

MINOR STEP PYRAMIDS (KNOWN AND NEWLY DISCOVERED)

Nabil SWELIM
(Le Caire)

Funerary pyramids have been explained as a communicating point between the cults of the upper world and the netherworld. The superstructures are the Heliopolitan concept of a primeval hill or mound of creation and the substructure which is reached by a polar descending corridor, contains the burial which gives the pyramid complex its mortuary character. In principle, the absence of the netherworld (Osirian) factor would cancel the funerary aspect of the pyramid and it would become similar in character (not in shape) to the V Dyn. Ben Bens in their Sun temples.

Frequently mentioned are four minor step pyramids. Three of them were definitely not funerary and the fourth has never been investigated. During the last 2 years the number of these step pyramids has increased to seven. One of the 3 added pyramids (Sinky, Abu Sinna and Elephantina) has already been investigated and is not funerary. One other monument at Abydos may turn out to be of this category. Moreover, a few more should be expected in the Delta and Valley. Those of Athribes and on a sketch of Nordon should be considered.

We think that these minor step pyramids were built early in the III Dyn. to serve the spreading cult of Heliopolis in the same way as we think the Nakkada Tumuli have served the cults of Horus and Seth at the end of the II Dyn. If we are right about the latter representing the "mounds of Horus and Seth", then we may give the minor step pyramids the name "Archaic Ben bens" and we may also consider that they prototype the Step Pyramid at Sakkara.