An inscribed limestone block found during the 2001 campaign of Polish-Egyptian excavations at West Saqqara (field inv. no. S/01/20) has turned out to bear a text that can be identified as a real and not conventional autobiography.

It was found between the northern “bastion” of Netjerikhet’s enclosure wall and Shaft 51, on a thin layer of dakka over the foundation level of the enclosure wall; it appears to have been connected with the last phase of the destroyed mastaba of Shaft 51.

The form and the decoration of the block suggest that it was the left jamb of a niche once containing a false door. It is carved in a single block of hard, white limestone and has the form of a slab, 110 cm high, 12 cm wide and 30 cm thick. It has not survived intact – much of the upper part of the decorated front has been destroyed and the lower part has been crushed, probably by blocks falling from the enclosure wall of the step pyramid. While the lower part of the jamb has been reconsolidated, the missing parts of its decorated surface could not be restored (Fig. 1).

Only the carved front of the jamb was dressed, the other sides being left unworked. The decoration consists of two columns of text and a figural representation below them, executed in shallow sunken relief, c. 3 mm in depth. The inscription and figural representation, both turned to the right, are framed with incised vertical lines. The block bears no trace of polychromy.

The initial part of the first column of the text, as well as final part of the second one, is missing. In addition, the standing figure of the deceased is badly damaged, the sole preserved elements being his left hand holding a long stick and part of the hrp-sceptre held in his right. The text in the second column can be considered as a direct continuation of the one in the first.
Fig. 1. Inscribed limestone jamb (S/01/2)  
(Drawing K. O. Kuraszkiewicz; photo M. Jawornicki)
TEXT

(1) [...] t.n\(^{\text{a}}\) w(j) \(hm n \ nb.\)^{\text{b}} j.m.s \(jw \ jr.n.\)^{\text{c}} s(j)^{\text{d}} r \(hz.t \ wz\)^{\text{e}} (2) \(hr.\)^{\text{f}} s n\(^{\text{g}}\) [j]q\(r.\)^{\text{h}} [hr] r \mtj.\)^{\text{i}} nb \(wn \ \(hm.f \ dj.\)^{\text{j}} n.\) nbw n '3t nt \(hz.s\)^{\text{k}} w(j) \hr\) [\(pr-\)^{\text{l}} [\(pr\)]

[... the Majesty of my Lord has [...] me (in it ?)^{\text{k}}. I have done this that I would be praised by My Lord [for] this, because I was [perf ect by His Majesty, more than everyone equal to me. His Majesty used to give me gold because he has praised me. Director of [...] of the Great House [...]]

COMMENTS

a. A \(s\)dm.\(n.f\) form of a verb of motion (as suggested by its determinative) should be expected in this place. It is impossible, however, to ascertain either the exact form of the verb used or its meaning. It seems that \(t\) is to be identified as the last consonant of the verb.


d. On the \(s\)dm.\(t.f\) form after the preposition \(r\), see: Edel, op. cit., § 734. (On the other interpretation of the phrase: \(jr \ \(hztj \ wz \ nb.j\) as a prospective relative form, see: Doret, op. cit., 25, n. 108, 110).

e. Cf. eg. Urk. I, 100.11.

f. A tall and narrow sign should precede the signs \(q\) and \(r\), as they are narrower than the width of the column. Only \(jqr\) would make sense in this place.

On the \(s\)dm.\(f\) form after the preposition \(n\), see: Edel, op. cit., §§ 503, 510.

g. On the compound form \(wn.f \ s\)dm.\(f\), see: Edel, op. cit., § 895; Doret, op. cit., 111-112. Apparently, suffix \(f\) should be read twice, although it is written only once for graphic reasons.

h. On the active \(hz.s\) after \(n \ '3t \ nt\) as the object of a preposition, see: Edel, op. cit., § 777; Doret, op. cit., 55.

i. Several titles are known to be composed of the two elements, \hrp\ and \(pr-\)^{\text{l}}, see: D. Jones, Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom, BAR International Series 866 (Oxford 2000), nos. 2551 (\hrp \(jrw\)-\$\(n\)), 2567 (\hrp \(jdt\)), 2597 (\hrp \(wtjw\)), 2621 (\hrp \(msw \ n\$d\)), 2684 (\hrp \(zh\)), 2725 (\hrp \(stjw\)). However, after \hrp\ a tall narrow sign should be expected, as e.g. \(w\) (\hrp \(wtjw\) or F29 (\hrp \(stjw\)). It is possible that the owner of the present monument was a supervisor of the embalmers or the necklace stringers of the Great House.

k. The translation of the preposition depends on the meaning of the predicate.

l. Cf. Wb II, 40.1.
CONCLUSION

The inscription on the present monument does not conform to the standardized autobiographical texts occurring in Old Kingdom tombs; hence, it should be recognized as a real life story. It is impossible to ascertain whether this biography of the tomb owner was inscribed on only the left or on both jambs of the false door, although it seems that the final part of the inscription is indeed the end of the text. The reconstruction of the initial part and the lost verbs poses a number of difficulties because of the unconventional character of the text. To judge by the graphy and phraseology, the monument should be dated to the Sixth Dynasty, but textual and stylistical data alone do not warrant a more precise dating.