

## 2.2 Old Kingdom Egypt; Architecture and the Afterlife

### 1) **Old Kingdom Egypt — c. 2686 - 2181 BCE**

- About 3000 BCE Egypt was centralized into a single state under a deified monarch, a **king** that later was called a **pharaoh**, meaning “great house.”
- \* Upper and Lower Egypt were the kingdoms that were unified
- **Upper Egypt** was the upper part of the river, therefore the farthest south
- **Lower Egypt** was the lower part of the river, therefore the farthest north (the delta)
- The pharaoh was the son of **Ra**, the Egyptian Sun God... compare w Sumerian Sun God **Anu**, and Greek Sun God **Helios**. Ra traveled across the sky during course of day.
- **Mortuary Architecture** - permanent stone built with great geometrical precision
- **Palace Architecture** - in north, similar to Mesopotamia, pleated mud walls
- **Domestic Architecture** - impermanent, mud, bundled reeds, matted papyrus

### 2) Some building **types** - mastaba and pyramid

- The **mastaba** (tomb) a burial mound. Perimeter of stone or brick, contained a secret burial chamber and entranceway, then infilled with sand. Mastaba is arabic for “bench.”

Mastaba a building block of a pyramid

- The **pyramid** became the tomb that provided for the pharaoh's **afterlife**. The pyramid was a solidified remaking of the pharaoh's palace (of sorts) to house the pharaoh's spirit, or **ka**...

Afterlife very important to Egyptians, as their pharaoh would continue to perform his kingly duties in conjunction with **Ra**... and after traveling the course of the sun during the day, for instance, pharaoh would then need a boat to paddle back to the beginning again...

The **serdab** was a sealed chamber within the pyramid which contained a statue of the dead.

Entry to the burial vaults was secret.

### 3) Some building **examples** - Zoser

- **Zoser** (spelled **Djoser** in book) but pronounced: ZO-zer
- Zoser's architect, the first documented in history: **Imhotep**
- Zoser's tomb at Saqqara about 2650 BCE (about 10 miles south of Giza on western bank)

**First pyramid - six-stepped pyramid about 200 feet tall.** Entire precinct surrounded by pleated walls. The entry was through a **processional hall** on the south end of the complex. A secret passageway immediately inside the processional hall led to the Heb-Sed Court filled with 22 altars and sham pavilions used in the Heb-Sed festival (see plan image)

Pyramid not square base

Like a solid stone ghost town for the pharaoh's afterlife

White and red courtyards symbolizing *upper* and *lower* Egypt

**Upper Egypt symbols:** white // white cone crown // lotus\*\*\*

**Lower Egypt symbols:** red // red cap crown // papyrus

\*\*\* An inconsistency is that at Karnak (Upper Egypt) uses all papyrus column capitals

4) Some building *examples* - **Sneferu**

- **Sneferu** father of **Khufu** (we'll use this Egyptian name, not the Greek name Cheops)
- Sneferu built (1) Meidum (MY-dum) which collapsed; **Bent Pyramid at Dashur**, which started out at too steep of an angle and had to be adjusted to finish; **Red Pyramid at Dashur**, which is probably where he's buried
- Sheathing stone (limestone) all gone. **Pyramidion** was the gilded capstone on top.

5) Some building *examples* - **Khufu**

- **Khufu** son of **Sneferu**. **Khafre** son of **Khufu**. **Menkaure** son of **Khafre**.
- **Khufu - Khafre - Menkaure** are the three giant pyramids on the Giza Plateau. Khufu largest; Khafre slightly smaller; Menkaure about half the size of Khufu.
- **Sphinx** is guarding the middle one, Khafre (second biggest).
- **Great Pyramid at Giza is Khufu. 479 feet tall. 755 feet square at base. 51.5° angle**  
Entryway partway up to an inclined path rising to burial vault. Sheathing stone all gone from Great Pyramid.
- Entire Giza complex has many valley temples, mastabas, smaller pyramids for lesser queens and courtiers.
- No good explanation for the constructability of the pyramids. Some explanations proffered.

6) Decline of Old Kingdom Egypt

- General exhaustion of resources - manpower, wealth - for such extravagances as giant pyramid burial tombs.
- Greek historian Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) wrote that Khufu's pyramid was ultimate act of tyranny. This condemnation may have been a criticism of the waste of resources, the use of tens of thousands of slaves (or more), etc.

7) Vocabulary

- **ashlar masonry** - stones that have been "worked" to have flat surfaces tightly coursed
- **obelisk** - a stone stele that is a tall rectangular stone or stack of stones tapering upward gracefully to a pyramidion. It's often covered with hieroglyphics. This is mortuary architecture.
- **stele** - a monumental stone marker, sometimes indicating a grave, that primarily told a story behind the monumental or funerary event.

8) **Middle Kingdom — 2150 - 1750 BCE**

- **Mentuhotep — 2161 - 2040 BCE** Buried at **Deir-el-Bahri** across Nile from Thebes (Karnak)
- **Mentuhotep's** mortuary site is a new type, and distinctly different from the pyramids as a mortuary architecture... it's a terraced, rock-cut assembly that accessed by a ramp or stair creates a short processional that leads to a temple and/or hidden burial vault. It was most likely landscaped as well, making a symbolic "paradise."

As the pyramids were giant structures within giant precincts, the mortuary architecture of Mentuhotep was much more of a ***human scale*** and much more accessible.