

Discoveries: Ramesses II: Greatest of the Pharaohs



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Thanks to films like *The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt*, Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses II (1301-1235 B.C.) is forever seen by the Western world as a heartless, bloodthirsty tyrant who lorded over Hebrew slaves until he was bested by Moses. French scholar Bernadette Menu's small but detailed book sets the record straight about this much-maligned leader, who reigned for an astonishing 66 years as the absolute ruler of a domain stretching from the present-day Sudan to Syria and built great statues bearing his likeness, which continue to inspire awe. "He was blessed with exceptional longevity, was spouse and lover of the most beautiful women of his time, husband to four or five of his own daughters and father to some 100 children," Menu writes. "He was a pious ruler and bold general ... [and] an enthusiastic patron of art and architecture." Through artwork, masonry, and texts by Greek historians and Egyptian scribes who recorded his exploits--and through the research of modern

Egyptologists--we discover Ramesses's early successes in foreign policy and diplomacy. There's also the marvel of his massive funeral temple, the Ramesseum, and his eternal resting place in the Valley of the Kings. Menu's exhaustive work and the numerous accompanying photographs illuminate the true character of a misunderstood giant of the ancient world.

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