

Ancient egypt: palaces and pyramids

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Pyramids have long been an image of ancient Egyptian lands and culture, being one of the most recognizable aspects of their life and culture. Huge man-made buildings give tourists and many alike a view into the past the dedication these ancient people put forth to their craft and cause. Not long before these great pyramids were raised, another people like the ancient Egyptians built huge complexes themselves.

Great palace structures like that of Sargon II, discovered in Dur Sharrukin where present-day Khorsabad, Iraq is located, allow us to understand how these people of the Ancient Near East were vastly similar and respectfully different from the people of Ancient Egypt. The pyramids of Ancient Egypt help us journey into the past and help us gain an idea of what these huge structures meant to the people constructing them, and those who they were constructed for. These structures were built for the burial of kings, rulers, and people of the like.

They were raised high to the sky, thought to help these fallen leaders become closer to the gods and to allow an easy transition into the afterlife. They had slanted triangular walls which are thought to represent the slanting rays of the sun. The first of these burial chambers was a mastaba, which was low, solid, and rectangular in shape. These mastabas consisted of a chapel where the deceased person's family and friends could pay tribute through the offering of gifts. A serdab was also inside the mastabas where the statue of ka (believed to be the soul of a person) was placed.

An underground burial chamber completed the construction of the mastaba. These mastabas were originally built with mud brick, but as the culture progressed they were built with limestone. Eventually, the mastaba evolved

into a much larger structure. This structure was a stacking of mastaba forms with a large mastaba at the base and decreasing in size as it extended vertically, like steps. The stepped pyramid, as they were called, contained an original mastaba towards the center of this raised structure. It also contained an underground burial chamber just like the original mastabas.

These huge pyramids were built with massive quantities of limestone making them very sturdy structures being able to withstand strong weather conditions. The pyramid structures that followed were slightly different in their structure and composition. They no longer contained the original mastaba like that of the stepped pyramids. Instead, they enclosed ascending and descending corridors leading to and from the underground burial chamber. There are also different in that they have small corridors that are believed to be air shafts. The most famous of these pyramid structures are the Great Pyramids of Giza in Giza.

These pyramids were built by three successive kings Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. Placed on the west side of the Nile, these pyramids were constructed as funerary temples for the three kings, each having his own built where he was to be placed upon his death. These pyramids are of the regular pyramid variety, not displaying the steps like those of the stepped pyramids. The building of these pyramids was no ordinary task. Teams of workers transported stones averaging 2.5 tons by muscle power, placing logs underneath as rollers, and sliding them across mud on sleds.

When the kings died, they were embalmed and placed inside a coffin which was placed deep and underground within the pyramid inside the burial chamber. A large 50-ton stone block sealed off the burial chamber. These

pyramids were used as a protection device as the kings' souls each climbed to the sky to be amongst the gods. These pyramids of Giza also contained three false passage ways to further protect the kings from intruders entering the pyramid. Inscriptions of the deceased kings depict them climbing up rays of sun to join the sun god Ra.

These inscriptions help tell us that the Egyptian people were highly invested in the afterlife and spent much time preparing for it. It also reinforces the structure and function of the pyramids as their slanting walls were thought to be built in accordance with the rays of the sun. The palace complexes of Assyria during the time period of the Ancient Near East were no slouch to the pyramids of ancient Egypt. These huge complexes were elaborate in design and structure as they were built for similar reasons to the pyramids of Egypt.

These palace complexes were constructed in honor and tribute of kings just like the pyramids of Ancient Egypt. However, these palaces were built in honor of military victories and ruling success, unlike the reasons of the pyramids. Constructed with adobe brick, limestone, and marble the complexes were used with different kinds of material unlike the pyramids of Ancient Egypt. These complexes were lined with relief sculptures, paintings, and wall reliefs describing military victories of kings. These works helped show the power of the king to the people visiting and entering the complex.

A famous palace complex was built by Sargon II and was located in Dur Sharrukin. Surrounding the castle complex was a protecting fortress. The palace complex was guarded by two towers and was only accessible by a wide ramp leading up to an open square around which government and religious officials were scattered about. The main courtyard was beyond this

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complex which housed service buildings on the right and temples to the left. The heart of the palace was just past the main courtyard where the king's residence was located. A gate with large a pair of lamassu guarded the entrance to the king's palace.

Inside the palace was a large ziggurat made up of seven levels each painted a different color. This ziggurat was a symbol of the king's claim to his empire. Both the pyramids of Ancient Egypt and the palace complexes of Assyria were massive architectural achievements of their respective time periods. These huge structures help show the kind of religious and military commitment that the people of these two periods possessed. The palaces and pyramids were both built upon the idea of honoring the kings of the time, each through a different avenue.

The pyramids of Ancient Egypt were used as a funerary complex to honor and ultimately assist their kings into the afterlife where they would live for eternity with the gods. The palace complexes were also built in tribute of their king but were used to honor military achievement and ruling success. Although we are uncertain of the exact meaning of everything to do with the two structures, they allow us to take a journey into the ancient world and better understand the culture and life of these interesting people.