Man fears time, yet time fears the pyramids

Star campus Desk

IT is the one and only Wonder of the world that does not require a description by early historians and poets. It is the one and only Wonder that does not need speculations concerning its appearance, size, and shape. It is the oldest, yet it is the only surviving of the Seven Ancient Wonders. It is the Great Pyramid of Giza.

Location

At the city of Giza, a necropolis of ancient Memphis, and today part of Greater Cairo, Egypt.

History

Contrary to the common belief, only the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops), not all the three Great Pyramids, is on top of the list of Wonders. The monument was built by the Egyptian pharaoh Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty, around the year 2560 BC to serve as a tomb for himself after his demise. The tradition of pyramid building started in Ancient Egypt as a sophistication of the idea of a mastaba or "platform" covering the royal tomb. Later, several stacked mastabas were used. Early pyramids, such as the Step Pyramid of King Zoser (Djoser) at Saqqara by the famous Egyptian architect, Imhotep, illustrate this connection.

The great pyramid is believed to have been built over a 20-year period. The site was first prepared, and blocks of stone were transported and placed. An outer casing (which disappeared over the years) was then used to smooth the surface. Although it is not known how the blocks were put in place, several theories have been proposed. One theory involves the construction of a straight or spiral ramp that was raised as the construction proceeded. This ramp, coated with mud and water, eased the displacement of the blocks that were pushed (or pulled) into place. A second theory suggests that the blocks were placed using long levers with a short angled foot.

Throughout their history, the pyramids of Giza have stimulated human imagination. They were referred to as "The Granaries of Joseph" and "The Mountains of Pharaoh". When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, his pride was expressed through his famous quote: "Soldats! Du haut de ces Pyramides, 40 siècles nous contemplent". (Soldiers! From the top of these Pyramids, 40 centuries are looking at us)

Today, the Great Pyramid is enclosed, together with the other pyramids and the Sphinx, in the tourist region of the Giza Plateau. Also in the area is the museum housing the mysterious Sun Boat, only discovered in 1954 near the south side of the pyramid. The boat is believed to have been used to carry the body of Khufu in his last journey on earth, before being buried inside the pyramid. It may also serve him as a means of transportation in his afterlife journey, according to Ancient Egyptian beliefs.

Description.

When it was built, the Great pyramid was 145.75 m (481 ft) high. Over the years, it lost 10 m (30 ft) off its top. It ranked as the tallest structure on Earth for more than 43 centuries, only to be surpassed in the nineteenth century AD. It was covered with a casing of stones to smooth its surface (some of the casing can still be seen near the top of Khefre's pyramid). The sloping angle of its sides is 51 degrees and 51 minutes. Each side is carefully oriented with one of the cardinal points of the compass. The horizontal cross section of the pyramid is square at all levels, with each side measuring 229 m (751 ft) in length. The maximum error between side lengths is astonishingly less than 0.1%.

The structure consists of approximately 2 million blocks of stone, each weighing more than two tons. It has been suggested that there are enough blocks in the three pyramids to build a 3 m (10 ft) high, 0.3 m (1 ft) thick wall around France. The area covered by the Great pyramid can accommodate St Peter's in Rome, the cathedrals of Florence and Milan and Westminster and St Paul's in London combined.

On the north face is the pyramid's entrance. A number of corridors, galleries, and escape shafts either lead to the King's burial chamber, or were intended to serve other functions. The King's chamber is located at the heart of the pyramid, only accessible through the Great Gallery and an ascending corridor. The King's sarcophagus is made of red granite, as are the interior walls of the King's Chamber. Most impressive is the sharp-edged stone over the doorway, which is over 3 m (10 ft) long, 2.4 m (8 feet) high and 1.3 m (4 ft) thick. All the interior stones fit so well, a card won't fit between them. The sarcophagus is oriented in accordance with the compass directions, and is only about 1 cm smaller in dimensions than the chamber entrance. It might have been introduced as the structure was progressing.

New theories concerning the origin and purpose of the Pyramids of Giza have been proposed... Astronomic observatories... Places of cult worship... Geometric structures constructed by a long-gone civilization... Even extraterrestrial-related theories have been proposed with little evidence in support... The overwhelming scientific and historic evidence still supports the conclusion that, like many smaller pyramids in the region, the Great Pyramids were built by the great Ancient Egyptian civilization off the West bank of the Nile as tombs for their magnificent Kings...tombs where Khufu, Khefre, and Menkaure could start the mystic journey to the afterlife.