CHAPTER IV
EARLY FORMS OF TOMBS

It is supposed that the earliest religion of the Egyptians, before the development of their complicated mythology, was based on the worship of ancestors and the divine character of kings—ideas to which modern parallels are found in China and Japan. To some such primitive system may be ascribed the importance persistently given to sepulchral rites and monuments.

The earliest tombs erected for kings and nobles were rectangular structures at first of brick, but afterwards of stone, the courses being sloped on the outer surface or slightly rebated so as to give the appearance of battering

1 Budge, B.M. Guide, pp. 116, 189. On the persistence of this belief, see Breasted, pp. 122, 123.
sides. They generally have on one side an architectural panel imitating a door with an inscription in hieroglyphics. In the interior there is nearly always a small chamber, or more than one, and through or beneath the substance of the mastaba there is a deep rectangular shaft or pit leading to a cavity in the earth below in which the mummified body was deposited, after which the shaft was filled up.

There is a large brick-built mastaba at Nakada, a village a little above Abydos on the left bank of the Nile, which is the tomb of Mena or Aha, and is the only royal

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1 The size of these mastabas (so called from the Arab word for a "bench") varies from thirteen to thirty feet in height, though some few are larger.
tomb of the Ist dynasty known. Its sides have projecting buttresses suggesting a similarity to the early fortifications attributed to the same period.

Another immense brick-built mastaba, forty feet in height and about 280 by 150 in area, also in the neighbourhood of Abydos, is the tomb of King Tjeser of the 11th dynasty. Through one end there is a stairway leading to a descending passage which terminates in a series of mortuary chambers. The passage is intercepted in several places by heavy stones which were let down through shafts from the top of the building with the object of securing the inviolability of the tomb.

Hitherto sun-dried bricks had formed the material for building, though stone was sometimes employed in details as in Tjeser's mastaba, or for the granite flooring found in the tomb of Den-Semti a king of the 1st dynasty. But it seems to have occurred to Tjeser to substitute stone for brick, for another monument built by him consists entirely of limestone. It was by no means unusual for kings to have a second tomb, a custom originating possibly in the desire that the so-called $\text{\textit{ka}}$, or "double," should find a temporal retreat both at Abydos, where it was supposed that Osiris was buried, and at some other site associated with the life or death of the deceased ruler; though it is not always clear which is the actual sepulchre and which the secondary one. Tjeser accordingly built a stone mastaba at Sakkarah. near Memphis, on which, it is assumed, he afterwards imposed another of smaller area, and repeated the process as time went on, until he had produced what is known as the Step-pyramid. It has altogether six

1 K. and H., p. 65.
PYRAMIDS AT DASHUR

Probably of the IIInd dynasty. The one with the double slope retains most of its limestone casing.
stages of a total height of 195 feet, and the area of its base is 390 from N. to S. and 347 from E. to W.\(^1\)

The fashion thus set was followed by Senefru, the last king of the IIIrd dynasty, who built himself an imposing tomb at Medûm, between the Nile and the district known as the Fayum, in which he was afterwards buried. It was constructed, like the Sakkara step-pyramid, of a series of

\(^1\) It has a complicated system of internal passages, which are all below the level of the soil, with four entrances which are outside the base of the structure. Its inception as a mastaba accounts for its oblong plan and for the fact that the principal cavity is a vertical shaft 80 feet deep and 20 feet square below the central point. The absence of any special tomb-chamber seems to indicate that the monument was not completed in the lifetime of Tjeser who was probably buried in the mastaba near Abydos. (Cf. Perrot and Chipiez, i, 205.)
mastabas, but the sides were filled out so as to form a continuous slope, and thus the first real pyramid was produced. It was afterwards partially destroyed by Rameses the Great, who used the fine stone of the casing for buildings of his own, and the existing structure is only the core of the original monument. In front of the east side is a small chapel which is the oldest known temple in Egypt. Senefru is also supposed to have built another pyramid at Dāshūr, nearer to Memphis. It is possible that it is the one the sides of which have two planes of inclination (p. 24), and which, as it is almost unique,\(^1\) may be assumed to be an experimental form of the type which attained such perfection under the next dynasty.

The pyramid, evolved in this manner, became the type for royal monuments during the early Memphite dynasties, but for less exalted persons of distinction the mastaba continued in use, preserving generally its outward form though internally it often received a good deal of architectural decoration.\(^2\) Hundreds of such tombs, as well as many pyramids in various states of preservation, fill the western side of the the Nile Valley above Memphis, and form probably the largest necropolis in the world.\(^3\) It extends from Abu Roash on the north to Dashur on the south, including the plains of Giza, Abusir and Sakkara, a length of fifteen miles with a width of from two to two and a half miles. At Giza the mastabas

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\(^1\) Perrot and Chipiez (i, 210) mention another pyramid with a double slope at Metarīeh between Sakkara and Medūm, and there are a few smaller ones of later date near Napata in Ethiopia (Murray, p. 553).

\(^2\) There is a small mastaba, partly reconstructed, in the Assyrian Basement at the British Museum.

\(^3\) See map at end of book.
are methodically arranged in regular ranks with their longer axes due north and south, but at Sakkara the arrangement is less regular and they sometimes encroach on one another. Within each is generally found a comparatively small interior chamber serving as a shrine or
chapel, and annexed to this is a walled-up cell, or more than one, in which a statue of the deceased was deposited, not as a visible memorial but rather as a guarantee that the ka or double might find its mortal counterpart still whole and undecayed. This faith in the prolongation of the conditions of earthly life which so strongly charac-

PILLARS IN THE TOMB OF THE (Vth dynasty.)

terizes the Egyptian race is further illustrated by the custom of depositing, within or outside the tomb, food and drink and models of objects associated with the former existence of the dead.

It is probable that the earliest tombs of this class

1 Usually called a serdab, the Arabic term for a subterranean shelter from the heat.
were solid except for the shaft which led from the top to the grave below the surface of the earth, the so-called "false door" being simply a panel commemorating the deceased. Its form suggests its derivation from a wooden framed doorway, such as must have been used in the more important dwelling-houses of which no vestiges remain. When the tomb was solid this panel or stele was in a recess on the east side towards the south end,¹ and on the floor of the recess was a carved slab of stone for the reception of the offerings to the dead. When there is a flat un recessed door, an interior chamber which served as a shrine or chapel for ritual observances is found. Sometimes the two plans are combined by the enlargement of the recess into a hall with an open front or porch with square pillars. In any case the shaft which led to the actual grave was, with rare exceptions, unconnected with the chamber, and concealed from view. In the latter form of mastaba the "false door" is found on the back or inner wall of the chamber. Other chambers were soon added and the interior walls were decorated with reliefs or paintings showing the slaves of the deceased at their daily tasks. Such are the tombs at Sakkar of Thi and Pta hotep, officials of the Vth dynasty, which have coloured wall-reliefs of extraordinary beauty and interest, illustrating the mundane life of the deceased; those of the former have been frequently illustrated.² By the time

¹ P. and C., i, 172.
STATUE OF MERERUKA IN HIS TOMB AT SAKKARA

PLAN OF THE TOMB OF MERERUKA. (From Maspero.) Room 9 is that in which the statue is placed.
of the VIth dynasty the mastaba became still more complicated; that of Mereruka, a vizier of King Pepi I, and his wife and son contained no less than thirty chambers. These more advanced types were imitated in the rock-cut tombs which became usual in Upper Egypt.

WALL-RELIEF FROM THE TOMB OF THI

Hunting amongst the water-reeds. The plant represented is probably the species of papyrus which suggested the shafts and capitals of some of the columnar forms which were commonly used in the later architecture. (See page 38 below.)