

THE BYU EXPEDITION TO SEILA
IN THE FAYUM, EGYPT

THE PYRAMID OF SEILA LOCALLY CALLED 'EL QALAH'
THE SEASON OF 1987

Location:

The Seila pyramid is located on a mountain range west of the Nile-Fayum Divide, at an approximate height of 120 metres above the cultivated land to the west. It approximately is two kilometres east of the bridge 'Hagz Nageeb' on 'Bahr Wahbi' canal, one kilometre south of Wadi 'Fag el Gamous', and ten kilometres west of the pyramid of Meydum.

Duration of the season of 1987:

From February 3rd, to March 8th, 1987.

Members of BYU staff:

Professor Wilfred Griggs, Director of ancient studies, supervised the expedition.

Dr. Nabil Swelim, Egyptologist, conducted the archaeological investigation of the pyramid, and will prepare the excavation report.

Mr. George Homsey, Architect, made the architectural drawings of the pyramid, and will prepare drawings of the elevations and a preliminary plan and section for the archaeological report.

Dr. Revell Philips, Professor of Geology, was engaged in preparing a map of the pyramid area and the Wadies around.

Representing the EAO:

At the pyramid site Mr. Sayyed Aly Kouleeb, Inspector of antiquities of Fayum.

Acknowledgements:

The BYU staff is grateful to Dr. Aly el Khouly, the Director of the Antiquities of Middle Egypt for corporation extended through the Inspector Mr. Sayyed Aly Kouleeb during the excavation season. They admit that the local personel worked very hard with enthusiasm, and part of the credit of this successful endeavor must go to them. The BYU staff are grateful to the German Institute of Archæology in Cairo for loaning Foreman Aly Awaad and his assistant El Tayeb Hassan Ibrahim. They have benifited from remarks made by members of the Czechoslovak, Swiss, Austrian and German Institutes of Archaeology in Cairo.

Aims of investigations:

- To measure the pyramid dimensions.
- To varify the architectural composition of the superstructure.
- To investigate the area surrounding the pyramid.
- To investigate what function the monument served within the following possibilities:

Funerary, a pyramid tomb or cenotaph.

Religious, a primeval hill or Benben, of

the Elephantine, El Ghinimiya, El Koula, Nubt, Sinki, and Hebenu group of pyramid-like monuments, as suggested in MDAIK, 38, p. 94; and 'History of the Third Dynasty' p. 3-4, 108.

Mythological, connected with Horus and Seth, as suggested in 'L'Architettura della piramidi Menfite II' p. 69-70.

Political, monument demonstrating power, as expressed in MDAIK, 36, 1980 42 ff.

- To investigate the relationship of the pyramid of Seila with:

The pyramid of Meydum.

The five Wadies branching off the area surrounding it.

The Fayum area during the Old Kingdom.

- To investigate the possibility of a substructure if the monument reveals any funerary aspects.
- To unearth the objects contributing towards:

Dating; pottery, cloth, organic matter, and inscribed objects.

Art History; Sculpture and painting.

- To disclose a history of the construction and destruction of the monument.
- Preserve, restore and reconstruct elements which are in need of such precautions.

Plan of investigations:

The work in principal was planned according to the following necessities:

- 1- To tidy up the confusion surrounding the pyramid.
- 2- To identify corners of the core and accretion layers projecting over the rubble.
- 3- Determine the limits of the pyramid base.
- 4- Fix points on the area surrounding the pyramid for measuring heights, distances, and for conducting the survey.
- 5- Proceed to clean its sides and prepare them for drawing the elevations.
- 6- To search for evidence concerning what function the monument served.
- 7- To clear a robber's trench cut into the pyramid core.

Procedure:

Our work was based on the study of sections revealed by six principal study trenches which reached the virgin gravel. The clearance which followed was made according to subsidiary study trenches and horizontally stratified layers which had accumulated during and after the building of the pyramid.

The dumps were in four out of the five surrounding Wadies; while the fifth the north east Wadi was maintained as a clean approach to the pyramid.

Fallen masonry was mainly collected and arranged in a storage area at the bottom of the north west Wadi.

Results:

The archaeological investigations of this season led to the following results:

- 1- The confusion surrounding the pyramid was largely reduced.
- 2- The corners of the core and accretion layers above the rubble were located.
- 3- The north west corner of the pyramid was unearthed and the north and west limits of the pyramid became partly known.
- 4- The architectural composition of the pyramid was verified and the inner corners were measured from points fixed around the pyramid; the mapping of the area was begun.
- 5- The areas along the axis north and east of the pyramid were partly investigated.
- 6- The robbers trench was partly cleared.

The pyramid base length cannot be decided this season because a clearance of the outside the outer layer on the north and west sides has to be completed; we can however suggest that the base length was in the range of 60 cubits.

The pyramid nucleus was probably composed of a core and two layers.

The outer facing was probably composed by the third layer.

The core and layers are inclined at an angle ranging between 13-15° ie a sqd of 1 palm and 3 fingers.

Finds:

Four quarry marks, an Arabic graffiti, leveling line? outer facing fragments, pottery, three fragment of basalt, a large tooth, pebbles with green stain, branches and roots of some kind, hay, straw, animal droppings, several fire pits, part of a skull of an unidentified animal, remains of a naos? and a statue, a libation table, mud bricks, mud brick walls, two stelae, cloth, human bones and many other finds were made during the excavation.

The naos? libation table, and thirty fragments of the seated statue, did not bear any inscriptions.

One of the stelae found was completely defaced; the other bore the serekh of Horus Nebmaat facing a cartouch containing the title of King of Upper and Lower Egypt and the name Snofru.

With the comple¹ments of,
 Dr. Nabil Swelim,
 Member of the BYU expedition,
 55 Alexandria st,
 Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt,
 Tel. 677973.
 15, March 1987.