

Coming and going: the tomb chapel

Active links to the living

Despite being located in a necropolis in the desert, tomb chapels were used for more than just the burial of the dead. Family funeral rites and religious celebrations took place there, helping to maintain active links between the living and the dead.

A place of ritual

Funerary rituals included leaving offerings of food, burning incense, and making libations of water, all required by the deceased's ka and ba. Such services were the object of contracts and fees when the family alone no longer performed them. If the actual rituals were to stop, then the funerary formulas themselves could provide eternal sustenance if they attracted the attention of a living person who would read them out loud. The offerings thereby acquired a virtual existence that sufficed for the survival of the deceased.

A site of social memory

The existence of a tomb chapel helped to maintain the deceased within the community, thanks to perpetuation of his or her memory by the family, by the local administration, or by professional colleagues. The chapel was thus fully open to the living, who were crucial to the performance of funerary rites and maintenance of the building, which perpetuated the deceased's social visibility



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