

The British  
Museum

# SHAPING LIVES

Mud brick craft in Ancient Egypt



3 September - 12 December 2015

Sponsored by

Marie-Louise von

Motesiczky

Charitable Trust

Book  
now



# SHAPING LIVES

Mud brick craft in Ancient Egypt



The absence of rain, the scarcity of wood and an abundance of sunshine made Adobe the preferred building material. Nile mud mixed with straw resulted in surprisingly strong bricks. Workmen had buckets and baskets to carry the mud, hoes for mixing it with straw or chaff and standard sized wooden molds. Wheelbarrows were unknown and the dried bricks had to be carried, for which a yoke was often used.

You may wonder why so many ancient monuments are left standing while many Egyptian homes did not survive. Mud versus stone is the answer. Homes were built out of the less expensive mud brick whereas monuments were constructed of stone as they were meant to last.

**Painted wooden model showing  
three figures making bricks**

Egypt, Beni Hassan, 2010-1961 BC

This model depicts the production of bricks by mixing mud, water and other ingredients with a hoe and transporting this mixture to the person who puts it into a mould. In front of him are rows of finished bricks, indicated by black painted lines.

Wood

© The Trustees of the British Museum, BM EA 63837

### Adults:

- 1- Professor NN will introduce a lecture about the importance of mud-brick in Ancient Egypt and how the ancient Egyptian used mud brick on a large scale.
- 2- A documentary film showing the mud brick process starts on the first Saturday of the exhibition.



### Families:

- 3- On the first and second weekend of the exhibition in the outdoor area families can enjoy making the bread in a mud brick oven and watch the process of baking this bread.



- 4- On 21 September and 3 October, visitors can watch a man resembling the process of making bricks according to ancient Egyptian methods, which lasted for thousands of years.

## Programmes

### Children workshops:

#### Friday 4<sup>th</sup> of Sep

- 1- Workshop with children to shape the clay with model of the tool which originally used for making bricks.



- 2- A workshop about stamping clay with their hands and writing their names in Hieroglyphics and keeps it after the workshop.

- 3- A workshop with the use of cubes to teach children how to make a quantity of mud bricks.

## **Current use of Mud Brick Traditional Egyptian oven**

During the cold winter nights, family members would gather around the 'house column' - as it was called in the countryside, for chatting, telling stories, and anecdotes of enjoyment. The oven creates warmth for this family community. Children often sleep on the roof of these ovens to stay warm.

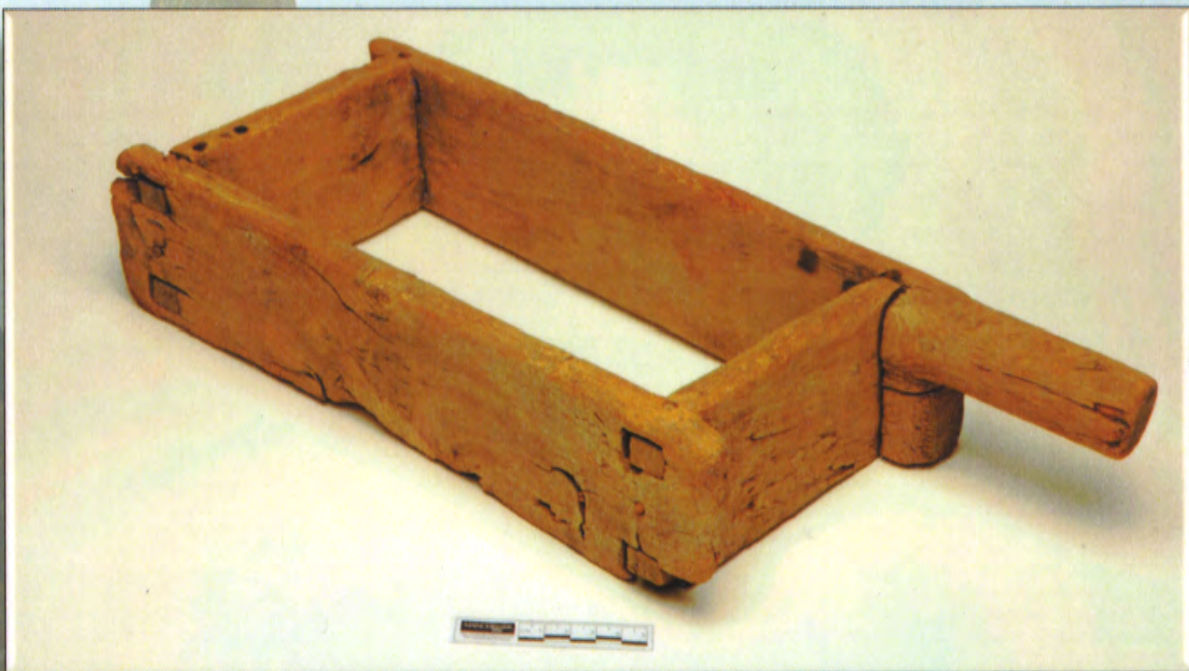


Egyptian women build ovens themselves as the ingredients for the construction components (mud brick) are widely available. After a few days, silt, crushed red brick, and some straw turn into mud bricks, which are difficult to demolished. Breads were placed on large circular surfaces which could easily be moved into the oven. The bricks were subsequently burned by the fire intensity achieved when baking the bread. The industry required high skills and some types of bread had to remain in the heat of the sun for a few days.

## Process and tool

The material used in making mud brick in Ancient Egypt was Nile mud, chopped with straw and sand. These were mixed in varying quantities to produce bricks of different characteristics. Varieties regularly occur which are made up of nothing but sand and gravelly desert soil.

The whole process of brick making in Pharaonic Egypt was so similar to that used today that a full description of the stages of production can be given.



*An oblong wooden mould for making bricks, Middle kingdom (Dyn 12, Manchester Museum).*

Wet Nile mud is mixed with chopped straw and sand, pushed into a wooden mould, and smoothed by hand. The brick maker then loosens the mould from the brick and lifts it off to leave the wet brick upon the ground. This process is repeated until the whole area is covered with neat rows of bricks.

## Significance and history

From the beginning of Egyptian history mud bricks were used as a basic material for construction. In the course of the Early Dynastic Period (about 3100-2613 BC) and the Old Kingdom (about 2613-2160 BC) bricks remained the basic building material of structures for living in, whether palaces or the houses of the ordinary people. Stone was gradually introduced for temples and the tombs of the élite.



*Thebes, Tomb of Rekhmire - 15th Century BC - Adobe making*

Bricks were produced in vast quantities for all sorts of projects. They were made from Nile mud mixed with sand and straw, the latter two elements giving strength to the basic material.

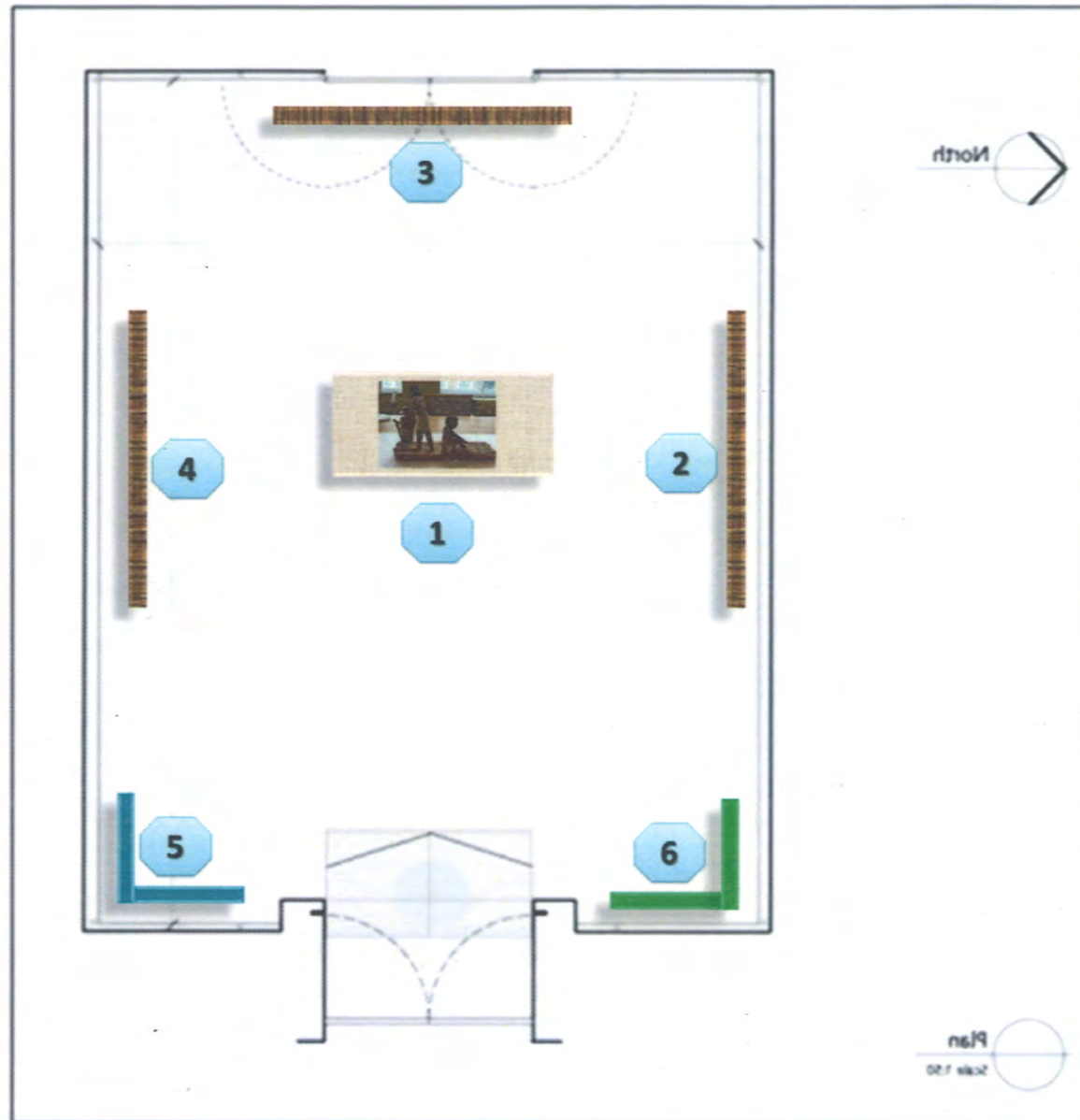
While the Sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt have survived the vagaries of age, Egyptian houses are another story. The main reason for this is that ancient residential and commercial construction in Egypt utilized Egyptian mud bricks, which are not durable.

The houses were constructed out of Egyptian mud bricks and then painted with a whitewash on the outside to reduce the impact of the harsh sunrays. Windows were placed on the upper parts of the walls and were extremely narrow in order to reduce the amount of heat that was transferred inside the house.



## Exhibition plan Shaping Lives room 3

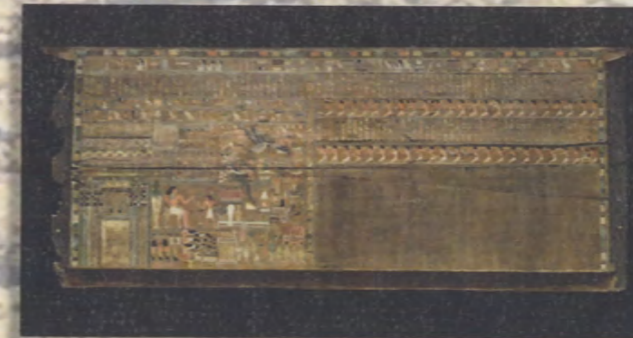
1. The Model
2. Significance and history
3. Process and tools
4. Current use of mud brick
5. Activities corner
6. Audio Visual





**Models and other objects in situ, tomb of Governor Djehutynakht, May 11, 1915.**

**Photograph by Mohammed Shadduf, Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition.**



**Panel from the outer coffin of Djehutynakht, 2010-1961 B.C.**

**Cedar, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**



**Statuettes of Governor Djehutynakht and his wife**

**Middle Kingdom, 2010-1961 B.C., Wood, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**



**Brick stamped with cartouches of Amenhotep III 1390-1353 B.C.**

**New Kingdom, The Metropolitan Museum of Art**