The last issue of Nile Magazine (#10, October–November 2017) gave you a small taste (above) of a very special exhibition now on at the Liechtenstein National Museum in Vaduz: Fascinating Pyramids (“Faszination Pyramiden”).

Our last Looking Back feature included this wonderful, hand-painted image of the Giza Plateau, from a 1598 travelogue by Austrian, Hans Christoph Teufel. From then to now, our addiction to pyramids has never really gone away—it’s just that the cravings are bigger at some times than others.

The Liechtenstein National Museum couldn’t have timed their exhibition any better. With the ScanPyramids mission just having announced their discovery of the Great Pyramid’s enigmatic “Big Void” (see page 6), we simply can’t get enough of Egypt’s pyramids.

Fascinating Pyramids showcases world-class artefacts from museums across Europe, and includes rarely-seen pieces from the Liechtenstein Princely Collections. Gathered together are artefacts spanning the entire length of Egyptian and Nubian pyramid-building, along with the early Egyptomania that saw pyramids rising in Rome, and Egypt’s famous obelisks being shipped across Europe, and, eventually, the world.

As the Museum states, “To this day, the pyramids exude a special fascination, while also raising many questions.” Fascinating Pyramids tackles the “Big Two” of pyramid studies: how and why were they built. Over the next few pages, we’ll detail a selection from the Fascinating Pyramids collection; each having a connection to Egypt’s pyramids and the powerful solar worship that inspired them.

Fascinating Pyramids is showing in Vaduz until January 14, 2018. If ever you needed an excuse to visit Liechtenstein, stunningly perched in the Alps between Austria and Switzerland, this is it. And in case you are wondering, the exhibition is also in English.
He named his pyramid *wer khafre*, “Great is Khafre”, and today, some 4,500 years later, his Giza monuments—pyramid, Valley Temple and Great Sphinx—still command a majestic presence over the plateau. Less than 400 years after his death, however, King Khafre was held in much less reverence.

Around 2100 B.C., during a stretch of disunity known as the First Intermediate Period (Dynasties 7 to 11, ca. 2181–2055 B.C.), the kingly statues that stood between the pillars of Khafre’s Valley Temple were torn down and attacked. The wanton violence with which they were hammered wouldn’t be seen again until the backlash against Hatshepsut’s rule, some 700 years into the future. When found, the above portion from one of Khafre’s Valley Temple statues was smashed into seven parts.

The First Intermediate Period saw the divine pharaonic pedigree grind to a halt, with power now divided among regional officials. At some stage, someone decided a demonstration of independence was in order, and Khafre’s magnificent statuary was targeted as a symbol of the old regime. This graywacke image of the king was discovered during the 1909/10 excavation season by German Egyptologist Georg Steindorff; its pieces found among debris at the south entrance to the Valley Temple.

Reconstructed, this piece shows Egyptian royalty at its aloof best. The king’s gaze peers into eternity—as well it should, for the statue’s purpose wasn’t to create a true portrait of a blue-blooded Egyptian from the 26th century B.C., but to proclaim the serenity of divine kingship.

Although unfinished, this statue is similar to the king’s most famous sculpture, discovered in a pit beneath the temple floor. The enthroned diorite statue, now in Cairo’s Egyptian Museum, shows the divine falcon spreading its wings protectively around the king’s head. In the second volume of his *A History of Ancient Egypt*, Egyptologist John Romer states that “one might well imagine, therefore, that the diorite statue of Khafre and the hawk had been thrown down the temple well in desperation after the other dozen or so similarly obdurate images of the king had been laboriously smashed into little pieces.”
Amenakht was no doubt proud to be a Servant in the Place of Truth forever. He had the words carved on the limestone pyramidion (or capstone) that surmounted the pyramid chapel above his tomb at Deir el-Medina (see Sennedjem’s example on page 18). Each morning, Amenakht would be reborn on the eastern sky as the sun burst triumphantly from the underworld and its life-giving rays fell upon the small pyramid and illuminating his name.

The pyramidion was known as a *benbenet*, symbol of the *benben*—the primaeval hill which rose from the primordial waters and glowed with the warmth of the sun on the first day of creation. The benben stone was venerated at Heliopolis, believed to be that sacred site. A divine stone with a direct link to the beginning of time—it’s hard to imagine a more special object.

Towards the end of the 18th Dynasty, long after the New Kingdom pharaohs had forgone pyramids for the perceived security of the Valley of the Kings, the benben went private. Steep-sided mud-brick pyramid chapels began appearing above private tombs like Amennakht’s. On his pyramidion, the royal tomb builder had himself shown praising Ra-Horakhty ("Ra who is Horus of the Horizon", referring to the god rising in the east at dawn).

Like Sennedjem, Amennakht would have worked on the tomb of the 19th-Dynasty’s Ramesses II. Given the cozy environment of Deir el-Medina, it’s unlikely that they didn’t work together.

Amenakht’s spectacularly decorated tomb (TT 218) was excavated by French Egyptologist Bernard Bruyère in 1928 and is one of the must-sees at Deir el-Medina today.
Egypt’s 5th Dynasty (ca. 2494–2345 B.C.) saw the kingly pyramids getting smaller, and the Egyptian bureaucracy ballooning and needing stately tombs to see out the eternity. At Giza, west the orderly 4th-Dynasty tombs of Khufu’s high-status officials is a crowded cluster of 5th and 6th Dynasty mastabas. Here, in the Steindorff Cemetery, so known for the German Egyptologist who excavated here in the early 20th century, is Tomb D 20, belonging to Tepemankh.

The cult of the 4th-Dynasty’s great bygone king was alive and well for centuries after he died, and Tepemankh was a “Priest of Khufu”, officiating at the temple of the Great Pyramid.

Tepemankh was also “Overseer of the Department of Palace Attendants of the Great House (the royal palace)”, and “Sole Friend (of the King)”. This latter title implies that while Tepemankh probably wasn’t his king’s only pal, he would have enjoyed close contact with some of the royal entourage. It helps to explain why someone with such a humdrum role (“Overseer of the Department of Palace Attendants…” ) could afford a finely-decorated Giza tomb. Tepemankh’s status was probably more closely linked to his proximity to the king than on his official responsibilities.

The scene probably depicts part of Tepemankh’s funeral procession. In it, three men pull hard on a sledge carrying a tall chest, decorated with ribbons. On the lid are three feathers. It is thought that the chest contained loaves and grain for Tepemankh to enjoy forever in the afterlife.
Akhenaten achieved what the mythical Seth never could: he killed Osiris. The king of the Underworld was swept aside, along with the traditional pantheon of gods. The Osirian netherworld went too. No longer would the sun god descend below the western horizon and spend the night battling agents of chaos and evil, before bursting forth triumphantly at sunrise. Under Akhenaten’s regime, the ancient solar deity, the Aten, reigned supreme. No longer could the deceased appeal to Osiris that they had lived a good life and deserved to be judged “True of Voice”. At night the Aten—and the revered dead—simply ceased to exist:

_When you [Aten] rise, they live, and when you [Aten] set, they die…_” (The Great Hymn to the Aten).

The up-side was that no netherworld gods meant no netherworld demons. Under the old philosophy, Re needed protecting from his enemies to ensure there would be a tomorrow. Akhenaten’s new beliefs, however, meant that the self-creating Aten would be guaranteed to emerge from oblivion each morning—in total control and all-powerful.

Whether anyone else thought so apart from Akhenaten is debatable. The Great Hymn to the Aten clearly states that Akhenaten held the exclusive rights to knowing or contacting the Aten. This may be one of the reasons that Atenism never “caught on”—the Aten would forever remain a remote concept for everyone outside of the immediate royal family. From the courtly elite down, the icon of worship would be the image of the divine triad: the Aten, Akhenaten, and Nefertiti. It is highly possible that Akhenaten’s officials may have yielded to the new religion only to be seen as loyal subjects of the crown and curry favour with the king.

The small stela opposite (less than 12 cm high), now in Berlin’s Egyptian Museum (ÄM 25574), may have come from the home of one of those officials who, privately, were only nominally devoted to the Aten (Building N 51.06). It was discovered in 1911 during the Amarna excavations of the German Oriental Society, led by Ludwig Borchardt.

The scene shows two figures holding aba sceptres and standing in front of an offering table, while soaking up the goodness from the rays of the living Aten. The couple can be confidently identified as Akhenaten and Nefertiti, with the second, smaller figure wearing Queen Nefertiti’s trademark tall, flat-topped crown.

What is most interesting about this scene is the presence of four blank cartouches to the left of the Aten. It appears that three cartouches were originally carved to name the royal personages beneath them, but hadn’t been inscribed when the cartouche closest to the Aten was squeezed in.

What is the significance of an alteration to the number of cartouches? Simply put, two cartouches were necessary to identify the king by his Birth and Throne names, while a queen needed just one, labelling her as the king’s wife. The presence of four cartouches, however, suggests two kings, and the late addition suggests the change in status of one of them—from queen to co-regent.

In his book, _Akhenaten, Egypt’s False Prophet_, Egyptologist Nicholas Reeves sees this stela as an important indicator of Nefertiti’s journey from queen to co-regent, and eventual successor to Akhenaten under the name Smenkhkare. When the stele was started, she was Akhenaten’s principal queen and thus portrayed with one cartouche. Shortly afterwards, with the stele still a work in progress, Nefertiti was elevated to co-regent and a fourth cartouche was forced in to accommodate two kings.
This unfinished scribal statue is attributed to a man named Henka. It was discovered, along with a named throned statue (ÄS 74), in the late 19th century, presumably in Dahshur. Stylistically, the large, wide eyes and smiling mouth matches a third figure of Henka, now in Berlin’s Egyptian Museum (Acc. No. ÄM 7334). Both the Berlin statue and the one above include a particularly rare feature: the scribe’s right hand is holding a reed pen which is modelled with the rest of the statue in one piece (although damaged in the above example). Usually, the pen is attached separately, and most have been subsequently lost.

The Berlin Henka bears the above hieroglyphic inscription across the pedestal, which tells us he was an overseer of the Dahshur pyramid complexes of King Sneferu, who had died more than 200 hundred years earlier.

The exact location of Henka’s tomb is today lost. The records reveal only that this statue (and its mate) came from a tomb “in the ruins of ancient Memphis”.

“Overseer of the Two Pyramids of Sneferu, Henka”
The Old Kingdom rulers of the 5th and 6th Dynasties (ca. 2494–2181 B.C.) chose to raise their pyramids in Abusir and Saqqara, both part of the great west bank necropolis of ancient Memphis. While the mastaba tombs of the royal retinue huddled in as close as possible to the king, this man, instead, chose to be buried in Khufu’s Western Cemetery at Giza (Mastaba S 466/467). It’s therefore likely that he served in the ongoing funerary cult of the great king who had died a number of decades earlier.

By the 4th Dynasty, mummification had developed to where the deceased’s internal organs were removed and the body dried before being wrapped in linen. Sometimes facial features were modelled using the linen or painted directly on the cloth.

It was during the 5th Dynasty that a short-lived funerary practice appeared: coating the deceased’s mumified body with a layer of gypsum plaster. Only six examples have survived antiquity—all from the 5th or 6th Dynasties. A little more common was plastering and modelling the head of the mummy only, and modelling it with life-like features. Twenty-nine plaster mummy masks have been found—almost all of them from Giza.

The fashion of coating the head or entire body with a layer of plaster died out during the 6th Dynasty—coincidentally, at around the same time that the first cartonnage (plaster and linen) mummy masks started appearing. It may be that the purely plaster versions were the direct precursors of what are recognised as the first mummy masks. It’s hard to deny that cartonnage masks had a convenient advantage: they could be fashioned separately well before the burial (and presumably to the owner’s satisfaction), rather than having to apply plaster directly to the mumified and bandaged head.

Great care has been taken to give the deceased a natural appearance; the thin straight nose, pronounced nasolabial folds and sharply-outlined, subtly smiling lips give the plaster face great expression. The open, heavy-lidded eyes appear less defined, however, and a straight hairline, or perhaps a headcloth, runs across the forehead.

The shaft of Mastaba S 466/467, in which this plaster mask and body covering was discovered, was excavated by German Egyptologist, Hermann Junker, who was Director of the German-Austrian expedition to Giza between 1911 and 1929.