

Typology 4: funerary structures

Structures or architectonic complexes for the storage of the human remains (corpses, bones, ashes) of one or more persons.

Throughout all eras, almost every civilisation felt the need to bury their dead. Each civilisation had its own 'burial system' depending on their particular religion and thus created primarily underground structures for the storage of the mortal remains. In view of the sheer numbers, this is the most common type of artificial cavity and it could be said that almost no anthropised place in the world does not have burials or funerary buildings.

Burials range from simple pits lined with stone layers through to monumental buildings such as the Pyramid of Giza in Egypt and the Pyramid of the Inscriptions at Palenque in Mexico or the megalithic tombs found in various areas of the Earth. There are many different types of sometimes complex architecture. Each one reflects a belief, a desire, a tradition, the available funding, the need to leave a mark, acquired technology and compliance with the law.

Catacomb

Series of underground tunnels and environments, sometimes on superimposed floors, used primarily as cemeteries by the ancient Christians and later as funerary places of worship.

In archaeological terminology, the term 'catacomb' refers to an underground Christian cemetery consisting of a structured system of passages, tunnels and cubicles, which are sometimes situated on different levels and are used for burial purposes. The burial sites are normally carved into the walls of the corridors themselves. The term may derive from a IV century toponym relating to a depression in the ground presenting large cavities, which was created by a stone quarry located at the IV mile of the Appian Way. Only during the Middle Ages (circa IX - X century) would paleo-Christian cemeteries, originally known by the generic name of *cryptae* be called catacombs.

Cemetery

Burial site for both the tumulation and inhumation of the dead.

Generally consisting of pits excavated in the ground and sealed with stone slabs or simple mounds of earth, the cemetery could also contain chapels and monuments under which, chambers containing corpses wrapped in sheets or in wooden boxes or sarcophaguses could be found. For Christian burials, the term cemetery normally applies.

Crypt: this term refers to the sometimes monumental tombs underneath funerary chapels.

Columbarium

A columbarium was used for the storage of cinerary urns.

From the Latin *columbarium* (meaning dovecote and group of sepulchres), the term indicates a type of structure for the storage of cinerary urns, the walls of which contain multiple rows of overlapping niches, reminiscent in appearance to a dovecote. The niches are either circular or quadrangular in shape and cinerary urns were bricked-in; they were used between the I century B.C. and the II century A.D. In modern-day cemeteries, the columbarium is a system of masonry compartments, on different levels, for temporary and permanent private burials.

Domus de janas

Type of Sardinian burial tomb in the form of a chamber and normally cut into the rock.

The *domus de janas* (House of the Fairies), is a type of ancient Sardinian burial. Developed in the Middle Neolithic (V millennium B.C. circa) and used until at least the First Bronze age, these underground structures were cut into any type of rock. Those in limestone and sandstone rock have

an extended planimetry, while those in trachytic tufa are, although large, smaller than those excavated in granite and basalt.

Foiba

Type of sinkhole into which, both the living and the dead were thrown.

Foibe, presenting a sinkhole at their base, are typical of Istrian karst. Although not strictly a type of burial, the *foiba* is linked to the civil and military excesses, which took place in Istria and on a lesser scale in the Triestine Karst from 8 September 1943 until shortly after the end of the Second World War. Many *foibe* still contain the remains of bodies.

Morgue

Particular collective burial structure located within a fortification.

When inside a besieged fortress, consideration must be given to the removal of corpses. This is particularly true during the summer months, as corpses can give rise to pestilence or at any rate spread disease in the operating garrison. Special underground rooms, aptly known as “morgue” (equivalent to the Italian term *obitorio*) were built within some XVIII century Savoia fortresses. The corpses of fallen soldiers were placed into these generally well-shaped structures equipped with special chutes to facilitate the introduction of the corpses. These large mortuaries have vents to extract decomposition gases.

Necropolis

Pre-Christian burial ground.

The term necropolis was used to refer to the underground sepulchres of Alexandria of Egypt. In archaeological terms it is reminiscent of pre-Christian burial grounds rather than Christian burials.

Cemetery: this term generally refers to Christian burial grounds; also known as graveyard. Its purpose is to serve as a burial site for both the tumulation and inhumation of the dead.

Ossuary

Its purpose is to collect and store the human remains, following their exhumation.

Sometimes subterranean or semi-subterranean environment or building, in which exhumed human remains or remains recovered from the ground following war or natural causes, are collectively stored. The structure may be either part of a cemetery or independent and may even take the form of a monument.

Memorial: this is a chapel-shaped structure or monument, which generally contains the remains and memories of those who died during war.

Tomb

Any type of burial place for the storage for human remains.

Generic term indicating any type of burial place for human remains (ashes, bones or corpses), of a specific type: rock-cut or underground tombs, well, tunnel, pit, chamber, *loculi* (*Columbarium*), cube aedicule, hut, house, soil, stone circle, raised tombs etc. In various civilisations, burials can point more or less in any of the cardinal points, depending to popular beliefs relating to the location of the afterworld.

As previously mentioned, there are various types of tomb, among which:

chamber tomb with machicolation entrance: with an entrance shaft and underground chamber;

chamber tomb with dromos: with an open entrance passage, leading to the underground chamber;

corridor tomb with sepulchral recess: the entrance to this type of tomb is cut into the side of a sunken corridor and leads to the *loculo*;

Narce type, niche tomb: with a well access and sepulchral niche;

Montanaro type tomb with double niche: with an access well and two sepulchral recesses;

thólos tomb: type of corridor tomb with an underground passage known as a *dròmos*; its sepulchral chamber has a cupola made of protruding layers or segments and sometimes has a central pillar.

Mastaba: Egyptian funerary structure for officials and ministers; in its most basic form it is a tronco-conical pyramid-shaped building, with a rectangular base. It has a false door and its summit opens onto a well, which vertically intercepts it and leads to an underground chamber, sometimes 15-20 m deep.

Mausoleum: this is a large sepulchral structure of which, one example is the *underground chamber mausoleum*. The name derives from the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, a sepulchral monument erected by Artemisia II in memory of her husband and for her own burial.

Temple tomb: situated in the territory of modern day Jordan, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, the city of Perta, known to Arabs as Wadi Musa (Moses Valley), is know primarily for its red and ochre monumental tombs, cut into the sandstone rock and which characterise the entire complex.

Tumulus tomb: also known as *burial mound*, this is a type of tomb used by some ancient civilisations. It can consist of a stone corridor and a chamber, built with large slabs and covered by soil or stone rubble; it can be circular, conical or dome shaped and be of monumental dimension, such as the Newgrange and Knowth tumulus in the country of Meath in Ireland.