

Ramses II and the Battle of Kadesh

At *Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs* you will be immersed in a range of sources and objects that will be invaluable to your understanding of his career and the Ramesside period during New Kingdom Egypt. Before your visit you will read about important parts of his career that will be built upon once you experience the exhibition.

Ramses II served as his father Seti I's deputy during the latter part of his reign. During this time, Ramses II supervised building projects, accompanied his father on campaign and worked alongside the vizier Paser in a range of administrative and religious affairs.

When he was still crown prince, Ramses successfully dealt with two minor wars in Nubia and the delta area. During his fourth regnal year as pharaoh he campaigned into Syria, bringing Amurru back into the Egyptian 'Empire' from the Hittite Kingdom. Suppiluliumas' successor Muwatallis, the new Hittite King, assembled an army to prevent Ramses II taking any more territory in Northern Syria, culminating in the battle of Kadesh.

The Battle of Kadesh is considered one of the most famous battles in the ancient world, and an excellent example of Ramesside propaganda. The historical account is depicted on many major temples throughout Egypt and despite being a stalemate, was framed as a great victory for Egypt. In the exhibition, you will experience an immersive multimedia display that recounts the battle. Before you watch it, first make yourself familiar with the major parts of the campaign.



Source N: A map of the Egyptian and Hittite power during the Battle of Kadesh. Crates, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Using source N and your own knowledge, answer the following questions.

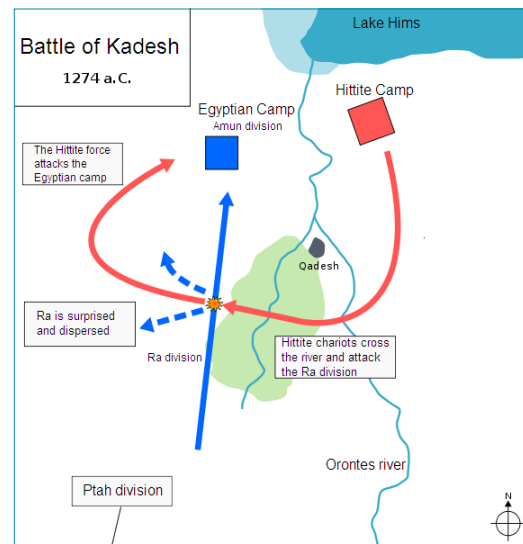
What do you think the strategic importance of Kadesh was to both the Hittites (represented in red) and the Egyptians (represented in green)?

Which army would be able to gather the most resources to wage a successful war?

In his 5th regnal year, Ramses II marched towards Kadesh with the Division of Amun, followed by the Divisions of Re, Ptah and Seth. At Shabtuna, south of Kadesh, two Shosu tribes informed him that they were to abandon the Hittites because Muwatallis was too afraid to confront the pharaoh, and instead remained in Aleppo, which was about 190 km north of their position.

As a result, Ramses II and the division of Amun made camp to the north-west of Kadesh where two Hittite scouts were captured, revealing that Muwatallis was in fact only 3 km to the east on the other side of the Orontes River and prepared for battle.

Ramses II sent his vizier to the Division of Ptah to inform them of the situation, however, Hittite chariots appeared from the south and defeated the Division of Re who had not yet arrived at Ramses II's position. Following their ambush on the Division of Re, the Hittites advanced towards the Egyptian camp.



The sources now state that Ramses II's troops were thrown into confusion. Determined to emerge victorious, he called upon Amun-Re, armed himself, mounted his horse, and with only his bodyguards, single handedly fought off the attacking Hittites. At this point, the Division of Nearin who was at the coast of Amurru arrived from the north-west, causing the Hittites to pull back. Ramses II took this opportunity to reorganise his army and pushed the Hittites against the Orontes River, and with the arrival of the Divisions of Ptah and Seth from the south, the Egyptians were able to prepare for a full offensive attack on Muwatallis and the Hittite army the next morning.

When the forces clashed the next morning, Ramses II's troops were unable to break the Hittite infantry ending in a stalemate. Muwatallis and Ramses II agreed to a truce and the Egyptians returned home with prisoners and plunder, but without the control of Kadesh, and in the following weeks, Amurru would also return to the Hittite kingdom. The Battle of Kadesh became Ramses II's most important victory, and would be inscribed on the temples of Abu Simbel, Karnak, Luxor and the Ramesseum. Despite Ramses II not achieving his territorial and political goals, it was presented as a magnificent personal victory for the pharaoh in which his personal bravery and superhuman qualities were emphasised. The propaganda campaign went far beyond what had been recorded previously, and for this reason, it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction.

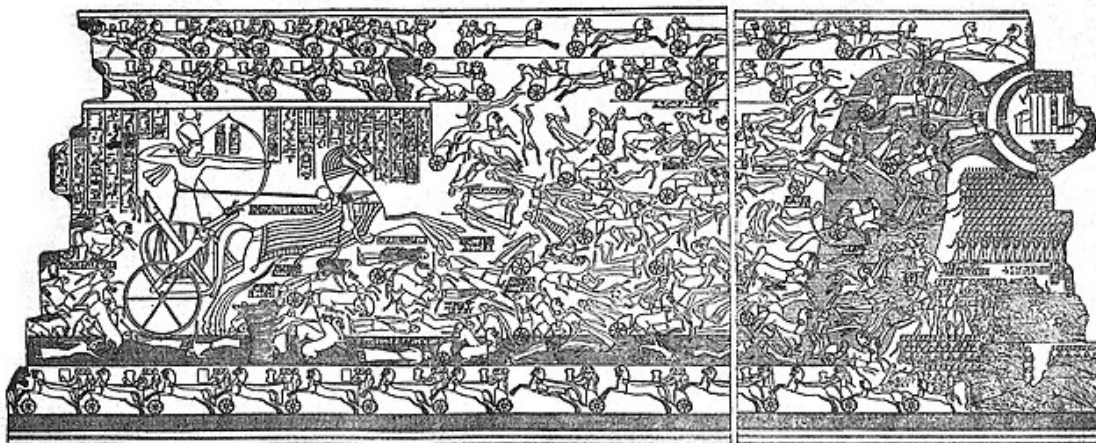
The Sources

The two sources that describe the Egyptian perspective of Kadesh are known as the Bulletin and the Poem of Pentaur, which were often placed side by side at a range of temples. The Bulletin and its accompanying reliefs are the official report of the event, whilst the Poem of Pentaur was a heroic narrative of the pharaoh's exploits. You will be able to see a range of these sources at the exhibition.

Source work and research task

Use the Bulletin relief from the Ramesseum, the extract from the Poem of Pentaur, and two other excerpts of your own choosing from these sources to answer the following question. Use the learning intentions and success criteria on the following page to guide your response.

To what extent does the official propaganda accurately portray Ramses II and the Battle of Kadesh?



BATTLE SCENE FROM THE GREAT KADESH RELIEFS OF RAMSES II ON THE WALLS OF THE RAMESSEUM.

Source P: Ramesses II charging the Hittite chariotry against the Orontes River at the Ramesseum James Henry Breasted (August 27, 1865 – December 2, 1935), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The King Says:

Not one of my princes, not one of my captains of the chariot, not one of my chief men, not one of my knights was there. My warriors and my chariots had abandoned me. Not one of them was there to take part in the battle. I had met two thousand five hundred pairs of horses. I was in the midst of the charioteers, but they were dashed in pieces before my horses. Not one of them raised his hand to fight. Their courage was sunken in their breasts, their limbs gave way, they could not hurl the dart, nor had they the courage to thrust with the spear. I made them fall into the water just as the crocodiles fall in. They tumbled down on their face one after another. I killed them at my pleasure, so that not one looked back behind him, nor did another turn around. I killed them; no one escaped me.

Source Q: An extract from the Poem of Pentaur describing Ramesses II charge against the Hittite chariotry.

Horne, Charles F (1917) *The sacred books and early literature of the East; with historical surveys of the chief writings of each nation*

Learning Intention	Success Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make judgements on the historical reliability of sources• Effective research of supporting evidence• Integrate sources explicitly in written responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a clear judgement of extent, using phrases such as “to a great extent”, or “to a minimal extent”.• Shows a clear understanding of the Battle of Kadesh• Evidence of at least two other references to the <i>Bulletin</i> or <i>Poem of Pentaur</i>• Explicit reference to the sources throughout the response