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Giza Plateau Mapping Project

Hossam Aboufotouh

Last Wednesday, December 6, 2006, there was a lecture by Mark Lehner in the American Researches Center in Cairo at 6pm. Despite it was a rainy evening and the streets were very crowded, I was eager to attend his lecture to hear what he talks about, and thus I was the first audient that entered the ARCE's conference hall at 5:10pm. It is a very intimate place and remained the same since I gave a lecture in it 8 years ago, on the UNDP project "Framework Plan for the Rehabilitation of Historic Cairo". Mark was there with his assistants preparing the data show for his presentation; I did sit in the first row without interrupting them. By 6:10pm he started his talk; there wasn't any empty chair in the hall. He showed us the progress of his project; and some of its outputs, particularly the survey maps of the village that he and Hawass claimed it was the settlement of the workers who built the Giza pyramids. The man is excellent presenter, and he knows how to master the event by his amazing charisma and that makes everybody awake during his presentation. Afterwards, two of his assistants presented the outcomes of a training course that they organized for some young Egyptian archaeologists in the excavation site. Then Mark started to talk again to thank the members of his team, and introduced them to the audience. The director of ARCE thanked Mark, and said now is the time for questions. One of the ladies asked Mark "do the trainees speak English? He replied "not all of them but we will handle that in the future." I was the second and

last questioner. I asked him three questions, which came in my mind during his talk.

First, why they did keep the temporary workers' village after completing the construction of the pyramids? Usually if we built mega project and built temporary village for its workers (indirect employees), we demolish it after completing the project.

Secondly, from your survey maps, I noticed that the fabric pattern of this village is irregular and even, in the architectural plans of its buildings, the walls are not parallel and do not follow the axis, i.e., the rooms are neither perfect rectangular nor are they squares; it is unlikely the builders of this village are those who built the Giza pyramids, with perfect geometrical accuracy and perfect cardinal orientations?

Thirdly, we know from the books of many ancient and medieval historians that Giza pyramids were built before the great flood/deluge, did you find any thing related to the great deluge in the remains of this village?

I did not imagine that, he will not answer the three questions in a convincing way. He replied, giving irrelevant short answers. For the first question, he said this is a colony for workers.

For the second question he said, while hinting to the irregular site plan, the walls are parallel and refused to show the audience the detailed architectural plans again.

For the third question, he said the great flood/deluge was mentioned only in religious books. Then, ARCE's Director said, no more questions, thank you.

[Continued in page 2]

Giza Plateau Mapping Project *[from page 1]*

On my way home, I was thinking on how to classify the value of this kind of excavation. No doubt, it is very interesting to see the physical plan of an ancient Egyptian village close to Giza pyramids; at least it shows many planning and architectural components of the ancient living environment, either indoor or outdoor. However, saying it is the village of the pyramids builders lack the scientific evidence. In the realm of physical planning, it is easy to identify the professions of those who planned the vernacular or spontaneous physical fabric, i.e., the irregular patterns. Those who planned this village were not engineers, architects, contractors, land surveyors or megalithicians. They had different profession completely far from the realm of construction. This is "a-b-c" in physical planning. Also, I noticed that while Mark was speaking about the architectural and physical planning components of that village, he wasn't familiar with the architectural and physical planning language, thus he was not able to specify which building was used for what daily function, he gave very wrong assumptions; it seems that there are no experienced architects and physical planning academicians among his team of experts; all of them are archaeologists. Finally, one can say Mark and his team have done very excellent work, which could be the basis for further studies on the architecture and physical planning of this village, i.e., in MSc. and PhD theses, in order to identify its land uses, its spatial structure, its core and secondary functions, and its economic base, using the social sciences that stand outside the realm of mere archaeological field.

The Megalithic Construction Technique

Hossam Aboufotouh



I read many papers and articles about the construction techniques of Giza pyramids that had been proposed by many interested scholars and amateurs too. In this regard, my opinion regarding this issue is the following:

When architect designs any building, he uses in its construction the most convenient construction technique in his days. Hence, the construction technique must be discovered before performing the design. In addition, smart architects always use the construction techniques that save time and efforts. Concerning the case of the Egyptian pyramids in Giza plateau, the ability to cut, transport and lift large stones was not the impossible construction technique in their days. The pyramids' architect was smart enough to recognize that it is the economic way for constructing the Giza pyramids, for conserving the time and efforts. This is contrary to the case of the masonry technique, which was also used in ancient Egypt, and that was excessively used during the medieval periods in many old monuments of the world, i.e., cutting small pieces of stones. The latter technique consumes longer time and needs more effort. If such smart architect wishes to construct a fortified building that lives for last and resist the natural disasters and both the megalithic and masonry construction techniques were possible to him, he would prefer the fastest and most sound technique. Why GP's architect did choose the megalithic technique? The simple answer is that it was the fastest and the most sound. He was abler, using his simple but sacred sciences. In short, because of the fact, that many scholars see the ancient

megalithic construction technique in the domain of the impossible or of the difficult, they give wrong assumptions to the construction period and the workforce used in erecting the Giza Pyramids.

Al-Maqrizi said in his book on Lessons and Consideration: "the pyramids' designer said in one of the granite stela that was found near to Giza pyramids during the 8th century AD, and that was translated into Arabic then: "We erected these pyramids in 6 years; if you try to demolish them, you would take 600 years; despite demolition is easier than erection."

Then, what is the core merit of the ancient megalithic construction technique? It is not only the ability to cut, transport and lift large pieces of stones but also, and the most important, is the fastest way to perform these construction activities for building huge and sound structure, in comparison with the other known masonry techniques of the day. The term fastest is the key of the megalithic technique and without it the masonry technique would be the best alternative. Add to this, architects of the past, today and tomorrow (architects of all civilizations) have the same way of thinking regarding how to choose the best, fastest and sound way to erect the important buildings. They always think about minimizing the construction time while maximizing the effective use of the construction materials and the workforce.

Upon that, researchers should take into their considerations that any construction theory that have been proposed for the GP and that is not faster than using the masonry technique is a false theory. A researcher should carefully estimate an answer for the next question. What is the period for constructing another copy of the GP using the masonry technique, in their days? If the answer was X years, then the true time for building the real GP was less than that X, taking into consideration that the masonry technique don't need mega- causeways nor it need other sophisticated lifting/transporting moods.

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