The false door of sedekhi discovered recently at Saqqara

Abstract

This article concerns a recently discovered Old Kingdom inscribed limestone false door at Saqqara. The false door is described, the scenes are explained and texts are translated. The false door is dated according to place of discovery, name, titles and epithets of the deceased, offering formula, architectural features and its decoration.

Keywords: old kingdom, false door, Saqqara, excavations, Sedekhi

Introduction

The false door of Sedekhi was discovered in a site located immediately to the west of the Unas Pyramid Complex and approximately 400 meters south-west of the Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara. The site is considered to be the western extension of the Unas cemetery, conventionally called ‘Gisr el-Mudir’. In January 2008, we initiated excavations at the site. The work continued until the revolution of January 25th 2011. Seven false doors and two blocks of false doors were discovered in the filling of the shafts during two years of intensive work (2008–2009). They were inscribed with the offering formula, titles, name and figures of the deceased. The false doors were given numbers starting with GM 008, GM 009 referring to the Gisr el-Mudir and the year of the discovery (2008, 2009). These false doors are numbered as architectural elements starting from A.F 700 (Architectural Find) onwards. The false doors took the numbers A.F 709, 713, 718, 742, 745, 746 and 750. While excavating to expose the northern and southern walls of the chapel of Mastaba A/A, a shaft (1005) was discovered in the north-eastern corner inside the chapel (pl. 1). When excavated, it revealed a deposit of sand and clay mixed with chips of limestone (Figure 1). As work continued in the shaft, at a depth of 6.90m, an un-inscribed, almost rectangular burial chamber (1.20 x 2.55m) was found. A large number of fragments and blocks were also found, including the entrance or niche jamb and false door of Sedekhi; an entrance lintel of unknown ownership; a piece of a jamb of a real door or a false door of unknown ownership and an offering table of Metet.¹

Description of the false door

Material: limestone. Dimensions: 67 x 46 x 17 cm.

Excavation no.: G.M 008- A.F 709

Place of Preservation: Museum storeroom II at Saqqara.

Architectural Features: The monolithic, limestone false door consists of a cavetto cornice, torus moulding, upper lintel, central panel, two side apertures, lower lintel, four jambs, drum and central niche (Figure 2).

Name of the owner of the false door

‘sedekhi’ is attested as a female name, known in the Old Kingdom at Saqqara² and continuing into the Middle Kingdom.³

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Titles and epithets of sedekhi

1. \(\text{im} 3\text{h}(w)t\), honored.\(^4\)

2. \(\text{im} 3\text{h}(w)t\ hr\ ntr\ \beta\), honored by the great God.\(^1\) This great god could be Ra, Osiris, or the living or dead king. He was lord of the sky, the west and burial. The deceased wished to ascend to him, to be honored before him, to be received and guided upon the beautiful road of the west by and before him.\(^6\)

3. \(\text{spst} nzw\), noblewoman of the king. This title was held by the royal and non-royal women.\(^7\) It was used more by men, but disappeared after the end of the Old Kingdom. The feminine form continued in the Heracleopolitan Period. It was more common for women in the Provinces.\(^8\)

Decoration

The scenes and inscriptions of the false door are executed in sunken relief. Upon discovery, the false door had a thick coating of gypsum that concealed much of the relief decoration.

Scenes: Sedekhi is represented on the panel, seated on a small chair with lion’s legs and a low cushion at the back. She is wearing a long wig descending to her shoulders and a sheath with V-strap. Her right hand reaches out to the offering table and the left one holds a lotus flower to her nose.

The deceased is also depicted at the end of the vertical texts on both outer jambs and facing the central niche. She is represented, wearing a long wig, broad necklace and sheath with V-strap. She holds a long scepter with one hand and a lotus flower with the other. There are a ewer and a basin on the other side of the offering table on the base line of the ground.

Inscriptions: The upper lintel, central panel and jambs are inscribed, while the lower lintel is decorated with a zigzag line and drum is blank (Figure 3)(Figure 4).

Upper lintel

There is one horizontal line of hieroglyphic inscription, directed from right to left:

\[\text{htp di nzw}t\ \text{inpw tpy dw.j prt-hrw nt}\]

An offering that the king and Anubis, who is on his mountain, give that an invocation offering may come forth for … (the left outer Jamb completes it).


\(^5\) Jones. Index. p. 41[210].


\(^7\)Jones. Index. p. 990–91 [3664].

thousand of clothes for the honored, Sedekhi. It is noticeable that the bird’s sign is repeated three times in the offering list. It is usually mentioned between one and five. This repetition refers to different types of birds. The offering lists of the Old Kingdom include usually five different birds as follows: $st$-geese, $hj$-geese, $zl$-ducks, $s$-geese and $mnwt$ (pigeons).

**Right inner jamb**

There is one vertical line of inscriptions, facing the central niche:

$im3\(w\)t\ s\ d\ h\ h\ i$

The honored, Sedekhi.

**Right outer jamb**

There is one vertical line of inscriptions, facing the central niche:

$spst\ nzw\ im3\(w\)t\ s\ d\ h\ h\ i$

The noblewoman of the king, the honored, Sedekhi.

**Left inner jamb**

There is one vertical line of inscriptions, facing the central niche:

$im3\(w\)t\ s\ d\ h\ h\ i$

The honored, Sedekhi.

**Left outer jamb**

There is one vertical line of inscriptions, facing the central niche:

$im3\(w\)t\ hr\ ntr\ s\ d\ h\ h\ i$

The honored by the great god, Sedekhi.

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12 Sedekhi had the inscribed supplementary frame of the false door consisting of a lintel and two jambs outside the cavetto cornice and the false door proper. This feature is not attested before the early part of the reign of Pepy II (Dawood, Inscribed Stelae, 17). The panel of the two false doors of Sedekhi is T-shaped. This type appeared from the middle of the Sixth Dynasty onwards, particularly in the reign of Pepy II (Strudwick, Administration, 36). She had a combination of ħm$\(t\)$-$ntr(t)$, $hr\ nzw$, $hk\ nzw\ w\ n\ t$, which appeared from the reign of Pepy II onwards. The arrangement of ħm$\(t\)$-$ntr(t)$, $hr\ nzw$, $hk\ nzw\ w\ n\ t$, which appeared from the reign of Pepy II onwards, is mentioned on the lintel of Sedekhi, indicates that this lintel belongs to Pepy II onwards (Brovarski, ‘The Late Old Kingdom at South Saqqara’, in: Pantalacci, L. and Berger-el-Naggar, C., (eds.), Les Nefertkarak aux Montouhotep. Travaux archéologiques sur la fin de la II$\textsuperscript{e}$ dynastie et la première Période Intermédiaire. Actes du Colloque CNRS – Université Lumiére-Lyon 2, tenu le 5–7 juillet 2001, Lyon, 2005, 62). The arrangement of ħm$\(t\)$-$ntr(t)$, $hr\ nzw$, $hk\ nzw\ w\ n\ t$, which appeared from the reign of Pepy II onwards, is mentioned on the lintel of Sedekhi, indicates that this lintel belongs to the end of the Sixth Dynasty (Brovarski, ‘False doors & history: the Sixth Dynasty’, in: M. Bárta, (ed.), The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology, Proceedings of the Conference held in Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004, Prague, 2006, 108).


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popular towards the end of the Sixth Dynasty and later.15

f. The epithet $\text{im3y(w)}t \text{ hr ntr}$ is written in its complete form, with the reed leaf, sickle, back bone, placenta and the bread. The $w$ is not written. This unabbreviated form is Old Kingdom writing, predating the First Intermediate Period examples.16

g. Sedekhi had the epithet $\text{im3y(w)}t \text{ hr ntr j,}$ which was known for females in the Old Kingdom19 and appeared from the reigns of Shepseskaf-Userkaf (Nubhetepet, wife of Nebemakhet)19 onwards and continued in the reign of Pepy II (Khnemti)20 and late Old Kingdom (Nyankh-hathor).21 This epithet was connected to the Sixth Dynasty middle class.

h. Sedekhi has a false door of the type with the cavetto cornice and torus moulding, features which appeared early in Dynasty 5 and became popular by the reign of Niuserre.22 It was confined principally to viziers and high officials until the late Fifth Dynasty. During the Sixth Dynasty, the middle classes also used it.23 Sedekhi, as we know from her titles, was not a high official so she was probably from the Sixth Dynasty middle class.

i. The central niche of the false door of Sedekhi is undecorated. This tradition was common during late Fifth Dynasty and in the Sixth Dynasty.25

j. Sedekhi has a false door with two narrow jambs of equal size with one column of text. In the Sixth Dynasty, the false door with cavetto cornice, torus moulding and two or three jambs of equal width became the standard type for all officials. In the second half of the reign of Pepy II, jambs became very narrow, usually with only one column of text.26

k. The false door of Sedekhi is inscribed with sunken relief. Towards the end of the Fifth Dynasty and onwards, sunken relief began to be used to decorate false doors with cavetto cornice and torus moulding.27

l. The panel of Sedekhi’s false door is T-shaped. This type


15Simpson. Western Cemetery. figs. 15, 17.


17PM II F, 230; Hassan, Giza, IV, p. 126, fig. 81; Scene-details Database: Tombs (p. 6).

18PM II F, 76; Junker, Giza, VI, p. 110, fig. 32; > Scene-details Database: Tombs (p. 2).

19PM II F, 118, Junker, Giza, IX, p. 94, fig. 39.

20PM II F, 108, 227; 606; Junker, Giza, IX, 172; Junker, Giza, XI, 136, 258, fig. 104; Hassan, Saqqara, III, p. 2, fig. 2; Saad, A Primary Report on the Excavations at Saqqara 1939-1940, AASAE 40, p. 681, fig. 72; Daressy, La mastaba de Mera, Cairo, 1900, p. 527.


25Strudwick. Administration. p. 36.

26Strudwick. Administration. p. 36.

27Cherpin. Mastabas. p. 49:171, fig. 33.


