

[EXTRAIT DES MÉMOIRES DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS, T. LXVI. — MÉLANGES MASPÉRO, VOL. I.]

THE
HISTORY OF THE EGYPTIAN MASTABA

BY

GEORGE A. REISNER



LE CAIRE

IMPRIMERIE DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS

D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

1934

Tous droits de reproduction réservés

THE HISTORY OF THE EGYPTIAN MASTABA

BY

GEORGE A. REISNER.

The material on which the history of the mastaba form of tomb is to be based lies in a long series of publications by scholars of many countries. A large number of the examples are contained in MARIETTE'S *Mastabas*, which was compiled by Gaston Maspero from Mariette's notes. The rest of the material has been recorded by foreign scholars, and by officials of the Department of Antiquities excavating in the great cemetery at Saqqarah. These officials, Mr. J. E. Quibell and Mr. C. M. Firth, were both selected for this work by Gaston Maspero, and the foreign expeditions worked under the policy laid down by that wise scholar for the administration of the Department of Antiquities. Thus the material is entirely associated with the name of Gaston Maspero. It may be said that the great cemetery north of the Step Pyramid at Saqqarah, which extended from Dyn. I to Dyn. VI, presents a nearly complete reflection of the history of the mastaba.

All the published mastabas known down to the building of the Cheops Pyramid at Giza were of crude brick, and it is with the history of the crude brick mastaba that we are concerned during this whole period. The making of crude brick and the use of crude brickwork with a typically Egyptian system of bonding was introduced about the time of the accession of Menes or a little earlier. This great discovery was at once utilized to improve the form of the Egyptian grave by making possible a better protection for the burial and its funerary equipment in the brick-lined and wooden-roofed substructure, and by permitting the construction of a more durable grave mound. In its origin the crude brick mastaba was merely an improved form of the grave mound of the Predynastic Period. The earliest known mastabas are those found by Petrie and Wainwright at Tarkhan which are of Dyn. I and covered simple open pit graves differing from the predynastic graves only by the objects which they contained.

The earliest mastabas were short oblong constructions with two paired offering niches and exterior open air chapels marked off by crude brick walls. The

faces of this mastaba were nearly vertical (less than 5 degrees from the vertical). I reconstruct the tombs of Menes and Narmer found at Abydos by Sir Flinders Petrie as similar constructions built of solid brickwork. The succeeding superstructure of Zer improved these mastabas by adding layers of brickwork around the base to prevent lateral penetration. It was this layer mastaba which developed into the layer or step pyramid of stone and finally into the true pyramid. In the meantime, the valley shrine was developed for royal tombs (see PETRIE, *Tombs of the Courtiers*, p. 3 a). This was a long superstructure without substructure, built of mud brick with a series of offering niches (*ka*-doors) on all four sides, and containing a number of magazines stored with offerings and perhaps a simulacrum of the royal person to whom it was dedicated. This panelled mastaba was painted elaborately in colors in imitation of the pavillon (*sh*) erected near the tomb to protect the offerings and probably the body during the final preparations for the burial. It was this type of superstructure which was selected for the tomb of Queen Neithetep, a wife of Menes, buried at Naqadah. There even the burial chamber was above ground in the superstructure. This mastaba was built after the death of Menes, in the reign of Narmer or Zer. Other great provincial mastabas of the reign of Zer and Zet followed the form of the Naqadah tomb but had the superstructure sunk in the ground. This was the type on which the large private mastaba was developed.

The superstructures of the larger mastabas of Dyn. I were all of the panelled type with a series of *ka*-doors on all four sides (palace façade panelling), or had a simplified form of this panelling. There can be no doubt that the old two-niched form continued in use for small mastabas. In Dyn. II the palace façade panelling was used only in a few isolated examples of large mastabas, and all mastabas even the largest reverted to the two-niched form. But the chief or southern niche had the form of the great *ka*-door used in the palace façade panelling. In Dyn. III both the plain compound niche and the great door were used for the chief niche, but the use of the plain compound niche became the predominating form.

Down to the reign of Khasekhemuwy, the chapel had always been an open air enclosure. In the great panelled mastabas this area was marked off by a low enclosing wall further away on the valley side with an entrance at the southern end of the wall on that side. The offerings were deposited at one of the great doors of the panelling opposite the body. Smaller mastabas had only the face of the mastaba enclosed on the offering side. But in the reign

of Khasekhemuwy, the two-niched mastaba was converted into a mastaba with interior roofed chapel and a subsidiary northern niche. This chapel amounted in effect to a withdrawal of the chief southern niche within the body of the mastaba, in order to protect the elaborate painting of the great door from weathering. At about the same time the roofed exterior chapel was introduced apparently for the same purpose (the protection of the paintings). These two types of protected chapels were further developed during Dyn. III. This early interior chapel I call the cruciform chapel because of its form with the offering niche opposite the entrance doorway. It has three different variations, (1) with the niche of the great door type, (2) with a plain compound niche, and (3) with one complete element of the palace façade panelling (great door with three dummy doors on each side). It is to be noted that the west wall of the chapel represents in effect a section of the façade of the mastaba, and ever afterwards the west wall of the interior offering room was conceived as equivalent to the façade or a part of the façade of a mastaba. The last of the three forms, the cruciform chapel with palace façade panelling was not introduced until the transition from Dyn. III to Dyn. IV. The chapel of Hesy was the result of a series of reconstructions and thus accidental.

It was in this period from Khasekhemuwy to Sneferuw that the decoration of the *ka*-door and the chapel with reliefs in stone was developed. The old niches derived from the palace façade panelling had, like the panelling, been built of crude brick with wooden strengthening, and decorated with colored mat-patterns. The carving of reliefs in limestone had reached a high level at the beginning of Dyn. III as is proved by the panels and inscriptions found in the substructures of the Zoser complex. The earliest use of reliefs in private tombs is represented by half a dozen niche stones which had been used in substitution for the wooden architraves over the offering niches of two-niched mastabas (or interior chapels). These stones, «primitive niches stones», present the earliest examples of the table scene which was the characteristic picture on the early slab stelae and the tablet of the traditional stone niche (false door). The date of the introduction of the niche stone is not to be clearly fixed, but some of the examples are certainly from Dyn. III, and probably none is earlier than Khasekhemuwy. We have the wooden panels of Hesy from the back of the inner niche, and the stone linings of the inner niche of Khabauwsokar and his wife as the earliest examples of relief decoration found in place. The latter reliefs are from the transition period between Dyn. III and IV. It is from this same period or from the reign of Sneferuw

that come the cruciform chapels lined with reliefs, Methen, FS 3078, Akhet-hetep, etc. The decorated cruciform chapels of Medum I place still later, early in the reign of Cheops.

While the superstructures were developing in this way, the substructures, the burial apartments, were also changing, due to the development of quarrying and stone masonry. This craft appears in the Memphite province in Dyn. I and by the reign of Wedymuw had caused a separation in the forms used in Lower and those used in Upper Egypt. This separation culminated in Dyn. II, when the deep underground stairway tomb appeared at Memphis.

All the Memphite tombs of Dyn. I at Memphis and all the Upper Egyptian tombs of Dyn. I-II were of the open pit type derived from the early open pit type of the predynastic period. The first advance over the single-room brick-lined pit was the introduction of the multiple-room brick substructure in the reign of Zer and Zet. These multiple-room substructures were all entered from above and roofed with wood and brick after the burial. The next advance was the introduction of the stairway entrance on one side which permitted the preparation of the substructure with its roof complete before the burial. This was introduced by Wedymuw and appears in this reign gravel-cut in Upper Egypt and sunk in the limestone stratum at Saqqarah (see Firth's tombs, FS 3035, 3036, 3038, and 3041). In Upper Egypt in Dyn. II the same forms continued in use, but with a corbelled brick roof substituted for the wooden roof. The crude brick corbelled vault appears to have been first used at Abydos in the tomb of Qay-^ca. At Saqqarah, however, the increased skill of the stone workers gave rise to an entirely new type of substructure, the deep stairway tomb with rock-cut underground chambers, and this was the type used for all large mastabas and many small ones at Saqqarah from the beginning of Dyn. II to the end of Dyn. III. In Upper Egypt, this type replaced the older corbel-roofed substructure about the beginning of Dyn. III and continued in use also to the end of Dyn. III, but these tombs were cut in the gravel or in *tuff*, not in limestone rock. At Saqqarah during the close of Dyn. III and the reign of Sneferuw the rectangular shaft type of substructure, so well known in later times, was developed directly from the deep stairway type through the modified stairway type, in which the stairway ended in a deep vertical shaft. At Medum another type, in which a sloping approach was substituted for a stairway, appears between the stairway type and the plain shaft type. In these sloping passage tombs, the chamber and the approach were both built in a great open trench, sometimes T-shaped like the unfinished royal tomb at Zawiyet-el-Aryan.

This type was obviously produced to make a secure substructure in the bad rock, which underlies the Medum site. For this same reason the early shaft mastabas at that site had substructures, shaft and chambers, constructed in an open pit. The chambers were of well-dressed limestone with slab or corbel roofs. Examples of similar chambers either built in an open pit or in a cavity excavated in the rock occur also at Dahshur in association with the North Stone Pyramid, the tomb of Sneferuw. It was this type from which the earliest shafts at Giza were developed with chambers cut in the solid rock and lined with finely dressed casing walls of white limestone.

There may have been earlier stone mastabas than those built by Cheops at Giza, but from the time that Cheops began his pyramid at that place, all the mastabas of the court were built of stone. The use of the stone mastaba was extended to other persons after the reign of Chephren both at Giza and Saqqarah. In Dyn. V even small mastabas were constructed of limestone, howbeit often stripped from older tombs. The earliest stone mastabas built by Cheops for his family were designed for exterior roofed chapels, which first came into use in the reign of Khasekhemuwy. These chapels were at first of crude brick, but almost immediately a better exterior chapel of stone was devised. Cheops lived to build for his favorite children in the cemetery east of his pyramid the first stone mastabas with interior chapels. These stone chapels of Giza do not follow the form of the older cruciform chapels of Saqqarah, although they have still only one niche in the west wall. They are of a form, which I call "L-shaped", because they have the offering niche (*ka-door*) in one end of the west wall while the entrance doorway is at the opposite end of the east wall. The L-shaped chapel follows the form of the uninscribed stone chapels of the subsidiary tombs of the Zoser complex. The form may perhaps be discerned in the open-air crude brick chapels recorded by Petrie at Tarkhan from Dyn. I.

The stone mastaba with interior L-shaped chapel containing one *ka-door* was developed by Cheops for members of his family at Giza, and this type formed the basis of the further development of the stone mastaba. At Saqqarah the cruciform chapel in a modified form (with flat shallow nichework) continued in use until Dyn. VI, but the L-shaped chapel was introduced even at that site.

At Giza the L-shaped chapel with one niche continued in use until the end of the reign of Chephren, after which it was displaced by the interior L-shaped chapel with two niches representing the full façade of a mastaba. After the end of Dyn. IV, the corridor chapel in its various forms with alcove at one end

was employed generally. About the end of Dyn. V and in Dyn. VI the multiple-room interior chapel was favored in large stone mastabas. One particular element of these later chapels is to be noted occurring either alone or surrounded by other rooms. This element consists of one long N-S corridor, often with two niches, which opens southwards into the east end of a long E-W room, which has in its narrow western end an elaborate shallow false door.

Space does not permit me to describe the development of the masonry used in the stone mastabas nor other points concerning their history. This whole question has been taken up in our first two volumes of the series on the Giza mastabas, the first of which *The Development of the Egyptian Tomb down to the Accession of Cheops* is now in press.