



The Builders Behind the Stones

New discoveries in the desert are rewriting the story of who really built Egypt's greatest monuments, and what their society was truly like.

For centuries, the pyramids of Giza have puzzled visitors and scholars alike. Rising from the desert sands near modern Cairo, these enormous stone structures were built more than four and a half thousand years ago, during a period known as the Old Kingdom. The largest of them, the Great Pyramid, once stood nearly 147 metres tall and remained the tallest human-made object on Earth for almost four thousand years. How a society without iron tools, wheels for heavy transport, or modern machinery managed such a feat continues to fascinate researchers today.

The scale of these projects is difficult to imagine.

Archaeologists [estimate](#)¹ that the Great Pyramid contains around 2.3 million blocks of stone, some weighing as much as fifteen tonnes. Each block had to be cut, moved, and lifted into position with extraordinary precision. The sides of the pyramid are almost perfectly aligned with the four points of the compass, a level of accuracy that even the best engineers would respect. For a long time, people assumed that such a [monument](#)² could only have been built through cruel force.

A popular [myth](#)³ once held that armies of enslaved people were whipped into building the pyramids. Recent discoveries have overturned this idea. Not far from the pyramids, archaeologists uncovered the remains of a large town where the builders actually lived. They found bakeries, breweries, and areas for preparing food on a huge scale. The bones recovered from workers graves show injuries that had been carefully treated, suggesting these people received medical

care. This was not a camp of prisoners but an organised community with a [skilled](#)⁴ and respected [workforce](#)⁵.

The evidence points to a highly structured society. At the top sat the pharaoh, believed to be a living god whose [status](#)⁶ placed him above everyone else. Below him were priests, officials, and scribes who could read and write, giving them considerable influence. Beneath them stood craftsmen, farmers, and labourers. Most workers on the pyramids were probably ordinary farmers who offered their labour during the flood season, when the fields lay underwater and farming was impossible. In return, they were fed, housed, and paid in goods such as grain and beer.

Building on this scale required careful planning. Officials had to organise the supply of food, tools, and materials for thousands of workers over many years. This was an ambitious undertaking that demanded a strong central government and enormous wealth. The pyramids, then, were not simply tombs for dead kings. They were proof of a state powerful enough to gather resources, direct people, and complete a project lasting decades.

Modern researchers continue to trace how the ancient Egyptians solved each problem. Experiments have shown that wet sand reduces friction, making it easier to drag heavy blocks on sledges. Ramps of various shapes may have been used to raise stones to great heights. Each new study adds a small piece to the puzzle. Yet part of the appeal remains untouched by science. Standing before these vast monuments, it is hard not to feel a deep respect for the people who imagined and built them so long ago.

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VOCABULARY — KEY WORDS FROM THE STORY

#	WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1	estimate <i>verb</i>	to guess or calculate the size, amount, or value of something, usually based on available information rather than exact measurement.	"Experts estimate that the repairs will cost around two million dollars."
2	monument <i>noun</i>	a large structure, such as a statue or building, built to remember an important person or event, or an important historic building.	"The city built a stone monument to honour the soldiers who died in the war."
3	myth <i>noun</i>	a widely held but false belief or idea; also, a traditional story about gods or heroes from ancient times.	"It is a common myth that we only use ten percent of our brains."
4	skilled <i>adjective</i>	having the training, knowledge, and ability to do something well.	"The factory struggled to find enough skilled engineers to run the new machines."
5	workforce <i>noun</i>	all the people who work for a particular company, in a particular industry, or in a country.	"The company reduced its workforce by two hundred people last year."
6	status <i>noun</i>	a person's rank or position in society or in a group, especially compared with other people.	"In many cultures, owning land was once a clear sign of high social status."

COMPREHENSION — ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

What is the main point the author makes by describing the town, bakeries, and treated injuries found near the pyramids?

- A-) The builders lived far away and travelled long distances each day.
- B-) The pyramids were built by a cared-for, organised community rather than by mistreated slaves.
- C-) The Egyptians ran out of food during the construction of the pyramids.
- D-) Modern archaeologists have found very little evidence about the builders.

QUESTION 2 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

According to the article, why did ordinary farmers work on the pyramids during a certain part of the year?

- A-) They were forced to leave their farms permanently by the pharaoh.
- B-) Farming paid far better than building the pyramids.
- C-) During the flood season their fields were underwater, so farming was impossible.
- D-) They wanted to learn to read and write like the scribes.

QUESTION 3 — SHORT ANSWER

Explain how the recent archaeological discoveries changed the older belief about who built the pyramids. Use your own words.

COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

My score today ____ / 3

- Q1 The pyramids were built by a cared-for, organised community rather than by mistreated slaves. ✓ Correct (B)

The text states this evidence 'overturned' the myth of enslaved builders and directly concludes: 'This was not a camp of prisoners but an organised community with a skilled and respected workforce.' The food areas and treated injuries are given as proof that workers were supported and valued.

- Q2 During the flood season their fields were underwater, so farming was impossible. ✓ Correct (C)

The text explains that most workers 'offered their labour during the flood season, when the fields lay underwater and farming was impossible.' This timing allowed farmers to work on the pyramids without losing farming income they could not earn anyway.

- Q3 **Answer:** Older beliefs claimed the pyramids were built by large numbers of enslaved people who were forced and beaten into working. However, when archaeologists found a nearby town with bakeries, breweries, and large food-preparation areas, along with worker graves showing injuries that had been medically treated, this picture changed. These findings suggested the builders were fed, housed, and cared for. As a result, historians now describe the builders as an organised and respected community of skilled and seasonal workers rather than mistreated prisoners.

Explanation: A strong answer must contrast the old view (slavery and cruelty) with the new evidence, and must name at least two specific discoveries (for example, the town, the food areas, or the treated injuries). The best answers explain the logical link between the evidence and the conclusion, showing that care for workers implies they were not treated as slaves, and use original wording rather than copying the text.

VOCABULARY — TRANSLATION & NOTES

estimate

Often followed by 'that' plus a clause: 'scientists estimate that...'. The noun has the same spelling but a slightly different pronunciation.

monument

Common collocation: 'a national monument', 'an ancient monument'. Do not confuse with 'moment' (a short period of time).

myth

Useful phrase: 'to bust a myth' or 'a popular myth' means a false idea many people accept. The adjective is 'mythical'.

skilled

Often used as 'skilled worker' or 'highly skilled'. The opposite is 'unskilled'. Use 'skilled at' or 'skilled in' before an activity.

workforce

Usually treated as a single unit: 'the workforce is growing'. Common with numbers: 'a workforce of thousands'.

status

Common collocations: 'social status', 'high/low status', 'status symbol'. It can also mean the current state of something, as in 'the status of the project'.

YOUR TURN — SENTENCE BUILDING

Mastery comes from practice. Write original sentences using today's target vocabulary.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

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