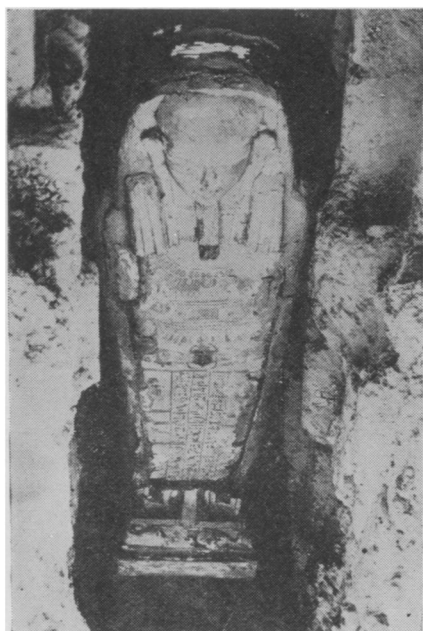


# Whose Memory Lives In This Egyptian Tomb?

*Archæology*



**Coffin of an Egyptian named Hep-res, who lived about 1200 B. C., taken from the mastabah at Meydum. The coffin is in the form of a bearded mummified man whose face is bright yellow, with features in black. Scenes and vignettes from the Egyptian Book of the Dead are plastered over the figure.**

**T**HE great tomb of an unknown Egyptian who lived about 2800 B. C. has been discovered and entered by the expedition from the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, working at Meydum, fifty miles south of Cairo. A report just received from the director, Alan Rowe, states that the tomb is one of the largest ever found in Egypt, and it is believed that some of the burial chambers have never been plundered.

The site is already producing surprises. The tomb is a mastabah; that is, a construction with sloping sides and flat top, which covered the entrance to the burial chambers beneath. Mr. Rowe states that "after removing the debris from the tops and sides of the huge brick retaining walls, we were astonished to find that these walls were honeycombed with intrusive burials dating from the New Empire, 2000 B. C., or later."

About forty Egyptians had taken over the tomb for a cemetery hundreds of years after the original owner's funeral. These were persons of means, for many of the burials are carefully wrapped mummies lying in rectangular or man-shaped coffins. Some of the coffins are brightly painted with elaborate religious symbols and hieroglyphics.

It was customary in the days of the pyramid-building pharaohs for nobles to place their less monumental tombs close by the king's pyramid. The great mastabah now being cleared is close to the so-called false pyramid of Meydum. The passage into this pyramid is now being cleared by the expedition, and the task is described by Mr. Rowe as being long

and arduous. The pyramid in its present damaged state has three receding square stories. Which of the pharaohs built it is not yet certain.

"Meydum is certainly one of the most important sites in Egypt," Mr. Rowe's communication states, "and we are convinced that a thorough exploration of the great pyramid and the surrounding land will produce discoveries of great interest and significance."

**A**NCIENT Egyptian tourists, who went sightseeing to the tombs of still more ancient kings up the Nile have left the only known clues to the ownership of the pyramid at Meydum. The Egyptian tourists scrawled the name of Snefru no less than five times on the walls of a temple by the pyramid, and it is likely that they knew their history, for Egyptologists today ascribe the pyramid either to the predecessor of Snefru or to Snefru himself, who ruled about 2900 B. C. or a little later.

The pyramid thus dates from the earliest days of pyramid building. The step pyramid of Sakkhara was the first experiment in a mighty towering tomb for royalty, and this great pyramid of Meydum is usually placed third in line in the order of the pyramid-building enterprises. This, too, is in steps, very irregular steps, the second being very steep and the third, now the top tier, being short and broken. Sir Flinders Petrie, British authority on Egyptian antiquities, has concluded that the pyramid was built in seven tiers, and that these were originally filled out in a smooth slope, but that the outer casing was removed by a later pharaoh.

The anxious mental processes of Egypt's kings, which led them to insure their immortality by duplicate tombs, are shown in the case of Snefru. He designed for his last resting place not only apparently the pyramid at Meydum, but also a tomb for his spirit, another pyramid on the desert plains at Dahshur, near the city of Memphis.

Archaeologists who heretofore explored at the Meydum pyramid were successful in finding a sarcophagus chamber beneath the towering structure, but this contained only the fragments of a plain wooden sarcophagus and a wooden vessel, not the sort of trappings which accompanied royalty to the grave even at this early time.

The great age of pyramid building dawned upon Egypt with remarkable suddenness. Not much more than a century after the Egyptians learned to construct stone masonry they were piling up the first pyramid for an ambitious king. That was about 2900 B. C. Thirty years later, the Great Pyramid at Giza, never to be surpassed, was started by Cheops. By 2500 B. C. the pyramid building age had spent itself, though later monarchs did follow the custom of planting ponderous pointed tombs near their royal cities or in the traditional cemeteries of the kings.

Tutankhamen, whose burial so aroused the world because the splendors had somehow escaped robbers, lived, paradoxically enough, more than a thousand years after the pyramid age when kings of Egypt made the most strenuous efforts in history to pile up formidable secure tombs. Tutankhamen's tomb was a small, hastily built rock sepulchre.

The great pyramid at Meydum has other tombs nearby, of which the mastabah now being excavated is one. Several of these tombs of the king's relations have been excavated in the past and have yielded some of the most beautiful Egyptian art known.

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