

Ancient egyptians and their use of slavery of building the pyramids research pape...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Once in a while, it is possible to turn to a television station like PBS and stumble upon a National Geographic documentary featuring the pyramids of ancient Egypt. They are so common it is almost easy to forget that ancient Incas and Aztec civilization also constructed unique pyramids. Three pyramids in particular are directly under a group of celestial stars and thus further complicate the mystery of them all. In Egypt, the archaeologists and forensic scientists have found bones of many people buried right beside the multi-dimensional triangles and other structures. They have questioned the role and status of these people who seemed to have been carefully laid to rest. It has raised the question about whether these people were slaves or just hard workers who devoted their lives to working for the great royal fathers of their day. While researchers can only rely on a few written accounts, their findings are subject to interpretation every bit as much as Biblical scriptures. Since no ancient Egyptian is alive today to tell the truth about their own time period, the only clues available are what little can be spoken by the graves and bones of the deceased. The purpose of this journey is to explore possibilities and discover whether or not the ancient Egyptian pyramids were built by slaves.

First, a few minutes should be spent defining slavery and it's comparison to indentured servitude. The effort to compare and contrast these two terms serves two purposes in this paper. Primarily, it highlights the varied types of treatment that each institution imposed on human beings. Perhaps they can serve as a measuring device by which Egyptian workers can be evaluated for their status in ancient society. Secondly, if there were slaves used to build the Egyptian pyramids, perhaps they experienced more mercy than their

future West African brothers and sisters who left the Ivory Coast to a hell-bound, trans-Atlantic journey. Just in case, the idea comes to mind that it really doesn't matter since the past has come and gone, the reason for further understanding the lives of Egyptian pyramid workers should ring as loud as a bell. The statues and timeless art that Egyptians left behind commands respect for the people who built them. They deserve to be properly recognized with honor in the history books and sympathy should be felt for their pain and suffering. If they were slaves and endured unbearable treatment while building enormous pyramids, it conjures a different kind of empathetic pain in the throat than if they were well paid craftsmen who were just happy to have and perform a job for ancient royal figure heads. If they were not enslaved like other victims across the centuries, then their work is equally appreciated but with a smile. The smile comes with the thought of people who might have been whistling joyful tunes at work, instead of singing to try to cope while wishing for death to end their misery.

Rather than imposing on the reader's point of view, only available data and the scientific translation of it will be presented. It will be up to an individual's interpretation of all the details presented to decide how the lives of those who built the pyramids were spent. It is quite subjective because a person could have elected to join the construction team and believed it to be an honor. Yet, despite bountiful meals and the respect of an approving smile from a Queen or King, his body could have worked harder than a beaten, cotton-picking African slave.

Enslavement is a practice that seems to date back to the days of cave men before written Biblical text. Perhaps the first very first slaves were women

serving as love dolls for their barbaric husbands. Over the centuries, the practice of enslavement occurred with various intensities ranging from simple servitude as a repayment for debts to brutally horrific. In some cases, it has resulted in torment for future generations even after it ends. The actual definition of slavery in accordance with the Merriam-Webster dictionary is, “ The state of being a slave; The practice of owning slaves”. Other definitions continue as, “ Submission to a dominating influence. A) the state of a person who is a chattel of another. B) The practice of slaveholding.” (“ Slavery”). Ironically, the definition does not insinuate the pain that a slave may experience. In fact, the definition makes it seem as physically painless as a raindrop on the forehead. If judging by the definition alone, it almost seems synonymous with another term, indentured servitude.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the definition of an indentured servant is, “ A person who signs and is bound by indentures to work for another for a specific time especially in return for payment of travel expenses and maintenance.” (“ Indentured Servant”). In other words, a maid who lives in separate residential quarters on her boss’s property might be an indentured servant. She might only be paid with a roof under which to sleep and limited food. In return, she might be the seamstress, babysitter, cook, housecleaner and perhaps the covert lover for the husband while the wife is asleep. She might not view herself as an indentured servant. However, if she agreed and signed a contract for any period of time, she would certainly fit the description quite well. The only difference if any, is that the person who is an indentured servant has agreed to fulfill this role and the relationship

with the boss might be symbiotic. Whereas the slave might have been forced or sold by others who have assumed the authority to put them up for sale. The slave might be stripped of all dignity and knowledge of himself. The indentured servant might still be able to enjoy some of the pleasures of life and experience healthy living and loving. The slave might be conditioned to accept no end in sight within their lifetime and lacerating abuse that scorches the body and spirit.

In many cases, slavery was employed to accomplish a long term project completion or to keep the cash bearing products in a mode of steady flow. For the American slave trade as an example, there was the famous cotton plant. Giant seas of cotton whitened plantation fields that stretched for miles. African slaves were also used to produce sugar, rice and other goods. Their treatment varied depending what their role was for the master. If they worked in the master's house as a servant, they might have experienced better treatment if they were obedient and submissive. In this situation, some slaves lived better lives than their fellow fieldworker counterparts. Much also depended on how merciful the master was with discipline and rules.

It would be reasonable to look at giant pyramids and statues and assume that slaves were entirely responsible for their long standing persistence through time. After all, who else could have been able to sling enormous rocks (that each look like a towering wall) on top of one another to reach several stories high in the air. Who else could have done the impossible work of creating secure tunnels within and beneath these amazing works of monumental art? How on Earth did such incredibly detailed pictures and

languages remain inscribed on the inner walls of buildings that offer mathematical mysteries? They tell stories of science, art, royalty, hard labor and rich history for which scientists still invest years of work investigating. For many centuries, slavery has given a rough texture to the world map as it has taken place at nearly every corner of the globe. For instance, in ancient times, the most ancient civilizations--ancient Mesopotamia, Old Kingdom Egypt, and the budding civilization that formed in the Indus and Yangtze river valleys all had some form of slavery present in their earliest years (Mintz, and McNeil). In medieval times, Italy, Russia, Spain and southern France were places that slavery has been known to take place. In the Christian era slavery as such was not condemned and churches and monasteries actually held slaves. Church councils of different nations and centuries formulated canons relative to the treatment of slaves. (Danenhower 407-412). In the 15th and 16th century the African slave trade started by Europeans that expanded across to the northern and southern Americas lasted for hundreds of years. Sadly and perhaps worst of all, there is modern day slavery. According to an article by Tim Hume of CNN, slavery in the form of human sex trafficking imposed on women and children is a hidden problem. There are 29.8 million people living in slavery “ with Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Bangladesh completing the list.” (Hume). The top ten countries listed in this article begin with India’s 14 million people enslaved, 2.9 million in China and 2.1 million people in Pakistan living in some type of slavery currently. Indentured servitude certainly seems like the lesser of two evils. By its definition and from reading examples of contracts viewable at the National

Women's History Museum, indentured service was a little more tolerable. Anyone afforded a chance at time travel might prefer to visit an indentured servant rather than a slave in the same historical time period. It is just plain painful to sit and watch the flowing tears of an enslaved human being. Lives of indentured servants were a little less harsh than slavery in the Americas. For instance, " Servants had some advantages slaves did not though; they were allowed access to and could testify in courts and could acquire their own land and property. They received a cash payment of freedom dues at the end of their term, and their children did not inherit the status of servitude. (" Conditions of Indentured Servants").

In a final effort to distinguish slavery from indentured servitude, it is a good idea to look at the rules and privileges that were given to masters who supervised their human property. American owners of indentured servants for instance, had legal pressures that held him accountable for the way his worker was treated. According to laws in a Massachusetts Plymouth colony, " servants could bring their masters to Court for abuse or for not fulfilling an indenture agreement. If a servant was killed by a master the Colony would bring the master up on charges. Sometimes a friend or family member worried about the well-being of a servant would bring a master to Court with charges of neglect or abuse. The most common punishments included paying a fine or being forced to give up that servant" (" Conditions of Indentured Servants"). On the other hand, masters who kept slaves were encouraged both legally and socially to whip and mentally control their slaves. They were even inspired by a man named Willy Lynch who wrote a letter advising southern American slave owners. He said with such

conviction, “ You must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves, and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves” (Lynch). While slavery and indentured servitude seem as different as the sun and the moon, they share some commonalities. First, both situations involved some form of imprisonment of the human spirit whether it was temporary or long term. Secondly, both lifestyles offered a limitation on freedom and economic advancement.

Now that slavery and indentured servitude have been laid on the table, it is time to examine their application to ancient Egypt with regard to pyramid construction. To become more familiar with the region and time period, ancient Egyptian society will be explored in terms of its laws for slaves and the various jobs required of them. A visit will be paid to the desert to gasp at the many Egyptian statements of creativity. The journey back to the days of ancient Egypt requires an open mind. This visit will question the types of work that slaves performed. It will involve careful, descriptive analysis of what today’s forensic and archaeological experts have found. Truthfully, every Egyptian questioned including the workers can only speak for themselves in a post mortem voice. Yet they may boisterously explain who they were in terms their work and social placement in society. Finally, after returning to the modern day thinking chair, appreciation will be paid to the work of slaves and indentured servants as their unique differences will be reviewed. After thoroughly dissection of the data and listening to the testimonies of reassembled bones, it might be possible to make an inference about the true nature of work on the pyramids.

Perhaps the people were forced to work and disobedience was punished with

public mutilation followed by a death suitable for a Stephen King novel. On the other hand, perhaps the Egyptians were excited to work in the burning desert sun while believing that generous rewards awaited them in the after-life. With that in mind, ample food, clothing and verbal praise was sufficient payment for painful, voluntary labor. Lastly, consider the chance that assumptions of scientists are completely wrong and the answers they seek are permanently locked away in the resting souls of the mummies.

Sometimes the facts are better off remaining mysterious because having a deeper appreciation for brilliant ancestors is more important than establishing their individual titles. No matter what happens on this excavation, learning something new is the souvenir that is (like the pyramids) priceless.

Deciding on a time period for observation is quite difficult. According to an outline of Egyptian history presented by Caroline Seawright, it spans period of time that cannot be described and struggles to be accurately calculated. To explain it according to titles of periods, Egyptians reigned from a time referred to as “prehistoric” to the “British Occupation Period” In between these two pillars of time, there are 54 periods entitled that are clickable to a page full of information about these numerous pockets in the past. Examples include, Greek, Roman, Islamic, French and British periods. They are followed by Lower, Middle, Upper and Epipaleolithic Eras which range from two million to 5500 B. C. Next, the time periods are named according to Dynasties that range from the first to 31st. They begin with 2, 920 and end at 332 years B. C. Lastly, the Ptolemaic Dynasty is followed by the Roman and Byzantine periods. The remaining seven periods (before the French and British

occupation periods) are given names such as Abbasid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mameluke, Bahri Mameluke, Burgi Mameluke and Ottoman. This summary gives a tiny hint about the vast length of time that Egyptian spans and why so many theories about events can only remain as mysteriously yet to be solved. There is simply too much information to try to summarize in a few pages. (Seawright, and Grimal)

For the purpose of pyramids, it is important to note that over 100 pyramids have been built over many years of Egyptian history. The most famous are the Great Pyramids at Giza and it is where many tourists rush to take photos and capture their beauty with video cameras. Archaeologists are still analyzing their findings at this site and they learn something new with each brush of soil across new evidence. Pyramids began sprouting out of the sands with the third dynasty and continued with better perfection as time moved forward. During all of these times, people worked for Kings and were considered to be property. In the 13th Dynasty, there were more than 40 slaves recorded to have been owned by one person. To quote one documented account, an owner wrote, "" I have acquired three male slaves and seven females in addition to what my father granted me." I have acquired three male slaves and seven females in addition to what my father granted me." Slaves have apparently fulfilled several roles during these times. This has been suggested by archaeological findings of written evidence in the form of Papyri and other pieces of writing.

One way that a person could become a slave would be to voluntarily submitted themselves into servitude. Document Papyri have been found to have come from the 6th century BC that serve as evidence of this. Actually

this may not have resulted from a person's freewill as much as it would've been something they did because they had an ability to pay off their debts to creditors. The creditor could then charge off the debt by acquiring the work as labor provided by the slave. Being that as somewhat better than forced enslavement, unfortunately once she becomes a slave this also became an instant title for her children and they would grow up as slaves to the debtor. It was viewed as credit offered by the debtor. In addition to submitting herself to slavery, she also must submit all of her personal possessions and material assets that were owned prior to beginning the servitude to the new master. In another instance, people presented themselves for enslavement in exchange for food or shelter as this might be the last resort to avoiding homelessness or starvation. This type of indentured service insinuates that ancient Egyptians were willing to help one another somewhat. If there was a war with another group or culture, the people from the losing group could be captured as slaves. In Egyptian culture, being a slave in one's own native land might have been a lot better than being a free man or woman among a foreign land. It is for this is the reason that scientists believe that only due to mistreatment would a slave consider running away. If they did run away and became free in another country, they could face much harsher conditions with language barriers, lack of resources and no familiar people with whom to connect. The conditions could be much harsher and an Egyptian slave that became free by running away (if not captured and returned) could be susceptible to being taken as property to a much less benevolent master than whom they fled from Egypt. Other ways of acquiring slaves include religious or simple

acquisition that came along with the purchase of land and the animals that were taken care of on the land. Some masters owned the people that worked for them and if he were to pass away, his beneficiaries could take on the ownership of the slave that the master had before passing away.

With regard to businesses, there were terms and conditions which allowed for slaves to negotiate transactions. In the Wilbour Papyrus which dates back to the New Kingdom, there is documentation that indicates that some slaves were individual holders of land and they were able to use their status regarding the ownership of property. Though it wasn't entirely clear, two female slaves were actually giving their masters land in exchange for various goods. They seemed to have acted independently as property owners. All of this evidence from various times in ancient Egyptian history show that there was without a doubt the incorporation, usage and application of slave labor in the economic, business and legal system of ancient Egypt (Dunn).

Upon discovering that there were slaves being used throughout various periods in Egyptian history, it is interesting to note that they experienced very different treatment in different aspects of society than the American slaves who woke up to daily torture and uncertainty. In these times the master of a slave might use their workers in many different ways. For instance, some of them were simply domestic workers or guardians of children. They may have prepared the meals, made the bread or beer and served as maids. Some of them might have had a green thumb and held responsibilities related to landscaping and gardening simply to please their master. Others might have worked as guardian physicians and managers of livestock. In order maintain their place in the house, the slave would have to

learn a trade. This trade afforded opportunities to improve their own status among slaves or be placed in supervisory positions over other slaves. They had the opportunity to become craftsmen which would allow them to obtain a higher status in the community though still bearing the slave title. One of the things that made this great is that these were items that children of slaves could inherit such as wisdom, education and a trade that could be passed on to future generations. They could learn how to write and how to rise to become managers for their masters. Other privileges of slaves have been discovered. In one case, a man who was a free person worked under the supervision of a Nubian slave who answered only to the high priest. In the legal system, some ancient Egyptian slaves could leverage their own defense in the legal systems. Unlike African slaves of colonial times, Egyptian slaves were given some consideration in the legal system. Archaeologists have found a Papyri that had information about an investigation of a crime in the New Kingdom wherein slaves were the accused. These slaves were afforded a hearing and some of them were allowed to testify against their own masters. While a few of them were brutally punished, others were not subjected to blame for what happened. In addition to being given leverage in the legal system, it is apparent that slaves were allowed to make unions among themselves and also to marry people who were not slaves. Although elaborate photos and wedding albums may not have been uncovered, there are some forms of physical evidence that has been found by researchers to suggest that slaves enjoyed unions of exclusivity or were at least allowed to engage in courtship of one kind or another. Of course any form of cohabitation would have been approved by

the master. As a result, some people who were not slaves were united with people who were slaves of a higher class. For instance, during the New Kingdom, the barber of a king actually gave his niece to become a slave's wife. Also, there was another time when the younger brother of a lady was given to marry one of her own slaves. In these examples, the slaves would have had to be set free publicly. When the mistress extended freedom to her slave, the freedom was stretched to include all of the children that were born to the slave and she later cradled them as her own future beneficiaries over her estate after having adopted them.

This evidence proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that being a slave might or might not have been a pleasant title to bear. It may still have been a very heavy cross to carry in ancient Egypt. There has not been much evidence to show slaves with abilities to buy their own freedom. However, earning their freedom was strictly at the discretion of the owner. In some instances, the master had every right to capture his escaped slave. Search parties could be assembled and required to help find the escaped slave. Once captured, the fugitive slave could be brought before the government by the master and required to return to servitude. The best hope that an escaped slave could have would be to go far away from Egypt and vow never to return. This was very hard with limited resources and transportation. There was also the chance of becoming vulnerable and susceptible to even more brutal enslavers in foreign lands.

In summary, there were several ways to become a slave. It was mostly voluntary or done out of desperation from poverty and basic human needs like food and shelter. Alternatively, voluntary enslavement of oneself might

have been for debt consolidation in the same way that a person might get an extra job that pays very little but will allow for paying off a credit card. Egyptians seemed to apply some kind of ethical ground rules with slave management even if harsh punishments were at the discretion of the masters. Unlike African slaves of the colonial days, Egyptian slaves might still be able to obtain education by way of learning a trade, managing animals, younger or less experienced slaves, or simply falling to the every whim of their masters- without having their family members beaten right in front of them just because of their skin color. An Egyptian slave could spend the entire day fanning and serving their King or Queen. On the other hand, a slave could spend the day in grueling mine work. Slaves could experience courtship, marriage under restrictions and perhaps even perform such an awesome job that their master cannot help but to grant their freedom in front of the whole community. Slaves may have had a typical life with a pressing glass ceiling not unlike being limited to a low wage job of today's times. Or, they could have had the possibility of freedom one day after years of good service.

The lifestyle of Egyptian slaves may have been as varied as the benefits bestowed upon land by the Nile River. Slaves might have had an adventurous life that began with indentured servitude and ended in marriage to the daughter of royalty. They might have been able to speak up for themselves in court or endure punishment for a crime they may (or may not have) committed. In order for the many pyramids to have been built to withstand centuries of weathering to this day, it makes sense to consider that the entire nation had to take up arms with tools and equipment. Many of

the workers may have been slaves who made sure the pyramid workers were fed and clothed with injuries being treated immediately. If the actual stone piling workers were slaves, they were given burial grounds that included gifts with their remains according to archaeologists. This shows they their work was at least regarded as worthy of appreciation. It is a world of difference from the way that traditional American slave work was regarded by their masters.

Before addressing the physical evidence as told by the skeletons of uncovered graves, it is worth mentioning one of the great, imaginative people who envisioned the pyramids and commanded their construction. The workers (whether they were labeled as slaves or not) worked day after day to build these structures for many years. They were a slave to the cause and with the great cooperation of massive numbers of Egyptians, they have produced some of the most amazing wonders of the world. A reliable source combined by Egyptian historians detail the following:

For many years, it was presumed that in ancient Egypt, the Great Pyramids at Giza were built by many thousands of foreign slaves, toiling under very harsh conditions over a period of decades. Today, many scholars refute this picture of ancient Egypt, believing instead that they were built by the free Egyptians themselves, some perhaps as seasonal conscripts with other artisans consigned permanently to the projects. One must also consider just how the Egyptians would really control so many slaves in one location with the rudimentary weapons of the Old Kingdom. (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm>)

The above statement speaks volumes about the treatment of the actual

workers who erected the pyramids. Further archaeological evidence supports it. It seems that, the assumption that whips were slashed over the nude backs of cruel enslavers who made their victims build the pyramids is nothing more than an ignorant reach for a Hollywood movie. Scientists have found evidence to exclaim that this was simply not the case. Another passage reads,

There were slaves to be sure, throughout the Near East. Slaves acquired as prisoners of war, slaves made due to debt. But the pyramids were monuments of the Kings, monuments to their connection with the gods, to their ascent into the afterlife with the gods. The pyramids and their temples were part of the royal cult, and required the dedication and devotion of craftsmen and laborers who believed in their King and their gods. Slaves there may have been. But the pyramids were built by Egyptians, by stonemasons, artisans, artists and craftsmen. While skilled craftsmen and management staff worked year round, farmers would come from the provinces during the inundation period to do the heavy work. (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/slaves.htm>)

Archaeologists have excavated villages that show where workers lived and uncovered more than 300 graves. They were dated to have lived under the reign of Sneferu. Bakeries, copper workshops and food preparation stations were all found within the physical realm of the great pyramid of a Pharaoh by the name of Sneferu and as well as other great leaders. Careful analysis of the worker's indicating that they died between 30 and 35 years of age. Their bones screamed stories of endless days of hard work. They suffered from arthritic conditions, spinal cord injuries and joint issues that undoubtedly

inflicted bodily pain. The workers received an exceptional level of medical attention for the time period of their injuries. Their treatments included surgeries, braces that serve as casts for broken bones and amputations which may have prolonged life and allowed for continued working in another role. To further describe some of the medical challenges faced by the workers, syphilis has even been detected by analysis of some bones. In conclusion, the question has been raised as to whether or not the pyramids were built by slaves. An effort has been made to examine the concept of slavery in Egypt during ancient times and whether or not it was put into practice. This was necessary in order to understand the people of ancient Egypt in terms of their people, various positions in society and legal practices.

Indentured servitude was introduced as a similar yet milder form of slavery. Since European enslavement was the basis for comparison, a few moments were applied here to show the differences between indentured servitude and brutal enslavement. It was important to present the concept of indentured servitude as a possible alternative to slavery as it was experienced by ancient Egyptian people. This made it easier to understand why an Egyptian person could be a slave and still have a chance to legally marry a person who lived as a free citizen. According to the original definitions of slaves and indentured servants mentioned earlier, it seems that Egyptians were slaves by choice or pressure from economic circumstances and debts. This leans them more towards the mold of indentured servants rather than slaves. There may have been more merciful masters who allowed for the security of a slave's children and consideration for their youth and need for nurturing,

compared to southern American lynch-happy enslavers.

It has been validated and made clear that Egyptian slavery was indeed a way of life. Yet, it wasn't likely to be the same as the stories told by the diaries of former Colonial slaves (Hughes Transcript). Slaves were used in Egypt. They can be classified by having received various levels of treatment ranging from kind to cruel. However, the spotlight turned to archaeological and forensic evidence to answer the question of how many of those slaves were assigned to help build the pyramids.

The overwhelming evidence suggests that the workers were skilled laborers who were qualified to work at various positions around the pyramids. They would have needed to demonstrate expertise in their crafts in order to be selected for their role. The Pharaohs were very passionate about their buildings and the exact perfection of their structures. They needed their workers to be able to perform well and the lavish stations for clothing, food and pottery unearthed among the burial grounds of the workers show that they were appreciated to some extent. Just to have the honor of being buried so close to important leaders shows that they were not regarded as pitiful slaves like victims of the West African slave trade. While they probably worked as hard as slaves, it seems to have been an honor to be on board with important projects for their king. It seems to have been synonymous with the many young men who willingly signed up to go to war after the attack on United State's Pearl Harbor. They know that the work would be dangerous but they wanted to do something for their country just like Egyptian workers wanted to build the pyramids for their beloved Royalty. Were American boys and men who were sent off to the Vietnam War

regarded as slaves? Many of them were drafted against their own will. Yet, were they considered by the American government to be slaves? The answer is no. However, were they working hard in the dangerous jungles of Vietnam and subject to tormenting circumstances? Indeed they were. Some war veterans returned and had very little support with recovering their normal lives and yet they were not regarded as slaves. After reviewing the evidence for this document, it seems as though the pyramid builders were not slaves. They willingly gave their lives for a cause that was deeply rooted in spiritual beliefs about their gods and destination after death.

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