

Why did Ramesses III try to emulate Ramesses II?

In any profession, emulating the success of predecessors allows the hope of similar success, particularly in times of a strengthened need for a return to such stability. When Ramesses III ascended the throne close to the beginning of the twentieth dynasty, he took steps to attempt to emulate the reign of Ramesses II that had occurred several decades previous to his own. Why would Ramesses III have a need to emulate a previous pharaoh? Times had changed since the end of the reign of Ramesses the Great, and by associating himself with a pharaoh whose reign was still so closely associated with success, prosperity and peace, Ramesses III ascribed to his own reign the hope of returning Egypt to the state that it was in during the height of the New Kingdom. Because of the factors which caused the decline in peace and prosperity in Egypt, Ramesses III did not have the opportunity to assert his success in the same way that his famous predecessor did, and so the most hopeful way that he could be remembered as favourably in Egyptian history would have been to emulate the pharaoh who served as such a strong model for the ideal pharaoh. To an extent, emulating such a great predecessor worked for Ramesses III. By many, he is considered the last great pharaoh of the New Kingdom before its downfall which followed his reign (Kitchen 1983, 224), and his success could be drawn from a desire to emulate the success of Ramesses II.

The name and reputation of Ramesses II continued in history long after his death, and his achievements set a standard to which later pharaohs would be compared (Freed 1987, 24). During his reign, Egypt reached a peak in terms of empire, peace and wealth. The length of his reign allowed sufficient opportunity for self-promotion, and long before his death his name was well-known and respected in the sense that he had been elevated to the status of living legend, so the reputation and influence that he would continue to have after his death would have been in no doubt for his successors (Tyldesley 2000, 1–2). The legacy of Ramesses II was great enough to last long after his death and serve as an example for later

pharaohs to model themselves upon, but for a pharaoh ascending the throne as close to the reign of the great pharaoh as Ramesses III, the achievements of Ramesses II were even more significant when considered in comparison to the three decades following his death. Despite the huge success of Ramesses II's reign, the reigns of his successors saw a decline in the prosperity and greatness that had characterised his reign.

The end of the nineteenth dynasty saw a decline in the stability and authority of the ruling house of Egypt (Kitchen 1983, 215–7). Associating himself with Ramesses II implied that Ramesses III's reign would be a continuation of a point in Egypt's history that was successful, rather than a continuation of the period to which his own reign actually belonged. He provided himself with distance from the chaos that had seen the decline and fall of the nineteenth dynasty. The motivation to emulate the reign of Ramesses II and associate himself with the pharaoh here serves as a means to distance himself from this chaotic sequence of rulers who had represented, particularly when following a hugely successful and long reign, great political instability (Dodson 2010, 31–46). It is hardly surprising that, following decades of political strife, short reigns and the usurpation of monuments and reliefs, Ramesses III chose to try emulating Ramesses II, who was at that point the most recent pharaoh to have presided over a peaceful Egypt with a stable government. The time between the death of Ramesses II and the beginning of Setnakht's reign which established the twentieth dynasty was described in the Great Harris Papyrus as a time in which the people had no leader for many years, during which time Egypt was in a state of lawlessness and chaos. This was apparently followed by many 'empty years' of no rulers, followed by the seizing of power by the Syrian Irsu, until the gods chose Setnakht, Ramesses III's predecessor, to rule and re-establish order (van Dijk 2003, 296). Although propagandistic for the sake of legitimising Setnakht's reign, this could still be considered a source, in moderation, for the people's perception of the state that Egypt was in following a hugely

successful reign. If the reigns of his predecessors from the end of the nineteenth dynasty were actually so damaged that they were hardly considered to have been rulers at all, then this serves as an even stronger incentive for the attempted revival of Ramesses II's success. The peace and order that was established by Setnakht upon the establishment of the twentieth dynasty was seemingly inherited by Ramesses III upon his accession, but his troubles with the Libyans and Sea Peoples overshadowed much of the first decade of his reign (van Dijk 2003, 297). This trouble with the Sea Peoples had occurred since the reign of Merenptah – consequently filling the time between Ramesses III's own reign and that of Ramesses II – and their destruction was evident throughout the Middle East.

Many of the problems that Ramesses III faced during his reign had arisen following the death of Ramesses II, and the subsequent decline of the nineteenth dynasty. Merenptah, Ramesses II's son and successor, encountered problems with the Libyans and Sea Peoples during his short reign. Although he was victorious over them, the threat of these groups seems to have continued until the accession of Ramesses III three decades later. Usurpation and strife were key to the breakdown of the nineteenth dynasty and the decline from the peak, which had been reached in the reign of Ramesses II (Dodson & Hilton 2004, 176). Because each king between himself and Ramesses II had represented part of a chain of short reigns and often some level of disorder, restoring *ma'at* and returning Egypt to a state of peace and prosperity would make Ramesses III a successful king at the beginning of a new and hopefully successful dynasty. By trying to emulate the respected Ramesses II, Ramesses III was using a model which had proved immensely successful only a few decades previously and gave hope that Egypt could return to a similar state of peace and stability.

The most immediate efforts that Ramesses III made to emulate his predecessor and try to follow suit of Ramesses II's reign was the use of his name, which would have been a significant factor in attempting to align the two pharaohs in the minds of contemporary

Egyptians. The desire to emulate the reign of Ramesses II did not come from an attempt to continue the family line of dynastic ideals, however, as Ramesses III was no more than perhaps a distant relative of Ramesses II, and he ascended the throne in a new dynasty. Regardless, by using Ramesses' name there was a clear and immediate link to be made between the pharaohs. At the mention of his name, the people would be reminded of the previous prosperity of Egypt not much longer than only a generation previously, and the new pharaoh would be associated with the hopeful revival of this, distanced from the failures of the pharaohs who reigned between them. Similarly, his name as recorded on monuments would bear similarity to the previous king, so that in posterity he may be remembered alongside him in a similar respect. Ramesses III's royal titulary demonstrates his desire to emulate previous pharaohs and associate himself with their success, not only with Ramesses II but also with dynastic founders. His Horus name was a copy of those of the dynastic founders Ahmose (eighteenth dynasty) and Ramesses I (nineteenth dynasty), emphasising that he recognised the importance of being associated with the achievements of previous pharaohs and did not aim to emulate only one. This connection to the founders of previous dynasties introduces the idea that Ramesses III considered himself the true founder of the twentieth dynasty. However, more important to the image that Ramesses III was creating for himself was the connection of himself to Ramesses the Great. The other components to his name were based on those of Ramesses II, boldly making an immediate connection between himself and the previous pharaoh to make it clear that his own reign would attempt to be similar to that of Ramesses II (Kitchen 1983, 137; Kitchen 2012, 3–4).

By the end of Ramesses II's reign, there had been an increase in the importance of the king's family rather than the sole importance of him alone. This concept of the broad 'royal family' that Ramesses II had adopted and promoted during his reign was a relatively new one, different to those of previous dynasties up until the Amarna Period (Dodson 2010, 6–7).

This continued throughout the period as a new aspect of the Ramesside age, having been used by Ramesses III, perhaps to emulate the success of Ramesses II's family rather than as a king alone, hoping to bring the same success to his own family. Ramesses III, as well as taking on the names of his respected predecessor himself, also named nine of his eleven known children directly after some of Ramesses II's own children, perhaps in an effort to bring the same fortunate attributes and achievements to his family as were evident in the family of Ramesses II. In emulating this importance of family, Ramesses III aligned himself firmly with the continuation of Ramesses II's reign and dynasty. This served as an almost effortless way to emulate the success of the previous Ramesses and his family, and hope to achieve the same success through his own family, particularly following the period of short reigns previous to his own which emphasised the breakdown of a family dynasty. Ramesses III's sons often received the same offices as their namesakes, meaning that they were successful in their father's administration just as the children of Ramesses II had been (Dodson & Hilton 2004, 160–1, 186–7). The scenes depicting the royal family of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu were copied directly from those of Ramesses II's family at the Ramesseum, implying a desire to be equal to, rather than simply associated with, this successful family from the previous dynasty (Kitchen 1982, 119 n. 22). Although perhaps a simple means of emulation, the use of the same names for himself and for his family aligned Ramesses III's image with that of a successful pharaoh, as well as projecting the view of his reign and his family being as successful and prosperous in Egypt as his predecessors had been.

Ramesses III, along with his government and his people, would have been very aware of the conflict affecting Egypt following the reign of Ramesses II. Perhaps trying to emulate the success that Ramesses II had exercised over the foreign enemies created hope of having his own victories over them, just as Ramesses had done and had documented so profusely for further generations to be reminded of.

A notable achievement of Ramesses II's reign was the building of fortresses along the west of Egypt to protect the country from a Libyan invasion, made possible as a result of peace negotiations with the Hittite empire. With the northern front peaceful, Ramesses II had the opportunity to focus on securing Egypt's western border from threats in Libya (van Dijk, 2003, 290). Control over the Libyans, at least for a long enough period of time to allow the construction of these fortresses, must be assumed, suggesting the level of control that Ramesses II had over them, and the extent to which he was able to prevent this foreign threat to *ma'at* in Egypt from the west. However, following his death, the Libyan threat arose again and his immediate successor Merenptah led a campaign against the Libyans in his fifth regnal year (van Dijk 2003, 294; Cline 2014, 6). The coalition of the forces of the Libyans and the Sea People was defeated, but the Libyans posed a threat to Egypt throughout its history, and were a significant part of Ramesses III's foreign activity (Cline 2014, 9, 136). Campaigns were led against the Libyans in both the fifth and eleventh regnal years of Ramesses III, which now eclipse much of his reign and must have been a significant part of his reign in the forefront of the minds of his people and in his legacy.

In Ramesses II's fifth regnal year, he had set out to recapture Qadesh, which had again fallen under Hittite control. The Battle of Qadesh has not been regarded by Egyptologists as a definite victory for either side due to the nature of recordings from both the Egyptians and the Hittites, each recording victory in the battle (Kitchen 1983, 53–60; van de Mieroop 2012, 40). Regardless of the true outcome of the battle, the 'victory' over the Hittites was recorded with credit to Ramesses II at Karnak. This served to create an image of Ramesses II as the ultimate leader in terms of both war and order – his strength in battle allowed for the Egyptians' victory and enforced the idea of Ramesses as a capable leader who could restore *ma'at* to Egypt in the event of foreign threat. Further foreign campaigns followed in the next 15 years of Ramesses' reign to further secure Egypt's empire, and the

peace treaty formed with the Hittites in his 21st regnal year demonstrated the effectiveness of Ramesses' reign and the peace that his actions could bring to Egypt (van de Mieroop 2010, 40–1, 107, 110–1). This notion of peace with former enemies is upheld in records, as many decades later it is recorded at Karnak that Ramesses II's son and successor Merenptah sent grain to the Hittites during a famine. Following this, the peace and prosperity of Egypt continued, and Ramesses II worked to establish himself as a god. Peace continued and Egypt and its people prospered in its continuation, and the fourteen jubilees of the pharaoh reinforced the idea that he was ruling as a god with the promise of an eternal rule with support from the gods and the growth of his country (Freed 1987, 48–9).

Whereas Ramesses III's own reign was dominated by Libyans and the Sea Peoples, that of Ramesses II, which acted as a model reign to follow, was concerned primarily with Syria in the first decade of his rule (Dodson 2010, 10). One way in which Ramesses III therefore could not turn to the victories of Ramesses II before him as a model for his own military efforts was in the case of the events that led to the Late Bronze Age collapse, which affected not only Egypt but also each of the great powers of that period (Cline 2014, 2). The military victories that were achieved in the midst of international chaos were more vital to Ramesses III's reign than they had been to Ramesses II (Kitchen 1983, 218). The Sea Peoples had attacked Egypt in Ramesses III's eighth regnal year, and brought down each of the powerful countries in the area – the Mycenaeans, the Canaanites, the Cypriots and others – who, according to Ramesses' inscriptions at Medinet Habu, could not resist the threat of these foreign enemies (Wilson 1969, 262–3). The forces of the Peleset, Tjekker, Shekelesh, Danuna and Weshesh recorded at Medinet Habu along with the Shardana (Adams & Cohen 2013, 645–64), are known from Egyptian recordings. Both the land and sea battles against the Sea Peoples are prominent events within the reign of Ramesses III, each recorded at Medinet Habu to remember the pharaoh's victory. The victory over these people, who were such a

threat to such a large part of known civilisation at that time, could be considered a victory for Ramesses III on the same scale as the achievement of Ramesses II concerning Qadesh or the building of fortresses to secure the western border. Although Ramesses II's son and immediate successor Merenptah had dealt with the Sea Peoples, Ramesses II himself did not display victorious accounts over them which Ramesses III could have hoped to emulate in an effort to reach his situation. Despite the fact that so many factors of Ramesses III's reign can be considered as attempts to emulate Ramesses II, he records his own victory over the Sea Peoples, after which they would not return to Egypt as 'their heart and soul are finished forever and ever', and 'their ships and their goods were as if fallen into the water' (Wilson 1969, 262–3). Although Egypt under Ramesses III was the only power to successfully resist the Sea People, they had a lasting effect on the rest of the Mediterranean and subsequently on Egypt itself.

Although Ramesses II was militarily active in Nubia and Libya to secure Egypt's dominant position as well as being concerned with affairs in Syria, much of his reign was peaceful and was focused on building activity, which allowed him to boast of his achievements. This left Ramesses II's mark firmly across the whole of Egypt and left no doubt of how much he was able to achieve during his time as pharaoh. Because of this vast recording of the military successes of Ramesses II, which led to the beginning of a peaceful reign, attempting to emulate the international control that his predecessor possessed through these victories could have been another way that Ramesses III aimed to emulate Ramesses II. Fortunately, for the sake of aligning himself with the great victorious pharaoh, the circumstances arose for Ramesses III to have the chance to emulate Ramesses II through military victories (Snape 2012, 405). The extent to which each pharaoh's main military achievements were boasted of and used to emphasise the success of his reign is most clear through their building activity and the decoration of their monuments, which Ramesses II

certainly set a precedent for. This is perhaps a more clear indication of the ways in which Ramesses III tried to emulate Ramesses II, rather than through comparison of military achievements that were, for the majority, against different enemies and had varied levels of significance in the context of each pharaoh's reign.

A reminder of the success of Ramesses II's reign, his power and authority, and the image of him as a fully divine being, was seen in the results of his extensive building work, most significantly his newly-established capital Per-Ramesses, his memorial temple in Nubia, Abu Simbel, and his mortuary temple, the Ramesseum. Each acted as a lasting reminder to following generations of his achievements and the long, peaceful reign which allowed him to successfully embark on such building activity; these would have served an essential point of continuation and emulation for Ramesses III. Large monuments across Egypt also served as a reminder of the great pharaoh to remain in people's minds, and during Ramesses III's reign these would have acted as a reminder to the people of the reign that the new pharaoh was attempting to emulate Ramesses II, and therefore the state which the country would, at least hopefully, be returned to. Despite his building efforts suggesting that Ramesses III's reign was not as prosperous as his famous predecessor, by building ambitiously and extensively to spread his ideology and display the image of himself as a deified being early in his reign, he deliberately emulated Ramesses II's building programme (Mojsov 2012, 271).

Ramesses II, with such an important legacy and such an impressive building program to keep implementing its influence, would have naturally been a role model for the ideal pharaoh. His legacy particularly would have displayed what a successful pharaoh could achieve during his reign, which had not been shown on such a grand scale before thanks to the length of his reign. Ramesses III's own mortuary temple, Medinet Habu, was closely modelled on the Ramesseum (Kitchen 1983, 218). Although the Ramesseum is now in much ruin and it is difficult to know exactly how closely it was copied (O'Connor 2012, 212–3),

the structures are similar and Medinet Habu reflects the battles against the Libyans and the Sea Peoples (Murnane 1980, 13–18) just as the Ramesseum portrays Ramesses II's success at Qadesh (Kitchen 1983, 55 fig.18). Even the pattern of reliefs at Medinet Habu was copied from the Ramesseum, by displaying reliefs depicting activity in the Levant inside and out of the first court just as Ramesses II had displayed his Levant and Qadesh military scenes inside and out of the first court of the Ramesseum (Kitchen 2012, 15). Reliefs and inscriptions were copied to such exact detail that blocks were mistakenly inserted into the wrong temple in modern restorations (Teeter 2012, 44). Ramesses III's efforts to expand Per-Ramesses also served as a physical continuation of Ramesses II's achievements. That is not to say that Ramesses III copied Ramesses II's building activity in every sense, it has been suggested that Medinet Habu improved upon the plan of the Ramesseum rather than simply copying it to create the same temple (O'Connor 2012, 224–5, 237). By emulating Ramesses II's building work to some extent, Ramesses III could hope to leave the same mark on Egypt as part of his legacy, and could boast of his achievements just as his predecessor had done.

Ramesses III sat on Egypt's throne as pharaoh for three decades, and although considerably longer than the reigns of his predecessors at the end of the nineteenth dynasty, he did not have the opportunity to assert his own importance with such ease as Ramesses II had done in his own reign. Because of the progressing collapse of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean, completing his own victories against foreign threats, decreasing economic stability and the continuation of internal political strife, Ramesses III lacked the time of peace and prosperity which had allowed Ramesses II to assert his importance throughout Egypt. The military efforts, which were so significant to the success in Ramesses III's reign, contributed to an economic strain on Egypt. Economic difficulty in upholding the empire in Asia proved difficult at this time, as the government lost control of the balance of finance and payments to the temples (van Dijk 2003, 298). Consequently, this led to a decline of Egypt's

empire and of governmental control, which although not recorded so as to not acknowledge the failures of Ramesses' and the declining strength of Egypt at this time, eventually led to loss of control of state finance and the inability to pay the workmen at Deir el-Medina (Lesko 1994, 38–9). Repeated raids by groups of Libyans in the Theban area and workmen strikes in Deir el-Medina, although not drastic enough to cause a decline as chaotic as the kings previously, caused a feeling of unrest and insecurity in Egypt. These factors contributed further to the breakdown of the centralised state, which had started with the death of Ramesses II and gradually progressed (van Dijk 2003, 298). These factors would have made it difficult, in fact nearly impossible, to create a powerful lasting image for himself during his reign. However, the monuments of Ramesses III overlook these factors and, emulating those of Ramesses II, display a reign of continuity and stability.

Despite changes in Egypt and the fact that it was defensive by the time of Ramesses III, he tried to emulate the achievements of Ramesses II in both war and peace, the achievements which had made him such a successful pharaoh (Kitchen 1983, 217). The motivation for doing so cannot have been clearer: Ramesses III wanted success on the same scale as Ramesses II. Whether this was in terms of his family, his building activity, or his monuments and legacy, Ramesses II was the most recent successful pharaoh before Ramesses III's own reign. The vast length of his reign provided many examples to his successors to copy in an attempt to emulate his reign. Although Ramesses III did not end up ruling as successfully and for as long as the pharaoh whose successes he modelled his own on, without his actions the steady national decline of Egypt may perhaps have begun on a significant scale decades earlier, incorporating the years of Ramesses' reign rather than beginning after them. It is clear that Ramesses would wish to be regarded as a king from the same mould as his illustrious namesake, (Snape 2012, 404) despite the factors that affected his ability to rule over an Egypt as peaceful and successful as Ramesses II had been able to do.

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