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Old Kingdom Architecture: Egyptian Pyramids



AP Art History

Dr. Roxanna Ford

Giza and Beyond

- **Most people associate pyramids with the great Old Kingdom pyramids at Giza.**
- **These gigantic stone pyramids at Giza were built over the course of three generations:**
 - + Khufu (r. 2551 – 2528 BCE)
 - + Khafre (r. 2520 – 2494 BCE)
 - + Menkaure (r. 2490 – 2472 BCE)
- **Are these the only pyramids in Egypt?**
 - + NO! Egypt has over 90 royal pyramids which span a period of a thousand years
 - + Over 180 pyramids were built in Nubia over the course of another thousand years.



The Step Pyramid of Djoser



- **Did pyramid construction begin with what we know from Giza? NO!**
 - + Pyramid construction evolved from mastaba tombs and stepped pyramid structures.
 - + This was NOT just a refinement of these structures.
- **What inspired this new tomb shape?**
 - + The sacred **Ben-Ben** stone in the temple of Heliopolis.
 - + Please take a moment and read pg. 58: *The Gods and Goddesses of Egypt*
 - + Pyramid texts inscribed on burial walls refer to the sun's rays as the ladder the god-king uses to ascend the heavens.

Old Kingdom Pyramid Complexes

- **The Age of the Pyramids was one of the most glorious in human history.**
 - + Known as the Old Kingdom
 - + 2650 to 2150 BCE or the 3rd through 6th dynasties
 - + During these five centuries:
 - Egyptians created their famous pyramids – the world's most abstract building form
 - Defined once and for all the essence of their civilization's art.



- **At the center of Egyptian art are the human figure and the animals and plants of the Nile Valley.**
- **Artists of the Old Kingdom created a limited number of conventions to depict this rich environment; the resulting artistic canon governed Egyptian art for the next three thousand years.**
- **Predominantly youthful and vigorous, Old Kingdom images exude an air of utter confidence in human achievement. At the same time, gentle gestures express the intimate relationships between:**
 - + king and deity
 - + man and wife
 - + mother and child

