

Surveying in Ancient Egypt

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SUMMARY

As many know from surveying textbooks, Egypt was the home of the first known surveyors. The textbooks explain how surveying was necessary in Ancient Egypt because the annual floods buried or destroyed boundary markers, which then had to be re-established for ownership of the fields. But surveying in Ancient Egypt went beyond re-establishing boundaries. Scribed control marks on the pyramids, architectural markings in tombs, and a few surviving sketch plans of tombs and shrines show that surveyors also performed construction surveys.

Scribes, the educated professional class in Ancient Egypt, had the practical and mathematical knowledge to supervise surveys. These scribes saw themselves as a special class of people who maintained order in society by running the bureaucracy. The symmetry and proportion of the monuments of Egypt well attest to the skills of these ancient surveyors.