

Document A: Herodotus (Modified)

The following is an excerpt from The Histories written by the Greek historian Herodotus in 440 BCE. Herodotus spent much of his life traveling to collect information for his book. He based his history book on the stories that the people in the places he visited reported to him.

The Egyptians told me that Cheops became king over the Egyptians and brought about every kind of evil. He closed all the temples and forced all the Egyptians to work for him. Some were forced to mine stones, and he ordered others to move the stones after they had been carried over the river in boats. They worked in groups of a hundred thousand men at a time, and each group worked for three months continually. This was the making of the [Great] pyramid, which itself took twenty years.

Document B: Textbook

This is an excerpt from a high school history textbook Our World Through the Ages published in 1959.

At Giza stands the Great Pyramid. It has stood there for five thousand years. It covers thirteen acres and stands nearly five hundred feet high. It contains over two million blocks, most of which weigh about two tons. One hundred thousand lash-driven men poured out their sweat and blood for twenty years to complete this resting place which King Khufu considered fit for his royal remains.

Corroboration Questions

Document C: News Article on Zahi Hawass

Dr. Zahi Hawass is an Egyptian archeologist. He has spent decades excavating and analyzing areas around the pyramids. Below is an excerpt from an article that appeared in many newspapers and magazines around the world reporting some of Hawass's recent findings.

Egypt displayed on Monday newly discovered tombs more than 4,000 years old and said they belonged to people who worked on the Great Pyramids of Giza, putting the discovery forth as more evidence that slaves did not build the ancient monuments.

The series of modest nine-foot-deep shafts held a dozen skeletons of pyramid builders, perfectly preserved by dry desert sand along with jars that once contained beer and bread meant for the workers' afterlife.

Egypt's archaeology chief Zahi Hawass said that discovery and the latest finds last week show that the workers were paid laborers, rather than the slaves of popular imagination.

Hawass said the builders came from poor Egyptian families from the north and the south, and were respected for their work – so much so that those who died during construction were bestowed the honor of being buried in the tombs near the sacred pyramids of their pharaohs. Their proximity to the pyramids and the manner of burial in preparation for the afterlife backs this theory, Hawass said. “No way would they have been buried so honorably if they were slaves,” he said.

Source: Katarina Kratovac, "New Discovery Shows Slaves Didn't Build Pyramids, Egypt Says," Associated Press, January 11, 2010.

Document D: Interview with Mark Lehrner (Modified)

Dr. Mark Lehrner is another leading archeologist and has worked along with Zahi Hawass for several years. Below is an excerpt from an interview Lehrner gave in 1997 to the PBS show NOVA.

Question: You've made reference to inscriptions at Giza that indicate who built the Pyramids. What do the inscriptions say?

Lehrner's answer: One of the most compelling pieces of evidence we have [of who built the pyramids] is graffiti on ancient stone monuments in places that they didn't mean to be shown. For example, above the King's chamber in the Great Pyramid, and in many monuments of the Old Kingdom—temples, other pyramids. Well, the graffiti gives us a picture of organization where a gang of workmen was organized into two crews, and the crews were subdivided into five *phyles*. *Phyles* is the Greek word for tribe.

The phyles are subdivided into divisions, and the divisions are identified by single hieroglyphs with names that mean things like endurance, perfection, strong. Okay, so how do we know this? You come to a block of stone above the King's chamber. First of all, you see this cartouche of a King and then some scrawls all in red paint after it. That's the gang name. And in the Old Kingdom in the time of the Pyramids of Giza, the gangs were named after kings. So, for example, we have a name . . . above the King's chamber in the Great Pyramid, "the Friends of Khufu Gang." This doesn't sound like slavery, does it?
Source: Mark Lehrner, "Who Built the Pyramids?" 1997.

Document E: Mark Shiffman

Dr. Mark Shiffman is a professor of Classical Studies at Villanova University and teaches courses on the ancient world. The following excerpt is from a comment he wrote online in response to claims that slaves built the pyramids.

In other words, the workers (or at least some of them) were well fed and not worked to death and got respectable tombs. . . .

So a certain proportion (maybe 25%?) of the workers were Egyptians of high status, a large number of Egyptian peasants were ordered to come do the hard labor, and we don't know how many slaves may have been employed in the work. Given the prevalence of slavery in the powerful nations of the ancient world, it would be surprising if there were not a significant number, and none of the evidence rules this out. On the other hand, there seems so far to be no direct archaeological evidence for the presence of slaves; but since they are not often honored with tombs, they can be hard to trace.

Two things are worth noting in assessing the “no slaves” claim and the evidence. One is that no one bothers to tell us in the broadcast sources how many tombs specifically belonging to workers have been found and what proportion of the workforce they might represent. One would have to ask that direct question of a knowledgeable scholar or consult the Egyptology technical literature.

Source: Comments of Professor Mark Shiffman, posted online on March 3, 2011.

Organizing and Evaluating Evidence

Documents	Did slaves build the pyramids?	What evidence does this source use to support its claim?	Do you find this evidence convincing? Why or why not?
Doc. A and B: Herodotus and Textbook			
Doc. C: Awass			
Doc. D: Lehrner			
Doc. E: Shiffman			