

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EGYPTIAN TOMB
DOWN TO THE ACCESSION OF CHEOPS

BOOK REVIEW

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EGYPTIAN TOMB DOWN TO THE ACCESSION OF CHEOPS, by *George Andrew Reisner*. Pp. xxvii+428, figs. in text 192, maps 2. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1936. \$20.00.

In happier times, one would hail this book of Dr. Reisner's as especially useful in field work, containing as it does an exposition of what the veteran excavator knows to a certainty, or thinks probable, of architectural forms in Egyptian tombs antedating the Great Pyramid at Giza. So many plans and sections from earlier publications are repeated in its pages that different types of tombs are abundantly illustrated; and some new material, recorded in notes that had been placed at the author's disposal, is added; in the text the available dimensions and forms are analyzed in much detail, not evading repetition. A field library must necessarily be limited, and the excavator's moments to utilize such a library when in the midst of a campaign, too, are limited. Dr. Reisner's recent book is no light manual, but in comparison with the mass of records and technical discussions on which it draws can be a great time-saver — also at home, for students of field practices and their results.

The union of Upper and Lower Egypt under Menes, Dr. Reisner places earlier than would many scholars today, that is, between 3500 B.C. and 3900 B.C. (p. 369). But the continuity of development from an open pit, with contracted body inadequately protected, down through the successive improvements made possible by the invention and use of crude brick and the acquisition of methods for quarrying stone and building with it seems to him vastly more significant than any question of absolute dates. He grasps advancing civilization as a whole which was helped on by better tools of metal and ever increasing wealth of the ruling classes. The layout of cemeteries was determined by local topography. The forms of tombs were conditioned largely by the character of the desert foothills, whether of exposed hard rock or of gravel; thus one development is traced for the Memphite cemeteries, another for those of Upper Egypt. In every Egyptian tomb two parts were essential: a substructure, so-called because usually below the ancient surface, and a superstructure for the protection of the body in the

lower part and for rites in behalf of the deceased; equipment to be used in the next life was variously divided between the two. On account of the greater vulnerability of the superstructure and consequent loss of evidence, Dr. Reisner's classification into types is established on the forms of substructures; and these he follows in the royal tomb, which presently was differentiated from the private tomb, the large private tomb of the well-to-do, and the small tomb of the poor to which improvement came most slowly. He does not, however, ignore the superstructure, but wrests from meager data opinions which will long be of value and perhaps be now confirmed, now corrected, by Walter B. Emery's penetrating investigations in the archaic cemetery at North Saqqarah. Dr. Reisner regards as the earliest royal superstructure preserved the layer pyramid at Zawiyet-el-Aryan which he himself excavated and in 1911 thought to be of Dynasty III but now assigns to Dynasty II; at Abydos, royal superstructures of Dynasties I and II are no longer extant even in part; Dr. Reisner suggests that they may have been mastabas of crude brick without continuous paneling, their bases approaching more or less closely a square in plan (map i). In this connection the tomb of an unknown Nebetka is of special concern; it is pronounced by Mr. Emery "From an architectural point of view . . . by far the most interesting example of First-Dynasty building yet discovered." There, at Saqqarah, so an initial report indicates (*JEA*, 24, 1938, p. 243), a mastaba with paneling of palace-façade type on all sides superseded an original oblong step-pyramid covering subterranean burial and storage chambers; and this change apparently took place in the time of the original builder who may, or may not, have been of the family of King Wedymuw, though assuredly of his reign.

Owners of the book under review may like to annotate it with these new disclosures as they are brought out. Thus the statement (p. 108) limiting the number of subsidiary cemeteries known from Dynasty I to eleven at Abydos and one at Giza is now to be modified by the discovery of others at Saqqarah including graves of pet animals and their keeper (*Chronique d'Égypte*, Jan. 1939, p. 79). At the tomb of Ankhka (FS 3036, p. 65), a trench for growing trees has been

found (*JEA. loc. cit.*), etc. As well as helping elsewhere, William Stevenson Smith has contributed to the book Appendix C and map ii, the latter dependent on hitherto published and unpublished sources critically gone over by him on the terrain; some needed addenda, such as the inscribed corner block in the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the tomb of Mery (p. 397) are familiar to him now.

Finally, the reviewer would draw attention to Dr. Reisner's discussion of the orientation of burials (pp. 11-12) and his rejection of the idea

that religious symbolism influenced the eventual adoption of the true pyramid as the form of the royal superstructure (p. 340). The square base he believes was to give equal protection to the burial chamber on all four sides. The entrance passage being "the weakest part of the defence" was better concealed and less readily attacked under a smooth facing extending from base to summit than it could be in any stepped construction.

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