

MYCERINUS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. THE ROYAL CEMETERY AT GIZA

THE pyramids of the Fourth Egyptian Dynasty stand on an isolated plateau of coarse nummulitic limestone, on the edge of the desert, about five miles west of the village of Giza. The three largest pyramids, standing in line and visible for many miles up and down the Nile valley, have held the eyes of travellers ever since they were built, and at the present time their appearance is probably better known than that of any other ancient monument. In popular imagination the Great Sphinx is part of the scene, although it is not visible from a distance. The nearer view reveals the granite temple beside the Sphinx, the smaller pyramids, the tombs of the courtiers of the Fourth Dynasty, and those of the priestly officials of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. The whole forms the royal cemetery of the Fourth Dynasty and consists chronologically of three similar parts, each associated with the name of one of the three kings, Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus, who were buried in the three large pyramids.

So far as our present evidence indicates, the first tomb on the plateau was that of Cheops, and consisted of:

- (1) The pyramid itself.
- (2) The pyramid temple abutting on the valley face (the eastern face) of the pyramid.
- (3) An enclosing wall bounding a small area around the pyramid.
- (4) A causeway on which stood a covered corridor connecting the entrance of the pyramid temple with the valley temple.
- (5) The valley or portal temple, built on the margin of the desert.

All the tombs of the kings of Dynasties IV and V consisted of these five parts. A special feature, however, is presented by the Great Sphinx, which lies at the eastern end of the causeway of the Second Pyramid, on the north near the valley temple of that pyramid. The human-headed Egyptian sphinx is always a representation of the reigning monarch with the body of a lion. At Abu Sîr, in the lower part of the causeway corridor, at least eight royal sphinxes were pictured in relief, facing the valley and trampling foreign enemies, and similar sphinxes were on the walls of the exit room of the valley temple of Sahura. The Great Sphinx at Giza was carved in a ridge of the native rock left isolated when the surrounding stone was removed by the quarrymen, probably those of Cheops, and may well have been the first of the sphinxes, whether in relief or in the round, used to guard the precincts of royal tombs or of the temples of the gods. The Great Sphinx belongs to the complex of the Second Pyramid, and was obviously conceived as the guardian of that complex. Former doubts as to the date of the Sphinx, based on the type of headdress and the style of the work, have now been removed by the headdress of the alabaster head of Mycerinus (statue 22), and by the addition of the statues of Mycerinus to those of Chephren as examples of the style of the sculpture of Dynasty IV. All these facts make it perfectly clear that the face of the Great Sphinx is a portrait of Chephren.

During the first six dynasties, the custom prevailed of making the tombs of the other members of the royal family and of the great courtiers near the tomb of the king of their time. Thus, associated with the tomb of Cheops, three small pyramids stand in front of its eastern face south of the pyramid temple; a number of mastabas, on the east and south; and a field of mastabas in regular lines divided by streets, on the west of the pyramid. The three small pyramids are clearly tombs of the most important members of the family of Cheops, probably queens. Some of the mastaba tombs also belonged to members of the royal family, and others to favorites of the Court. These tombs form the royal cemetery and are, in construction, contemporary with the reign of Cheops and the early part of the reign of Chephren. But the cemetery of Cheops did not end with the royal mastabas. The services in the temples of the king and in the chapels of the royal mastabas were maintained by landed endowments entrusted to certain priestly officials and their heirs. These officials appear to have had complete control of the

cemetery maintained by the endowments. At any rate, they built their own tombs in the streets of the royal cemetery. The pyramids of Chephren and Mycerinus also have associated with them small pyramids, royal mastabas, and tombs of priestly officials. Thus the pyramid plateau at Giza contains three royal cemeteries, each associated with one of the three kings buried there, and each consisting of:

- (1) The king's pyramid, including the five parts noted above.
- (2) The pyramids of favorite members of the royal family, probably queens.
- (3) The mastaba tombs of other persons of the blood royal, or of the Court.
- (4) The mastaba tombs of the priestly officials who controlled the funerary endowments.

There is one other king's pyramid at Giza — the unfinished pyramid southeast of the Chephren pyramid. Beside it on the northeast is a small cemetery; but it is as yet uncertain whether the unfinished pyramid with the adjacent cemetery is to be reckoned as a fourth part of the whole site. After Cheops had built his pyramid, only two of the kings of Dynasty IV, Radedef and Shepseskaf, avoided the Giza site. Their royal cemeteries are at Abu Roash, a few miles to the north, and Dahshur, about eight miles to the south.

The bulk of the evidence preserved to us of the arts, the crafts, and the culture of Dynasty IV, one of the great creative periods of Egyptian civilization, was contained in the royal cemetery at Giza. The pyramids and other tombs of this place have, therefore, attracted the researches of a series of modern scholars, Vyse, Mariette, Lepsius, and Professor Petrie, as well as the attention of several generations of illicit excavators serving the market created by the demands of European and American museums for statues and reliefs. Of quite a different character was the interest excited by the supposed mysteries of the pyramids in the group of writers led by Piazzzi Smyth, whose disquisitions have never had any archaeological value and need no further mention.

In 1902 the Egyptian Department of Antiquities granted the Giza site to three expeditions — an American, a German, and an Italian — with instructions to them to agree among themselves as to the limits of their concessions. A conference was held, attended by Dr. Borchardt acting on behalf of Professor Steindorff of Leipzig, Professor Schiaparelli of the Turin Museum, and myself, at that time director of the Hearst Expedition of the University of California, and an agreement was made dividing the whole pyramid field. The pyramid of Chephren was included in Professor Steindorff's territory, and the pyramid of Mycerinus in my territory. The Hearst Expedition came to an end in 1905, and the organization was taken over by the Joint Egyptian Expedition of Harvard University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. After a few years Professor Schiaparelli resigned his concession, and it was granted to me. All the early work of our expedition had been in the northern third of the cemetery which lies west of the Cheops Pyramid, and the first year of the Harvard-Boston work was devoted to continuing these excavations. It was not until December, 1906, that I began the examination of the Third Pyramid.

In 1906-07, assisted by Mr. C. M. Firth, I cleared the temple against the eastern face of the Third Pyramid, and part of the cemetery of mastabas to the southeast of the temple. In the summer of 1908, with Mr. Oric Bates as field director, the excavation of the valley temple was begun, and in 1909-10 it was completed by myself and Mr. C. S. Fisher. In the latter season, the chapels of two of the three small pyramids were excavated. In January, 1914, I cleared out the tombs in the quarry south of the temple, and finally, in 1923, the chapel of the remaining small pyramid. Thus we have excavated the precincts of the Third Pyramid, not the pyramid itself, and these precincts consist of:

- (1) The pyramid temple.
- (2) The causeway leading down to the valley.
- (3) The valley or portal temple at the lower end of the causeway.
- (4) The chapels of the three small pyramids beside the Third Pyramid.
- (5) The adjacent field of mastaba tombs belonging to the funerary priests and officials of Mycerinus.

2. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE THIRD PYRAMID

The identification of the Third Pyramid at Giza, the smallest of the three large pyramids, as the tomb of Mycerinus was still a matter of tradition, if not of record, in the time of Herodotus (II, 134). Diodorus Siculus also ascribed the Third Pyramid to Mycerinus (I, 64, 7). The opinions of later

writers went astray until modern times, when Sandys (1610) and Greaves (1638–39) each independently repeated the statement of Herodotus. In 1837 Howard Vyse, during his excavation of the burial chambers of the Third Pyramid, found an anthropoid wooden coffin inscribed with the name of Mycerinus.¹ Just a month previously he had found the name of Mycerinus written in red paint on the roof of the burial chamber of (III-*b*), the middle one of the three small pyramids south of the Third Pyramid (*loc. cit.*, p. 48). The wooden coffin itself appears to be a restoration of Dynasty XXVI, or later, and thus the proof is clear that at that time the Third Pyramid was still known as the tomb of Mycerinus. Since the discoveries of Vyse, no doubt has existed that Mycerinus was the builder of the Third Pyramid, as recorded by Herodotus; and the results of the excavations presented in this volume fully confirm that identification. The inscriptions found on the statues and stelae in the pyramid temples and on the walls of the adjacent mastaba tombs, unassisted, prove definitely that the Third Pyramid was the tomb of Mycerinus.

The name of the Third Pyramid was meaning "Mycerinus is divine."

This was first recognized from the inscriptions of the funerary priests Tepy-em-ankh² and Debehen.³ The royal decrees found in the Mycerinus temples, as well as the titles of the priests buried in the adjoining cemetery, establish the name of the pyramid beyond doubt. The Debehen inscription is of especial interest, as it contains the following lines, probably written by the son of Debehen:

This tomb Mycerinus caused to be made for my father, while His Majesty was on the road to the pyramid-plateau, in order to see the work being done on the pyramid (named) Mycerinus-is-divine. His Majesty commanded to come the commander of the boats and the great master craftsman (high priest of Memphis) and the craftsmen.

The rest of the text is not clear in details, but Mycerinus ordered a detail of fifty workmen from the pyramid shops to excavate and decorate the tomb of Debehen, and justified the opening phrase that Mycerinus gave the tomb.⁴ The interest for the present purpose is the contemporary statement that the Third Pyramid was called "Mycerinus-is-divine" and was being constructed in the lifetime of the king under his occasional personal inspection.⁵

¹ Vyse, *The Pyramids of Gizeh*, II, 93.

² Mariette, *Mastabas*, p. 198.

³ Lepsius, *Denkmaeler*, II, 37*b*; Sethe, *Urkunden* I, 18; and translation, Breasted, *Ancient Records*, I, 211, 212.

⁴ See Appendix A.

⁵ The tomb of Debehen is now used as a mosque, called "Sheikh Hamid," much frequented on Fridays by women-folk of the adjacent villages.