoh are Rameses and Ramesses. Ramses II is also believed to be the pharaoh mentioned in the biblical story of Moses which gives him additional importance in history.

# Ramses II's Family

His father, Seti I, appointed Ramses II Prince Regent at the age of fourteen. After the death of his father, Ramses II then became pharaoh and ruled Egypt for many decades. Ramses II took the throne in his very late teens or early twenties. It is believed that Ramses II ruled from 1279 BC to 1213 BC for a total of 66 years. Ramses II had many wives and fathered about 100 children during his lifetime; although, the actual number is not known. At the time of his death, Ramses II was over 90 years of age and due to his longevity outlived many of his offspring, wives, and family members. Living this long was almost unheard of for people of that time. During his lifetime, Ramses II celebrated an unprecedented 14 Sed Festivals. These Sed Festivals were held after 30 years of a pharaoh's reign and then every three years thereafter. The Sed Festivals were meant to celebrate the continued success of a pharaoh and also to rejuvenate a king's strength.

Ramses II's father was Seti I and his mother was Queen Tuya. Ramses II's chief wife and consort was Nefertari although he had many other wives as well. Two other known wives are Isetnofret and Maathorneferure. It is believed that 12 sons died during Ramses II's lifetime. Upon Ramses II's death, he was succeeded by his thirteenth son Merenptah (aka Merneptah). Merneptah was thought to be between 55 or 60 years old when he actually took over the throne. Merneptah went on to rule for about ten years.

# Ramses II as the Builder of Monuments

Throughout his life, Ramses II went on to build various monuments and thus his legacy of being a builder in Ancient Egypt and Nubia was born. Ramses II constructed monuments such as Abu Simbel, the mortuary temple Ramesseum, Pi-Ramesses in the Delta, and most notably completed the Temple at Karnak. On many already built temples and existing statues he had his own cartouche inscribed to ensure that his name lived on. The inscriptions were deeply carved into the structures to ensure that they could not be easily destroyed or removed by succeeding empires. In addition, Ramses II had an abundance of colossal statues erected which depicted him as pharaoh. It was more statues than any other pharaoh before him had erected. This helped to solidify his existence and reign in the 19th dynasty and make him more powerful.

It is important to note that many of the monuments from previous pharaohs were destroyed and the materials were used to build things that represented Ramses II, his dynasty, and his god-like status. Chefred's pyramid at Giza became a target for needed materials. As a result, some of the blocks from this structure were taken to help build the base at Ptah's Great Temple in Memphis. The Abu Simbel temples are two colossal rock temples located in Nubia, southern Egypt. Today they are also known as the Nubian Monuments. These two temples were originally carved out of a mountainside and were completed as a lasting monument to himself and Queen Nefertari. They were also done to commemorate his supposed victory at the battle of Kadesh. In 1968, however, Abu Simbel was relocated in its entirety in order to protect it from being submerged under water by an artificial water reservoir called Lake Nasser.

The mortuary temple of Ramesseum is located in the Theban necropolis in Upper Egypt close to the current city of Luxor. Mortuary temples were created by the Ancient Egyptians to commemorate the reign of a pharaoh and also to be used by cult followers after a king's death. In the beginning, throughout the Old and Middle Kingdoms, these mortuary temples were constructed close to pyramids. During the New Kingdom, and as more pharaohs began to build tombs in the Valley of the Kings, the location of mortuary temples changed and they were located in other places as well. The Ancient Egyptians called these temples "house of millions of years." The name of the Ramesseum temple mortuary was coined by Jean-Francois Champollion who visited the site in 1829, albeit with a French name.

In addition to Abu Simbel and Ramesseum, Ramses II also founded a new capital city called Pi-Ramesses. This just meant "House or Domain of Ramesses." Today it is better known as Qantir (Khatana-Qantir) and is about 60 miles northeast of Cairo. This new capital was located in the Delta and had previously been a summer palace during his father's reign. This new capital became a scene of huge temples and a spectacular presidential palace for the Pharaoh but more importantly was probably constructed for strategic reasons. It was important because this eastern border location helped to control the threat of continuous invasions. It was also a significant commercial point which connected the Egyptian Kingdom to the Asian World. This new location provided many riches in that agriculturally it was extremely productive. The waterways had an abundance of fish and this added to the wealth of this area. The new capital was comprised of a mixed population; people from Amurru, Canaan, Libya and Nubia. Pi-Ramesses, the capital, kept its status for over a century until after Ramses II's death. Thereafter, the crowned heads of the XXI Dynasty then moved the capital to Tanis. They destroyed many of the existing buildings in Pi-Ramesses to develop their newfound capital.

In the 1970s, the site of Pi-Ramesses was examined under the direction of Manfred Bietak using magnetometer technology to map out this lost city. Over 75,000 square meters had been measured by 1999. A palace-temple, a cemetery, inferior houses, and a huge horse stable were identified. Below the horse stable layers, a palace like complex showing a gilded gold floor and overlaid by stucco was found. Computer plots constructed by the team went on to show winding roads and even a lakeshore that had likely existed. This instrumental work by this archeological team firmly established this to be the capital of Pi-Ramesses.

One of his most impressive accomplishments was completing the great Hall at the Temple at Karnak. This is a 60,000 square foot area monument comprised of 16 rows and 134 columns; most of the columns stand over 50 feet in height. Additionally, there are 12 outside columns each standing over 80 feet in height. The great hall at Karnak is today still considered one of the greatest feats of the ancient world.

In addition to these other monuments, he also built a fabulous temple for his chief wife, Nefertari. This temple was for a woman he had married in his teens and who died long before Ramses II. The temple was designed with an elaborate array of artistic décor and built much like

that for a pharaoh. In this temple, Nefertari was depicted alongside the gods which was a practice usually reserved only for pharaohs. Doing this, however, showed his love and respect for Nefertari and the sensitive side of Ramses II as man.

To our surprise, in 1987, the tomb KV5 was discovered. Eight years later a mysterious 100 foot corridor was found within this tomb. At the end of the corridor, an outline of Ramses II as Osiris was found. Upon further excavations, this tomb has been found to be one of the largest ever built, and was most likely

constructed to bury the many children that Ramses II had fathered; currently 130 corridors have been located. To date, four of Ramses II's sons have been found buried in this tomb. It is believed that there could be at least 20 sons buried in this site, but the search is still ongoing. The excavations have not yet been completed; however, the promise of new discoveries is sure to be forthcoming.

## Ramses II's Mummy

Due to the great discovery of Ramses II's mummified body, Egyptologists and scientists have since been able to piece together some great information about this pharaoh. For example, upon analysis of Ramses II's remains, the pharaoh is thought to have had red hair. Because this was not a prominent characteristic in Ancient Egypt, it most probably helped set him apart from other citizens of that time. In addition to standing out from the general population, persons with red hair were also seen as followers of the God Seth. Regarding other characteristics, Ramses II's mummy further revealed that he had a hook nose with a strong jaw line and was about 5 feet 7 inches tall. It was also revealed that he was ridden with arthritis.

In addition to finding Ramses II's mummy and learning more about this pharaoh's attributes, information regarding the movement of his corpse was revealed through a linen cloth found wrapped around the mummified body. The linen cloth contained hieroglyphic pictures and provided details of how this move was accomplished in order to protect the pharaoh's body from looters. The recordings revealed that Ramses II had been originally buried in the tomb KV7 (Valley of the Kings), but then the body was rewrapped and transferred to a holding area; the tomb of Queen Inhapy. It appears that within 72 hours, the body was again moved. This time it was moved to the tomb of the High Priest Pinudjem II. Today, Ramses II's mummy can be found at Cairo's Egyptian Museum.

More study of this great pharaoh reveals that toward the end of Ramses II's reign, he developed serious health problems; although, these can be mostly attributed to old age. It appears that Ramses II walked with a hunched back due to his arthritis, had a hardening of the arteries, and had severe dental problems (abscessed tooth issues caused by bacterial infections).

Before Ramses II came to power, two thousand years of Pharaohs had come to rule before him, and the pyramids had been standing for at least a thousand years. By the time Ramses II died, he

had accomplished many things. He was known as warrior, great king, family man, and venerated as a god. He had acquired several wives, many offspring, and had made the country wealthy by collecting riches and supplies from other empires. Due to his love of architecture, he had also created many memorials throughout Egypt. Some of the memorials completed were especially created for his first queen, Nefertari. Upon his death, at least nine pharaohs are known to have taken the name Ramses; however, none came close to leaving the legacy that Ramses II had left for Egypt and the world except for one – Ramses III. As history continues to reveal more about this great pharaoh, his success most likely came as a result of being the master of propaganda and politics.