THE OTHER PYRAMIDS[1]

What do you think of when someone mentions the pyramids? Probably the three at Egypt's Giza complex, including the iconic Great Pyramid. Surprisingly, however, Egypt isn't the African country with the highest number of pyramids! That accolade instead goes to its southern neighbour Sudan, which boasts more than 200 pyramids. In Egypt's case, the tally is closer to 100. This all begs the question: why are there so many more pyramids in Sudan?

The Sudan pyramids are in a region called Nubia, itself once home to the Kingdom of Kush. This ancient kingdom lasted from about 780 BC to about AD 350 and fluctuated in size throughout its history. At its largest geographical extent, Kush comprised much of the land currently taken up by the modern states of Egypt and Sudan.

From 744 to 656 BC, the Kushite monarchs even ruled Ancient Egypt, too, as its 25th Dynasty. For most of the Kushite kingdom's existence, however, it was ruled separately to Egypt, with both cultural and trade links flourishing between the two countries. This all helps to explain why Kushite leaders took cues from the Egyptians when it came to preparing for the afterlife. While the Giza pyramids were built around 2,600 to 2,500 BC, the Nubian pyramids didn't start emerging until about the 7th century BC.

Why have Sudan's pyramids been so overlooked compared to Egypt's? One simple reason is civil war leaving Sudan too dangerous for many tourists to visit. You

can find most of these pyramids in the areas of El-Kurru, Nuri, Jebel Barkal and Meroë. The earliest Sudan pyramids were built in El-Kurru, the resting place of the last 25th Dynasty king, Tantamani. Just don't expect to find his pyramid there. That's because it's no longer standing — but you can still visit his tomb. Nubian pyramids — unlike Ancient Egyptian pyramids — were built as headstones rather than tombs. So, the ruler's remains would be interred under the pyramid, not inside it.

KUSH[2]

In trying to find a map of the kingdom of Kush, I came across this map that I thought might be of interest. Its historical accuracy is doubtful as my understanding was that Africa comprised linguistic groups and dominant tribes rather than European-style countries. Also, Egypt would have been conquered by Alexander The Great by 350BC. In antiquity, the area south of the Nile's First Cataract was known as Kush.

The region of Nubia was an early cradle of civilisation, producing several complex societies that engaged in trade and industry. The city-state of Kerma emerged as the dominant political force between 2450 and 1450 BC, controlling the Nile Valley between the first and fourth cataracts,

an area as large as Egypt. The Egyptians were the first to identify Kerma as "Kush" probably from the indigenous ethnonym "Kasu", over the next several centuries the two civilisations engaged in intermittent warfare, trade, and cultural exchange. Much of Nubia came under Egyptian rule during the New Kingdom period (1550–1070 BC). Following Egypt's disintegration amid the Late Bronze Age collapse, the Kushites reestablished a kingdom in Napata (now modern Karima, Sudan). Though Kush had developed many cultural affinities with Egypt, such as the veneration of Amun, and the royal families of both kingdoms occasionally intermarried, Kushite culture, language and ethnicity was distinct; Egyptian art distinguished the people of Kush by their dress, appearance, and even method of transportation.

In the 8th century BC, King Kashta ("the Kushite") peacefully became King of Upper Egypt, while his daughter, Amenirdis, was appointed as Divine Adoratrice of Amun in Thebes. His successor Piye invaded Lower Egypt, establishing the Kushite-ruled Twenty-fifth Dynasty. Piye's daughter, Shepenupet II, was also appointed Divine Adoratrice of Amun. The monarchs of Kush ruled Egypt for over a century until the Assyrian conquest, being dethroned by the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal in the mid-seventh century BC. Following the severing of ties with Egypt, the Kushite imperial capital was located at Meroë, during which time it was known by the Greeks as Aethiopia.

From the third century BC to the third century AD, the northernmost part of Nubia would be invaded and annexed by Egypt. Ruled by the Macedonians and Romans for the next 600 years, this territory would be known in the Greco-Roman world as Dodekaschoinos. It was later taken back by the Kushite king Yesebokheamani. The Kingdom of Kush persisted as a major regional power until the fourth century AD when it weakened and disintegrated from internal rebellion amid worsening climatic conditions and invasions and conquest of the kingdom of Kush by the Noba people who introduced the Nubian languages and gave their name to Nubia itself.

Long overshadowed by its more prominent Egyptian neighbour, archaeological discoveries since the late 20th century have revealed Kush to be an advanced civilisation in its own right. The Kushites had their own unique language and script; maintained a complex economy based on trade and industry; mastered archery; and developed a complex, urban society with uniquely high levels of female participation.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST CITY[3]

Çatalhöyük overlooks the Konya Plain, southeast of the present-day city of Konya (ancient Iconium) in Turkey. The eastern settlement forms a mound that would have risen about 20 m (66 ft) above the plain at the time of the latest Neolithic occupation. There is also a smaller settlement mound to the west and a Byzantine settlement a few hundred meters to the east. The prehistoric mound settlements were abandoned before the Bronze Age. A channel of the Çarşamba River once flowed between the two mounds, and the settlement was built on alluvial clay which may have been favourable for early agriculture. Currently, the closest river is the Euphrates.

The site was first excavated by James Mellaart (right) in 1958. He later led a team which further excavated there for four seasons between 1961 and 1965. These excavations revealed this section of Anatolia as a centre of advanced culture in the Neolithic period. Excavation revealed 18 successive layers of buildings signifying various stages of the settlement and eras of history. The bottom layer of buildings can be dated as early as 7100 BC while the top layer of the later West Mound is from 5600 BC.

Mellaart was banned from Turkey for his involvement in the Dorak affair, in which he published drawings of supposedly important Bronze Age artefacts that later went missing. Mellaart was an undoubted genius but a flawed character. For example, he believed that patterns on the walls were the origin of those on Turkish *kilim* rugs, but no evidence has been found to support this idea. After this scandal, the site lay idle until 1993, when excavations began under the leadership of Ian Hodder (left) then at the University of Cambridge. The Hodder-led excavations ended in 2018. Hodder, a former student of Mellaart, chose the site as the first "real world" test of his then controversial theory of post-processual archaeology. The site has always had a strong research emphasis upon engagement with digital methodologies, driven by the project's experimental and reflexive methodological framework.New excavations are being directed by Ali Umut Türkcan from Anadolu University.

Initial estimates suggested an average population of between 5,000 and 7,000. However, more recent work using revised ideas of the distribution of residential buildings, and employing archaeological and ethnographic data exploring building use, suggests that between 600 and 800 people would have lived at Çatalhöyük East during an average year during the Middle phase (6700–6500 BC).

The sites were set up as large numbers of buildings clustered together. Households looked to their neighbours for help, trade, and possible marriage for their children. The inhabitants lived in mud-brick houses that were crammed together in an aggregate structure. No footpaths or streets were used between the dwellings, which were clustered in a honeycomb-like maze. Most were accessed by holes in the ceiling and doors on the side of the houses, with doors reached by ladders and stairs. The rooftops were effectively streets. The ceiling openings also served as the only source of ventilation, allowing smoke from the houses' open hearths and ovens to escape. Houses had plaster interiors accessed by squared-off timber ladders or steep stairs. These were usually on the south wall of the room, as were cooking hearths and ovens. The main rooms

contained raised platforms that may have been used for a range of domestic activities. Typical houses contained two rooms for everyday activity, such as cooking and crafting. All interior walls and platforms were plastered to a smooth finish. Ancillary rooms were used as storage, and were accessed through low openings from main rooms. Left is the site today.

All rooms were kept scrupulously clean. Archaeologists identified very little rubbish in the buildings, finding middens outside the ruins, with sewage and food waste, as well as significant amounts of ash from burning wood, reeds, and animal dung. In good weather, many daily activities may also have taken place on the rooftops, which may have formed a plaza. In later periods, large communal ovens appear to have been built on these rooftops. Over time, houses were renewed by partial demolition and rebuilding on a foundation of rubble, which was how the mound was gradually built up. As many as eighteen levels of settlement have been uncovered.

As a part of ritual life, the people of Çatalhöyük buried their dead within the village. Human remains have been found in pits beneath the floors and especially beneath hearths, the platforms within the main rooms, and beds. Bodies were tightly flexed before burial and were often placed in baskets or wound and wrapped in reed mats. Disarticulated bones in some graves suggest that bodies may have been exposed in the open air for a time before the bones were gathered and buried. In some cases, graves were disturbed, and the individual's head removed from the skeleton. These heads may have been used in rituals, as some were found in other areas of the community. In a woman's grave, spinning whorls were recovered and in a man's grave, stone axes. Some skulls were plastered and painted with ochre to recreate faces, a custom more characteristic of Neolithic sites in Syria and Neolithic Jericho than at sites closer by.

Vivid murals and figurines are found throughout the settlement on interior and exterior walls. Distinctive clay figurines of women, notably the Seated Woman of Çatalhöyük (right), have been found in the upper levels of the site. Although no identifiable temples have been found, the graves, murals, and figurines suggest that the people of Çatalhöyük had a religion rich in symbols. Rooms with concentrations of these items may have been shrines or public meeting areas. Predominant images include men with erect phalluses, hunting scenes, red images of the now extinct aurochs (wild cattle) and stags, and vultures swooping down on headless figures.
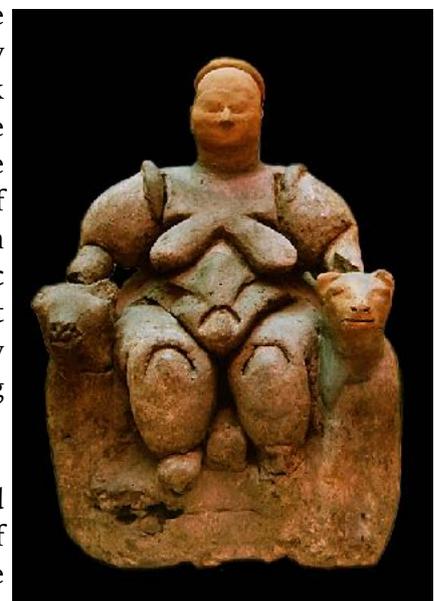
There is no doubt that this is a remarkable site discovered and excavated by two remarkable archaeologists; and it blows out of the water the accepted theory that civilisation began at one site - the Fertile Crescent (Iraq).

DEATH OF A POPE[4]

The death of the pope is verified by the Cardinal Camerlengo, or chamberlain, who traditionally performed the task by calling out his baptismal (not papal) name. After confirming the death of the pope, the camerlengo pronounces the phrase *sede vacante* (The throne is empty). The camerlengo takes possession of the Ring of the Fisherman worn by the pope. The ring, along with the papal seal, is later destroyed before the College of Cardinals. The tradition originated to avoid forgery of documents, but today merely is a symbol of the end of the pope's reign.

During the *sede vacante,* as the papal vacancy is known, certain limited powers pass to the College of Cardinals, which is convoked by the Dean of the College of Cardinals. All cardinals are obliged to attend the general congregation of cardinals, except those whose health does not permit, or who are over eighty. Those older cardinals may choose to attend if they please as non-voting members. The particular congregation that deals with the day-to-day matters of the Church includes the cardinal camerlengo and the three cardinal assistants—one cardinal bishop, one cardinal priest and one cardinal deacon—chosen by lot. Every three days, new cardinal assistants are chosen by lot. The camerlengo and assistants are responsible, among other things, for maintaining the election's secrecy

The congregations must make certain arrangements in respect of the pope's burial, which by tradition takes place within four to six days of the pope's death, leaving time for pilgrims to see the dead pontiff, and occurs within a nine-day period of mourning known as *the novemdiales* (Latin for 'nine days'). The congregations also fix the date and time of the commencement of the *conclave*. The conclave normally takes place fifteen days after the death of the pope, but the congregations may extend the period to a maximum of twenty days in order to permit other cardinals to arrive in Vatican City.

A papal conclave is a gathering of the College of Cardinals convened to elect the bishop of Rome, also known as the pope. Catholics consider the pope to be the apostolic

successor of Saint Peter and the earthly head of the Catholic Church. It is the oldest historical method of electing a particular head of state that remains in use to the present day.

Concerns around political interference led to reforms after the interregnum of 1268–1271 and Pope Gregory X's decree during the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 that the cardinal electors should be locked in seclusion *cum clave* (Latin for 'with a key') and not permitted to leave until a new pope had been elected. Conclaves are now held in the Sistine Chapel of the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City. Since the Apostolic Age, the bishop of Rome, like other bishops, has been chosen by the consensus of the clergy and laity of the diocese. In 1059, the body of electors was more precisely defined, when the College of Cardinals was designated the sole body of electors. Since then, other details of the process have developed. In 1970, Pope Paul VI limited the electors to cardinals under 80 years of age in *Ingravescentem aetatem*. The current procedures established by Pope John Paul II in *Universi Dominici gregis* were slightly amended in 2007 and 2013 by Pope Benedict XVI.

A two-thirds supermajority vote is required to elect the new pope. The most recent papal conclave occurred in 2013, when Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected as Pope Francis, succeeding the retiring Pope Benedict XVI. Following the death of Pope Francis on April 21, 2025, a conclave will be determined by the College of Cardinals. Incidentally, if like me you enjoyed the film *Conclave*, Vatican experts believe it gave a fairly accurate view of the process but there were some glaring differences to the real thing, from the shade of the robes to the idea that an unknown who had not been presented to the College could be considered as a candidate - but why let the truth ruin a good story. If you want to learn more, I recommend the very readable *The Popes* by John Julius Norwich (Vintage 2012).

1. Taken from Sky History, photo courtesy of JSTOR Daily.
2. Courtesy of Wikipedia, map from The African History's post on Facebook.
3. Following a TV program, this article was taken from wikipedia. Photo credits: artists impression by Dan Lewandowski in Science News; James Mellaart courtesy of Omar Hoftun, Creative Commons; Ian Hodder courtesy of Stanford University; Site today from National Geographic; seated woman courtesy of Ankara Museum.
4. With thanks to Wikipedia. Photo - Cardinals walk in procession to the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, at the beginning of the conclave, April 18, 2005. (Osservatore Romano via AP, File)