

Following in the footsteps of the True Father at Donggureung

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The Donggureung is the biggest royal grave area in Korea. It is named as such from the saying; “there are nine royal tombs in the east.” The tombs of 17 kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty are gathered here. When the founder of the Joseon Dynasty, King Taejo, Yi Seonggye, passed away in 1408, King Taejong ordered that a good gravesite be found for the royal family. After looking in the Paju and Goyang areas, the current place was designated. Construction of the Donggureung was done throughout the entire Joseon Dynasty. It came to be called the Donggureung after 1855 (the 6th year of King Cheoljong), when the Sureung, the tomb of King Ikjong who received the title after death, was constructed as the ninth of its kind. Before that, it was called the Dongoreung (東五陵) or the Dongchilleung (東七陵).





A total of nine tombs are in the Donggureung. Centered round the Geonwolleung (健元陵), the tomb of the founder King Taejo, in the north of the Geomaksan Mountain, there is the Mongneung (穆陵), the tomb of the 14th King Sunjo, his lawful wife, Queen Uiin and his second lawful wife, Queen Inmok on the eastern hill. The Hyeolleung (顯陵), the tomb of the 5th King Munjong and his wife Queen Hyeondeok, is located in the south of the mountain, along with the Sureung (綏陵), the tomb of King Ikjong and his wife Queen Sinjeong (King Ikjong was the Crown Prince of the 23rd King Sunjo and received the posthumous title of king). On the west side of the Geonwolleung, there is the Hwireung (徽陵), the tomb of Queen Jangnyeol, the second lawful wife of the 16th King Injo, and on the next, the Gyeongneung (景陵), the tomb of the 24th King Heonjong, his wife Queen Hyohyeon and his second lawful wife Queen Hyojeong, is located. Under the Gyeongneung, the Wolleung (元陵), the tomb of the 21st King Yeongjo and his second lawful wife Queen Jeongsun, is located along with the Hyeung (惠陵), the tomb of Queen Danui, the wife of the 20th King Gyeongjong. Finally, on the far left, the Sungneung (崇陵), the tomb of the 18th King Hyeonjong and his wife Queen Myeongseong, is located.



The Donggureung is a very important piece of cultural heritage to enable us to see the changes in the tomb system and the ups and downs of the 500 years of the Joseon Dynasty at one glance. Besides, its surrounding scenery is very graceful, with the overgrown forest throughout the entire tomb area and the stream passing through it.

*During the Joseon Dynasty, sites were chosen according to pungsu (fengshui in Chinese) principles.

Accordingly, outstanding natural sites were chosen, which were mainly along two mountain chains stretching to the north and south of the Han River that flows through present-day Seoul. The burial mounds, the “heart” of a royal burial ground, were usually placed in the middle of a hillside. Protected from the back, they face outward (to the south) toward water and, ideally, toward layers of mountain ridges in the far distance.



Royal Graveyard Divided into Three Areas: Burial, Ceremonial, and Entrance Areas

The burial chamber was located at the point where propitious energies are said to be concentrated and it was fortified with a dirt covering, creating the mound. With a low, curving wall and knoll at the back, energy is further directed toward the burial chamber.

In addition to the burial area, royal tombs consist of a ceremonial area and an entrance area, and each area has a different function and symbolic meaning. The burial area is the sacred place of the dead and it contains an open, grassy area, the burial mound and a spirit road that descends to a T-shaped shrine. The shrine is the centre of the ceremonial area and it is here that ancestral rites are conducted to symbolize the meeting of the living and the dead. The shrine is linked by a worship road to a red-spiked gate, the main entrance to the royal graveyard.



Burial Mound

The entrance area, itself, lies beyond the gate and it contains the forbidden stream with a stone bridge, the house of the tomb keeper and additional buildings used for ceremonial preparations. The separation of the living and the dead is further symbolized by the nature of the roads: the chamdo, the worship road, links the main gate to the shrine and is shared by the living and the dead, while the sindo, the spirit road, links the shrine to the burial mound and is used solely by the dead.

In addition to the burial mounds, associated buildings are an integral part of the royal tombs: the T-shaped wooden shrine (jeongjagak), where ancestral tablets are kept and royal ancestral rites performed; the stele shed, which protects the tomb stele; the royal kitchen, where food for the royal ancestral rites is prepared; the guards' house, located southeast of the T-shaped shrine and facing the kitchen; the red-spiked gate (hongsalmun), which marks the beginning of the worship road at the southern end of the tomb area, signifying entry to the sacred realm; and the tomb keeper's house (jaesil), where ritual equipment is kept and overall preparations are made for royal ancestral rites.



Burial Area

Royal tombs are adorned on the outside with a range of stone objects, including ceremonial artifacts and figures of people and animals that are placed around, and in front of, the grave mound. All serve the purpose of wishing the interred a peaceful afterlife.

Around the burial mound, on the upper platform (sanggye), a 12-angled retaining stone protects and decorates the mound. A stone fence, slightly further out, encircles the mound, and outside of this fence pairs of stone sheep and tigers face outward, their backs to the mound. Further out, a low wall shelters the components on three sides. At the open side, and in front of the mound, there is a stone table on which spirits can play. And to the right and the left of the table are stone watch pillars.

In the middle platform (junggye), a four- or eight-sided stone lantern is found in the middle with two civil servants and their horses, both in stone, nearby. In the lower platform (hagye), two military officials and their horses, in stone, are found.

