

Nameless Lives at Tarkhan and Saqqara

Early Tombs and the Ka



Burials and Beliefs in Predynastic Cemeteries

One of the most regularly repeated refrains within Egyptian archaeology is the extent to which the subject is relatively blessed with the survival of ancient tombs and cemeteries when compared to settlement sites. Indeed many ancient towns and cities can only be located because of the survival of their cemeteries while the dwellings of the Living have disappeared beneath the floodplain of the Nile. This is especially true for the Predynastic – the period before the unification of Egypt at c.3050 BC. While shifts in the course of the Nile over the past six thousand years mean that a few Predynastic towns are now on the desert rather than submerged beneath the damp Nile silt of the cultivation, it is still the desert-edge cemeteries, deliberately placed there, which provide the best corpus of evidence for Egypt before the pharaohs (Wengrow 2006; Wilkinson 1999).

The evidence from the excavation of hundreds of Predynastic graves (Castillos 1982), especially from the cemeteries of southern Egypt, makes it possible to describe, in broad terms, typical burials of the Predynastic Period and its sub-divisions, although it should also be noted that, as later, no two graves of the Predynastic are identical in their form or contents. Typical burials of the Badarian (c.4500–3800 BC) consist of oval pits containing contracted burials, lying on their left side, head to the south, facing west, lying on a mat and wrapped/covered by a mat or gazelle skin. Grave goods

include distinctive handmade pottery, long-toothed bone/ivory combs, slate palettes and personal jewellery (Midant-Reynes 2000: 153–8). Graves of Naqada I (c.3800–3500 BC) are essentially similar to those of the Badarian, but with some degree of differentiation based on the size of the grave and the number and quality of its contents, especially at the major centre of Hierakonpolis (Adams 1987; Midant-Reynes 2000: 170). This differentiation became more marked in Naqada II (c.3500–3300 BC). Other innovations of Naqada II included much less consistency in the orientation of the body and the replacement of animal skin coverings with matting and linen; in richer graves they were superseded by the introduction of coffins made of basketwork and, ultimately, wood. (Midant-Reynes 2000: 187; see Chapter 9 below). The move towards a clear differentiation between small numbers of large and well-provisioned tombs and a majority of much less impressive graves, probably indicating social status within larger, politically sophisticated communities, is seen most starkly during Naqada III (c.3300–3100 BC; Midant-Reynes 2000: 235ff.). However, the most remarkable tomb of the Predynastic – the so-called ‘Painted Tomb’ at Hierakonpolis – probably dates to Naqada II (Midant-Reynes 2000: 207ff.); in any case this tomb belongs to an owner who can certainly be regarded as elite, and probably quasi-royal, and a precursor to the definitely royal tombs of Dynasty 1 (see Chapter 2).

We can be reasonably confident about the reconstruction of these Predynastic graves and their contents owing to the exceptionally high levels of preservation of objects placed within the grave, which was filled with the dry, desiccating sand of the desert. These high levels of preservation extended to the body itself, which had effectively, but in all probability accidentally, been provided with ideal conditions for natural mummification as the dry desert sand acted as a natural absorbent for the potentially destructive decompositional fluids. This natural preservation of the body would have far-reaching consequences for Egyptians’ attitudes to the body in their view of the afterlife and, consequently, tomb design itself. However, although these Predynastic graves and their contents are often extremely well preserved, we have little idea as to how, if at all, the position of the graves was marked since no substantial superstructures have survived until relatively late in the period. It is possible that a simple mound of sand/gravel was the most usual covering of these graves. In addition, we do not know how the graves of the Dead were regarded by the Living. In fact we have no real idea about what the Predynastic Egyptians actually believed would happen to them after death. The evidence of the graves themselves is ambiguous and capable of radically different interpretations.

A good case in point is a burial excavated by Petrie in 1912–13 at the late Predynastic cemetery of Tarkhan, which is 60 km south of Cairo on the West

Bank of the Nile. The interment in question was numbered 1845 by Petrie (1914) and was particularly important as it seems to have been the only one of the burials he excavated that season which had not been robbed, and therefore the only one where the placement of the objects within the grave could be confidently said to be a deliberate arrangement at the time of burial. On the basis of the pottery found within it, the grave was assigned Sequence Date (SD) 77, which places it just before the unification of Egypt; it might therefore be seen as sitting on the cusp between the somewhat enigmatic graves of the Predynastic Period and the explanation-rich tombs of the Dynastic Period. An alabaster bowl, with a slate palette placed over it, had been positioned in front of the face of the contracted body, lying on its left side with head to the south facing west, while other pottery storage jars had also been put into the grave (Figure 1.1).

Faced with this evidence, it is possible to produce a range of hypotheses which explain the observed phenomena. One might draw the conclusion that the grave and its contents represent a belief (or, rather, possible sets of beliefs) in the afterlife – the body buried in the foetal position might reflect the cycle of birth and death; the body facing west towards the setting sun and the land of the afterlife beyond the horizon; the objects within the tomb might have been placed there for the use of the Dead in the afterlife, or for their journey there. Predynastic graves might therefore display a developed spirituality in respect of the afterlife which can be directly traced into those belief-systems which are very clearly expressed in the Dynastic Period.

However, one might also look at the evidence of Tarkhan 1845 and decide that it represents a very different state of affairs in that the body buried in



Figure 1.1 Tarkhan Tomb 1845: the burial (after Petrie 1914: Pl. 12)

the crouched position within a shallow grave minimizes the effort needed to dispose of a dead human body by burial and that the objects placed within the grave represent a fairly minimal set of comparatively low-value objects which were personally associated with the dead individual and, for superstitious reasons, would not be wanted by a living member of the community. Predynastic graves might therefore represent a minimal effort to dispose of the inconvenient dead and no belief in the afterlife need be assumed.

Both these explanations represent extreme cases of trying either to find or to deny a belief in an afterlife in every feature associated with these burials, and the 'truth' is unrecoverable since we cannot reconstruct the mental states of those individuals who lived and died in Predynastic Egypt. In fact the interpretation of beliefs in an afterlife based on the fact of burial and the presence of grave goods is fraught with difficulties, and any ethnographic survey of burial practices and the social and belief-systems which gave rise to them presents us with a surprising kaleidoscope of possibilities; such a survey was carried out by Ucko (1969), from whose work the following examples are drawn. Burial itself does not necessarily imply any specific belief in an afterlife, nor may it be socially important to the society which carries it out – it may simply be the necessary disposal of waste in the form of an inconveniently large dead human body. For the Nuer of the Sudan, burial involved the disposal of the body, with little in the way of funeral ceremonies, in an unmarked grave. This raises the interesting issue that the treatment of the body after death does not necessarily correlate with ideas regarding an afterlife for the non-corporeal person; Dynastic Egyptians, as we shall see, were unusually concerned with the dead body as a vehicle for eternal well-being.

The objects placed within the grave might be interpreted as things which were needed by the Dead, but this is also not necessarily the case. For the Lugbara of Uganda, grave goods do not reflect a belief in an afterlife but rather the social personality of the tomb owner, with specific objects reflecting specific elements of the person – a quiver for a hunter/warrior, a stool for an elder, firestones for a wife, grinding stones for a mother. The issue of 'person-ness' connected to the tomb was a fundamental one for the Dynastic Egyptians and, at particular periods, the selection of material placed within a burial reflects this concern. It may also be the case that the disposal of objects within the grave represents not the needs of the Dead but those of the Living, who, at the time of burial of a loved one, 'simply wished to dispose of objects which had particular emotional connotations' (Ucko 1969: 265). It is also the case that the specific positioning of the body within the grave, although it hints at a special treatment of the body with a specific aim in mind, is also capable of varied interpretations. Is

an eastwards-facing body always looking towards the rising sun, or one looking westwards towards the setting sun? Is the east or the west a place where the Dead face because that is where the Dead go? Are there specific local or more distant (e.g. Mecca for Muslims or Jerusalem for mediaeval Christians?) points of orientation which are more significant than cosmological factors?

The ambiguity of Tarkhan 1845 seems, as an example of Predynastic burials, to stand in marked contrast to the high-quality, understandable material from the elite tombs of Dynastic Egypt, and the interplay and different levels of explanation provided by that material – architecture in its localized context; extensive visual depictions and explanatory texts on the walls of those tombs; contents including specialized mortuary ‘kit’, among which is the body itself, elements of which are also often inscribed with explanatory text – which provide a very solid platform to understand the afterlife beliefs of the ancient Egyptians.

However, Tarkhan 1845, like other late Predynastic tombs from this site, and unlike most earlier Predynastic burials, had a carefully constructed superstructure which, although modest in size and made from simple mudbrick, indicates a significant development in tomb design which itself reflected the development of a major idea in the role of the tomb as a vehicle for the well-being of the Dead.

The Emergence of the Bipartite Tomb

Tomb 1845 at Tarkhan contains, as we have seen, an interment consisting of a shallow oval grave within which was buried a contracted body and a modest selection of grave goods which may, or may not, tell us something about the afterlife beliefs of the society which produced it. However, the wider context of the burial is rather more informative since the grave is only one part of a larger and more complex tomb. The grave was marked by being surrounded by a mudbrick rectangle which, if filled after burial, could form a rubble-filled, solid ‘box’ now more than a metre high. The position of the burial was therefore clearly marked, but equally clearly no-one was intended to enter this part of the tomb. Attached to the outside wall of this *mastaba* (the name derives from the low mudbrick benches found outside some village houses in Egypt) was an addition – a tiny room just big enough for a human to enter (Figure 1.2). Petrie found that this room, and the area outside the tomb near it, was filled with large pottery storage jars and food containers. This evidence need not in itself imply any particular beliefs in the afterlife since it might simply be the remains of a funeral feast by the living at the time of inhumation, but there is one further relevant detail: the

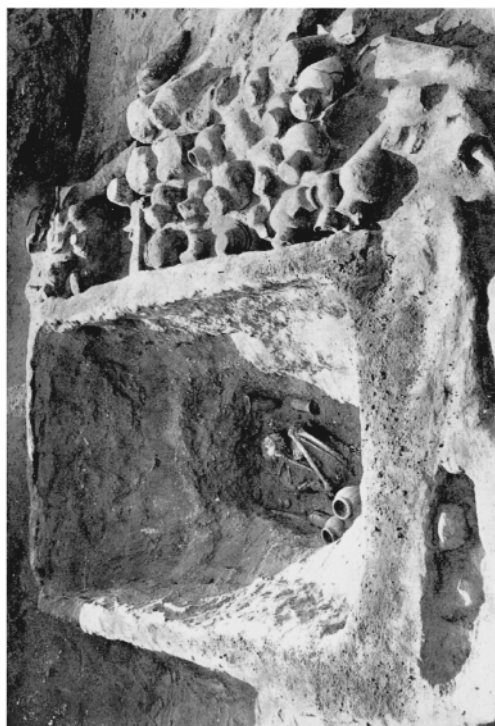
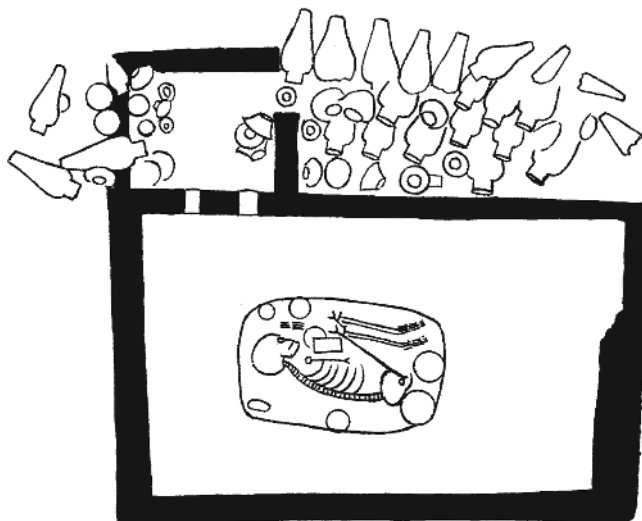


Figure 1.2 Tarkhan Tomb 1845: the Burial Chamber and Offering Chapel (after Petrie 1914: Pls 12 and 14)

body within the grave was orientated so that it faced the wall shared by the grave enclosure and the external room, and that wall was pierced by 'two slits in the brickwork of the *mastaba* wall, for the offerings to reach the deceased' (Petrie 1914: 2). This architectural feature was not unique to Tomb 1845, but shared by other similar tombs at Tarkhan. Although it would be dangerous on the basis of this evidence alone to draw wider conclusions about the beliefs behind the development of this tomb-type, two things seem reasonably clear: the importance of food to the Dead and the possibility of some connection between the Dead buried underneath the *mastaba* and the food brought by the Living and placed in the liminal zone of the attached room. In fact it is almost certain that these Tarkhan tombs represent an early version of what would become a fundamental feature in the way that the form of Egyptian tombs reflected their function – the tomb was essentially bipartite in nature, consisting of two distinct elements which were linked together through overall function, but significantly different in practical use. It is probably accurate at this stage to regard the external rooms at Tarkhan as Offering Chapels and the burials underneath the *mastabas* as Burial Chambers.

However, the Tarkhan tombs only represent one solution to what seems to be a major issue in the afterlife beliefs and burial practices of late Predynastic/early Dynastic: the problem of providing food for the Dead. This problem seems to be the main determinant in the Tarkhan tomb with its separate, accessible Offering Chapel, but other approaches to the problem were experimented with at other sites, especially the among the elite non-royal tomb owners of Dynasty 1.

Elite Mastabas at Saqqara: The Tomb as a Storeroom

The unification of Egypt had a number of important effects on the way the Egyptians expressed the way they understood the afterlife through their tombs. One aspect of this was the apparently unique position of the king and, initially at least, the very separate nature of his burial at the exclusive Umm el-Qa'ab cemetery at Abydos (see next chapter). This royal exclusivity meant that emerging court elites – the high officials who acted for the king in the government of what had become the largest and potentially most powerful country in the early Bronze Age of the Near East – had to look elsewhere for a suitable place to be buried. This suitable place was, essentially, self-selecting. The unification of the Delta in the north and the Valley in the south required a new administrative centre from which both halves of the new country could be governed. The location chosen was Memphis, close to modern Cairo, which was (with a few breaks) the

most significant administrative, economic and population centre of Egypt until the foundation of Alexandria in 332 BC. Partly because of the movement of the Nile in this part of its floodplain, the actual location of the city of Memphis shifted over the next 2,500 years, gradually moving eastwards to follow the river. Comparatively little of pre-New Kingdom Memphis remains to be seen today and the location of Old Kingdom Memphis is still unknown. However, although the houses, streets and districts of the ancient city now seem to be lost, the tombs of its cemeteries have survived to a very much greater degree since they were built on top of the desert escarpment immediately to the west of the ancient city.

The desert edge to the west of Memphis which was used as the cemetery for this ancient metropolis stretches a huge distance – c.30 km from Abu Roash in the north to Dahshur in the south, and even further if the southern outlier of Meidum is included – the result of rapid development during the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom. As far as significant tomb building is concerned, the earliest part is North Saqqara, where the court officials of Dynasties 1 and 2 were buried in huge *mastaba*-tombs, probably overlooking the city in which they lived and worked (Emery 1938, 1949, 1954, 1958).

These *mastabas* are so large, particularly when compared with what might appear to be relatively modest royal tombs at Abydos, that their excavator, Bryan Emery, came to believe that the Saqqara *mastabas* of Dynasty 1 were in fact the real royal tombs of that period, with the Abydos structures merely being dummies or cenotaphs. The presence of royal names in these Saqqara tombs seemed to support this identification. However, when the 'funerary enclosures' at Abydos are brought into consideration, it is clear that the total amount of funerary provision made for the king at Abydos is greater than any of the Saqqara *mastabas*. In addition, the presence of objects naming court officials found within the Saqqara tombs points the way to their real owners, members of the royal court based at Memphis and buried there.

There are a number of features shared by the elite Saqqara tombs throughout Dynasty 1. They were all designed to be strikingly impressive, with a superstructure consisting of a huge *mastaba* made of mudbrick, whose external appearance was embellished by decorative brickwork producing a series of plastered vertical niches of varying depth which, because of its supposed connection with early palace architecture, is often referred to as 'palace façade' decoration. In contrast to the large and deliberately visible superstructure, the burial apartments under these *mastabas* were comparatively modest, essentially designed to house the body and those grave goods which were of especial connection to the deceased, or of significant value. The bulk of the objects which

accompanied the deceased were housed not within the burial apartments under the *mastaba*, but within the body of the *mastaba* itself, which, initially at least, was not solid but composed of a series of closed 'cells', each one of which was effectively a sealed storeroom for the grave goods which were placed within them.

Perhaps the most famous example is the tomb of Hemaka (numbered 3035; Emery 1938), a high official who lived during the reign of King Den. His tomb is a typical large *mastaba*-tomb, made of mudbrick and with an external surface with elaborate palace façade decoration. The underground burial chamber was relatively modest in size but the *mastaba* itself was enormous, measuring over 65 × 25 m. The massive proportions of the superstructure made an impressive statement about the status of their owner, but there was an important functional element too since the interior of the *mastaba* was divided into a series of 45 individual cells which were intended to serve as closed storage rooms or magazines. Although robbed, Hemaka's *mastaba* still contained some of its original contents when it was excavated, which included ox-bones and, in a series of four connected rooms, over 700 large storage jars. Other objects from Hemaka's *mastaba* represent extremely high levels of craftsmanship in the creation of luxurious items, such as ivory gaming pieces and thin stone bowls of elaborate shape, but the vast majority of the objects discovered by Emery in Hemaka's tomb were ordinary storage jars for food and drink. Hemaka's *mastaba*, like those of his contemporaries, was, in effect, a huge larder. Whatever the uncertain specifics of the ideas about an afterlife represented by this tomb and its contents, it seems to have a concern with the provision of food which is not very different in essence to that of Tarkhan 1845. The difference seems to be, at least in the case of the tomb of Hemaka and some similar Dynasty 1 *mastabas*, that the wealth of the owners meant that they were able to fill their tombs with the food they would need. The potential flaw in this system is that if the stored food is 'consumed' by the tomb owner, eventually any amount of stored food will run out and other systems need to be put in place to ensure a continued flow for eternity. Some of these changing ideas seem to have influenced the development of elite *mastaba*-tombs at Saqqara during Dynasty 1, which, despite their similarities, reveals a distinct evolution of the form. For the excavation reports of the *mastaba*-tombs described here see: 3035 (Emery 1938); 3471 (Emery 1949: 13–70, pl. 2); 3036 (Emery 1949: 71–81, pl. 14); 3507 (Emery 1958: 73–97, pl. 85); and 3505 (Emery 1958: 5–36, pl. 2).

Saqqara *Mastaba* 3471 (Figure 1.3) probably dates, on the evidence of jar sealings found within it, to the reign of King Djer, early in Dynasty 1. Its substructure consists of a series of seven rooms cut into the bedrock, and roofed with timber, the central, deepest room being the Burial Chamber

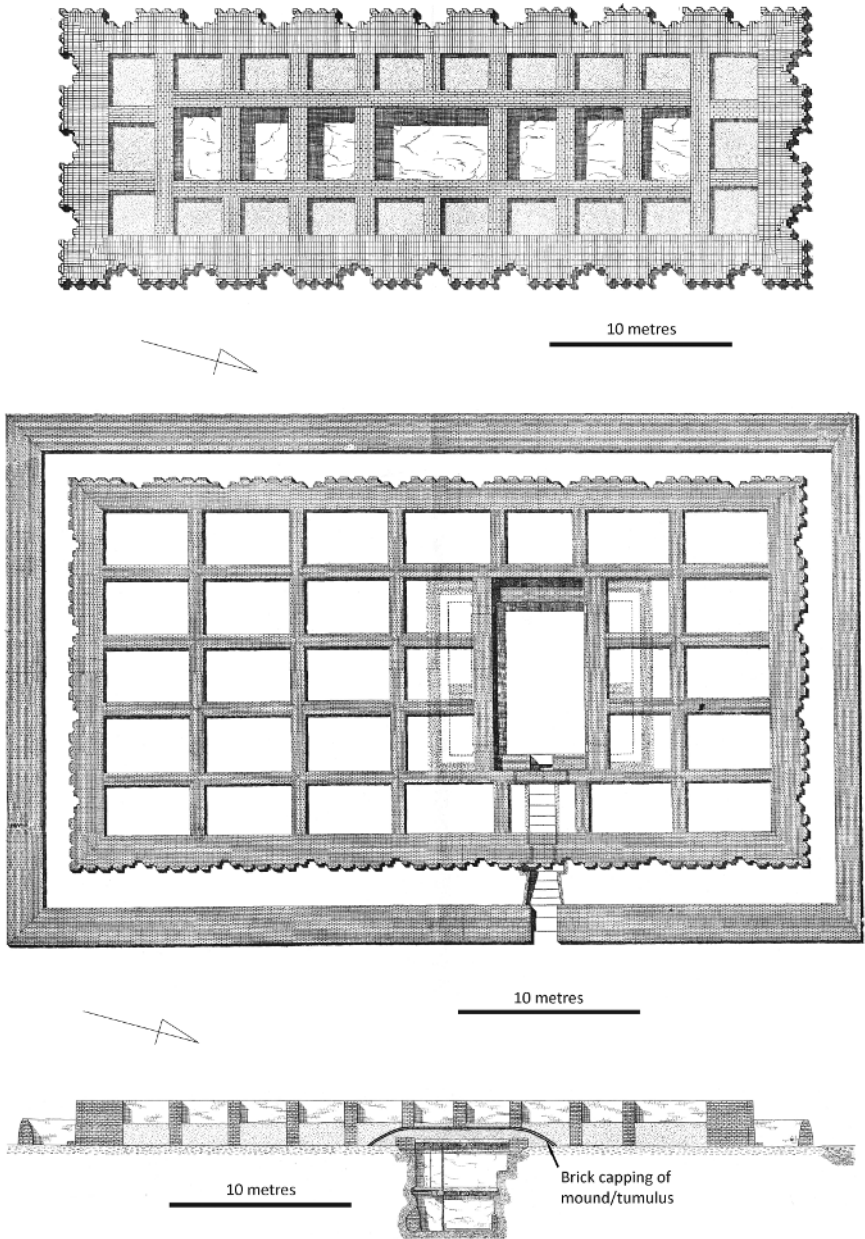


Figure 1.3 Saqqara Mastabas 3471 (plan, top), 3036 (plan, middle) and 3507 (cross-section, foot) (adapted from Emery 1949: Pls 2 and 4; 1958: Pl. 85)

itself. The superstructure is a rectangular mudbrick *mastaba*, just over 41 m long and 15 m wide, with palace façade niches, with its interior divided into 29/30 cells, turning the *mastaba* into a large storeroom. The superstructure rooms were largely empty, but the substructure rooms contained a range of grave goods, especially hundreds of copper vessels and implements.

Saqqara *Mastaba* 3036 (also Figure 1.3) probably belonged to Ankhka, who served under King Den. The superstructure of the tomb – a honeycomb of storerooms – is essentially the same as that of 3471, but there are a number of significant differences, particularly the depth of the burial pit and the ease of access to the Burial Chamber by the innovation of a stairway running down to it from the eastern side of the *mastaba*. Hemaka's tomb, from this reign, is also a 'stairway tomb'.

Saqqara *Mastaba* 3507 also dates to the reign of Den (Emery believed it to be the tomb of Queen Her-neith, mother of Den). It has much in common with 3471 and 3036. It may be earlier than 3036 (pre-stepped phase). But although the superstructure is dominated by the rectangular, niched *mastaba*, the superstructure has embedded within it a further feature: the burial chamber itself is covered by a mound or tumulus of sand and rubble, but given a casing of mudbrick to regularize this loose pile into a definite feature 10.5 m long × 9.2 m wide and just over 1 m high (Figure 1.3). It is possible that this is an artificial re-creation of the tumuli piled on top of earlier tombs; if so, this may represent a compromise between a 'mound' tradition of tomb superstructure and the development of the new rectangular niched 'palace façade' *mastaba*/enclosure, which some scholars argue comes to a full flowering in King Djoser's step-pyramid complex in Dynasty 3.

Saqqara *Mastaba* 3505 (Figure 1.4) is dated to the reign of King Ka'a, last ruler of Dynasty 1, and therefore the latest in this group. It represents a distinct break with the earlier *mastabas* in a number of important respects. Superficially it looks the same, a large niched mudbrick *mastaba*, but the interior of the *mastaba* is not filled with storerooms but is solid. The underground burial apartments are accessed via a stairway on the east side of the *mastaba*, but the *mastaba* is within an enclosure, marked by a surrounding mudbrick wall. A remarkable object was found close to the southern end of the eastern wall of the *mastaba*, a limestone stela 1.73 m tall naming and depicting a high official called Merika. There has been much debate over this object (Bestock 2007: 102): Emery thought it belonged to a nearby subsidiary burial and that the *mastaba* was the tomb of King Ka'a himself, while other later scholars, led by Kemp (1967; this view is not universally shared – see Morris 2007b: 171), believe it to name the owner of the *mastaba* himself and that the stela originally occupied one of the nearby niches, in a position which would become standard in later

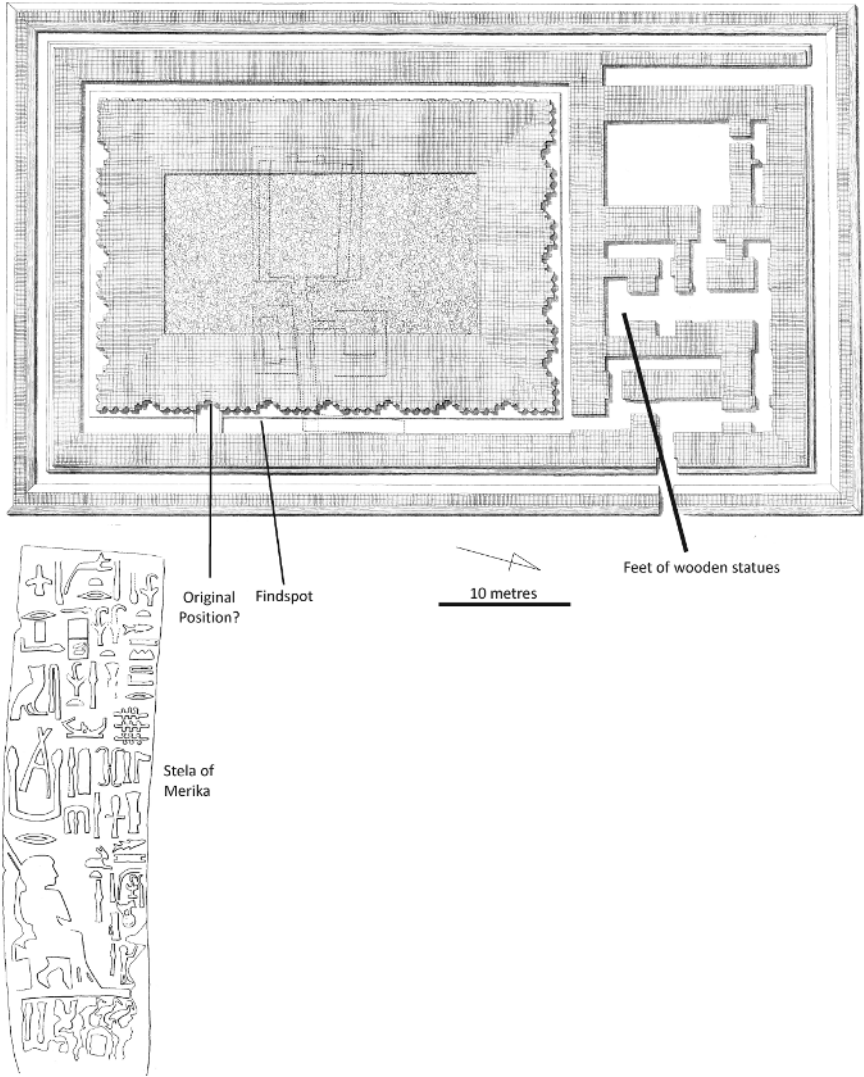


Figure 1.4 Saqqara Mastaba 3505 (adapted from Emery 1958: Pl. 2)

mastaba-tombs. But the tomb complex of *Mastaba* 3505 also housed another important structure, a multi-roomed mudbrick building built immediately to the north of the *mastaba* which it is tempting, based on parallels with later structures, to think of as a funerary temple/offering chapel, particularly as one of the rooms within this building contained the feet of a pair of standing wooden statues which, in later *mastabas*, one

would expect to be figures of the tomb owner, provided as a focus for offerings. It may be that *Mastaba* 3505 provided the prototype for later elite tombs of the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom, not just in the early emergence of specific architectural features and stelae/statues but, much more fundamentally, in the abandonment of the idea of the tomb as being self-sufficient in stored food; instead it was to provide an appropriate reception point for the Living to bring food for the Dead.

This might be regarded as a triumph of the design model of Tarkhan 1845. It is certainly the case that the bipartite tomb – Burial Chamber and Offering Chapel – despite sometimes radically different local variants, and the over-layering of other requirements, became the model for almost all Egyptian tombs which followed for the next 3,000 years. In essence, the Burial Chamber is the place where the body, once interred, is intended to be left in peace. The Offering Chapel, in marked contrast, is designed to be a busy place, where the Living came to leave offerings – particularly food offerings – for the Dead. These two factors – a secure Burial Chamber and an accessible Offering Chapel – are the essential elements of tomb design. But underlying all of these architectural developments is a set of basic questions which still need to be answered. What happens to an individual after death? What is the relationship between the Dead and the Divine? What is the relationship between the Dead and the Living?

The Human Spirit (1): The Ka

The Egyptians have left us with a mass of evidence which relates to their answers to these three questions. Unfortunately their answers are not necessarily simple or consistent. This is perhaps to be expected since we are talking about the evolution of religious beliefs over 3,000 years, but the Egyptians' attitude to the afterlife, and indeed to the spiritual nature of humans in general, is also confusingly sophisticated.

The first point to note is that the Egyptians did not have a unitary view of the spiritual component of a human being. That is to say, they did not believe that a human being had a single 'soul' or 'spirit', but a cluster of spiritual entities, each with a different nature and different potential. Death caused the disaggregation of this bundle of spiritual entities, releasing them to their own specific afterlives. The unitary concept of the soul is one which is perhaps taken for granted by most people in the West and the debate regarding the afterlife centres on what happens to this single spiritual form. Is it reincarnated? Does it go to a much better (or much worse) place? Does it roam the world in an incorporeal state? Does it exist at all? For the Egyptians the multiple possibilities provided by the multiplicity

of personal spiritual forms were a source of varied opportunities for a beneficial afterlife, but also multiple potential problems.

Another factor which needs to be taken into consideration is the ways in which expectations of an afterlife changed over time. Although there was no fundamental revolution in the ways the Egyptians viewed the afterlife, there was a gradual agglomeration of possibilities – new possibilities were added to older ones without necessarily replacing them. In particular, ideas which began as solely royal prerogatives filtered down to the population at large. By the New Kingdom a private individual could look forward to a kaleidoscopic existence after death compared to the more restricted range of opportunities available to his or her Old Kingdom predecessor. This evolution of possibilities is one of the drivers behind changes to the form of the tomb itself, its decoration and its contents.

The starting point for an examination of the spiritual entities which were released on death is the *k3* (*ka*), a word which is incorporated within the names of three of the individuals who owned elite Dynasty 1 Saqqara *mastabas*: Hemaka, Ankhka and Merika. The *ka* as a spiritual entity remained of fundamental importance throughout Egyptian history, even when other expectations of the afterlife had developed (Bolshakov 1997). It was the entity which, in essence, determined the basic nature of the bipartite tomb as a place for the protection of the body and for interaction with the Living. It is often difficult to directly render into a simple word or phrase the religious or cultural concepts of different cultures. The *ka* is just such a concept. It might be defined as the ‘life force’ or ‘spiritual essence’ of a person, their ‘spiritual double’. The word *ka* was usually written using a sign of two upraised arms, perhaps a sign of a person being embraced or protected by their *ka*, and the term is related to words for ‘food’ and is connected to the idea of sexual potency (Bolshakov 1997: 159–63). This indicates that the *ka* was rooted not in an ethereal existence beyond the limits of physical existence, but very much in the real world of the human body and its needs. It can best be summoned up by the idea of ‘vital energy’; as such, a superhuman individual such as a god or a king could have more than one *ka*. The *ka*-force of the king was sometimes shown as a separate entity, and often identified with the god Horus. An important New Kingdom ceremony which was concerned with the rejuvenation of the king – the Opet Festival – saw the merging of the god Amen-Re with the *ka* of the king at Luxor Temple (Bell 1985). The origin of the *ka* seems to have been as a person’s inner force, yet was also connected to their essential personality or even their destiny. But the Egyptians were skilled in taking spiritual entities and personifying them. A good example of this process is the concept of *maat*, the idea of rightness, justice, the antithesis of chaos – very much an intangible concept but one which was coalesced into the

figure of the goddess Maat, a woman with an ostrich feather as her emblem. Other divine concepts were given personifications, but so too were human spiritual attributes, most importantly the *ka*. The 'inner *ka*' was personified as the 'external *ka*', a spiritual entity which, on death, became a quasi-independent entity separate from, yet connected to, the human body which it had inhabited.

But, although a spiritual entity, the *ka* was intimately connected to the body, not just in life, but also after death, when the direct link created at birth between the physical and spiritual had been broken. Crucially, the Egyptians chose to view the external *ka* as having a range of possibilities and limitations which it had shared with its living being/host: a body as a physical host, the sustenance of food and drink, a home in which to live. These limitations meant that the *ka* did not leave the physical world, but dwelt within it: although a spiritual form, it continued to need a physical host, ideally the body; although a spiritual form, it required sustenance in the form of food and drink. Other requirements, or desires, for a beneficial afterlife would follow, but the core need of the *ka* as a spiritual entity requiring physical necessities was one of the major factors which dictated the attitude of the Egyptians towards the Dead, including the form and use of the tomb as the place where the necessary ongoing relationship between the Living and the Dead was crystallized. This is obvious from the way in which the tomb developed during the Old Kingdom; it is also obvious from the term used by Egyptians of the Old Kingdom to refer to the tomb – *pr k3* – 'house of the *ka*'. Arguably, the tomb owner who is depicted on the walls of a non-royal tomb is not the living person but their *ka*. In this context it is important to note the stress which was also placed on the survival of the name, the *rn* (*rn*), as a vital component of the self. A tomb which was heavily labelled with the name(s) and titles of its owner provided an important means by which this could be achieved, and the labelled depiction of the tomb owner on its walls provided 'equipollent' attestations of the *ka* and the *rn* in image and text (Bolshakov 1997: 155). This combination was to become particularly important in the case of statuary within the tomb.

The Tomb as a House for the Ka

Therefore the Archaic Period and Early Old Kingdom saw the experimentation with the form of the tomb as a place of interaction between the Living and the Dead, driven by the nature of the *ka*, and centred on the Offering Chapel. However, it also saw a similar, if less extensive, period of experimentation with the form of the inner parts of the tomb – the Burial

Chamber(s) – in order to try to answer an important question: if the tomb was the house of the *ka*, how house-like should it be? This question was to have slightly different answers at different times, mostly revolving round the idea of a superficially house-like appearance to the tomb in which the Burial Chambers were small and simple and the Offering Chapel comparatively large and complex, but in Dynasties 2–3 attempts were made to create underground suites of rooms for tombs with the intention to re-create a multi-roomed house-like environment (Scharff 1947) which was isolated from access by the Living by one, and sometimes more, massive stone portcullis(es). This form of tomb was, by its nature, created

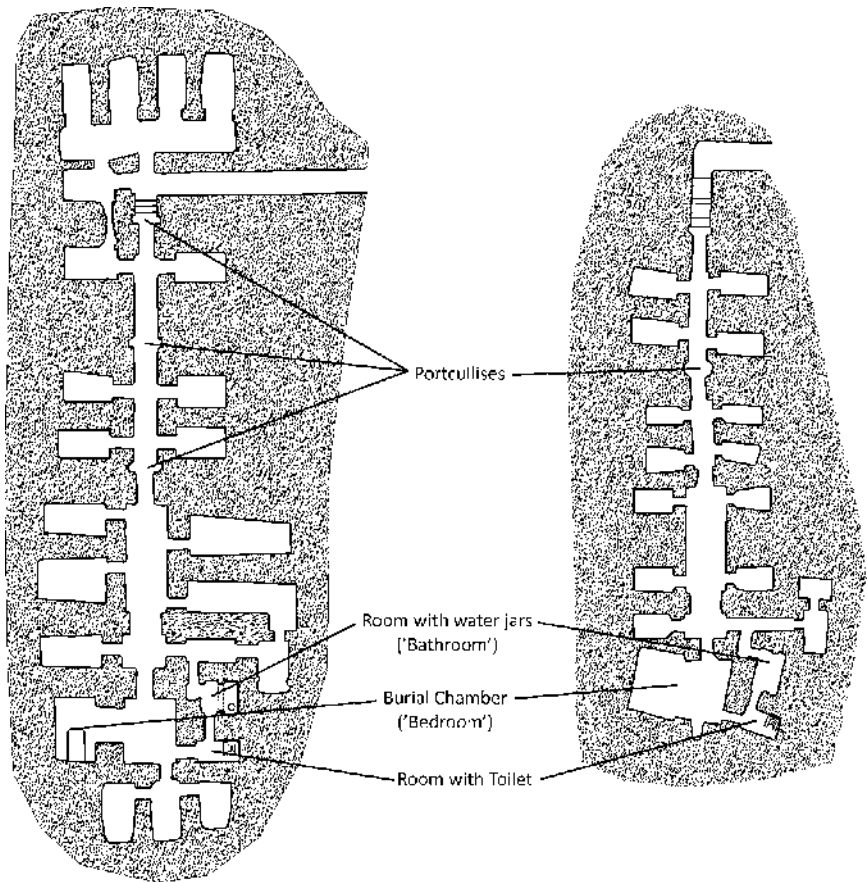


Figure 1.5 The underground rooms of the Saqqara ‘house’ tombs S.2302 (left) and S.2337 (right) (adapted from Quibell 1923: Pl. 30 – no scale on the original plans, but S.2302 is approximately 60 m long)

for a small elite who owned both large multi-roomed houses and the tombs which replicated them, and this form of tomb was a relatively limited phenomenon found at Saqqara (for a provincial exception at Reqaqna see Garstang 1904), mostly excavated by Quibell in 1912–14 (Quibell 1923). Attempts to attribute specific functions to specific rooms in these tombs (Figure 1.5) are problematic (Bolshakov 1997, 29–30; Quibell 1923; Scharff 1947), although the identification of the smallest room in the *mastaba*, containing a lavatory, is unmistakable.