

FOREWORD

The Beginnings of Art, the first volume of THE ETERNAL PRESENT, dealt with prehistory. The present volume, *The Beginnings of Architecture*, deals with the first high civilizations, Egypt and Sumer. The two volumes are independent of each other, yet related by a common interest—the problem of constancy and change.

It is a problem that does not end with prehistory nor with the first high civilizations. It permeates the entire history of mankind. At no time, however, did the problem of constancy and change, rooted ineradicably in the human soul, flare up with such intensity as it did during the first high civilizations, following upon the fundamental changes caused by the establishment of a strictly differentiated social order.

The Eggshells of Prehistory. Since time immemorial, man had lived in isolated, independent groups. Even in the context of the new stern, hierarchical society, certain of man's primeval beliefs lived on with a remarkable constancy.

Among the most notable was the role of the animal, venerated throughout prehistory as a being mightier and more beautiful than man. The constancy with which this veneration persisted side by side with the worship of anthropomorphic deities—the transmutation of animals into deities and deities into animals, and the granting of immortality to animals through mummification—bears witness that at no time during the entire Egyptian period was the prehistoric bond with the animal severed.

Creating an Anthropomorphic Cosmos. The establishment of the state coincided with the establishment of a pantheon of anthropomorphic gods in which each deity possessed a clearly differentiated physiognomy, had a particular task to perform, and was part of a patriarchal family with a dictatorial ruler at its head.

Closely connected with the conception of individual, anthropomorphic gods was the recognition of the human body—more especially the female body—as beautiful. Delicacy in its sculptural treatment was achieved in the Fourth Dynasty, and thereafter the portrayal of the female body has remained a supreme goal of the sculptor's art.

Constancy and Change in the Mode of Expression. The differences between paleolithic art and art of the high civilizations leap to the eye. The astonishing thing is the constancy with which certain constituent elements of paleolithic art live on. The most telling qualities of prehistoric art endure: the stress upon

outline and the sinking of reliefs into the stone. Although the uneven rock walls of the caverns have been replaced by plane surfaces, the sunken relief persists as a light-catcher, the illumination of one rim of the sunken outline being emphasized by a dark line of shadow along the other even in the glaring sunlight of the New Kingdom pylons.

The Origins of Monumental Architecture: Mesopotamia. The creation of the first man-made temple is synonymous with the emergence of monumentality. The prehistoric Al 'Ubaid acropolis of Tepe Gawra XIII, with its open plan of three temples, and the large temples of Uruk (ca. 3000 B.C.) were not surpassed or even equaled throughout Mesopotamian history.

Ziggurats: Stairways of the Gods. The ziggurat, the temple tower, originated early but did not reach its culmination (as in the ziggurat of Ur) till around 2000 B.C., half a millennium later than the pyramids. Ziggurats, in contrast to the pyramids, were accessible and stood within the precincts of the city. Their sequences of terraces afforded opportunity for Sumer's most inspired architectural invention: the monumental stairway.

Beginnings of Stone Architecture and the Ka: Egypt. It was the grave that gave birth to the first stone architecture. The sacred precinct of Zoser's mortuary temple at Saqqara, with its step pyramid and galaxy of inner courts, was built of the "eternal" material for one sole purpose: to provide an eternal existence for the Ka of the dead king.

Pyramids: Rites and Space. The form of the pyramid consists of four equal isosceles triangles converging on a single point. Plane surfaces, the constituent element of Egyptian architecture, reign supreme—a triumph of abstract form.

Through its symbolic impact the pyramid merges and even competes with eternity. Human endeavor has never again achieved such sublime simplicity in materializing man's irrepressible urge to link his fate with eternity. Immaculate precision makes logic merge with enigma and mystery.

The Great Temples and the Eternal Wandering. Ground plans of the great temples of the New Kingdom correspond to Egyptian belief, which accepted no standstill in life or death. Their layout expressed the idea of an eternal wandering. Except for the dark cella in which the image of the god was preserved, every part was conceived as a place of passage. Even the great hypostyle halls, with their forests of columns, formed passageways for the king and his procession taking the sacred statue of a god on his wandering to another sanctuary. No interior space was provided for the community as, for example, in a Christian church.

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Hatshepsut and the Cosmic Inner Court. The terraced mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut was built in the rock amphitheater of Deir el Bahari and represents the radiant climax of Egypt: a rare unity of architecture and sculpture which remained unsurpassed. Like all Egyptian architecture, this temple is oriented vertically, its finely articulated man-made structure being embedded with great daring within the immense verticality of the rock amphitheater.

Supremacy of the Vertical. One of the great changes from prehistory, with its equal rights of all directions, was the advent of the vertical as an organizing principle to which everything had to be related. This occurred at the beginning of the high civilizations, with the rise of architecture. The pyramid, the ziggurat, and monoliths in the form of steles and obelisks expressed the vertical as the connecting link with the cosmos.

The horizontal is the line of repose: the vertical is the line of movement. Yet horizontal and vertical belong together, connected by the angle of ninety degrees, which, together with them, acquired an extraordinarily powerful position. Axis and symmetry are consequences of this new principle of organization.

The penetration into Egyptian art of the vertical as an organizing principle is overwhelming. In reliefs all figures are projected onto a vertical plane, and in sculpture a vertical axis passes through the body, forming the line of intersection of two vertical planes crossing each other at right angles. This method of representation was retained throughout three millennia.

The meaning of the squared grid, invented by the Egyptians, was not to facilitate the reproduction of the external appearance of things, but to project their absolute proportions onto the vertical plane.

The First Architectural Space Conception. Space conception is an automatic, psychic recording of the visible environment. It develops instinctively, usually remaining in the unconscious.

The first space conception in architecture encompasses the high civilizations of Egypt and Sumer and also Greece. The common denominator, despite deep-rooted differences in almost every sphere of life, was a common attitude toward the placing of volumes in limitless space. The pyramids of Giza and the Acropolis of Athens give perhaps the clearest expression of the attitude toward architectural space throughout this long period. Differences between them are more obvious than their underlying common approach to space.

In neither the Greek nor the Egyptian civilizations was there any development of interior space that could compare with the immense force their builders knew how to express when confronting their structures with the open sky.