



Fig. 15 Egyptian wall decoration (15th cent. BCE)

Brick

Bricks may be fired or unfired. Normally, private houses were constructed with unfired bricks made of clay and covered with chalk to avoid destruction by rain and wind (cf. Ezek 13:10–15). Brick walls were typically built on a stone foundation as a shelter against rainwater running down the street. To attain a better consistency, unfired bricks were made of clay mixed with straw (Exod 5:7–8, 16, 18–19), the clay pressed in a special wooden mold (*malbēn*; cf. Nah 3:14) and dried by the sun. A famous Egyptian picture from the time of Thutmosis III (1479–1426 BCE), painted in the tomb of his vizier Rechmire, shows the typical steps in the production of bricks and wall building: (1) clay and mud were cleaned in a water basin; (2) the pure clay or mud was mixed with straw to get a good consistency; (3) the clay was pressed into molds and (4) dried by the sun (see fig. 15). When the brick was dry, it could be used to build a wall, the size of the bricks varying between 25–60 cm in length, 16–35 cm in breadth, and 10–15 cm in height.

Official buildings were sometimes built with fired bricks to guarantee a long life (cf. the tower of Babylon, Gen 11:3). Buildings made of clay – fired or unfired – were much cheaper than those made of masonry (Isa 9:9). Therefore, even at the famous tower of Babylon only the outer parts were built of fired bricks, while the core was constructed with unfired bricks. Exodus 24:10 describes YHWH standing on a platform built with bricks (or stones) made of blue lapis lazuli (*sappir* does not mean “sapphire stone” but “lapis lazuli”) in order to show the holiness of God; the deep blue color of the lapis

lazuli stone was used as a symbol for heaven, and the platform was typical for the holy of holies in Assyrian temples or the throne room in palaces (cf. a similar platform in Palestine in Tell Abu Salima; Reich: 1.15). The prophet Ezekiel was asked to scratch a picture of Jerusalem into a brick (Ezek 4 : 1). Some clay tablets with depictions of city plans have been found in Mesopotamia (cf. Uehlinger 1987: 141–49). In the postexilic time the population of Jerusalem offered incense offerings on bricks since regular monolithic stone altars were missing (Isa 65 : 3).

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