Tombs

Grand and royal tombs continued to be built for the deceased during the prosperous Middle Kingdom.

Figure 1: Shabti figures

Shabti were funerary figurines that were placed in tombs along with the deceased to assist them in the afterlife.

- As the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom restored the country's prosperity and stability, they stimulated a resurgence of art, literature, and monumental building projects, including tombs and burial goods.
- While burial goods continued to be common, objects of daily use were not typically included as they were in the Old Kingdom.
- Toward the end of the Middle Kingdom, new objects were introduced such as shabtis and scarabs.
- Scarabs were popular amulets believed to be protectors of written products.
- Shabtis were funerary figurines placed in tombs of the deceased to help them in the afterlife.
- Coffin Texts evolved from the previous Pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom, expanding and introducing spells that were more relatable to nobles and non-royal Egyptians.

Note:

A sarcophagus is a stone coffin, often inscribed or decorated with sculpture.

The Pyramid Texts were a collection of spells to protect the pharaoh from harm in the afterlife.

Burial goods are items included in tombs that were thought to be necessary in the afterlife, from everyday objects to jewelry and valuables.
Figure 2:
A modern imitation of an ancient Egyptian scarab amulet

Scarabs were often included in tombs along with other burial goods as protectors of written products.
Royal funerary practices in the Middle Kingdom remained much the same as in the Old Kingdom, with kings continuing to build pyramids for their burials. Unlike the Old Kingdom, however, Middle Kingdom royal pyramids were not quite as well constructed, and so few of them remain as pyramid structures today. Among the tombs built during this time are Amenemhat I's funerary monument at El-Lisht; Sesostris I's funerary monument; Amenemhat III's pyramid at Hawara, which includes an elaborate labyrinth complex; and Sesostris II's pyramid at Illahun. The construction of pyramids declined toward the end of the 12th Dynasty, as instability led to the decline of the Middle Kingdom.

*Burial goods* continued to be commonplace in tombs. Starting in the First Intermediate period, wooden models became very popular, often depicting everyday activities that the deceased expected to continue doing in the afterlife. The standard coffin was rectangular and brightly painted, often including an offering formula. Unlike the Old Kingdom, objects of daily use were not often included in the tombs; however, they reappeared toward the end of the Middle Kingdom.

Other new objects were introduced toward the end of the Kingdom as well, including the first shabtis and the first scarabs. *Scarabs* were popular amulets believed to be protectors of written products (Figure 1). The scarab was also used as a holder or medium for personal name seals. A figurine of a scarab would be carved out of stone, and then on the smooth stomach of the scarab, the engraving of a seal was made. *Shabtis* were funerary figurines placed in tombs of the deceased to help them in the afterlife (Figure 0). Used from the Middle Kingdom until the end of the Ptolemaic Period nearly 2000 years later, most shabtis were of a small size, often covering the floor around a sarcophagus. Exceptional shabtis were of larger size, or produced as a one-of-a-kind master work. They were generally distinguished from other statuettes by being inscribed with the name of the deceased, his titles, and often with spells from the *Coffin Texts*.

Another change in funerary practice during this time had to do with non-royal Egyptians. In contrast to elitist Old Kingdom attitudes towards the gods, the Middle Kingdom experienced an increase in expressions of personal piety and what could be called a democratization of the afterlife. In this worldview, all people possessed a soul and could be welcomed into the company of the gods after death. Previously, literature like funerary Pyramid Texts, which contained spells to help the dead reach the afterlife successfully, were only accessible to the elite. During the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians outside of the elite levels of society gained access to this funerary literature and began incorporating it into their own burials. *Coffin Texts*, as they are called by the scholars, expanded upon the previous Pyramid Texts, introducing new spells and incorporating slight changes to make them more relatable to the nobility.