

Architectural Wonders - The Great Pyramid of Giza and the King that built it.

Ancient Egypt is one of the topics that attract interest from people around the globe. It is a subject that people are well aware of, either through learning about it during their history lessons or their interest in ancient cultures and their remains in this day and age. When thinking of Egypt, the one of the past or the one of the present, the pyramids are one of the most distinctive features that come to mind - together with the hieroglyphs - the 'sacred carved (letters)'¹. It is these structures that this essay will focus on, as the pyramids are not only a symbol of the past, but predominantly the symbol of age-defying craft that survived not only generations but also millennia. Putting aside multiple theories of the origin of Pyramids, this essay will focus on them from Archaeological and Architectural perspectives and attempt to introduce the subject in an interesting and work-to-understand way for those who begin their journey through the architectural wonders of Ancient Egypt.

The pyramids this work will discuss are located in Giza, a place known as their agglomerate, including the one that tends to be most associated with the image of the Pyramids and Egypt in general - The Great Pyramid of Giza known also as the Pyramid of Khufu.

The Great Pyramid of Khufu was built around 2600 B.C.E and is 146.5 metres tall and has a ground plan of 230 square metres.² Made of 2 300 000 blocks of limestone it is the biggest pyramid in Egypt,³. The number of blocks is of course an approximation.⁴ The Great Pyramid of Giza nevertheless is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.⁵. This fact is also confirmed by Diodorus Siculus, one of the classical writers, who says the following: 'The eighth king, Chemmis of Memphis, ruled fifty years and constructed the largest of the three pyramids, which are numbered among the seven wonders of the world.'⁶ The pyramid itself is named after the one who had it built - King Khufu, who ascended to the throne in c. 2589.⁷ The King himself did not rule for long, as his reign is dated between 2589 BCE and 2566 BCE.⁸ His full name Khnum-khufu means 'the god Khnum protects me',⁹. This is particularly important as it possibly provides the approximation of the origin of the King. God Khnum was a local god of the Elephantine, which, if it is believed that King Khufu was named as such due to the place of his origin, puts his birthplace a fair distance from the location of the Pyramid. There is unfortunately a very limited amount of resources and

1

Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, (New York: The Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 474.

2

Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, p. 88.

3

Filer, Joyce, *Pyramids*, 2nd ed. (Place of publication not identified: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.22.

4

Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, p. 89.

5

Filer, Joyce, *Pyramids*, p.22.

6

Bill Thayer, *Diodorus Siculus, Library Of History*, N.A.,

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/1C*.html#ref52> [Accessed on 19 May 2023] p.217.

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Filer, Joyce, *Pyramids*, p.22.

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Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, p. 88.

9

Ibid. p.88.

knowledge that deal with Khufu,¹⁰ Therefore, such an idea is merely a hypothesis by the author of this work. There is not much known about the king himself, apart from a few mentions by the Greek authors who were quite critical of his rule. Diodorus Siculus, one of the ancient scribes describes the pyramid as follows:

*The entire construction is of hard stone, which is difficult to work but lasts for ever; for though no fewer than a thousand years have elapsed, as they say, to our lifetime, or, as some writers have it, more than three thousand four hundred, the stones remain to this day still preserving their original position and the entire structure undecayed.*¹¹

As evidenced above the Great Pyramid of Giza was widely known even 2000 years ago during the age of the classical writers, who, quite appropriately deemed it to last thousands of years as it is standing to this day. The Khufu Pyramid has a unique feature that has not been seen in other pyramids - namely the location of the burial chamber.¹² Ian Shaw, in his book *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, says the following: 'Unusually, the burial chamber is situated in the core of the pyramid and not below or on ground level.'. This is a very important piece of knowledge, as it provides a context to the uniqueness of this pyramid, as the size itself could be considered more of a choice and show the strength of the ruler. The fact that Ian Shaw calls this unusual suggests that it defied tradition, which was important to the Egyptians. According to Ian Shaw, the construction plan of the pyramid was changed during the time it took to build it, but he approximates that it could not have happened more than once.¹³ Interestingly, a bit further in his book Ian Shaw states that the building of the pyramids was not based on slave labour.¹⁴ He hypothesised that the necessary workforce was simply relocated from other areas of the economy, such as agriculture or food production.¹⁵ This, of course, put a heinous strain on the Egyptian resources, a may be one of the reasons King Khufu was considered a despot.¹⁶

The Great Pyramid stands out due to its size, but that is not the only reason. Ian Shaw list quite a few of them, '[...]its enormous size, the astonishing mathematical properties of its design, and the perfection and accuracy of its construction[...]',¹⁷. Sadly, there are little to no artefacts found inside or around the pyramid, except for two boats, one dismantled, but somewhat well preserved and another one still buried.¹⁸ Seemingly these were part of the Egyptian burial beliefs and were meant to serve as means of passage for the King after his death.¹⁹

10

Ibid. p.88.

11

Bill Thayer, *Diodorus Siculus, Library Of History*, p.217.

12

Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History Of Ancient Egypt*, p. 88.

13

Ibid. p.88.

14

Ibid. p.94.

15

Ibid. p.94.

16

Ibid. p.89.

17

Ibid. p.89.

18

Ibid. p.89.

19

Ibid. p.89.

Another interesting fact about the pyramid is that it is surrounded by other, smaller pyramids, located to the east of it.²⁰

Next to the Pyramid of Khufu are a few smaller pyramids, this being the Pyramids of the Queens, three pyramids smaller in size. Each one belongs to different people connected to King Khufu - his sister Henutsen, Queen Meretetes and Queen Hetepheres, Khufu's mother.²¹ The subject of Egyptian Pyramids causes excitement and intrigues the masses, to the point that there have been quite a few films inspired in some way by the myths and legends surrounding the constructions. The topic of the Pyramids in Giza requires a lot of research and study and, even after so many years, is still nowhere near providing complete answers for curious minds. Hopefully, this piece of work was able to inspire those interested in Ancient History to look for the answers themselves and with some luck, uncover new facts that they can then share with the academic world.

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[Accessed on 19 May 2023].

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Ibid. p.89.

21

Filer, Joyce, *Pyramids*, 2005 p.24.