

## **Ramses the Great: The Legacy of Egypt's Most Powerful Pharaoh**

Ramses II, commonly known as Ramses the Great, reigned as the Pharaoh of Egypt for an extraordinary 66 years, from 1279 BCE to 1213 BCE, during the 19th Dynasty of the New Kingdom period. Often regarded as the most powerful and celebrated pharaoh in ancient Egyptian history, his reign was marked by monumental building projects, military campaigns, and a keen ability to project his power, influence, and divinity.

### **Early Life and Ascension to the Throne**

Born around 1303 BCE, Ramses II was the son of Seti I, the Pharaoh who initiated the military and building programs that Ramses would later expand upon. His mother was Queen Tuya. Ramses grew up in the royal court, where he was groomed to succeed his father from a young age. He received military training, learning tactics and strategies that would become crucial in his later campaigns. Seti I involved Ramses in the governance and military activities of Egypt early on, making him a co-regent before Seti's death in 1279 BCE, when Ramses officially became pharaoh.

Ramses II wasted no time in asserting his power. Soon after ascending the throne, he launched military campaigns to secure Egypt's borders and reassert Egyptian dominance over neighboring territories like Nubia, Canaan, and Syria. His most famous military engagement was the Battle of Kadesh in 1274 BCE, fought against the Hittite Empire.

### **The Battle of Kadesh**

The Battle of Kadesh is one of the most famous military confrontations of the ancient world and was significant for multiple reasons. Kadesh, located in modern-day Syria, was a critical strategic city, and both the Hittites and Egyptians wanted to control it. Ramses led his army into battle against the Hittite King Muwatalli II in what is widely considered one of the largest chariot battles in history.

The battle ended in a stalemate, with neither side gaining a decisive victory, but both parties claimed success. Ramses' version of events, however, was immortalized in temples across Egypt. According to his accounts, he singlehandedly led his troops to victory, casting himself as a warrior-king who embodied the power of the gods. This self-promotion was a hallmark of Ramses' reign.

### **Diplomatic Triumph: The First Peace Treaty**

Though the Battle of Kadesh was inconclusive, it set the stage for what would become the world's first recorded peace treaty, signed between the Hittites and the Egyptians around 1259 BCE. The treaty ended decades of hostilities and established a long-lasting peace between the two great empires. This diplomatic achievement was not only a significant milestone in the history of international relations but also underscored Ramses' skill as a statesman.

### **Monumental Achievements in Architecture**

Ramses II is perhaps best remembered for the grand scale of his building projects, which were unmatched by any other pharaoh. His reign was marked by an ambitious program of temple construction and monumental architecture that proclaimed his divine status and glorified his reign.

The most famous of these is the complex at Abu Simbel, located near the southern border of Egypt. This temple, carved directly into the mountainside, features four colossal statues of Ramses seated on his throne, each standing over 20 meters tall. The temple was designed so that twice a year, on Ramses' birthday and coronation day, the sun's rays would penetrate the temple and illuminate a statue of the king seated among the gods inside. This architectural marvel is a testament to the sophistication of ancient Egyptian engineering.

Other significant monuments include the Ramesseum, Ramses' mortuary temple on the west bank of the Nile near Luxor, and the additions to the Temple of Karnak, one of the largest religious complexes in the world. Throughout his reign, Ramses sought to make his mark on Egypt's architectural landscape, often building new structures or modifying existing ones by adding his name and images to them.

#### Ramses' Family and Personal Life

Ramses II was a prolific ruler in more ways than one. He is said to have fathered over 100 children, with many wives and concubines. His principal queen, Nefertari, was his great love, and their relationship is immortalized in the temples and tombs of Egypt. Nefertari's tomb in the Valley of the Queens is one of the most beautifully decorated and well-preserved burial sites, featuring vivid depictions of her in the afterlife and inscriptions that highlight her importance to Ramses.

Ramses II lived to be around 90 years old, an impressive lifespan for the time. His long reign allowed him to consolidate power and maintain stability in Egypt, and his influence was felt across the ancient world. His mummy was discovered in 1881 and is now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, where it remains one of the most visited exhibits.

#### Religious Role and Deification

Like other pharaohs, Ramses was considered both a king and a god. He was seen as the earthly embodiment of the god Horus, the son of the sun god Ra. Throughout his reign, Ramses emphasized his divine nature, often depicting himself in the company of the gods in temple reliefs and statues. The Abu Simbel temple, for example, includes images of Ramses alongside the gods Amun, Ra, and Ptah, further cementing his status as a divine ruler.

#### The Legacy of Ramses the Great

Ramses II's reign left an indelible mark on Egypt. His military campaigns helped secure Egypt's borders, his diplomacy fostered long-term peace, and his architectural achievements continue to awe and inspire people today. His legacy was so profound that nine subsequent pharaohs took

the name Ramses in his honor. In modern times, Ramses the Great is remembered as a symbol of ancient Egyptian power, grandeur, and resilience.

Today, Ramses II's legacy continues to fascinate scholars, historians, and enthusiasts of ancient Egypt. His ability to blend military prowess, diplomacy, religious devotion, and artistic achievement made him one of the most influential figures in history, earning him the title "Ramses the Great."