



Menkaure  
flourished 26th century BC

also spelled **Menkure**, Greek **Mykerinos** fifth (according to some traditions , sixth) king of the 4th dynasty (c. 2575–c. 2465 BC) of Egypt; he built the third and smallest of the three [Pyramids of Giza](#).

He was the son and probably the successor of Khafre and, according to the Turin papyrus, reigned for 18 (or 28) years. According to tradition, Menkaure was a pious and just king. Although his pyramid and mortuary temple were unfinished at his death, his successor, [Shepseskaf](#), completed the stonework of the mortuary temple in brick. In the funerary complex were found some of the finest sculptures of the Pyramid Age, including a slate statue group of Menkaure and his sister-wife Khamerernebti II and a number of smaller slate triads representing Menkaure, the goddess Hathor, and various nome (district) deities.

## Herodotus on Menkaure

After him (i.e. Khafre), they said, Mykerinos became king over Egypt, who was the son of Cheops; and to him his father's deeds were displeasing, and he both opened the temples and gave liberty to the people, who were ground down to the last extremity of evil, to return to their own business and to their sacrifices: also he gave decisions of their causes juster than those of all the other kings besides. In regard to this then they commend this king more than all the other kings who had arisen in Egypt before him; for he not only gave good decisions, but also when a man complained of the decision, he gave him recompense from his own goods and thus satisfied his desire.

But while Mykerinos was acting mercifully to his subjects and practising this conduct which has been said, calamities befell him, of which the first was this, namely that his daughter died, the only child whom he had in his house: and being above measure grieved by that which had befallen him, and desiring to bury his daughter in a manner more remarkable than others, he made a cow of wood, which he covered over with gold, and then within it he buried this daughter who as I said, had died.

This cow was not covered up in the ground, but it might be seen even down to my own time in the city of Sais, placed within the royal palace in a chamber which was greatly adorned; and they offer incense of all kinds before it every day, and each night a lamp burns beside it all through the night. Near this cow in another chamber stand images of the concubines of Mykerinos, as the priests at Sais told me; for there are in fact colossal wooden statues, in number about twenty, made with naked bodies; but who they are I am not able to say, except only that which is reported.

Some however tell about this cow and the colossal statues the following tale, namely that Mykerinos was enamoured of his own daughter and afterwards ravished her; and upon this they say that the girl strangled herself for grief, and he buried her in this cow; and her mother cut off the hands of the maids who had betrayed the daughter to her father; wherefore now the images of them have suffered that which the maids suffered in their life. In thus saying they speak idly, as it seems to me, especially in what they say about the hands of the statues; for as to this, even we ourselves saw that their hands had dropped off from lapse of time, and they were to be seen still lying at their feet even down to my time.

The cow is covered up with a crimson robe, except only the head and the neck, which are seen, overlaid with gold very thickly; and between the horns there is the disc of the sun figured in gold. The cow is not standing up but kneeling, and in size is equal to a large living cow. Every year it is carried forth from the chamber, at those times, I say, the Egyptians beat themselves for that god whom I will not name upon occasion of such a matter; at these times, I say, they also carry forth the cow to the light of day, for they say that she asked of her father Mykerinos, when she was dying, that she might look upon the sun once in the year.

After the misfortune of his daughter it happened, they said, secondly to this king as follows:--An oracle came to him from the city of Buto, saying that he was destined to live but six years more, in the seventh year to end his life: and he being indignant at it sent to the Oracle a reproach against the god, making complaint in reply that whereas his father and uncle, who had shut up the temples and had not only not remembered the gods, but also had been destroyers of men, had lived for a long time, he himself, who

practised piety, was destined to end his life so soon: and from the Oracle came a second message, which said that it was for this very cause that he was bringing his life to a swift close; for he had not done that which it was appointed for him to do, since it was destined that Egypt should suffer evils for a hundred and fifty years, and the two kings who had arisen before him had perceived this, but he had not.

Mykerinos having heard this, and considering that this sentence had passed upon him beyond recall, procured many lamps, and whenever night came on he lighted these and began to drink and take his pleasure, ceasing neither by day nor by night; and he went about to the fen-country and to the woods and wherever he heard there were the most suitable places of enjoyment. This he devised (having a mind to prove that the Oracle spoke falsely) in order that he might have twelve years of life instead of six, the nights being turned into days.

This king also left behind him a pyramid, much smaller than that of his father, of a square shape and measuring on each side three hundred feet lacking twenty, built moreover of Ethiopian stone up to half the height.

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**Sources:** Herodotus Histories II,129ff



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Design, Layout and Graphic Art by [Jimmy Dunn](#), an [InterCity Oz, Inc.](#) Employee

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