

**History of Architecture and Culture - I**  
**Unit - II - Ancient River Valley Civilization - Egypt**  
**Lecture 2**

**Contents:**

- > Introduction to Egyptian Architecture
- > Various factors that influenced the architecture of Egypt
- > Tomb architecture

**Ancient Egyptian Architecture**

This is the architecture of Ancient Egypt, one of the most influential civilizations throughout history, which developed a vast array of diverse structures and great architectural monuments along the Nile, among the largest and most famous of pyramid structures are the Great Pyramid of Giza and Great Sphinx of Giza.

**Factors that influence the architecture :**

Geographical factors

Climatic factors

Location of the Place

**Historical Background location**

Egypt is located in Africa, on the northern edge of Sahara. The Nile bisects through the land from the south to the north. The Nile is a seasonal river that overflows its bank yearly to create a fertile valley. The Ancient Egyptians lived in the fertile valley and grew their crops, they also buried the dead in the desert.

The Nile played an important role, as a trade route for Egypt. It helped connect the Mediterranean sea and the Arabian Sea. Egypt had access to the Red sea as well, which helped import and export products with other countries, thereby building ties with other countries. People resided in the delta region and along the stretch of Nile. Civilization started here only after King Memphis united the north and south of Egypt.



The History of Ancient Egypt began when the land was divided into two sectors; upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. The two regions were frequently at war with each other. Around 3000 BC, King Memphis united the two regions. This unification was the reason behind Egypt's civilization.



The chart above depicts Egypt's transition stages from the Old kingdom - First Intermediate Kingdom - Middle Kingdom - Second Intermediate Kingdom - New kingdom - Late Dynastic period - Ptolemaic period

In the Old kingdom came the pyramid of Zoser, the Pyramid of giza was constructed during the First intermediate Kingdom, The reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose came along in the second intermediate period. The foreign Conquest and Decline came about in the Late dynasty period, which further lead to the decline of Egyptian civilization, that lead to the conquest by Persia, later a conquest by Alexander the Great in the Ptolemaic Period.

### Historical Background Location

The history of Egypt is divided into periods based on the ruling dynasties. Seven periods can be identified;

- > 4500 - 2000 BC Early Dynastic
- > 2350 - 2200 BC Old kingdom
- > 2000 - 1600 BC First Intermediate period
- > 1600 - 1717 BC Middle Kingdom
- > 1350 - 612 BC Second Intermediate Period
- > 612 - 539 BC New kingdom
- > 539 - 330 BC Greek Roman period

### **Influences :**

#### **Geographical influences**

The River Nile and its delta was the guiding force of ancient Egyptian civilization. It was a river that overflowed its banks every year from July to October. The floods leave a rich black silt that is fertile and is farmed by the people.

During the floods, people were freed from farming to engage in other activities including building work. The Nile was also the highway of Egypt connecting the upper and lower parts of Egypt. The Nile offered protection to the Egyptians from invasion by outsiders.

## **Geological influences**

Norther part of Egypt had an abundance of limestone, the Centre had abundance of sandstone while the southern part had granite. It is due to the hard and durable nature of these materials that so many monuments exist. Plants consist of readily available material like reeds, papyrus and palm ribs and shaft as well.

## **Climate Influences**

Egypt has been said to have two seasons; spring and summer. The climate is equable and warm in most cases. Such climate changes are brilliant because of its abundant sunshine. Due to such a climate, there was no fog and unseasonal rains, thereby helping the land produce sufficient crops for the people of Egypt.

As sufficient light reaches the interior through doors and roof slits, there was no need for windows and thus unbroken massive walls not only protected the interior from the fierce heat of the sun, but also provided an uninterrupted surface of hieroglyphics or pictorial representations of religious ritual historic incidents and daily pursuits.

In the absence of rain, roof drainage was not a consideration and flat roofs of thick stone slabs sufficed to cover in the building, and to exclude the heat, while in the temples these roofs served for religious processions.

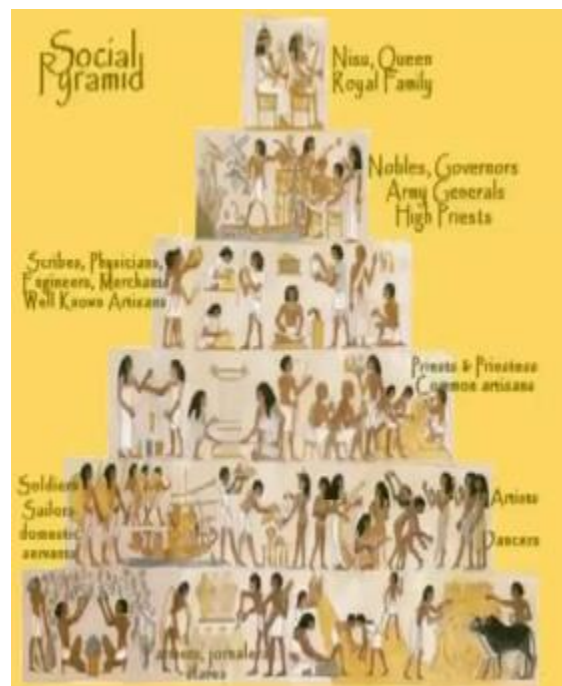
## **Religious Influences**

The Egyptians worshipped nature in several forms like the sun, moon etc. Religion and Architecture amongst Egyptians were a close knit relationship. The close connection between religion and architecture is everywhere manifest for the priesthood was invested with unlimited authority and equipped with all the learning of the age. The religious rites of the Egyptians were traditional, unchangeable and mysterious.

## **Social Characteristics and Belief Influences :**

The Hierarchy begins with the influence cause by the Royal family; the Nisu, the Queen which is then followed by the other royalty such as; Nobles, Governors, Army generals and High priests; then came the Scribes, Engineers, the Merchants and well known artisans. The fourth tier in the hierarchy were occupied by the Priests, the priestesses and the common artisans. The fifth but

not the least in the hierarchy constituted of the soldiers, the domestic servants, dancers etc. The last level in the hierarchy included the farmers, the journalists and the slaves.



The government also had a tremendous amount of say in Egypt's architecture. The pharaoh is the leader of the government. The pharaohs provided stability and a unified sense of purpose. The Egyptians believed in life after death, they believed that their souls would live in them for ever. It needed either the body of the dead person or the body in the form of a statue. If the statue were destroyed, then the spirit wouldn't return. Hence, the process of Mummification came into being. Mummification is the process of ensuring the availability of a body to the ka ( spirit ) of a dead person, the Egyptians developed a process of preservation called mummification.



Egyptians believed that earthly dwellings are temporary. They paid little attention to the house construction. The tomb was seen as a permanent dwelling for the afterlife. Immense amount of effort were put into tomb construction by the slaves who were simply rewarded with food. The mummified dead body was buried in a stone box known as Sarcophagus in the tomb.



Once the body was put into the Sarcophagus, the believed that the dead person needs all his worldly goods. The tomb was usually packed with all the treasures of the dead person. If anything cannot be provided, it is painted on the walls of the tomb.



Tombs had charms to protect the dead person and his property. The dead were buried in cities of the dead, called Necropolis located in the desert.

### **Ancient Egyptians had achieved several achievements :**

- > a developed system of government, a belief system and an art of mummification already discussed.
- > They also left a legacy of tombs and temples that will be further explained.
- > The Egyptians developed a system of irrigation to improve agriculture , they also invented the hieroglyphic system of writing.
- > Historians were able to read Hieroglyphics following the discovery of the Rosetta stone.

### **Architecture of the civilization**

During the old kingdom, the pharaoh and his court lived in Memphis. When they died they were buried at the Necropolis at Saqqara. The earthly dwelling of the ancient Egyptians was perceived to be temporary while the tomb was perceived to be a permanent dwelling. Houses were built out of temporary materials to last for a lifetime. These normal households or rather known as temporary according to Egyptians, were built out of brick. While, the tombs were constructed with more effort and better material as well.



Tombs were most outstanding architectural element of the period. Tombs also serve as the focus for the people to worship the dead. The tomb evolved during the old kingdom from the



Matsaba, through the stepped pyramid to the renown ancient Egyptian pyramid. The Egyptian architecture contributed more to remembering the dead than the living.

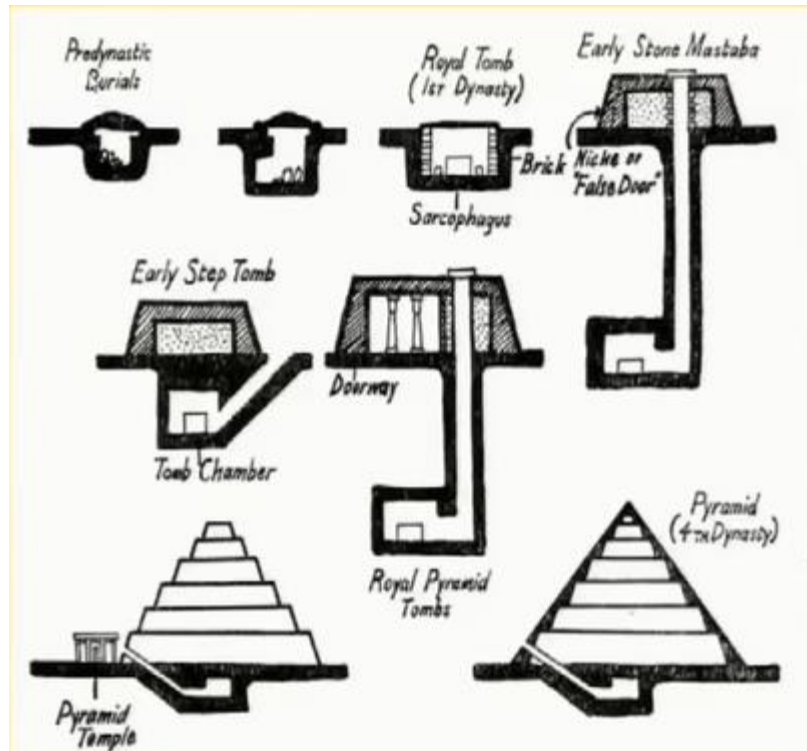
### **Tomb Architecture**

As depicted in the image below, a huge monument with several workers about 3000 to 30000 , across the steps of the pyramid and by the foot of the pyramid as well. Huge blocks of limestone and sandstone were used for the construction of these huge monuments. There have been several theories on how these huge stones were transported.



The tomb architecture, as depicted in the image below, The predynastic burials were simple shallow pits dug into the ground. However, animals came into contact with the bodies, so they dug even deeper. This tomb was further advanced with the use of Sarcophagus that contained the mummified body of the person. This was royal tomb of the 1st Dynasty.





Next came, the Early stone Mastaba, this was built with slanting brick walls and a flat roof. The body is stored in the innermost bottom chamber. The beginning to this tomb, is divided into two rooms; one for the priest and the other for the storage of the statue of the person. The Mastaba was further protected with a false door or a niche in them.

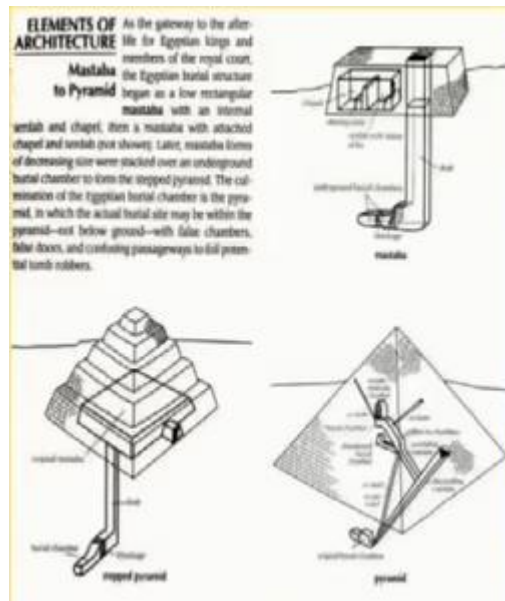
The Early Steep Tomb, which made it convenient to visit the chamber was equipped with steps in order to do so. The top area, the one enclosed with slanted brick walls and a flat roof was enclosed with the body in them.

Then came the Royal Pyramid Tombs, which had a little doorway that led to the temple which was meant for any offerings to the dead and another small room.

Then came the infamous, Pyramid temple. The pyramid as a temple, had a doorway, which led to a burial chamber that was at the bottom of the pyramid.

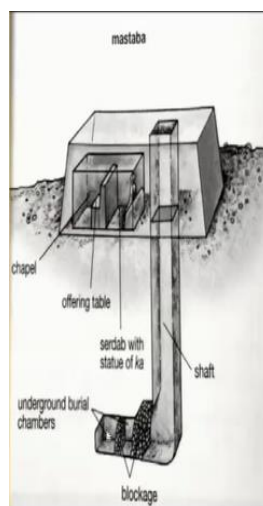
Last but not the least, came the Pyramid which evolved in the 4th Dynasty. When compared to its previous which was at an angle of 51.50 degrees, this pyramid was angled at 52 degrees, which was the perfect geometrical figure.

## Early Kingdom tombs - Mastaba



The earliest method of burial in ancient Egypt was in shallow pits in the desert. In the end they built a bench like structure over graves to create the first burial structure called Mastaba. The Mastaba has a shallow shaft, which went below the underground burial chambers. It has two blockages to protect the dead body placed there. The Mastaba is equipped with two rooms; a chapel which had an offering table and a serdab with a statue.

Mastaba was mainly derived from podiums above the ground. They are basically adobe podiums which rise above the ground. Their height usually scales about 30 m and a shallow depth that goes about 30 m below the ground



In the chamber is found the sarcophagus where the dead body was placed. The burial chamber is packed with all the necessary things needed in the afterlife. After burial, the shaft to burial chamber is sealed. The Serdab and Chapel are located above ground.

Egyptians believe that the Ka must return to the body or a copy of it each night. If both the body and statue are destroyed, the ka would die. The chapel is where the ka is supposed to live for ever. It is a colorful room used to deceive the Ka, so that the Ka will remain the chapel



## SUMMARY

- > Egyptian Architecture, the evolution of Egyptian Architecture.
- > The influence of geographical location on social life and architecture
- > Architecture as a store of social history
- > Architecture of pyramids, tombs and temples

## QUESTIONS

What are the various factors which affected the Egyptian Architecture?

Evolution of pyramid