

# FOCUS POINT & OBJECTS FROM THE COLLECTION

## IMAGING ANCIENT EGYPT: ABU SIMBEL OLD AND NEW

BY MOYA SMITH & HEATHER TUNMORE



The relocated temples of Abu Simbel in 2006. On the left is the Temple of Ramesses II, on the right is the smaller temple of Hathor, where the goddess is depicted with the features of Nefertari.

During the 1960s construction of the Aswan High Dam, UNESCO spent US\$40 million relocating these temples before the waters rose in the newly created Lake Nasser. They are now 65m above and 210m to the northwest of their original position.  
*PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*

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Late nineteenth century western travellers to Egypt were ready purchasers of high quality black and white photographs as souvenirs of their visit, providing an early, eager consumer market. The exotic places, ancient monuments and desert landscapes they visited were captured in stunning detail in the images of a variety of early specialist travel photographers. Returning to the western world, these images continued the creation or embellishment of Egypt as 'the exotic other'.

*This was the golden age of travel photography when professionals used large cameras to create technically brilliant images. The vast majority of them were albumen prints made from wet-plate collodion negatives. The rather challenging wet-plate process required that the photographer fully prepare and develop the negative at the site of exposure, while the chemicals on the plate were still wet. This meant that the photographers had to take along not only their camera, but also a dark tent, glass plates, and chemicals. The fragile glass negatives that survived the trip were then printed on albumen paper, thin paper coated with egg white (albumen) and light sensitive materials (Minneapolis Institute of Fine Arts, website 2002).*

In the early 1980s the Western Australian Museum was given permission to copy

and use images from an album of nineteenth century photographs of Egyptian sites.

The photographs were taken between 1870 and 1898 by British photographer Antonio Beato (1825-1903), Turkish photographer Jean Pascal Sebah (1823-1886) and an unnamed photographer. Many institutions hold original albumen prints by the same photographers, for example the University of Glasgow, the Oriental Institute in Chicago, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which mounted an exhibition of these works in 2002.

Many of the sites portrayed in these early photographs continue to be both significant tourist destinations and the focus of ongoing research. In this article we have focussed on Abu Simbel, and include a selection of images from the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as more recent images of the same temples.

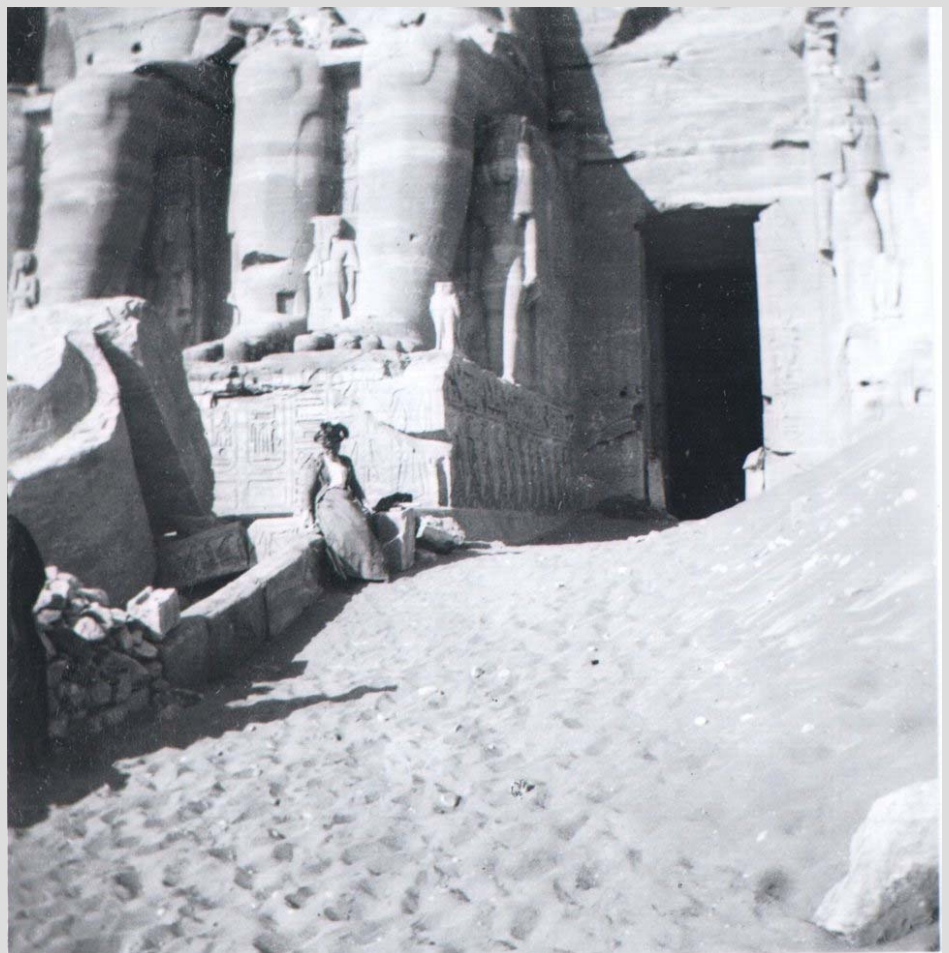
## Abu Simbel

Ramesses II (*user-ma'at-re' setepenre*), who ruled Egypt between 1279 and 1213 BC, built the Abu Simbel temples 280 km south of the First Cataract, the traditional southern border of Egypt. Rising 31 metres above the sands, and situated deep into *wawat*, the region between the first and second cataracts, the main temple, the *hwt ramesses meryamun*, (the *Temple of Ramesses, beloved of Amun*) must have been a powerful reminder to the Nubians that their land was subject to the pharaoh.

The human figure is dwarfed by the massive size of the temple façade. Impressive as it is to the modern visitor, how much more impact there must have been on the ancient Nubians who would have watched its construction which began in the first few years of Ramesses' reign. Not only would they have been dwarfed by the size but they would have been in no doubt of the messages contained in both the written script and the symbolism of the structure. Ramesses, after all, reigned triumphantly for 66 years!

Visitors standing in front of the larger temple face four colossal statues of Ramesses with members of his family. The smaller figures include the princesses Nebttawi, Bint-Anath, Beketmut, Nefirtiri and Merytamun; Prince Amenirkhopshef; the Queen Mother Muttuya; and the Queen Nefertari.

Lying in the sand in front of the temple is the head of one of the colossal statues. This was part of the destruction caused by the earthquake in about Year 31 of Ramesses' rule. There is evidence both inside and out of the damage caused and the repairs that were made by Paser, the then Viceroy of Kush. However,



**Above:** Lady in front of the Temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, 1890s. Note the fallen head of the colossus to her right. *PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, WA Museum 1984-11-78-5.*

the fallen head was left where it fell. Paser erected a kneeling statue of himself to commemorate his restoration work. This is now in the British Museum.

Above the entrance of the Great Temple is a niche with a large falcon-headed statue of the sun god Re-Horakhty. Beside his right leg is the jackal-headed *wsr* symbol of power and beside his left leg is *Maat*, goddess of truth and justice. This is a rebus for the throne name of Ramesses II, *user-ma'at-re' – Powerful in Justice is Re'.*

Above this again is the frieze of 22 east-facing baboons welcoming the sun as it rises each morning.



**Above right:** Statue above the entrance to the Great Temple. Re-Horakhty is shown with *wsr* to his right and *Ma'at* to his left, a rebus of Ramesses II's throne name – *user-ma'at-re'.* *PHOTO: NORAH COOPER, 2005.*



**Above:** The Temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, about 1880. This view looks south across the temple and further down the Nile's west bank. The four colossal statues, two either side of the entry, depict Ramesses II wearing the double crown and *nemes* headdress. The crowned head of the figure second from the left, damaged by earthquakes during Ramesses II's reign, lies on the ground in front of his feet. Above the façade is the frieze of baboons, with the rebus, mainly hidden in this photo, between the two pair of colossi. Amelia Edwards described the colossi: *A godlike serenity, an almost superhuman pride, an immutable will, breathe from the sculptured stone. He has learned to believe his prowess irresistible, and himself almost divine. If he now raised his arm to slay, it would be with the serene placidity of a destroying angel* (University of Chicago website). PHOTO: J.P. SEBAH. WA Museum 1984-11-77.



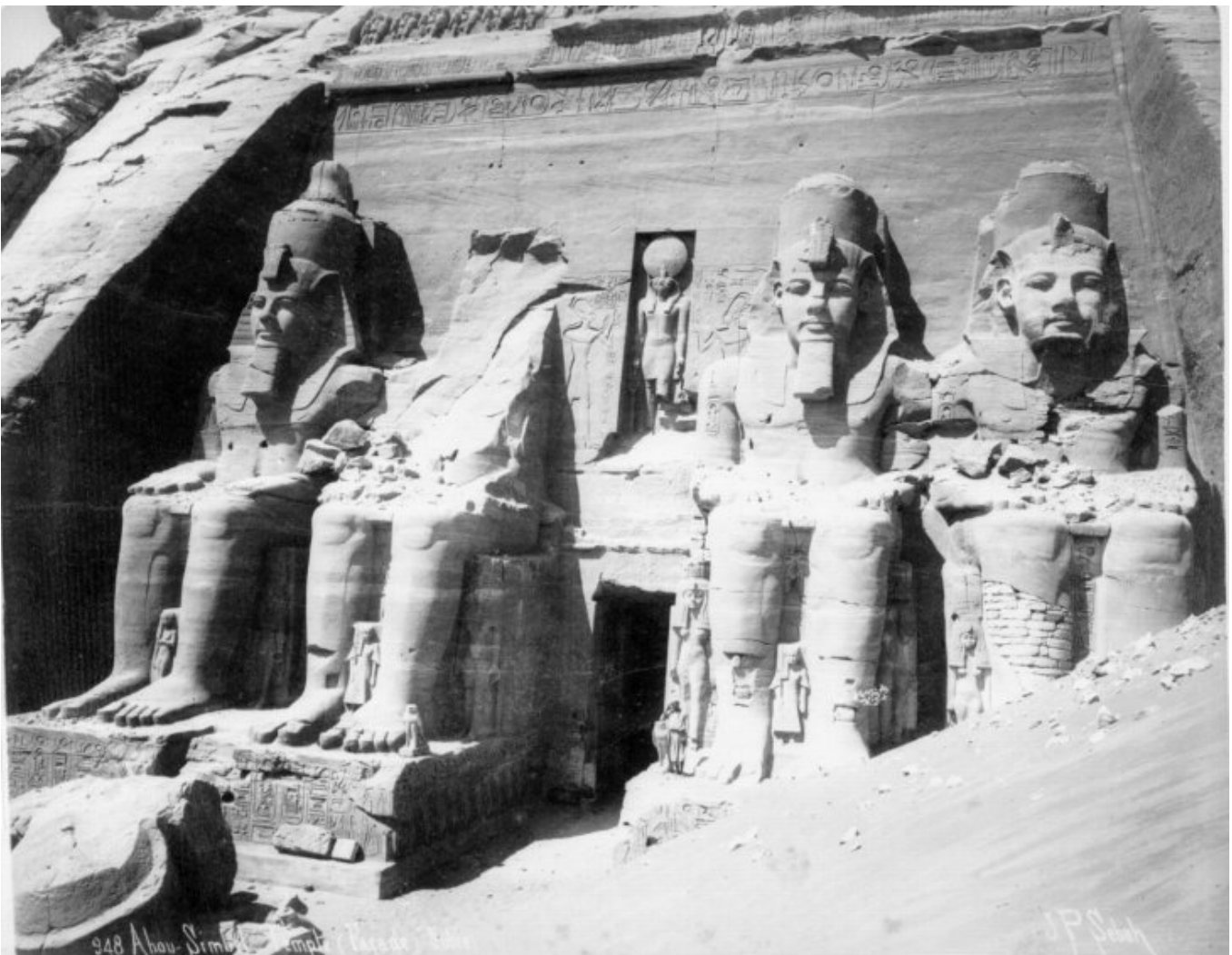
**Above:** Detail from the row of 22 baboons, symbolically welcoming the rising sun, at the top of the façade of the relocated temple of Ramesses II. Abu Simbel. PHOTO: NORAH COOPER, 2005.



**Above:** Relocated temple of Ramesses II looking north. Only two of the four colossal statues are visible. The stelae, carved by a variety of people and for various reasons, are clear along the front base of the temple, as is the line of baboons across the top. Continuing the solar theme, further right (and north) is the small sun chapel, of Re-Horakhty. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*



**Above:** The interior of the small sun chapel on the northern side of the Temple of Ramesses II. This is visible in the right foreground of the photo above. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*



**Above:** The temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, about 1880. The fallen head of one of the colossal statues is in the left foreground. Small figures of the royal family stand beside the legs of the statues of Ramesses. The statue of Re'-Horakhty, forming a rebus for Ramesses' throne name, is in the middle above the doorway. Higher still, the left side of the frieze of baboons is just visible. Nineteenth century visitors are shown standing near the front of the statue of Nefertari, near the feet of the colossal statue to the right of the entrance. Clambering onto the temple is not encouraged today. *PHOTO: J.P. SEBAH. WA Museum 1984-11-80.*



The relocated Temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, in an artificial mountain. The figure, damaged by earthquakes during Ramesses II's reign, was not restored during the UNESCO rescue mission and the head remains lying at the foot of the statue. The baboons and rebus are clearly visible. *PHOTO: NORAH COOPER, 2005.*

In Norah Cooper's photo of the temple on the previous page, the small statues placed beside the legs of the colossi are clearly visible. On the left hand side, from left to right, these have been identified as Princess Nebttawi, an unnamed princess, Princess Bint-Anath, Queen Mother Muttuya, Prince Amenhirkhopshef and Queen

Nefertari. On the right hand side from left to right the figures include Queen Nefertari, Prince Ramesses, Princess Beketmut, Princess Merytamun, Princess Nefirtiri and Queen Mother Muttuya.

To enter the main temple of Ramesses, visitors have to pass between two lines of bound captives, emphasising

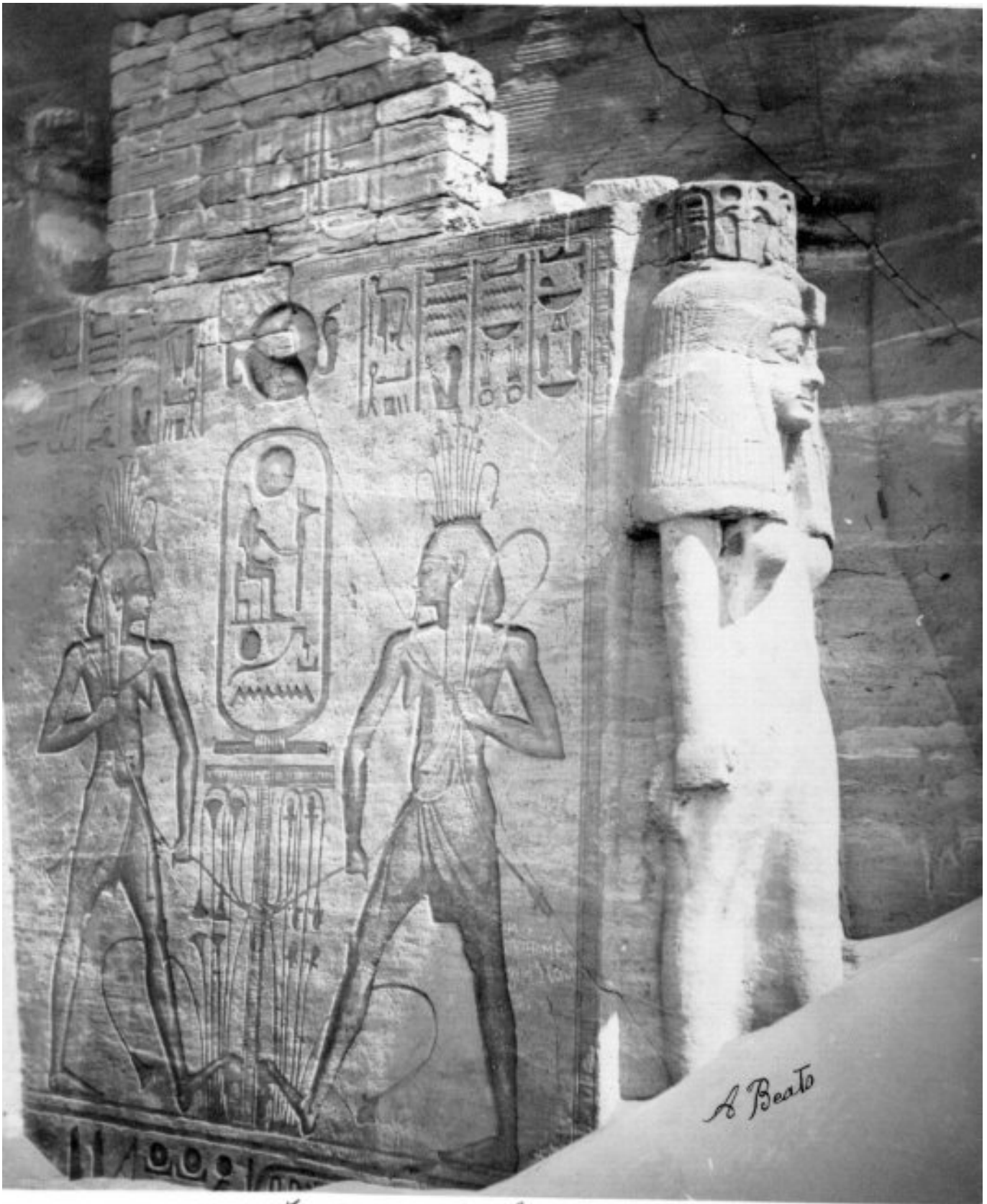
the strength of the Egyptian state and of Ramesses in particular. Those on the northern side of the temple entryway are Asiatic and a Libyan, representing the northern victories of the king, while those on the southern side, are Nubian in their features, a further reminder to the locals of their subjugated state.



**Above:** The northern prisoners at the entrance to the main temple, showing 'Asiatics' and a Libyan, and with their arms bound behind their backs. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*

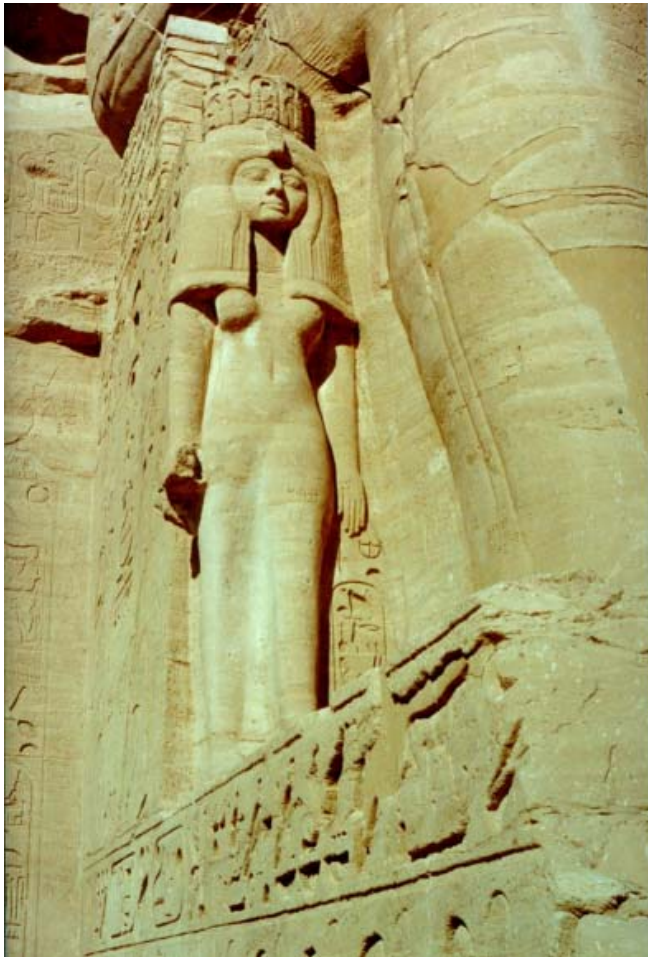
**Below:** The southern prisoners at the entrance to the main temple, showing Nubian prisoners, with their arms bound behind their backs. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*





*Temple of Abu-Simbel*

A relief at the entrance to the main temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, about 1876. This is an emphatic representation of the unity and strength of the Egyptian state because it shows two representations of the Nile god Hapi, one with a lotus and the other with papyrus, symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt. They are binding the plants around the hieroglyphic sign for *unite*, symbolising the unification of the country. Above the hieroglyph the cartouche contains the king's name – *user-ma'at-re' setepenre'*. The *King's Great Wife* Nefertari is shown to the right of the relief, which forms the southern side of the throne of the colossus flanking the northern side of the temple. The arm of the colossal figure above this was damaged during the earthquake in Year 31 of Ramesses II's reign. Repairs made by Paser, the Viceroy of Kush, include stone blocks to support the arm. These repairs, visible at the top of this image, were also relocated during the 1960s. PHOTO: ANTONIO BEATO. WA Museum 1984-11-81.



**Left:** Statue of Nefertari, the King's *Great Wife*, to the right of the entry to the relocated temple of Ramesses II, 2000. She stands next to Ramesses' right leg. The brickwork repairs made during Ramesses' rule are visible above and behind her head. This is the same statue that appears in Beato's 1876 image shown on the previous page of this article.

*PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

**Below:** The northern two of the four colossal statues of Ramesses II's relocated temple, Abu Simbel, 2005. The relief depicting the Nile god on page 6, is on the side of the throne of the colossi to the right of the entrance, and on the left of this image. In this photo the title of the left hand statue can be clearly seen on its shoulder. Each of the statues had its own title, reflecting aspects of Ramesses II's kingship. This one says that he is 'The Beloved of Amun.' The small statues beside the colossi are from left to right Queen Nefertari, Prince Ramesses and beside the leg of the fourth colossi, Princess Merytamun. The other small statues are hidden in this photo. Note the different headgear worn by Nefertari and Merytamun.

Ramesses wears the *nemes* headdress, the double crown and the sacred cobra, and on his chin the false beard. The false beard is missing from the colossi on the right.

*PHOTO: NORAH COOPER, 2005.*





Once inside the Ramesses II temple, the great pillared hall contains eight Osirioid statues of Ramesseses. Of much greater interest are the panels or reliefs around the walls behind the statues. On the northern side is a graphic depiction of the Battle of Kadesh, an event in regnal year five which Ramesses seems to have portrayed in his temples as often as possible. There are fascinating vignettes in this version, including enemy spies being beaten, a doctor attending to a patient, and attendants looking after the pharaoh's pet lion. In addition it is clear that some of the scenes were being recarved as work on the temple progressed.



**Above left:** Ramesses in a chariot. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

**Above right:** An Osirioid in the relocated temple. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

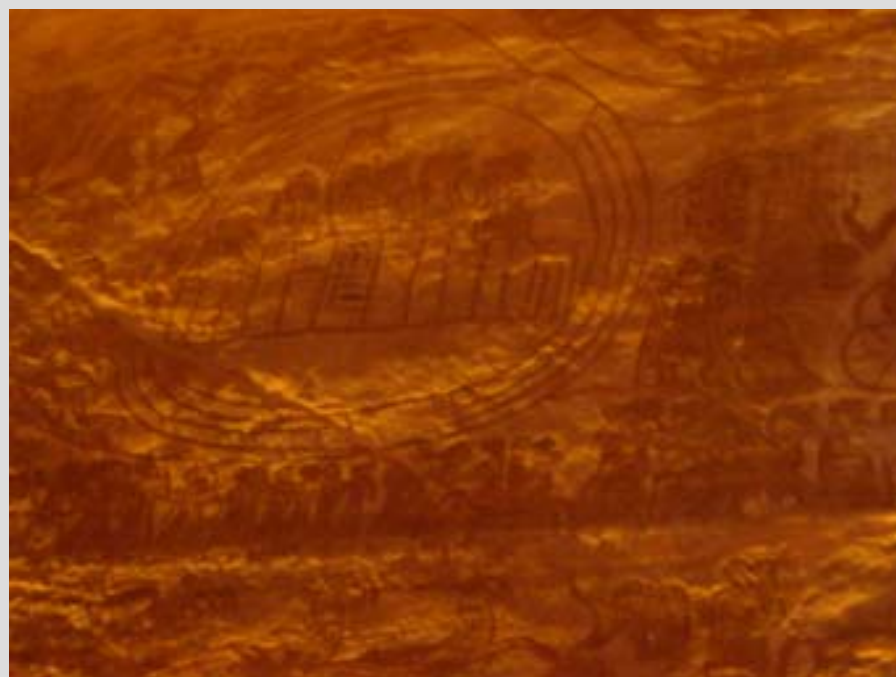
**Left:** Interior of the main temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, about 1880. The interior of the temple is around 65 metres long. The first or great pillared hall has four Osirioid statues of Ramesses II on either side of the room attached to pillars. The statues on the left depict Ramesses wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, while those on the right show him with the double crown of the united Two Lands. The doorway at the rear of the great pillared hall leads through a second pillared hall and a vestibule to a sanctuary at the rear containing statues of four gods: Ptah, Amun Re', the deified Ramesses and Re-Horakhty. *PHOTO: J.P. SEBAH. WA Museum 1984-11-76.*



The visitor enters the great pillared hall through doorways bearing Ramesses' name, walks between the Osiroids, through the second pillared hall and vestibule to the sanctuary and the statues of the gods, visible here at the very end. Note the wooden walkway installed to protect the floor. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

The second pillared hall has four pillars showing Ramesses and various gods, and walls with a religious theme. From here one enters the vestibule which leads to the sanctuary containing three of the most important 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty state gods: Ptah (god of Memphis whose chapel is on the northern side of the temple), Amun-Re' (god of Thebes) and Re-Horakhty (god of Heliopolis), as well as the deified Ramesses. The temple was constructed so that twice a year, in February and October, the sun shone through the temple entrance, the great hall, the second pillared hall, and the vestibule, before finally lighting up the statues of Amun-Re', the deified Ramesses, and Re-Horakhty in the sanctuary at the rear. Ptah remained in the shade.

This larger of the two Abu Simbel temples celebrated not only Ramesses and his connection with the gods but also his power and might on the battlefield and in the administration of his territory.



**Above:** Relief behind the northern Osirioid pillars showing the city of Kadesh ringed by the Orontes River.

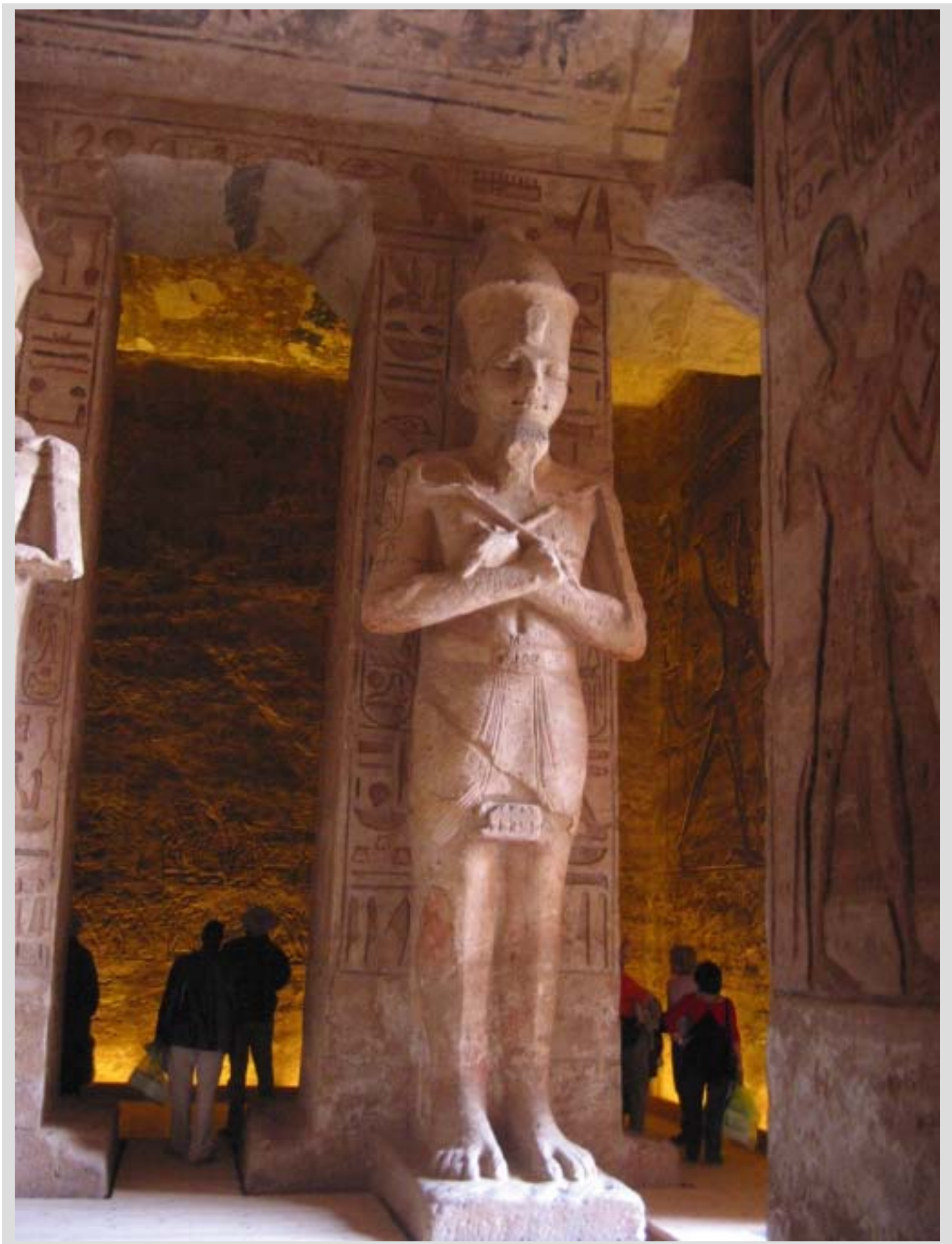


**Right:** A detail of Ramesses II's pet lion, running next to his chariot, from the reliefs on the walls behind the southern Osirioid pillars.

*PHOTOS: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



The gods Ptah, Amun-Re', the deified Ramesses and Re'-Horakhty in the niche at the rear of the relocated temple of Ramesses II, This was lit by the sun twice a year. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



Facing north in the great pillared hall of the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel. The back wall, behind the Osirid, is covered with scenes from the Battle of Kadesh. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



On the south wall Ramesses is shown attacking a Syrian fortress. He appears to have four arms and two bows, probably as a result of the sculptor deciding to recarve the figure. Once the plaster was gone the original carving could be seen as well as the correction. Ramesses is followed by three of his sons and the front legs of their horses can be seen on the right of the picture. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



On the north wall the seated Ramesses is shown consulting with his generals before the Battle of Kadesh. Below him can be seen his bodyguard and behind him his attendants. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



On the north wall of the Temple of Ramesses II, charioteers are depicted at the bottom of this scene of the Battle of Kadesh. Above them is the Egyptian camp which is surrounded by shields. Behind the protection of the shields it is possible to see some of the activities of the camp as the men look after the horses and soldiers rest. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



A north wall scene, inside the Egyptian lines showing enemy spies being beaten by the Egyptians. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

The smaller Abu Simbel temple appears to have been a tribute to Ramesses' wife Nefertari although the façade has two colossal statues of Nefertari and four of Ramesses. Here, unlike the façade of the larger Abu Simbel temple, the statues of Nefertari are of the same size as the king. The temple is dedicated to Nefertari and also to Hathor of Abshek, a local form of the goddess of love, beauty and motherhood. (Gohary 1998).

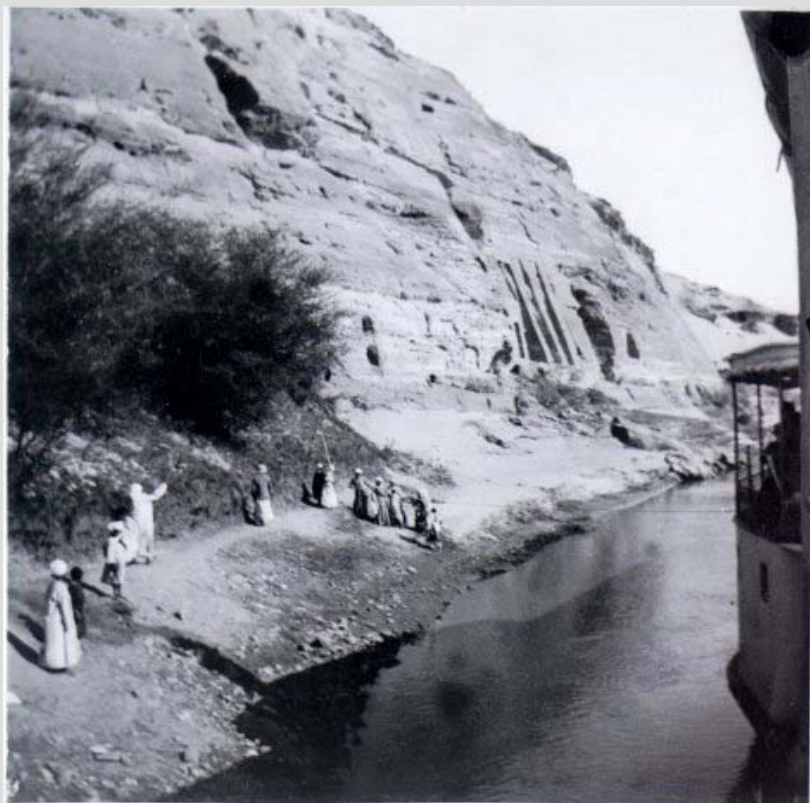
In a similar fashion to the larger temple, members of the royal family are also portrayed beside the colossal statues. Inside there is a six-pillared hall, a vestibule and then the sanctuary. The scenes on the walls and the pillars of this temple celebrate the king, the queen and the gods. The overwhelming impression one gains from this temple is one of beauty and love. The dedicatory inscription on the buttresses says it all when it states that "Ramesses II has

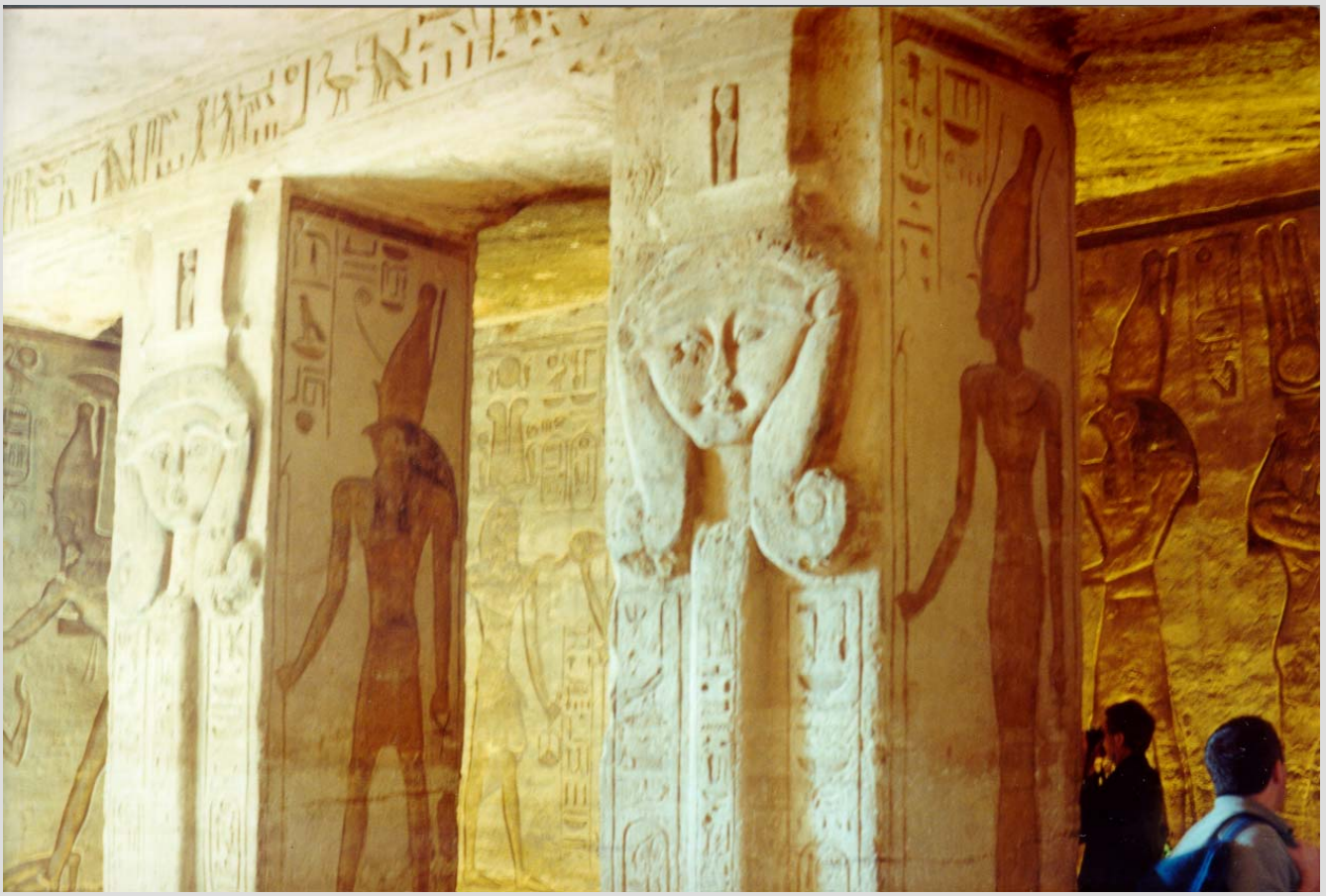
cut the temple from the mountain in Nubia for his chief wife Nefertari, for whom the sun shines, the like of which has never been done before" (Gohary 1998). This is underscored by the scene in the sanctuary, which shows Ramesses worshipping before depictions of the deified Ramesses and of the deified Nefertari.

Statues of Ramesses and Nefertari on the front of the relocated temple of the goddess Hathor and the *King's Great Wife Nefertari*, Abu Simbel. PHOTO: NORAH COOPER. 2005.

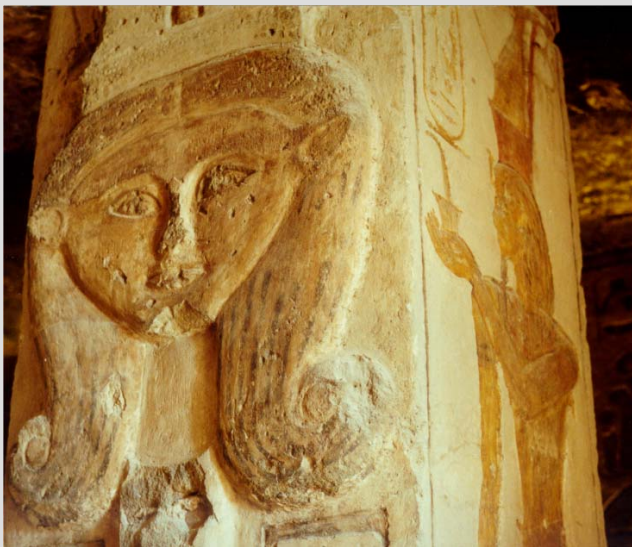


**Right:** Tying up a tourist boat near the Ramesside temple of the goddess Hathor and the *King's Great Wife Nefertari*, Abu Simbel, about 1898. The façade of this much smaller temple has six 10 metre high statues cut into the rock face. Four represent Ramesses II, two represent Queen Nefertari. These statues flank an entry into a pillared hall, behind which is a vestibule and a sanctuary with a statue of Hathor as the cow-goddess, protecting Ramesses. The niches for the statues on the façade are visible towards the right and middle of the rock face. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN: WA Museum 1984-11-78.





**Above:** The pillared hall of the smaller temple at Abu Simbel has six pillars, three on each side. Each is in the form of a sistrum with a Hathor headed handle and the sounding box above. This photo shows two of the pillars. On the side of the left pillar is a relief of Horus of Buhen. On the side of the right pillar is a depiction of Satet. She is the goddess who caused the annual inundation as she poured water into the Nile each year. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



**Left:** A close up of the Hathor head on one of the pillars of the smaller temple at Abu Simbel. On the side is a relief of Ramesses II holding incense. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



Over the entrance to a small, undecorated chapel in the smaller temple at Abu Simbel is this scene of Hathor in the papyrus thicket in her form as a cow. Standing in front of her on the left is Nefertari. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*





This relief on the south wall of the smaller temple at Abut Simbel shows Ramesses II being crowned by Seth of Nubet on the left and Horus of Maha on the right.  
*PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



On the east wall of the vestibule of the smaller temple is this lovely scene of Hathor of Abshek on the left and Isis on the right crowning Nefertari.  
*PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*



On the east wall of the vestibule of the smaller temple at Abu Simbel, Ramesses II, holding flowers, is shown with Nefertari who is holding both flowers and a sistrum. The flowers are being presented to Taweret who is shown here in the form of a woman with a horned Hathor type headdress.  
*PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

Before one becomes too carried away with the romance of it all, it should be remembered that on the southern wall of the façade of the temple of Ramesses II, there is a stele commemorating the marriage of Ramesses and the daughter of the Hittite king Hattusil III, which sealed an alliance between these two monarchs. This marriage took place in Year 34. Nefertari, who was one of two main wives married to Ramesses before he was King, has a magnificent tomb in the Valley of the Queens, but we hear no more of her after Year 20.

The beautiful Hittite princess with her splendid dowry (described below) spent a number of years as a prominent figure at the Pharaoh's court, but by middle age she had been relegated to the great Harim 150 miles from Pi-Ramesses (Kitchen 1990:89).

*Then he (the Hittite king) caused his daughter to be brought, with splendid tribute (set) before her, of gold, silver, much bronze, slaves, spans of horses without limit, and cattle, goats, rams by the myriad, limitless ... (such were) the dues they brought for Ramesses II ... Thus the ruling chiefs of every land that (the cavalcade) passed by, they cringed, turning away faint, when they saw all the people of Hatti united with the army of the King of Egypt ... (as for Ramesses II) ... the land of Hatti is with him just like the land of Egypt. Why even the sky is under his thumb and it does whatever he wishes! ... Then the daughter of the Great Ruler of Hatti was ushered in before his Majesty ... Then His Majesty beheld her as one fair of features, first among women ... she was beautiful in the opinion of His Majesty and he loved her more than anything ... she was installed in the royal palace,*

*accompanying the Sovereign daily, her name was radiant in the [entire] land ...*

( from correspondence on the royal wedding, see Kitchen 1990).

A few years later Ramesses II married her sister as well!

**Below:** Marriage stele, c. 3.5 metres tall.

**Bottom:** A detail from the stele showing Hittite and Egyptian figures. *PHOTOS: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*

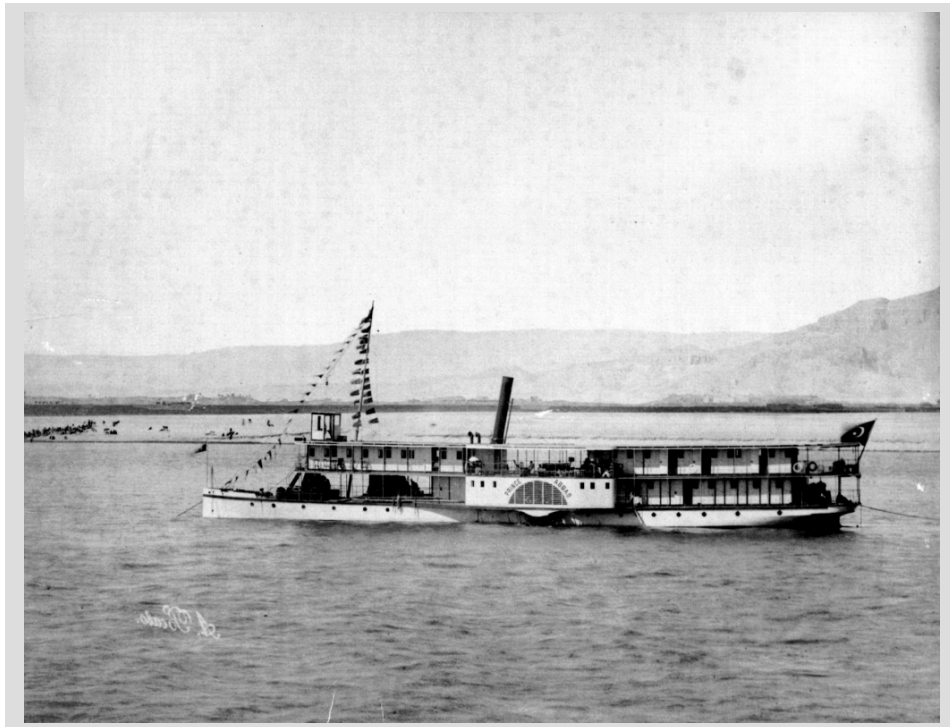


Never forget that Ramesses II was a king who ruled his empire by force. Those who were not with him were most definitely against him. These temples at Abu Simbel are a powerful expression of his might and the extent of the power he wielded.

Today the two Abu Simbel temples attract a continual stream of visitors. You can fly in, you can drive in a convoy or you can arrive by boat. Their popularity has grown steadily since they became known to the wider world after Burckhardt's and Belzoni's visits of 1813 and 1817 respectively.

Alexandre Barsanti, an Italian artist, restorer and archaeologist undertook restoration work on both Abu Simbel temples between 1909 and 1910. His work was eclipsed by one of the most ambitious and multi-national archaeological rescue programs ever. The 1960s UNESCO program to rescue monuments before they were inundated by the rising waters of Lake Nasser, created by the construction of the Aswan High Dam, has no parallel.

The reconstructed temples are a testament not just to Ramesses II, but also to the determination of the modern Egyptian and international communities to save these monuments for the future and to overcome national differences and work together.



**Top right:** An early cruise ship, late 1800s. *PHOTO: ANTONIO BEATO. WA Museum 8411-69.*

**Middle:** A modern cruise boat at Abu Simbel, with Lake Nasser behind. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.*

**Bottom:** Sunset over the Nubian Sea, and a modern boat built in the old style; each cabin having a door leading onto a promenade deck. *PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2006.*

## Further reading:

- Gohary, Jocelyn 1998  
*Guide to the Nubian Monuments on Lake Nasser*  
American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Healy, Mark 1993  
*Qadesh 1300 BC*, Osprey, Oxford,
- Kitchen, K.A. 1990  
*Pharaoh Triumphant, Life and Times of Ramesses II.*  
American University in Cairo Press, Cairo
- Wilkinson, Richard H. 2000  
*The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*. Thames & Hudson, London.

## Links:

The following web site of the American University in Beirut gives you access to a large range of digital images, including some taken by the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers included here. Open this page and click on the photographers' names, or anything else you like! Remember to check with them about copyright use before you use them.

<http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/jafet/blatchford/html/index-list.html>

Three sites have images from the collections of the University of Chicago:

<http://fathom.lib.uchicago.edu/1/777777190176/index2.htm>  
OR

[http://ecuip.lib.uchicago.edu/diglib/social/ancientegypt/lostegypt/lostegypt\\_images\\_v2\\_pg01.html](http://ecuip.lib.uchicago.edu/diglib/social/ancientegypt/lostegypt/lostegypt_images_v2_pg01.html)

OR

[http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/EGYPT/Egypt\\_AbuSimbel.html](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/EGYPT/Egypt_AbuSimbel.html)

The Breasted expedition photos from 1905-1907 clearly show the cascade of sand separating the two temples:

[http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/EGYPT/BEES/IMAGES/BEES\\_AB\\_U\\_SIMBEL.html](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/EGYPT/BEES/IMAGES/BEES_AB_U_SIMBEL.html)



**Above:** View of the rear of the artificial mountain with the relocated Abu Simbel Ramesside temples. PHOTO: HEATHER TUNMORE, 2006.

**Below:** Ramesses trampling and smiting Libyans – a powerful visual symbol of his control over his kingdom. Relief from the Temple of Ramesses II. PHOTO: JAMES TUNMORE, 2000.



An exhibition mounted by the Minneapolis Institute of Art is described in the following site:

[http://www.artsmia.org/press/vlew.cfm?PR\\_ID=49](http://www.artsmia.org/press/vlew.cfm?PR_ID=49)

For floor plans of the temples visit:

<http://members.tripod.com/~ib205/abu.html>

[http://members.tripod.com/~ib205/abu\\_simbel\\_lesser\\_1.html](http://members.tripod.com/~ib205/abu_simbel_lesser_1.html)