



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants Curriculum

Cheikh Anta Diop and Theophile Obenga Were Right (The Pyramids of Egypt Were Not Built By Slaves!)

A BBC News report of January 11, 2010 announced the discovery of a complex of tombs near Egypt's great pyramids—Khufu (Cheops) and Khafre (Chephren). The tombs, made from bricks of dried mud, date back 4,500 years. Zahi Hawass, the chief archaeologist heading the Egyptian excavation team stated that evidence from the site shows that the workers were employed for three-month stints, and the tombs, which date from the 4th and 5th Dynasties (2649-2374 BC), were for those who died during construction. Additional evidence also revealed that the approximately 10,000 workers who built the pyramids had eaten 21 cattle and 23 sheep sent to them daily from farms in the Delta and Upper Egypt. Scholars in the excavation team seem to think that this suggests the farmers who sent the animals were not paying their taxes to the Egyptian government, but were sharing in one of Egypt's national projects.

The recent archeological digs, however, confirm what the late Senegalese physicist and egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop and Congolese philosopher, egyptologist and linguist Theophile Obenga had said all along: the pyramids of Egypt were built by free men, not slaves. For decades Egyptian civilization had perniciously been representation as slave-based. The idea that slaves built the pyramids has been a persisting one in scholarship. It works to devalue the skill and sophistication involved in the construction of the pyramids, and it also tars ancient Egypt's civilization as an oppressive and slave-holding empire. Upon review of the archeological evidence, the excavation team concludes too that the tombs reinforce the theory that the pyramids were built by free workers rather than slaves. Hawass declared that "The location of the workers tombs beside the king's pyramid show that they were not slaves. If they were slaves, they would not have been able to build their tombs beside their king's."

Archeological discoveries of ancient Egyptian civilization are invaluable in shedding light on an obscure period of world history. They are also important in exposing the mythifications that have gone on in the discipline of Egyptology by scholars who are averse to accepting that the root of present Western knowledge and civilization lies in Africa, not Europe. Scholars, including Diop, Obenga, and Cornell University professor Martin Bernal, have tackled head on the mythifications in the field of Egyptology. They have pointed out that such myths enable their makers to push a bankrupt racist project, Bernal calls an "Aryan Model" of knowledge. The racist model underplays the intellectual and research achievements of ancient Egyptians in order to ensure that the cradle of Western knowledge is firmly anchored in Greece.

Some might assume that Hawass's recent announcement is the first time slave labor has been shown to not be involved in the construction of the pyramids. The assumption is quite mistaken must be dispelled for the sake of scholarly accuracy. Ancient Egyptians left a vast array of records on stela, papyri, and on buildings themselves providing important information on how these architectural marvels were constructed. As scholars had done earlier, Diop (1991) utilized the Papyrus of Moscow and the Rhind Papyrus to establish that ancient Egyptians went beyond the practical knowledge of building forms and actually studied the mathematics of the pyramid and of the cone, 2,000 years before the Greek began their study. (See *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* (NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991). Drawing on the works of earlier scholars as well, Diop showed in that the ancient Egyptians were familiar with the different trigonometric lines—the tangent, the sine, the cosine, the cotangent—which they used to calculate their slopes and the conical pillars of the temple (1991, 237).

Obenga's examination of ancient Egypt's historical records in his work such as the Inscriptions of Rameses II, the Wage Bill from Deir el-Medina, and the Invoice for a worker's pay, Deir el-Medina provides a different perspective, that establishes the builders were paid workers. His fluency in Greek, Latin, French, English, Italian, Arabic, Syriac and medu netjer (Egyptian hieroglyphs) enriches his translations and gives him deep insights that few scholars have. He brings these translations together in his book, *African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*, Penguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2004 translated from *La Philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique, 2780-330 BC avant notre ère*. L'Harmattan, Paris, 1990. His translation of Ramses II's inscription shows the pharaoh's exhorting what must be *free* workmen and shows that he became a great builder and constructor of numerous colossal monuments because he took care of the material living conditions of workers and craftspersons.

The excerpt reads: "O you elite craftsmen, skilled and strong, who build for me monuments in great numbers, you experts in all manner of work with stone, connoisseurs of granite; you skilled and zealous builders of my monuments; O you, accomplished workmen averse to laziness, focused on work, doing your assignments with conscientious merit, listen to what I have to say to you. You shall be supplied with provisions in abundance. You shall know no penury. Your food shall be plentiful, because I know that your work is really hard, which is why the worker cannot rejoice until his belly is full" (Obenga 2004, 526).

The Wage Bill and the Invoice for a worker's pay goes a step further to detail the actual pay of these workers. If they are not more widely known, it points to the selective way materials on ancient Egypt is being handled and presented to a reading public, rather than there being an absence of documents. In sum, we did not have to wait for the discovery of these tombs to know that like the workers who built the Sears Tower the workers who built the pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt were equally free.