

The Great Pyramid as the First Amduat Tomb

*Nehad Kamal Eldeen**

In this research, I will introduce a new interpretation of the Great Pyramid's passages and chambers system in the light of Solar-Osirian beliefs. There are three known chambers inside the Great Pyramid: The lowest chamber that is cut into the bedrock upon which the pyramid was built, and it was unfinished. The so-called¹ Queen's Chamber, and the King's Chamber which are higher up within the pyramid structure.(Fig 1)

1. The Previous Interpretations

About the function of passages and chambers system in the Great Pyramid many questions still remain unanswered. Some Egyptologists as Ludwig Borchardt believed that the pyramid was built in three phases: In the first phase, the rock chamber was intended to be the grave chamber, thereafter the so-called Queen's Chamber was finished and in the third phase, the Great Gallery and King's Chamber.² Today it is rather believed that the pyramid was planned and built from the outset in the apparent dimensions.³

This is not the first attempt to explain the construction of the pyramid on the basis of religion, but was preceded by numerous attempts. A number of Egyptologists such as Mark Lehner and Stadelmann have noted that certain features of the pyramid

* Associate professor in Mansoura university.

¹ By themselves, of course, none of these modern labels define the ancient purposes of the architecture they describe." J.Romer, *The Great Pyramid: Ancient Egypt Revisited*. Cambridge University Press(Cambridge, 2007).8.

² [M.Verner](#), *Die Pyramiden* Rowohlt (Hamburg, 1999) 233f.

³ [R.Stadelmann](#), *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Vom Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder*. (Mainz am Rhein, 1997) 111.

reflect aspects of the religion described by the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead, or as it was called by the Egyptians, "The Chapters of Going Forth by Day". Marsham Adams⁴ proposed that the unique system of passages and chambers (particularly the Grand Gallery, obviously unnecessary in a tomb) has an allegorical significance only explained by reference to the Egyptian "Book of the Dead". Sir Gaston Maspero endorsed his thesis and added, "The Pyramids and the Book of the Dead reproduce the same original, the one in words, the other in stone."⁵

All these studies thought that the pyramid construction has a religious meaning, and maybe symbolizes the Duat or the night journey of the Sun God, but they didn't try to explain the unusual construction of the pyramid in the light of the solar-Osirian beliefs, which I will try to prove in this research.

We need at first to discuss the ancient Egyptian beliefs of the sun journey and the unification between Re and Osiris to understand this complicated chamber system in the Great Pyramid.

2. The Journey of the Sun and the Unification with Osiris .

The ancient Egyptians believed that every deceased person becomes Osiris, and he would receive a similar fat, and live after death in his realm. At the same time, there was a belief that the dead after his death would accompany the sun god Re in his journey in the heaven, and rise with him every morning, but how could the deceased become Osiris and descend with him to the Underworld, and at the same time become Re and ascend with him to heaven. The religious books tried to find a solution of this

⁴ W.Marsham.Adams, *The Book of the Master of the Hidden Place* (London,1933);

B.Steward, *History and Significance of the Great Pyramid* (London,1935).

⁵ J.Desalvo, *The Complete Pyramid Sourcebook* (2003) 109f.

question, and they succeeded to find a satisfactory answer to this difficult question. They believed that Osiris was the body, which descended to the Underworld followed by bodies of all the blessed ones, and Re was the *b3* (soul), which was separated from the body at the death and ascended to heaven with the souls of all the blessed dead. The ancient Egyptians believed that the journey of the sun in the Underworld takes twelve hours, and in the sixth hour at the very depth of the Netherworld, the sun reaches the water hole filled with Nun, the primeval water. Here lies the corpse of the sun (the corpse of Osiris). As soul and corpse, Re and Osiris unite together in the Underworld. As the life is renewed by the union of soul and body, it is renewed as well by the union of Re and Osiris every night⁶.

These ideas were known in the Pyramid Texts, they were understood through the texts without illustrations. But they appear more clearly in the Books of the Netherworld which were spread in the New Kingdom.

3. Interpretation of the Pyramid's Construction in view of Solar-Osirian Beliefs

3.1 The Underground Chamber

Through the descending passage we can reach the underground chamber. The chamber was unfinished, and even the floor has not been processed on its planned level.(Fig.2)

The chamber measures 8.36 m in a north-south orientation, 14.08 m in an east-west orientation and is a maximum of 5.03 m high. The uneven ground in the eastern part is up to 1.30 m deeper than

⁶ E. Hornung, *Die Nachtfahrt der Sonne: eine altägyptische Beschreibung des Jenseits*, (Düsseldorf, 1998), 95; W. Barta, Osiris als Mutterleib des Unterweltlichen Sonnengottes in den Jenseitsbüchern des Neuen Reiches, *JEOL*29, (1985-1986).

the level of the passage. In the eastern part of the rock chamber a shaft leads into the depths.⁷

Some Egyptologists suggested that the chamber was intended to be the original burial chamber, but Pharaoh Khufu later changed his mind and wanted it to be higher up in the pyramid,⁸ but Stadelmann believed that the chamber was not built to be a burial chamber, he thought that it was originally built for religious purpose⁹. some stories describe the tomb as the grave of Osiris, but Stadelmann saw that the Osirian religion was not common in that time like the religion of Soker and Ptah, from that point of view he believed that the chamber represented the cave of Soker¹⁰, and the hell of Soker, which occupies the Fourth and Fifth division of the Amduat.¹¹

I agree with Stadelmann, that this place was the hell of Soker *rst3w*, that must be traversed by the deceased (Re) to enter the Sixth division of Amduat where he united with Osiris.¹²

3.2 Air or Escape Shaft

Just 98 meters from the original entrance, in the right side of the descending passage we find the entrance of the shaft which follows an irregular path through the masonry of the pyramid to connect the underground Chamber and the descending passage with the beginning of the horizontal passage, which leads to the so- called Queen's Chamber.(Fig.3)

⁷ [R.Stadelmann](#), *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*, 113.

⁸ M.Haase, *Eine Stätte für die Ewigkeit. Der Pyramidenkomplex des Cheops aus baulicher, architektonischer und kulturhistorischer Sicht.* von Zabern (Mainz; 2004) 35.

⁹ [R.Stadelmann](#), *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*, 114.

¹⁰ R.Stadelmann: *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*, 121

¹¹ E. Hornung, *Das Amduat. Die Schrift des Verborgenen Raums. Teil I: Text*, ÄA 7 (Wiesbaden, 1963) 80ff.

¹² E. Hornung, *Das Amduat*,109f.

Some Egyptologists believe that this shaft served originally the workers in the underground Chamber for ventilation or as an escape route. But if the shaft has been constructed only as an emergency exit, we expect that it is better to be shorter route.¹³

So I believe that this shaft has a religious purpose, it represents the route of the dead's soul (Re), on which he passed from the hell of Soker, which was represented in the underground Chamber to the so-called Queen's Chamber, where he meet his body Osiris and united with him.

3.3 The so-called Queen's Chamber

This chamber was the most mysterious chamber in the pyramid. The purpose of this chamber was not certainly identified. The Queen's Chamber is exactly half-way between the north and south faces of the pyramid and measures 5.75 meters north to south, 5.23 meters east to west, and has a pointed roof with an apex 6.23 meters above the floor. At the eastern end of the chamber, there is a niche 4.67 meters high.(Fig.4) The original depth of the niche was 1.04 meters, but has since been deepened by treasure hunters. In the north and south walls of the Queen's Chamber, there are shafts, which unlike those in the King's Chamber that immediately slope upwards, are horizontal for around 2 m before sloping upwards¹⁴.

The function of these shafts was unknown. Also the purpose of the niche was unidentified. Petri believed that in it a statue was

¹³ V. Maragioglio, C. Rinaldi, *L'Architettura Delle Piramidi Menfite Parte IV La Grande Piramide di Cheope*. (Torino, 1965) [Band 1](#),140; R.Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*; 117f.

¹⁴ For more information about these shafts see: R.Stadelmann, R.Gantenbrink, *Die sogenannten Luftkanäle der Cheopspyramide. Modellkorridore für den Aufstieg des Königs zum Himmel*. In: *MDAIK* 50, (1994) 285f.

located.¹⁵ Lehner believed that it was used as place for the Ka statue and assumed that the Queen's Chamber plays here the role of the serdab.¹⁶

But I don't agree with these interpretations. I believe that this chamber was the most important place in the pyramid. In this mysterious chamber the unification of Re -who represents the soul of the dead- with Osiris -who represents the body of the dead- occurred.

This unification of Re and Osiris was known from the pyramid texts¹⁷, but it was not clear and common in that time as it became in the New Kingdom, when it became the main subject in the religious books.¹⁸

This unification took place in the depth *md3t*¹⁹ of the underworld, in the middle of the journey, and this applied to the Queen's Chamber, which lies exactly half-way between the north and south faces of the pyramid.

The body of Osiris, when he united with Re, was named *št3t* namely the mystery the "secret self", in which Re was rejuvenated during the night, and through which he was born in

¹⁵ R.Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*, 118; F.Petrie, *The Pyramids and Temples of Gizeh* (London, 1883), 136f.

¹⁶ M.Lehner, *Geheimnis der Pyramiden* (München, 1997) 111.

¹⁷ Pyr.703-705; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1962) 132.

¹⁸ E. Hornung, *Das Amduat*; E. Hornung, *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits. Teil I: Text, AH7* (Genf 1979); A. Piankoff, *Le livre des quererts* (Kairo 1953); J.A. Roberson, *The Book of the Earth: A study of ancient Egyptian symbol-system and the evolution of New Kingdom cosmographic models*. unpublished Ph.D. dissertation; (Pennsylvania Univesity, 2007)

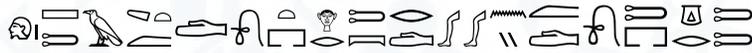
¹⁹ I. Hegenbarth-Reichardt, *Der Raum der Zeit (Eine Untersuchung zu den altägyptischen Vorstellungen und Konzeptionen von Zeit und Raum anhand des Unterweltbuches Amduat)*, (Wiesbaden, 2006) 222.

the east place, the body which embraced Re in the night and gave him birth in the morning²⁰.


h3t 3t imyt 3ht h3t ntr st3t

"The great corpse, which is in the horizon, the mysterious and divine corpse"²¹.

This *st3t* was described in the texts of the New Kingdom as one her head "in the Upper Duat, and her feet being in the Lower Duat"



tp st3t m dw3t hrjt rdwj.sy²² m dw3t hrjt²³

"The head of the mysterious one is in the Upper Netherworld; her feet are in the Lower Netherworld".²⁴

The Upper Duat is equivalent to the height of the daylight world which is equivalent here to the King's Chamber, and the Lower Duat is synonymous with *htmyt*, the "place of Annihilation" in the eastern horizon, where the Damned ones are punished", which is equivalent here to the Underground Chamber, which represent the hell of Soker *rst3w*. Also we can say that the niche in the east of the Queen's Chamber was the place of *st3t*, whose head was in the King's Chamber(Upper Duat), and whose feet were in the Underground Chamber(Lower Duat).

The union of Re and Osiris leads to the renewal of the energies of life in both gods and all aspects of life. The Egyptians believed

²⁰ J.C.Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the solar-osirian unity: cryptographic compositions in the tombs of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI, and Ramesses IX* (Chicago, 1995), 566, Fn.50.

²¹ E.Hornung, *Zwei ramessidische Königsgräber: Ramses IV. und Ramses VII, Theben 11*(Mainz,1990) 64f, pl.117.

²² Substituting — for —

²³ Substituting  for 

²⁴ A.Piankoff, *La creation du disque solaire* , *IFAO* 19,(1953) 45, pl.25; J.C.Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the solar-osirian unity*, 563.

that the emergence of the first thread of light in the sky at dawn was due to this union.²⁵

This means that the life was renewed in the Queen's Chamber and from it the king ascended to his burial chamber, which represent the last station in his journey, and from which he shall arise in the sky with the Sun God.

3.4 The Grand Gallery

The Grand Gallery is an architectonic masterpiece. Its ceiling consists of a corbel vault built of seven layers of enormous limestone blocks, each of which projects about seven and a half centimeters. The passage is 47 meters long and 8.46 meters high²⁶.(Fig.5)

The function of this magnificent ascending passage is unidentified. The design features suggest that it had a specific purpose. If it was symbolic, then the features would have symbolic explanations.

I think that this ascending passage was constructed as magnificent gallery to be the path of *šbt* (the form of giant represented the united Re-Osiris) to the king's Chamber. I also believe that number seven of the layers of ceiling may indicate to the Seventh hour of the night in which the enemies of Re would be under his feet to enable him to arise in the sky.

3.5 The King's Chamber

The King's Chamber is 10.47 meters from east to west, and 5.234 meters north to south. It has a flat roof 5.974 meters above the floor. 0.91 m above the floor there are two narrow shafts in the north and south walls. The purpose of these shafts is not clear, they appear to be aligned towards the stars or areas of the northern and southern skies, yet one of them follows a dog-leg course through the masonry, indicating no intention to directly sight stars through them. They were long believed by

²⁵ W. Barta, *Die Bedeutung der Jenseitstexte für den verstorbenen König, MÄS42* (Berlin, 1985) 80.

²⁶ [R.Stadelmann](#), *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden*, 115.

Egyptologists to be "air shafts" for ventilation, but this idea has now been widely abandoned in favor of the shafts serving a ritualistic purpose associated with the ascension of the king's spirit to the heavens²⁷.

Here the journey of the sun approached its end. Here the Sun God Re separated from Osiris and arises in the sky from the pyramid. He lasted Osiris in the pyramid, which represents the Duat, the realm of Osiris, who waits for the next night, when the god Re comes to him and gives him life once again.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The unusual system of chambers and passages running throughout the Great Pyramid, probably reflects an attempt by early Pharaohs to construct a permanent "Duat" world, very similar in appearance to the many illustrations of passages and chambers depicted in the Am-Duat texts painted all over Tomb walls in the Valley of the Kings.

4.2 The Underground Chamber symbolizes the cave of Soker which occupies the Fourth and Fifth hour in the Amduat.

4.3 The dead king who was equivalent to the sun god left the cave of Soker in peace, and went through the so called escape shaft to the next step of the journey which was embodied in the so called Queen's Chamber.

4.4 The so called Queen's Chamber was the most important place in the pyramid, because it symbolized the place of the most mysterious event in the journey, the unification between Re and Osiris, which occupied the Sixth hour in Amduat.

4.5 The niche in the Queen's Chamber maybe represent the place of the goddess *št3t*, who represents the united Re-Osiris, and whom was described in texts as the goddess her head in the Upper Duat, and her feet in the Lower Duat.

²⁷ K.Jackson, J.Stamp, *Pyramid: Beyond Imagination. Inside the Great Pyramid of Giza* (2002), 79, 104; A.Fakhri, *The Pyramids*, (Chicago and London,1969) 118; M.Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids* (London,1997) 114; R.Stadelmann, R.Gantenbrink, *Die sogenannten Luftkanäle der Cheopspyramide*, 285ff.

This mysterious lady was represented in the Book of the Earth, standing with her hands held palms up, looking backward. In her left hand, she holds a ram-headed bird. In her right hand, she holds a disc. The text identifies these two images as the two bas of the Sun God. Here the sun travels over the hands of this goddess as he travels between the mountains of the horizon²⁸.

The two raised arms of the goddess in this representation are very similar to the north and south air-shafts around the niche of the Queen's Chamber. Therefore we may say that this chamber embodied the goddess *št3t*, who represents the corpse of Osiris when it was united with Re. This maybe the reason of the strange name of this chamber as the Queen's Chamber. (Fig.6)

4.6 After the unification between Re and Osiris in the Sixth hour of the night, they still be united until the end of the journey in the Twelfth hour . So this united gods will pass through the ascending passage, which was called the Grand Gallery to the King's Chamber. This is the reason of the magnificent of this passage to fit to the great one who passes through it. And this is also the reason of the similarity between the ceiling of this passage and the ceiling of the Queen's Chamber.

4.7 I believe that the Grand Gallery symbolizes the Seventh hour of the night, the hour of defeating the enemies of Re to enable him to arise in the sky.²⁹

4.8 The King's Chamber represents the last station in the journey, which occupies the Twelfth hour of the night, in which the dead king, who equivalent to the Sun God, arises in the sky, and be separated from Osiris, who shall stay in the Duat waiting the next coming of Re in the next night. This perception explains the naming of the pyramid as " horizon of Khufu" the place of arising Khufu.(Fig.7)

²⁸ N.Billing, The Secret One. An Analysis of Core Motif in the Books of the Netherworld, SAK 34 (2006) Fig.3,5

²⁹ E. Hornung, *Das Amduat*, 125f.

4.9 As the life is renewed by the union of the soul and the body, it is renewed as well by the union of Re and Osiris every night³⁰. The Egyptologists believe that as long as Re unites with Osiris every night and leaves him in the morning, that means the continuity of renewal time, and when the end of the world comes, Atum the nocturnal form of Re will unite with Osiris, and will never be separated from him³¹. Thereby the wheel of the universe stops, and the life ends. Also they see in the pyramid the place which controls the continuity and stopping of life upon earth.

4.10 In the late religious texts they believed that Osiris embodied the Duat,³² in which the journey of the sun shall occur every night, so we may say that the pyramid with its unusual construction represents the body of Osiris itself. Some scholars see in the chambers and passages of the pyramid a representation of a standing king with a crown upon his head, who maybe represent Osiris.(Fig.8)

³⁰ E. Hornung, *Die Nachtfahrt der Sonne*, 95.

³¹ W. Westendorf, Die Geburt der Zeit aus dem Raum, *GM* 63(1983) 74.

³² E. Hornung, *Das Buch von den Pforten des Jenseits nach den Versionen des Neuen Reiches* II; 290f; *Idem*, Zu den Schlußszenen der Unterweltbücher, *MDAIK* 57, 218, Abb.1

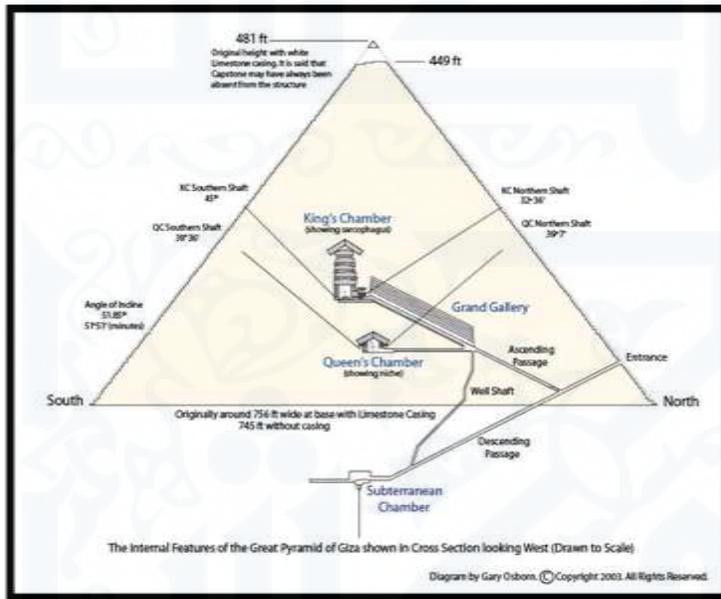


Fig.1 Diagram of the interior structures of the Great Pyramid.

<http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread531478/pg2>



Fig 2. The Underground Chamber

<http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk/Ghizaarchitecture.htm>

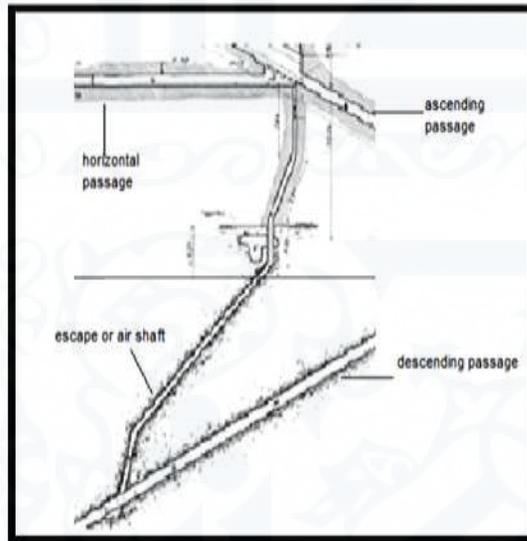


Fig 3. The air or escape shaft

<http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk/Ghizaarchitecture.htm>

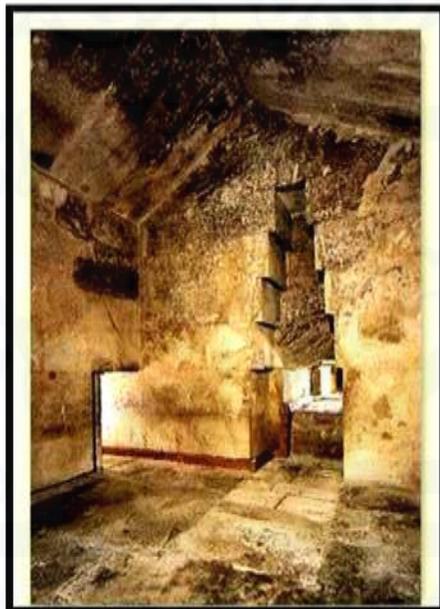


Fig 4. The Niche in the Queen's Chamber

<http://www.ancient-wisdom.co.uk/Ghizaarchitecture.htm>

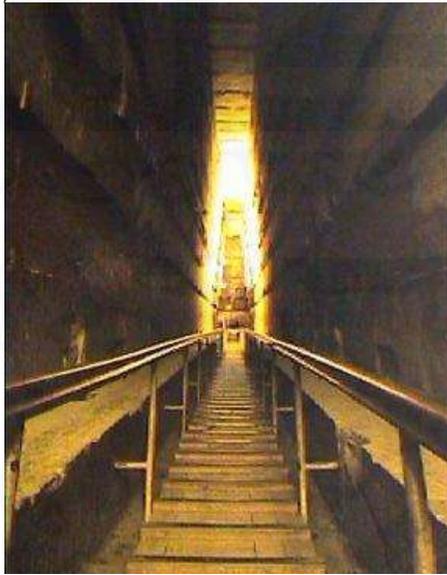


Fig 5. The Grand Gallery

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza

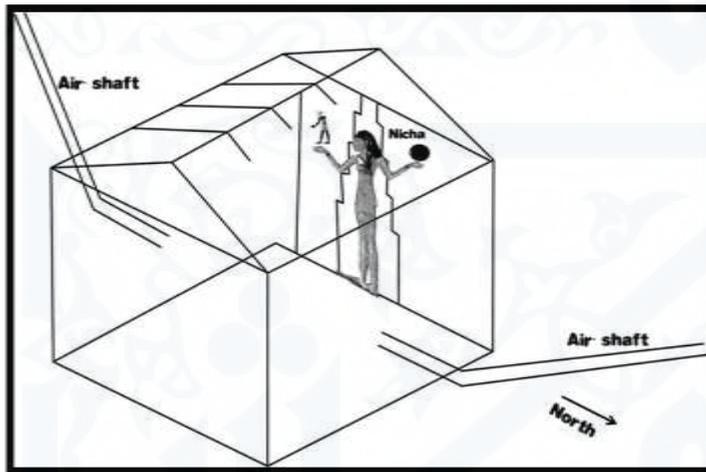


Fig 6.

Imaginary sketch of the Niche in the Queen's Chamber with statue of *št3t*

(My drawing)

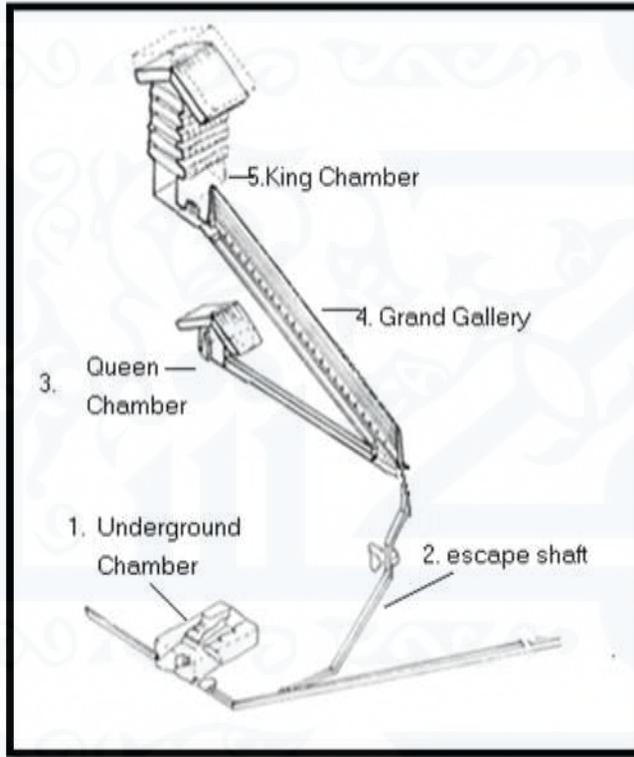


Fig 7.

The route of the Sun God in the pyramid from sunset until sunrise

R.Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Vom Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder.*

(Mainz am Rhein, 1997) Taf.45 b

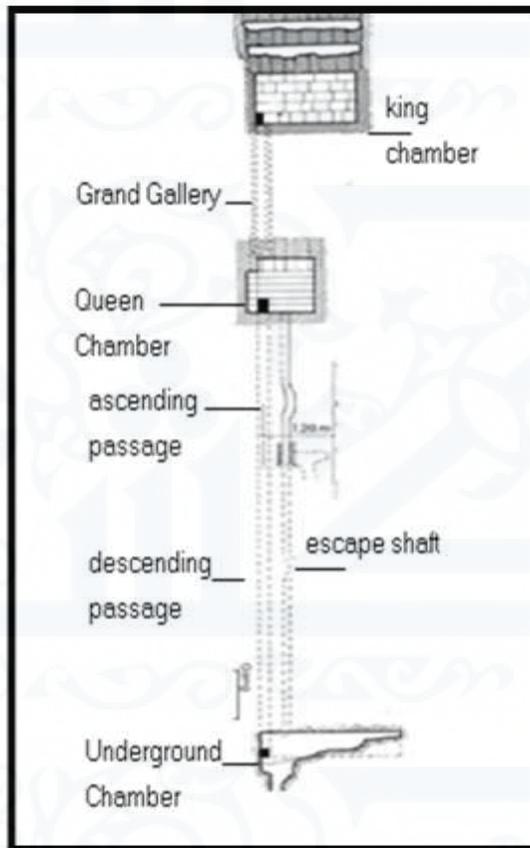


Fig 8 Chambers and passages in the Great Pyramid

look like a standing king

R.Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Vom Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder.*

(Mainz am Rhein, 1997) Taf.45 c