

## Pyramids

The pyramids of Egypt are the last remaining Wonder of the World. Even in the days of Ancient Egypt when powerful pharaohs ruled over Egypt the pyramids were considered a wonder. Today, the ruins of 35 pyramids still stand near the Nile River in Egypt. These pyramids were built to protect the bodies of Egyptian kings and other royalty but before the pyramids became the standard for burials, tombs were used for Egypt's early rulers, nobles, and other high ranking officials. This group of hierarchy were laid to rest in rectangular, flat-topped mastabas of mud and brick. These mastabas were about 12 feet high and were easy targets for tomb robbers.

The first pyramid built was the Step Pyramid of Saqqara; it stands in the open desert south of Cairo. The Step Pyramid was built for King Djoser. The people of Egypt willingly labored to build these monuments for their rulers, believing that, as gods, the pharaohs had to be properly provided for in their afterlife. The Step Pyramid was built around 2630 B.C. It exhibited a radical new shape never before used, and it was so new the Egyptians used its silhouettes as the hieroglyphic for "primeval mound", the first piece of earth to emerge from the soup of creation (Malek 90).

King Djoser's chief architect for his pyramid was Imhotep. It is thought that King Djoser's stone tomb started out having the standard shape of a mastaba. Then, as construction progressed, a concept evolved. Imhotep began to place one flat-topped stone structure atop another until he had created six steps by which the king could ascent to the heavens after death. The Egyptians had a firm belief in an afterlife and viewed their pharaohs as gods. These beliefs were a strong force that led to the piling up of stones to such a monumental scale. The Step Pyramid rose to a height of 204 feet; later pyramids increased in height as their designs changed. It was not sufficient that a pyramid be immense, but it had to be built so solidly that it would stand forever.

Although the Step Pyramid was the first pyramid, the Great Pyramid is the best known. The Great Pyramid was built for King Cheop. It is the largest pyramid of the three at Giza. The three pyramids built for King Cheops, King Chephrun, and King Mycerinos stand on the west bank of the Nile outside Cairo. They are the largest and best preserved of all Egyptian pyramids. They were built between 2600 B.C. and 2500 B.C. However, it is hard today to imagine the manpower involved in building the Great Pyramid (especially in our world of computers, machinery, and advanced technology. The ancient Egyptians had no machinery or iron tools to help in the building of the pyramids. The large limestone blocks used to build the pyramids were cut with copper chisels and saws. Most of these stones came from nearby quarries. An interesting fact to note is that camels were not brought into use until twenty centuries after the pyramids were built. Human strength was used to drag the stones from the quarries or from the boats (Casson 76). The stones were then dragged and pushed into place for the first layer of the Great Pyramid, which was placed on flat level ground. Next, long ramps were built of earth and brick moving the blocks up the ramps to form the next layer. After the top layer was finished the workers covered the pyramid with an outer coating of white casing stone, which gave the Great Pyramid a brilliant shrine during the day when the sun shone down on it. The outer coating of white casing stone were laid so perfectly that from a distance the pyramid appeared to have been made from a single white stone.

The main difference of the Great Pyramid compared to other pyramids, besides the fact of its size, is the difference of the location of the burial chamber. The Great Pyramid's burial chamber was in the uppermost part of the pyramid. This was something new, burial chambers in other pyramids were located beneath the pyramid. To reach the burial chamber inside the Great Pyramid a upward sloping corridor was built. The ramp for the king's ascent to the polar stars was therefore lost. A substitute for the ramp was devised in the form of a northern ventilation shaft,

which was a replica of the lower entrance corridor. King Cheop was to be positioned facing this northern view. But what of King Cheop? His body has never been found. Did he have a secret chamber built for himself that was so well hidden that it was impossible to find? Did thieves steal or destroy King Cheop's body for the jewels and gold hidden within the body wrapping? Answers to these questions have yet to be found.

It is estimated that it took about 2,300,000 separate blocks, each weighing an average of two and a half tons, to build King Cheop's Great Pyramid. Some blocks weighed up to fifteen tons. The base of the Great Pyramid covered thirteen acres and reached a height of 481 feet. To accomplish the feat of building the Great Pyramid it took 23 years and a work force of tens of thousands peasant laborers (Hallibunton 335). The enormous size of the Great Pyramid can better be visualized with the fact that Saint Paul's Cathedral and the House of Parliament could be housed within the Great Pyramid. If the Great Pyramid was sawed into cubes, measuring a foot in each dimension and placed in a row, they would extend over a distance almost equal to the circumference of the earth (Edwards 104). It is no wonder the Great Pyramid is still a Wonder of the World.

All pyramids, no matter their size, design, or age, share a common curse. Tomb robbers have plundered the pyramids for centuries stealing gold, gems, beautiful furniture, clothing, musical instruments, even sacred vases containing a pharaoh's vital organs. All these items were common items found inside a burial chamber. Now they have all been lost forever because of tomb robbers of today and yesterday. The well known Arabic proverb "Death comes on wings to he who enters the tomb of the pharaoh" (Casson 81) meant little to the tomb robbers. Others who have heard the warning and chose not to listen or believe have eventually paid the price. One such person was Lord Carnarvon, who headed the excavation of King Tutankhamun's tomb. Lord Carnarvon died quite unexpectedly from a 4000 year old fungus he came in contact with inside the tomb of King Tutankhamun. Shortly after Lord Carnarvon perished, other members of the excavation party began to meet with unusual and sometimes unexplainable accidents. These so called accidents claimed the lives of thirty six members of the party (Reeves 31). Was it the pharaoh's curse or just coincidence?

In Las Vegas, Nevada the hotel-casino Luxor was built. The Luxor was built in the shape of a pyramid. A replica of the Sphinx sits in front of the giant pyramid shape casino. When the hotel was being built a report was given, and the construction workers interviewed were afraid of the pyramid shaped casino. The workers believed in the Curse of the Pharaohs. The numerous accidents had sent other workers to the local hospital emergency room. Other Las Vegas casinos are blaming their misfortunes on Luxor. It is no wonder that magic, superstition, and the unknown has followed mankind since the earlier times of the first mysterious pyramids!

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