

Two Old Kingdom false doors from Saqqara

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<<Abstract>>

Two false doors in Cairo Museum are the objects of this article.* They bear nos. JE 68923 and CG 57188. JE 68923 is a false door within its niche, belonging to the Priest of Horus Strong of Arm and Overseer of the Scribes of the fields of the 12th nome of Lower Egypt, Shepsi. It was found in Saqqara, to the north of the Step Pyramid.¹ The second false door CG 57188 belongs to the Tenant and Overseer of the Ten, Teti. It was also found in Saqqara, but there is no available information concerning its exact location.²

In spite of the missing parts of JE 68923 and the rather poor state of preservation of CG 57188, the two false doors have some details of considerable interest concerning their epigraphic and artistic details.

I. The false door JE 68923

(Figs. 1, 3a; pl. 1)

Description

The false door³ and its niche are made of several different sized slabs of white limestone of which only eleven slabs remain; three of them belong to the niche and eight to the false door. The niche has lost its architrave and some parts of its two jambs. It measures 190 cm. in max. height, 155 cm. in breadth. It seems that the two jambs were left rough and undecorated.

The false door has lost its architrave and nearly the upper half of the panel and the two wide adjacent apertures. It measures 190 cm. in max. height, 75.5 cm. in breadth. The remaining half of the panel has suffered much, and both of its decoration and inscriptions are badly worn out. The remaining part of the false door, which consists of a lintel supported by two jambs, and a central niche surmounted by a drum, is generally smooth and even. The decorations were well executed in raised relief with some internal details, while the text was cut in sunk relief of good quality with some internal details too. Traces of black paint are still visible on the wig and the leopard's skin garment of the owner's figure on the central niche, in addition to the wigs of the other two figures on the jambs.⁴

Representation and Text

The Panel (A): A fragmentary table scene is still visible, in which a male figure is depicted on the left side of the panel before an offering table. He sits facing right on a backless chair with a bull's legs,⁵ while extending his right hand towards the offering table. The figure's head, left

*I am very much obliged to Dr. Mohamed Saleh, the former Director General of Cairo Museum, for his approval to publish these two false doors.

¹ PM III², 443. The false door was found by Emery in the mastaba S 3302. However, it is generally unpublished except for the text of its lintel, which was copied by A. Gardiner, Notebook, 127, p. 51 verso [middle].

² PM III², 736.

³ The terms used here for describing the principal elements of the false doors are those of N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom*, London, 1985, 10-11, fig. 1.

⁴ According to Smith, *Sculpture*, 150, n.2, there were some traces of green paint lining the eyes of Shepsi's figures. However, nothing of this green paint can be seen now.

⁵ For the different types of chairs as criteria for dating the Old Kingdom tombs see: N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire*, Brussels, 1989, 25-42.

arm and the details of his dress are now missing. The offering table consists of a stand flaring at the bottom and a round tray, which was loaded once with half-loaves of which only a few vertical lines remained.

Of the accompanying inscriptions beside and under the offering table, only four short lines of offering items are still visible. One of them is written vertically to the left side of the table and two are written vertically to the right. The fourth line is written horizontally at the extreme right side. All the hieroglyphic signs were oriented to the left towards the sitting figure in the usual manner indicating that they are addressed to him.⁶ The four lines read:

(1) *h3 hnqt* “one thousand of beer.”

(2) *h3 ss mnht* “one thousand of alabaster bowls and clothes.”

(3) *...qbhw* “...cold water.”

(4) *...h3 ht nbt h3 3pd* “...one thousand of every (good) thing and one thousand of fowl.”

The Lintel (B): One horizontal line of inscription is written from right to left, as follows:

jmj-r zsw n 3hwt Tb Ntrt⁷ zs pr hrj-wdb hm-ntr Hr qm3-c⁸ rh nswt Spsj⁹
“The overseer of the scribes of the fields of the 12th nome of Lower Egypt, the scribe of the house of the master of largesse, the priest of Horus strong of arm, the acquaintance of the king, Shepsi.”

The Drum (C): A short line of horizontal inscription is written from right to left, it reads:

zs pr hrj-wdb Spsj

“The scribe of the house of largesse, Shepsi.”

The Right Jamb (D): Shepsi is represented on a large scale standing on a short ground-line, facing left towards the central niche.¹⁰ He is clad in a close-fitting wig with overlapping locks, of which the topmost row is much higher than the rest and is filled with vertical lines,¹¹ and a half-goffered kilt provided with a belt around the waist.¹² He is adorned with a broad collar consisting of three rows of tubular beads with small pendants projecting from the edge and a bracelet on each wrist. A *hrp*-sceptre is held horizontally in his left hand, while his folded right hand rests on his chest.¹³

⁶H. G. Fischer, *The Orientation of Hieroglyphs, Part I: Reversals*, Egyptian Studies II, New York, 1977, 63-65.

⁷Montet, *Géographie I*, 103-110. This false door should be added now to the monuments of the Old Kingdom mentioning the 12th nome as listed by Helck in: Gaue, 179-180.

⁸Helck reads the title *hm-ntr Hr q3-c*, translating it “priest of Horus with raised arm” (Beamtentitel, 120, n.3). However, W.K. Simpson suggests the reading *hm-ntr Hr qm3-c*, translating it “priest of Horus strong of arm” (The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II, Giza Mastabas 3, Boston, 1978, 12).

⁹Ranke, PN I, 326: 15. He reads the name *Spsjj*, but according to Junker, *Gîza XII*, 163, it is to be read *Spsj*.

¹⁰For some examples of jambs decorated with the owners on large scale see: LD II, 19, 23, 55; CG 1295-1808, nos. 1295, 1808, 1384, 1389, 1415, 1416, 1417, 1456, 1485, 1564, pls. 10, 12, 19, 20, 35, 40, 64; A. Moussa/ H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep*, AV 21, 1977, pl. 92 (b), fig. 26; W.V. Davies et al., *Saqqâra Tombs I: The Mastabas of Mereri and Wernu*, ASE 36, 1984, pl. 4.

¹¹Stahelin, *Tracht*, 86-88.

¹²Ibid., 11-30.

¹³An uncommon attitude for the main figures of men through the Old Kingdom: Vandier, *Manuel IV*, 59 (β), fig. 18(4). For some examples from the different sites see: Hassan, *Gîza III*, figs. 56, 58; IX, fig. 30; Junker, *Gîza III*, fig. 16; XI, fig. 47; A. Moussa/ H. Altenmüller, *The Tomb of Nefer and Ka-hay*, AV 5, 1971, pls. 32, 39.

Over his figure are three lines of horizontal inscriptions running from left to right, as follows:

jmj-r zsw sp3t hm- ntr Hr qm3-^c Spsj

“The overseer of the scribes of the nome, the priest of Horus strong of arm, Shepsi.”

The Left Jamb (E): A large figure of the owner is represented again standing on a short ground-line, facing right towards the central niche. He wears a wig and a kilt of the same type shown on the right jamb. He is adorned with an amulet of tubular form around his neck,¹⁴ and a bracelet on each wrist. In his right hand, he holds a *hrp*-sceptre, while his left arm rests on his chest with a folded hand.

Over the owner’s figure is an inscription identifying him, it is written in three horizontal lines from right to left, as follows:

jmj-r zsw n Tb Ntrt Spsj

“The overseer of the scribes of the 12th nome of Lower Egypt, Shepsi.”

The Central Niche (F): A large figure of the owner and the inscription identifying him are the decoration of the niche.¹⁵ He is depicted standing on a short ground-line, facing right. He wears a wig of the same type shown on the two jambs and a knee-length kilt over a short leopard’s skin garment, fastened on the left shoulder by means of a knotted ribbon. The garment is of the type covering one arm only.¹⁶ In this case the covered arm is the left one. He is adorned with a broad collar consisting of three strands with small pendants projecting from the edge and one bracelet on his left wrist. In his right hand, he holds a *hrp*-sceptre, while his left hand is placed upon his chest holding one of the garment’s ribbons.

The accompanying inscription is written in one horizontal line running from right to left, as follows:

zs pr hrj-wdb Spsj

“The scribe of the house of largesse, Shepsi.

Dating

~~Smith dates this false door to the late Fourth Dynasty according to the style of its relief.¹⁷ However, his dating should be reconsidered in view of the following considerations:~~

¹⁴Stahelin, Tracht, 103 (b+).

¹⁵For some similarly decorated central niches from the different sites see: LD II, 23, 55; Mariette, Mastabas, 92-93; Junker, Gîza III, fig. 27; VI, fig. 104.

¹⁶It seems that we have here another example of the rarely documented short garment made of leopard’s skin, covering one arm only (cf., Stahelin, Tracht, 50-52). The other known example of this garment is in the chapel of Ka-ne-neswt [I] at Giza (Junker, Gîza II, fig. 15), but contrary to our example, Ka-ne-neswt’s figure wears the garment without any kilt. However, wearing a kilt over any kind of leopard’s skin dress is undocumented elsewhere, for the kilts are only seen under the leopard’s skin mantles (cf., Stahelin, Tracht, 36-52). It is likely that the garment was added here in a later stage of decoration and for unknown reason the artist decided not to remove the kilt.

¹⁷Smith, Sculpture, 150, n.2. His dating depends on the comparison of the relief style with that of Shery (PM III², 490) whom he dates to the late Fourth Dynasty (Smith, Sculpture, 150, n.2). However, the tomb of Shery is dated to the reign of Djedefre by Cherpion, op. cit., 116.

- (1) The practice of making the false doors of several slabs or blocks of stone was used through the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties down to the reign of Neferirkare or even later.¹⁸
- (2) The false doors with wide apertures prevailed in Saqqara during the second half of the Fourth Dynasty and the first half of the Fifth Dynasty.¹⁹
- (3) The false doors with one or two pairs of jambs decorated with large figures of their owners and inscriptions identifying them characterized the false doors in Saqqara during the Fourth Dynasty and the first half of the Fifth Dynasty.²⁰
- (4) The sunk relief was not used in the inscriptions before the reign of Khafre.²¹
- (5) The raised relief was used in decorating the false doors in Saqqara throughout the Fourth Dynasty and the greater part of the Fifth Dynasty.²²
- (6) The style of decorating the central niche with a large figure of the owner surmounted by an inscription identifying him characterizes the false doors dated to the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties down to the reign of Neuserre.²³
- (7) The backless chair is a feature characteristic of the scenes dated to the Fourth Dynasty and the first part of the Fifth Dynasty down to the reign of Neuserre.²⁴ As regards the chairs with a bull's legs, they are familiar in the scenes dated to the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties.²⁵
- (8) The close-fitting wig with overlapping locks, of which the topmost row is much higher than the rest and is filled with vertical lines, is a type characteristic of the scenes dated to the Third and Fourth Dynasties.²⁶
- (9) The tubular form amulet hanging down from a short cord is a type familiar only in the scenes ranging in date between the reigns of Send and Djedefre.²⁷

In conclusion, according to the multi-slab making type, the style of jamb decoration, the relief type of the decorations, the style of niche decoration and the chair type (remarks 1,3,5,6 and 7), the false door could be dated within the Fourth Dynasty and the first part of the Fifth Dynasty. And according to the wide aperture type (remark 2) and the wig type of the owner's figures (remark 8), the false door should not be dated before the middle of the Fourth Dynasty or after its end. But while the relief type used in the inscriptions (remark 4), excludes any date before the reign of Khafre, the short cord amulet type on the left jamb (remark 9) excludes any date much later than the reign of Djedefre.²⁸ Accordingly, the reign of Khafre is suggested here for the false door of Shepsi.

¹⁸ Reisner, *Giza I*, 372-379; S. Wiebach, *Die Ägyptische Scheintür*, Hamburg, 1981, 12.

¹⁹ Strudwick, *op. cit.*, 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

²¹ Smith, *Sculpture*, 150, n.2.

²² Strudwick, *op. cit.*, 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24-25; cf., Cherpion, *op. cit.*, 74, Criterion 51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26, Criterion 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-34, Criterion 10.

²⁶ H.G. Fischer, in: *JNES* 18, 1959, 238-239; cf., Cherpion, *op. cit.*, 55, Criterion 28.

²⁷ According to Cherpion (*ibid.*, 60, Criterion 35), the earliest royal name inscribed in a tomb having a representation of this type of amulets is that of Send, while the latest royal name is that of Djedefre. However, she points out elsewhere that the presence of a royal name on any private monument must not necessarily signify that it dates to that reign, but only that it does not precede him (*BIFAO* 82, 1982, 140-141). Accordingly, a slightly later date could be justified sometimes when her criteria are used for dating.

²⁸ See the previous note.

II. The false door CG 57188

(Figs. 2, 3 b; pl. 2)

Description

The false door is formed of one slab of limestone measuring 160 cm. in max. height, 58 cm. in breadth, 18 cm. in thickness. It has lost its architrave, and its surface is pitted in some areas, but it is generally in a rather good condition of preservation. The remaining part of the false door consists of a panel, two narrow apertures, a lintel, two pairs of jambs, a drum and a narrow central niche. The decoration and text on the panel, lintel and jambs are well executed in sunk relief, while the apertures, drum and central niche are left undecorated. Traces of red, yellow and black paint are preserved on the four jambs and the lintel. The red paint is used for the bodies of the male figures, the bread and some of the hieroglyphic signs, while the yellow is used for the body of the female figure and the basket on her head. As for the black paint, it is used for some of the hieroglyphic signs and for drawing a vertical line to the left side of the inscriptions on the outer right jamb.

Representation and Text

The panel (A): The owner is represented standing, facing right. He wears a short wig, a bracelet on each wrist and a flaring knee-length kilt. In his left hand, he holds a long staff, while his right arm hangs by his side.

In front of the owner's figure there is an inscription identifying him, it was written in a short vertical line oriented towards the right. It reads:

*rh nswt jm3hw Ttj*²⁹

“The acquaintance of the king, the revered Teti.”

The Lintel (B): One horizontal line of inscription is written from right to left, as follows:

*hntj-s*³⁰ *jmj-r md Ttj*

“The tenant and overseer of the ten, Teti.”

The Right Outer Jamb (C): An offering formula is written in one vertical line oriented to the right, as follows:

htp dj nswt Jnpw nb t3 dsr hntj zh-ntr qrs.tj.f m hrt-ntr j3w nfr wrt rh nswt Ttj

“An offering which the king gives and Anubis, lord of the sacred land, foremost of the divine booth, (gives), that he be buried in the necropolis, having reached a very good old age, the acquaintance of the king, Teti.”

~~The Left Outer Jamb (D): A short text concerning the tomb building is written in one vertical line oriented towards the right, as follows:~~

~~*jr iz pw jr(j) sw m jst(j) m3^ct m-hnw-^cwj*³¹ *jm3h(j) hr nswt dw3.n n(j) hmwtjw ntr hr(.s) ^c3 (-wrt)*³²~~

²⁹Ranke, PN I, 384: 4.

³⁰For this title and the responsibilities of its holders see: Junker, Gîza VI, 15-19; Fischer, Dendera, 170-171.

³¹This is a very rare compound preposition used during the Old Kingdom, of which no other examples are known to me (cf., Edel, Altäg. Gramm., §800). In this respect, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor W. Schenkel of Tübingen for providing me with the following later examples of this preposition: CT I 236c (B12C, B16C); II 136a (S1C); IV 318b (M54C), 382e (B1Bo); VI 1811 (G2T), 395i (T1L); Urk. IV, 239(10). As for its Old Kingdom parallel *m-swj* “in the shadow of, as a result of”, see: Edel, Altäg. Gramm., §804; for some examples see: Urk. I, 51(2-3), 223(6); Pyr. 1105d.

“As for this tomb, I have made it of (lit. from) (my) rightful property, as a result of my honour with the king. The workmen greatly praised god for me because of (it).”

The Right Inner Jamb (E):

Three superposed offering bearers are represented standing facing left towards the central niche. The topmost one is a female holding a basket filled with loaves of bread on the head with her right hand, while the left hand is hanging to the rear holding the handle of what seems to be another basket. She wears a long wig and a long tight-fitting dress of which no detail can be recognized of its upper part. The second offering bearer is a male clad in a short wig and a short kilt with a belt sash. He carries a cloth offering in both hands. The third offering bearer is also a male clad in a short wig and a short kilt. He holds a large bird with both hands, grasping the beak of the fowl with his right hand.³³

The Left Inner Jamb (F): Three superposed male figures are represented standing facing right towards the central niche. The topmost one is an offering bearer wearing a short wig and a short kilt with a belt sash. He holds up a basin and ewer before him with both hands. The second one is also an offering bearer dressed in a similar way as the upper one. He is probably holding a loaf of bread in each hand. As for the lower figure, he is clad in a short wig and a short folded kilt, with his right arm crossing over to his right shoulder and his left arm hanging by his side in an attitude of respect.³⁴

Dating

There is no conclusive evidence for dating this false door, but the following remarks may help in assigning it to a reasonably secure date:

(1) The tendency towards panel elongation was known in some of the Saqqara false doors in the period of the reign of Teti to Pepy I.³⁵

(2) The false doors with narrow apertures were used in Saqqara from the middle of the Fifth Dynasty onwards.³⁶

(3) The sunk relief began to be used for decorating the false doors in Saqqara by the time of Neuserre at least, and gradually became the predominant form by the end of the Fifth Dynasty.³⁷

³³The last sign of this text is doubtful because of its bad state of preservation. It could also be the sign of the leg-bone with adjoining meat (Gardiner, EG, Sign-list, 466: F 44), and accordingly the text reads: *dw3.n n (j) hmwtjw ntr hr jsw* “The workmen praised god for me because of the reward” (cf., Junker, Gîza IX, 74, fig. 30; Hassan, Gîza III, 18, fig. 15). However, the reward mentioned here in such abbreviated manner is detailed in some other inscriptions in a similar context. In the chapel of Hetep-her-akhti is an inscription from which we know that he gave the craftsmen who worked for him in his tomb bread, beer, clothes, oil, barley and emmer (H.T. Mohr, The Mastaba of Hetep-Her-Akhti, MVEOL 5, Leiden, 1943, 34: 2-3). See also: Hassan, Gîza II, 173.

³⁴For some examples of jambs decorated with the offering bearers in registers from the different sites see: LD II, 85; CG 1295-1808, nos. 1416, 1449, pls. 20, 32; Mariette, Mastabas, 154-155; Junker, Gîza I, fig. 51; II, figs. 18, 28; III, fig. 27; VII, fig. 69; Petrie/ Murray, Memphite Tomb Chapels, pl. 14.

³⁵For the significance of this attitude see: B. Dominicus, Gesten und Gebärden in Darstellungen des Alten und Mittleren Reiches, SAGA 10,1994, 5-9, fig. 1 (4a).

³⁶Strudwick, op.cit., 18, 36.

³⁷Ibid., 21-22, 36.

³⁸Ibid., 24, 36.

(4) Decorating the jambs with registers of offering bearers is generally an uncommon style for the false doors in Saqqara, and its use was confined to the period from the middle to the late Fifth Dynasty.³⁸

(5) The standing figure of the owner as a panel decoration is highly uncommon; for the panels are normally decorated with a seated figure of the owner before an offering table.³⁹ However, some panels of the Saqqara false doors showed their owners in the standing attitude.⁴⁰ These false doors range in their dates from the reign of Djedkare onwards.⁴¹

In conclusion, according to the narrowness of the apertures (remark 2) and the use of sunk relief in decorating the false door (remark 3), it could be dated through the second half of the Fifth Dynasty and the Sixth Dynasty. The depiction of the owner in a standing attitude over the panel (remark 5) restricts the possible range of dating to the period extending from the reign of Djedkare onwards. As for the latest possible dating, it should not be later than the Fifth Dynasty according to the representation of offering bearers in registers on the inner jambs (remark 4). While this limit should be extended to include the period of the reign of Teti to Pepy I according to the elongation of the panel (remark 1).

However, this could be reasonably explained if we assumed that the owner of this false door lived long enough within the later Fifth Dynasty that the style of the decorated jambs with the offering bearers in registers impressed him. At the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty he was still alive to witness the introduction of the new type of false doors with the elongated panels. So the reign of king Teti is suggested for making the false door, although his owner could have possibly lived for some time under king Unis.

³⁸ Ibid., 25-26.

³⁹ For the panel decorations see: Junker, Giza XII, 68-75, figs. 3-4; Hassan, Giza V, 86-128, 143-149, 166-172.

⁴⁰ Only three examples are known to me: The false door of *M3-nfr* (LD II, 65), the false door of *Ssm-nfr: Hb3* (Mariette, Mastabas, E 8, 399-400) and the false door of *Hb3j* (Jéquier, Tombeaux, fig. 128). As for some other examples from Giza: Hassan, Giza I, pl. 44 (1); II, fig. 222; VI, 3, fig. 69; IX, fig. 28a; Junker, Giza VI, figs. 70, 76; IX, 40; W. K. Simpson, Mastabas of the Western Cemetery: Part I, Giza Mastabas 4, Boston 1980, fig. 45.

⁴¹ *M3-nfr* is dated by Baer to his period VI B [Teti year 10-Mernere] (Rank and Title, 77 [170], 290), and is dated by Y. Harpur to the reigns of Unis and Teti (Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom, London, 1987, 274[406]). *Ssm-nfr: Hb3* is dated by Baer to the reign of Djedkare (Rank and Title, 133 [482], 293), and is dated to the late Fifth Dynasty by Strudwick, op. cit., 140-141 [132], while it is dated to the reigns of Djedkare-Unis by Harpur, op. cit., 276 [510].

Fig. 1: The false door of Shepsi (JE 68923)

Fig. 2: The false door of Teti (CG 57188)

Fig. 3 (a): Plan of Shepsi's false door (JE 68923)

Fig. 3 (b): Plan of Teti's false door (CG 57188)

Pl. 1: The false door of Shepsi (JE 68923)

Pl. 2: The false door of Teti (CG 57188)