

CHEOPS (KHUFU)



Suppose that you've heard that a new boy named John is going to be attending your summer camp this year. You've never met him, but one of your friends tells you that he's heard that John is a very unpleasant boy. Another friend of yours tells you that he's met John and finds him to be very agreeable. Which account would you believe? Well, soon you will meet John and will be able to make your own observations of his character.

Unfortunately, when we try to learn about Cheops, the mighty Pharaoh who built the Great Pyramid, we hear differing accounts about him too. We can never meet him for ourselves in order to make sure we get it right, but must gather our information from those who knew him or have heard about him.

The time Cheops lived in was so very long ago, that we cannot find much information about him. Only a few scraps of writing even mention him. One of the first accounts scientists found about Cheops was written by the ancient historian Herodotus. Even though Herodotus lived in ancient times, even before Jesus was born, Cheops had lived and died about two-thousand years before Herodotus was born! Herodotus never met Cheops and had to learn about him in the same way we do—through research. Herodotus talked to Egyptian leaders and priests and wrote down what they told him. In his records, Herodotus described Cheops as a very cruel leader who closed all the temples and required his people to labor, grinding them down to the lowest misery all while they were building enormous pyramids to his glory.

Another scrap of writing found on some ancient papyrus told this story: One day a magician came into Cheops' court and asked if he might be permitted to demonstrate his unique ability. When Cheops heard that the magician claimed he could bring a dead thing back to life, he was fascinated. According to the account, the magician usually performed his trick on a hapless animal. However, rather than choosing an animal for the demonstration, Cheops showed how little he valued human life by ordering a servant to be put to death in order that he might see if the magician could really bring him back to life. We do not have a record as to how the trick turned out, but I bet we can make a good guess.

Right now, you might think that Pharaoh Cheops was a cruel man. For many years, historians too seemed to have no doubt that Cheops was a brutal leader. However, soon their ideas began to change. Archeologists found no evidence of a cruel Cheops, but instead they found descriptions of him as a "good god." The people who actually knew Cheops seemed to think well of him and applaud his pyramid building activities. Researches found information that seemed to describe him as a man of warm affections. He loved his mother, Hetep-heres; his slim Queen Mertitefs, and his brood of lively

children, one of whom, a little girl, ran about the palace, surprisingly yellow-haired amid the dark locks of Egypt.

Sometimes, to amuse his family, Cheops summoned clever magicians to perform their tricks at his court, even ordering his servants to pay one skilful wizard a thousand loaves each day with a hundred jugs of beer, an ox, and a hundred bunches of onions!

These accounts don't really match the earlier accounts, do they? We will never know for sure what Cheops' character really was, but we do know that he was a man of forceful nature who was able to direct a hundred thousand men in the building of enormous pyramids. The Great Pyramid, which was his tomb, is one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World and is the only one that is still around today. He was buried in his tomb as planned, but years later his tomb was raided and his body lost. After Cheops' death, Egypt had a succession of bad leaders and entered a period referred to as her Dark Ages.