

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

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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 'Gisir 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



Figure 1 View of Chapel of Mastaba A/A, unknown ownership, showing location of shaft 1005, looking north-east.

¹S Soleiman, A El-Batal. *Coffins and Architectural Elements*. Cairo: 2015. p. 18–24, 48–50, figs. 10–12, 22, pls. 42–48, 75–78.

Description of the false door

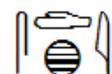
Material: limestone. Dimensions: 67 × 46 × 17cm.

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).



Figure 2 False door of Sedekhi.

Name of the owner of the false door

 *sdhi*, Sedekhi.

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

²K Scheele-Schweitzer. *Die Personennamen des Alten Reiches, Altägyptische Onomastik unter lexikographischen und sozio-kulturellen Aspekten*. Philippika: 2014. p. 668 [3259].

³H Ranke. *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*. Glückstadt: 1935. p. 323.

Titles and epithets of sedekhi

1.  *im3h(w)t*, honored.⁴
2.  *im3h(w)t hr ntr* 
 , honored by the great God.⁵ 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.  *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:



htp di nzw inpw tpy dw.f 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).

⁴D Jones. *Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom*. Oxford: 2000. p. 11[42].
⁵Jones. *Index*. p. 41[210].
⁶For more details of the great god see: Junker, *Giza*, II, p. 52–59; J. Baines, ‘Greatest God or Category of Gods’, *GM* 67 (1983), p. 13–25.
⁷Jones. *Index*. p. 990–91 [3664].
⁸HG Fischer. *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and of the Heracleopolitan Period*. NewYork: 2000. p. 30.

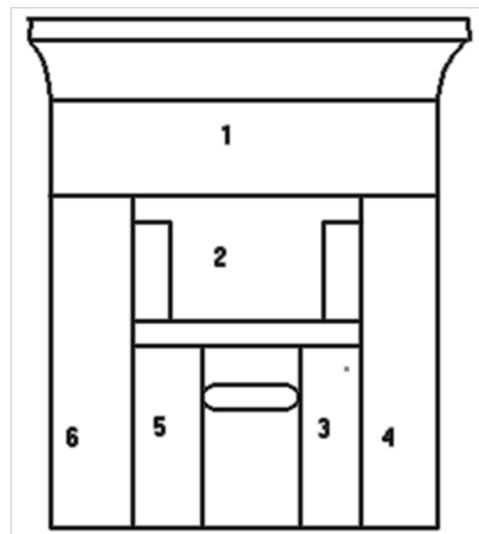


Figure 3 Numbered parts of the false door of Sedekhi.

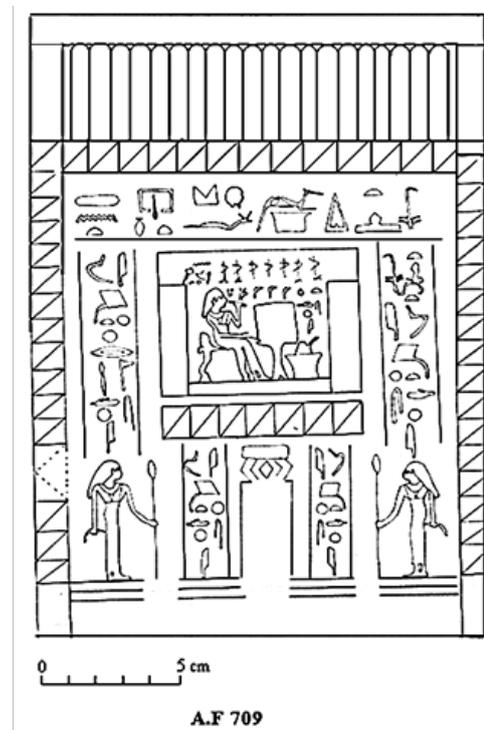
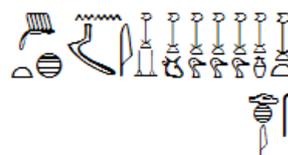


Figure 4 Inscribed false door of Sedekhi.

Central panel



h3 t h3 hnk t h3 3pd h3 3pd h3 3pd h3 k3w
h3 mnht n im3h(w)t sdh3

A thousand of bread, a thousand of beer, a thousand of birds, a thousand of birds, a thousand of birds, a thousand of oxen and a

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.⁹ The offering lists of the Old Kingdom include usually five different birds as follows: *sr* -geese, *lrp* -geese, *zt* -ducks, *s*-geese and *mnwt* (pigeons).

Right inner jamb

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

im3h(w)t sdhi 

The honored, Sedekhi.

Right outer jamb

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

špst nzwt im3h(w)t sdhi 

The noblewoman of the king, the honored, Sedekhi.

Left inner jamb

There is one vertical line of inscriptions, facing the

central niche: *im3h(w)t sdhi* 

The honored, Sedekhi.

Left outer jamb

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

im3h(w)t hr ntr 3 sdhi 

The honored by the great god, Sedekhi

⁹N Kanawati, M Abder-Raziq. *The Tomb of Hesi*. Warminster: 1999. p. 35.

Purpose of the false door

The purpose of any false door is to afford the *k3* Double of the tomb owner an opportunity to “go forth” from it in order to receive Offerings.¹⁰

Dating

The false door of Sedekhi could be dated to the reign of Pepy II, Sixth Dynasty or the end of the Old Kingdom (late Dynasty VI–VIII), because:

- The false door was found in the so called Unas' cemetery, in the western part. The site of this false door is the natural western extension of the cemetery of Unas, which contains tombs from the reign of Unas to the end of the Old Kingdom. According to this criterion, this lintel can be dated to this period.
- The name ‘Sedekhi’ was known and attested from the Sixth Dynasty onwards. There is a false door and a lintel found west of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara for a lady with the same name. She is dated to the Sixth Dynasty,¹¹ probably Pepy II's reign or late Old Kingdom.¹² There is an offering table, for eight family members, one of them is Sedekhi, found around the pyramid of Pepy I at South Saqqara. She is dated to late Old Kingdom.¹³ This name was known in the Old Kingdom from Pepy II's reign to late Old Kingdom.
- The tomb owner held the title *špst nzwt*, which appeared from the Sixth Dynasty.
- In the offering formula, Anubis is written in the form of an animal on a stand, which appeared from the Sixth Dynasty (possibly Pepy I onwards).¹⁴
- The *prt-hrw nt* formula in the false door of Sedekhi is

arranged in this shape . This arrangement is

¹⁰AO Bolshakov. Hinting as a Method of Old Kingdom Tomb Decoration I. The Offering Stone and the False Door of the Dwarf Snb. *GM* 139 (1994), p. 15.

¹¹PM III², 610; E Drioton and J. Ph. Lauer, ‘Un groupe de tombes à Saqqarah: Icheti, Nefer-khouou-ptah, Sébek-em-khent et Ânkhî’, *ASAE* 55 (1958), p. 229–231, pl. XX.

¹²Sedekhi 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 *hm(t)-ntr(t) hwt-hr, rht nzwt, hkr t nzwt wtt*, which appeared from the reign of Pepy II onwards, The arrangement of

 as mentioned on the lintel of Sedekhi, indicates that this lintel belongs to Pepy II onwards (Brovarski, E., ‘The Late Old Kingdom at South Saqqara’, in Pantalacci, L. and Berger-el-Naggar, C., (eds.), *Des Néferkaré aux Montouhotep. Travaux archéologiques sur la fin de la VI^e dynastie et la première Période Intermédiaire*. Actes du Colloque CNRS – Université Lumière-Lyon 2, tenu le 5–7 juillet 2001, Lyon, 2005, 62). The arrangement of

 as 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).

¹³V Dobrev, J Leclant. Les tables d’offrandes de particuliers. Découvertes aux complexes funéraires des reines près de la pyramide de Pépi Ier. in: N. Grimal (ed.), *Les critères de datation stylistiques à l’Ancien Empire*. Bibliothèque d’Étude 120. *Cairo*: 1998. p. 143. fig. 15.

¹⁴HG Fischer. *Dendera in the Third Millennium B.C.* NewYork: 1968. p. 84.

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

- f. The epithet *im3h(w)t* 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 *im3h(w)t hr ntr 3*,¹⁷ which was known for females in the Old Kingdom¹⁸ and appeared from the reigns of Shepseskaef-Userkaf (Nubhetepet, wife of Nebemakhet)¹⁹ onwards and continued in the reign of Pepy II (Khneft)²⁰ and late Old Kingdom (Nyankh-hathor).²¹ This epithet was more connected to the Sixth Dynasty.²²
- 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.²³ It was confined principally to viziers and high officials until the late Fifth Dynasty. During the Sixth Dynasty, the middle classes also used it.²⁴ 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

appeared from the middle of the Sixth Dynasty onwards, particularly in the reign of Pepy II.²⁸

- m. The rectangular form of the bread of the offering table on the panel of Sedekhi's false door, which is uncompleted and has only outlines (without details), indicates a quick and economic work, which appeared rarely in the reign of Teti onwards and increasingly in the reign of Pepy II.²⁹
- n. From the reign of Teti onwards, one or two nested ewers and basins set on a table, or on a base- or ground-line, regularly appear beneath the offering tables on tomb walls of lesser officials.³⁰ Sedekhi has a ewer and a basin resting on the ground line of the scene. A single ewer and basin on the ground line of the scene on the panel is dated to the reign of Merenre or Pepy II.³¹
- o. Sedekhi has an abbreviated panel scene including the deceased sitting before the offering table and the ewer and basin. This feature is dated to the reign of Pepy II onwards.³²
- p. The panel of the false door of Sedekhi shows the deceased sitting before the offering table with a nested ewer and basin on the ground on the far side of the table. This feature is dated to the reign of Pepy II, probably the second half of his reign.³³
- q. Women on false doors are usually shown holding papyriform and lotiform staffs from the reign of Pepy II onwards. This is especially the case for priestesses of Hathor and Neith, to express their office and to symbolize an association with these goddesses.³⁴ Sedekhi is depicted holding a lotiform staff and is described on her entrance jamb as priestess of Hathor.³⁵
- r. Sedekhi is shown on the panel, smelling a lotus or perfume? This image of smelling a lotus is known on false doors of the Sixth Dynasty.³⁶ The representation of a woman holding an unguent jar to her nose is a posture which appeared at the end of the Sixth Dynasty.³⁷
- s. The false door of Sedekhi has two pairs of jambs; the central pair of jambs bears two columns of text and lacks the two figures. This tradition is dated to the end of Pepy II's reign or later.³⁸

¹⁵Brovarski. 'False doors & history: the Sixth Dynasty'. In: M Bárta, editor. *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology, Proceedings of the Conference held in Prague, May 31- June 4, 2004*. Prague: 2006. p. 111.

¹⁶J Leprohon. 'The Sixth Dynasty False Door of the Priestess of Hathor Irti'. *JARCE*. 31 (1994). p. 45.

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

¹⁸Jones. *Index*. p. 41:210.

¹⁹PM III², 230; Hassan, Giza, IV, p. 126, fig. 81; Scene-details Database: Tombs (p. 6).

²⁰PM III², 76; Junker, Giza, VI, p. 110, fig. 32; > Scene-details Database: Tombs (p. 2).

²¹PM III², 118; Junker, Giza, IX, p. 94, fig. 39.

²²PM III², 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, ASAE 40, p. 681, fig. 72; Daressy, La mastaba de Mera, Cairo, 1900, p. 527.

²³S Wiebach. *Die Ägyptische Scheintür*. Hamburg: 1981. p. 133.

²⁴N Strudwick. *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom*. London: 1985. p. 35; N Cherpion. *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire – Le problème de la datation*. Brussels: 1989. p. 75.

²⁵L Azzam. The False Door of Senet at Beni Hassan. In: F Haikal, editor. *Mélanges offerts à Ola el-Aguizy*, BDÉ 164 (2015), p. 44 (foot note 48).

²⁶Strudwick. *Administration*. p. 36; E Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta, editor. *Old Kingdom Art*. p. 99.

²⁷Strudwick. *Administration*. p. 36.

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Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

²⁸Strudwick. *Administration*. p. 36.

²⁹Cherpion. *Mastabas*. p. 49,171, fig. 33.

³⁰Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta, editor. *Art and Archaeology*. p. 74–75, 80.

³¹Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta, editor. *Art and Archaeology*. p. 89.

³²Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta, editor. *Art and Archaeology*. p. 100,103.

³³Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta, editor. *Art and Archaeology*. p. 107.

³⁴Y Harpur. *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom*. London and New York: 1987. p. 134–35.

³⁵Soleiman and El-Batal. *Coffins*. p. 19–23, fig. 11, pls. 43–46.

³⁶Harpur. *Decoration*. p. 256.

³⁷KH. Dawood. *The Inscribed Stelae of the Herakleopolitan Period from the Memphite Necropolis*. vol. I, Liverpool: 1998. p. 44.

³⁸Brovarski. False doors. In: Bárta editors. *Art and Archaeology*. p. 107.