

Tombs

During the Old Kingdom, mastabas and pyramids were built as tombs for the deceased in order to preserve their soul in the afterlife.

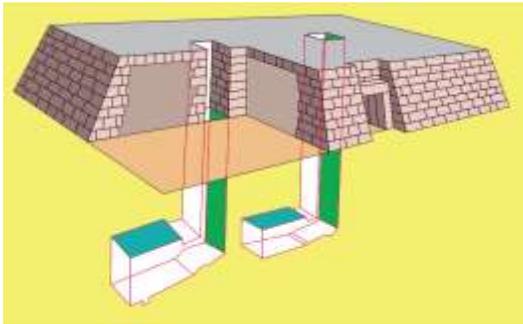


Figure 1:
Schematic of an Egypt mastaba from the Old Kingdom

Inside the mastaba, a deep chamber was dug into the ground and lined with stone or bricks. Over time these tomb chambers sank deeper and were connected by stairs. The above ground structure had space for a small chapel to which priests and family members could bring offerings for the soul of the deceased.

- In the early period, Egyptians built mastabas to mark the tombs of their deceased.
- During the Old Kingdom, these royal mastabas eventually developed into rock-cut “step pyramids” and then “true pyramids,” the greatest of which are the Pyramids of Giza.
- The process of mummification continued and evolved during the Old Kingdom, but was not perfected until the New Kingdom.
- Ceremonies such as the Opening of the Mouth ceremonies were performed to help the deceased’s soul transition into the afterlife.
- Throughout the Old Kingdom, Egyptians were buried with burial goods that they thought were necessary after death, such as bowls, combs, food, and – for the wealthier Egyptians – jewelry, furniture, and other valuables.

Note:

A **mummy** is an embalmed corpse wrapped in linen bandages for burial, especially as practiced by the ancient Egyptians.

Mummification is the preserving of a dead body by making it into a mummy.

The **Pyramid Texts** were a collection of spells to assure the resurrection of the deceased and protect the Pharaoh from various malignant influences.



Figure 2:
Example of a Mastaba

Royal mastabas were used to mark the burial site of many important Egyptians.



Figure 3:
The Pyramids of Giza

The Pyramids of Giza served as tombs to the Kings. By preserving their bodies and providing them with gifts for the afterlife, it was believed that their soul would live on.

The ancient Egyptians had an elaborate set of burial customs that they believed were necessary to ensure their immortality after death. The building of tomb structures such as *mastabas* and *pyramids* were intended to preserve the corpse of the deceased, under the belief that this would in turn preserve their soul in the afterlife. Rituals and protocols included mummification, casting of magic spells, and burial with specific grave goods thought to be needed in the afterlife. In this way, tombs not only served as a burial place for the deceased's body, but also as storage for the various items he would need in the afterlife.

Burial Tombs: Mastabas and Pyramids

In the early period, Egyptians had buried their bodies in simple graves in the desert. These shifted to the use of royal *mastabas*: flat-roofed, rectangular structures made of stone or mud bricks that marked the burial site of many important Egyptians (Figure 1). Mastabas gradually evolved through the early dynastic period, with the underground tomb chamber sinking deeper. Figure 0 During the Old Kingdom, these royal mastabas eventually developed into rock-cut *step pyramids* and then *true pyramids*, although non-royal use of mastabas continued to be used for more than a thousand years.

The *Pyramids of Giza*, massive stone-cut structures built from limestone quarried from the Nile River, are the most well-known example of pyramid tombs built during the Old Kingdom (Figure 2). As the pyramids were constructed for the kings, mastabas for lesser royals were constructed around them. Tombs were built of permanent materials and the interior walls of the tombs were decorated with scenes of daily life and funerary rituals.

Mummification and Ceremony

In order to preserve the body and therefore the soul of the deceased, Egyptians used the process of mummification. This involved removing the internal organs, wrapping the body in linen, and burying the mummy in a rectangular stone sarcophagus or wooden coffin. The first evidence of intentional mummification in Egypt dates to 3500 B.C.; beginning in the Fourth Dynasty, some parts were preserved separately in canopic jars. The process of mummification however was not perfected until the New Kingdom.

The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony was a ritual involving the symbolic animation of a mummy by magically opening its mouth so that it could breathe, speak, eat, and drink in the afterlife. There is evidence of this ritual from the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period. Special tools were used to perform the ceremony, such as a ritual adze, an arm shaped ritual censer, a spooned blade known as a *peseshkaf*, a serpent-head blade, and a variety of other amulets. A calf's leg was also held up to the lips painted on the coffin. The ancient Egyptians believed that in order for a person's soul to survive in the afterlife it would need to have food and water. The opening of the mouth ritual was thus performed so that the person who died could eat and drink again in the afterlife.

Burial Goods

From the earliest periods of Egyptian history, all Egyptians were buried with at least some burial goods that they thought were necessary after death. These usually consisted of everyday objects such as bowls, combs, and other trinkets, along with food. Wealthier Egyptians could afford to be buried with jewelry, furniture, and other valuables, which made them targets of tomb robbers. As burial customs developed in the Old Kingdom, wealthy citizens were buried in wooden or stone coffins; however the number of burial goods declined, sometimes to simply a set of copper tools and some vessels.

Many mummies were provided with some form of funerary literature, often consisting of spells and instructions for navigating the afterlife. During the Old Kingdom, only the pharaoh had access to this material, which scholars refer to as the *Pyramid Texts*. The Pyramid Texts are a collection of spells to assure the royal resurrection and protect the pharaoh from various malignant influences.

The above ground structure of the mastaba had a small offering chapel equipped with a false door to which priests and family members brought food and other offerings for the soul of the deceased. A second hidden chamber called a “serdab” housed a statue of the deceased that was hidden within the masonry for its protection. Because of the riches included in graves, tombs were a tempting site for grave-robbers. The increasing size of the pyramids is in part credited to protecting the valuables within, and many other tombs were built into rock cliffs in an attempt to thwart grave robbers.