

# Egyptian temples and early christian churches essay

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Danny Ingraham Architecture in History Rand Carter October 2, 2012 New Kingdom Egyptian Temples and Early Christian Churches One of the most spectacular things about art history is being able to see how artistic works can vary across cultures and in passing time. However, art does not always completely change, and often times two artists or even two entire civilization can create works that are independent, yet share stark similarities in style or function to a creation or creations of another artist or civilization. The Egyptian New Kingdom, which spanned from approximately 1550 - 1070 BCE, and the era of the Early Christian Church, while separated by thousands of miles and more than a millennium, are two examples of civilizations that have created such comparable works. Aside from the fact that both structures were associated with tremendous religious, and often political, significance, New Kingdom Temples and Early Christian Churches were erected with a longitudinal progression and striking structural similarities. One of the most notable differences between New Kingdom Temples and the early Christian Churches are their outer facades. The basilica of St. Apollinaire Nuovo at Ravenna provides a great example of the plain, brick exterior that was characteristic of the early Christian basilicas, however, these simple walls were only the outer shell to a vast and elaborate interior. This is quite different in style and function from the New Kingdom Temples, such as the Great Temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, whose facade exhibits colossal rock cut figures and pylon gates. Unlike early Christians, most Egyptians were not even permitted to enter their temples, and thus could only appreciate them from their exteriors. This intimidating exterior was as much of the temple that most people would see, and, as a result, it served

the aesthetic purpose of forbidding the public's progression to the interior, while the unassuming exterior of the Christian churches facilitated entrance into the church for worship.

Another similarity between the Egyptian New Kingdom Temple and Early Christian Church construction are the series of archways that distinguish the aisles and nave of Old St Peter's Basilica create a visual affect quite comparable to that of the interior colonnade of the hypostyle hall at the Temple of Khons at Karnak. Indeed both these features function as the first step in the progression from the Egyptian peristyle court and Christian atrium to a more sacred space and the altar. The hypostyle hall and nave both incorporate clerestory windows, which allows light to flood into the upper volume of the hypostyle columns and through the incense smoke that collected there in order to create a sense of mystery, the desired effect of religious ritual. In addition, both of these halls run down the longitudinal axis, which allows people to be able to track the east west progression of the sun. The center most point of both Egyptian New Kingdom Temples and Early Christian Churches are home to the most sacred spaces and the altar. In a religious sense, these two sites perform very similar functions.

At the center of a New Kingdom Temple, the pharaoh was as close to his father, the sun god, as earthly possible. In Christian practice, the Church is considered to be the house of God and the altar is where the Eucharist is consumed and the divine Father is at one with his congregation. Ultimately, both the altar and the center of Egyptian New Kingdom Temples serve not only as the most sacred of spaces, but also as culminations of the

architectural and spiritual journeys that one embarks on by traveling from one end of the structure to the other. Conceptually, these two forms of religious building are very similar. Although the architectural techniques and the time periods of the Egyptian New Kingdom and Early Christianity were quite different, these two styles of building achieve a similar structure and function. Both buildings are clearly focused on a progression from the exterior peristyle courtyard, through the hypostyle hall, to the center of worship. This journey is a common theme between the two styles of architecture, and is ultimately meant to reflect the spiritual journey that are common to these two early civilizations. ————— [ 1 ].

Fazio Michael W. , Marian Moffett, and Lawrence Wodehouse. A World History of Architecture (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 31.