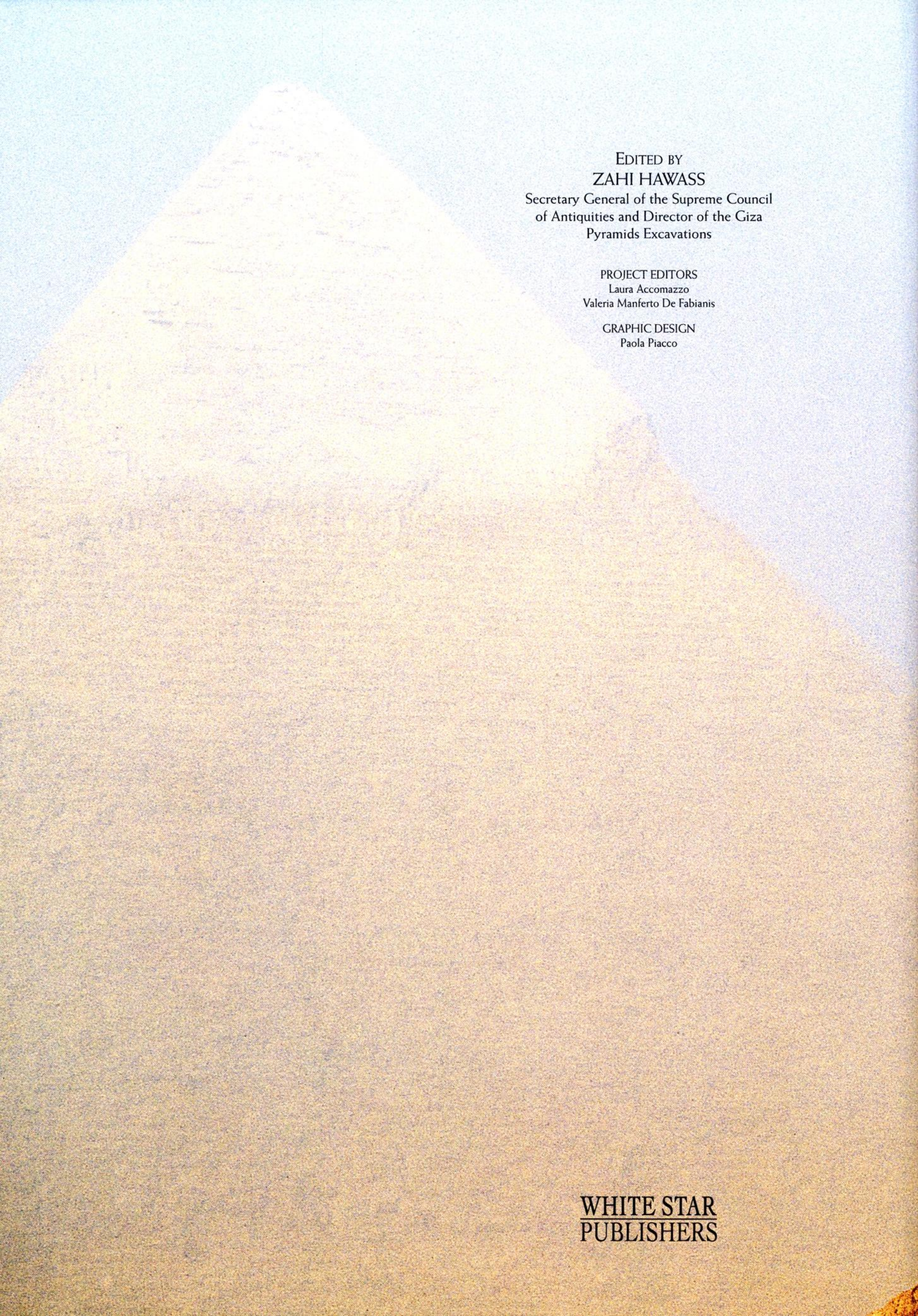


An aerial photograph of the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. The pyramids are constructed from dark, weathered stone blocks, showing significant erosion and some missing sections. The Great Pyramid of Giza is the largest and is positioned in the foreground, slightly to the right. Behind it, the two smaller pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure are visible. In the background, a dense urban area with numerous buildings is visible under a clear blue sky. The foreground shows the desert landscape with some smaller structures and debris.

ZAHÍ HAWASS

# THE TREASURES OF THE PYRAMIDS





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# THE TREASURES OF THE PYRAMIDS







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10-11

Scene showing the 'Meidum geese',  
Egyptian Museum Cairo, Old  
Kingdom.

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# The Pyramidion

by Zahi Hawass

**T**he term 'pyramidion' refers to a miniature pyramid that was placed on the top of the larger pyramid to serve as its apex. It was made of a special type of stone, in the Old Kingdom, either diorite, granite, or a very fine limestone which was then cased with gold or electrum was used. In the Middle Kingdom, the pyramidion was usually granite, which was then inscribed with texts and symbols.

A number of examples of pyramidions, or capstones, have been discovered around Old and Middle Kingdom pyramids. The oldest pyramidion ever discovered was found by Rainer Stadelmann in 1982 in the area of the Red Pyramid of Sneferu at Dahshur. It is made of fine, white Tura limestone and is uninscribed. The pyramidion was found in pieces; it has now been reconstructed, and stands at a height of about three quarters of a meter. It has been placed on a stand located on the east side of the Red Pyramid at Dahshur.

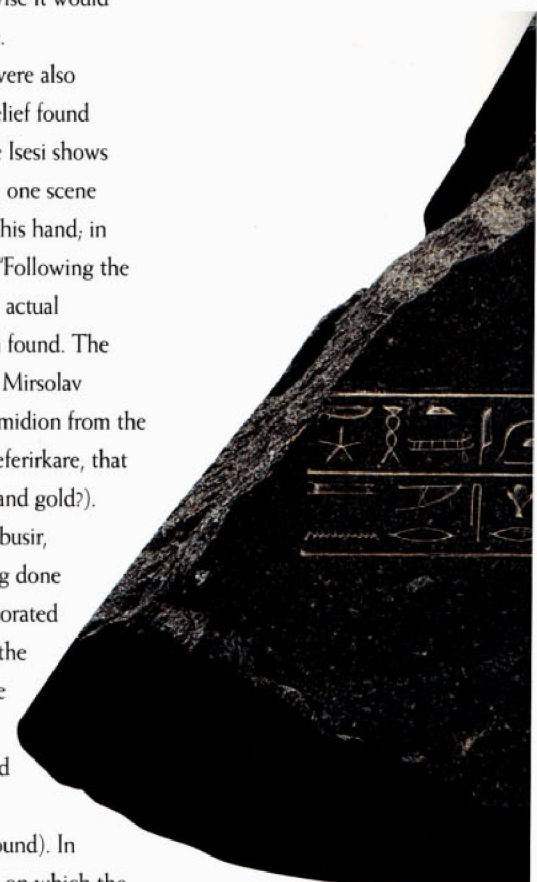
The second oldest pyramidion was found east of the Great Pyramid of Khufu in 1991, near the recently discovered satellite pyramid that it once surmounted. The east side of Khufu's pyramid had been explored before, but all previous excavators had missed this small pyramid. The pyramidion was found to the south of the satellite pyramid; its top and base had been destroyed and were reconstructed by Josef Dorner. A trapezoidal block from the third course from the top was also found near the satellite pyramid; this block and the pyramidion have been set up just to the north of the satellite pyramid.

Many people believed that the pyramid of Khafre never had a pyramidion because they thought that the casing of white limestone continued to the top of the pyramid. However, Italian scholars Maragioglio and Rinaldi surveyed the top of this pyramid and pointed out that the summit of the pyramid had been destroyed and now ended in a small platform. Another Italian expedition recently surveyed this pyramid to assess damage from an earthquake. They discovered that the casing stone of the top is only five centimeters thick,

which is different from all the other pyramids at Giza. Nabil Swelim believes that two pieces of polished diorite, discovered by Selim Hassan, could be part of the pyramidion of Khafre. He reconstructs this pyramid as having a whitish-gold outer facing with a course of rose granite below a dark green, diorite pyramidion.

The only other Fourth Dynasty pyramidion discovered was found near one of the subsidiary pyramids of Menkaure. Only the square base of this pyramidion has been preserved; a second piece that would have been on top is missing. The lower surface is smooth and pierced with holes that could have been used to secure the stone to the pyramid. This base is made of limestone; I believe that the upper part was made of a different type of stone, otherwise it would most likely have been made in one piece.

The pyramids of the Fifth Dynasty were also surmounted by special pyramidions. A relief found within the pyramid complex of Djedkare Isesi shows that his pyramid once had a pyramidion: one scene shows King Isesi standing with a staff in his hand; in front of him is an inscription that reads: "Following the pyramidion to the pyramid of Isesi." The actual pyramidion of this pyramid has not been found. The Czech expedition under the direction of Mirsolav Verner found a fragment of a basalt pyramidion from the pyramid of Khentkaus II, a consort of Neferirkare, that was originally cased with metal (copper and gold?). Blocks from the causeway of Sahure at Abusir, discovered recently when work was being done to prepare the site for the public, are decorated with scenes related to the installation of the pyramidion. One unique scene shows the pyramidion being dragged toward the pyramid. Workmen pull a rope connected to the pyramidion (depicted on the next block to the right, which has not been found). In this scene, one can see part of the sledge on which the pyramidion rested, as well as the workmen who pull the



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*The black granite pyramidion dating from the reign of Amenembet III, Twelfth Dynasty, found at Lisht, measures 140 cm in height and the base is 185 cm. Now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.*





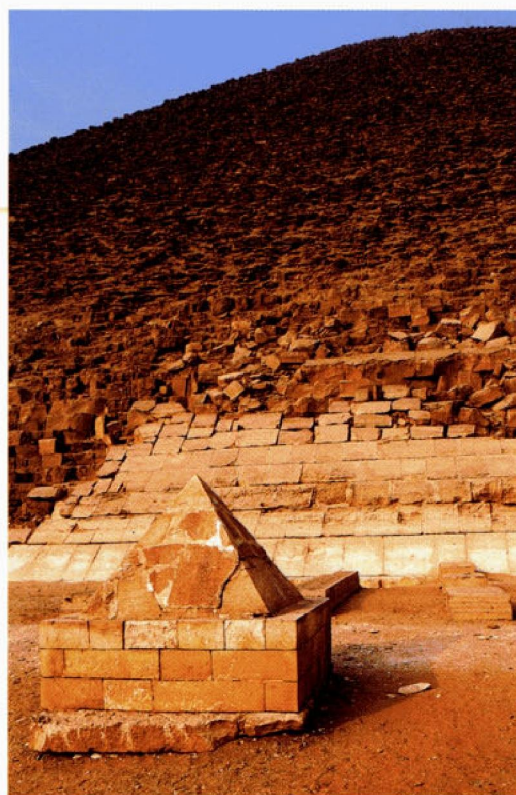






sledge and pour water in front of the runners to reduce friction with the ground. Other scenes show women, labeled as members of the *khener*, wearing a special uniform, standing with their right hand upraised and their left hand on their waist. The word *khener* has traditionally been translated as 'harem,' but has recently been reinterpreted as 'musical troop.' However, this meaning seems rather narrow and does not express the nuance of constraint that the original word conveys. They may well have been restricted in their freedom, and some of them may also have served as concubines to the king. Whatever the interpretation, entertainers, musicians, singers, and dancers were clearly an important part of the king's female entourage, and part of the celebration of the pyramidion installation. It is clear from these scenes that an expedition was sent into the desert to quarry special stone for the pyramidion. The presence of a group of emaciated Bedouin, who are apparently being brought to the royal court to be tried for attacking the quarrying party, indicates that the area into which the royal team ventured was barren and desolate, inhabited only by wandering tribes. In 1996, while we were carrying out excavations at Saqqara in the complex of Teti, the first king of the Sixth Dynasty, we rediscovered a pyramidion which had originally discovered in 1930 by Firth and Gunn near the southeast corner of the pyramid of Queen Iput I, one of Teti's wives. When we found it, it was lying in the area between the pyramid temples of this queen and another, Khuit. It is uninscribed and its top is destroyed. It is of polished limestone and has a rectangular base. Its total height is 47 centimeters. Maragioglio and Rinaldi suggested that it might be part of an obelisk, similar to one found in the upper temple of Pepy II, rather than the pyramidion for Iput I's pyramid. However, the style of this pyramidion is of the New Kingdom, and I do not believe it comes from an obelisk.

We found three additional pyramidions during our recent work at Saqqara. One was inside the storage magazine of Firth and Gunn, the original excavators of the complex of Teti. They had not published this



discovery, so it was a surprise to find it in the magazine. The surface of this pyramidion is polished and is pierced with three holes. These holes would have been used to attach a plating of electrum to the pyramidion. We found the second and third pyramidions in the area of the Teti complex in 1992–93. Both were made of limestone: one has a square base, is unpolished and has broken edges; the other is 46 centimeters high and its base is 53 by 37 centimeters.

The French expedition at South Saqqara recently found pieces of the pyramidion of the subsidiary pyramid of Queen Meritetes, wife of Pepy I of the Sixth Dynasty. And finally, there is evidence for the existence of a pyramidion connected with the subsidiary pyramid of Queen Wadjebten of Pepy II, which is located at the northeast corner of the main pyramid. An inscribed block was found here by Jéquier in 1925–26; the text included a phrase which he translated as "pyramidion of electrum." This interpretation is supported by the work of other scholars; there is no other reasonable way to understand this text. Most of the Old Kingdom pyramidions found were in poor condition. There is no direct evidence that pyramidions were cased in the Fourth Dynasty. However, it is likely that these pyramids had pyramidions encased in gold, connecting them to the sun cult. The inscriptions from Abusir and Saqqara, coupled with the pierced example from the complex of Khuit, all support the theory that pyramidions of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties were

coated with electrum. Several pyramidions have also been found that date from the Middle Kingdom. Fragments of pyramidions made of red granite have been found near two of the queens' pyramids in the complex of Senusret I, second king of the Twelfth Dynasty, at Lisht. From Amenemhet III's pyramid at Dahshur comes a pyramidion of black granite, with a band of hieroglyphs running around its base and the image of wings and a sun disk protecting the eyes, names, and titles of the king. This was found in good condition. It may never have been set at the apex of the pyramid, since Amenemhet left Dahshur and built a second pyramid at Hawara. Numerous fragments of a black granite pyramidion belonging to the Thirteenth Dynasty king, Khendjer, were found in his complex at South Saqqara. These were covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions and have now been reconstructed. Two additional pyramidions of black granite were found at South Saqqara, in association with an unfinished and unattributed pyramid of the Middle Kingdom. One of these was polished and the other was left rough; both were uninscribed. The fact that these pyramidions were found on the site of an unfinished pyramid suggests that they were brought to the site early on in the construction process. The scenes on the blocks found at Abusir illustrate the importance of the king's search for special stone for the pyramidion; a military escort was even sent along to protect the quarrying expedition. The pyramidion, like the pyramid itself, was a representation of the *benben* stone—in fact, the word in Egyptian for pyramidion is *benbenet*. The original *benben* was kept in the sun temple at Heliopolis, and was a potent symbol of the sun god.

The scenes from Abusir suggest that the pyramidion was the last architectural component to be installed as part of the pyramid. It was probably done during a festival in the presence of the king, and marked the moment when the king became a god. When the workmen put the pyramidion on the top of the pyramid, it meant that the pyramid was officially finished, and everyone in Egypt would have danced and sung in celebration of its completion.

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*The fine white limestone pyramidion from the reign of Khufu, with the Great Pyramid of Khufu behind. Giza, Fourth Dynasty.*

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*The pyramidion of the Red Pyramid at Dahshur dates from the reign of Sneferu, Khufu's father. Dahshur, Fourth Dynasty.*



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**THE PYRAMIDS OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY**  
**Text by Rainer Stadelmann**

Born October 24, 1933 in Oettingen/Bavaria as son of a professor of classical languages, he studied Egyptology at the Universities of Munich and Heidelberg. He first visited Egypt between December 1955 and April 1956 and participate in excavations at the Sun Temple of Userkaf at Abusir. Completed his PhD in spring 1960 with a thesis on "Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten" and became Assistant Lecturer of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg. In 1967 he completed a second Ph.D., Habilitation, in Heidelberg with a thesis on: "Altägyptische Bauinschriften und Namen von Bauteilen" and became Assistant Professor. In April 1968 he became Scientific Director of the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo and Honorary Professor at the University of Heidelberg. In 1989 he became First Director of the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo. He has at Elephantine Island and the Mortuary temple of Sety I at Gurna and the Pyramids of Sneferu at Dahshur. Newest excavation and conservation work at the Temple of Amenhotep III and the Colossi of Memnon. He has published several books about the pyramids and ca. 100 scholarly articles in German, English, and French in international periodicals.

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**THE QUEENS' PYRAMIDS**  
**OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY AT GIZA**  
**Text by Zahi Hawass**

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**THE SATELLITE PYRAMID OF KHUFU**  
**Text by Zahi Hawass**

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**THE MYSTERY OF HETEPHERES**  
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**THE SECRET DOORS INSIDE**  
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Text by Zahi Hawass

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Text by Mark Lehner

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### THE TOMBS OF THE HIGH

#### OFFICIALS AT GIZA

Text by Peter Der Manuelian

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