WILEY

79. The Earliest Stone Tombs

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Source: *Man*, Vol. 10 (1910), pp. 129-130

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2788415>

Accessed: 25-06-2016 18:50 UTC

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Egypt.

With Plate I—J.

Petrie.

The Earliest Stone Tombs. *By W. M. Flinders Petrie, D.C.L., F.R.S.,*
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Although in recent years the burials of the prehistoric and early dynasties in Egypt have been well explored, no instance of a stone-built tomb is known before the end of the Second Dynasty, when King Khasekhemui built a stone chamber at Abydos. The succeeding kings were buried in rock-cut chambers, and not till the latter part of the Third Dynasty did stone-built chambers become the custom, even for kings. The oldest stone tombs of subjects are those at Meydum, which were opened by the British School this last winter.

The outsides of the great mastabas of Nefer-maat and another noble, close to the pyramid of Sneferu, had been visible in all ages, but the interiors had defied modern search. They were attacked in a thorough manner this year. The mound over the tomb, No. 17, was mined through to a depth of 45 feet, the clearance needing to be about as wide, in order to descend safely through the mass of stone chips of which it is formed. At the bottom was found a closed stone building, which had been completely buried beneath the mound, without leaving any external opening. The burial had therefore taken place before the mound was thrown up, and as the material of the mound was clearly from the mason's waste left in building the pyramid adjacent, the burial must have been made before the date of the pyramid of Sneferu, 4600 B.C. This is the earliest private stone tomb that can be dated.

The construction is magnificent; the passages are lofty, and the great chamber is roofed with beams of stone which weigh up to 40 tons each, where the dimensions can be seen. In a recess at the end of the hall stands the sarcophagus of red granite, the oldest stone sarcophagus known. The tomb had unfortunately been entered by plunderers, while its construction was well known, as they had tunnelled through to its weakest point; they had broken the body, but not destroyed it.

The burial is of the greatest interest, as it shows that the body was completely unfleshed before it was wrapped in linen. We have long known of the prehistoric burials being unfleshed, and even the bones being broken to extract the marrow; and in the Fifth Dynasty over a third of the bodies were more or less cut up before burial. In the present case the bones had been completely stripped and severed, excepting that the spine was not dissevered. Each bone was then wrapped separately in fine linen, even the small bones of the ankles and wrists; the spine was packed closely with linen, between and under all the processes, and linen was pressed into the empty eye sockets. A cloth model of the penis was very carefully formed and placed in the wrappings.

The neighbouring tomb of the noble Nefer-maat is the largest of all, the size being 380 feet by 206 feet. The body of it is of Nile mud, which is as tedious to work in as soft stone, owing to its toughness and the hard flints which it contains. A large pit, which we sank behind the offering chamber, showed nothing. Tunnels in various directions were then cut until the chamber was found. A pit 34 feet square had been sunk in the rock, 5 feet of mud had been poured into it and left to harden, then the stone chamber had been built upon that, and heaped over and around with large blocks of stone. This arrangement is unique, as also is the inlaid colour decoration of the tomb-chapel. The sculptured offering chamber of Nefer-maat was removed to Cairo, and that of Atet has been distributed to different museums by the British School.

The burial of Nefer-maat again proved to have been an unfleshed skeleton. It was in bad condition, as the last workmen before closing the chamber had rifled the body

SKULL OF BURIAL.

SECTION OF MOUND.

GRANITE SARCOPHAGUS.

CONTEMPORARY VASES.

EARLIEST STONE TOMB, MEYDUM.

and broken up the wooden coffin. Mud had been poured into the passage to close it, and this had run into the chamber to about a foot deep, thus wetting and rotting away any linen. But it had preserved a curious piece of evidence, for the mud had flowed into the hip joint, filling the acetabulum around the ball of the thigh which was still in place. This proves that the bones must have been separated and cleaned, and that there was no tissue or skin over them when the pit was closed.

Thus the two greatest nobles of the end of the III Dynasty are seen to have been entirely unfleshed, and their bones to have been buried recomposed in order. Both the bodies were extended at full length, as were the dismembered burials of the V Dynasty at Deshasheh. The present examples show that dismembering of the bodies was the custom for the highest classes in the beginning of the Pyramid Period. The full account by Mr. Wainwright, who excavated these tombs, will appear in *Meydum and Memphis*, the annual volume of the British School in Egypt.

A very important result has been the finding a series of quarry marks of Sneferu, which cover the whole range of the working season. This, we know, by the conditions of the country, was from April to October, and thus we find the interval from the XII to the III Dynasty to be 1,113 years, with about 40 years of uncertainty. This accords nearly with Manetho's statement of 1,198 years: if we credit the Egyptians with knowing their own history, and do not make any arbitrary reductions, this gives the date of 4600 B.C. for Sneferu, the first of the Pyramid builders.

The other main results of the season were the removal of the whole of the sculptures of Meydum, the earliest known, to Cairo and other museums for safety; the successful opening of the low levels of the great temple of Ptah at Memphis by working 10 feet under water level, and beginning thus to find the sculptures, a work that will occupy twenty years at least, and the finding of many sealings of Persian and early Greek work which illustrate the fifth and sixth centuries, B.C. Work will be continued at Memphis and its neighbourhood in the coming winter.

W. M. FLINDERS PETRIE.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE.

The skull was found with the rest of the bones in the granite sarcophagus. Its measurements are: length, 187 mm.; optryon, 186; breadth, max. 141; biauricular, 118; bi-zygomatic, 123; height to bregma, 140; basi-nasal, 99; basi-alveolar, 87; nasi-alveolar, 79; nasal height, 59; width, 24; nasion to chin, 127; jaw length, max. 119; breadth at joint, 121; breadth at base, 101. As compared with usual Egyptian heads this is large with narrow face, extremely orthognathous, and very narrow nose. In every respect it is of high type.

The section of the mound shows the strata of pyramid masons' chips which were piled over the stone burial chamber. The clearance was much wider within the mound in order to reach the chamber safely. At the left of the cutting is seen the brick wall of the tomb façade.

The granite sarcophagus in the stone chamber had been opened by plunderers. The block in front of it is one of two on which the lid had rested before the burial.

The stone vases, limestone and granite, were found in a contemporary tomb of the age Sneferu, 4600 B.C.

Australia.

Lang.

The Puzzle of Kaiabara Sub-class Names. By A. Lang.

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If we study the sub-class names of the Kaiabara tribe, of the mountains Bunya Bunya, so called from the fruit of that name (the hills are within sixty miles of Maryborough in South Queensland), we are puzzled. The passages are in *Journ.*

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