

“ RAMESSES II  
ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS  
AND HITTITE  
EGYPTIAN PEACE  
TREATY

## WAR AND PEACE

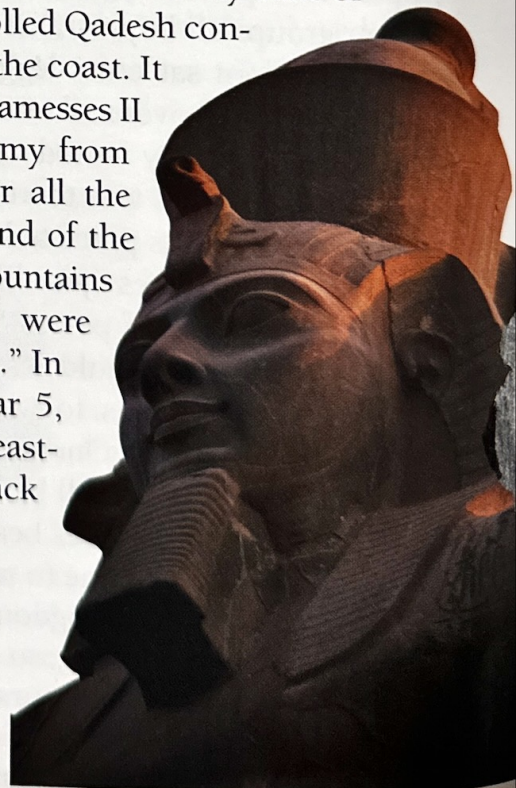
### RAMESSES II AND THE BATTLE OF QADESH

**N**orth of the Nile Delta, across the Mediterranean Sea, the land of the Hittites juts out like the snout of a barking dog. From an area where a whisker might sprout, the people of an initially insignificant nation called Hatti, began to spread throughout the Near East. By the late second millennium BCE, they had grown into a great power. Asian princes wrote time and again to Akhenaten, warning him that he had better stop the Hittites now, before it was too late. The Hittites were chipping away at Egypt's control in Syria. But Akhenaten ignored the letters and he ignored the Hittites. And the Hittites grew stronger.

In the 13th century BCE, during the early part of Egypt's 19th Dynasty, when Ramesses II was king, the Hittites could no longer be ignored. They controlled the city-state of Qadesh, and whoever controlled Qadesh controlled the trade route from the coast. It was a strategic position and Ramesses II knew it. “Now the vile enemy from Hatti had gathered together all the foreign lands as far as the end of the sea. . . . They covered the mountains and filled the valleys and were like locusts in their numbers.” In the spring of his regnal Year 5, Ramesses II led his army eastward on a mission to beat back the Hittites.

*This close to Ramesses II's colossal statue, you can see the strings that hold the fake royal beard in place. Ramesses lived 96 years, kept 200 wives and concubines, and fathered more than 100 children.*

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, about 1279–1212 BCE

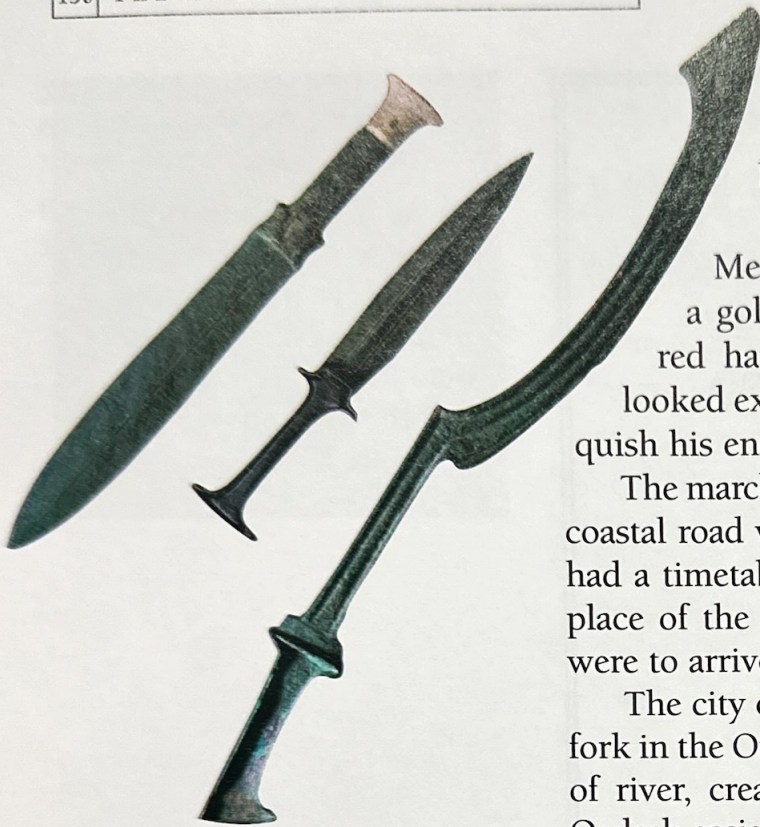


## LET MY PEOPLE GO

In the Biblical story of the Exodus, Moses petitions a pharaoh 10 times to allow him to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. It is possible that the pharaoh was Ramesses II.



The Egyptian army was a fearsome force. Twenty thousand infantrymen and charioteers advanced toward Qadesh. Four divisions of highly trained soldiers, each unit named after a protective god—Amun, Re, Ptah, and Seth—marched east. Ox-drawn carts and donkeys loaded with food and weapons followed, kicking up dust as they went. Members of the royal family, priests, advisers, and diplo-



*Soldiers adapted their weapons from farm tools. The curved double-edged sword looks similar to a scythe, which was used for cutting grain.*

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, about 1279–1212 BCE

#### NOSE JOB

To keep the hook shape of Ramesses's nose from collapsing, embalmers stuffed his nostrils with peppercorns.

mats accompanied the soldiers to meet an enemy that Ramesses II claimed outnumbered them two to one.

Ramesses II and his faithful shield bearer, Menna, led the troops, riding front and center in a golden chariot. Tall and dignified, with flaming red hair and a prominent, hooked nose, the king looked exactly as a pharaoh should, heading out to vanquish his enemies. He indeed was Ramesses the Great.

The march through Canaan and southern Syria along the coastal road would take a month. It is likely that Ramesses had a timetable to meet. As was the custom, the time and place of the battle had probably been agreed upon. They were to arrive at Qadesh in May.

The city of Qadesh lay tucked into a crook formed by a fork in the Orontes River. A moat connected the two prongs of river, creating an island city. The water barrier made Qadesh easier to defend.

One day's march from Qadesh, in the Wood of Labwi, Ramesses and his men halted. They needed to rest before crossing the Orontes River and facing the Hittite army. A refreshed army was a strong army. While setting up camp, Egyptian sentries found two men hiding in the trees. The men claimed to have deserted the Hittite army and professed profusely their allegiance to the great and powerful Ramesses II. When questioned, they told Ramesses that the Hittite king had stalled 120 miles north of Qadesh. “He was too frightened to proceed southwards when he heard that the Pharaoh had come northwards.”

Believing the story completely (flattery will get you everywhere) and without making any attempt to be sure it was true, Ramesses took one division, the Army of Amun, and crossed the river. The single division advanced quickly on Qadesh. The king anticipated an easy victory. Without the Hittite army there would be little opposition. Ramesses prepared for a sunrise surprise attack. But it was Ramesses who was in for the surprise.

That night the Egyptian patrol captured two Hittite spies. When they refused to talk, they were tortured and interro-

gated. “His Majesty asked, ‘Who are you?’ They replied, ‘We belong to the king of Hatti. He has sent us to spy on you.’ Then His Majesty said to them, ‘Where is he the ruler of Hatti?’ . . . They replied, ‘Behold, the Ruler of Hatti has already come . . . They have their weapons of war at the ready. They are more numerous than the grains of sand on the beach. . . ready for battle behind Old Qadesh.’”

Ramesses knew then that he had been tricked. The Hittite king and his entire army lay in wait just over the hill. And Ramesses’ hasty advance had left his forces strung out on both sides of the river, miles apart. He was doomed. He called for his officers. Messengers were dispatched to summon the other field armies. The royal family was whisked away to safety.

Not yet knowing that the king and the Army of Amun were in mortal danger, the Army of Re approached the rendezvous point in a vulnerable formation. Their ranks stretched for two and a half miles. And they marched right into a trap. Hittite charioteers raced out from a line of trees and charged the Army of Re. The Egyptian soldiers panicked and scattered. Fleeing the battlefield, the soldiers led the enemy directly toward Ramesses II and the Army of Amun.

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, about 1279–1212 BCE

#### DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ

Ramesses wasn't a particularly skilled general. He was inexperienced, impatient, and gullible, but you would never know it from the inscriptions he commissioned. Some of the battle scenes, like Qadesh, are exaggerated accounts of true events. Others never happened at all and are merely symbolic images of what a great king should be—a super hero!



Details of the battle of Qadesh are carved on Ramesses II's mortuary temple. The Egyptian shield bearer holds his shield high to protect the fleeing soldiers from incoming arrows.

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh  
battle inscriptions of  
Ramesses II, about 1279–  
1212 BCE

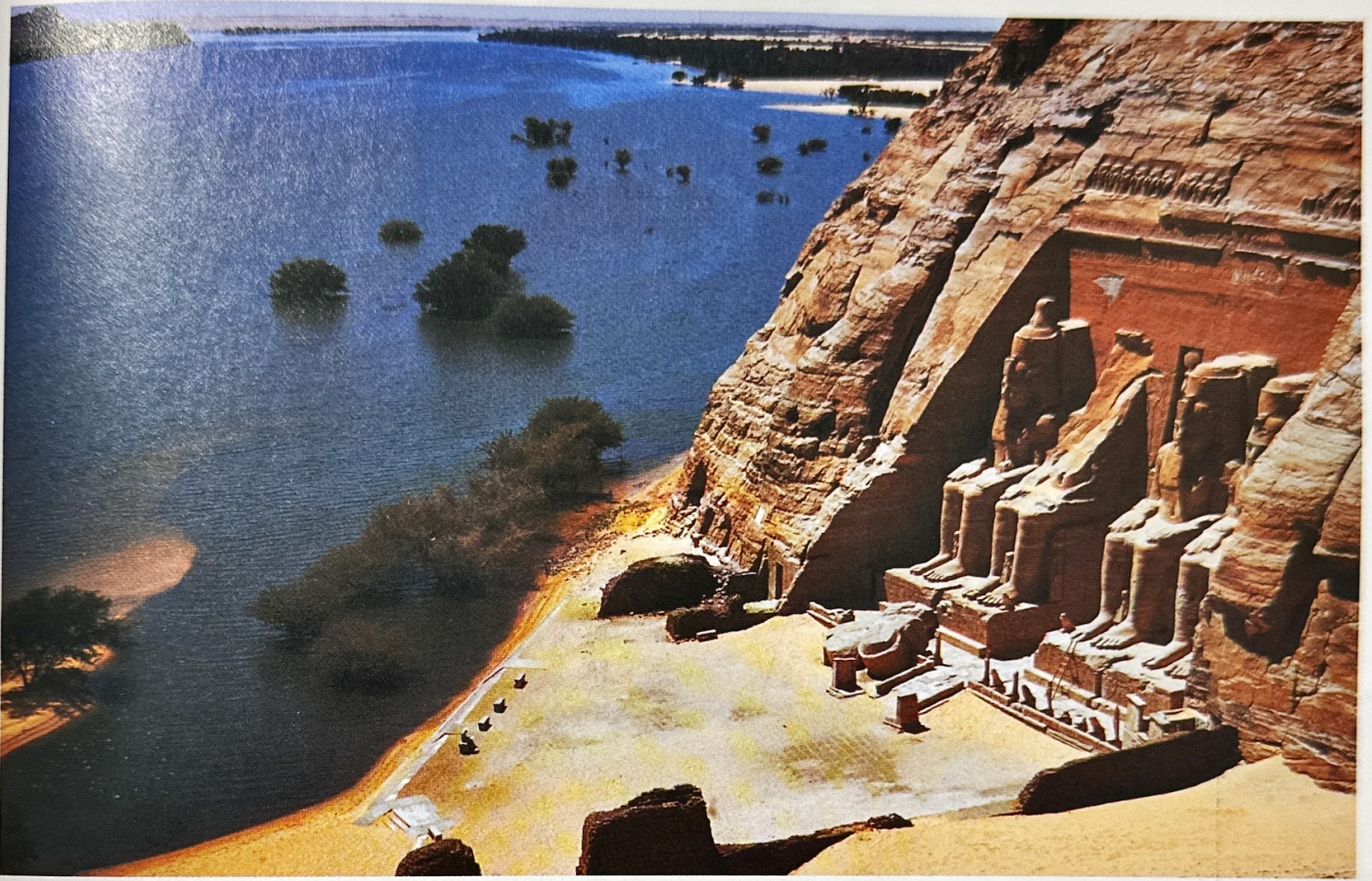
The first soldiers to reach Ramesses II's camp burst into the command tent, shouting that the Hittite army was right behind. Ramesses grabbed his battle armor and stepped out of the tent to see his camp already in chaos. The Hittites had broken through the defensive line. Ramesses realized he was isolated from his elite guards in the midst of the enemy with only his shield bearer, Menna, at his side. “When Menna saw so great a number of chariots had ringed about me, he felt faint, and fear entered his limbs. Thus he spoke to his majesty, ‘We stand alone in the middle of the enemy. The infantry and the chariots have abandoned us. . . . Let us also leave unharmed.’” Ramesses stood firm and answered, “Steady your heart, Menna. I shall move among them just as a hawk.”

The battle scenes carved on the walls of the Great Temple at Abu Simbel show Ramesses single-handedly taking down the Hittite army:

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh  
battle inscriptions of  
Ramesses II, about 1279–  
1212 BCE

There was no officer with me, no charioteer, no soldier. My infantry and my chariotry had run away before the enemy and no one stood firm to fight. . . . I found that my heart grew stout and my breast swelled with joy. Everything which I attempted I succeeded. . . . I found the enemy chariots scattering before my horses. Not one of them could fight me. Their hearts quaked with fear when they saw me and their arms went limp so they could not shoot. . . . I made them plunge into the water like crocodiles. They fell on their faces, one on top of another. I slaughtered them at will. . . . Behold, I am victorious, me alone!

What really happened when the Hittite army infiltrated the royal camp is muddied by Ramesses' illusions of grandeur. The camp surely was in mass confusion. Many of his soldiers undoubtedly deserted, fleeing for their lives. The Hittite army had a clear advantage. Their ambush had worked. But once they were inside the camp, things began to fall apart for the Hittites. Rather than pressing their advantage and fighting the Egyptians while they were most



vulnerable, the Hittites stopped to grab all the riches they were stumbling over. While they were busy plundering, Egyptian reinforcements arrived. The Egyptian divisions joined forces. They charged the Hittites. When it dawned on the Hittites that they were no longer facing disorganized stragglers, but a determined army, they turned and fled, diving into the Orontes River and swimming to the east bank where the bulk of the Hittite army waited.

When the dust settled, two of the greatest armies of the ancient world stood facing one another on opposite banks of the river. It seems neither wanted to fight. They had both lost many men. The Hittites no longer could ambush an unsuspecting army. The Egyptians would come at them prepared. And the Egyptians weren't facing some small outpost that offered little resistance. Hittite soldiers were trained and organized. War would mean enormous losses for both sides. And the outcome was by no means certain.

*In a remote, sacred spot south of the Valley of the Kings, Ramesses II built his greatest monument, which Egyptians called "Place of Beauty" and we call Abu Simbel. Flanking the entrance of the Great Temple, carved into the limestone cliffs, are four giant statues of Ramesses II. The eyes, looking downward, watch those who approach six stories below.*



*Scribes recorded historical events that honored the king. Impressed onto this clay tablet is a copy of the treaty between Ramesses II and the Hittite king.*

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, about 1279–1212 BCE

“ Treaty between Hattusilis III and Ramesses II, 1258 BCE

“ Royal inscriptions, Qadesh battle inscriptions of Ramesses II, about 1279–1212 BCE

What happened next depends on whom you believe. Ramesses claimed the Hittite king begged for a truce by saying, “O victorious king, peace is better than war, Give us breath.” The Hittite king claimed it was Ramesses who buckled under. The fact that Qadesh remained under Hittite control makes the Hittite king’s version of the story more believable.

It took 16 years, but in Year 21 of Ramesses II’s reign the two nations negotiated peace. The treaty is the earliest recorded document of its type preserved in its entirety. Inscribed on two matching silver tablets are the pledges of the king of Egypt and the king of Hatti to one another. “If a foreign enemy marches against the country of Hatti and if the king of Hatti sends me this message: ‘Come to my help’ . . . the king of the Egyptian country has to send his troops and his chariots to kill this enemy. . . .” The Hittite king made a similar vow to defend Egypt. The treaty also pledged support if the enemy were to come from within. The Hittite king swore that if Ramesses should “rise in anger against his citizens after they have committed a wrong against him . . . the king of the country of Hatti, my brother, has to send his troops and his chariots. . . .” Ramesses promised to stand by the Hittite king in the same circumstances. The treaty was honored until the fall of the Hittite Empire. Even when tested, Ramesses stood by his ally, announcing to the world, “Today there is a fraternity between the Great King of Egypt and the king of Hatti.”