

# Doors, Entrances and Beyond...

Various aspects of entrances and doors of  
the tombs in the Memphite necropoleis  
during the Old Kingdom

Leo Roeten



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978-1-78969-871-8

ISBN 978-1-78969-872-5 (e-Pdf)

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Photo cover: Entrance into the tomb of Inty at Abusir.

(From: M. Bárta and V. Dulíková, “The Afterlife Existence Captured in Stone”, in P. Jánosi and H. Vymazalová (eds), *The Art of Describing. Studies in Honour of Yvonne Harpur* (Prague, 2018)).

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For Marga who keeps on supporting me



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# Chapter One\*

## About this Study

### I. Introduction

Throughout pharaonic times a tomb, particularly an elite tomb, was a monument that was erected for, and usually exclusively paid by the tomb owner, and it had multiple functions. The most obvious of them were:

1. The purely prosaic purpose of serving as a burial place for the mortal remains of a deceased person.
2. To be a monument that marked the place where the deceased had been buried, thus enabling the relatives to pay respect to the deceased and to bring offerings for the sustenance of his/her *k3*.
3. To ensure that the personality of the deceased was retained within the context of the society whence he/she came.
4. To show the social status not only of the tomb owner but also of his or her family.<sup>1</sup> This status was shown not only in the titles the deceased had held, in the dimensions and the decoration of the tomb, but also in texts that stated the relation the deceased had had with royalty. These texts could also make reference to presents given or decrees made by the king.<sup>2</sup>

The tomb owner dead and the monument had been finished or nearly so, the first of its functions was to be the stage for the final phases of the burial ceremony and the funerary rituals pertaining to it.<sup>3</sup> For this short-term but important part of its functions some provisions were made. These were usually removed after the funeral, but nevertheless they left enough marks to be noticed and interpreted during excavation.<sup>4</sup> After the funeral, the monument became the focus of its second, and in fact its most important, function: acting as the daily stage for the 'eternal' mortuary rituals, a recurrent offering ritual, necessary for the sustenance of the *k3* of the deceased.<sup>5</sup>

The construction of the tomb had to permit the necessary architectural facilities for both its funerary and the mortuary aspect, although more was required for the total ritual functioning of the monument than just the building itself, including movable items as ritual furniture, equipment and model offerings. The architectural necessities for the funerary and mortuary rituals were not identical; if part of the funerary rituals were performed on the roof of the tomb,<sup>6</sup> the construction of a ramp would have been necessary,<sup>7</sup> of which remnants have indeed been found near some mastabas.

In some tombs most of the stages of the funeral were depicted on various walls of the chapel,<sup>8</sup> but a relatively small number of chapels have decoration themes depicting the funeral ritual in the vicinity of the tomb itself. The observation that this part of the overall funerary activities was not frequently depicted could be a consequence of the scene being considered not important enough to be indispensable. In view of a hypothesis concerning this specific part of the funeral that will be put forward in the present study, this explanation is not probable. A more valid argument is based on the same proposal which interprets the statue during the opening of the mouth ritual as a facsimile of the dead body of the tomb owner, and this, in combination with the reluctance to depict dead bodies that was still strong during the Old Kingdom, would explain the low frequency of depiction.

The mortuary monument consists of a set of architectural elements that are completely inter-independent. Yet they have to form two separate sets in order to make it possible both for the funerary and the mortuary rituals to take place in the traditional manner

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of the magical part of the sustenance showed a continuous increase (Roeten, *Decoration*).

<sup>6</sup> LD, II, 35. On the false door of *tp-m-ꜥnh* (PM, III/2, 483) is written 'causing to stand on the roof, an invocation-offering is made to you...' (Mariette, *Mastaba*, 195). Forshaw, *Lector*, 91 suggests that this liturgy was performed in the chapel, although in view of the dimensions of the average chapel, this statement might be valid for the tombs of the members of the highest social stratum, but certainly not for the smaller tombs.

<sup>7</sup> This ramp might at first have been used for the construction of the higher layers of the mastaba. Alexanian, *Netjeraperef*, 38, note 110, Plates 4, 7b, Figure 15; Abu-Bakr, *Giza*, Figure 3; Junker, *Giza IX*, Figures 2, 3; Plate IIc/d; Reisner, *Estate stewards*, Figure 3, for further examples see: Arnold, *Building*, 84 – 5, notes 94, 95 (page 105).

<sup>8</sup> OEE, scene-detail database, item 15 (funerary rites and funeral scenes); Forshaw, *Lector*, 83 – 94.

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\* I would like to thank Mr. David Sexton (former literary editor 'Evening Standard', London) for going over my English; of course mistakes of any kind are entirely of my hand.

<sup>1</sup> Alexanian, *Tomb and social status*.

<sup>2</sup> Kloth, *Biographische Inschriften*, 185.

<sup>3</sup> For the definition of the terms 'mortuary' and 'funerary', see 'Bibliography, abbreviations and technical terms'.

<sup>4</sup> Friedman, *Hierakonpolis*, Figure 4.13.

<sup>5</sup> For sustenance the deceased was not solely dependent on the daily mortuary offering ritual in the chapel; during the funeral food had been left behind in the burial chamber or in the shaft leading to it (Ikram, *Food*, 361). In the course of the Old Kingdom the importance

that is necessary for the deceased to obtain afterlife. The decision that both sets can and should be studied separately is based on an interpretation of a definition given by Hoffmann concerning the evidential value of the conclusions drawn from various parts of an architectural whole:

*'Architectural elements are portions of structures which can be dissociated from their original context but which still provide evidence of the architectural competence of the period under consideration'*<sup>9</sup>

Elements that played an important role in the tomb-bound part of the funerary rituals are the shaft and the burial chamber, while the chapel and its entrance, although they had a role in the funerary functioning of the monument, played a major role in the ensuing mortuary activity. An example of the inter-relation between the two sets is that, although the shaft and the burial chamber were prominent in the funerary rituals, the chapel must have been the centre of some of these rituals too. It is certain that, due to their inaccessibility, the latter two architectural elements cannot have been implicated in the mortuary rituals. This leads to the realization that the offerings that had been placed in the burial chamber were not considered sufficient sustenance in the longer term and a mortuary cult had to be installed to continue sustaining the *k3* of the deceased.

In the literature it is usual to consider the offering place in the chapel as the most important area of the total monument. Seen from a ritual point of view, this is correct, but it takes more than an offering place to get people to enter the chapel of a person with whom they are not directly affiliated. The primary task of the entrance is to introduce, to invite and to warn. This makes the entrance in its totality an area of interest in its own right, but not just because it is a way to get into the chapel. The importance of the entrance lies in the realization that it represents a non-physical aspect of the monument in that it is where the worlds of the living and the dead meet. In the richer tombs this threshold between the two worlds was marked by a door; in this way marking the transition and giving it a special significance. This underlying meaning makes a door not only a physical object; it makes it also an integral part of the totality of an entrance, granting access not only to ordinary rooms, but also to rooms with a liminal function. Based on this assumption the various types of entrances and their inter-connectivity will be further studied, which gives rise to a hypothesis concerning their ritual function and meaning.

Part of the study will investigate whether the decoration themes of the various architectural

elements of the entrance of the mortuary monuments are chronologically interconnected, possibly indicating a chronological development of the ritual meaning of the entrance.

The various parts of the chapel, whether exterior or interior, are the most obvious ritual elements of the tomb. Yet, there are parts, either subterranean or above ground, that, although hidden, nevertheless can be interpreted as part of the total ritual combination. The most obvious example of this hidden, ritually important, element is the serdab, and where necessary this part of the mortuary ensemble will be included in this study.

## II. Preliminary considerations

- The names of kings are written according to Verner, *Chronology*. Private names are written in transliteration font and are spelled according to Harpur, *DETOK*, 265 – 84. The place of the king within the dynasty is determined in the table given in Stadelmann, *Pyramiden*, 310 – 2.
- Within the context of this study the type of tomb, whether mastaba, rock-cut or a combination of both, is irrelevant.
- The tombs that are subject of this study and that are accepted in eventual catalogues are those situated in the necropolis of Giza, Saqqara and Abusir.
- If in the course of this study it becomes necessary to investigate a possible connection between the signalling and inviting function of the entrance decoration and the themes placed on this architectural element, solely those placed on the real (outside) entrance of the mortuary installation are taken into account.<sup>10</sup> Entrances that are suitable for inclusion in the catalogues can be either those of interior or exterior chapels.
- Due to the chronological limits set for this study, only tombs that can be dated from the 4th up to and including the 6th dynasty are usually accepted in the catalogues. In case of necessity for the study at hand, it is possible that tombs that can be dated to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd dynasty can be included in the catalogues also, and thus incorporated in curves describing various chronological developments.
- The northern and southern walls of the corridor of a cruciform chapel are considered as entrance thicknesses; if these walls are decorated, the tomb is included in the relevant catalogue.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffmann, *Amratian house*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> This condition has been added because in the multi-chambered mastabas (e.g. *Mrrw-k3.j* (PM, III/2, 525 – 34)) the room with the offering place is deep in the substructure of the monument (room A-11 in the aforementioned tomb).



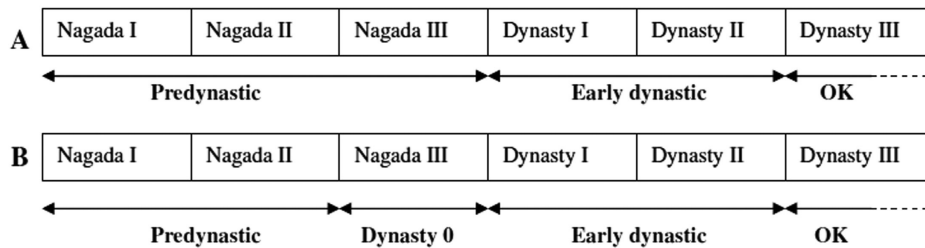


Figure 1.1 The two main naming systems for the periods prior to the Old Kingdom.

- If a tomb has two chapels (e.g. in tomb M6 at Maidum the separate chapels of *R<sup>c</sup>-htp* and his wife), the decoration of both chapels is taken into consideration.<sup>11</sup>
- A tomb with an offering place in the form of a niche can be included in the relevant catalogue if decoration is present on its jambs. This type of offering place has no corridor and consequently has no entrance thicknesses in the usual sense of the word.
- If the entrance of the tomb is what is called ‘a portico’, only the decoration at both sides of the real entrance or the false door that functions as such is interpreted as door jamb decoration, while the decoration on the northern and southern walls of the portico is not included in the catalogue (certain aspects of the portico will be discussed in later chapters).
- Because there is the possibility of a difference between the architectural and mortuary background of the tombs in the Memphite area and the provinces, only the tombs in necropoleis of Giza, Saqqara and Abusir are included in the catalogues.<sup>12</sup>
- In view of the relatively careless use of the terms funerary, mortuary, funerary offerings and mortuary offerings, the definitions of the terms as they will be employed in this study are those given in the table ‘Bibliography, abbreviations and technical terms’.
- In some parts of this study material aspects of periods before the Old Kingdom are discussed. In the literature the nomenclature of these periods is somewhat confused due to the intermingling of two systems, while other terms have been added too. In Figure 1.1 the two main naming

Dynasty	Number	Name	Kings per period	Period		
IV	IV.1	Sneferu	IV.1 – IV.3	IV.E		
	IV.2	Khufu				
	IV.3	Radjedef				
	IV.4	Rakhaef (Baka)	IV.4 – IV.6	IV.L		
					IV.5	Menkaure
					IV.6	Shepseskaf (Thamthis)
V	V.1	Userkaf	V.1 – V.3	V.E		
	V.2	Sahure				
	V.3	Neferirkare				
	V.4	Shepseskare	V.4 – V.6	V.M		
					V.5	Raneferef
					V.6	Niuserre
					V.7	Menkauhor
					V.8	Djedkare
					V.9	Unas
VI	VI.1	Teti	VI.1 – VI.2	VI.E		
	VI.2	Pepy I				
	VI.3	Merenre	VI.3 – VI.4E	VI.M		
					VI.4	Pepy II

Figure 1.2 Table of the kings of the Old Kingdom and the division in periods (after Harpur, *DETOK*, 43).

systems are shown, and in this study system A will be employed.<sup>13</sup>

- If the gender of the tomb owner has to be given in the form of a possessive pronoun the male form ‘his’ is used, unless the context demands the use of a female pronoun.

### III. The chronology employed

The following considerations are taken into account for the chronology employed in this study, which is the same as the one used in the author’s two prior studies of the author related to this subject (Figure 1.2).<sup>14</sup>

1. This study is based on the order of kings in a dynasty as given in Figure 1.2.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> An example of this is the tomb of *S3bw* and *Pth-šps*; PM, III/2, 460-1.

<sup>12</sup> Because the cemetery of Abû Rawâsh can be interpreted as one of the Memphite necropoleis, tombs from this cemetery can be included in the catalogues. The excavation reports of this necropolis as given by the Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale in Cairo (BIFAO) give two tombs with entrance decoration (tomb F 19, Baud, *F 19*, 29 and Figure 4; tomb F 48, Baud, *F 48*, Figure 14), both of them dated to the earlier part of the 4th dynasty. These tombs are included in the catalogue of the necropolis of Giza.

<sup>13</sup> In system B the period ‘predynastic’ is sometimes called ‘dynasty 00’.

<sup>14</sup> Roeten, *Decoration*, Figure II.9 (page 48) and Roeten, *Economic decline*, Figure 18 (page 18).

<sup>15</sup> Harpur, *DETOK*, 34.

		Verner, <i>Chronology</i>	Harpur, <i>DETOK</i>
IV.E	Sneferu	24	24
	Khufu	23	23
	Djedefre	8	8
		55	55
IV.L	Rakhaef	20 + x	25
	Menkaure	18/28	18/28
	Shepseskaef	4	7
		Min. 43, max. 53 + x	Min. 50, max. 60
V.E	Userkaf	7	7
	Sahure	12	12
	Neferirkare	?	≤ 20
		19 ?	Min. < 39, max. 39
V.M	Shepseskare	7	7
	Ranferef	1	≤ 10
	Niuserre	11 (+ x)	> 11
		Min. 19, max. 19 + x	Min. 20, max. 18 + x
V.L	Menkauhor	8	8
	Ranferef	28	28
	Niuserre	30	30
		66	66
VI.E	Teti	lost	15?
	Pepy I	20	≤ 30 (25?)
	Merenre	6	7
		26 + x	Min. 47?, max. 52
VII.L	Pepy II	90 + x	85
		90 + x	85

In total Verner = 98 – 108+x and Harpur = 105-115

In total Verner = 85 + x and Harpur = (< 125) – (123 + x)

In total Verner = 116+x and Harpur = 132?

Figure 1.3 Comparison of the reign lengths given by Harpur, *DETOK* and Verner, *Chronology*.

2. The dating given to the tombs that are accepted in the various catalogues is based on the literature and databases available (e.g. PM, the Giza Mastabas Series of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Abusir series published by the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in Prague, the databases 'Mastabase' of the University of Leiden (Walsem, van, *Mastabase*) and OEE (Oxford Expedition to Egypt: Scene-details Database (Linacre College, Oxford)).
3. Because of the small number of tombs that can be dated to one particular reign, they are only assigned to the various Old Kingdom periods as given in Figure 1.2.
4. If additional information is available concerning the dimensions of the tombs, the methodology developed and employed in Roeten, *Economic decline* can be used to check the reliability of the given date.
5. This methodology can be applied when in the literature a dating like IV.L/V.E or V.L-VI is given. If the additional data about the dimensions do not lead to a decision; then the date in the catalogue is given as a 'flowing' date between the two periods; for 'IV.L/V.E' this becomes 'IV.L – V.E'. The date 'V.L or VI' is interpreted as V.L – VI.E.
6. A date 'V – VI' is not included unless the dimensions of the tomb enable the determination of a more precise date (e.g. *Hwtj*, PM, III/2, 489).<sup>16</sup>

The abbreviations used in the chronology of Figure 1.2 are the following:

IV.E and IV.L mean resp. 4th dynasty early and late.

V.E, V.M and V.L resp. 5th dynasty early, middle and late.

VI.E, VI.M and VI.L resp. 6th dynasty early, middle and late.<sup>17</sup>

Although there is still a lot of debate about the length of the reign of some of the kings of the Old Kingdom,<sup>18</sup> the approximate length in years of the three dynasties of the Old Kingdom as given in Harpur, *DETOK*, 34 – 5 is IV = 110, V = 140 and VI = 140<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Mariette, *Mastaba*, 99 gives a plan that omits the width of the mastaba.

<sup>17</sup> In this dynasty the division in periods is hampered by the long reign of Pepy II (VI.4). This problem is treated in accordance with Harpur, *DETOK*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Harpur, *DETOK*, 33 – 5; Verner, *Chronology*; see Figure 3.

<sup>19</sup> The shortened length of the reign of Teti according to Harpur, *DETOK*, 35.

The division of the dynasties as given in Figure 1.2 provides a distribution of sub-periods that have, according to Figure 1.3 some equilibrium in length. Because for the period-divisions the number of tombs and not the equilibrium in length of time is statistically important, in this study two kinds of time-line are used:

System I: IV – V.E – V.M – V.L – VI

System II: IV.E – IV.L – V.E – V.M – V.L – VI.E – VI.L

The choice of dating system depends largely on the number of tombs in the population.