

2022-01-28 - Lecture 05

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** (*pronounced RAY*), 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, med, bundled reeds, matted papyrus

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

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

- The mastaba is a building block of the 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**... imperfectly defined as the spiritual connection between the body and the soul.

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 pharaoh.

Entry to the burial vaults was secretive and circuitous.

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 - about 2650 BCE - a six-stepped pyramid about 200 feet tall. Entire precinct surrounded by pleated walls. The entry was through a **processional hall** of strong Egyptian columns 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). The sham altars must have resembled a frozen, ghost-town-like sort of recreation of the life of the pharaoh for his afterlife.

Zoser's pyramid does not have a square base.

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. *The pyramidion* was the gilded capstone on top.
 - Try to imagine perfectly smooth gleaming white limestone pyramids with gleaming gold pyramidions on top. Must have been a stunning sight.
- 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 (the second biggest one).
 - **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 great explanation for the constructibility of the pyramids. Some explanations offered.
- 6) Decline of Old Kingdom Egypt
- General exhaustion of resources - manpower, wealth - for such extravagances as giant pyramid burial tombs. This was not a free society, so we must imagine the pyramids were mostly built by slaves. A type of theocratic dictatorship with priests and kings at the top and everyone else and slaves at the bottom of the society.
 - Greek historian Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) wrote that Khufu's pyramid was the *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" or "dressed" to have flat and cubic volumes and smooth surfaces tightly coursed
 - **pyramidion** - the final piece (the capstone) of a pyramid or obelisk, made of gold and carved with depictions of Ra and Horus
 - **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.
 - **hypostyle hall**
 - **pylon**
- 8) **Middle Kingdom — 2150 - 1750 BCE** (hiatus of 350 years and Capital moves to Thebes)
- **Mentuhotep II — 2061 - 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.