

The Temple of Ramesses II in Abydos
Volume One: Wall Scenes

Part One: Exterior Walls and Courts

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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure and an honor to be invited to provide a foreword to this splendid book, volume 1 of a projected two-volume series providing a most comprehensive record of a major royal monument, which up to now has never received the thorough presentation and discussion it deserves. The primary temple of the famous pharaoh Ramesses II at Abydos is one of several scattered over the large expanse of this ancient site, situated at wide intervals over an area of about 1.9×3.7 kilometers (including another, much more ruined one also built under Ramesses II, in the vicinity of a long-lived temple dedicated specifically to Osiris). Indeed, the temple of Ramesses II, which is not far away from the much larger one of his father pharaoh Seti I and is the subject of this book, is one of only two such temples (the other being Seti's) to survive as, at least partially, standing monuments at Abydos. Other temples are much more reduced and can only be revealed by excavation.

Abydos was a site of tremendous importance to ancient Egyptians, for reasons I will briefly discuss below, and has experienced two major phases of exploration and documentation. The first ran from the 1860s to the 1930s, and was followed by a long hiatus; then, beginning in the late 1960s, various research projects became situated at Abydos, all of which are still quite active and have greatly expanded our knowledge of this mysterious place. Prominent amongst these is the highly professional team led by my colleagues and friends, Professor Ogden Goelet and Dr. Sameh Iskander, on behalf of New York University. The results of their work is of the highest quality, and as documented in this book can be appreciated by both specialists in Egyptology and lay enthusiasts, so striking are the scenes (some retaining their original and brilliant colors) and so intriguing are their contents.

This first volume in the series is exemplary in several ways. First, it provides complete coverage of the scenes and texts preserved on the temple's walls, making it a primary resource for the specialized scholar, as well as for students, for whom the images will provide opportunities to study both scenes and texts and exercise the skills they have been learning in the class room. Second, the monograph will appeal to scholar and enthusiast alike because of the striking way in which the material is presented. Every scene is presented in graphic form (line work presentations typically utilized in Egyptological publications because of their clarity). Line work however cannot adequately convey the quality of the relief carving or reproduce the sometimes brilliant colors which survive on many scenes. Professor Goelet and Dr. Iskander have therefore followed a less usual procedure; the graphic rendering of a scene faces a color photo of the same scene, the latter of the highest possible quality. In this way, this particular volume becomes not only a scholarly resource, but also a visual feast for any reader. Also noteworthy is the sometimes highly intriguing subject matter, including an extensive, if incomplete, list of many of the kings who ruled before Ramesses (now in the British Museum) and also parts of a large-scale rendering of a great battle between Egyptian and Hittite armies near Kadesh in Syria. Fuller accounts from elsewhere reveal Ramesses II himself was almost captured, though he and his troops rallied and achieved what they chose to interpret as a victory.

Finally, this book is exemplary in another way, one that points to the future of the temple of Ramesses II. In highlighting the richness of the art, and the informative nature of the texts that are displayed (which will be further discussed in the other volume), this book also raises concerns as to the conservation needs of this unique Abydene monument. Like other major monuments at Abydos, Ramesses II's temple needs to be protected so its surviving brilliance can survive through subsequent centuries, a process involving Egyptian authorities and their colleagues from elsewhere. This book documents how vital such future initiatives are.

Finally, perhaps the significance of Ramesses II's Abydos temple is better appreciated if considered in a broader context. Why were it, and other royal monuments built at Abydos on the first place? The earliest temple, in the northwest part of Abydos, was dedicated first to a local god, but after 2000 BCE to the god Osiris. In fact, the Egyptians believed the tomb of this god had been discovered at Abydos, although in reality the tomb in question was part of a cemetery for a group of very early kings. The supposed tomb of Osiris was

set far back in the desert, but every year a great processional festival proceeded out from his temple, close to the Nile floodplain, and proceeded to the tomb, celebrating Osiris' myth as they went.

Osiris was an enormously popular god. Supposedly once a divine king of Egypt, he was murdered by his envious sibling, Seth, only to be resurrected via the agency of his consort Isis. She gave birth to Osiris' son Horus, who claimed Osiris' throne to become ruler of the living, while Osiris functioned as the ruler of the millions of deceased Egyptians, who sought to emulate the eternal life that Osiris represented.

Probably all Egyptian kings sustained the temple of Osiris in northwest Abydos and it was sometimes rebuilt; it lasted for an enormous span of time, from ca. 2000 BCE into the Roman period. But occasionally, a few of these rulers also built separate temples at Abydos, notably King Senwosret III of the Twelfth Dynasty, and King Ahmose of the early Eighteenth—both of these opened up new areas of activity, in the southeast part of Abydos. Later, Seti I commissioned an enormous temple in the northwest part of Abydos, of which much survives today; a large part of it was actually completed by Ramesses II. All three temples associated the mortuary cult of the ruler who built it with that of Osiris, and each was associated with a tomb, in Seti's case definitely a cenotaph or imitation tomb. In this way, all three temples imitated the topographical relationship of Osiris' supposed tomb with the Osiris temple itself. Abydos thus became a sacred landscape, the key elements of which were mimicked over its wide expanse by these other temple-tomb combinations.

How did Ramesses II's temple fit into this process? It was much smaller than Seti's but nevertheless a relatively large one; was it simply a pious gesture, to signify his association with his father, or might Ramesses also have had a cenotaph? Only time, and future excavation will tell.

In conclusion, like the many other excavators and philologists who have now been working for many years at Abydos, I am delighted to see this first volume of the upcoming two volume series on the temple of Ramesses II appear in print and to celebrate its aesthetic appeal along with its great scholarly value.

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PREFACE

In 2007, the authors launched a project to document the temple of Ramesses II in Abydos under the auspices of New York University, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, with the purpose of producing an up-to-date, comprehensive publication of the temple. The authors spent six field seasons at the site, which were made possible through the annual permits issued by the Supreme Council of Antiquities of the Egyptian government.

The temple was most likely the first temple built by Ramesses II “the Great,” ca. 1279–1212 at the height of Egypt’s power during the Nineteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom. This remarkable monument contains a wealth of information about the religious and social life of ancient Egypt during the thirteenth century BC.

Many features of the temple demonstrate the efforts of the early Ramessides to reestablish the Osiris cult in Egypt and particularly at Abydos, in the aftermath of the Amarna period. The temple is perhaps best known for its dramatic reliefs depicting the battle of Kadesh, the culmination of a long struggle between Egypt and Hatti for dominance in the eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. The influence of the Amarna artistic style is unmistakable in these battle scenes as elsewhere in the temple’s decorative program. In the early nineteenth century, an extensive king list recording pharaohs from the early dynastic era to Ramesses himself was removed from the temple and brought to the British Museum.

Today the temple of Ramesses II is considered one of the most important sites at Abydos, a preeminent sacred place of ancient Egypt where pilgrims came for millennia to worship Osiris. It is situated about six hundred kilometers south of Cairo, and roughly ten kilometers west of the Nile, just beyond the western flood plain at the modern village of El-Araba el-Madfoudna. The temple measures 100 meters × 36 meters and lies just 300 meters north of the bigger and better-known temple of Ramesses II’s father, Seti I.

The temple was first excavated by the French Egyptologist, Auguste Mariette in 1869, and subsequently published in 1880. Although Mariette’s work still remains the standard comprehensive source for information on the temple, it is nevertheless sketchy and inaccurate in many respects. In particular, numerous inscriptions were not recorded, or were copied with significant errors. It no longer meets the standards for present-day analytic study in Egyptology. In the late 1970s, the German Archeological Institute spent two seasons at the temple under the direction of Dr. Klaus Kuhlmann, with the intention of producing a more accurate publication, but produced only two brief survey articles in the *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologisches Instituts, Abteilung Kairo (MDAIK)*. Piecemeal publication of a number of the chapels and other aspects of the temple have appeared over the past forty years, but even these lack epigraphical precision.

The walls of the first court have completely disappeared, save for a few remnants of the first pylon, as well as a badly damaged chapel occasionally referred to in some publications as the *heb-sed* chapel. The condition of the rest of the monument varies from reasonably well-preserved painted wall reliefs that retain their original brilliant colors to reliefs executed on easily friable and poorly preserved stone that are accompanied by scarcely legible texts. Clearance of sand and rubble from the temple has ironically exposed the temple to constant damage due to environmental threats such as erosion from wind-blown sand as well as man-made damages arising from vandalism, theft, and mistakes in conservation practices. Since the temple contains much important evidence about Egyptian art, religion, history, and society in the Ramesside period, there is an urgent need to document all elements of the temple in a reliable modern publication governed by a comprehensive approach.

We began our work on the project by producing an updated architectural rendering of the temple showing in detail its plan and cross sections. We then photographed all of the temple’s relief scenes in sections varying from one to three meters depending on context and location. These photographs were used by a team of computer artists and Egyptologists skilled in digital drawing from images to produce detailed, precise line drawings using the Adobe “Illustrator” software that meet modern standards of epigraphical publication. The Egyptian government does not allow direct contact with the relief or painted surfaces and through this process, there was no need for physical contact with the monument at any stage. This technique thus represents a responsible

approach to epigraphy at this site especially in light of the deteriorating conditions of the stone surfaces at various locations.

For convenience and for a better understanding of the temple decorations, each line drawing plate in this publication is placed facing its corresponding color photograph. The photographs provide a great deal of information not easily discernible in the line drawings, such as the stone’s physical condition, painted surfaces, architectural context, and damaged areas. We attempted to minimize the impact of some of these elements on the clarity of the line drawings by rendering the architectural elements in lighter weight or by removing them all together.

Several parts of the temple walls, especially those in the second court (A) and in chapels H, G, I, J, K, and L were partially been restored in several phases during the 1980s and 1990s. The restoration work included installation of new precast concrete chapel roofs, new stairs, and plastering of some damaged wall areas. Several of these wall restorations included resetting fallen fragments in plaster. This intervention resulted sometimes in deviation from the original layout. The conservators employed color plaster to match the stone, and as a result it is sometimes difficult to differentiate in the photograph between restored and unrestored damage. We rendered the restored areas as white blank spaces, and the unrestored broken or friable areas in solid gray, making it easier to differentiate between the two in the line drawings.

Furthermore, the line drawings were produced using varying line weights, which indicates to the reader the presence of raised versus sunken relief (sun and shadow lines), and allows for a more thorough analysis and understanding of the scene. Similarly, weights of painted lines vary and are therefore distinguished from those of the carved lines.

For ease of identification, the geographical orientations have been approximated. The northeast–southwest axis of the temple is treated as a direct east–west orientation.

This volume is organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents the temple’s architectural surveys, maps, schematics, and key plans. Chapter two includes the exterior walls of the temple. Chapter three includes the remaining court, and the two hypostyle halls marked on the plan as courts A, B, and C respectively. There are seventeen chapels inside the temple, and they are all arranged in chapter four, including the badly damaged chapel located in the first court, which has been referred to in some publications as the *heb-sed* chapel. The few remains of the first pylon are illustrated in chapter five. Brief descriptions of each wall scene are included in the key at end of this volume.

Additional elements of the temple, such as the pillars, graffiti, statues, and fragments are presented in volume 2. The second volume also includes translations and commentaries for all inscriptions in the temple.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>KRI</i> II	Kitchen, K. A., <i>Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical</i> II (Oxford, 1979).
Kuentz	Kuentz, C., <i>La Bataille de Qadech. Les textes ("Poème de Pentaour" et "Bulletin de Qadech") et les bas-reliefs</i> . MIFAO 55 (Cairo, 1927).
Kuhlmann	Kuhlmann, K., "Der Tempel Ramses II. in Abydos. Vorbericht über eine Neuaufnahme," <i>MDAIK</i> 35 (1979), 189–93 and "Der Tempel Ramses II. in Abydos. Zweiter Bericht über die Neuaufnahme," <i>MDAIK</i> 38 (1982), 356–62.
Mariette	Mariette, A. <i>Abydos. Description des fouilles exécutées sur l'emplacement de cette ville</i> , vols. I–II (Paris, 1988; repr. of 1869–1880 edition).