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Pyramids Excavations

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## THE TREASURES OF THE PYRAMIDS




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Scene showing the 'Meidum geese,' Egyptian Museum Cairo, Old Kingdom.
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# The Mystery of Hetepheres 

by Zahi Hawass

O
ne of the most spectacular discoveries at Giza was made in 1925 by Mohamadien Ibrahim, the Egyptian photographer who worked with the Reisner Expedition from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. One day, while Reisner was on vacation in the United States, Ibrahim was getting ready to take photographs on the east side of the Great Pyramid when one of the legs of his tripod hit an unusual patch of plaster. When he investigated this patch, he found that it served to seal off the entrance to a subterranean stairway. He reported the discovery to Alan Rowe, Reisner's assistant, who in turn sent a telegram to Reisner, who returned immediately.

The stairway, twelve steps long, led to a vertical shaft, about 27.5 m deep, which was filled to the top with limestone plaster blocking. This shaft, labeled G 7000 x , took ten years to excavate. The shaft follows two vertical fissures in the rock; its walls were left rough. Various artifacts and pottery sherds were mixed with the fill, and near the bottom was a sealing bearing the name of Khufu's mortuary workshop. A niche in the west wall of the shaft, which had been blocked with plaster masonry, contained the remains of an offering: three leg bones of a bull wrapped in a reed mat; a horned skull that had been crushed $;$ and two wine jars. Also mixed in with these remains were a limestone boulder, two chips of basalt, and some charcoal, which were probably not part of the original offering.

In the burial chamber at the bottom of the shaft, also left unfinished, were many beautiful objects. There were several items made of gilded wood, including a portable pavilion, a bed, two armchairs, and a carrying chair. There were also a curtain box, a leather case for walking sticks, several wooden boxes, some copper tools, and numerous other small objects, including twenty silver bracelets inlaid with turquoise, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. An alabaster sarcophagus
lay against one wall of the chamber, but to everyone's great disappointment, it was empty.

Various inscribed objects from the tomb bore the names and titles of Sneferu and of Hetepheres, whose principal title was 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt.' Mud sealings bearing the name of Khufu were also found in some of the boxes; the obvious conclusion is that Hetepheres was the wife of Sneferu and the mother of Khufu.

A sealed recess in the west wall of the burial chamber contained an alabaster canopic chest on a small wooden sledge. It was divided into four compartments, three of which contained packages lying in a solution of natron and water; the fourth compartment contained dried organic material. A mud sealing, protected by a small pottery lid, was found on the lid of this box.

The style of the objects found in the tomb, including many fragments of pottery found scattered throughout the chamber, confirmed a Fourth Dynasty date. After the artifacts were restored by Hagg Ahmed Youssef, our great Egyptian conservator, they were divided between the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The Egyptian Museum objects now form one of the Museum's most important collections, the contents of the oldest intact royal tomb to be discovered in Egypt.

Reisner attempted to account for the condition of the burial chamber, the broken and scattered pottery, the chips from the sarcophagus found strewn about the chamber, the lack of a superstructure, and the lack of a body, with the following hypothesis: Hetepheres died during the first part of Khufu's reign (as indicated by sealings from his mortuary service) and was

152<br>Plan of the funeral eduipment found inside the shaft of Hetepheres. Giza, Old Kingdom.<br>Drawing from Reisner and Smitb.

## 153 top

Gilded wooden cbariot, part of the funeral furniture found in the shaft of Hetepberes, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

153 bottom
Gilded wooden cbair from the shaft of Hetepberes, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom:


154-155
Gilded wooden bed from the sbaft of Hetepberes, Egypitian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

45 bottom
Wooden box with beautiful inscriptions from the shaft of Hetepberes, Egyptian

Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.
originally buried by him at Dahshur, near her husband Sneferu. At some point in Khufu's reign, her tomb was broken into and her body was stolen. Khufu found out that the tomb had been disturbed and had the burial dismantled and the remaining contents moved secretly to Giza, where shaft G 7000x was hastily dug to receive it. As further support for his theory, Reisner notes that the side of the alabaster sarcophagus against the wall of the burial chamber was damaged, which he believes could not have happened in G $7000 x$. He also believes that the contents of the Giza tomb were in the reverse order of their original positions at Dahshur. The equipment found in the body of the shaft would represent items that were forgotten and then thrown into the shaft at the last minute. Since an offering was made at this new tomb, Khufu presumably did not know that the body of the queen was missing. These events would have occurred while Khufu's upper temple was in the process of being paved, accounting for basalt fragments found in the offering niche.

Mark Lehner objects to this interpretation on a number of grounds. He thinks that robbers would have smashed the lid of the sarcophagus rather than lifting it carefully, and that they are unlikely to have
missed easily portable valuables such as the silver bracelets. He believes that if Hetepheres had originally been buried at Dahshur (a theory for which there is absolutely no evidence), the reburial should also have been made there. He also objects to the idea that such a deep shaft could have been dug in secret, and points out that it is hard to imagine Khufu knowingly allowing his mother to be reburied with broken pottery and violated equipment.

As an alternative scenario, Lehner has suggested that Hetepheres died early in her son's reign and was buried in this hastily dug shaft. It was dug in the style of the Third Dynasty, then still current. A superstructure that would have overlain this shaft was started, again in the style of the Third Dynasty, but then abandoned when Khufu's cult was changed and the plan of the eastern field was modified because Khufu's upper temple would have interfered with it. Instead, the three small pyramids, G 1a, b, and c, were built. The queen mother's body was then taken from G 7000x and reburied with new funerary equipment inside either G 1 a or G 1 b .

Lehner deals with each of the points raised by Reisner, and comes up with alternative explanations that fit his new theory. For example, he suggests that
the basalt fragments found in the offering niche might be tools, and proposes that the limestone boulder might have been thrown into the niche to crush the skull and invalidate the offering. Lehner suggests that the copper tools found in the burial chamber were left by the workmen, who pried off the lid of the sarcophagus and removed the body of the queen. He disagrees with Reisner's assessment of the damage to the sarcophagus, noting that the chipping of the lid is not just on the east side, but runs all the way around, and could easily have been done in G 7000 x .

Both of these theories are very attractive, but neither accounts for all of the evidence. If the queen was originally buried at Dahshur, where is her first tomb? How could her burial equipment have been moved all the way from Dahshur to Giza in secret? If G 7000x represents the original burial, why was it left in such disorder? Why was the queen mother buried in such haste? Why would Khufu's officials have needed a completely new set of funerary equipment? Most importantly, why would Khufu's mortuary officials take the queen's body but leave her canopic material behind?

I believe that Hetepheres was originally buried in G 1a, the northernmost of the small pyramids. Lehner


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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 SATELLITE PYRAMID OF KHUFU Text by Zahi Hawass

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Text by Zahi Hawass

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