Subject: **Urban & Regional Planning**
Topic: **Egyptian Civilization**
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- **Ancient Egypt** was a long-standing [civilization](#) in [north](#)-[eastern Africa](#). It was concentrated along the middle to lower reaches of the [Nile River](#), reaching its greatest extent in the [second millennium BC](#), during the [New Kingdom](#). It reached from the [Nile Delta](#) in the north, as far south as [Jebel Barkal](#) at the [Fourth Cataract](#) of the Nile. Extensions to the geographic range of ancient Egyptian civilization included, at different times, areas of the southern [Levant](#), the Eastern Desert and the [Red Sea](#) coastline, the [Sinai Peninsula](#), and the [Western body](#) (focused on the several [oases](#)). Ancient Egypt developed over at least three and a half millennia. It began with the incipient unification of Nile Valley polities around [3150 BC](#), and is conventionally thought to have ended in [31 BC](#) when the early [Roman Empire](#) conquered and absorbed [Ptolemaic Egypt](#) as a state.

- The civilization of ancient Egypt was based on a finely balanced control of natural and human resources, characterized primarily by controlled irrigation of the fertile Nile Valley; the mineral exploitation of the valley and surrounding desert regions; the early development of an independent writing system and literature; the organization of collective projects; trade with surrounding regions in east / central Africa and the eastern Mediterranean; and finally, military ventures that exhibited strong characteristics of imperial hegemony and territorial domination of neighbouring cultures at different periods. Motivating and organising these activities were a socio-political and economic elite that achieved social consensus by means of an elaborate system of religious belief under the figure of a semi-divine ruler (usually male) from a succession of ruling dynasties, and related to the larger world by means of polytheistic beliefs.

Culture

- The Egyptian religion, embodied in Egyptian mythology, is a succession of beliefs held by the people of Egypt, as early as predynastic times and all the way until the coming of Christianity and Islam in the Græco-Roman and Arab eras. These were conducted by Egyptian priests or magicians, but the use of magic and spells is questioned.

- Every animal portrayed and worshiped in ancient Egyptian art, writing and religion is indigenous to Africa, all the way from the predynastic until the Graeco-Roman eras, over 3000 years. The Dromedary, domesticated first in Arabia, first appears in Egypt (and North Africa) beginning in the 2nd millennium BC.

- The temple was a sacred place where only priests and priestesses were allowed. On special occasions people were allowed into the temple courtyard.

- The religious nature of ancient Egyptian civilization influenced its contribution to the arts of the ancient world. Many of the great works of ancient Egypt depict gods, goddesses, and pharaohs, who were also considered divine. Ancient Egyptian art in general is characterized by the idea of order.

- Evidence of mummies and pyramids outside ancient Egypt indicate reflections of ancient Egyptian belief values on other prehistoric cultures, transmitted in one way over the Silk Road. Ancient Egypt's foreign contacts included Nubia and Punt to the south, the Aegean and ancient Greece to the north, the Levant and other regions in the Near East to the east, and also Libya to the west.

- Although analyzing the hair of ancient Egyptian mummies from the Late Middle Kingdom has revealed evidence of a stable diet,[5] mummies from circa 3200 BC show signs of severe anæmia and hæmolytic disorders

Town planning

- **Location**

    The reasons for the foundation of a new settlement could be varied: security, often combined with economics, as in the case of the southern fortress towns (Buhen); cultic and administrative needs (Kahun); political motives seem to have led Akhenaten to found Akhetaten. The main consideration where to build was generally proximity to a waterway and height above the floodplains. Adobe buildings are very vulnerable when brought in prolonged contact with water, be it seeping groundwater or the rising Nile. But even stone edifices are in danger of collapsing, above all when their foundations are as flimsy as those the Egyptians built.

    Elevations, as long as they were inhabited, kept above the slowly rising plains, where the river deposited its silt. When old houses crumbled, new ones were built on top of the debris. This has been going on until recent times, when the yearly inundations were stopped by the Aswan dam. The continuity of settlement during the millennia is one of the reasons for the scarcity of data about ancient villages and cities, as excavation is virtually impossible.

- **City quarters**

There was little town planning, and what little there was looked a bit like the hieroglyph for city. But in a number of cases attempts at rational planning

seem to have been made.

Residential areas

The Egyptians rarely planned much further than keeping a few spaces free for the important roads of access, setting temple districts apart and erecting an adobe wall around it all. Even 'planned' cities like Akhetaten were at times a jumble of houses, alleys and courtyards in what looks like a case of build-as-build-can.

But plot owners were not free to do as they liked. They had to take into account their neighbours' rights and wishes and reach an

understanding with them.

- **Temple districts**

Temple districts on the other hand were better planned. The outlay of individual temples was basically symmetrical. Walls surrounded them.

Palaces

   Royal palaces housed apart from the pharaoh's main family, his secondary wives, concubines, and their offspring, also a small army of servants. The whole compound was enclosed and separate from the rest of the capital, albeit close to suppliers of services, temples and the seat of the administration.

   Unlike the temples which were, at least from the outside, mainly symmetrical, Egyptian palaces were at times a conglomeration of functional units not hidden behind a unifying façade, even when they were built by just one pharaoh and were not the result of successive builders adding onto an initial building.
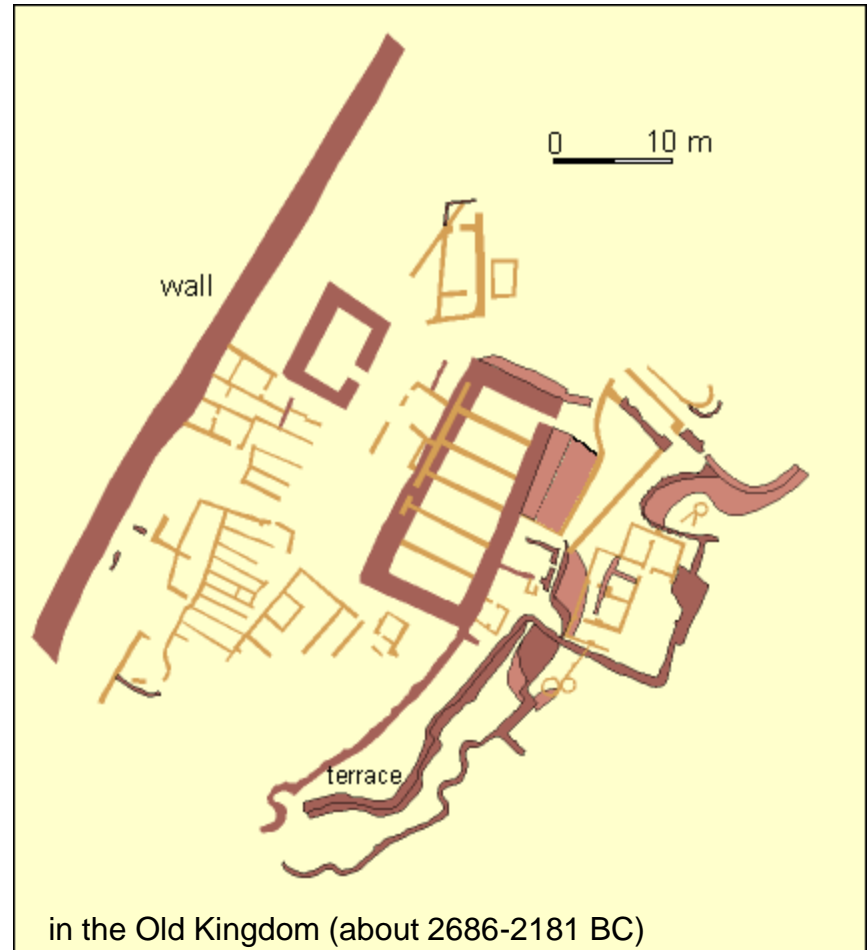
Map of kahun city

- ■ Dwellings
- ■ Six Great Houses along the northern wall, another three south of the street
- ■ Dwellings. for workers
- ■ Acropolis, the highest spot in the town
- ■ Storage, walls etc
- ■ Temple area

N

Thick brick wall

Porter's lodge

Area of Temple

Foundation Deposit

Temple slope

Hotep Senusret (Kahun)

After a map by W.M.Flinders Petrie

- [Hotepsenusret](#) (Kahun; Ha-Usertesen-hotep as Petrie called it) was founded by Senusret II in the Fayum and inhabited for about a century. The outlay of the city itself was rectangular, covering an area of 350 by 400 metres. It was surrounded by a brick wall and divided into two parts by another wall. Generally different social classes did not live in separate city quarters. But here there was a rich residential area, where a handful of palatial 60 room residences were fifty times as big as the dwellings in the poorer half of the city.

  This part had also a wide street leading to the palace. The streets all over the city were laid out in approximately straight lines. The alleys leading to the workers' dwellings ended in *culs-de-sac*. The main street was nine metres wide, as opposed to the alleys and streets in the residential districts which were sometimes as narrow as 1½ metres. The streets had shallow stone channels running down the middle for drainage.

  Despite the love Egyptians had for gardens, there was no space left for them inside the walls at Hotepsenusret. The whole area was covered with streets and one-storeyed mud-brick buildings

Buhen

- In the Old Kingdom (about 2686-2181 BC) it was the site of a small settlement, perhaps a trading post and place for copper working. The finds suggest that mainly Egyptians lived here, although some Nubian pottery was also found. In the Middle Kingdom (about 2025-1700 BC) the Egyptians built a huge fortress at the site, with a temple of Horus. The place was still important in the Second Intermediate Period, when it became part of the realm of the rulers of Kush (probably Kerma). On reconquering the region the Egyptians rebuilt the temple and fortress in the New Kingdom (about 1550-1069 BC)

0   10 m

wall

terrace

in the Old Kingdom (about 2686-2181 BC)

brown: stone structures; light brown: mud brick structures