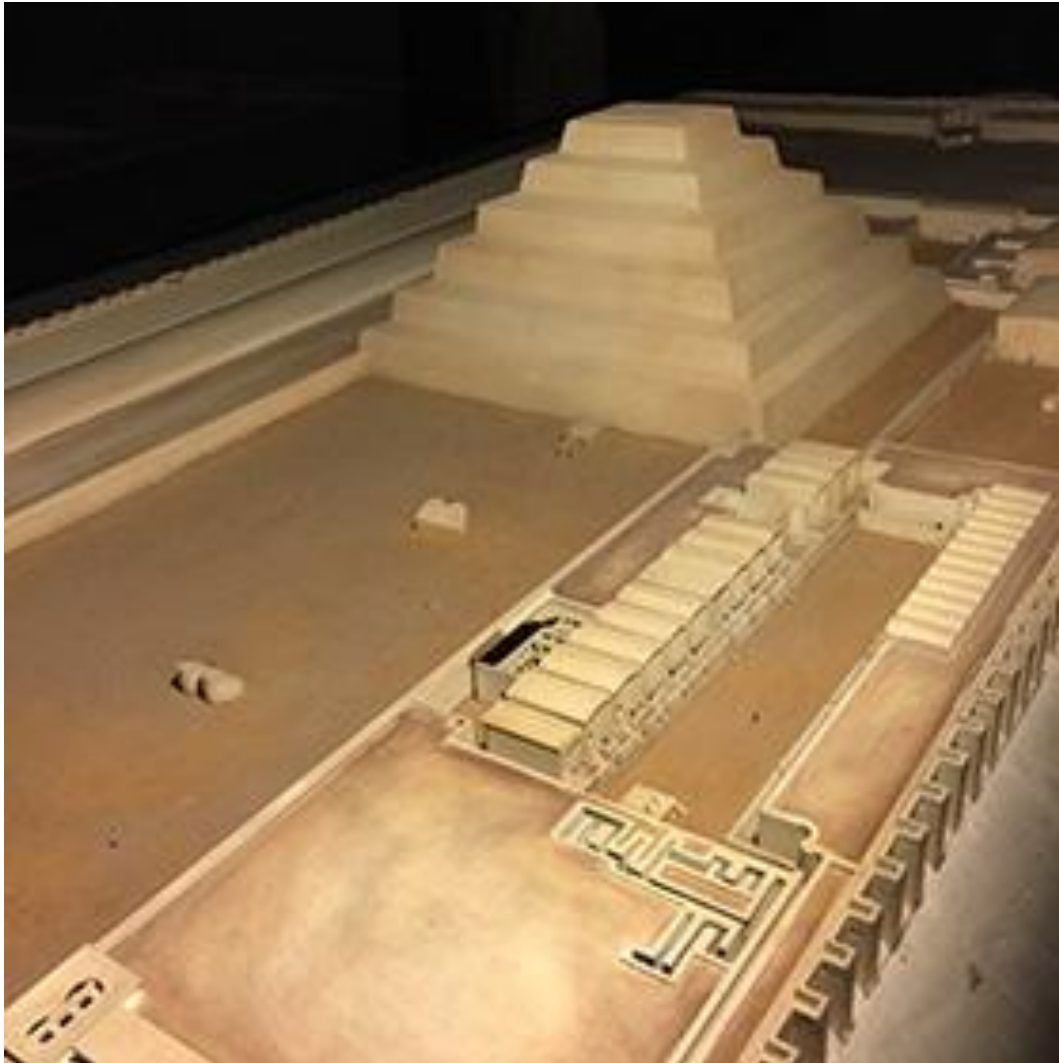


Step Pyramid Architecture



Built ca. 2630 Image: Step Pyramid model

The Step Pyramid was built during the Third Dynasty as the tomb for Pharaoh Djoser. It was designed by the famous architect, Imhotep, who was later deified.

The Step Pyramid stands at a height of 204 feet (62 meters) with six stepped layers. It was the largest building of its time. Here limestone was first used on a large scale as a construction

material and the idea of a monumental royal tomb in the form of a pyramid was first truly realized. It can be said without exaggeration that the Step Pyramid complex constitutes a milestone in the evolution of monumental stone architecture, both in Egypt and in the world as a whole. After the Step Pyramid was built, the successors of Djoser began to build pyramids as their tombs.

Prior to the Step Pyramid, pharaohs were buried in mastaba tombs, large rectangular monuments. However Imhotep, Djoser's vizier, decided that his pharaoh needed a more impressive tomb. He came up with the idea of stacking mastabas on top of one another, while decreasing in length and width. The Step Pyramid got its name from this stepped design.

Like the previous mastaba tombs, the burial chambers are beneath the pyramid. Below ground, the Egyptians created an underground structure on a scale previously unknown, quarrying out more than 3.5 miles (5.7 kilometers) of shafts, tunnels, chambers, galleries, and magazines. A central corridor and two parallel ones extend over 1,198 feet (365 meters), connecting 400 rooms.

Step-Pyramid Architecture

Step-pyramid architecture is a fascinating and historically significant style of construction that features a series of flat platforms, or "steps," stacked progressively smaller as they ascend, creating a pyramid-like shape. This design is both functional and symbolic, often associated with ancient civilizations.

Key Features

1. **Layered Structure:** The pyramid is built in tiers, with each level smaller than the one below, giving it a stepped appearance.
2. **Symbolism:** Often linked to religious or ceremonial purposes, step pyramids were believed to represent a connection between the earth and the heavens.
3. **Materials:** Early step pyramids were constructed using stone, mudbrick, or other locally available materials.

Notable Examples

- **Step Pyramid of Djoser (Egypt):** Designed by the architect Imhotep for Pharaoh Djoser during the 3rd Dynasty (circa 27th century BCE), it is the oldest known stone structure in Egypt. Located in Saqqara, it served as a mortuary complex.
- **Mesoamerican Step Pyramids:** Cultures like the Maya and Aztecs built step pyramids, such as the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, often used for rituals and sacrifices.
- **Ziggurats (Mesopotamia):** Though not true pyramids, ziggurats share a similar stepped design and were used as temples.

Architectural Evolution

The step pyramid is considered a precursor to the smooth-sided pyramids seen later in Egypt, such as the Great Pyramid of Giza. Its design reflects an early experimentation with monumental architecture, blending practicality with spiritual significance. This architectural style remains a testament to the ingenuity and cultural values of ancient civilizations, inspiring awe and study even today.

Imhotep

fl. 2667 BCE – 2600 BCE

Imhotep was an ancient Egyptian genius – a brilliant architect, mathematician, physician, astrologer, poet, priest, and Chief Minister to Pharaoh Djoser. Imhotep's name means "the One Who Comes in Peace." Although he was born a commoner, Imhotep rose to become King Djoser's vizier and was in charge of building Djoser's tomb at Saqqara. Rather than constructing a regular mastaba, or bench-shaped tomb, Imhotep chose to stack several mastabas on top of each other to create the famous Step Pyramid. Imhotep's high standing in Djoser's court is affirmed by an unprecedented honor - an inscription bearing his name on a statue of Djoser found at the site of the Saqqara pyramid.

Imhotep was worshipped as a deity after his death, in Egypt's Late Period and in classical times up until the seventh century CE. Temples and shrines dedicated to Imhotep were built in Memphis and Philae, where the wounded and ill would sleep in hopes that Imhotep would reveal a cure to them in their dreams. Imhotep was associated with the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Asclepius, both of whom were gods of medicine and wisdom. While there is debate about how much and what kind of medicine he practiced in his lifetime, some contemporary scholars have attributed the founding of modern medicine not to the famous Greek physician Hippocrates, but to Imhotep instead.