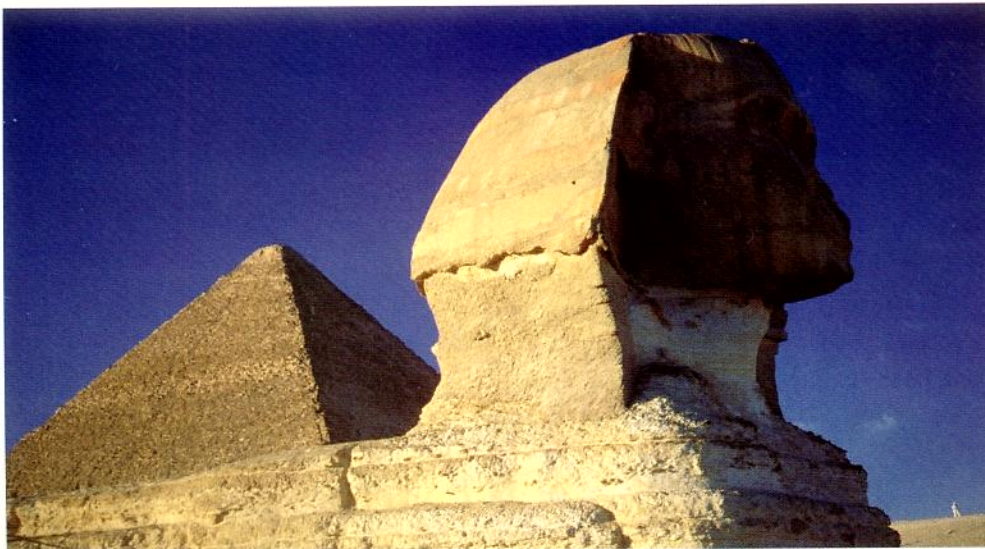


10 PUZZLING PYRAMIDS

Of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, only the pyramids of Egypt remain in anything like their original splendour. The pyramids are the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and the biggest.



ⓘ The royal burial chamber was reached by a passage deep inside the Great Pyramid.

Why were the Great Pyramids built?

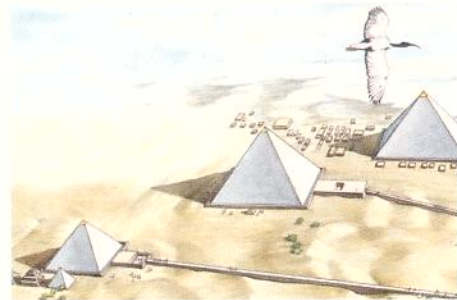
The pyramids were built as tombs for kings of Egypt. The Egyptians believed that their rulers would continue to live on after they had died. The pyramid tombs contained burial chambers inside which the dead king was placed, along with objects that he might need in the next world. Inside the Great Pyramid of King Khufu were sealed chambers full of treasure.

Who thought pyramids were a waste of money?

The ancient Romans. They were impressed by the size of the Egyptian pyramids, but they thought they were extravagant projects of Egyptian kings with too much wealth, too many slave-workers – and nothing better to do! The Romans spent their money on useful projects, such as the building of roads.

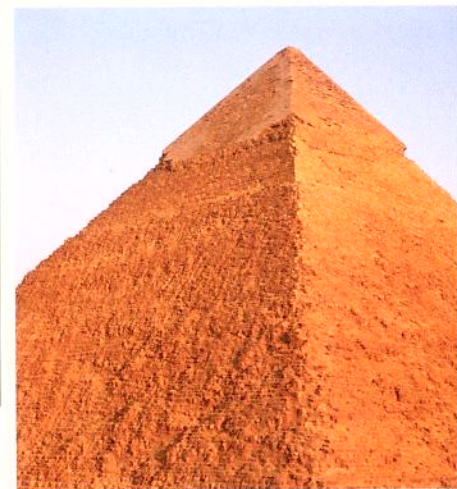
➔ The three great pyramids were built about 4,500 years ago – about 2600 to 2500 BC.

ⓘ The Great Pyramids stand at Giza beside the Nile River in Egypt.



How many pyramids are there?

The ruins of 35 large pyramids can be seen today near the Nile River in Egypt. The most famous are three enormous pyramids that stand at Giza, near the capital city of Cairo. These pyramids were built for three very powerful kings of Egypt. Their names were Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure.



Pyramid facts

Mysterious pyramids

American pyramids were vast piles of earth, faced with stones, with temples on top. Egyptian pyramids were made entirely of stone, with tombs inside.

The largest Egyptian pyramid, Khufu's, was built with over two million stones.

Risking many different booby-traps, tomb-robbers managed to steal the treasures in almost all of the tombs.

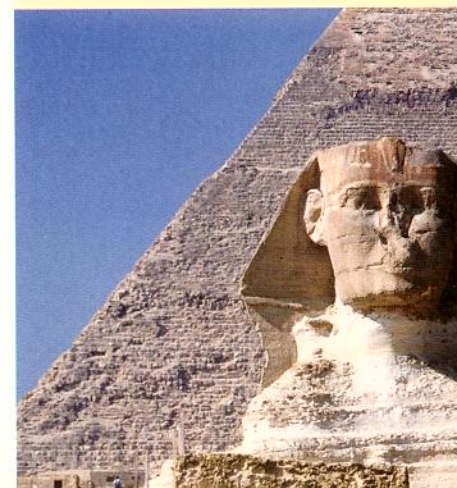
Valley of the Kings

After 1700 BC, Egyptian kings were buried in rock tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Tutankhamen's tomb is one of 62 royal tombs in or near the Valley of the Kings, on the west bank of the Nile River.

The Egyptians cut stones with copper tools – they had no iron. They had no machines either, relying on rollers, sledges, ropes and muscle power.

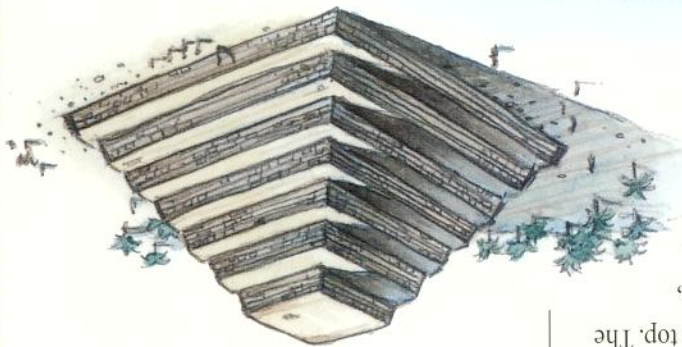
ⓘ The Great Sphinx has a human head, and wears a royal headdress.



What is a step pyramid?

The first pyramid in ancient Egypt was built for King Zoser about 2650 BC and is called the Step Pyramid, because it rises in a series of giant steps. It stands at the site of the ancient city of Memphis, near Saqqarah. Later pyramids were faced with stones, which made each side smooth, though today the sides look rough and worn.

④ The Step Pyramid looked like the zigurat-temples built in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). Below ground, there is a warren of tunnels, galleries and rooms.



⑤ The Pyramid of the Sun was built by people who lived in Mexico, long before the Spanish conquerors came in the 1500s.

Great pyramid facts

Base length (each side)	230 m
Area	5 hc
Number of stones	about 2.3 million
Average stone weight	over 2 tonnes
Biggest stone	290 tonnes
Labour force	100,000 workers toiling for 30 years

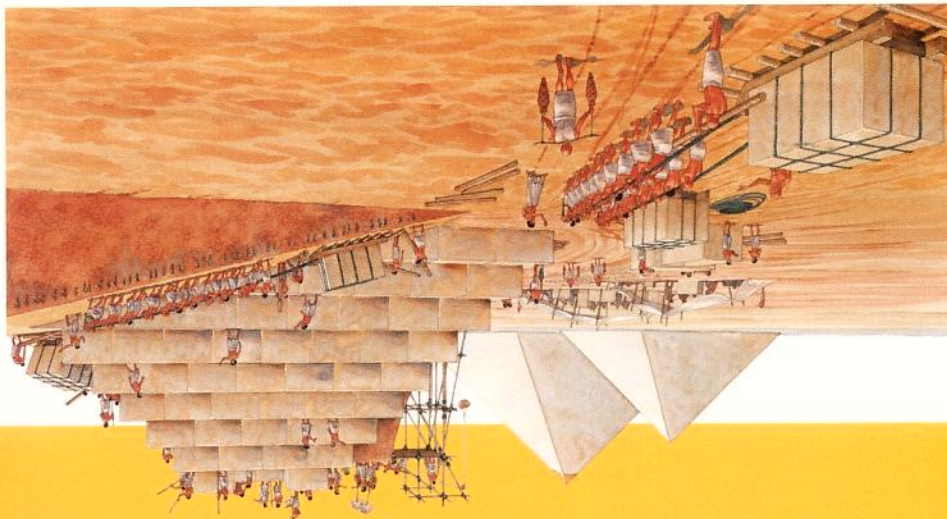
Huge stone statues of King Ramses II guarded the Great Temple at Abu Simbel near the Nile River. When the Aswan High Dam was built in the 1960s, engineers moved the 3000-year-old temple to higher ground so that it was not flooded by the rising waters.

Where else were pyramids built?

There are pyramids in America too. People of Mexico and Central America built stepped pyramids with temples on top. The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, Mexico, is bigger (in volume) than the Great Pyramid in Egypt. This huge pyramid is more than 1,500 years old. Ancient people in Peru in South America also built pyramids.

How were pyramids built?

Egyptians had no machinery or on tools and so they cut huge blocks of stone with copper chisels and saws. Most of the stones came from quarries nearby, but others were brought by boat along the Nile River. Gangs of workers dragged the stones up long ramps of earth and brick as the pyramid slowly rose higher and higher. Finally, it was coated with white stones, to gleam brilliantly in the hot desert sun.



Inside the Great Pyramid, a passage led to the burial chamber. Heavy stones sealed the passage to stop robbers breaking into the tomb.

For thousands of years, people have come to stare at the statue of the Great Sphinx. This monument, half human and half animal, guards the pyramid of King Khafre. Some experts think the Great Sphinx is even older than the pyramids. The Great Sphinx is 73 m long and about 20 m high. The head and body were carved out of limestone rock. Part of the head is broken. Some historians believe Napoleon's soldiers shot at it for fun. Over the years, the Great Sphinx has been buried up to its neck in sand many times.