



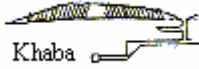
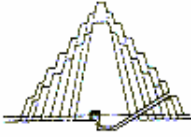
II: Tombs of the Old Kingdom

A: Royal Tombs.

The III Dynasty begins a relatively brief period that has to be one of the most astounding in human history. The small stones that were used in the place of bricks in the elaborate Step Pyramid of Djoser quickly grew into gargantuan blocks weighing many tons, placed with no more apparent difficulty than Lego blocks. In less than two centuries all the really big pyramids were built, during the III but mainly the IV Dynasties. And there is no avoiding or disparaging the fact they were *BIG*.... big beyond the budgets and will, if not actually the technology, of the modern world. Seth was now forgotten in the royal cult. Tombs are again built at Saqqara, and the palace façade of the I Dynasty tombs, although returning in stone with Djoser, disappears forever by the time of the IV Dyn.

Plenty of people still find it hard to believe that the mere Egyptians, at such a time, could have done anything of the sort. Something miraculous, or at least extraterrestrial, seems called for. Unfortunately for such theories, the Egyptians, although leaving no contemporary record of their techniques, did leave some of their tools in the limestone quarries and quarry marks from the work gangs on many blocks (from which the organization of the gangs can be reconstructed), and, before too

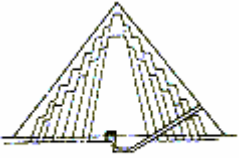
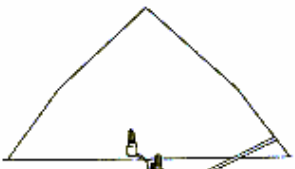
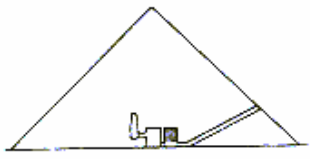
Egypt. Monuments

III Dynasty			
Reign	Dating		Tomb
	<i>Clayton, 1994</i>	<i>Lehner, 1997</i>	
Sanakhte, Nebka	2686-2668	2649-2630	
Djoser, Zoser	2668-2649	2630-2611	 <p>Saqqara Djoser</p>
Sekhemkhet	2649-2643	2611-2603	 <p>Sekhemkhet Saqqara</p>
Khaba	2643-2637	2603-2599	 <p>Khaba Zawiyet el-Aryan</p>
Huni	2637-2613	2599-2575	 <p>Huni? Meidum</p>

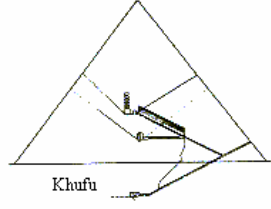

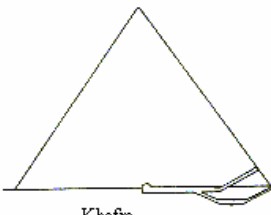
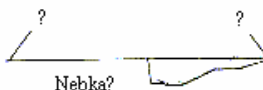

nobles responsible for later projects begin to long, the tombs of show us the means of their realization. Sadly, the III and IV Dynasty tombs do not yet show that, and the whole period is gravely lacking in inscriptions, especially in comparison to the thoroughness with which the Egyptians later covered every surface available. Where at Karnak hardly a square foot goes without the name of the king who had it made, the major pyramids never bothered to officially display the names of their owners. We are reduced to the few remaining quarrymen's marks, given fortunately in regal years, to positively identify several pyramids. Only one such mark survives (on accessible surfaces) to identify the Great Pyramid of Khufu, as only one small figure survives to represent the king himself.

The real mystery of the IV Dynasty is not so much how Khufu could have built his pyramid on such a scale but how his father, Seneferu, could, apparently, have done three of them nearly as big, one at Meidum and two at Dahshur, all within sight of each other. The pyramid at Meidum was begun as a step pyramid, perhaps by Huni of the III Dynasty (although evidence of this is missing, Huni is usually credited with a long enough reign to have completed a large pyramid), but was then certainly finished as a pyramid, with the steps filled in, by Seneferu. Why this was true done is a good question, but one thing for certain is that it as not

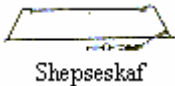

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<i>IV Dynasty</i>			
<i>Reign</i>	<i>Dating</i>		<i>Tomb</i>
	<i>Clayton, 1994</i>	<i>Lehner, 1997</i>	
Seneferu	2613-2589	2575-2551	 <p>Seneferu, Meidum</p> <p>Meidum</p>
			 <p>Seneferu, Dahshur</p> <p>Bent Pyramid</p> <p>Dahshur</p>
			 <p>Seneferu, Dahshur</p> <p>Dahshur</p>

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Khufu	2589-2566	2551-2528	 <p>Khufu</p> <p>Giza</p>
Djedefre	2566-2558	2528-2520	 <p>Djedefre</p> <p>Abu Roash</p>
Khafre	2558-2532	2520-2494	 <p>Khafre</p> <p>Giza</p>
Nebka		2494-2490	 <p>Nebka?</p> <p>Zawiyet el-Aryan</p>
Menkaure	2532-2504	2490-2472	 <p>Menkaure</p> <p>Giza</p>

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Shepseskaf	2504-2500	2472-2467	 Shepseskaf Saqqara
Khentkawes		2467-2465	 Khentkawes Giza

done well. The structure was unstable. At some point the outer parts actually collapsed, leaving the core looking rather like a huge cube. The first pyramid at Dahshur, the "Bent Pyramid," was then begun as a true pyramid from scratch, but it too had stability problems, and had to be finished with a flattened top. The full mastery of the medium then appears in the third with a good foundation, larger blocks, and successful pyramid completion. The whole technique of truly large scale construction thus rapidly evolved in just one reign. Seneferu seems to have had money to spend, time to spare (in 24 some years), and a very clear end in mind. A shame he can't tell us about it.

One key feature we should note about the pyramid building is that the quarries for the finest limestone were on the opposite side of the Nile from the pyramid sites, and that the quarries for all the

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granite were far up the Nile at Aswan. This means that the best time to move all that rock to the pyramid sites was during the season of the Flood, when the Nile would be the widest and deepest.

Indeed, an essential part of all pyramid architecture was the dock at the edge of the desert, i.e. at the high water mark, with a causeway leading up to the pyramid foundation. It is not hard to imagine the government of Egypt impressing all the farmers idled by the Flood into a great effort to move a year's worth of stone up and/or across the Nile. The rest of the year, the more skilled stone masons would work to place the blocks, or would quarry the sites rougher, interior stone for the pyramids adjacent to the




Another feature we should note is that the Old Kingdom kings of Egypt did not, as far as we know, engage in the scale of foreign military adventures that become familiar in later dynasties. Many countries have impoverished themselves through war -- Louis XIV's gratuitous wars may have ultimately brought on the French Revolution -- but Seneferu through Menkaure focused the whole resources of their state on building their tombs. Not even the Egyptians were long able to keep that up.

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The V Dynasty, indeed, ushered in an era of less colossal, but also more articulated, works. The mortuary temples became larger and more elaborate, private tombs began to tell the everyday stories of the time (though without the kind of historical narrative that we would like), and soon the pyramids themselves acquired a voice, as the "Pyramid Texts," starting in the pyramid of Unas, related the perils of the voyage to the afterlife.



<i>V Dynasty</i>			
<i>Reign</i>	<i>Dating</i>		<i>Tomb</i>
	<i>Clayton, 1994</i>	<i>Lehner, 1997</i>	
Userkaf	2498-2491	2465-2458	 <p>Userkaf</p> <p>Saqqara</p>
Sahure	2491-2477	2458-2446	 <p>Sahure</p> <p>Abusir</p>
Neferirkare	2477-2467	2446-2426	 <p>Neferirkare</p> <p>Abusir</p>

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Shepseskare	2467-2460	2426-2419	
Ranferef, Neferfre	2460-2453	2419-2416	Abusir
Niuserre	2453-2422	2416-2388	 <p>Niuserre</p> <p>Abusir</p>
Menkauhor	2422-2414		
Djedkare	2414-2375	2388-2356	 <p>Djedkare-Isesi</p> <p>Saqqara</p>
Unas	2375-2345	2356-2323	 <p>Unas</p> <p>Saqqara</p>

Egyp. Monuments

The entire period ends with the child king, Pepi II (who later boasted perhaps the longest reign in world history), writing charming letters to his expedition leader, urging him to keep safe the pygmy or dwarf he was bringing back from deep in Africa -- how deep we do not know -- so that the king could enjoy seeing him. The wandering mind of an octogenarian and nonagenarian king, however, may have left the nobles too much to their own devices. The country broke up when the power that devolved on them lost its last remaining unity in the death of the old king.

<i>VI Dynasty</i>			
<i>Reign</i>	<i>Dating</i>		<i>Tomb</i>
	<i>Clayton, 1994</i>	<i>Lehner, 1997</i>	
Teti	2345-2333	2323-2291	 <p>Teti</p> <p>Saqqara</p>
Pepi I	2332-2283	2289-2255	 <p>Pepi I</p> <p>Saqqara</p>

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Merenre	2283-2278	2255-2246	 <p>Merenre</p> <p>Saqqara</p>
Pepi II	2278-2184	2246-2152	 <p>Pepi II</p> <p>Saqqara</p>