The Sacred Landscape in the
Age of the Pyramids

When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also a revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse ... the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center.


19.1 An Ordered Landscape

We have come a long way since the idea that the pyramids were nothing but the product of the wildest dreams of megalomaniac sovereigns, monuments created without any overall design and packed with ventilation shafts. But our journey is not yet over.

We have still to tackle the problem of the topographical arrangement of the pyramids themselves, or more precisely of those located in that vast area stretching from Abu Roash to Abu Sir, by way of Giza.

Let us start with a careful look at a map of the plateau. Immediately one gets the impression that the arrangement of the great pyramid complexes on the plain is not random, but quite ordered, following a strict but unfathomable logic.

To remove any lingering doubts, let us suppose that we have one building in a neighborhood, and an architect decides to add another. He will normally build the new one in line with the others, unless there is not enough space, an intervening river, or some other natural obstruction. The other alternative is to break away completely from what already existed, to arrange the new building in as original a way as possible.

In fact, at Giza it did not happen either of these two ways. The designers did not choose to place the two buildings in line, even though they could have done so if they so wished. Aligning the pyramids on the same parallel would not have made sense, since it would involve moving steadily away from the Nile, with the preexisting pyramid plumb in the middle. But placing
the new pyramid on or near the same meridian of the preexisting one, facing the Nile, would have been a convenient solution in all respects. That, however, was not done, and not for any reasons relating to the morphology of the land—quite the opposite. Indeed, the geography of the place, if anything, would clearly have deterred the designers from building Khufu’s pyramid so close to the rocky ridge running across the northern part of the plateau. As it was, to build the causeway sloping downhill, they had to create hefty structures out of stone blocks, which allowed the monumental path to leapfrog over the abrupt edge of the plateau, more than 20 meters high. Some of the blocks from this great endeavor can still be seen at the point