Please cite the Published Version

Review: The Giza Project

Jennifer Cromwell[1]

[1]Manchester Metropolitan University

Project

The Giza Project

Project Director

Peter Der Manuelian, Harvard University

Project URL

http://giza.fas.harvard.edu

Project Reviewer

Jennifer Cromwell, Manchester Metropolitan University

Project Overview

Peter Der Manuelian

The Giza Project, a non-profit international initiative based at Harvard University, assembles information about all the archaeological activity at the most famous site in the world: the Giza Pyramids and surrounding cemeteries and settlements (third millennium BCE to present). Using digital archaeology, the project unites diverse documentation to produce powerful online and traditional academic research tools and new teaching technologies. It presents academic information about Giza at all levels of expertise for the world community and strives to provide a model of archaeological information management.

When we started in 2000, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, courtesy of a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the goal was not to simply scan thousands of large-format glass plate expedition photo negatives, but rather to digitize diverse archaeological data about the Giza Pyramids and link it together intelligently. That means, for Giza tomb X, say, on the west side of the Great Pyramid, the system search results include all the relevant items for that tomb — photos, maps, plans, dig diary pages, object register books listing the finds, manuscripts, publications, and more recently, 3D models and photogrammetry. The project subsequently moved to Harvard University in 2010. To date, more than 1,000 people have contributed: Egyptology PhDs; graduate students; undergraduates from Harvard, Tufts, and other universities; museum associates volunteers; professional computer graphics artists; programmers; web designers; database designers; and photogrammetry experts.

One of our great challenges is that we aim to be all things to all people: providing basic info for the beginner as well as deep dives into Egyptological and archaeological data for professionals. We hope to reach grade school students, teachers with lesson plans, armchair archaeologists, the entire world community with no limits. That means avoiding jargon, paying attention to writing levels and vocabulary, and aiming for clear web interfaces for non-native English speakers.

Our data resides in a SQL database, fed to the web using Elastic Search, with elements written in Python and Django. We follow basic thesaurus standards. Our work, chiefly through the website, has reached 448,097 lifetime users from 111 countries. The website has aided countless theses, dissertations, and research projects, resulting in hundreds of scholarly journal articles and academic monographs. It is constantly cited as a form of digital publication for Egyptian monuments and antiquities, many of which are unpublished in any other format.

A summary of the project's first decade is provided in Peter Der Manuelian, *Digital Giza: Visualizing the Pyramids* (Harvard University Press, 2017), and the work has inspired a free online self-paced 8-module, 60-video "Pyramids of Giza" course on the HarvardX/EdX platform. Since its launch, the course has served 124,077 learners from 163 countries.

Project Review

Jennifer Cromwell

The Giza Project is an open access online resource that provides the largest collection of information, media, and research materials about the monuments on Egypt's Giza Plateau, including the famous Great Pyramid. Located on the edge of the Western Desert, less than 10 miles southwest of the center of Cairo, the Giza Plateau is the location of the pyramids of the fourth dynasty (mid-third millennium BCE) pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure, as well as the Great Sphinx and related sites. The Giza Project opened at Harvard in 2011, succeeding the Giza Archives Project at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2000–2011), and is a work-in-progress. To date, 20 tombs and monuments have been included, with hundreds more still to be done. The collection is an invaluable research tool for scholars of Egyptian history and archaeology, as well as a public engagement tool that provides resources for other interested groups.

The centerpiece of the project is its archive, based on the Giza Consolidated Archaeological Reference Database (GizaCARD), which organizes over 150,000 files. Users can search for monuments, artifacts, and archival material, with an advanced search function providing additional support. Individual records provide a wealth of information. For example, museum objects are accompanied by images, details (including findspot, material, dimensions, inventory numbers, date, and excavator), and a bibliography. Entries for monuments include links to finds from the site, excavation notes, maps and plans, and published documents. The platform also allows users to curate and save their own collections, requiring only the creation of a free "MyGiza" account. Each record has a clear "MyGiza" tab on the right, facilitating individual research. Additionally, a comprehensive library comprising several hundred publications on Giza is provided. Usefully, all items are scanned and made available on the platform itself, rather than sending users to external sites.

The archive is not, however, showcased on the homepage. Here, the "search the archives" bar provides its entry point, but is easily overlooked, especially by new users. More prominent resource links below the search bar

instead draw users' attention, including Giza 3D and Giza@School. Giza 3D comprises "guided tours" (digital reconstructions) of the three pyramids, the Great Sphinx, and other monuments, as well as "virtual tours" (3D models with interactive labels) of several tombs. The labels embedded in the virtual tours identify key features, with some providing additional archival material and links to information in other languages, including — importantly for resources on Egypt — Arabic.

Giza@School provides materials to support teachers and students, including introductions to several lesson topics, information about monuments and historical figures, as well as a question and answer area that provides brief information and selected readings on popular subjects. A timeline of Giza history also provides information on periods of pharaonic history, as well as the Giza Plateau's recent history, including the Napoleonic expedition of the early 18th century and subsequent major excavations until 2020.

As noted, the Giza Project is a work-in-progress, with the team continuing to add monuments and further develop ways to interact with the platform and experience Giza virtually. The functionality of several sections would especially benefit. For example, while Giza@School provides information that is accessible to non-specialist users, more examples of curated collections on the named themes would be of immediate benefit to school teachers, who may not have the time to navigate the site's archives when preparing lessons. The project team might also consider making the archive search function more prominent on its homepage. This is the real core of the website but is easily missed.