

The Pyramids

The pyramids of Egypt were built more than 40 centuries ago as grand tombs for Egyptian rulers called “pharaohs.” Scholars believe that most of the pyramids were built between the years 2686 and 2181 BC. The ancient Egyptians believed that humans continued to live after death, as long as their human bodies were well preserved. The Egyptians also believed that the pharaohs represented the gods on earth. As a result of this belief, it was natural for them to carefully preserve the rulers' bodies.

The Egyptians used a process called “mummification” to preserve bodies. Mummification was a long and expensive process that included the removal of the internal organs because their decay tended to hasten decay of the whole body. After the organs were removed, the body was dried by soaking it in a salt solution. Then it was covered with a kind of soda powder. The next step in mummification was to wrap the body in bandages and soak it in oils. After all these steps were completed, the body was placed in a coffin.

Inside the pyramids there were many rooms in addition to the burial chamber. For example, the pyramid erected to King Zoser, who lived from 2686 to 2613 BC, had a series of rooms that he could live in during his next life. Also, the pyramid had sculptures and inscribed slabs that told the story of Zoser's life. The walls of the pyramid had blue, glazed earthenware tiles. Food, weapons, and furniture were also placed in the tomb.

The pyramids are awesome feats of engineering, considering they were built with only crude hammers, chisels, and other basic tools. The wheel would not be introduced to Egypt until 800 years after the pyramids were constructed. How the laborers hauled the perfectly cut, massive stones into position to build the sloping sides of the pyramids remains a mystery.

