

THE ORIGIN OF THE GUANCHES - PARALLELS WITH ANCIENT EGYPT?

by

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Summary

On 07, March 1999 Dr. Joann Fletcher, Prof. Don Brothwell, University of York, and Joyce Tylor, University of Cambridge, examined an about 500 years old Guanche mummy from the Canary Islands. They found similarities to Egyptian mummification techniques used in the Egyptian 21. Dynasty. The methods were up to now regarded as unique and have only been related to Egyptian mummies, mummified after 1.070 BC. The research results correlated with the currently accepted theory of settlement of the Canaries. According to this theory two to three immigration waves from Northafrica to the Canary Islands have taken place. The second took place around 1.100 BC. Due to this reason as well as to further cultural similarities, e.g. pyramid-building, some experts come to the conclusion that contacts between Egypt and the Canary Islands, had existed. Both cultures, might have had the same ancestors.

THE PYRAMIDS of Guimar on Teneriffa have become world-famous since Thor Heyerdahl's engagement and have been described and examined repeatedly within the last few years. Little has become known as yet, however, about the cultural and religious achievements, and their origins, of the original inhabitants of this wonderful island, and the other Canary islands. This is deplorable because their culture, in certain respects, may be regarded as quite comparable with advanced civilizations elsewhere, e.g. Egypt. Some archeologists even see connections. The British Egyptologists Dr. Joann Fletcher, Prof. Don Brothwell and Joyce Fyler

examined an about 500 years old Guanche mummy at the University of Cambridge on 07.March1999 and came to very interesting results. The examinations Brothwell already started in the sixties became known to a wide audience by a BBC-Television documentation sent in 2001: „Cave Mummies of the Canaries“¹. The expert's team research results could actually throw a completely new light on the prehistory of the Canaries, because striking similarities between the

¹ results are published in Reid, H.: In Search of the Immortals: Mummies, Death and the Afterlife, 2001, p. 160-170

mummification methods in Egypt of the 21st dynasty and the so called Guanche mummy were discovered.

Mummification methods of the Ancient Egyptians...

THE MUMMIFICATION techniques of the ancient Egyptians were subject to constant change. Whereas the Old Kingdom (traditional Chronology 2800 - 2200 B.C.) mummification techniques were rather primitive, the tradition reached a high degree of sophistication in the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.). During the Middle Kingdom (approx. 2200-1750 B.C.), occasionally already earlier the Egyptians began rule in the new empire. This custom changed again during the 21st dynasty (1070 B.C.). Germany's most well known mummy expert Renate Germer e.g. writes in her book: „Mumien, Zeugnisse des Pharaonensreis“: *„According to the ideas of the ancient Egyptians of the 21st dynasty the mummy bodies dried out of ancient times didn't correspond to her ideal of a mummy any more.“* That means, that during the 21st dynasty the Egyptians had begun to fill the bodies on of the dead with linen or saw dust, but the muscle tissue remained shrunken. This was however detrimental to true-to-life appearances of the deceased. Then they had the idea, subcutaneous carry out cuts for the fabric and then stuff it with linen, wood shaves or sand and loam. Traditional practises, like the withdrawal of the brain by the nose, still was used just as the withdrawal of the organs. Finger- and footnails were fixed with threads, so that they couldn't fall down. Even the hair were dressed by the embalmers and then they rubbed it with wax and/or oil to preserve it. Then they served the body of the mummy with up to 14 numbers or about 375m² of linen bandages.²

² Germer, „Das Geheimnis der Mumien“, repeatedly proved

...and at the Guanches

Of course this is a very special method of embalming and the researchers were very surprised to find very similar mummification methods also on the Canaries, but not only in Egypt. The team Fletcher/Brothwell/Fyler subject to the Guanche mummy of an exact examination. Technical aids like computer tomography were used. Although the body of the man (deceased about 500 years ago) showed strong injuries, great similars were found in comparison with Egyptian mummies of the 21st dynasty: „I [H. Reid, annotation by R.P] *quizzed the experts on whether, in the light of the day's work, they now thought that Guanche and Egyptian mummification techniques were related. The consensus was that the techniques were uncannily mummification similar.*“³

Actual this observation isn't new. Already at the 1st international mummy convention 1992 on Teneriffa, the Spanish archeologists García Barrios and Ramundo José emphasized that many of the spiritual and practical characteristics typical of Guanche mummies show great similarities to Egyptian practices⁴.

FIRST, the embalmers have to be mentioned. On the Canaries, as in Egypt, they were subdivided into two categories: One was responsible for emptying the corpses, the other one for the embalming. And as in the land of the Nile (according to the chroniclers and historians) the former were avoided by the people, and the embalmers proper, however, were highly respected. The Canary chronicler Alonso de Espinosa describes this fact as follows: *„According to tradition there were, on these islands, men and women who were responsible for the task of embalming. These persons did not possess a good reputation, they lived in segregated quarters, contact*

³ Reid, p. 162

⁴ Barrios, José, Congreso p 159

with them was avoid, because they were regarded as impure, since occupied with the emptying of corpses. On the other hand the true embalmers proper, whose task it was to embalm the corpses, could claim their fellow-citizen's respect."⁵ For ancient Egypt it was the historian Diodorus who pointed to the unpopularity of the corpses openers. They had been so unpopular that they had to hide after their work not to be stoned.⁶ Diodorus' report has even been the pattern for the famous novel: „Uarda“, by the German author G. Ebers.

THE ANCIENT Canarian mummification practices determined by Fletcher and her Team look typically Egyptian: the Guanches, like the Egyptians, executed a cut on the left side of the abdominal region and removed the organs. They were cleaned and then put again into the abdominal cavity of the mummies.⁷ The cut was then stitched up cleanly in the abdominal wall. The sutures, however, were rougher than with the Egyptians. But this is not an indication of another mummification technology: the Guanches (for geographical reasons) did not have access to the same materials. There was only some farming on the Canaries. Plants to produce clothes, were non existing. The same with stock farming. Cows were unknown, therefore the natives of the Canaries used goatskins or kid-leather. Understandably this is circumstance inferred in mummification practices. Whereas the inhabitants of the Nile country used linen bandages, made from clothing pieces, the Guanches were only able to use what was at their disposal: up to 15 layers of goatskins. At last the fingernails and toe nails were attached with threads. The hair was fixed with beeswax and coiffured. Perhaps the

most important parallel to the Egyptian mummies of the 21st dynasty can be seen in the fact that the Guanche embalmers, too, used subcutaneous incisions and stuffed corpses. This practice is known elsewhere only from ancient Egypt, and was in vogue only after 1070 B.C.

Such an unusual treatment of corpses is not unique on the Canary Islands. So we can read e.g. in the exhibition catalog of the Museo Arqueologico y Etnografico de Tenerife with respect to mummies: „*Mummification as a part of the funeral rites of the Canarian aborigines, present different kind of operation performed on the corpses: washing, handling and treatment with chemical substances, desiccation and covering.*“⁸ And a little below: „*To some of them [the scientists, annotation R.P.] the bodies were eviscerated, even with extraction of the brain.*“⁹

LOOKED at superficially there were also instances of difference in mummification technologies. The Guanches did not use the same herbs and anointing substances for the embalming as the Egyptians. However, the materials used in Egypt were not available on the Canary Islands. The bandages show dissimilarities for the same reasons. In examinations of Guanche mummies scientists found up to 15 layers of kid-leather¹⁰. It is true, the Egyptians did not use goatskins but bandages of cloth. But obviously what cloth fabrics were for the Egyptians, namely garments burial material, were goatskins for the Canarians. The parallels then altogether seem to be quite impressive. Caution nevertheless

⁵ Schmidt, p. 84, translated from German to English

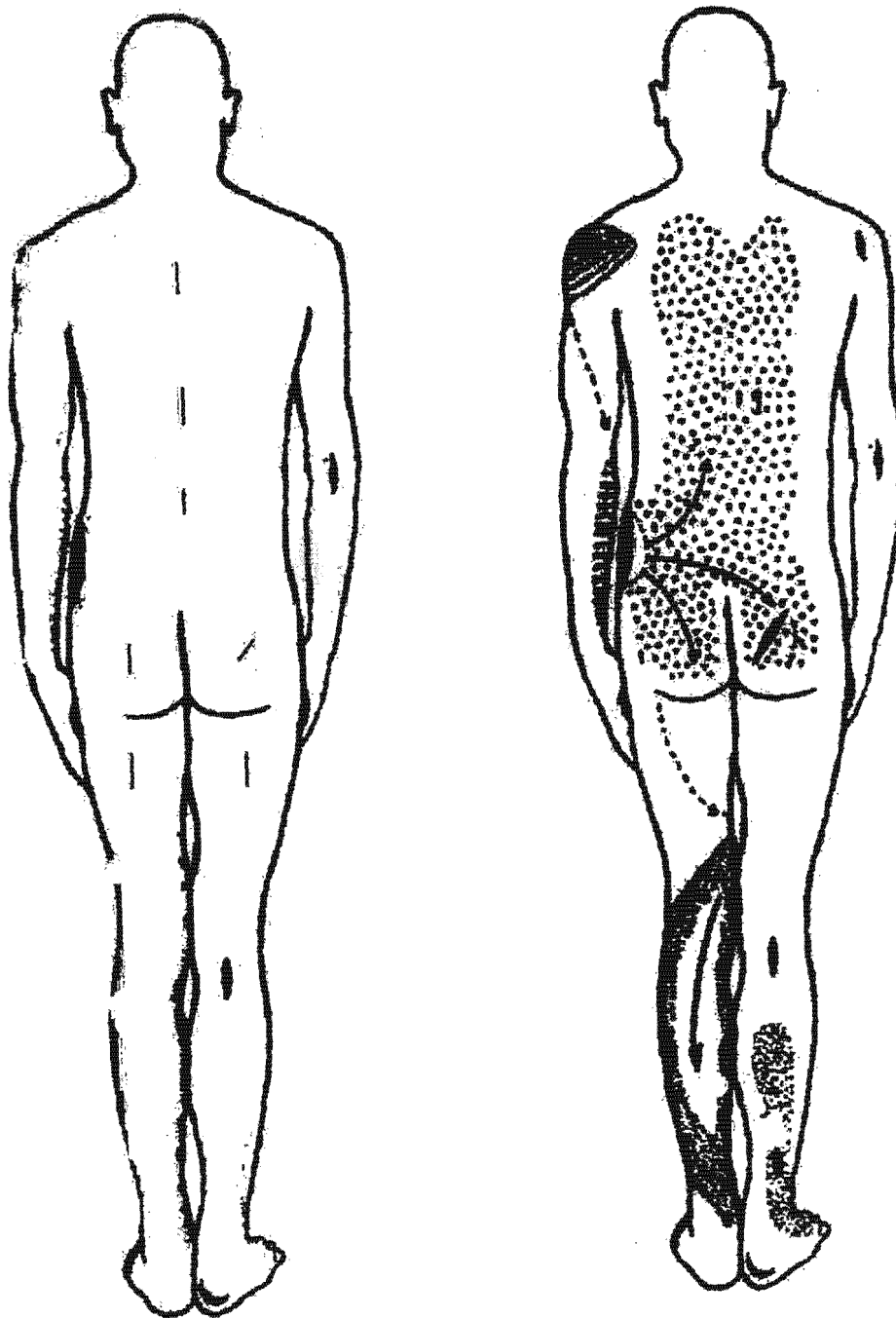
⁶ Hawass, p.138

⁷ cf. Etnografico de Tenerife, p. 35 Braem pp. P. 44. F.

⁸ p. 35

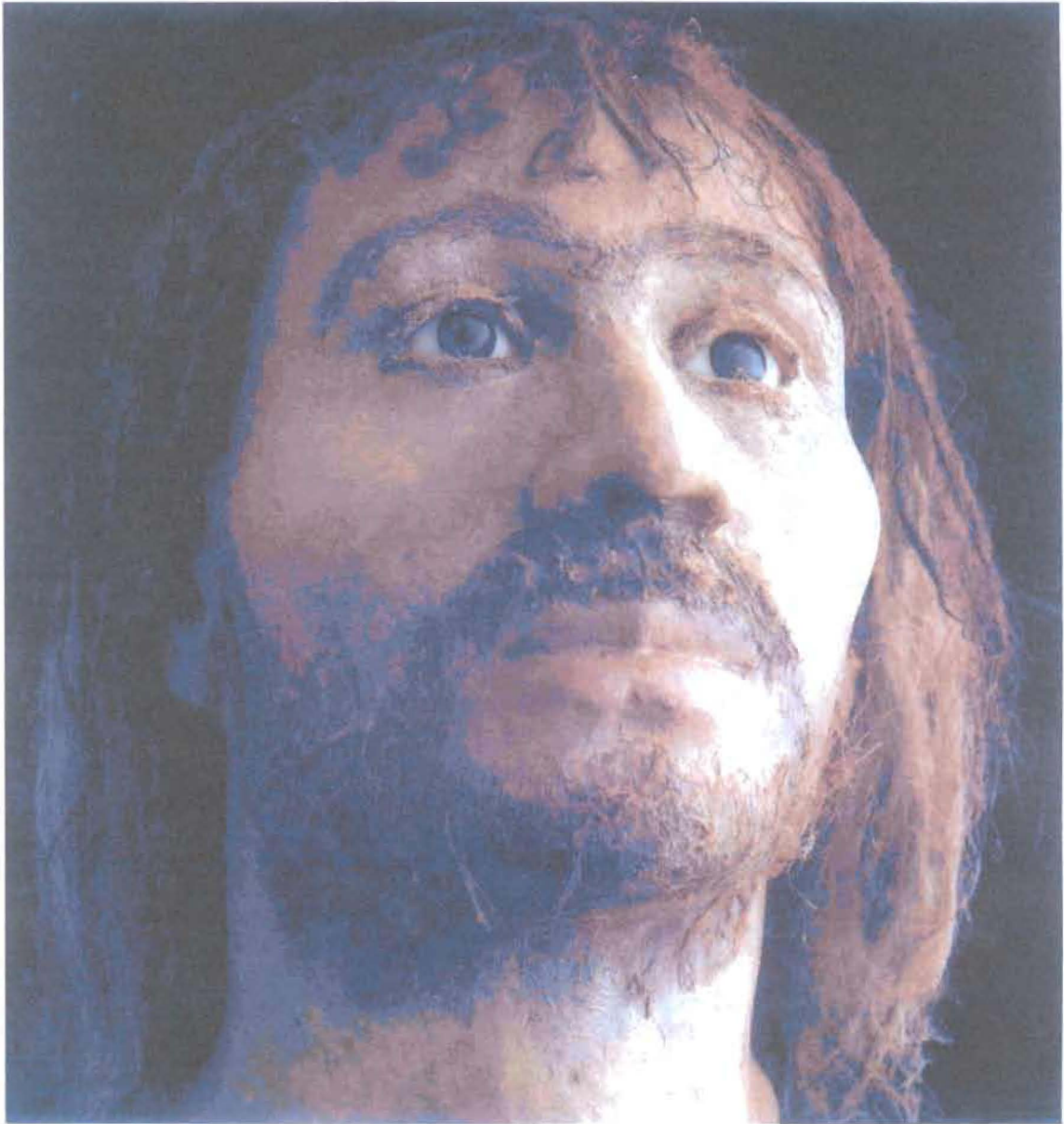
⁹ p. 36

¹⁰ Braem, p- 47



Subcutaneous Cuts on a Guanche Mummy, graphic: Reinhard Prah! After the TV-Documentation: Cave Mummies of the Canaries.

Subcutaneous Cuts on a Egyptian Mummy, Taken from Renate Germer, Hamburg (Germany): „Mumien, Zeugnisse des Pharaonenreichs“, p.80.



**Reconstructed Head from a Guanche;
Museo Arqueologico y Etnografico de Tenerife; catalog, p.36.**

necessary, says e.g. the expert Renate Germer. Available facts often are interpreted too fast according to our own ideas. It is fact that the preservation of corpses doesn't allow too many possibilities, dehydration is the first supreme dictate. So it would seem only logical that worldwide similar methods have been developed also without contacts. For quite specific, however, e.g. the manner of stuffing the corpses such explanations sound doubtful. The conclusion that we have to reckon with contacts between Egypt and the Guanches, does then not seem so far-fetched after all, especially since mummification techniques do not seem the only similarities between both cultures.

Pyramids like in Egypt?

THIS COMPARISON has often been made in books, journals and newspapers articles. Harald Braem even spoke about the missing link between Africa and America in reminiscence of Thor Heyerdahl, deceased in 2003. At first sight it is meanwhile hard to see special similarities with Egyptian pyramids, if one inspects the gigantic Egyptian more closely buildings. All pyramids on the Canary Islands have been built with volcanic rock, which is traceable in situ there, mainly basalt. The biggest complex on Teneriffa is surrounded by a 280 m long wall, and the Central pyramid with a base of 35 x 16 meters and 6 steps is just 12 meters high. Braem and Walter B. Hähnel indicate an average height of 6-7 meters for the pyramids of Guimar, one has a base of 10 x 20 meters, another one 9 x 35 meters. In comparison with the chufupyramid with its 146,5 meters of height and 230 m of length, the ceremonial buildings on the Canary Islands appear rather tiny. In other words it seems as if the small, rectangular but unequally built pyramids on the Canary Islands cannot be compared to the monumental pyramids of Egypt. There are not incidentally only on Teneriffa step pyramids, but also on Gran Canaria and Las Palmas.

Here polygonal buildings are known even a triangular one with concave sides.¹¹ The pyramids of ancient Egypt normally have been built in quite another manner, to wit square ground plan, smooth surfaces, and much bigger. This has, however, not been the case during the earliest times. During the earliest period of Pharaonic Egypt, the kings were buried in so-called Mastabas (from the Arabic word for „bench“).

One of these buildings, namely No. 3038 at Saqqara, positively shows certain affinities with the pyramids on the Canary Islands. On three sides it is surrounded by 8 small steps. It is supposed that it has been built by king Adjib, 7th king of the 1. dynasty, who is said to have lived around 2910 B.C. This building has, however, probably been situated in a pit of circa 4 meters depth, and in consequence nobody would have noticed it from distance. Though this tomb was surrounded by a wall of mud-bricks of 6 meters height it would have looked very similar to the Guimar pyramids, had it been situated on level ground.

A rather direct line of evolution can be observed from the mastabas to the rectangular (i.e. not square) step pyramid of Djoser (1st king of the 3rd dynasty, circa 2700 B.C.) Pyramids with smooth surfaces appeared even later, after about 100 years, in Egypt.

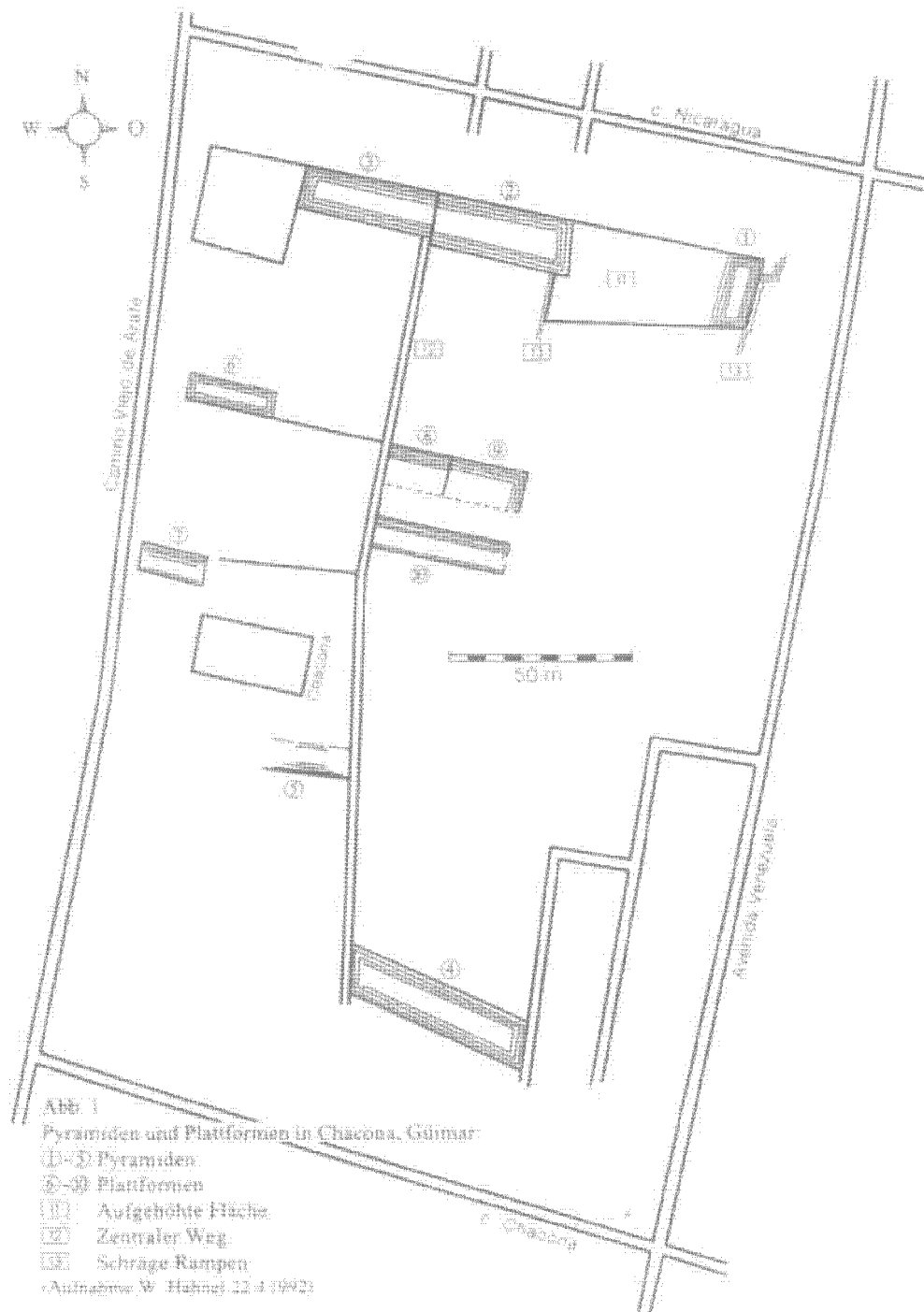
Can it then really be said that a comparison between the pyramids of ancient Egypt and of the Canary Islands sounds far-fetched?

Dating of Guanche culture

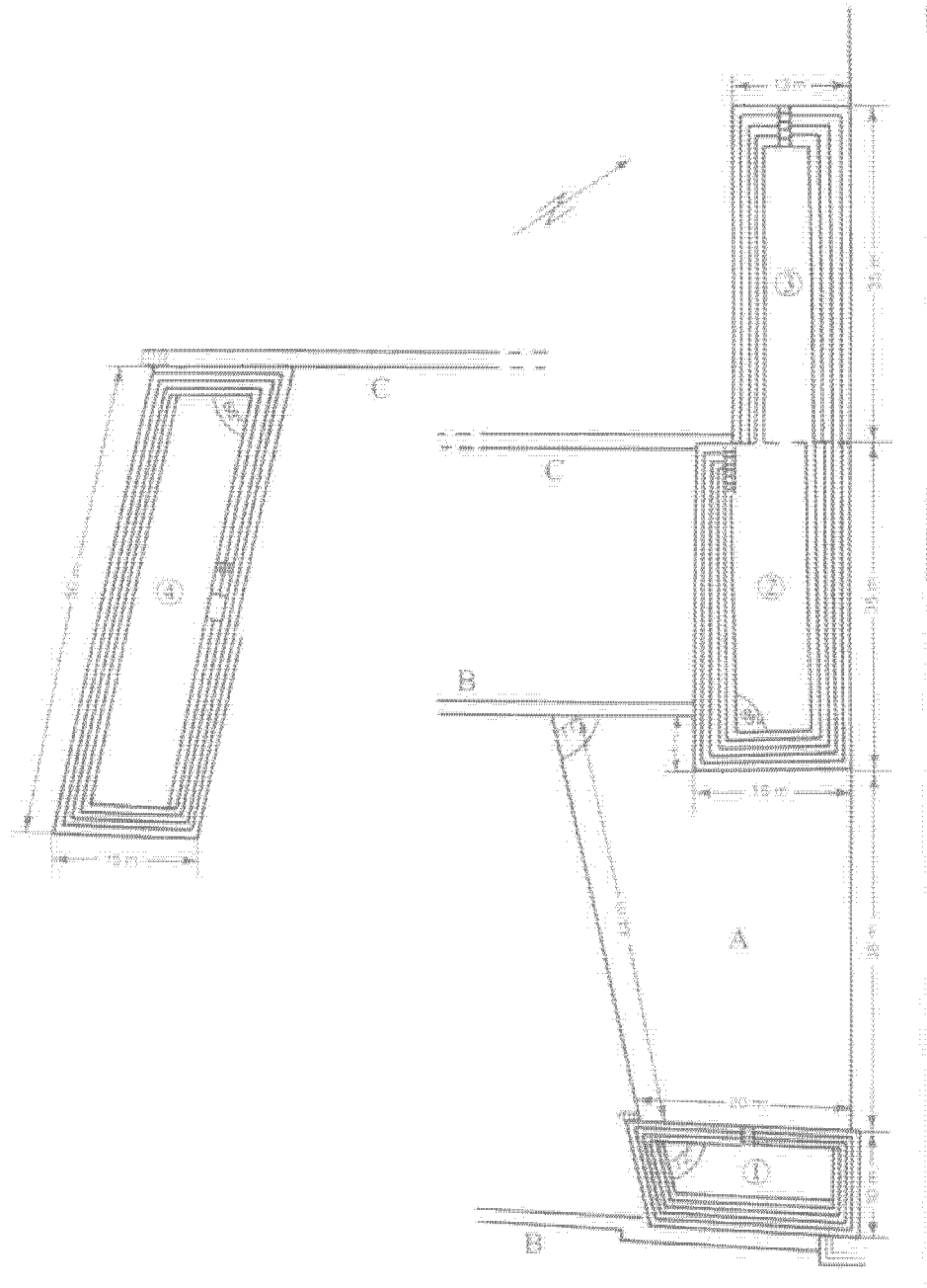
SOME WELL-KNOWN experts like Harald Braem, Hans-Joachim Ulbrich¹², Walter B. Hähnel and Joann Fletcher, in view of the

¹¹ Hähnel, p.359

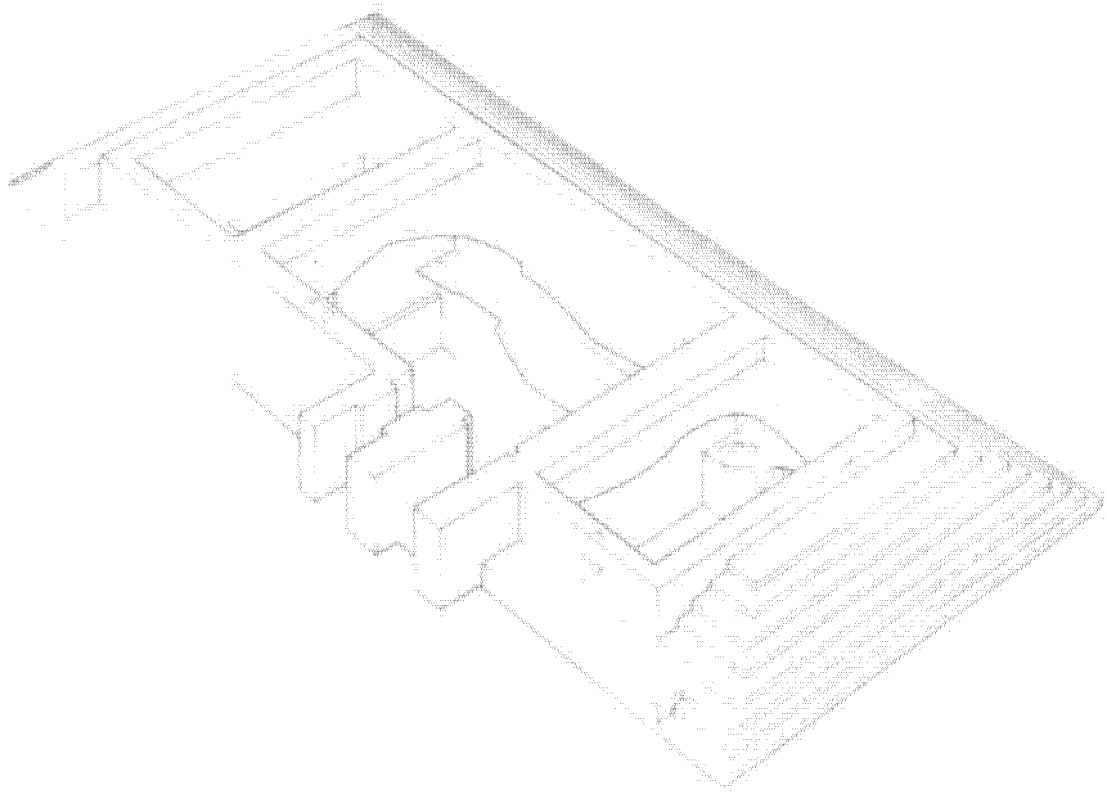
¹² Institutum Canarium, Austria, telephone call from 26. March 2004



**Plan of Guimar, Institutum Canarium, Vöcklabruck (Austria),
Walter B. Hänel, ALMOGAREN, p.367.**



**Some of the Most Important Pyramid Forms;
Institutum Canarium Vöcklabruck (Austria), Walter B. Hähnel, p.368.**



Econ, Lehner, „Das Geheimnis der Pyramiden“ p.81.

above and other cultural similarities, obviously do not exclude in principle contacts between Egyptian civilization and the Guanches. However, at least in currently accepted Egyptian chronology, there is a time span of circa 1500 years between the Cambridge mummy and the 21st dynasty of Egypt. This would be too much to postulate cultural contents. However, what do pyramids and mummies really say about the age of the Guanche culture? Tentative datings e.g. of the pyramids on the Canary Islands is at least controversial, among the specialists, even their at all in a scenario in which the pyramids have been built by the Guanches. Some (mostly

Spanish) archaeologists think that those are mounds piled up only after the conquest by Spanish farmers.

IN MY OWN opinion there can be no doubt, however, that the research results obtained by the Institute de Astrofisica de Canarias¹³ show quite clearly that we have here obviously sacral buildings. The institute was engaged by Thor Heyerdahl and the research results are convincing. The pyramids are oriented in line with certain „strategic points of the

¹³ Hähnel, p. 362

heavens.”¹⁴ They have been built in an exact manner and, moreover, cornerstones have been cut to certain angles which were essential for the general form, or configuration, of these buildings.

UNFORTUNATELY the pyramids of the Canaries cannot be dated correctly as yet, not even roughly. As yet no method is known to at least approximately determine which time has passed since some stone has been worked by man. Only the geological age of the material can be ascertained, but this is irrelevant for the problem, at which point in time the stone has been worked by man. Organic material, which might have been used for C14 dating, has as yet not been excavated near the pyramids, although under certain pyramids caves have been localized which may perhaps been used for burials. Though it is occasionally possible to use the patina or weathering of rock material for dating purposes, this is not possible on the Canary Islands, because „under the existing climate of the Canary Islands volcanic rock, especially basalt, weathers only very slowly. It is also not possible to use the covering of lichen, the growth of which is extremely on light and humidity. At Guimar one finds scarcely lichen on the rocks and stones, the climate is too dry.”¹⁵

On the other hand the form or configuration of these monuments of an as yet unknown Canarian past show affinities not only with Egypt, but also with the Megalithic cultures of Western Europe. There, however, these monuments have been created between 4500 and 2600 B.C. Have the pyramids on the Canary Islands been built during that same period?

Also the relatively low age of most of the mummies there, between 500 B.C. and the

15th century AD¹⁶, does not necessarily speak against a high age of Guanche culture. Harald Braem says about the C14-dated mummies as follows: „Exactly 34 skeletons have been found here (near La Guanche, annotation R.P.) in the stone chamber, which had been roofed over with stone slabs. It is assumed that they were those of members of the royal family. According to C14 carbon dating the skeletons were about a thousand years old - not very much for the Canarian culture, and not very useful because indicating only that point in time, at which at which the site discontinued. The Guanches had the tradition to use burial sites ever long periods of time”¹⁷

Till today the earliest settlement of the Canary Islands by man is thought to have occurred quite late¹⁸. Most experts think that this view of things is today definitively obsolete. A reliable dating, in which we can have confidence is, however, as yet still not possible. As it stands it is a matter of controversial debate. In 1963 the anthropologist Ilse Schwidetzky of Mainz (Germany) has studied the problem in depth. From her researches, to which we will return in a moment, she believed that we have to reckon with two immigrant waves, the first one beginning towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC, for which she found evidence on Gomera, and a second on before 1100 BC. More recent researches date the first wave as far back as the 4th millennium BC¹⁹.

The origin of the Canarian „Aborigines“

HOWEVER, that may have been: But from where did the first settlers of the Canary

¹⁴ Hähnel p. 362

¹⁵ translated from German, Hähnel, p. 364

¹⁶ Kelley and Smeenk Congreso p. 74

¹⁷ translated from German, Braem, p. 45

¹⁸ Rafael Conzales, spanish archeologist, for example dates the first settlement of the Canary Islands by man about 500 B.C., Reid, p. 143

¹⁹ private communication with Mr. Ulbrich

Islands arrive there? In fact this is not so easy to find out. First we have to realize that there has not been any homogenous ethnic entity, named „Guanches“, on the islands in the sense of an pan-Canarian nation. The Guanches were simply the natives of Teneriffa. On all islands there lived individual ethnic groups, of which today we know in some cases their own designation for themselves, in other names given by the Spaniards.

ON LANZAROTE and Fuerteventura they were called „Majos“, on Gran Canaria „Canarios“. On La Palma lived the „Benahoaristas“, on Gomera the „Gomeros“, and on Hierro the „Bimbaches“.²⁰ As yet the origin of all these tribes or ethnic groups is far from clear.

In scholarly discussions this thought-provoking enigma is known as the „Canarian Problem“. Known scenarios propose e.g. the Maghreb, especially Morocco, Egypt and the Mediterranean region generally, Europe and even Atlantis. As first settlers have proposed Roman slaves, Berbers, or Carthaginians respectively Phoenicians. Dominik Josef Wölfel, one of the most well-known Canarian scholars expected a solution only „in an intensified interconnection with the elucidation of the racial, archaeological, cultural, and linguistic“²¹ facts.

It is a general preconceived notion that the Canarian „Aborigines“ were fair-haired, auburn and sandy to blond, blue-eyed, and only about 10% of fair complexion²². Schwidetzky differentiates between two groups. The so-called „Guanche Type“ christened already thus in 1918 by R. Verneau, with broad and short face, belongs to the so-called „Cromagnon race“ and means the auburn to blond, fair-complexioned racial

category. The other category - „Semitic“ after Verneau, „Mediterranean“ after Schwidetzky - has a high and narrow face, and is more often somewhat higher built.²³

There can be no doubt that the romantic notion often held by Europeans (self-evidently influenced by once current European ideas about „races“ of mankind) about a one hundred percent fair-complexioned population of the Canary Islands, is wrong. However, research results which have been presented at the 1st international Mummy Congress on Teneriffa make it rather probable that, should Schwidetzky be right, the „Cromagnon Type“ most have been predominant at least on Teneriffa. The Spanish scholar Francisco García-Talavera has examined 547 long bones of 367 individuals, and has found an average stature of the Guanches of 170,5 cm for men, and 156,8 cm for woman.²⁴ For antiquity such a stature is definitely above average.

Current research is convinced of at least immigration wave from North Africa²⁵. The Berber tribes living there were not only immediate neighbours of ancient Egypt and they are exactly in conformity with the above described racial type.

CANARIAN ROCK inscriptions - mostly, however, from later times in local language - show affinities with the Lybo-Berber languages²⁶. These languages belong to the Afro-Asiatic (formely: „Hamito-Semitic“) language family, in other words: they are relatives of ancient Egyptian²⁷.

²⁰ Schmidt, p. 65

²¹ Schmidt, p. 78

²² Kutzer in SOKAR, p.50

²³ taken from Schmidt, p. 89 f.

²⁴ Congreso p. 62, p. 71

²⁵ indication from H. Ulbrich

²⁶ for example Pichler, ALMOGAREN XXVI

²⁷ Graefe, p. 1; Ross, Spektrum der Wissenschaft Dossier, p. 6/7

Another hint for the origin of the Guanches may be seen in the famous „whistle language“ on the Canary Islands, called „el-Silbo“. We have here not a kind of signal-language, in the use of which „words become transposed into whisper language, and then whistled“²⁸. Especially interesting in this connection is the fact that, as late even as our present time, this strange kind of communication has survived among the Berber people of the Siwa oasis (which has ever been part of Egypt), in the same manner in which is still used on Gomera, to communicate over greater distances.²⁹

Perhaps we are here on the tracks of the partial affinities and correspondences between the cultures of ancient Egypt, and of the Guanches of Canary Islands. In the same manner, in which it can be made relatively certain that the Canarian „Aborigines“ are of partly North African origin, can it be shown for the ancient Egyptians. The archaeological finds from Nabta Playa in the Libyan Desert, dated to the 6th millennium BC, are unequivocal witness in this respect. The ancient Egyptians, too, had never been a homogeneous ethnic entity, but have been composed of Libyan, Nubian and other groups³⁰. If one of those immigration waves to the Canary Islands which have tentatively been dated to 1100 BC, originated from North Africa, the cultural similarities would constitute no great miracle.

²⁸ Schmidt, p.80

²⁹ Schmidt, p. 81

³⁰ see the important article of Kaiser MDAIK 46, or Emery, Egypt

Gratitude:

My gratitude goes to Dr. Renate Germer, university of Hamburg, Hans-Joachim Ulbrich, Institutum Canarium, Dr. Joann Fletcher, university of York, for the cession of literature, communication by telephone and letters, as well as approval to the take-over of pictorial material.

Zusammenfassung

Am 07. März 1999 untersuchten Dr. Joann Fletcher, Prof. Don Brothwell von der Universität York und Joyce Fyler von der Universität Cambridge eine etwa 500 Jahre alte Guanchenmumie der Kanarischen Inseln und kamen zu dem Resultat, dass grosse Ähnlichkeiten zu Mumifizierungsmethoden in Ägypten zur Zeit der 21. Dynastie vorliegen. Die entdeckten Methoden galten bislang als einmalig und konnten zuvor nur an ägyptischen Mumien festgestellt werden, die nach 1070 v.Chr. mumifiziert worden waren. Diese Untersuchungsergebnisse korrelieren mit der derzeit akzeptierten Theorie über die Besiedlung der Kanaren. Demnach hat es zwei bis drei Einwanderungswellen von Nordafrika aus gegeben; die zweite fand um 1100 v.Chr. statt.

Diese und weitere kulturell auffällige Ähnlichkeiten, z. B. im Pyramidenbau, lassen für einige ausgewiesene Experten nur den Schluss zu, dass es Kontakte zwischen Ägypten und den Kanarischen Inseln gegeben habe. Vielleicht können beide Kulturkreise teilweise auf dieselben Vorfahren zurückblicken.

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