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A FRAGMENT OF A BIOGRAPHICAL INSCRIPTION OF THE OLD KINGDOM

By HANS GOEDICKE

DURING the excavations carried out by the University of Alexandria under the direction of Professor A. Abubakr a slab of limestone was found in the *radim* at the western end of the Gīzah plateau which cannot be attributed to any particular tomb. The slab, of rather poor, soft limestone, is approximately rectangular in shape, measuring 54 cm. on the right, better preserved edge, 42 cm. at the bottom, and 9 cm. at the top. The entire surface is covered with an inscription arranged in one horizontal line at the top and eight

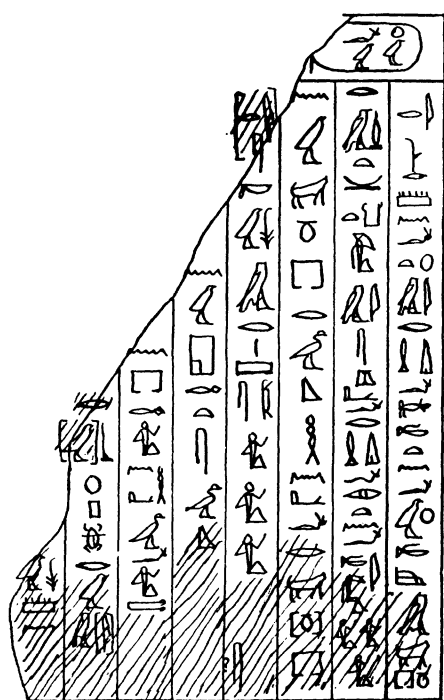


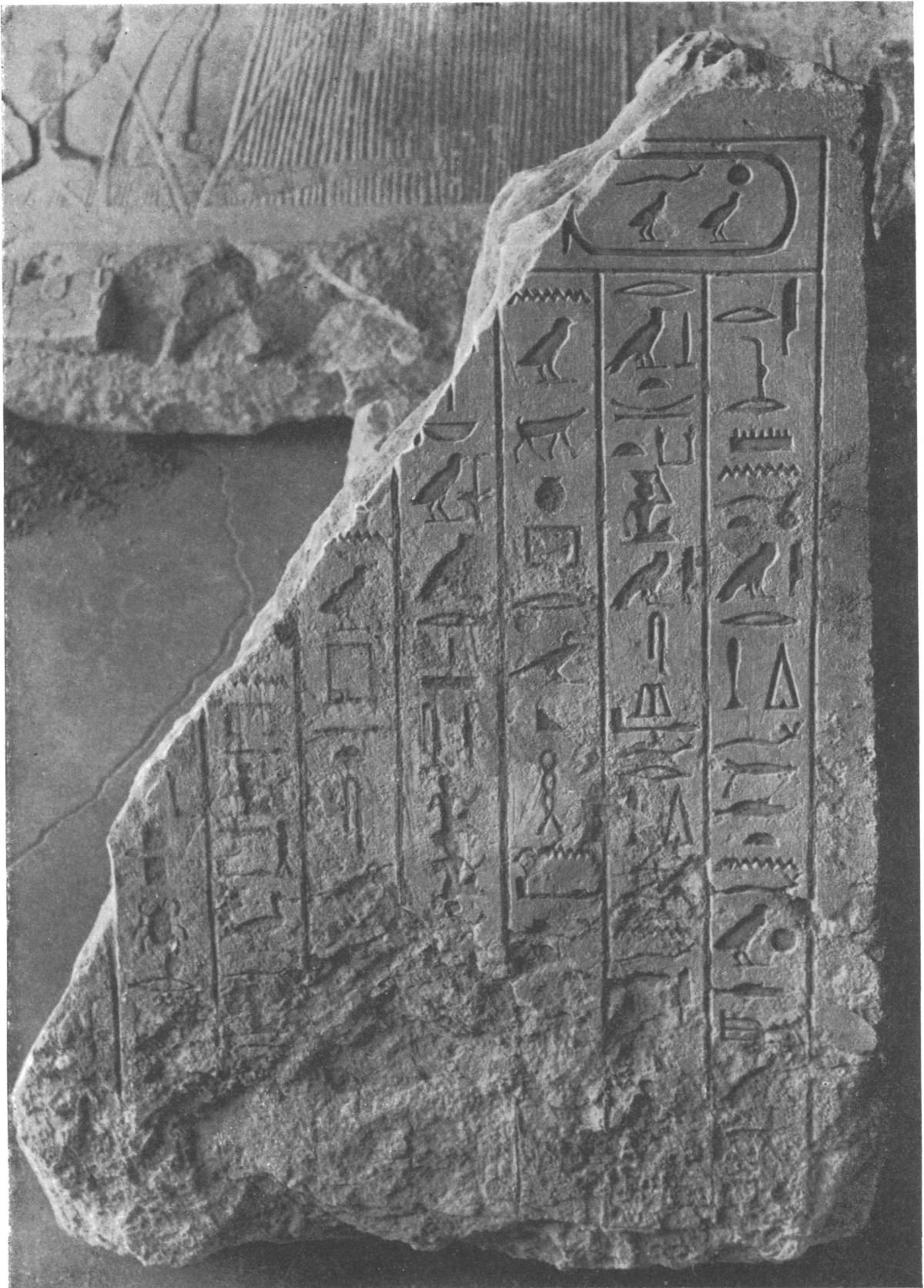
FIG. I

vertical lines underneath. In addition to its fragmentary state the surface is in many places badly corroded and the decipherable signs reduced to a few unconnected groups (pl. II).

The inscription represents the beginning of a biographical text describing a memorable event in the unknown man's life. The text does not tell us the entire career of the official concerned, but commences with a particular event which happened presumably late in the man's life. In this respect the text tells a story similar to the well-known biographical episodes related by *Dh̄ny* and *W̄š-Pth* in their tombs. It is particularly in connexion with the latter that our text should be considered, as beside the similarities of content there exist other points of resemblance. In both cases we are told about the illness of an esteemed official of the king and the favours shown to him upon that occasion by the latter. Since we so rarely get a glimpse of the personal relationship existing between the monarch and his officials, it is the more regret-

table that our text should be preserved in such a fragmentary condition.

The date of the fragment is obscure, particularly since we are unable to link it with a particular official. The text itself does not furnish any indication either palaeographically or contextually which could permit an attribution to a specific date. The impersonal form in which the episode is told, using the suffix of the third person in reference to the individual concerned, suggests rather a date not later than the end of the Fifth Dynasty, since later inscriptions of this kind prefer the use of the first person. On the other hand, an attribution to the Fourth Dynasty also offers some difficulties in view of the emphasis given to the personal nature of the events described, so that the Fifth Dynasty seems



A BIOGRAPHICAL INSCRIPTION OF THE OLD KINGDOM

the most likely date for the fragment under discussion. The close relationship with the inscription of *W3š-Pth* supports such a suggestion.

Translation

(1) *Hwfw* (2) As for the time when he was sick, His Majesty caused that there should be procured for him a carrying-chair from the Residence (3) in order to carry out the work under his supervision from it. His Majesty caused that there should be organized for him a guard (4) of the Residence in order to enter the Residence (?) with him . . . (5) When he was in the performance of the duty the people (6) of the *Hwt-ṛst* cause to enter (7) of the *pr-ṛ3*-man and his son (8) to the place where it happened (9) he

Commentary

L. 1. In the original arrangement a horizontal line of hieroglyphs was placed above the inscription, which was set out below in vertical columns. It apparently represents a kind of heading and seems not directly connected with what follows. Only the very beginning of it remains, consisting of the name of Cheops in a cartouche. It is impossible to put forward any conclusive suggestion concerning the original contents of this line on the basis of such a short and ambiguous fragment. It is, however, tempting to conjecture that this part of the text mentioned the person to whom the following inscription refers. In that case the name of Cheops is likely to be part of a title; *hm-ntr Hwfw* appears the most probable.¹ Whether other titles followed cannot be determined since there is no indication of the original number of vertical columns. As can be deduced from the text, the man to whom it refers must have been a favourite official of an unknown king engaged in work presumably connected with official building for the Crown.

L. 2. *mn ht* 'to be sick', cf. *Wb.* II, 66, 20. Here clearly with this meaning and not 'to fall sick' as envisaged by Junker, *Giza*, XI, 176. *ir tr . . . im* is a clear reference to the period of sickness which covered a certain length of time. No indication is given as to whether the man finally recovered or not. The latter possibility seems more likely in view of the stylistic build-up of the narrative, which may have concluded with a description of the tomb and burial outfit supplied by the king as an expression of his high favour. An arrangement of this kind is found in the biographical inscription of *Dbḥny*. *Šdi* clearly has the meaning 'to bring', 'to procure'. The passage here is probably a literal parallel to *Urk.* I, 43, 16, which should be restored accordingly. *Hwd(t)* is a not infrequent term for a kind of carrying chair; no feminine ending is indicated here, but the gender of the term is determined by the subsequent *im·ś*. For the form of the object, cf. Davies, *Deir el Gebrawi*, I, 14; II, 6. 10 and Reisner & Smith, *A History of the Giza Necropolis*, II, 33, pl. 27a. The litter was not only a favourite form of conveyance, but even more a sign of high social rank and importance. The motif of the man in the carrying chair is often found among the reliefs in the mastabas of the great nobles of the Old Kingdom.²

¹ One could also think of restoring *ḥt-Hwfw* in this place, but it would be difficult to explain its appearance here, except by regarding it as part of a title.

² Cf. Klebs, *Reliefs des alten Reiches*, 27 ff.; Junker, *Giza*, XI, 249 ff. See furthermore *Urk.* I, 231, 14, where, however, a different term, *šbnr*, is used.

L. 3. *r dšt kšt im-s hr-rf* states the purpose of the royal provision. *Dšt kšt*, apparently not attested elsewhere, seems to have the meaning 'to carry out the work' as required by the context. For this interpretation, cf. the use of *dšt ts* in *Sin.* B304, rendered by Gardiner¹ 'to busy oneself' 'to be occupied with'. *Im-s* refers back to *hwd(t)*, while *hr-rf* concerns the preceding mention of *kšt*. For the technical expression *hr-rf*, cf. *Wb.* III, 386, 24. *Kšt* as a general term for 'work' is rather ambiguous in its significance, but nevertheless likely to have the specific connotation of building activity. For the assumed meaning of *iri*, cf. *Wb.* I, 109, 6, but this use is not attested for the Old Kingdom. Cf. however, *Urk.* I, 101, 10, concerning the recruiting of the army under Weni's command. The use of *idw* in this connexion is surprising, since one would rather expect some other term. It is seemingly used to denote troops of some kind, for which cf. *Wb.* I, 151, 19. The specification *nyw hnw* shows that the men concerned were closely connected with the 'Residence'. The latter, as an expression for the royal administration, is frequently found in the Old Kingdom. The legal status of the people remains uncertain. From the way in which the order is given, it seems most tempting to assume a status of dependence for them, but it is questionable if they can be called 'servants', still less 'slaves'. From the usual employment of the *idw* as military personnel² one is inclined to picture them as a kind of guard. Our text is probably to be compared with a fragmentary passage in the inscription of *Wšš-Pth* (*Urk.* I, 44, 3-4) where there is mention of the different kinds of troops attached to the Residence. As in our case, the statement follows the donation of a carrying chair which, in *Wšš-Pth*, is complemented by the issue of detailed instructions, which are missing here.

L. 4. The purpose of the *idw* is stated to be *r ck hnc-fr (hnw?)* 'in order to enter with him into (the Residence?)'. *Hnw* is a possible but uncertain restoration. The traces of the first sign seem to be part of $\overline{\text{𓆎}}$, which would also permit the restoration $\overline{\text{𓆎}}\overline{\text{𓆎}}$ (*Wb.* III, 372, 10) and which seems rather likely in view of the long lacuna. For the formal introduction to the palace, to which the passage seems to refer, cf. also *Sin.* B248-9.

L. 5. For *rš-šmsi*, see Junker, *ZÄS* 77, 2 ff.

L. 6. The lack of context makes it impossible to recognize the significance of *hwt cšt* in this connexion. The preceding *nyw* prompts one to conjecture the mention of some kind of people, closely related with the *hwt cšt*, for which cf. *Urk.* I, 102, 4.

L. 7. $\overline{\text{𓆎}}\overline{\text{𓆎}}$ denotes a certain kind of people of the working class. It apparently is a *nisba* formation of *pr cš*, meaning the man belonging to the *pr cš*. In *Urk.* I, 149, 6 they are mentioned among the workmen engaged in quarrying. The term is possibly to be compared with *nšwtyw* 'royal slaves',³ but the two are probably not identical. This word

¹ *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe*, 115; cf. also Dévaud, *Sphinx*, 13, 118-20.

² Cf. Faulkner, *JEA* 39, 36; Junker, *Giza*, v, 159.

³ For the meaning of the term, cf. Maspero, *Études égyptiennes*, II, 230 and Moret, *Rec. trav.* 29, 67, while Junker, *Giza*, III, 173 and Kees, *Kulturgeschichte*, 44 and *Beiträge zur altäg. Provinzialverwaltung*, II, 587 (*Nachr. d. Ges. d. Wiss. Göttingen*, 1933) consider them not as slaves, but as a kind of specially privileged farmers. The latter view is hardly tenable on account of the mention in the inscription of *Mfn* (*Urk.* I, 2, 8; 4, 8), where the people are acquired (*ini r isw*) together with the land they are dwelling on.

could be restored in the lacuna in *Urk.* I, 21, 11, where the context would require such a term. The following word might be restored as $\overline{\text{mn}} \overline{\text{ht}}$ or $\overline{\text{mn}} \overline{\text{ht}}$, a term used for the recruiting of people, particularly in connexion with funerary installations; cf. *Urk.* I, 302, 13 ff.

L. 9. $\overline{\text{mn}} \overline{\text{ht}}$ either 'to endure' or to be restored as *mn ht* as in l. 2).