

GLOSSARY

crushed: *schiacciati*
wear: *usura*
allegiance: *fedeltà*
limestone: *calcare*
quarries: *cave*
polished: *lucidate*
ropes: *corde, funi*
smoothly: *liscio*

MORE ABOUT...

The **British Museum** collection gives us an insight into various aspects of Egyptian culture. There are coffins and mummies as well as furniture, jewellery and other burial objects related to the wealthy Egyptian who could afford a lavish burial. On the other hand, we can also learn about the daily lives of the ordinary people through the tools they used for agriculture and the pottery vessels they kept in their houses.



www.britishmuseum.com

Masterpieces of the past: Egyptian pyramids

Who Built the Pyramids?



Pyramid builders were really Egyptians who lived in villages run by the pharaoh's supervisors. These villages were well-organised with all the usual facilities we find in a modern village today, such as bakers, butchers, pubs, houses, cemeteries and even some kind of hospital care, proven by the fact that labourers injured in building accidents managed to survive after having crushed limbs operated on. The shops did good business providing food for the massive workforce needed to construct the pyramids.

Although there are no depictions of women labourers, some female skeletons which have been found show signs of wear due to working with heavy stone over a long period of time. Some of the builders were permanently employed by the pharaoh while others were taken on just for a limited period of time and came from nearby villages. They worked in teams and showed allegiance to their pharaoh by calling their team after him.

It is likely that it took between 20,000 and 30,000 workers 80 years to complete the pyramids at Giza during which time the river Nile was probably flooded. This meant that huge limestone blocks could be floated from quarries right to the base of the pyramids. They were then probably polished by hand and pushed up ramps into position. The correct positioning of each block was of utmost importance and architects used ropes which ran from the external corners up to the planned top of the pyramid to make sure everything went smoothly. The Egyptians were also superstitious and consulted priests who were experts on astronomy to choose the right spot for the pyramid so that they would enjoy the favour of sacred constellations. Everybody from the most humble worker to the highest priest was involved in preserving the glory of Egypt through its pharaohs.



www.nationalgeographic.com/pyramids/pyramids.html

READING COMPREHENSION

1 **PET** Read the text and decide if the statements below are true (T) or false (F).

- 1 The workforce involved in the building of the pyramids came from abroad.
- 2 Victims of accidents at work, who needed an operation, were taken care of in the nearby village.
- 3 The state of some parts of female skeletons may indicate that women too built the pyramids.
- 4 All workers involved in building the pyramids had a full-time permanent contract.
- 5 The fact that the Nile was full of water helped in the building of the pyramids.
- 6 Priests did not give any advice about where the pyramids should be built because the Egyptians preferred to read their horoscope and act accordingly.

T	F
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VOCABULARY

2 Complete the following text about the Egyptian pyramids with the words from the box.

tombs • includes • masonry • exists • largest • estimates • outskirts

These ancient pyramid-shaped (1) _____ structures were built by the Egyptians during the Old and Middle Kingdom as (2) _____ for their Pharaohs and their wives. Nobody really knows how many workers were required to build the pyramids but (3) _____ range from a few thousand up to 100,000. The most famous and the (4) _____ of these structures can be found at Giza on the (5) _____ of Cairo and (6) _____ the Pyramid of Khufu, which not only is the largest Egyptian pyramid of all, but is also the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World which still (7) _____ today.

LISTENING

3 **PET** Listen to a tourist guide at Giza talking to a group of students and complete the text with the correct information.

Khufu, second ruler of the (1) _____ dynasty, moved the (2) _____ here to Giza and as we can see, his builders constructed the largest pyramid ever built, oriented almost perfectly (3) _____. It has three (4) _____. The first is underground and (5) _____ into bedrock, while the second chamber is situated (6) _____. Finally the third chamber, (7) _____, is located almost exactly (8) _____ of the pyramid which can be accessed via the Grand Gallery which even had (9) _____ blocking systems to catch thieves. This Great Pyramid was the centre piece of an elaborate complex of pyramids, (10) _____, and tombs for officials and some members of the Royal Family.



WRITING

4 **PET** Why do you think the Egyptians went to such lengths to make the final resting place of their pharaohs so extravagant? Do you agree with this ideal? Write your essay (about 100 words) explaining your point of view.