

# Pharaoh Triumphant: Power Politics in Ancient Egypt

Dates: June 19 – August 7, 2020  
3-4PM EST

Zoom meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83742163399>

## Overview

Ancient Egyptian kings were masters of the known world - gods on earth. This mindset was publicized through an entrenched royal propaganda machine and is manifest in many of the surviving ancient texts. As opposed to today, when people can widely broadcast their political opinions, ancient public messaging was largely restricted to the literate elite. Imagine how differently we would view current events if powerful state leaders, like Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin, were able to always control the narrative? So ancient Egyptian texts tell us how kings *wished* to be seen and understood by their own subjects, by foreign people, and by the gods. But is that what everyone really thought?

In truth, we have reason to believe that prominent texts, including The Teaching for Merikare, the Semna Stelae, and the Battle of Kadesh Poem, were highly propagandistic. In order to properly understand ancient Egyptian civilization, we must examine these texts more as tools of the political battle for legitimacy, rather than as accurate portrayals of the Pharaohs. Questions of the performance of authority and power in comparison to its real effects on society span the ages and are fundamental points of departure for discussions about today's global political climate. In these discussions we will explore ancient Egyptian kingship and, through conversations about these ancient texts, we will ponder topics crucial to our modern political dilemmas.

## Structure

Each week's meeting will focus on the discussion of readings assigned for that particular day. These will be mostly primary sources, but I will provide some secondary sources when relevant. While the reading group is organized thematically rather than chronologically, I am happy to provide suggestions of additional readings to those interested in attaining a basic grounding in Egyptian history and culture. If a particular topic interests you, let me know and I will find more resources for you. I would also love to incorporate different participants' backgrounds and interests, so if you are familiar with readings that you think would help us explore these topics (either from Egypt or elsewhere), please get in touch with me!

Egyptian kingship was not only expressed and performed in texts; on the contrary, monumental art and architecture also reveal much about how they wished to be understood. As such, I will also bring a selected monument or two to show you in each class. Our last class will involve an activity for those who are interested in participating: you'll be asked to write the end of a sonnet (don't worry, I'm definitely not a poet!).

## Schedule

The reading list below is subject to change a bit as we move through; please check back a few days before each session to make sure you have everything you need for that discussion.

### Meeting 1 (June 19): *ideology vs. reality*

- Youtube lecture on the Battle of Kadesh:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1AGe2V0qHo>
- Battle of Kadesh inscriptions ([Lichtheim pp. 57-72](#))
- [Ozymandias sonnet \(Percy Shelley\)](#)

*Monument:* Ramesseum

It may look like this session and the next are flipped, theme-wise: they are not! This is quite intentional. I want your thoughts on Egyptian kingship and how the Battle of Kadesh poem seems to reflect its ideology before you know much about it. Think of the Kadesh text in light of the Shelley sonnet, keeping in mind that both are about Ramses II – what questions does this comparison raise?



**Meeting 2 (June 26): introduction to Egyptian kingship**

- “Kingship,” chapter 3 (pp. 65-89) in Lloyd’s *Ancient Egypt: State and Society* (this is a bit long but is an excellent overview – feel free to pick specific sections that interest you most if you don’t have time to read the whole thing): [Google books link](#)
- The Teaching for Merikare ([Simpson pp. 152-165](#) -- the book is quite long so I would suggest downloading this one rather than trying to use it on Google drive)

*Monument:* Giza pyramids

Video on statues as alive: <https://vimeo.com/412761433>



**Meeting 3 (July 3): *boasting and propaganda***

- [Semna stela 1](#)
- Semna stela 2 ([Simpson pp. 337-338](#))
- Senwosret III hymns ([Simpson pp. 301-306](#))
- Learn about the current Brown University excavation of the Uronarti fortress: <https://blogs.brown.edu/archaeology/fieldwork/uronarti/> (read the whole thing -- it is short and will give you a good overview of the fortresses in general, too)

*Monument:* Nubian fortresses, smiting scenes



**Meeting 4 (July 10): *royal legitimacy and its ramifications***

- [Hatshepsut coronation inscription](#)
- Hatshepsut obelisk inscriptions ([Lichtheim pp. 25-28](#))

- Dorman, “The proscription of Hatshepsut” (in [Roehrig pp. 267-269](#) -- also download this one, file is quite heavy for online viewing)
- Arnold, “The destruction of the statues of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri” (in [Roehrig pp. 270-274](#))
  - Roth, “Erasing a reign” (in [Roehrig pp. 277-281](#))
- Punt inscriptions in English [here](#), for those who are interested!

*Monument:* Deir el-Bahri and erasures



**Meeting 5 (July 17): *restoring and forgetting***

- The Prophecies of Neferti ([Simpson 214-220](#))
- [Moreno García, “Climatic change or sociopolitical transformation”](#) (pp. 1-8 but you are welcome to read the rest if it interests you!)
- [Assmann, “A new state theology – The Religion of the Light”](#)
- [Tutankhamun Restoration Stela](#)

*Monument*: First Intermediate Period art, talatat in Karnak pylons, king lists



**Meeting 6 (July 24): Egyptian kings in conflict with other kings**

- Manley, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* ([pp. 52-55](#))
- Kamose texts ([Simpson pp. 345-350](#) + [Smith translation](#) – please read these two different translations, they are short)
- The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre ([Simpson pp. 69-71](#))
- [Speos Artemidos inscription](#)
- Go back to the Battle of Kadesh inscriptions from Meeting 1 ([Lichtheim pp. 57-72](#))

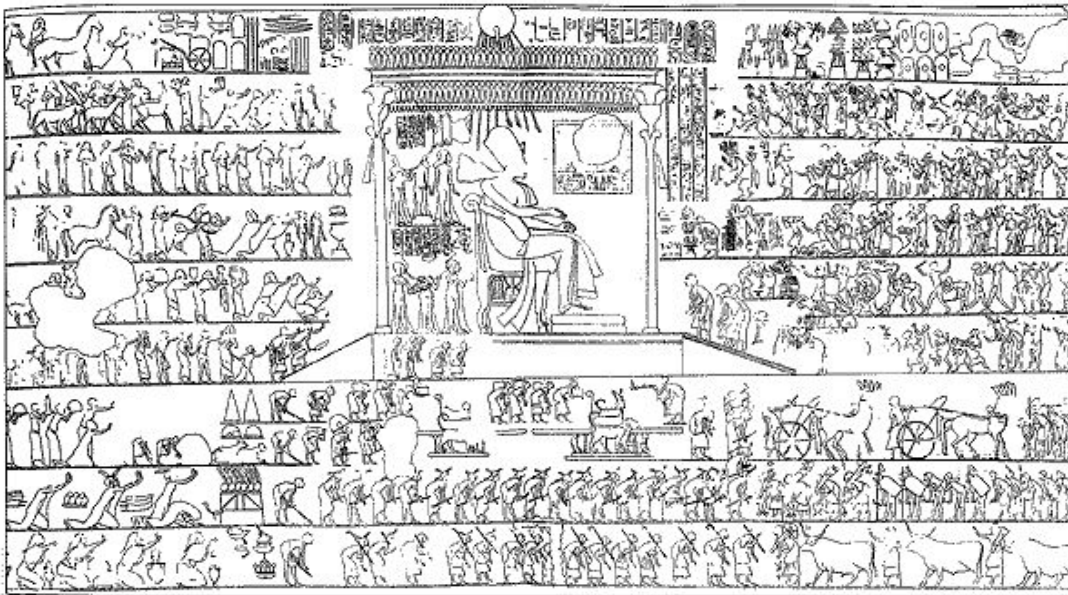
*Monument:* Avaris and Kerma



**Meeting 7 (July 31): diplomatic interactions with other kings**

- [Amarna letters](#) EA 1, 4, 9, 16, 26, 55, 74, 99, 136 (I'm giving you the full book of translations – besides reading the assigned letters, choose another you found particularly interesting to introduce to everyone else during the meeting)
- Liverani, "The Great Powers Club" ([pp. 15-27](#))
  - Only if interested, here are two other chapters from this book: [Introduction: The Amarna System](#) and [The Amarna Age: An International Society in the Making](#)
- [Eternal Treaty](#) (+ go back to the [Battle of Kadesh video](#) from Meeting 1 if you need a refresher on the Egyptian-Hittite conflict)

*Monument:* Akhenaten durbar, Kadesh reliefs





### Meeting 8 (August 7): reactions to kingship

- Go back to the Prophecies of Neferti from Meeting 5 ([Simpson 214-220](#)) -- the same king is discussed in the Teaching of Amenemhat below
- Teaching of Amenemhat ([Simpson 166-171](#))
- [Ramses III in retrospect](#) (from the Great Harris Papyrus)
- [Ramses III harem conspiracy texts](#)
- [Tomb robberies](#)
- Go back to Shelley's sonnet [Ozymandias](#) from Meeting 1

*For those who want to participate, write the end of Shelley's sonnet thinking of any power structures you are familiar with; juxtapose the perspective of that power structure and an external perspective of their power and impact (as Shelley does with Ramses II and what remained of his reign in the 19<sup>th</sup> century).*

