

EGYPT AND BEYOND



ESSAYS PRESENTED TO  
LEONARD H. LESKO



Leonard H. Lesko, in his office at Brown University

# Egypt and Beyond

Essays Presented to Leonard H. Lesko  
upon his Retirement from the  
Wilbour Chair of Egyptology  
at Brown University  
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Edited by  
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# Contents

PREFACE BY STEPHEN E. THOMPSON	vii
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	ix
BARBARA S. LESKO Leonard H. Lesko: A Biographical Sketch	xi
Bibliography of Leonard H. Lesko (through 2007)	xxvii
MARIAM F. AYAD Some Remarks on the Pyramid Texts Inscribed in the Chapel of Amenirdis I at Medinet Habu	1
GUITTY AZARPAY The Pahlavi Archive at Berkeley	15
LANNY BELL The Ancient Egyptian “Books of Breathing,” the Mormon “Book of Abraham,” and the Development of Egyptology in America	21
J.F. BORGHOUTS Trickster Gods in the Egyptian Pantheon	41
EDWARD BROVARIKI A Second Style in Egyptian Relief of the Old Kingdom	49
LEO DEPUYDT The Function of the Particle $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} jh$ in Old and Middle Egyptian	91
FLORENCE DUNN FRIEDMAN The Menkaure Dyad(s)	109
FAYZA HAIKAL Cultural Similarities, Kinship Terminology and Ethno-Egyptology	145
TOHFA HANDOUSSA An Act of Piety from the Western Cemetery at Giza	149
ZAHY HAWASS Unique Statues found at Giza VI: Two Unknown Statues found in the Western Field and near the Causeway of Khafre	155

MATTHIEU HEERMA VAN VOSS Beginning and End in the Book of the Dead of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Dynasty	163
R. ROSS HOLLOWAY Was Pausanias Right Concerning Peirithoos in the West Pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia?	167
RAMADAN B. HUSSEIN A New Coffin Text Spell from Naga ed-Dêr	171
MARTHA SHARP JOUKOWSKY Common Name: Poppy. Habitat: Nabataean Sculpture. The Petra Great Temple	197
DIANA WOLFE LARKIN Making Egyptian Temple Decoration Fit the Available Space	209
PETER DER MANUELIAN A “New” Slab Stela for Nefer from G 2110? (Giza Archives Project Gleanings: I)	227
MALCOLM MOSHER, JR. Five Versions of Spell 19 from the Late Period Book of the Dead	237
PAUL F. O’ROURKE AND MADELEINE E. CODY A Papyrus Grows in Brooklyn. The Book of the Dead of Neferrenpet in the Brooklyn Museum (P. Brooklyn 35.1448+35.1464)	261
ALI RADWAN The Nun-basin of Renpetneferet	277
CHRISTINA RIGGS Gilding the lily: Sceptres and Shrouds in Greco-Roman Egypt	285
ROBERT K. RITNER Libyan vs. Nubian as the Ideal Egyptian	305
ALESSANDRO ROCCATI A Fragmentary Mummy Bandage inscribed with three Isis Spells in the Book of the Dead	315
DAVID P. SILVERMAN A Reference to Warfare at Denderah, Prior to the Unification of Egypt in the Eleventh Dynasty	329
STEPHEN E. THOMPSON From Two Ways to Totenbuch: A Study in Textual Transmission and Transformation	333

# A “New” Slab Stela for Nefer from G 2110? (Giza Archives Project Gleanings: I)

Peter Der Manuelian

**B**OSTON AND PROVIDENCE LIE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY, and the Egyptological collaboration between these two cities has always been exemplary. I am particularly grateful to Leonard Lesko for the opportunity to teach at Brown University, and to both Leonard and Barbara for their encouragement, support, and friendship over many years. May the small fragment discussed below, which is not without some larger implications, remind him of his interest in epigraphy.

This short paper initiates what I hope will be a series of essays on various aspects of the Giza Necropolis. The discoveries discussed in these essays all came to light thanks to research enabled by the “Giza Archives Project.”<sup>1</sup> Initiated in the year 2000 with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,<sup>2</sup> the Project’s goal is to provide a centralized online repository for all archaeological activity at Giza, from the excavations begun in 1902 and continuing to the present day. By digitizing massive amounts of archaeological data,<sup>3</sup> and cross-referencing them all online with relational databases, we find that new research questions may be posed—and answered—in ways that were heretofore impossible. In recent years, the Giza Archives Project has moved beyond processing solely the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts excavation records of 1902–1947 (directed by G.A. Reisner)<sup>4</sup> to henceforth include documentation from sister institutions with Giza objects and archives in Cairo, Turin, Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Hildesheim, Berkeley, and Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup> We hope eventually to reassemble all of Giza “virtually” for scholars and to reunite the disparate documentation that is spread throughout the world.

In a monograph on the well-known corpus of slab stelae from Giza I briefly discussed the pivotal Western Cemetery mastaba of Nefer (G 2110).<sup>6</sup> Central to the study of Khufu-era

- 1 The Giza website is currently located at [www.gizapyramids.org](http://www.gizapyramids.org). I am particularly grateful to the more than 400 staff, students, docents, and volunteers who have contributed to this project since its inception. In particular, I would like to thank Egyptologist and Giza Research Assistant Diane Flores, Project Archivist C.M. Pate, Project, as well Egyptological interns Heidi Saleh, Heather Evans, Christine End, and Nicholas Picardo.
- 2 [www.mellon.org](http://www.mellon.org). From 2000 to 2004, the Project was funded by the Museums and Conservation Division, and I thank Program Officer Ms. Angelica Zander Rudenstine for her support. From 2004 to the present, the Project owes its support to the Scholarly Communications Division, and I am grateful to its Program Officer, Mr. Donald Waters.
- 3 An early 2008 count of items posted on [www.gizapyramids.org](http://www.gizapyramids.org) revealed 3,808 tombs, 31,615 photographs, 21,037 objects, 3,105 expedition diary pages, 2,305 ancient and modern individual names, 9,904 archaeological plans and drawings, and more than 400 scholarly monographs and articles in text-searchable PDF format.
- 4 The Project at the MFA could not move forward without the constant support of Katie Getchell, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, and Rita E. Freed, Chair of the Department of Art of the Ancient World. I also thank Arthur Beale, Chair Emeritus, Department of Conservation and Collections Management, and his successor in that position, Matthew Siegal.
- 5 The international collaboration over Giza documentation could not take place without the expertise and support of the following individuals: Eleni Vasilika, Elise Fiore Marochetti, Matilde Borla (Turin), Manfred Bietak, Peter Jánosi, Regina Hözl (Vienna), Stephan Seidlmayer, Stephan Grunert, Dietrich Wildung, Klaus Finneiser (Berlin), Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, Friederike Kampp-Seyfried (Leipzig), Katja Lembke, Bettina Schmitz, Antje Spiekermann (Hildesheim), Joan Knudsen, Cathleen Keller, Elizabeth Minor (Berkeley), David Silverman, Josef Wegner, and Jennifer Wegner (Philadelphia).
- 6 PM 3<sup>2</sup>, pp. 72–4; G.A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis* 1 (Cambridge, Mass, 1942), pp. 422–25. This mastaba is scheduled for publication in a forthcoming volume of the Giza Mastabas Series.

mastaba decoration, Nefer's mastaba is often cited in the debate over the developmental roles of slab stelae versus false doors (figs. 1–3). In 1971, G. Haeny argued that false doors, rather than slab stelae, were the originally intended cult focus for the earliest Giza mastabas.<sup>7</sup> His primary argument rested at Giza on Nefer's mastaba, a tomb with finished casing, exterior stone chapel and false door:

Es gibt jedoch, was Junker anscheinend übersehen hat, im Friedhofgelände von Giseh eine Mastaba, G 2110, deren Kalksteinverkleidung am ursprünglichen Kernbau fertiggestellt und auch außen geglättet worden ist, bevor die Anlage um einen geschlossenen Kultraum erweitert wurde; dessen Anschlußwände sind ohne jeden Verband gegen die Außenfläche der Mastaba gesetzt. Hier aber ist die Opferstelle nicht—wie wir nach Junker erwarten müßten—durch die in Giseh übliche Grabtafel gekennzeichnet, sondern in traditioneller Weise durch zwei abgetreppte Scheintürnischen, die man im voraus beim Anlegen der Verkleidung einberechnet hatte.<sup>8</sup>

Haeny is correct in that no joins are apparent between the exterior stone casing and the exterior stone chapel; the chapel therefore does not break into the casing. This merely indicates, however, that G 2110 received its final casing complete, unlike most of the tombs in the three early nucleus cemeteries of the Western Field. I suggested in 2003 that G 2110 did not differ from other nucleus cemetery mastabas except by virtue of the completion of its casing. In other words, the contention that the current appearance of G 2110 proves that false doors in general—rather than slab stelae—were intended as the original cult focus is not supported by the evidence.<sup>9</sup>

I had speculated that Nefer's tomb might once have stood uncased and provided with a slab stela, only to be subsequently cased and given an exterior chapel with a false door (and a subsidiary niche at the northern end of the east wall). I raised the possibility that such a slab stela might once have been, or actually could still be, resting in situ between the mastaba's core stones and the massive blocks of the exterior chapel and casing. Perhaps the slab stela had been plastered over and/or walled up, as were the stelae of Wepemnefret (G 1201), Nefretiaabet (G 1225), Seshat-sekhentiu (G 2120), and Iunu (G 4150).<sup>10</sup> In fact, excellent photographs taken by the Harvard–MFA Expedition in 1906 show the gap between the original core stones and the casing blocks, site of a hypothetical slab stela of Nefer (figs. 4–5).<sup>11</sup>

Neither Reisner nor A.M. Lythgoe, who directed the 1905–1906 season when Nefer's mastaba was first unearthed, make any mention—at least, in the records preserved to us—of examining the area between the mastaba's core and the exterior casing and chapel for a possible slab stela. However, no excavation diaries or object register books survive for the 1905–1906 season, so the daily strategy of the Expedition during those years remains unknown to us.

As a result of recent research in the Giza archives in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, documentation regarding a seemingly insignificant fragment of relief may now shed further light on Nefer and the slab stela question. We may even gain a new addition to our corpus of preserved slab stelae from the Giza Necropolis. The reason this fragment has escaped noticed for so long rests in a possible misnumbering in the original documentation.

7 G. Haeny, "Zu den Platten mit Opfertischszene in Helwan und Giseh," in *Aufsätze zum 70. Geburtstag von Herbert Ricke*, Beiträge Bf. 12 (Wiesbaden, 1971) (hereafter Fs. Ricke), pp. 143–64.

8 Haeny, *Fs. Ricke*, p. 158.

9 Manuelian, *Slab Stelae of the Giza Necropolis* (New Haven and Philadelphia, 2003), p. 161. For recent comments on the subject of the slab stela, see the reviews by N. Kanawati, *BiOr* 63 (2006), cols. 72–75, and H. Altenmüller, *JEA* 91 (2005), pp. 201–202, as well as remarks by P. Jánosi, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie* (Vienna, 2005), p. 118 and passim, and M. Fitzenreiter, "Zum Phänomen der isolierten Speisetischtafel in der 4. Dynastie," *GM* 208 (2005), pp. 19–28.

10 These stelae are numbered 1 (Hearst Museum, Berkeley 6–19825), 6 (Musée du Louvre, Paris E 15591), 7 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 06.1894), and 13 (Pelizaeus-Museum 2145); cf. Manuelian, *Slab Stelae of the Giza Necropolis*, pp. 32–40, 58–62, 76–82, and 98–103.

11 Also illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 161, figs. 243–44.



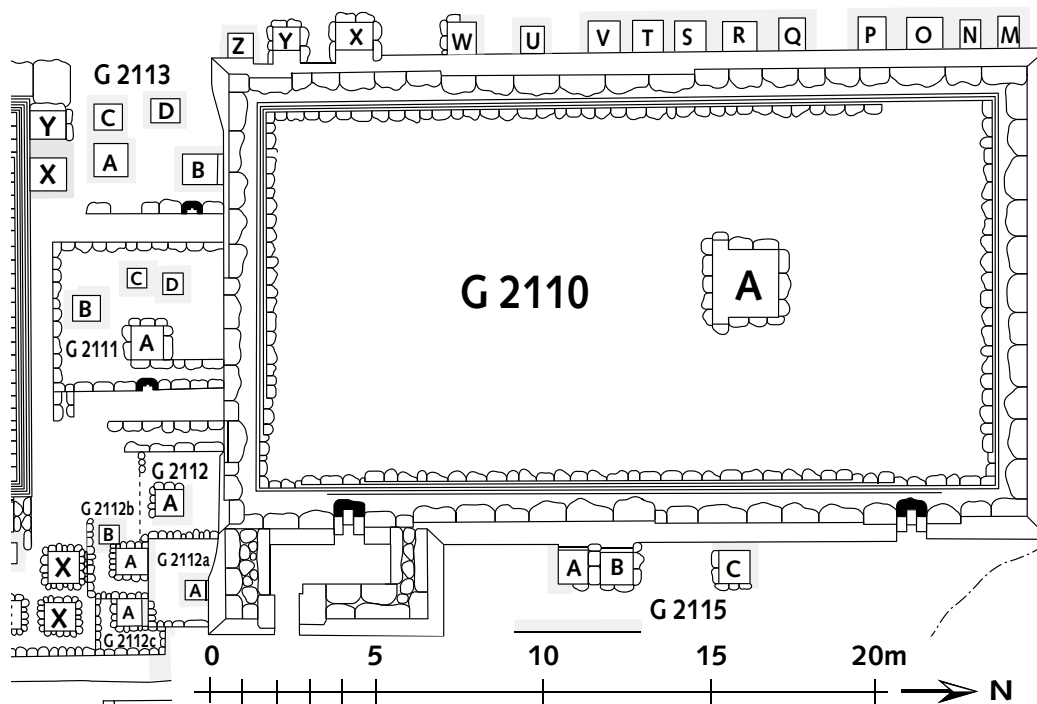


Fig. 1. Plan of the mastaba of Nefer (G 211) and surrounding tombs. For the location of this area within the Western Cemetery, see fig. 11 below.



Fig. 2. Exterior chapel of the mastaba of Nefer, G 2110, looking northwest. 1905–1906. HU–MFA Expedition photograph, Albert M. Lythgoe, C 883. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 3. Exterior chapel of the mastaba of Nefer, G 2110, looking southwest along the mastaba's east face. 1905–1906. HU–MFA Expedition photograph, Albert M. Lythgoe, C 1488. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The HU–MFA Expedition re-examined the area of Nefer's mastaba on several occasions after 1906 (fig. 1). As late as 1938, Expedition Diary entries record the clearance of the row of shafts along the western face of the mastaba. On Wednesday, February 9, 1938, Reisner's Egyptian *reis* describes in sequence the excavation of shafts M, N, O, P, and Q. The final entry for this day, illustrated in fig. 6 from the original Arabic diary<sup>12</sup> suddenly jumps from Nefer's G 2110 to the anonymous tomb G 5236 much farther east, in the Cemetery en Echelon:

Wednesday, February 9, 1938

(2) G 5236. We found on top of this mastaba on the south a limestone block, inscribed with raised relief. Here is its drawing.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the reference to a drawing, no sketch or illustration of this relief, in either the original Arabic diary or the contemporary English translation, was made. But turning from the Expedition Diaries to the Expedition Object Register, we find an entry for a fragment numbered 38–2–3, which stands for the year 1938, month of February, object no. 3:

White lst. [limestone] frag. of tablet; h. 6.5 cm; w. 5 cm; th. 1.2 cm; Feb. 9, [1938]; From top of G 5236

12 The HU–MFA Expedition Arabic Diaries were discovered in Cairo in 2006. They are now housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I am grateful to Mr. Hassan Mohamed Said Ahmed Diraz, son of Reisner's *reis* Mohamed Said Ahmed Diraz, for preserving the Arabic diaries, and to Zahi Hawass, Secretary General, Supreme Council of Antiquities, for allowing them to come to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Giza diary volumes are scheduled for translation into English by Ramadan B. Hussein, and for posting on the Giza Archives Project website, [www.gizapyramids.org](http://www.gizapyramids.org).

13 This is a slightly modified translation, kindly provided by Ramadan B. Hussein. The contemporary English translation of the Arabic Diary (by Mahmoud Said Ahmed Diraz), volume 31, p. 615 reads: "(2) G 5236. An inscribed limestone fragment from a stela found on the top of the mastaba (in relief). Sketch of the inscription." The southerly location on top of the mastaba brings the fragment into closer relation with the chapel area.



Fig. 4. View between the casing and core of the mastaba of Nefer, G 2110, looking south. 1905–1906. HU–MFA Expedition photograph, Albert M. Lythgoe, B 953. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 5. View between the casing and core of the mastaba of Nefer, G 2110, looking north. 1905–1906. HU–MFA Expedition photograph, Albert M. Lythgoe, B 887. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

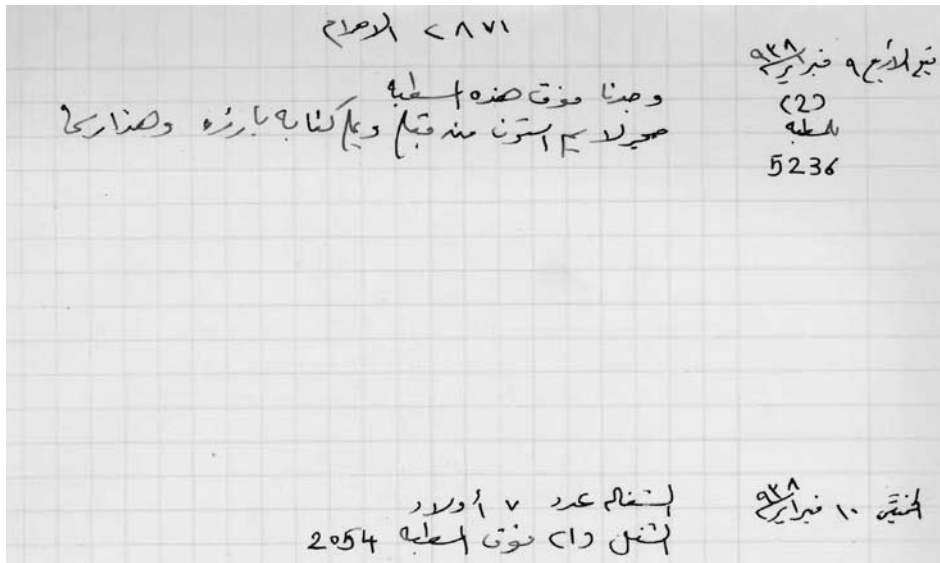


Fig. 6. HU–MFA Expedition diary vol. 34, detail of page 2,871, with entry for February 9, 1906. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

1482


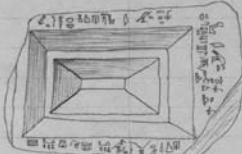

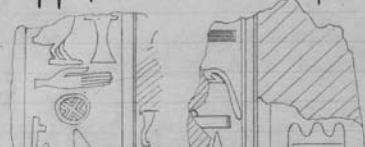
No.	DESCRIPTION	MATERIAL	MEAS.	DATE	PROVENANCE	REMARKS
38-2-1	Frag. of white lst. with hieroglyphs in relief 	Limestone	L. = 21 cm W. = 9.2 Th. = 8.2	1938	From top of G 2110	
2.	Rough white lst. offering basin crudely incised inscription 	Limestone	L. 39 cm W. = 27 Th. = 13.5 Depth = 2.3 + 2.7 cm	Feb. 7	From G 2110 R pit	Photo B 8948
3.	White lst. frag. of tablet 	Limestone	L. = 6.5 cm W. = 5 Th. = 1.2	Feb. 9	<del>From top of G 5236</del>	
4.	Three frags of white lst. shells in relief 	Limestone	L. 11.6; 27; 14 W. 39; 24; 7 Th. 11.5; 8.5; 6	Feb. 9	From top of G 2110 re-used as roofing slab.	A 7975

Fig. 7. HU-MFA Expedition Object Register vol. 29, detail of page 1,482, with entry for relief fragment 38-2-3 (outlined). Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In this case there is a sketch drawing, visible in the reproduction of the original Object Register vol. 29, p. 1482 above in fig. 7.<sup>14</sup> Note, however, that the date and the provenance (G 5236) have been crossed out, but no substitute provenance has been added. Unfortunately, the current location of fragment 38-2-3 has yet to be determined. I have so far been unable to identify it in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It is perhaps now lost, or in storage in a Giza magazine, or in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. I have likewise been unsuccessful so far in locating an actual photograph of the piece; our only documentation remains the line drawing preserved in the Expedition Object Register, from which my fig. 8 has been drawn.

We would have to leave the mystery there but for the recent discovery of a note card in the Giza Expedition archives in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This card contains a handwritten list of field number fragments bearing inscriptions. It is most likely written in the hand of Expedition co-*reis*, Mahmoud Said Ahmed Diraz. It includes the fragment described above with the caption: "38-2-3 small," and a provenance of G 2110 (fig. 9).

There seems therefore, good evidence for (re)assigning our fragment to G 2110, Nefer's mastaba, instead of G 5236. First of all, the date of the find (February 1938) corresponds with the work progressing in G 2110 as described in the Expedition Diary. Secondly, the Object Register has crossed out G 5236, while the expedition note card clearly assigns 38-2-3 to G 2110. And finally, the nature of the fragment itself supports for this "new" provenance, for it clearly

14 The original Object Register books are housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

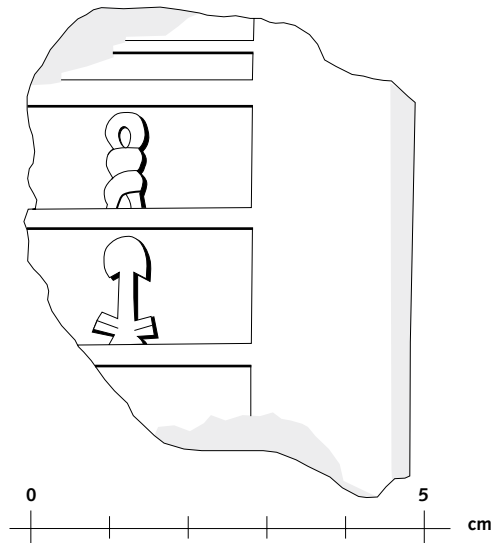


Fig. 8. Relief fragment 38-2-3, redrawn from sketch in HU-MFA Expedition Object Register vol. 29, page 1,482 (see fig. 6 above).

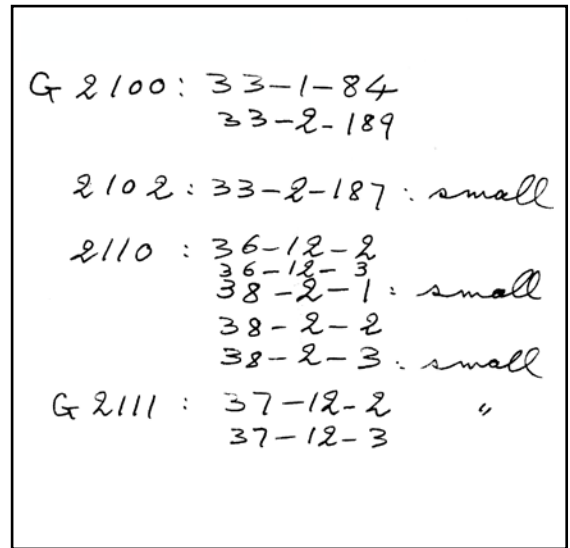


Fig. 9. HU-MFA Expedition note card (detail), written by Mahmoud Said Diraz, listing inscribed objects, and including the relief fragment 38-2-3. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

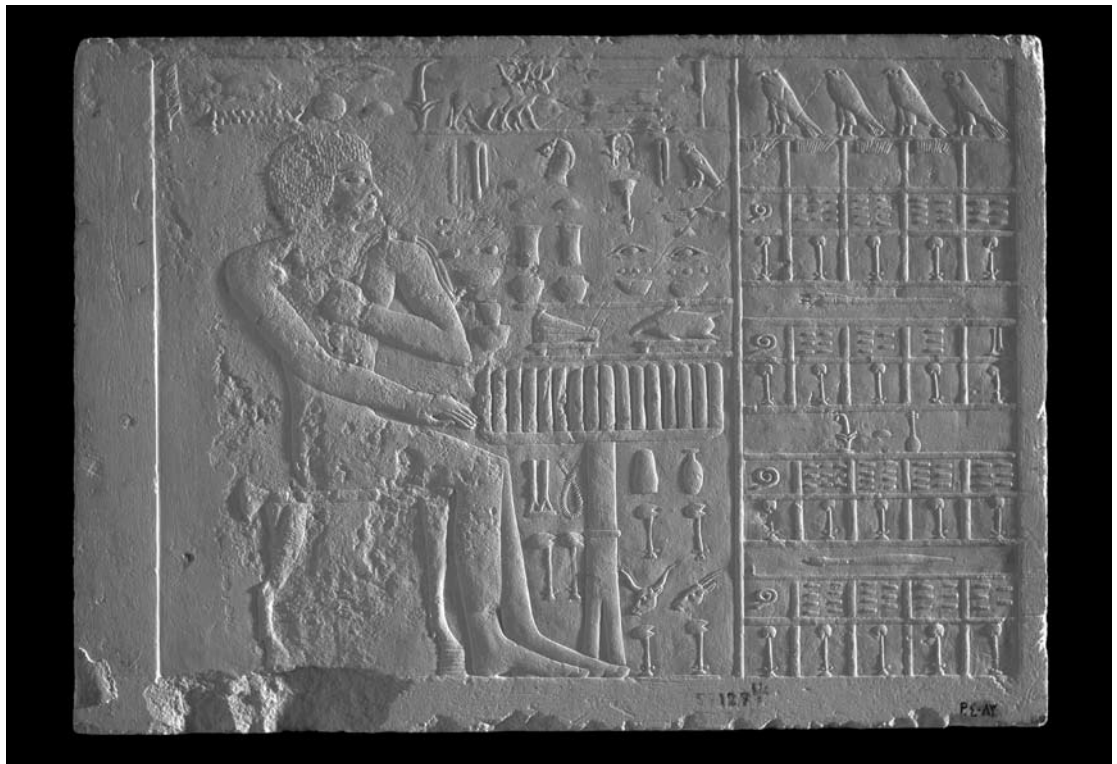


Fig. 10. Slab stela of Ini from G 1235. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 37727 (57127bis); currently in the Port Said National Museum, P 4083. Photograph by Brian Snyder, April 15, 1999.

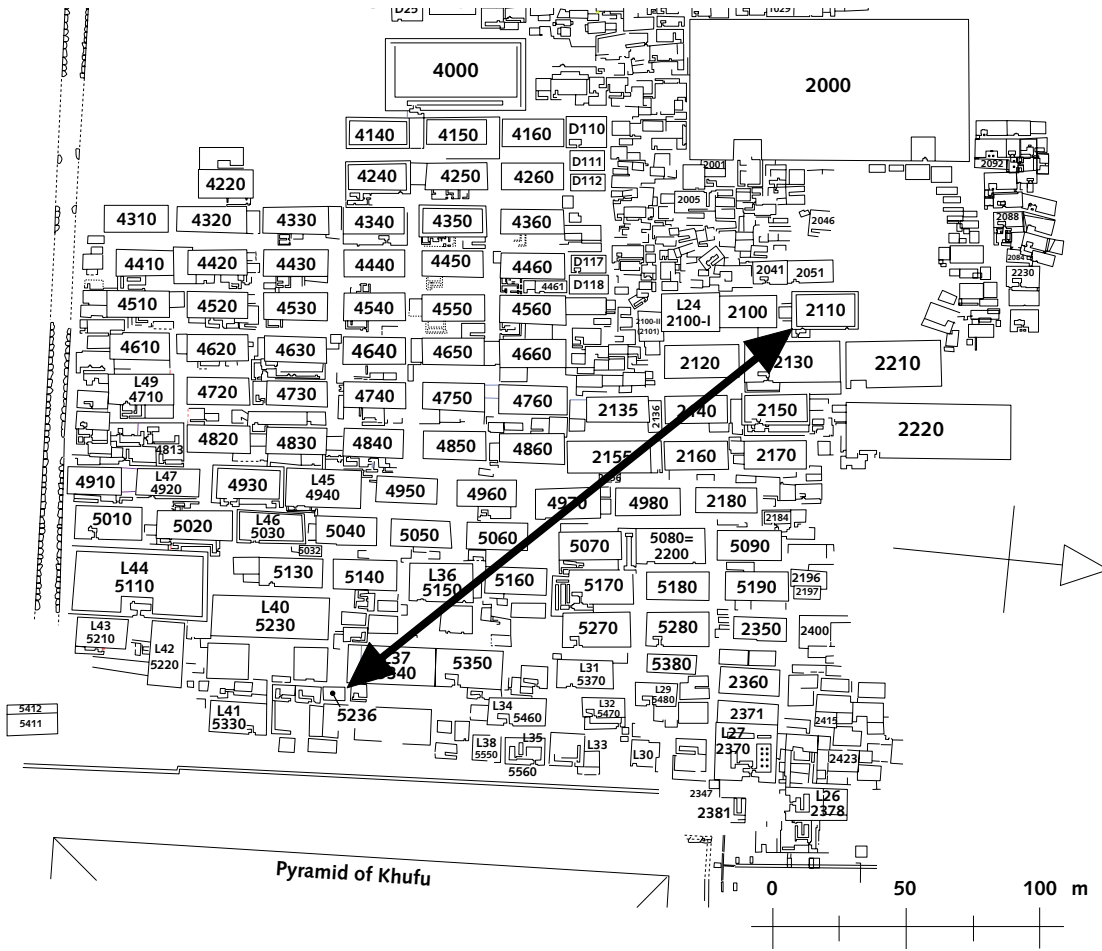


Fig. 11. Partial plan of the Western Cemetery, showing the relationship between tomb G 2110 (Nefer) in Cemetery 2100 and G 5236 (anonymous) in the Cemetery en Echelon.

derives from a previously unattested slab stela. It is a linen list fragment such as we might see towards the right-hand edge of a typical slab stela, such as that from the tomb of Ini (G 1235; fig. 10).

The tomb of Nefer probably dates in its final occupation phase to the reign of Khafre.<sup>15</sup> But the core mastaba construction clearly belongs to the original, Khufu-era layout of major mastabas that make up nucleus Cemetery 2100. A slab stela fragment would be contemporary with a Khufu-era mastaba core. It would make far less sense deriving from a Dynasty 5 multi-shafted mastaba in the post-Khufu Cemetery en Echelon, which is what G 5236 must surely be (see the plan in fig. 11). We cannot exclude, of course, the possibility of a disturbed or intrusive context for the fragment, but otherwise all signs seem to point to Nefer's tomb as its original provenance.

Although fragment 38-2-3 preserves little more than two hieroglyphs, it very clearly derives from the linen list of a slab stela. The right-hand edge delineates the end of the stone, so we can

15 G 2110 is scheduled for publication in the Giza Mastabas Series.

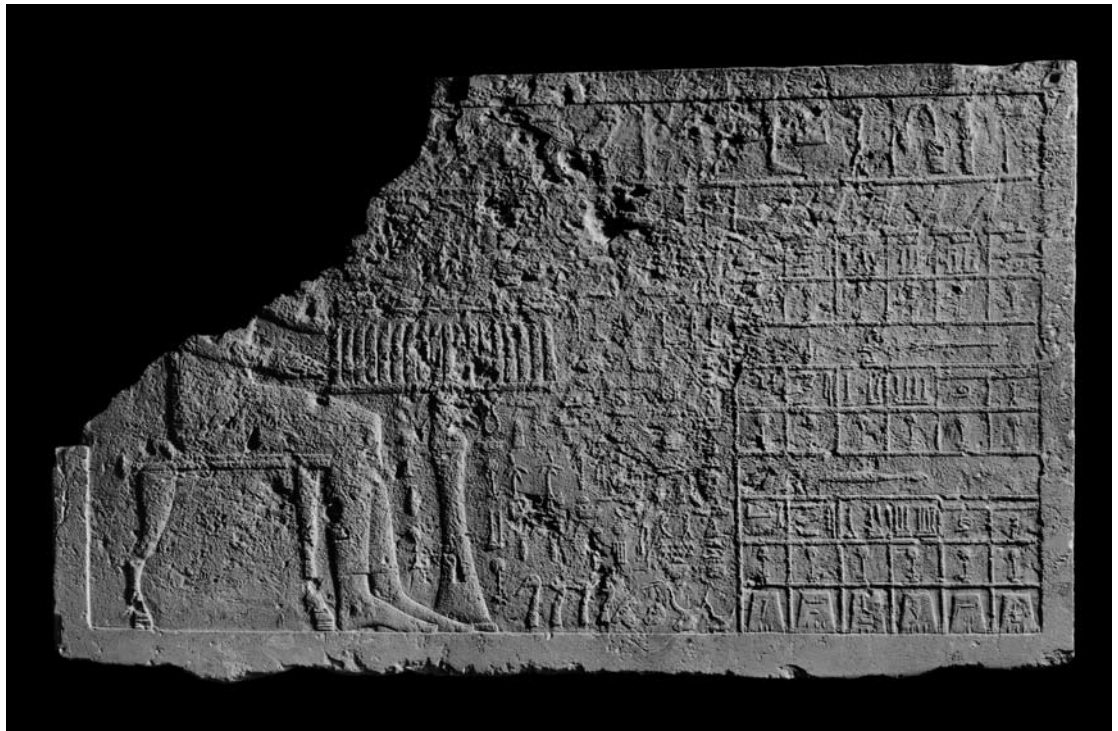


Fig. 12. Slab stela from G 486o. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. ÄS 8549. Photograph courtesy Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna III 26.117.

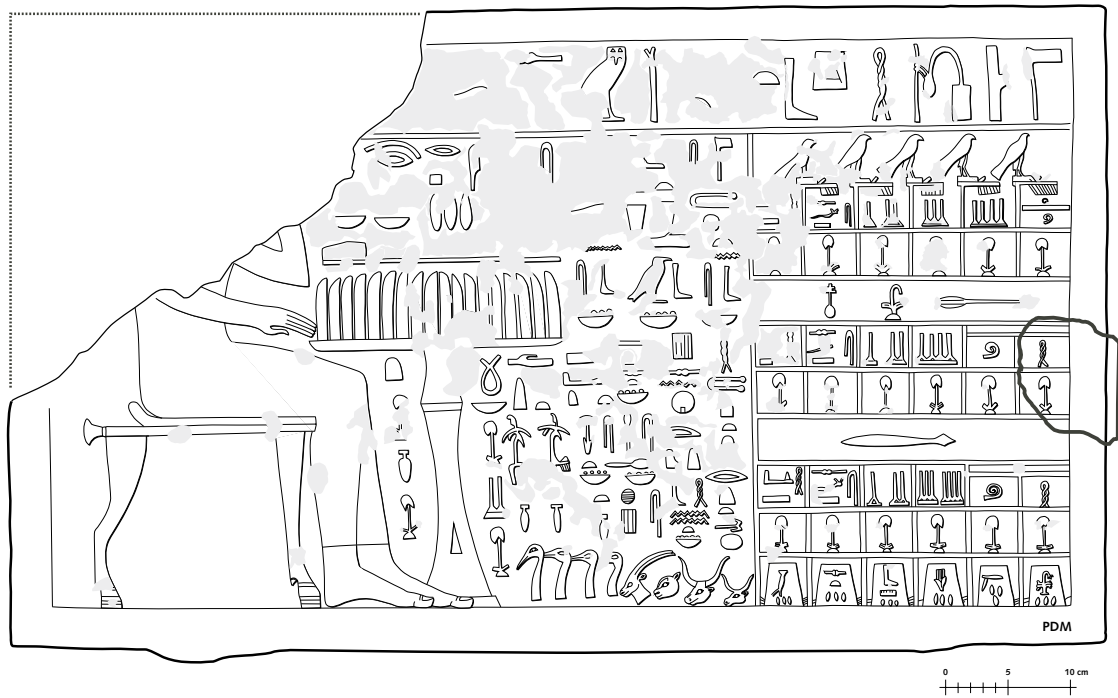


Fig. 13. Drawing of the slab stela from G 486o (Vienna, Inv. ÄS 8549), showing the hypothetical location—at the right edge—for a linen list fragment such as 38–2–3.

safely eliminate its derivation from the tablet of a false door.<sup>16</sup> A series of horizontal compartments separates the signs. Above is a  $\text{h}$  sign, denoting a type of linen width, and below is the plant  $\text{h}_3$  (1,000). The phrase to be reconstructed refers to a type of linen (either *idmy*, *ssr*, *šmṯ-nfrt*, or  $\text{h}$  linen) in “a thousand of width *h*.”<sup>17</sup>

The best parallel for the linen list layout of fragment 38–2–3 among the preserved slab stelae from the Giza Necropolis derives from G 4860, and is now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (ÄS 8549).<sup>18</sup> This stela shows several anomalies, such as a linen list facing right instead of left, and has been dated as a result to “post-Dynasty 4” (see figs. 12–13).<sup>19</sup> Our fragment shows no anomalies, and does not preserve enough to warrant any such post-Khufu era date, but merely shows the same arrangement of *h* over  $\text{h}_3$  at the right-hand edge of the slab, with some similar additional horizontal divisions towards the top. We might reconstruct our fragment within a hypothetical slab stela, using the stela from G 4860 as a model. Fig. 13 shows the relative position of fragment 38–2–3 within the larger slab stela composition.

If our interpretation of the admittedly scant evidence described above is correct, then we have our first confirmation that Nefer’s tomb, mastaba G 2110, possessed a slab stela prior to the completion of its exterior casing and the addition of its exterior limestone chapel. Slab stelae thus trump false doors, as a major pillar of Haeny’s “false doors first” argument falls away. It is possible that the original slab stela actually belonged to Nefer himself, owner of the decorated chapel, and of the reserve head found in at the bottom of shaft A of G 2110.<sup>20</sup> However, it is equally possible that our fragment derives from a slab stela belonging to a prior owner of G 2110 under Khufu. Perhaps Nefer later replaced this individual and in the process expanded and occupied the structure in Khafre’s reign. Whichever solution holds to be true, we have one more slab stela to add to our corpus, and another piece of the puzzle towards understanding the evolutionary history of table scenes, false doors, and slab stelae during some of the most important reigns of the Old Kingdom.

16 For an example of a linen list added to a false door tablet, see the south false door from the chapel of Merib (G 2100–1) which, like the tomb of Nefer (G 2110), is scheduled for publication in the Giza Mastabas Series; cf. Lepsius, *Denkmaeler* II, pl. 19; K.-H. Priese, *Die Opferkammer des Merib* (Berlin, 1984), front cover.

17 This word is written *ht* on the Helwan stela from tomb 247; cf. Z. Saad, *Ceiling Stelae in Second Dynasty Tombs from the Excavations at Helwan*, ASAE Supplément, Cahier 21 (Cairo, 1957), pl. 30; J. Kahl, N. Kloth, and U. Zimmermann, *Die Inschriften der 3. Dynastie* (Wiesbaden, 1995), p. 175 (d); however, it never appears with a *.t* on any of the Giza slab stelae. The value is most likely more than 100 or 200, but less than 1,000; cf. Posener-Kriéger, “Les mesures des étoffes à l’ancien empire,” *RdE* 29 (1977), pp. 93–94. For additional examples, see Manuelian, *Slab Stelae*, p. 158, fig. 238.

18 Manuelian, *Slab Stelae*, pp. 108–11, pls. 29–30; PM 3<sup>2</sup>, p. 141; Junker, *Giza* 1, p. 245, fig. 59, pp. 242–46, pl. 8a; R. Hözl, *Reliefs und Inschriftensteine des Alten Reiches* II, CAA Vienna 21 (Mainz am Rhein, 2000), pp. 144–49; E. Schott, “Friedhofsbräuche in Giza,” in F. Junge, ed., *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens (Fs. W. Westendorf)*, vol. 2: Religion (Göttingen, 1984), p. 1130, fig. 2a; J. Vandier, *Manuel d’Archéologie Égyptienne* 1 (Paris, 1952), p. 759, fig. 502 (drawing). For a similar arrangement of the *h* and  $\text{h}_3$  signs at the right edge of the linen list from a false door, see the tablet from G 4260 = II: Junker, *Giza* 1, p. 186, fig. 36 (missing left-hand extension) and pl. 29a (Dynasty 4).

19 Manuelian, *Slab Stelae*, pp. 111, 166–67.

20 For Nefer’s reserve head, MFA o6.1886 see PM 3<sup>2</sup>, p. 74 (with bibliography); Reisner, *Giza Necropolis* 1, p. 425 (note the height of the head should be corrected to read 0.272 cm), pl. 34b–f (34b is printed upside down); R. Tefnin, *Art et Magie au temps des Pyramides. L’énigme des têtes dites “de remplacement”* (Brussels, 1991), pp. 99–100, pls. 3a–d, 4a–b