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In-Depth Studies: Deir el-Medina in the Days of the Ramesses

Introduction | The king is dead | At work in the royal tomb | The gods | At home
| Background: the site of Deir el-Medina | The days of the Ramesses |
| Bibliography

Nestled in a desert valley in the hills of Thebes across from Luxor in Upper Egypt, the site of Deir el-Medina contains vestiges of the dwellings and necropolis of the laborers and craftsmen who dug and decorated the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Uncovered in the early nineteenth century and methodically excavated from 1922 onward by the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, the site of Deir el-Medina has made a unique contribution to our knowledge of pharaonic Egypt thanks to the secular, civilian nature of its remains. The village homes and objects discovered there allow us to reconstruct the daily lives of the families whose breadwinners devoted themselves to the "Grand and Noble Tomb of Millions of Years," a euphemism for the royal tomb then being built in the Valley of the Kings. Family life took place within the village of Deir el-Medina, while work was carried out in the Valley of the Kings or the Valley of the Queens, both located in the nearby Theban hills. Objects discovered during the excavations, partly conserved in the Louvre, offer insight into the world of Deir el-Medina and provide unique access to a more intimate understanding of the ancient Egyptians. The sum of these vestiges—sometimes spectacular, sometimes modest—is nothing less than an overview of human deeds, personal aspirations, artistic creation, professional activities, fears and thoughts attributable to the community of individuals who lived in Deir el-Medina over three thousand years ago.

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Author(s)
Texts: Lili Aït-Kaci
Scientific supervision: Guillemette Andreu, Geneviève Pierrat-Bonnefois
with contributions by Sylvie Varry
The king is dead, long live the king

Mourning, burial, coronation

The death of a pharaoh was immediately followed by the accession of his successor. Even in those days one might have used the phrase later heard in European courts: "The king is dead, long live the king!" It was crucial that the new pharaoh ascend to the throne without delay, in order to remain the sovereign head of the country, the only person qualified to maintain order and communicate directly with the gods.

The coronation of the new pharaoh could only take place, however, after a period of mourning that corresponded to the mummification and burial of the deceased pharaoh. The heir "showered praise" on his predecessor along the path that led to the tomb in the Valley of the Kings where, after lamentations and rituals were performed, the deceased was placed in his "eternal dwelling" with all his funerary furniture.

After the funeral was completed, the coronation ceremony could take place. Thot wrote down the names of the king as royal seals were engraved. At which point the pharaoh could issue his first orders, which included the digging of a new tomb.

King, vizier, scribe

The royal order to begin work on his tomb was conveyed by the Vizier of the South who, as "Director of All Royal Works," was responsible for launching and supervising construction of the tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

On the site itself, orders from the pharaoh and vizier were implemented by the "Royal Scribe in the Place of Ma'at [necropolis]," who saw that work went as planned. In his capacity as "Director of Works to the West of Thebes," he embodied the link between the royal government and the teams of workers on the construction site.

A royal committee headed by the vizier, which perhaps included the royal scribe, chose the best spot to dig the tomb. A plan was drawn on papyrus or an ostracon; it would inevitably imitate the layout of older tombs when it came to the main chambers, with certain variations in the number of additional rooms. Once the king had indicated his agreement and a date was chosen, construction could begin.

Artistic and religious program

Once the spot for the pharaoh's tomb was chosen, priests carried out rites to purify the site. Only then could the digging of chambers and corridors begin.

"Year 2 [of Ramesses II], 2nd month of the peret season, 13th day, the Chief of Artisans began digging the first corridor with a chisel of silver." Thus officially began work on the royal tombs.

Ramesside royal tombs had a rectilinear layout composed of a series of rooms and corridors. All were entirely decorated, from the entrance hall to the chamber holding the sarcophagus.

The decoration recounted the nocturnal journey of the sun, associated with the voyage of the pharaoh to the underworld. His journey would end in resurrection, like the sun that rose again each morning. The walls of royal tombs featured a combination of texts and images, taken from various funerary books. These books contained magic formulas designed to assist the deceased monarch to overcome all obstacles encountered in the underworld. Some books, written during the New Kingdom, were solely for royal use: the Book of Amduat, or Book of Gates, which described the states of the sun during the twelve hours of nighttime; the Litany of Ra, which listed the various forms of the sun god; the Book of the Cow of Heaven; the Book of Caves; the Book of Heaven. All these books, illustrated with the gods and genii of the kingdom of the dead, were inscribed on the wall of the royal tomb, turning the deceased pharaoh into a complete victor over the forces of evil.
At work in the royal tomb

The teams

Known as “Servants of the Tomb,” the people living in Deir el-Medina were a subdivision of a larger royal institution generally referred to as “The Tomb” in administrative documents. The actual construction team had, on average, between forty and sixty members. In unusual circumstances, as under the reign of Ramesses IV, the numbers were increased from sixty to 120 men in order to accelerate completion of certain tasks, but once this goal was met the team was reduced to sixty members again. It was subdivided into two sides, “Right” and “Left.” Each side had a “team leader,” assisted by a deputy. These two leaders and a shared scribe constituted the “Captains of the Tomb” who ran the institution; the trio enjoyed distinct power and prestige within the community.

There can be no mistaking the unusual nature of this community: its members were highly qualified, worked for a royal institution, and had all their needs paid for by the king personally, which insured them a privileged status well above that of peasants.

Working conditions

It has been estimated that ten years, on average, were needed to dig and decorate a tomb. The workers were mostly quarrymen who extracted rock in the Valley of the Kings all day long to dig the tombs. The other men were specialists who did the decorative work—draftsmen, sculptors and finally painters who applied the pigments. Working conditions are well known thanks to the records that the Scribe of the Tomb kept on a daily basis. The tomb was lit in the same way as private homes—a twisted wick, soaked in oil, burned slowly in a shallow dish. A wick would burn for four hours, and every working day required two wicks, which tells us that the team worked eight hours per day. A week lasted eight days, after which workers had two days of rest, when the men could return to the village.

Methods of work

Papyri and ostraca—shards of limestone or broken pottery on which texts were written in hieratic script—recorded the work done in royal tombs. It appears that once the chambers and corridors were dug—which meant shattering the rock with bronze chisels—the surfaces of walls and ceilings had to be polished. A thin layer of plaster was then applied to the flat surface in order to cover any holes, making it perfectly smooth. The plaster was then sanded and coated with lime wash, in order to make everything uniform. Then came the “scribe of outlines”—usually translated as “draftsman”—who drew the decorative figures with a black brush. Sometimes a corrector came behind and altered mistakes with a stroke of a red brush.

Excavations in the Valley of the Kings have turned up stone and brick huts in which the craftsmen prepared their work in daylight. Figurative ostraca, or shards of limestone decorated with swiftly-executed drawings, have been found, representing either working sketches or artistic leisure. At Deir el-Medina itself, excavations have turned up hundreds of ostraca. The Louvre–IFAO mission (2004–2005), concentrating on the southern edge of the Great Pit to the north part of the site also turned up a few fine ostraca, some being figurative and others covered in hieratic script.

Sculptors at Deir el-Medina

Sculptors gave body to the figures traced by the “scribe of outlines,” which they carved in low relief. As amazing as it may seem, Egyptian technology basically remained neolithic until the first millennium BC: the use of iron was extremely rare, while bronze was scarce and therefore precious. Copper was more common, but too soft to produce sturdy tools. So in order to exploit their talent, sculptors at Deir el-Medina—as elsewhere in Egypt—basically used hard stones such as flint and above all dolerite: hammers for roughing out, punches for detailed work, and pebbles and sand for polishing. Copper and bronze tools...
were restricted to work on wood and soft stone (limestone and sandstone), usually with the aid of sand as an abrasive. Use of these metals for certain phases of work on harder stone (granite, quartzite, diorite) is nevertheless attested in sporadic instances (drills, occasionally saws). The art of sculpting involved a very subtle, soft modeling technique that conveyed the muscles of legs, the curve of cheeks, and the roundness of breasts of goddesses and queens in low relief that was sometimes barely raised yet highly expressive.

**Painters at Deir el-Medina**

Painters went to work last, employing their palette of colors to enliven the carvings with bright hues. Among the artists who worked at Deir el-Medina, draftsmen should probably be distinguished from painters, the former being able to execute the iconographic and mythological repertoire determined by the Scribe of the Tomb and the team leader, the latter being charged with mixing and applying the colors. Colors were obtained from natural pigments, then thinned in water. Iron oxide was the source of all the ochers, from yellow to red; calcium sulfate or calcium carbonate yielded white; powdered charcoal was used for black; blue was obtained from calcium copper silicate which, when mixed with yellow, produced green.
The gods they worshipped

Evidence of beliefs

Excavations at Deir el-Medina have yielded a great number of objects and diverse texts that, once studied by archaeologists, epigraphists, and historians, offers insight into the private behavior of village residents toward the gods they chose to honor in their special pantheon.

Their divine world differed from the official religion, where distant, imposing demiurges reigned. The learned priests at court elaborated myths, concepts and rites for royal worship in the secret of the large temples, which were off-limits to commoners.

The people of Deir el-Medina lived in an environment protected by their own gods, who accompanied their daily lives. Some gods had been known in the region for several centuries, others arrived in the community along with the establishment of the team of the Royal Tomb. The evidence concerning popular beliefs among workers and their families suggests a straightforward relationship with the divine world. People addressed the gods directly in small temples erected in the village and along the paths to work. Graffiti etched into the rocky walls of the Theban hills still preserve a record of prayers addressed to the gods.

To protect the family, images of these gods, as well as of honored, deceased ancestors, were set in niches in the walls of homes or in small chapels.

The national pantheon

The major gods of the Egyptian pantheon were present at Deir el-Medina, but they took more familiar forms, that made them more approachable and liable to answer everyday concerns.

Amen, the dynastic god, reigned from Karnak and crowned the king. People at Deir el-Medina prayed to his sacred animals, the goose and the ram. His ba [manifestation] took the unusual form of a mountain goat that appeared on the hillside and who, after granting a prayer for restored health, was invoked as “the handsome ram” or “the savior.

Ra of Heliopolis was the demiurge who vanquished Apopis. He was present during the day in the world of the living, insuring that people woke up; at night he lit the world of the dead. On little stelae he was addressed as “the large cat, the peaceful one” or “the fine, still swallow”—cats hunted harmful snakes and rodents, swallows were a guarantee of rebirth.

Hathor was daughter of Ra and Grand Lady of Dendera: every day, people in the village turned to her as their favorite goddess, who presided over love, intoxication, and joy. But above all they invoked and respected Hathor because she was the goddess of the underworld, which was their workplace as well as their own eternal resting place.

Ptah, the demiurge of Memphis, created the world through the word: his quality as master of artisans automatically placed Ptah in the top ranks of the pantheon at Deir el-Medina, where he was worshipped in his most common form of a man sheathed in a shroud, wearing a skullcap.

The local pantheon

The great goddess of the local pantheon at Deir el-Medina, adored and dreaded by all, was certainly Meretseger, "she who loves silence," a personification of the desert hills in which the village nestled. Her holy place was a hole in the rock between the village and the Valley of the Queens. There she shared a chapel with Ptah, where the faithful would come to seek her wisdom, addressing her directly or through stelae or votive items deposited as perpetual prayers or devotions.

Although her promontory was her main abode, Meretseger was present everywhere—in all the village temples, in every home, in tombs and in the mountains, where numerous graffiti testify to her worship. The goddess had various manifestations: “She who loved silence”
could be a cobra who protected her mountain from intruders. Often confused with Hathor, she might take the appearance of a cow. One scene engraved in her temple shows her as a woman suckling a king. She could be a dreaded lion when she punished men who sinned gravely, or she could be a soft breeze bringing mercy and pardon.

In their homes, people sought the protection of benevolent deities. **Renenutet**, a snake-goddess, presided over harvests, guarding grains and insuring the food supply. As to **Taurt** the Fat and **Bes** the Lion-dwarf, they watched over the house and protected childbirth.

**Gods from other regions**

Teams of workers on the Tomb were composed not only of men from Thebes. They included craftsmen from other regions of Egypt and even abroad, from Nubia and the Near East.

When moving to Deir el-Medina, these workers brought their beliefs and gods, who were quickly included in the local pantheon. **Khnum, Satet** and **Anuket** descended the Nile from their original home at the First Cataract. **Seth** might have been brought by people from Ombos or the Delta; **Thot**, the inventor of writing, came from Hermopolis. **Sobek** the crocodile, who had several temples, apparently arrived from Sumenu, south of Thebes, or else from the Fayum region in Middle Egypt. **Onuris-Shu**, meanwhile, came from the ancient capital of This in Upper Egypt.

The gods and goddesses **Ishtar, Astarte, Qadesh, Anat, Baal** and **Reshep** were imported from the Near East and took their places alongside Egyptian gods. Their iconography was "Egyptianized" by endowing them with the mythological features and attributes of local deities. Thus Qadesh was shown wearing Hathor’s curled wig, while Reshep acquired a short loincloth and a white crown.

Extensive evidence of the assimilation of foreign gods indicates that in the days of the Ramesses (13th century BC), any deity likely to bring benevolence to the community of Deir el-Medina was welcome there.

**Ancestor worship**

One of the most amazing aspects of private worship at Deir el-Medina concerned what might be interpreted as ancestor worship. Indeed, it would seem that families identified men and women of exemplary virtue, irreplaceable behavior, or notable charisma from among their ancestors. These individuals would be contacted in the world of the dead and asked to help resolve problems and conflicts in the world of the living. Prayers to ancestors were said before portrait busts or stelae at an altar or libation basin. The busts bear few inscriptions and are simple in form, men usually having a shaved skull. A few represent women or couples.

Among the most venerated figures, special mention should be made of the royal couple composed of Queen **Ahmose Nefertari** and **Amenhotep I**, posthumous worship of whom is attested by countless votive monuments. Ahmose Nefertari was the wife of Ahmose, first king of the 18th dynasty (1550–1525 BC), and served as regent for her son Amenhotep I (1525–1504 BC). A century later, both became objects of unusual devotion, representing guardian ancestors and glamorous heroes. In a collective enthusiasm, the community of Deir el-Medina placed itself under the protection of this fetish couple, who benefited from original forms of personal worship.
Privileged families

Given their status as "Tomb craftsmen" working on the reign's most prestigious building project, the teams at Deir el-Medina enjoyed many advantages and were privileged members of New-Kingdom society. They were housed by the institution of the Tomb, which also supplied them with much of their food (grains, fish, fruit) as well as water and basic necessities (cloth, oil, lighting). They furthermore received a burial plot in the cemetery near the village.

During the Ramesside period, 40 to 120 families lived in this town, depending on the size of the team required. Ancient texts tell us that boys and girls "took one another as man and wife" then "set up house" by living together under the same roof. Children were desired and loved, being a source of social recognition. Families of ten children or more were not rare. Infertile couples prayed for help from the gods, but they sometimes resorted to adoption. This simple family group might be enlarged by the arrival of a relative, a widowed parent, or an unmarried sister. It was therefore common for twelve to fifteen people to live under the same roof in Deir el-Medina, where the size of houses was nevertheless modest.

Entering the house

All houses gave onto the street via a wooden entrance door painted red—a protective color—whose jambs were set on a limestone base. Inscriptions and figures on these bases, carved in bas-relief and painted, identified the occupants of the premises. The main door led to the first room, whose floor was slightly lower than street level. This room was characterized by a strange brick construction that rose against one of the walls; excavator Bernard Bruyère compared its shape to the old enclosed beds found in rural Brittany. It had a narrow, impractical brick staircase of three to five steps, leading to an opening in its façade.

Painted stucco decorations on this construction have been partially preserved. They feature subjects and figures evoking sexuality and fertility (Bes, nude female dancer, convolvulus). The other walls of the room contained hollow niches.

This arrangement of "enclosed platform bed" and niches certainly had religious significance. Votive offerings to the household gods must have been placed in the niches, and it is possible to imagine one or several members of the family performing regular devotions so that the gods would look kindly on the home of a venerable lineage, guaranteeing its members' health and peace of mind.

Living room

The second room was the largest and highest. Small openings in the upper part of the wall were fitted with wooden slats that allowed for ventilation while blocking the hot sun and intrusive birds. The flat ceiling was held up by a wooden column set on a stone base. The brick walls were covered with a layer of mud, the lower part of which was whitewashed; the brightly colored column was also a decorative feature.

This is where the family gathered, along with venerable ancestors whose exemplary, protective presence was perpetuated by the busts or stelae placed in niches. The size of this room also allowed for festive gatherings where friends and co-workers might join the family for a meal, with everyone seated on the floor. Beer was appreciated by all, and flowed freely, until musical instruments were brought out to enliven the proceedings. A low brick bench, covered with mats, ran along one wall. In certain houses this was the location of a short shaft leading down to a small cellar dug into the rock, where the household reserves were stored (oil, wine, seasonings, tools and various utensils).

At the back of the house
Off the "living room" ran a small hall that led to one or two multipurpose rooms used as storeroom and rest area. All kinds of baskets, caskets, earthenware jars, tools, and brooms were found there.

Then came a staircase leading to the rooftop terrace. The terrace was made from tightly aligned trunks of palm trees covered with branches and palm fronds, all consolidated by mud daub. It was here, in the evening when the weather was fair and mild, that the family could enjoy some peace and fresh air.

At the back of this row of rooms, a passage led to the last room of the house, an open-air kitchen. This was where the women went to work. A kitchen was equipped with a brick oven, a grindstone, a mortar and pestle, and a kneading trough, testifying to the importance of grains (wheat and barley) in household foods (bread, cakes, beer, etc.). Large earthen jars containing supplies of water must have occupied a large place in the courtyard. A shelf-like bench enabled the mistress of the house to arrange her vessels, utensils, baskets and containers for vegetables, fruits and spices. This room was placed under the protection of hearth deities, whose votive statues or stelae were placed in wall niches.

Furniture, toilets, washing

In ancient times houses had neither closets, cupboards, sideboards, settees or shelving, but merely a few seats, mats, chests (usually wooden) and wickerwork baskets whose shape and size depended on specific use. All these furnishings were small and lightweight, to be pushed aside at night when mats were placed on the floor for sleeping.

Atypically, the town was located at some distance from the Nile and its canals, hence had no nearby source of water. The institution of the Royal Tomb supplied water by delivering earthen jars of it carried by donkeys or on the heads of servants employed for that arduous task. Perhaps these were the same serving women, paid by the day, that the Royal Tomb placed at the disposal of families to help the mistress of the house with strenuous jobs such as grinding wheat and weaving cloth.

Archaeologists have not found any canals or gutters for waste water in the streets or outside the village, nor any toilet facilities inside the houses. An architect named Kha, buried at Deir el-Medina, took his close-stool with him to his grave (now in the Egyptian museum in Turin, Italy). The washing utensils and products that have been uncovered provide evidence of personal hygiene: oils and unguents to care for the skin and perfume the body; pins, combs, and mirrors for doing the hair; and other make-up products.
The site of Deir el-Medina

The town

The ruins, which can be visited, include a village, a cemetery, and a temple. The village of Deir el-Medina is by far the best-preserved residential site in the entire Nile Valley. It owes its amazing state of preservation to the fact that it was built in the middle of the desert. Not having a direct source of water to tempt other people to move there, and never flooded by the waters of the Nile, Deir el-Medina was simply buried in sand down through the ages, after having been abandoned at the end of the New Kingdom (circa 1100 BC). Founded by Thutmose I in the early 15th century BC, the village underwent several renovations and extensions. The level now revealed by excavation dates to the Ramesside era (13th–12th centuries BC); it covers some 6,600 square meters (132 meters long by 50 meters wide) and includes sixty-eight houses. It is surrounded by a town wall. A central street divides it into two sectors along a north-south axis, and leads to the only gate in the wall, at the north end, though which inhabitants passed to get to the “control post” where they were given orders and received supplies.

An aerial view of the Theban hills with the site of Deir el-Medina: at the bottom of the photo is the village ringed by its wall, with the outlines of sixty-eight tightly packed houses that gave onto narrow lanes. On the left, in the shadow of the buttress leading to the high Libyan plateau, are the graves of the western cemetery. The tombs of Gurnet Murai, along the eastern wall of the village, are now completely covered by rubble from the village. In the north of the village is the temple of Hathor with its high wall and the large opening of its Great Pit. The paths that workmen took on their way to the construction site can be clearly seen. The middle path, passing by a rest station, led to the Valley of the Kings, where most of their work was carried out.

Houses

All the houses resembled one another, built to the same plan: three rooms in a row, plus kitchen and outbuildings. They covered roughly seventy square meters and gave onto the main road. The uprights and lintels of doorways were made of stone, carved with the name of the owner, whereas the door itself was wood. Inside, the floor was simply packed earth, but a large swathe of whitewash ran along the lower walls and lent an impression of cleanliness.

The two larger rooms were used for family life and for receiving guests. The roof was made of split tree trunks and palm fronds. There were no windows, but openings high in the walls brought light to these houses, which were all adjoining. After the second room, a corridor led to smaller rooms (for storage) and the kitchen, which had no roof but was equipped with essential items such as bread oven, cooking hearth, kneading trough, jars, grindstone and mortar and pestle.

A stairway led to the roof-top terrace, where the family gathered when the heat was tolerable. Basic furnishings included chests and baskets for storing crockery, food, and linen.

Families were large, numbering ten children or more; several generations might live in these houses, which must have seemed small for so many people.

Graves

The craftsmen’s cemetery was located on the lower part of the hill that rose to the west of the village. It had fifty-three decorated tombs, forty of which dated from the days of the Ramesses. An Egyptian tomb comprised an underground vault in which the deceased and his burial goods were placed, plus a chapel that, at Deir el-Medina, was usually topped by a small pyramid, at the apex of which was a carved pyramidion symbolizing the rising sun. The chapel had several chambers and was decorated with scenes showing the deceased and his wife welcomed by the gods of the underworld. The iconographic and religious repertoire of the vaults was heavily inspired by funerary texts popular during the New Kingdom, especially the Book of the Dead. It was probably in response to a desire to
generate a maximum of magical protection around the coffin that the craftsmen designed their vaults like an immense papyrus text with chapters and illustrations from the Book of the Dead, giving the walls an ocher-yellow color similar to papyrus. The most well-known tombs today are those of Sennedjem, Pashedu, and Inherkhau.

The temple of Hathor

Outside the village, to the north of the site, a high wall surrounds a small temple dedicated to Hathor and Ma’at, major goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon, and to two individuals who were the object of a posthumous cult, Imhotep and Amenhotep, sons of Hapu. Built during the Greco-Roman period on the site of an earlier temple, this precinct has retained its ritualistic outbuildings, mainly storerooms and constructions of unfired brick. A hypostyle hall, a vestibule, and three chapels comprise the temple, whose often-polychrome bas-reliefs show traditional scenes of offerings. One of the chapels is decorated with an important subject from funerary mythology, namely the weighing and judgment of the soul by Osiris. The outer walls of the temple and the terrace (which should not be missed), are covered with Coptic graffiti, testifying to the transformation of the building into a place of Christian worship.
The days of the Ramesses: The 19th and 20th dynasties

How many Ramesses were there?

Succeeding the pharaohs of the 18th dynasty (1550–1295 BC), which included such glamorous rulers as Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, Akhenaton, and the famous Tutankhamen, the two next dynasties (19th and 20th) were named after the Ramesses, who ruled from 1295 to 1069 BC and left their mark on the second half of the New Kingdom. Eleven of these eighteen pharaohs were called Ramesses—"born of Ra"—indicating that they placed themselves under the protection of the sun-god Ra. The major New Kingdom god, Amun, eventually merged with Ra to become Amun-Ra, who presided over the fate of pharaohs from his main temple in Karnak in Upper Egypt. Royal residences and government were spread among three capital cities: Pi-Ramesses in the Delta, Memphis (near Saqqara), and Thebes (now Luxor). All the Ramesses were buried in the Valley of the Kings, whereas wives and princes were buried in the Valley of the Queens.

What policies did they pursue?

A defensive foreign policy and wars of conquest during the 18th and early 19th dynasty brought Egypt wealth that profited the upper classes and, in particular, the temples. The offerings and tributes brought to the gods tamed religious precincts into powerful economic centers. Among the major political figures of the Ramesside era, it is worth mentioning Ramesses II, who reigned for sixty years (1279–1213 BC) and Ramesses III (1184–1153 BC). The former won major victories against the Hittites on the Orontes River (battle of Qadesh), thus regaining territories previously under Egyptian control. Shortly after his death, the country was slowly destabilized by an influx of foreigners. Ramesses III, a key 20th-dynasty ruler, managed to repulse the People of the Sea during a memorable naval battle. Decline set in during his reign, however, and delays in payment to workers in Deir el-Medina led to strikes (the first occurred in the 29th year of his reign). The great crisis at the end of the dynasty would have serious consequences for the economic, political, and social structure of Egypt (administrative scandals, pillaging of tombs in the Valley of the Kings, etc.).

What did they build?

Great builders in the Delta region as well as along the Nile Valley as far south as Nubia, the Ramesses erected numerous buildings designed to glorify their military exploits, their power, and their devotion to the dynastic gods. These monuments—temples, palaces, chapels, commemorative stelae—were characterized by bas-relief decoration, which was easier and swifter to execute than raised relief. The Ramesseum and the mortuary temple of Medinet Habu in Thebes, and the temples at Abu Simbel are examples still highly appreciated by tourists to Egypt. Numerous stelae and bas-reliefs illustrating this particularly recognizable style can be seen in museums.

What image did they project?

The upper part of a stela dedicated to Ramesses II by the Royal Scribe Ramose (E 16373) provides us with an idea of the image Egypt’s Ramesside pharaohs wanted to give of themselves. Ramesses II brandishes a white club in a dynamic pose, about to smash the heads of his kneeling enemies, whom he seizes by the hair. He towers over them, while his name, written above the foreigners, further reduces them to submission. To glorify their power and superiority over neighboring countries, the pharaohs commissioned countless depictions of royal victory—standard since the archaic period—which adorned small jewels, private monuments like this little stela, and gigantic temple façades.
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Introduction | The king is dead | At work in the royal tomb | The gods | At home | Background: the site of Deir el-Medina | The days of the Ramesses | Bibliography

**Bibliography—Deir el-Medina in the days of the Ramesses**

Finally, this In-Depth Study concludes with a select bibliography.

- Exhibition catalog: *La Vie quotidienne chez les artisans de Pharaon*, Metz and Marseille.