

ABU SIMBEL

Abu Simbel is located along the Nile River in Upper Egypt, near the border of modern-day Sudan. The main temple located there was originally carved out of a mountainside. It was considered to be a sacred place where the Egyptians could worship Pharaoh Rameses II as a god. The temple was completed during the monarchy of Rameses II, a reign which lasted approximately 67 years (1279-1213 B.C.).



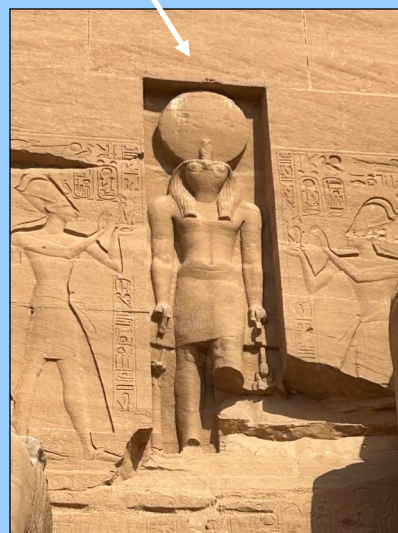
Temple of Rameses II at Abu Simbel

During Rameses' reign, he expanded Egypt's control over neighboring countries. The inscriptions and reliefs on the walls of his temple at Abu Simbel recount his victory over the Hittites at the battle of Kadesh. They also celebrate his conquering of Nubia. Four colossal statues of the seated pharaoh—each nearly 70 feet high—are located outside the temple. They faced Nubia, likely to remind the people of their subjection to Rameses. Smaller figures of his mother Mut-Tuy, his wife Nefertari, and his children can be seen at his feet.



RAMESES II

- 1 Double Crown (*Pschent*)
- 2 Cobra (*Uraeus*)
- 3 Royal Headdress (*Nemes*)
- 4 Artificial Beard (*Postiche*)



RA-HORAKHTY

The name Ra-Horakhty means "Ra, who is Horus of the Two Horizons." He was the god of the sun and the sky. He is portrayed as a falcon with a sun disk.

The attire of the pharaoh was worn to underscore his authority and power. (1) The double crown (*pschent*) combined the white crown of Upper Egypt (*hedjet*, which is conical and resembles a bowling pin) with the red crown of Lower Egypt (*deshret*). The double crown conveyed the unification of Egypt, which had been two separate kingdoms prior to about 3100 B.C. The double crown was a symbol of pharaoh's power over the whole land. (2) Upper Egypt was represented by a vulture goddess (Nekhbet), whereas Lower Egypt was represented by a serpent goddess (Wadjet). The latter connects with the *uraeus*, the sacred cobra emblem worn by the pharaoh symbolizing his authority over Lower Egypt. The serpent was believed to protect the king, and it also signified his protection of the people. (3) Pharaohs wore a *nemes*, a striped head cloth that represented their power, whether in life or death. (4) Typically, facial hair was viewed as unfavorable by the Egyptians. Nevertheless, they believed that the gods had braided beards (goatees), so the pharaoh would wear a fake beard (*postiche*) during ceremonies in imitation of the gods. It conveyed his divine power and authority.

As one enters the temple, he comes into the central (hypostyle) hall which is lined with eight imposing statues of Rameses carved out of the rock. The excavated columns portray Rameses as Osiris, god of the underworld. He holds a shepherd's crook and a flail, symbols that may suggest both the kindness and the severity of the king. (They also appear on the coffin of King Tutankhamun.) The statues on the left have the white crown of Upper Egypt, whereas those on the right have the double crown. The images of a vulture repeated on the ceiling symbolize the royal protection of Nekhbet, the goddess representing Upper Egypt.



The Central Hall



Rameses Attacks a Fortress in the Battle of Kadesh



Rameses Attacks an Enemy While Trampling Another

Temple reliefs portray Rameses' victory over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh on the Orontes River in Syria (1274 B.C.). Scholars have suggested that Rameses overstated his victory; they believe the battle actually ended in a stalemate. Peace between the Hittites and the Egyptians was later sealed by the marriage of the daughter of Hattusili III to Rameses. Other reliefs in the temple record Rameses' victories over the Nubians, Lybians, and other peoples.



Rameses Worshipping a God



Rameses Attacking an Enemy



Inner Sanctuary of the Temple

In the sanctuary at the rear of the temple, an image of the deified Rameses takes his seat among the gods. The order is (1) Ptah, (2) Amun-Ra, (3) Rameses, and (4) Ra-Horakhty. Originally, these deities remained in the dark. Twice each year, on February 22nd and October 22nd, the morning sunlight shone on the back wall featuring these figures (except for Ptah, god of the underworld). Some think that these dates were the king's birthday and coronation day, but evidence to support this claim is lacking. Now the light shines on February 21st and October 21st, due to the movement of the Tropic of Cancer over the past 3,290 years. The two dates probably relate to the winter solstice, which now occurs on December 21st. October 21st is 61 days before the winter solstice, and February 21st is 61 days after.



Temple of Nefertari

The smaller Temple of Nefertari is located northeast of the Temple of Rameses. Queen Nefertari, whose name means “The most beautiful one,” was the favorite wife of Rameses. She was known by several titles, including “Sweet of love,” “Lady of grace,” “Great king’s wife, his beloved,” “Lady of the two lands,” and “Mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt.” She was one of only a few Egyptian queens to have a temple built in her honor. Unlike at the neighboring Temple of Rameses, the statues of Rameses and Nefertari forming the façade of the Temple of Nefertari are the same size (about 35 feet high). Nefertari was educated and took an active role in politics. Her spectacular tomb has been found in the Valley of the Queens (QV66).

The Temple of Nefertari was dedicated to Hathor. This goddess was considered to be the mother of Horus (a sky god) and of Ra (a sun god). She was the goddess of beauty, love, music, dancing, and maternity. Hathor is sometimes depicted with cow horns and a disk between them. In the central hall, she is pictured on the six pillars as a woman with cow ears. The inner sanctuary features Hathor as a cow emerging from the rock.



The Goddess Hathor



Pillar Featuring Hathor (with Ears of a Cow)



Central (Hypostyle) Hall Leading to Inner Sanctuary



Lake Nasser (Reservoir of Aswan High Dam)

The Temple of Rameses and the Temple of Nefertari were lost in the sand dunes of time, until Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (Swiss) and Giovanni Battista Belzoni (Italian) rediscovered them. In 1817, enough of the sand was cleared to enter the Rameses temple. By 1909, the sand had been fully cleared away from both temples. They have become famous historical sites in Egypt and are visited by thousands of tourists each year.

The relocation of the two temples to higher ground was completed in 1968 in order to prevent them from being submerged by Lake Nasser, the reservoir formed after the building of the Aswan High Dam. This amazing engineering feat was organized by UNESCO and the Egyptian government, and it involved the financial support of over fifty countries. The two temples were cut into about 1,600 pieces. The blocks were catalogued, moved to higher ground, and then reassembled. An artificial dome was built to recreate the mountain appearance, and the lines where the blocks had been cut were filled. Other monuments, such as the Temple of Isis at Philae, were also rescued from the rising waters of Lake Nasser.

The Temple of Rameses and the Temple of Nefertari have no direct bearing on the Scriptures. While some scholars believe Rameses was the pharaoh of the exodus (assuming the Late Date Theory), this position cannot be convincingly argued from the biblical data. (See David Stewart, *A Commentary on Judges* [Searcy, Ark.: Stewart Publications, 2021], 3-9.)