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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



## **Dentists Tombs from Ancient Egypt**

*The graves were discovered by looters*

Three royal dentists' tombs 4,200 years old have been discovered in the Egyptian desert after the arrest of several tomb looters. "The thieves had launched their own dig in Saqqara-the ancient, pyramid-rich royal cemetery just south of Cairo" told Zahi Hawass, chief of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. "It seems for the first time that the ancient Egyptians made a cemetery to the dentists, and they are buried in the shadow of the Step Pyramid" said Hawass. The Step Pyramid is Egypt's oldest pyramid - 4,630 years old - built for Pharaoh Djoser and named for its staircase-like construction. The tombs of the dentists are from the Egypt's 5th dynasty period, which lasted for 153 years and ended in 2345 B.C, and are made of mud brick and limestone. These were the dentists of the pharaohs and their families. The hieroglyphs depicting dentists, eye over a tusk, appear frequently on the walls of the tombs. In one tomb, there was found a curse proclaiming that anyone who enters it should be eaten by a crocodile and a snake. "Saqqara is probably the single most important private cemetery of the 5th dynasty," said Cathleen Keller is an Egyptologist at the University of California, Berkeley. The place where the tombs were built reflects the high status detained by the dentists in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians "cared about the treatment of their teeth," Hawass told. "These are people who on a fairly regular basis would actually touch the person of the king," Keller said. No mummy was found, but the names of the owners were written on the wall: the chief dentist was Iy Mry and the others Kem Msw and Sekhem Ka. Because they were buried together, the dentists were no relatives. Wall paintings also depict scenes of the daily life of the chief dentist, something fairly common for ancient Egyptian tombs. "I wouldn't expect there to be any depictions [of the tomb owner] working in the royal mouth," Keller said. "We'd love to see him applying those ancient drills," she said. "But what he's interested in is showing how he conforms to accepted standards of elite representation." The tombs have a false door, built as a gateway to the land of the living for the dead. Archaeologists believe that only 30 % of the ancient Egyptian tombs have been unearthed till now. "There are vast expanses of areas [at Saqqara] that have simply not been scientifically investigated," Keller said. "The fact that local looters found the tombs is an index to how much more there must be out there." "Just about every expedition I know of that has gone out to Saqqara to look for tombs has found something." Photo credit: Sky News