

ANCIENT HISTORY

Assess the reign of Ramesses the first

Ramesses reign was one of great success that saw Egypt go into new heights of power. Despite the fact that he did not vastly extend borders, he ultimately secured borders through a peace treaty with the Hittites. Thus he paved the way for future pharaohs to lead Egypt on sound lines, shown by the Ramesside period where numerous successors named themselves after him, according to Bradley. He also helped by his vast building policy. He also played a vital role in promoting Amen and Polytheism in society.

Ramesses held a successful foreign policy that led Egypt into new relations with powerful rulers and also consolidate his reign. After the Battle of Kadesh, the Hittite king promptly asked for peace due to the Libyan threat in the east. Ramesses wisely accepted the offer, which stated that both empires would defend each other, and also share education. The success of his foreign policy is shown in the good relations between them, which was achieved through diplomatic marriages which took place in the 34th year of his reign. Inscriptions, reliefs and statues were created to celebrate the wedding and thus acted as form of propaganda used to justify his reign. Diplomatic marriages played an important part in cementing peace between the empires, shown when Ramesses' successor sent grain to the Hittites in order to help them break a famine. Thus Ramesses successful foreign policy brought Egypt into new heights and power, and also minimised the threat of the Hittites. It also allowed him to devote the second half of his reign towards religion and building. However, Kitchen believes that Ramesses was not careful in his quest to maintain peace as he made a letter to the Hittite king refusing to accept a lady due to her old age. Thus at times there was instability, also in the sense that he did not provide Egyptian women for the Hittites. Bradley also criticises the treaty as he believes that he lost the opportunity to win military glory in northern Syria. However, suspicion and uncertainty about Syria would now cease according to Breasted. Despite this, his foreign policy was a great success which saw him do what no other pharaoh was able to in the previous Dynasty's.

As with previous pharaohs, Ramesses understood the need for a significant administration policy. His admin policy ultimately took up much of his time. He gained valuable experience under his father guidance, supervising quarries, buildings, and also the royal palace and estate. By holding a successful policy, Ramesses ultimately gained much support from the masses, shown by when he built a well to supply water to people in the gold-mining area, which gained large amounts of praise. As he surrounded himself with competent key officials, such as Paser, his administration policy was of high standard. He also administrated the empire through propaganda. After the battle of Kadesh, Ramesses emphasised himself as a victor in temples and reliefs on walls.

This is shown through the Bulletin and the Poem, which helped consolidate and justify his reign, as well as suggest to the empire that he would run it on solid grounds.

Ramesses continued the religious policy of his father and grandfather in the sense that he promoted polytheism, as well as Amun throughout Egypt. Amen retained a very important position in society with Ramesses ensuring that he honored the god as soon as he came to throne. Thus from the beginning of his reign, he won the support of the masses bringing about stability in society. This is shown as he often referred to Amen as his father, and also called upon Amen to come to his aid at the Battle of Kadesh. However, it was not only Amen that was a major god, Re, Ptah and many other foreign gods as mentioned at Per-Ramesses, were also referred to as father which helped him consolidate his reign. This is further supported as he named army divisions after them, thus suggesting his belief that gods played a major influence in life. In doing so, according to Kitchen, and by also promoting himself equally with the gods, at some temples in Nubia being the sole god, he put himself in a religious position that would be accepted and endorsed in society.

Building was a role in which Ramesses prided himself with, allowing him to emphasise his political and religious role in society. Ramesses built himself a new capital in the northern Delta region that was referred to as the house of Ramesses, Great of Victories. According to Erman, the city was renowned for its beauty, as a commercial port and a military centre. By making communications easier between Egypt and the Asiatic lands, Per-Ramesses allowed the pharaoh to justify and consolidate his political role in society. It also played a religious polytheistic role as foreign gods were worshipped there, as well as Egyptian gods. By completing the great Hypostyle hall of SETI I, Ramesses suggested to the empire how he was going to lead Egypt on sound lines. Furthermore, Ramesses added a front court, pylon and obelisks to the 18th Dynasty Luxor Temple which allowed him to claim that it was all his own work, as stated by Breasted. Thus his building program allowed him to increase the strength of his political position. This was consolidated through buildings on Abydos, which were constructed in quantity rather than quality. The use of colossal statues in major sizes reinforced his reign according to Lawless, and also reinforced the image of a warrior pharaoh. This is shown in the Ramesseum where he is depicted as larger than his army and enemies in the Battle of Kadesh. His mortuary temple was dedicated to Osiris, and thus he brought back the traditional funerary customs that had been lost in the Amarna revolution. However, his building policy has been criticised in the sense that quantity overcame quality in the sense that he used sunk-relief decoration. This often saw the quality of work sacrificed for gigantic and overwhelming proportions. Overall, his role of a builder was well implemented, providing temples for numerous vassal states, which all justified his reign as an equal of god.

Ramesses clearly upheld the image of a warrior pharaoh due to his significant military campaigns. In year 4 of his reign, he struck Amurru.

However, the success of the campaign is compromised as the stela that was set up is illegible. It was in year 5 that Ramesses undertook the most important campaign of his career, the Battle of Kadesh. Kadesh was crucial if Egypt wanted to gain control of northern Syria, which would provide a rich and fertile plain, but also link Egypt on a main trade route. The Egyptian army was well comprised, having archers, infantry and chariotry, whereas the Hittites lacked archers, despite having 17,000 men. As military divisions were named after primal gods, such as Amen, Ramesses was able to stress his relationship with the gods and his successful military career which was assisted by the gods. However, the attack has been criticised by numerous historians. Lawless believes that Ramesses's army was outwitted by the Hittite king as their spies revealed that Hittite forces were far away, when they were actually hidden in the north of Kadesh. Thus, the Hittites launched an attack on the Egyptian army that was scattered at the time and only saved by reinforcements. The outcome of the war, the Egypto-Hittite peace treaty is also criticised as it limited Ramesses in the sense that he could no longer take control of Syria. Ramesses also undertook several other minor campaigns, such as the revolts in Palestine. Despite taking over the states, the cities frequently left Egyptian dominance and drifted back into Hittite control. The Temple of Abu Simbel also shows reliefs of a Nubian campaign, with the conventional smiting scene shown. Thus Ramesses kept Nubia under control with efficient and strong viceroys and their garrisons.