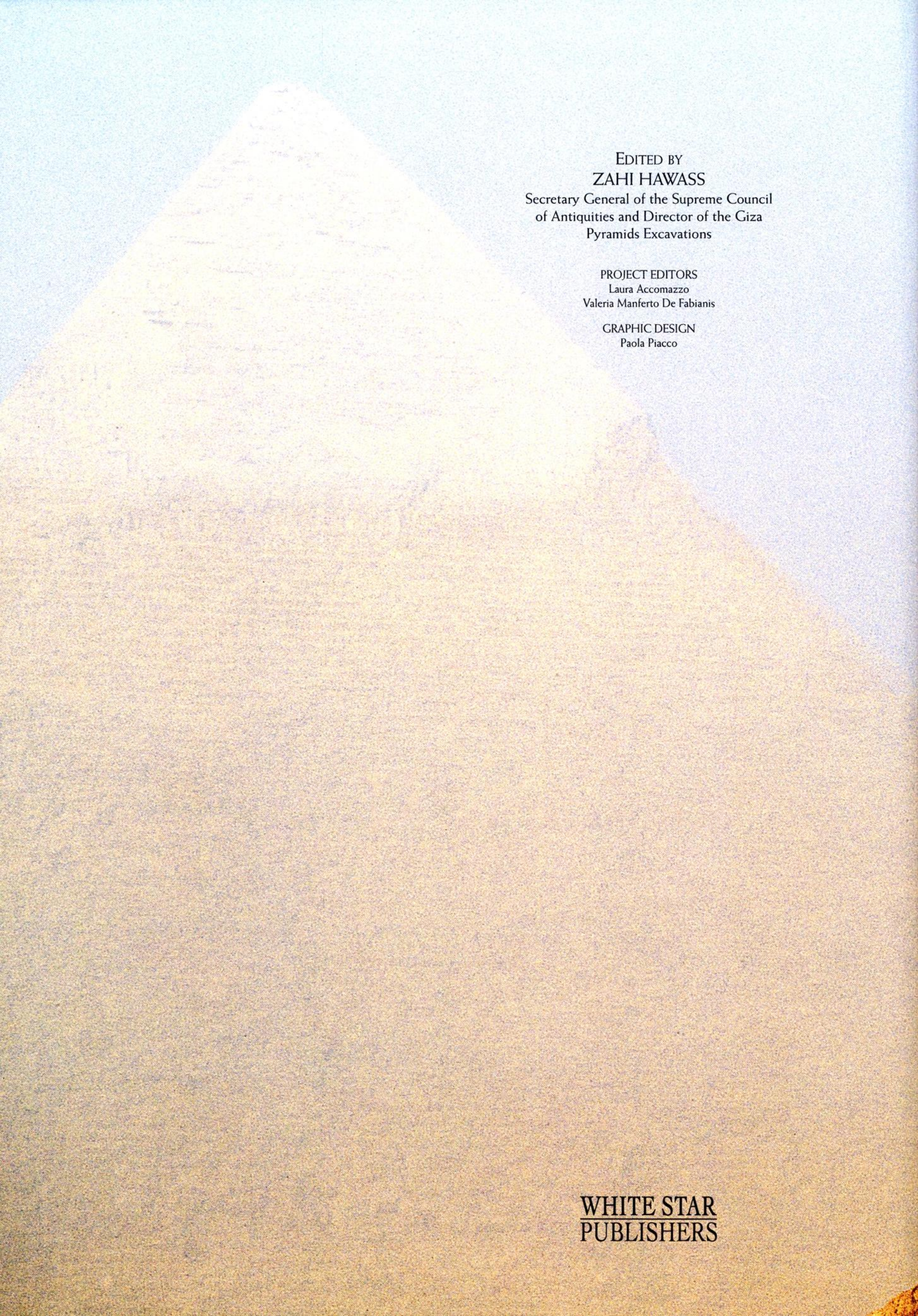


An aerial photograph of the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. The pyramids are constructed from dark, weathered stone blocks, showing significant erosion and some missing sections. The Great Pyramid of Khufu is the largest and most prominent in the foreground. Behind it, the pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure 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



EDITED BY
ZAHİ HAWASS
Secretary General of the Supreme Council
of Antiquities and Director of the Giza
Pyramids Excavations

PROJECT EDITORS
Laura Accomazzo
Valeria Manfredi De Fabianis

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Paola Piacco

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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 Decorative Program of Old Kingdom Pyramid Complexes

by Zahi Hawass

Simple stelae bearing a royal name that were erected outside the kings' tombs of the Early Dynastic Period, developed, over the course of the Old Kingdom, into an elaborate decorative program, designed to both ensure a successful afterlife for the king and to maintain the proper order of the cosmos. This development can be traced from scenes of the royal *sed* festival seen in the Third Dynasty complex of Djoser, to reliefs found in the early Fourth Dynasty complexes of Sneferu, and fragments of relief from the temples of Khufu, to the standard decorative program of the pyramid complexes of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.

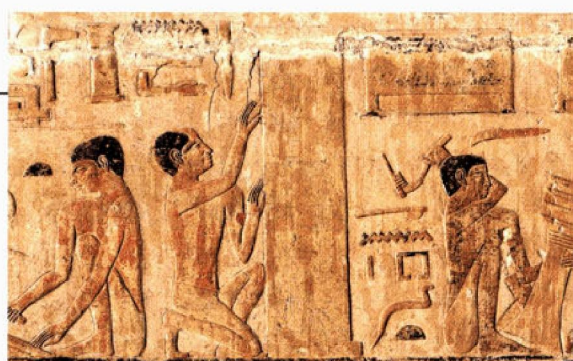
Decorative scenes appear in the earliest pyramid complex, that of the Third Dynasty king Djoser Netjerikhet. Niches under both the Step Pyramid itself and the south tomb depict the king, wearing the white crown, a kilt, and the bull's tail, holding the flail and performing a ritual dance. These represent ceremonies that were performed at the *sed* festival, where the king's right to rule was renewed and he celebrated the accomplishments of his reign.

Important wall reliefs were found in the lower temple of the Bent Pyramid complex of Sneferu, the first king of Fourth Dynasty, at Dahshur. The entryway into the temple is decorated with sculpted friezes on the eastern and western walls. The western frieze depicts the royal estates of Upper Egypt, which are represented as female offering bearers with the names of specific estates on their heads. The eastern frieze is similar, but the estates represented are in Lower Egypt. Above these registers are scenes representing the king in front of different gods. The

walls of the portico were also adorned with representations of personified royal estates. Some of the pillars of the portico were decorated with scenes of the *sed* festival, with the king wearing his *sed* robe and the crown of Upper Egypt while holding the flail, or wearing a kilt and dancing, again holding the flail. Other pillars depict the king making ceremonial visits to important religious sites, standing in front of the gods, or being embraced by a lioness-headed goddess. There are six niches within the temple. Above the opening to each niche are carved the names of the king, flanked by emblems and stars representing the night sky.

Fragmentary wall reliefs from the complex of Khufu have been found at Giza, and also at Lisht, where they were taken to be used as fill in a pyramid of the Twelfth Dynasty. The reliefs from Giza represent the *sed* festival; fragments from Lisht show processions of personified funerary estates, foreign captives, representations of ships, scenes including animals, and *sed* festival scenes. A fragmentary depiction of the *sed* festival from Khufu's complex, which includes a white hippopotamus, was discovered built into the wall of a staircase inside Bab al-Futuh in Cairo. According to Herodotus, the causeway of Khufu was carved with figures.

Few or no wall reliefs have been discovered from the complexes of Khufu's successors: Djedefre at Abu Rawash, and Khafre and Menkaure at Giza. It seems to me that the statues found in all of these pyramid complexes served the same purpose as the wall reliefs found in other complexes. In general, these statues represent the king in the company of various gods and goddesses.



282 bottom
This Fifth Dynasty relief, in the tomb of Niankb-khnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara, shows a few artisans probably working on some funerary equipment, like stelae.

283
Relief from the south tomb in the Step Pyramid complex of Djoser in Saqqara, showing King Djoser running in the *sed*-festival. Third Dynasty.



Decorative Program

Substantial quantities of wall relief have been found in the pyramid complexes of Sahure of the Fifth Dynasty and Pepy II of the Sixth Dynasty. These reliefs give us a good idea of the decorative scheme that became standard in the late Old Kingdom.

In the first portico of the lower temple of Sahure are a number of scenes. On the north wall, the king is shown hunting. On the south wall are scenes of the *sed* festival, with the king seated, wearing his robe, and holding a flail in his hand; in front of him are priests. There are also scenes of gods and goddesses, and depictions of the king in

hunting and fishing, and the king giving offerings to the gods. The king is shown here in large scale, holding arrows. There are also scenes that show Asiatics with foreign pottery; animals and birds; the king, accompanied by his courtiers, witnessing the departure of twelve seafaring ships to a land whose name is not written; and scenes of the king and his courtiers watching the return of the ships laden with cargo and carrying a group of Asiatics, who are not prisoners, but are connected with trade or diplomacy. Additional scenes show the gods Horus and Anubis bringing gifts to the king.

appears again in the upper temple of Pepy II, even though the two kings are separated by a period of almost two hundred years.

Thus, the scenes did not necessarily record historical events from the lifetime of the king, but instead served a symbolic and religious purpose designed to ensure the divinity of the king and through him, ensure the proper functioning of the Egyptian world. The basic program, repeated from one complex to another, was designed to maintain the cosmos and provide for the afterlife of the king.

The wall decoration seen in Old Kingdom



the form of a great sphinx trampling Libyans and Asiatics.

Sahure's causeway repeats some of the scenes from the lower temple, but with different gods and goddess. Recently discovered blocks depict the celebrations associated with the placing of the pyramidion on top of the pyramid, and include dancers, wrestlers, and processions of priests and officials, as well as a group of emaciated Bedouin from the area where stone for the pyramidion was quarried being brought to court for judgment.

On the walls of the upper temple are processions of royal estates, depictions of the king

The same types of subjects are represented in the pyramid complex of Pepy II and in fragmentary reliefs from some of the other late Old Kingdom complexes. Each component, such as lower temple, causeway, and upper temple has its own repertoire of scenes, but the scenes themselves are repeated from one complex to another. Scenes could even be copied exactly from one complex to another. For example, one scene from the complex of Sahure shows the king smiting a captured Libyan chieftain on the head while the chieftain's two sons and wife watch and beg for forgiveness. Exactly the same scene, down to the names of the wife and sons,

pyramid complexes can be divided into several categories:

1. Scenes of domination

These portray the king imposing his will and might on disorderly elements of the universe, such as wild creatures or foreigners. Scenes that show the king hunting or fishing in the marshes, hunting in the desert, or smiting his enemies belong to this category. Also included here are scenes of ships sailing to visit foreign countries.

2. Scenes of the king's identification with the gods

The function of these scenes is to show the king

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THE 'UNFINISHED' PYRAMIDS OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY
Text by Michel Valloggia

Michel Valloggia, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Geneva, Switzerland and field Director of the Archaeological Mission at Abu Rawash, Egypt, is former "Membre scientifique à titre étranger" of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo. He was in charge of the archaeological excavations between 1976 and 1993 in the Kharga Oasis (Douch) and the Dakhla Oasis (Balat). He is also Corresponding Member of the German Institute in Cairo and Consultant on behalf of UNESCO."

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THE PYRAMIDS OF THE FIFTH DYNASTY
Text by Miroslav Verner

Born in 1941; he graduated in Egyptology and prehistory at Charles University in Prague. He directed the Czech Institute of Egyptology for twenty five years and since 1976 has been leading the excavations by Czech archaeologists in Abusir, Egypt. He is professor at Charles University in Prague and also serves as guest professor at the universities of Vienna and Hamburg and at the American University in Cairo.

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THE SURPRISING ABUSIR BLOCKS
Text by Zahi Hawass and Miroslav Verner

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THE PYRAMIDS OF THE SIXTH DYNASTY
Text by Audran Labrousse

Architect and Doctor of, Literature and Human Sciences, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Sorbonne in 1988 and is researcher at the CNRS. He carried out excavations in Iran between 1969 and 1973 and at Sedeinga, in the Sudan, from 1976 to 1994. He has worked in Egypt since 1973, where he is the Director of the French Archaeological Mission of Saqqara.

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THE DECORATIVE PROGRAM OF THE OLD KINGDOM PYRAMID COMPLEXES
Text by Zahi Hawass

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THE TOMBS OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH DYNASTIES AT SAQQARA
Text by Karl Myśliwiec

Karol Myśliwiec is the director of the Research Center for Mediterranean Archaeology at the Polish Academy of Sciences and professor of Ancient Egyptian Archaeology at the Warsaw University. He is also director of Polish-Egyptian excavations at Saqqara. Excavating in Egypt on various sites since 1969. K. Myśliwiec also directed the Polish-Egyptian rescue excavations at Tell Atrib (Nile Delta) in 1985-1995. He is the author of many books and articles on Egyptian archaeology, art, and religion.

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THE PYRAMIDS OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM
Text by Dieter Arnold

Dieter Arnold is Curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and has for forty years been conducting excavations in Egypt, at Thebes, El-Lisht, and Dahshur, among other sites. He is the author of numerous books on Egyptian architecture, including *Building in Egypt: Pharaonic Stone Masonry* (1991), *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (1999), and *The Pyramid Complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur* (2000).

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