



FEBRUARY 2017

The Face of a Pharaoh

Relief Fragment of Ramesses II



VISIT THE BMA
and see *Relief Fragment of Ramesses II* in the African Art Galleries.

Artist unidentified. Detail, *Relief Fragment of Ramesses II*. c. 1279–1213 BCE. Egypt. Rose granite. 29^{15/16} x 18^{1/2} x 4^{15/16} inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Blanche Adler, BMA 1931.4.1

About 3,200 years ago, an Egyptian stone carver used hand tools to cut into hard granite and create an image of the pharaoh, Ramesses II (1303–1213 BCE). He and other artisans had been charged with producing relief sculpture for the facades of buildings in the pharaoh's city. The stone carver cut deeply into the granite to create dark shadows around the figure's head and shoulder. In bright sunlight, those shadowed areas would accentuate the pharaoh's form. Ramesses II would appear as a strong, commanding leader, easily recognizable from a distance.

As was common among the nobility, Ramesses wears a helmet-like wig. Made with human hair woven into a mesh cap, the actual wig may have been decorated with a ribbon or band of gold. The rectangular strip that hangs down just below Ramesses' chin is a false beard that would have been attached to his face with hooks behind each ear. The artificial beard was a symbol of a pharaoh's power, a reference to the bearded god Osiris, and a sign that the pharaoh himself was a living god on earth.

This wall fragment, just 2½ feet tall, is very small compared to the colossal statues that Ramesses II built to celebrate himself and his achievements. During his 66-year reign, the pharaoh had conquered new lands and protected his country from outside attack. He had erected temples throughout Egypt and established the capital city Pi-Ramesses, which he named for himself. As he reached the end of his 90 years, he fervently hoped that the durable stone that carried his image would tell of his power and might for ages to come.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Learn about relief sculpture at bit.ly/2kk2Dyt. Point to areas on *Relief Fragment of Ramesses II* that might be described as *high relief*, *low relief*, and *sunken relief*.

Make a relief sculpture with a bar of Ivory or other soft soap. Remove portions of the soap using safe tools such as an unsharpened pencil, popsicle stick, toothpick, nail, or clay sculpting tool.

Learn how the poem *Ozymandius* by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was inspired by a sculpture of Ramesses II. What does the poem say about the fate of powerful rulers over time? bit.ly/2jnoju9

Discuss methods used by today's leaders to create and disseminate their public images.



To comment or register for Art-To-Go, email Lwilson@artbma.org
For visitor information: artbma.org

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



Relief Fragment of Ramesses II

Artist unidentified. c. 1279–1213 BCE. Egypt. Rose granite. $29\frac{15}{16} \times 18\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{15}{16}$ inches.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Blanche Adler, BMA 1931.4.1