

Is Architecture the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today, or ever will be lived?

Were architecture the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today, or ever will be lived, it would be able to stand on its own, speaking to events that had occurred in the past in their entirety. This does not necessarily hold true, as architecture shares influence with literature, art, philosophy, and science and even politics, and only when all these aspects of intellectual inquiry are brought together, is the history of a people and the record of a culture portrayed holistically.

Take for instance, the Roman Renaissance. The cultural revolution profoundly affected European intellectual life and inevitably influenced architecture at that time. However, the architecture could not be complete without the art that embellished it. The commercial centers and renaissance halls that emerged reflected in their civic atmosphere the stewardship of an evolving group of self-reliant, skilled citizens. The palaces, adorned with renaissance art spoke of the esteemed elite that held power at the time. In this manner, the structure of buildings communicates life as it was lived during the renaissance.

This cultural movement was instrumental in augmenting the image of Roman civilization, and resulted in developments that would stand the test of time. The structures built during the renaissance went on to influence the form of other buildings in Rome as well as other parts of Europe. The crafting of timeless monuments does support that architecture can truly epitomize the life of a society, but only in a particular point in history. The Palazzo Farnese in Rome was built as a palace, but has been serving as the French embassy in Italy since 1874. The palace tells a story of the Farnese family, an influential family during renaissance Italy. However, its use as the French embassy does not necessarily speak to life as it is lived today or will be lived in the future in Rome. The functionality of some of the buildings built during the renaissance has thus changed, but their structure however remains the same. As a result, they bear more accurate representation of a historical past than of the culture at present or in the future.

Another example is the Nubian civilization which existed in Africa as far back as 2000BC. They were highly developed in their technique of architecture. Although less recognized, it would be interesting to note that there are more pyramids in the Nubian Kingdom—with 223 pyramids—than in the Egyptian Kingdom

Buildings in Nubian villages were made of stone, clay and sand. The roofs of the well-to-do are arched domes of clay bricks. They also invented the Nubian Vault technique, an age-old method of timber-less vault construction that only uses earth bricks and earth mortar. The technology has been advocated by environmentalists as environmentally friendly and sustainable as it makes use of pure earth without need for timber. One of the key advantages of the Nubian vault is that it can be built without any support or shuttering. These discoveries give a peek into the principles that guided their mode of thinking. A greater part of Nubia was located in the desert, thus they found the need to carefully manage the natural resources available when building their structures. Sand was readily available to them and so the floors of the buildings were covered with clean sand. They also valued aesthetics within their homes as depicted by the aesthetic quality of the vaults.

Kerma, one of the major cities in the kingdom, had a population of 2000. It was Nubia's first centralized state with its own indigenous forms of architecture and burial customs. It was a walled city containing religious buildings, a large circular dwelling, a palace, and well laid out roads. On the eastern side of the city, a funerary temple and chapel were laid out. Deffufa, one of the most endearing structures, was a mud brick temple where ceremonies were performed. Such religious sites indicate the religious lives of the people. The structures give insight into how the Nubians lived their lives, with particular emphasis on the aspects of culture they valued most.

Architecture is an indicator of how life was lived in the world. However, architecture, which deals with the frameworks of structures, cannot give a comprehensive account. More often than not, arts, crafts, and documentations augment the vague evidence provided by the architecture of a particular time in order to give more accurate inferences. In this sense, architecture is not necessarily the truest record of life.

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