Civilizations of the Ancient Near East

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Modern stereotypes of ancient Egypt revolve around the pyramids, the Valley of the Kings with its royal tombs, and the tombs of the elite. Although in antiquity buildings for the dead were vital foci of expenditure and prestige, they were neither the locations where normal social activities took place nor the centers of power. The symbolism of these structures was also specialized. Palace and temple were far more important to the political and religious life of king and elite, since they were the centers of political power and ceremonial and of the official cult of the gods. They were also crucial works of architecture.

The pictorial decoration of temples, palaces, and nonroyal monuments belonged to a single hierarchical system of decorum, in which the most sacred and important forms and subjects were reserved for temple reliefs. The symbolism of palace and temple differed in character, but each had an all-embracing, cosmic significance. Temples also incorporated a wide range of mobile works of art. Within their symbolic setting, temples were the stages on which kingship and the maintenance of the cosmos were acted out, in a society that placed enormous emphasis on ritual. For the later New Kingdom (thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE), and quite probably for other periods, there were strong parallels between the architecture and symbolism of palaces and those of temples, and the ritual importance of palaces was as great as that of temples.

From the beginning of the dynastic period (circa 3000) to the later New Kingdom, the dominant institution of Egyptian society was kingship. Thereafter, the temples and their priesthoods acquired great wealth and power, and for more than a millennium they formed the principal context in which traditional high culture was maintained. Kingship was ideologically based both on secular power—with its attendant administrative hierarchy, bureaucracy, and economic infrastructure—and on the mutual support of the king and the gods, which presented the royal and the divine to human society almost as if they were one. During the third and early second millennia, the king’s role in this relationship between humanity and the gods was dominant, and his major funerary monuments were vastly more imposing and enduring than the temples of the gods, on whom he nonetheless depended. Although many temples of the gods may have been of modest scale, they had great significance, often perhaps more for their rich furnishings and symbolism than for their imposing structures. The principal reason why constructions for kings were so much more grandiose than the gods’ temples is that in earlier periods most display was in the mortuary sphere, in which, for reasons of decorum, the gods were
hardly depicted. In later times, when mortuary display was not so central, temples were much more prominent.

This essay surveys the fragmentary evidence for early palaces and temples before moving to structures of the New Kingdom and later, which show great richness of design and symbolism.

THE ORIGINS

Early Palaces

Little or nothing is preserved from the earliest palaces, which were a point of departure for many later developments, but it is possible to reconstruct a hypothetical image of them. The two essential strands of evidence are mortuary-cult structures, whose forms probably used motifs shared with buildings for the living, and representations of buildings and building complexes.

The basic construction materials of early times were plant stems ranging from tree trunks to bundles of reeds, which formed structural elements; matting, used to fill the spaces between the supports; and mud brick. The Egyptian use of these materials was similar to that of Mesopotamia, and it has often been suggested that Egyptian architectural forms derived originally from there. Difficulties with this idea have been the fact that such forms could arise independently from manipulating similar materials, so that Egypt need not have depended on another tradition, and the problem of how such an influence could have reached Egypt from Mesopotamia more than a millennium before any attested direct connections between the two regions. In the 1980s, the discovery of cones for Mesopotamian-style wall mosaic at Buto (modern Tell al-Fara‘in) in the Delta (a few cones have also been found at Elephantine on the southern frontier) demonstrated such a link between Mesopotamia and late Predynastic Egyptian culture (circa 3200), most likely through the intermediary of the short-lived Late Uruk period settlements on the Euphrates in Syria. The architectural style of Egyptian palaces probably originated in the north of Egypt and hence could have absorbed Mesopotamian influence in the region. Southern Egypt, however, became politically dominant,
god Horus, who descended from his abode in the sky to be manifest in the king, the palace’s inhabitant. Thus, the palace was one meeting point of the divine and human spheres. The gods could also be manifest in their cult images in the fully sacred context of temples. Palace and temple were the most important places on earth, the palace being oriented to human life and the exercise of terrestrial power, and the temple to divine life and the maintenance of the cosmos through service to the gods.

Niche paneling did not remain restricted to the king. As early as the First Dynasty, it was adopted for the facades of the most prestigious nonroyal tombs, later becoming a symbol of passage or transition between the worlds of the living and the dead: the meeting point of human and divine on earth was changed into the locus of contact between two different realms of being. In the latter function, the niche panel became the false door, the characteristic offering place of tombs, and later of many temples, through which the recipient could emerge in spirit to partake of what was offered.

Despite this broadening, paneling continued to be important for palaces and temples. The most impressive preserved buildings of the first two dynasties, the “fort” at Hierakonpolis and the Shunat al-Zibib at Abydos (modern Araba al-Madfuna), which were the mortuary cult complexes of Kings Khasekhem and Khasekhemwy (probably the same ruler), are vast mud-brick enclosures with niche paneling, originally plastered, painted white, and perhaps decorated with colored patterns like some First Dynasty tomb facades (see the map in the “Historical Overview of Egypt” in Part 5 for the location of these and subsequent sites). The Shunat al-Zibib still stands to a height of about 10 meters (about 11 yards) and its ground plan is 105 by 65 meters. Structures on this scale would probably have dominated others of the time, their high walls rendering them visible and impressive from afar in the flat Nile Valley, as well as ensuring that only those entitled to enter could see what happened within. These buildings probably corresponded to similar ones constructed for living kings. Within the enclosures were mud-brick buildings, of which little is yet known; like their successors, these may have imitated forms in organic materials.

By far the largest such complex, and one that pointed toward the principal developments in Old Kingdom architecture, was the Step Pyramid enclosure at Saqqara, built in the Third Dynasty as the mortuary-cult complex and burial place of King Djoser. In this direct descendant of the Shunat al-Zibib, the transition to full construction in stone was made. The buildings within the niche-paneled enclosure wall were replicas, mostly dummies, of structures made of organic materials, or of their mud-brick descendants. Their style would have been at home both in temple complexes and in palaces, and the complex may have incorporated a model of a palace. Most of the buildings had a ritual significance. The Step Pyramid complex also introduced the divergence between timeless major monuments, which were built in stone, and other structures, including palaces and temples, which were of brick with at most some structural elements and furnishings in stone, as well as probably having roofs and many doorways of timber.

The Step Pyramid marked the final move of kings’ and other people’s principal expenditure on architectural display into the mortuary sphere, but palaces no doubt continued to be the most impressive buildings constructed for the living. The palace was where the king was at home and encountered his court. Since he manifested the world of the gods on earth and incorporated in himself all of the country’s power, the palace was necessarily remote from most people and probably continued to be legitimized by the ancient symbolic forms known from mortuary replicas. Palace and throne were symbolically equivalent: when they saw the complex from outside, those who could not enter saw both of these crucial symbols of rulership. When the king went outside the palace complex, he traveled with a portable throne, which symbolized the palace wherever he stopped and sat on it.

Royal residences included columned halls and porticoed reception areas next to pools stocked with fish and surrounded by trees and aquatic plants. A Middle Kingdom story depicting the Fourth Dynasty king Sneferu boating with twenty rowing girls implies that these pools could be large enough for such outings. The king had private living apartments probably forming
Social Institutions

a distinct building, while the palace complex as a whole, which may have been similar in extent to the entire capital of a particular king, included artists' workshops and, no doubt, large areas for administration, storage, and other everyday functions. The king's life was ritualized, and the palace was a stage on which he acted out his rule.

In one sense, the royal "residence" was also the country and the cosmos. The generic term ḫnw describing ḫtjtwy, the "residence"—or possibly the capital city—of the Twelfth Dynasty kings, was also a term for "Egypt." Written with a hieroglyph representing the plan of a brick enclosure with niche paneling or buttresses (𓊩), the word survived into Greco-Roman times. Nothing has been discovered of these complexes where kings resided, and the renaming of the residence for many successive Old Kingdom kings suggests that those rulers may have moved their residences frequently within the capital region, perhaps partly in order to be near their chief monumental undertakings, which were their mortuary complexes. Traces of Middle Kingdom provincial palaces have been discovered in the Delta, but little can yet be said of their architecture. A late Middle Kingdom palace with a garden is in the course of excavation at Tell al-Dab’a in the eastern Delta.

Despite the palace's central significance, the environment it created may not have been highly urbanized. The possible mobility of royal residences may have related to the relatively extensive settlement patterns favored by the elite, whose ideals, as presented in their tomb reliefs, were of residence in country estates rather than in cities. A little like such European Baroque palaces as Versailles near Paris and Caserta near Naples, which housed large numbers of people and their functions at a remove from major cities, the king's principal residence could have been a focus of state affairs without being very densely built or sited in the middle of the capital. He may also have resided in one palace and conducted administrative business in another at the heart of the capital, as he is known to have done in the New Kingdom. Whatever the detailed settlement pattern may have been—and this is largely unknown to archaeology—the capital region was thickly populated and formed a true center to the country. Additional royal residences were scattered through the country so that the king could stay in them on his journeys. Middle Kingdom remains of temporary palaces probably associated with military campaigns have been found in Lower Nubia, while New Kingdom provincial palaces have been identified at such sites as Dayr al-Ballas north of Thebes.

Early Temples

Temples were dwellings of gods as palaces were of kings. Most remains of early temples are of modest size and simple materials, and some are irregular in design. Thus, the temple of the goddess Satis on Elephantine Island focused on a small shrine in a natural opening between two granite boulders. It has generally been assumed that during the Early Dynastic period and the early Old Kingdom, the increasing expenditure on enormous mortuary monuments diverted resources away from provincial temples. (No large temple has been found near the capital, probably because the temples were within the floodplain.) Kings of these periods seldom mentioned temple construction, whereas they did record their dedication of cult statues and other materials within temples. A listing of deities of Memphis preserved in the Nineteenth Dynasty temple of Semy (Sethos) at Abydos refers to large numbers of temples, many of which can have been little more than small local shrines.

David O'Connor has shown that this evidence must be set against archaeological indications of large Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom temple enclosures, notably at Hierakonpolis, where remains of a First Dynasty enclosure previously interpreted as that of a palace are more likely to be part of a temple enclosure; a second enclosure nearby may date to the Second Dynasty. These temple enclosures, like those of palaces for living and dead kings, had niche-paneled walls and were centered on a large mound. In the late Old Kingdom, cult chapels for royalty were built near major provincial temples. These point to the significance of the temples themselves, of whose structures nothing is preserved.

Pictorial representation and some hieroglyphs on Early Dynastic objects show a wide range of types of early temples, including brick enclosures containing shrines that could be similar to the enclosures at Hierakonpolis. These forms may look back to Predynastic precursors, which
supplied the lineage for the more elaborate buildings of the Dynastic period. The most distinctive form in the representations is that of the sanctuary of the goddess Neith (fig. 2), which was depicted as a low reed or wattle enclosure containing a small vaulted building made of perishable materials. The drawing shows a pair of poles with pennants in the form of triangles of cloth at the entrance to the complex, while inside is another pole displaying a shield crossed with arrows, an emblem that became the hieroglyph of Neith. The poles with triangles are probably the forerunners both of the hieroglyph for “god” and of the monumental flagpoles before the pylons of later temples. Such flagpoles were not set up outside royal palaces or tombs, so they were a distinctive marker for residences of gods, which otherwise might have had a symbolism similar to that of royal complexes.

Literary evidence and excavations at Heliopolis (biblical On) show that some temples were built upon platforms filled with clean sand. In later times the foundations of walls were often built upon a layer of sand at the bottom of a trench. This usage, which probably did not have a structural purpose, may have symbolized either purity or the initial mound of creation on which temples emerged.

Fig. 2. Sanctuary of the goddess Neith represented on a wooden tag of the reign of Aha (First Dynasty), from Abydos. After ERHART GRAEFE AND URSULA VERHOEVEN (editors), RELIGION UND PHILOSOPHIE IN ALTEN AGYPTEN (1991).

Fragments of relief decoration show that, probably from the beginning of the Dynastic period, some temples had elaborate scenes of the king and gods on their walls and doorways, while a group of late Predynastic colossal statues of Min from the temple of Koptos (Qift, Gebtu) demonstrates that the approaches to a temple that was never among the most important in the country were treated in monumental fashion at a still earlier date.

Apart from mortuary temples in pyramid complexes, the earliest preserved temple structure with relief decoration is the Sixth Dynasty chapel dedicated to the “ka” of Pepy I (Meryre) in the temple complex of the goddess Bastet at Tell Basta in the Delta. The chapel was a small mud-brick building with stone doorways carved in relief. This was probably placed at a right angle to the axis of the temple of Bastet, and suggests indirectly that the latter was quite large, and perhaps also built in mud brick. Dedications of Pepy I show that he built similar chapels in other provincial centers, such as Dendara and Hierakonpolis.

Stone-built provincial temples are preserved at several Middle Kingdom sites, notably in the Faiyum at Madinat Madi and the undecorated temple of Qasr al-Sagha (fig. 3), while a limestone way station of Senwosret (Sesostris) I has been reconstructed from blocks reused in foundations at Karnak; more fragmentary evidence comes from many other places, including the turquoise mines of Sarabit al-Khadim in Sinai, where a temple of Hathor was constructed for the frequent expeditions to the site. The majority of temples probably continued to be built in mud brick. Some, such as that of Montu at Nag al-Madamud near Thebes, were of considerable size.

The temple of Madinat Madi consists of a portico with a transverse vestibule leading to three small shrines, of which the central one was the sanctuary of the goddess Renenutet. This temple is the earliest to preserve a fairly full range of the scene types known from later periods and foreshadowed by fragments and by reliefs in Old Kingdom royal mortuary temples and Middle Kingdom material from the Theban area.

THE NEW KINGDOM AND THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD

Whereas early palaces may have formed the point of departure for many architectural developments, temples dominate the record for the New Kingdom and later. I treat them first both
because they are better preserved and because some analogies between the two types of complex may be due to borrowings from temple to palace rather than the other way around.

**Temples**

The New Kingdom brought a great increase in temple building. Numerous structures of the period are well preserved, most of them within Egypt; but many important temples were built in Nubia, including the great rock-cut temple of Ramsesses (Rameses) II at Abu Simbel. The principal New Kingdom temples are concentrated around a small number of sites and should be set in context against the many that are lost. In this period the balance of expenditure on monuments shifted from mortuary complexes to temples, and royal mortuary temples became similar in both form and function to divine cult temples.

The ceremonial capital city of Thebes was turned into a stage on which rulership and relations among king, gods, and humanity could be celebrated on a grand scale. Comparable global designs existed in much earlier periods, as in the planning of the Great Pyramid and its surroundings at Giza, where the disposition of the king's enormous tomb in relation to its temples and the elite tombs on its east and west sides modeled the structure of society in plan, and in elevation related society through the king to the heavenly world of the gods.

The conception underlying the temples was that the gods gave the king rulership on earth and created a world that could be made bountiful both for themselves and for human beings. The king's duty was to set order, which was constantly threatened, in place of disorder, and to maintain and expand the territory of Egypt. In return for the gods' bounty and for the victories they vouchsafed to him, the king constructed temples, filled them with exquisite furnishings made of rare and exotic materials, and endowed them with land and personnel to support and perform the cult. Thus, the temple structures represented only part of the resources dedicated to the gods for their foundations. Dedications were cumulative, so that by the end of the New Kingdom much of the country's land was owned by temples.

Temple traditions continued and developed into the early centuries CE. The best preserved and most informative temples date to late Ptolemaic and early Roman times. Their decoration is much more elaborate than that of the New Kingdom, but they represent a specialized development. The hieroglyphic script was extended, vastly enriching its capacity to convey meanings in complex forms; but in that period normal Egyptian literacy in the demotic script did not give access to hieroglyphs, which were therefore the preserve of a small priestly group. Moreover, unlike New Kingdom temples, those of the
Greco-Roman period contain few reliefs and inscriptions that relate to events of the time. Thus, they constitute a rich and refined source of native Egyptian conceptions—they display hardly any Greek influence—but they seem to have been connected only weakly to the everyday realities of their time. For a full picture of temples, both New Kingdom and Greco-Roman sources should be reviewed.

**Temples in Their Settings**

The principal temples were grouped into complexes typically containing a dominant structure dedicated to the principal local god, with subsidiary temples for other deities; many cities worshiped triads of deities and had three main temples. There were smaller temples dedicated to particular rituals, such as the bark shrines and way stations of the New Kingdom and the birth houses of the Greco-Roman period, where the principal deity was born or, if female, gave birth to a young god.

Temple complexes were often linked to one another. The whole Theban area formed a vast sacred space, whose principal axes were the north-south route linking the great temple of Amun-Re at Karnak with the more specialized Luxor Temple, and the east-west axis linking Karnak to the temples on the West Bank of the Nile. At a smaller scale, the Greco-Roman complex of Hathor at Dendara, which also included a birth house, a temple of Isis, and various other structures, related to a second complex on the other side of a settlement less than a kilometer away. At Esna (Iunyt, Latopolis) the temple of Khnum was connected with another temple in the nearby countryside and a third across the river. The most far-flung connections of this sort were the links among the Greco-Roman temples of Lower Nubia, focusing on the island of Philae in the First Cataract, and the association of the temple of Horus at Edfu with that of Hathor at Dendara, nearly 200 kilometers (about 120 miles) downstream.

New Kingdom temples were also closely bound to palaces. Next to the complex of temples of Amun-Re, Mut, and Khons at Karnak, probably on the left, that is, the north side of the approach to the temple from the river, was the principal royal palace of the Theban area. Several texts recount visits of the king to the royal palace near Karnak, while others described his visits to the Luxor Temple to the south. The main administrative business of the state would probably have been conducted within the palace. Late New Kingdom evidence, from a time when the king no longer resided at Thebes, shows that justice, a function closely related to royalty, was exercised just north of Karnak, near the Eighteenth Dynasty royal palace, whose location may still have been in use.

The same spatial relationship of palace and temple can be seen in the mortuary complexes of Ramesses II at the Ramesseum (fig. 4) and Ramesses III at Madinat Habu, in both of which there was a small ceremonial palace next to the first court and to the left—in those cases south—of the axis. The function of these palaces may have been symbolic, perpetuating the accessibility of the temple for the king in the next life. These complexes may be descendants of the grandiose design of Amenhotep (Amenophis) III, whose palace at al-Malqata was near an enormous artificial lake and to the south of his colossal mortuary temple. The project involved extensive management of water levels and probably foundered on its failure. The palace had an additional connection with temporary ritual structures in the low desert to its south, where the king's jubilee or *sed* festivals in his thirtieth, thirty-fourth, and thirty-seventh years were celebrated.

While the buildings of Amenhotep III, in particular, re-created a sanctified cosmos in the ritual capital—and probably also at the administrative capital of Memphis—the most elaborate symbolism was reserved for the temples themselves. In comparison with the city, the temple was multiply protected and sanctified. The first layer of protection was given by the mud-brick enclosure wall surrounding a temple or temple complex. Individual temples had stone enclosure walls and were approached through colossal entrance gateways and pylons, the latter being the most characteristic of Egyptian architectural forms.

After the pylon or pylons came a courtyard, followed by one or two multicolumned, or hypostyle halls, intermediate halls, and the sanctuary, behind which was a set of service rooms or subsidiary sanctuaries. The sanctuary was often set apart from the rest of the structure by a corri-
The temple axis ran straight from gateway to sanctuary, so that, on a theoretical east–west orientation, the sun could strike the image of the god within, while leaving most of the surrounding rooms almost dark (temples were mostly set at right angles to the Nile, so that many did not, in fact, face east or west). This openness was limited, however, because the...
The Construction and Decoration of Temples

Temples presented fewer challenges in construction than did pyramids, and the methods by which they were built are better understood. These methods evolved considerably between the New Kingdom and the Greco-Roman period. While some New Kingdom temple structures built on surprisingly insubstantial foundations have collapsed in modern times, this has not happened with Greco-Roman buildings, whose standard of construction is remarkable. Over millennia temples were rebuilt repeatedly on the same sites, incorporating stone from earlier structures into the foundations and walls of their successors. Tens of thousands of blocks from Middle and New Kingdom buildings have been recovered from foundations in the temple complex of Amun at Karnak. The late Ptolemaic temple of Hathor at Dendara stands on a raft of masonry intended to support an enclosure wall in addition to the main structure and including earlier Ptolemaic decorated blocks (fig. 5). These show that the temple’s predecessor was not ancient when it was torn down to make way for a grander replacement.

Early stone temples were mostly built of limestone, which occurs throughout the Nile Valley as far south as Edfu. From the New Kingdom on, sandstone quarried from Jebel al-Silsila became the normal material in southern Upper Egypt. (Few temples to the north are preserved.) Certain elements, such as doorways, were sometimes constructed in hard stone; the ruined temple of Isis at Bahbayt al-Hagar in the Delta (fourth-third centuries) is the only one known that was built throughout in hard stone. The best limestone provided a superior surface for relief carving, but limestone architraves could span only three meters, imposing severe restrictions in design. With Egyptian structural techniques, major temples could not have been built in limestone: that of Sety I at Abydos, the only surviving one with limestone walls, uses sandstone for structural elements.

Rock-cut temples were constructed with techniques essentially similar to those used for the excavation of tombs. They vary in scale, from small shrines in out-of-the-way places, such as stations on the routes to quarries in the Eastern Desert, to the grandiose temples of Abu Simbel, which are similar in size to temples in major centers in Egypt. Architecturally, the rock-cut temples derive from freestanding structures and show no special originality; even the colossi of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel are paralleled by artistically much superior statues in front of temples in the Theban area.

The basic methods of construction of freestanding temples were simple: successive courses of masonry were laid on extremely thin layers of mortar, secured in position with wooden dovetail clamps on the internal joints, and left until the mortar set. The clamps were then taken out and their cavities filled with mor-

Fig. 5. Southwestern view of the temple of Hathor at Dendara (first century BCE to first century CE). E. CHASSINAT, LE TEMPLE DE DENDER A I (1934) (Cont.)
At this stage the wall surfaces were dressed only along block joints. The masonry was irregular, and the jointing made maximum use of the stone; a complete course of blocks was not always level. The only period during which blocks of a standard size were used, generously jointed with mortar, was that of King Akhenaten.

As buildings rose, they were surrounded by heaps and ramps of rubble, and sometimes of mud brick, upon which the large blocks were dragged. The base of the southeastern construction ramp for the first pylon of the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak, which was made of mud brick, was never cleared away. This method was still in use at the beginning of the twentieth century and is recorded in photographs of the reconstruction of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak after its partial collapse in 1899. It had the advantage of simplicity and of using only materials easily available, as well as being probably less hazardous than more economical methods.

After the walls were completed, their surfaces were dressed smooth for decoration in painting or in relief. The dressing may often have been carried out as the ramps and filling of the rooms were removed, but sometimes it was completed later or not at all. The decoration was then probably done from wooden scaffolding, except for ceilings and other sections at a great height, which may have been carved before the filling was taken away. Although pictures of Egyptian scaffolding survive, there are remarkably few traces of it on walls.

The principles of temple decoration were the same as those for other painting and relief. Because of the complexity of decorative schemes, the creation of an overall design must have been an essential stage, and Greco-Roman schemes in particular were often executed over many decades. Much decoration is unfinished, leaving abundant evidence of the methods employed. Despite the long period involved in construction and decoration, the methods seem to have been devised for speed and economy of execution. Artists worked in groups under supervisors and little evidence for their identity is preserved, but the master artists, who may have been the designers or architects of whole temples, had a high status. The stela of the twin brothers Suty and Hor of Amenhotep III’s reign, which is itself a religious and artistic masterpiece, states that they together controlled the works on the Luxor Temple, one of their king’s principal projects; they were its architects.

Areas to be painted or carved were laid out with squared grids, onto which the decoration was drafted in paint, probably from a model at a much smaller scale. In some cases the figures were then covered with a thin wash of plaster, and before this was fully dry the final painting of the outlines was executed, followed by the addition of surface color and detailing.

If reliefs were to be carved, the stages of work were essentially similar—and sometimes reliefs reworked existing completed paintings. There were two basic forms of relief, raised and sunken. In raised relief, which was used principally for interiors, the area between the figures was carved away so that they projected a few millimeters. For sunk relief, used on exterior walls in part because it took the strong sunlight better than raised relief, the uncarved areas were retained and the figures were contained within the thickness of the stone. In both forms of relief, the outlines were first incised and the depth of the intended modeling was roughly cut away. The final modeling, which was mostly very flat and subtle, was carved separately. Unfinished works show that these stages could succeed one another very quickly.

Relief carving was in principle painted, although the paint was often not applied. For painting, the artists worked over the surface again and repeated essentially the same stages as they used for painting where there was no relief. The various craftsmen—outline draftsmen, painters, and sculptors—often departed considerably from one another’s work. The full effect of a painted relief can be judged accurately only if it was completed and is well preserved. But incomplete works, which were very common, may reveal features and meanings that would have been obliterated if they had been completed.

The provision for removing rainwater, of which there was very little, illustrates this respect. The roof was constructed of flat stone beams, sometimes with inserted fillets of stone along the joints. On top of this layer was an irregular paving, which ensured that the straight joints did not coincide with those between the beams, thus...
Palaces and Temples of Ancient Egypt

completely excluding the outside from within, except at a few window slits. The rainwater itself was evacuated through the wall of the roof parapet and then poured forth from gargoyles in the form of lions inscribed with spells protecting the temple against evil influences. In a country relying on river water, rain from the sky was an element of disorder that could disturb the temple’s sanctity.

The decoration on pylons and other exterior walls was similarly significant, both for the temple itself and for the celebration of the king’s role. In the New Kingdom, these surfaces were decorated with scenes of the king ritually slaughtering his enemies before the god of the temple, or in the Nineteenth and Twentieth dynasties with sequences of reliefs showing the course of his military campaigns. Several ritual scenes are accompanied by listings of the foreign regions the king claimed to dominate, and similar lists were carved on statuary in the outer courts of temples. Temples of the Greco-Roman period reverted to the ritualized design. All this decoration had a similar symbolism, signifying that the king, as the protagonist of human society, established order against chaos and protected the temple within from enemies and disturbance, while also dedicating the fruits of his actions to the gods. The placing of the reliefs symbolically warded off enemies and reinforced the temple’s status as a sanctified microcosm of the larger world of Egypt.

The temple’s status as a model of the world at creation was symbolized in other ways. The columns in the courtyard and hypostyle halls alluded to aquatic marsh plants; this motif was repeated in different forms on the base registers of the walls. These features are absent from the innermost sanctuary areas of New Kingdom temples, and this absence probably symbolizes the ordered world within, as against the primeval marsh outside from which it arose. Greco-Roman wall designs present all of the principal symbolic elements in most areas of temples, varying them more subtly from outer to inner spaces. The top of each wall, and especially the ceiling, symbolizes the sky, parts of it bearing patterns of stars or more detailed astronomical representations, and parts, solar motifs indicating the passage of the sun through the temple.

As in Western Classical and Renaissance architecture, the individual scenes on a wall replicated at small scale the design of whole walls, each forming a minor “order” within the colossal “order” of the wall and itself creating a “world.” The line forming the base of each unit of decoration signified the earth. The scenes could be framed by was scepters (ধ) symbolizing the supports of the sky, while along the top of each register was an elongated hieroglyph of the sky.

The subject of the scenes was almost invariable: the king offered to a god or gods, while they gave him gifts symbolic of life, prosperity, and power. Figures of the king face toward the sanctuary and figures of gods away from it. The deity to whom a temple was dedicated was represented many times, but numerous other deities were also shown. Scenes were grouped into sequences to convey the outlines of particular rituals, or the composition of areas of decoration mimicked the geography of the country. In Greco-Roman temples a schema was designed in which the vertical columns of inscription framing each scene could be read in sequence down the four registers of a wall to form a large-scale statement of the king’s titulary, and on the god’s side to give a grouping of epithets and statements interchanging with those attributed to the king. The iconography of the king, and to a lesser extent of gods, was often patterned to create meaning over whole areas of decoration, while color contributed an additional and to some extent independent symbolism. The main areas of temple relief include few extensive texts. In the inner areas, writing is confined to identifying captions, tags describing the ritual act performed in a scene, and brief speeches of the participants. The meaning of these compositions is in the complex interplay of figures, ritual actions, identifying texts, and sequences of scenes.

The relief figures of deities do not represent cult statues, but are instead generalized images that interact with the king and are depicted at the same scale as him. Cult statues, on which the daily rituals of the temples were performed, were kept in shrines in the sanctuaries or stored in hidden “crypts” set in the thicknesses of the temple walls. Decorated crypts, notably those of the temple of Hathor at Dendera, and the sanctuary of the sixth-century temple of Amun-Re at Hibis in al-Kharga oasis, are the
principal sources for a great variety of often exotic-seeming forms of these statues.

The complexity and subtlety of the relief compositions reached its zenith in the Greco-Roman period, for which several well-preserved temple complexes present a very rich record. Although the texts of these temples have been much studied, their architecture, iconography, and composition have been insufficiently appreciated because their artistic style has found less favor than those of New Kingdom temples.

New Kingdom and Late Period Palaces

A number of palaces are preserved from the New Kingdom and Late Period. The principal cities contained ruling, residential, and mortuary palaces. In other places there were palaces for temporary royal visits and country residences, such as the "Harim Palace" of Kom Madinat Ghurab, at the entrance to the Faiyum, near places favored for hunting. Several royal women resided there permanently.

Apart from the structures of Akhenaten at Amarna, the most significant remains of New Kingdom palaces are those of Amenhotep III at al-Malqata in western Thebes and of Merneptah in Memphis. The principal ruling palaces are not preserved.

Al-Malqata was a residential palace built around Amenhotep's year thirty. The palace, sited next to the vast artificial lake of Birkat Habu, was an extensive complex of buildings focusing on suites of rooms organized around columned halls, as well as probably including open areas for assembly (fig. 6). The whole appears to have been a single story high; the columned halls would have been higher than the surrounding rooms, with their upper walls pierced by windows to let in light. (Egyptian interiors, like most in premodern times, were

Fig. 6. View looking southwest of the al-Malqata palace of Amenhotep III, Eighteenth Dynasty, during excavations at the beginning of the twentieth century. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK
Palaces and Temples of Ancient Egypt

rather dimly lit.) In keeping with the greetings in the international correspondence of the period, a major set of suites in the palace consisted of apartments for royal women of two ranks. The ceremonial structures on the low desert nearby included one for military displays. The palace complex contained a temple of Amun-Re.

Many administrative sealings and ink inscriptions from jar walls have been found on the palace site. They document principally the preparations for the sed festivals and show that vast amounts of provisions were delivered there from various economic institutions. A certain number were "gifts" from high officials to the king; they were presumably formal contributions to the festivities rather than vital to their organization.

Many walls were decorated with brightly colored paintings in a lively "secular" style; floors too had paintings. Much of the subject matter related to the world of nature, including both plants and animals. The ceilings of the public halls had more formal decoration similar to that of temples, showing winged disks and other sacred emblems of the sky. The range of preserved motifs suggests that the excavators did not find the principal ceremonial areas, but the richness of the decoration and its artistic liveliness give it a unique value.

The palace of Merneptah at Memphis, from which a number of decorative stone elements are preserved, was much smaller than al-Malqata and was a ceremonial and perhaps administrative structure rather than a residence. Its layout was similar to that of a temple, with an entrance court that led to an audience hall containing a throne on which the king sat for audiences. As in temples, the central area was elevated. Floor paintings probably showed bound captives, conveying a message of dominance to foreigners brought before the king, while other features of the decoration likened the king's presence to that of a god in his temple.

The latest preserved major palace is that of King Apries (589–570) at Memphis. It appears to have been similar in design to Merneptah's. Its most striking feature is that it was constructed on top of an enormous artificial platform, which raised it more than thirteen meters (about forty feet) above the surrounding land. Thus, although the palace was within an enclosure wall, the building, which was approached up a monumental ramp, must have been clearly visible from the nearby city, above which it may have been elevated. This greater visibility of the king's ceremonial abode may perhaps relate to the character of kingship in the Late Period, which was rather more secular than that of earlier times. A gateway with sed-festival decoration found dismantled on the site probably formed part of the palace complex, showing that it displayed the king's ritual status as well as his material power and dominance.

CONCLUSION

Temples and palaces were central symbols of the religious and secular aspects of Egyptian culture—aspects that were far less distinct in antiquity than often in later periods. Thus the two merged in their symbolism. The many smaller temples and local shrines that complemented the preserved major structures are largely unknown, but doubtless presented a more diverse image while also contributing to the pervasive significance of religious building complexes. Yet relatively few people had access to temples, and the doorways of both temples and palaces were potent symbols of the exalted nature of the divine and royal beings within and of the subordination of those who were not privileged to enter the temple, for reasons of ritual purity and initiation, or the palace, for reasons of status and perhaps security. This remoteness of deity and king was a vital support for their power.

The expenditure on temples and palaces was commensurate with their importance for the state, and few major temples were constructed in decentralized periods. But much of the significance of temples was also internal to themselves, relating to their guardianship of an artistic and cultural tradition. In this perspective, Greco-Roman period temples form a pinnacle of Egyptian achievement. The rulers of the time, who may have adopted a few features of Egyptian architecture in their own lost palaces, recognized the significance of temples for Egyptian culture and for national consciousness as represented by the native priestly elite, and devoted greater resources to their construction.
than ever before. From beginning to end, temples are vital to the comprehension of ancient Egypt.

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