Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

EGYPTIAN HOUSE AH8

This is a model of an Egyptian nobleman's house. It is of a similar design to those excavated at Akhetaten (El Armana), which is a remote, windswept site in Middle Egypt.

Houses in Egypt were often made of mud-brick. Mud from the banks of the river Nile were mixed together with straw and shaped into blocks. These blocks would then be dried in the sun until they became solid and hard. The ancient Egyptians rarely used foundations when building, instead, the soil was simply levelled and then built directly upon. Walls would be built of varying thicknesses, depending on how many storeys they had to support. Most houses appear to have been two or three storeys high. Sometimes beams and columns would be put into the walls and ceilings to reinforce them. Once built the houses were usually covered with plaster.

Inside, houses would have been cool and dark as windows were narrow and positioned high up. Rooms were probably painted with patterns or scenes from nature. The Egyptians do not appear to have used much furniture, in most cases simply stools, tables, beds and storage chests. Houses often had flat roofs, which could be used as an additional living space. Egyptian people probably slept out there during hot summer evenings. The kitchen had an open roof and cellars were also often dug out underneath the ground floor of houses to store food and possessions.

Outside, gardens appear to have been popular, and fruit trees, flowers, and vines were often grown. Some grander houses had a well located in the gardens, which would have supplied water for the household. Most people though would have had to fetch water from a shared well in their town or village.

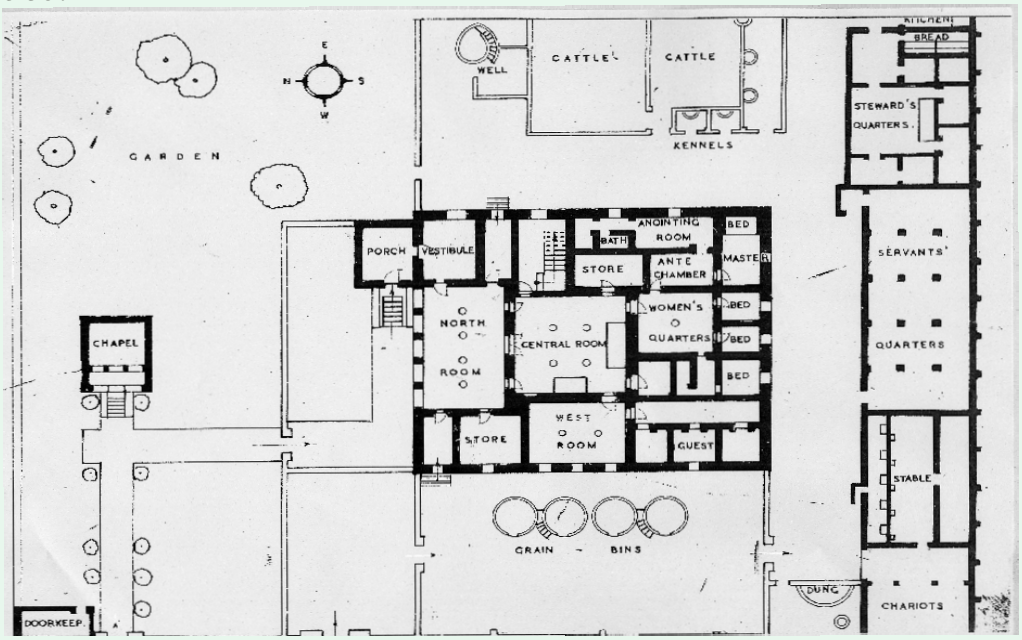


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As you can see with the model, this estate was laid out with a central rectangular block surrounded by yards, gardens and outbuildings that are all contained by a surrounding wall. At the entrance to the complex is a small building where a lodge keeper would keep guard. The estate owner's family would live in the main building. The central room in this building was the main hall that was probably used as a living room. The surrounding rooms would have kept it insulated against the summer heat and cool winter evenings. This room had a higher ceiling than some of the other rooms, which was supported with four columns. It probably also had a series of windows running around the top of the walls to let light in. Raised platforms set against the wall may have been for visitors to sit on. There would also have been bays around the walls, in which religious statues or ancestor busts would have been placed.

Running off from the main hall was another square shaped room, which may have been the women's quarters. Again, windows set high up in the walls would have let light in. Tucked away in the top right part of the building was the master's bedroom, the most private room in the house. Near to this room would have been a bathroom. The bathroom probably would have been very basic and consisted of a wall, from behind which an attendant would pour water over the bather. The water would probably have drained away through channels made in the floor. The toilet would have had a seat either carved from stone or made from wood, which would lift you above floor level. The waste would then fall into a vessel below, which could be removed and emptied.



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The long building set against the inside wall, would probably have served as housing for the servants and stables for the animals. In addition, this area probably contained storerooms and a cooking area with ovens, where the servants would make bread. Leading off from here, in a yard at the front of the complex were four large containers where grain was stored.

The small lone building with an opening in the roof is a chapel where the estate owner and his family would worship the gods. The window in the roof would allow light to shine down on the altar where people made offerings.