

Coming and going: the tomb chapel

The Chapel: a threshold between worlds

A tomb chapel was composed of various elements, all serving the same end, namely to insure that the deceased lived eternally. Pictures and texts played the crucial role of virtual incarnation of a reality subject to unforeseen vagaries.

A chapel and its substitutes

In an approach repeatedly adopted by Egyptian philosophy, an image of a part could often stand for the whole, just as the means could stand for the end. The three-dimensional reality of the chapel and its furnishings could thus be transposed into a two- or three-dimensional votive item, whose shape and decoration—even when extremely simplified—recalled its function.

False doors, real passages

A stele called “false door” allowed the surviving entities of the deceased to move between the worlds of the living and the dead, performing the ritual exchanges required for regeneration. This stele can thus be seen as an artificial architectural element that looks like a doorway, yet can also be viewed, in false perspective, as a dwelling for the deceased.

Image of self, images for self

By way of self-preservation, the deceased was depicted in bas-reliefs or statues indicating social and marital status. There might be one or several such effigies, depending on the period. They were usually placed somewhere away from the living, or included in the frame of the false door, thus indicating that their owner no longer belonged to this world.



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