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*The Tomb of J^c-M³t in Saqqara
and Its Date*

In the autumn of 2008, the Egyptian mission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) directed by Zahi Hawass begun a systematic excavation in an area, south west of the Step Pyramid of Djoser, and northeast of the Pyramid of Unas. The site of the excavation is a part of the area known as Gisir el-Mudir, which attracted scholars' attention since the 1990s.¹ In fact, the discovery of the tomb of Qar in 2001 by the Egyptian mission² as well as the results of the Polish mission endorsed the decision to begin the excavation in the site.³ The results of the first archaeological season 2008–2009 proved that the site has a vast cemetery of middle class officials related to the first half of the Sixth Dynasty.⁴ The site chosen for the excavation is located on a hill that was covered with wind-blown sand. On the surface a mixture of *tafla* and limestone could be seen (**Figs 1–2**).

THE TOMB OF IA-MAAT

One of the tombs discovered by the Egyptian mission is that of Ia-Maat, which was uncovered during the archaeological season 2009. It is located in the southwestern side of the cemetery at a distance of *c.* 410m from the Pyramid of Djoser (**Fig. 1**). It was covered completely with windblown sand. The tomb was left semi-finished; only the lintel on the façade of the cult chapel as well as its south and west walls are decorated with reliefs.

The false door (west wall)

The west wall of the cult chapel of Ia-Maat is entirely occupied by a monolithic false door of white limestone (**Fig. 3**) that is 1.55m high and 1.00m wide. The false door consists of a relatively narrow recessed panel which constitutes the actual doorway topped with a semi-cylindrical molding representing the reed mat generally used to close a real door. The recessed panel and the molding are set inside a rectangular frame consisting of two door-jambs and a lintel, topped by a rectangular panel depicting the tomb owner sitting on a low back chair with lion-shaped legs in front of an offering table loaded with bread. The tomb owner is facing right (north), and reaching the bread with his left hand. Above him an abbreviated offering formula is inscribed. An architrave and two jambs frame the rectangular panel. All components were set inside an outer frame. The inscriptions on each of the three sets of jambs are almost identical, and each vertical line ends with a standing

* I dedicate this article to professor Karol Myśliwiec in appreciation of his great efforts and helpful notes that he gave me during my master thesis. This article is in essence part my master.

¹ I. MATHIESON *et al.*, The National Museums of Scotland Saqqara Survey Project 1993–1995, *JEA* 83, 1997, pp. 17–33; see also I. MATHIESON, E. BETTLES, J. DITTMER, C. READER, The National Museums of Scotland Saqqara Survey Project, *Earth Sciences* 1990–1998, *JEA* 85, 1999, pp. 21–43.

² Z. HAWASS, The Tomb of Qar at Saqqara, *in preparation*.

³ K. MYŚLIWIEC, K. KURASZKIEWICZ, D. CZERWIK, T. RZEUSKA, M. KACZMAREK, A. KOWALSKA, M. RADOWSKA, Z. GODZIEJEWSKI, The tomb of Merefnebef, *Saqqara I*, Warsaw 2004; K. MYŚLIWIEC and K. KURASZKIEWICZ, with contributions by M. RADOWSKA, T.I. RZEUSKA, M. KACZMAREK, I. KOZIERADZKA, Z. GODZIEJEWSKI, S. IKRAM and A. ZATORSKA, The Funerary Complex of Nyankhneferem, *Saqqara IV*, Varsovie 2010.

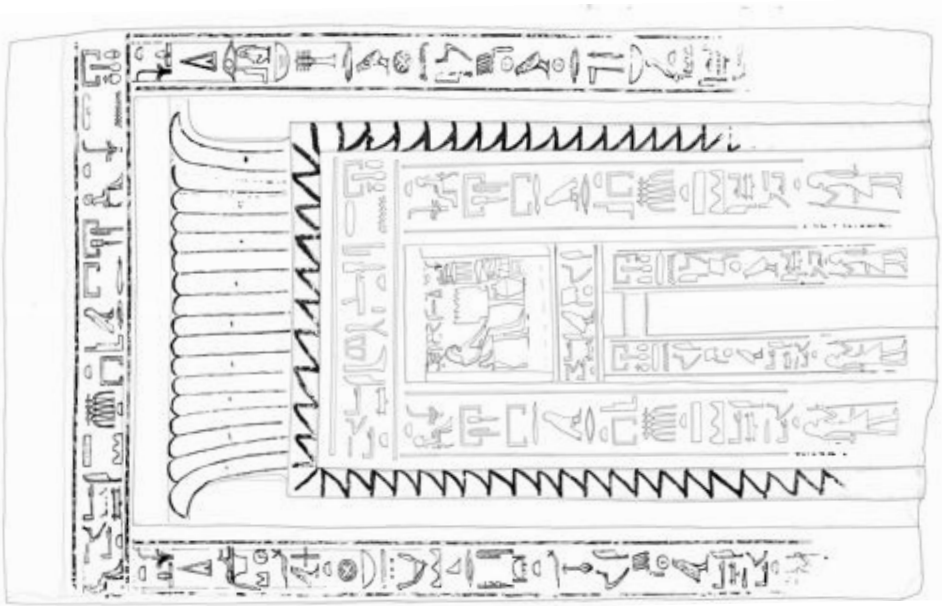
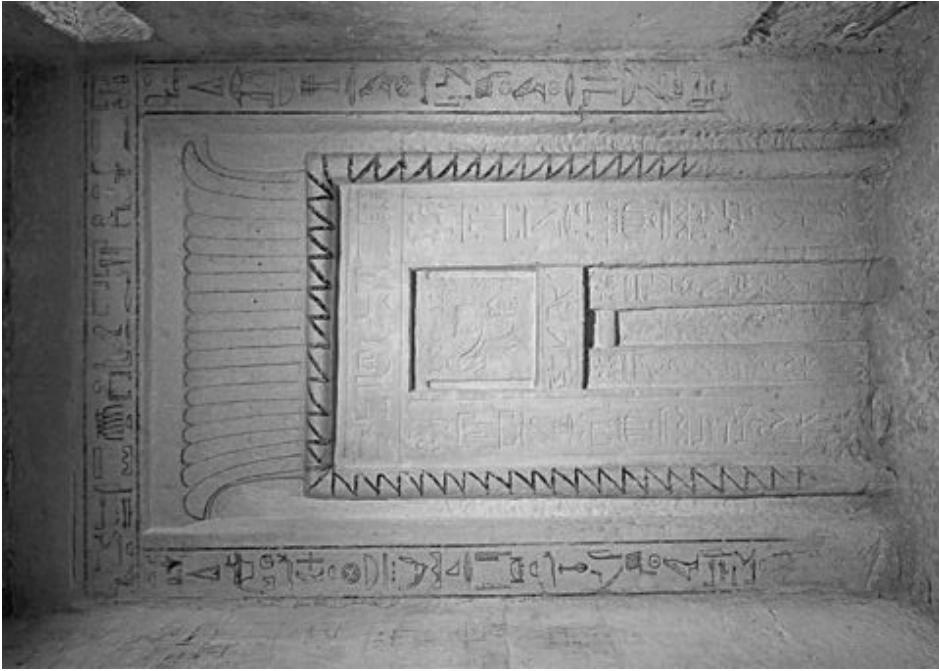
⁴ Z. HAWASS, The Cemetery of Gisir El Mudir at Saqqara, *in preparation*.



1. Location of the tomb of Ia-Maat (Photo's credit: Zahi Hawass Photo Archive).



2. Supreme Council of Antiquities excavation of the tomb (Photo's credit: Zahi Hawass Photo Archive).



3. The false door of Iah-Maat. Gisir el-Mudir necropolis (Drawing and photo's credit: Zahi Hawass Photo Archive).

figure of the tomb owner holding a walking stick and a scepter in his hands. The false door is placed on a stone platform, its shape conforms to the later Old Kingdom false doors form with the cavetto cornice and torus molding which, developed from the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty to the end of the Sixth Dynasty.⁵

The Inscriptions on the False door:

1) 

pṛt-ḥrw t ḥnkt p3t n špsj njswt smr pr jmj-r3 jst ḥntj(w)-š pr-ḫ J^c-M3^t

Invocation offering (consisting of) bread, beer and cake for the noble of the king, companion of the house, assistant overseer of the palace attendants, Ia-Maat.

2) 


ḥtp dj njswt Wsjr nb ḏdw n jm3ḥw ḥr ntr-ḫ nb jmnt J^c-M3^t

An offering which the king gives (and) Osiris, of Busiris, to the revered one before the great god, lord of the west,⁶ Ia-Maat.

3) 

ḥtp dj njswt Jnpw tpj ḏw:f jmj-wt nb t3 ḏsr krs.tw:f nfr jm3ḥw J^c-M3^t

An offering which the king gives (and) Anubis, who is upon his mountain, who is in the embalming tent, lord of the Necropolis, that he may be buried well, the revered one, Ia-Maat.

4) 

pṛt-ḥrw t ḥnkt p3t n smr w^ctj ḥrj-ḥ3bt J^c-M3^t

Invocation offering (consisting of) bread, beer and cake to the sole companion the lector-priest, Ia-Maat.

⁵ N. STRUDWICK, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom. The Highest Titles and their Holders*, London-Boston-Henley-Melbourne 1985 [= *Administration*], pp. 9ff.; S. WIEBACH, *Die ägyptische Scheintür. Morphologische Studien zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Hauptkultstelle in den Privat-Gräbern des alten Reiches*, Hamburg 1981, pp. 133–135.

⁶ D. JONES, *Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles. Epithets and phrases of the Old Kingdom I*, *BAR IS* 866 (I), Oxford 2000, p. 31 No. 145.

In such system, the event of a king's ascension to the throne of Egypt is considered *the* defining moment in history to which *all* dated events are linked in a time referential. In other words, the events that occurred during the reign of a certain king were linked in time with the moment of his ascension and identified by year, day, month and season of the reigning king. The system of preferentiality to multiple defining moments (i.e. kings' ascensions to the throne) resulted in the absence of continuous dates for historical events and individuals' achievements.⁷

Striving to identify criteria for dating tombs and documents, Egyptologists have adopted different approaches to the pictorial and textual records in hand. Principal among these records are the Old Kingdom biographical inscriptions on tomb walls.⁸ They traditionally contain references to kings, and could be analyzed in order to establish the date of the tomb.

However, it is always advised against a heavy reliance on the mere mention of a king's name in the tomb inscriptions, particularly in the case of priests or administrators employed at royal funerary establishments. The king's name in such case is misleading as these funerary establishments were functioning even after the death of their kings, and younger generations of administrators and priests were employed in order to maintain the cult of these already dead kings.

In this regard, K. Baer⁹ and N. Kanawati¹⁰ have made significant strides in reconstructing the skeleton of Egypt's administrative system, depending in most part on the administrative titles recorded on the different architectural elements of the tomb and integrated in the 'auto-biographical' texts. Their monumental works were supplemented by N. Strudwick's careful analysis of the same records, in addition to tracing the evolution of the false door in these tombs, not only as an architectural element, but also as a medium of transcription for administrative titles.¹¹ Moreover, the importance of the false door as an architectural element that carries dating criteria was further underlined by E. Brovarski. He analyzed the scene of the deceased and the offering table that customarily appears on the panel or tablet of the false door.¹² He identified several components of that scene that are indicators of certain periods. N. Cherpion also focused on the development of certain scenes and attire.¹³

Adopting the same apparatus of scene analysis, Y. Harpur carefully studied the decorative program of wall relief in the Old Kingdom mastabas.¹⁴ She paid considerable attention to the distribution of scenes on the walls of the different chambers and galleries of the

⁷ I. SHAW (Ed.), *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford-New York 2000, pp. 64–65.

⁸ Cf. N. STRUDWICK, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, Atlanta 2005, *passim*.

⁹ K. BAER, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties*, Chicago 1960.

¹⁰ N. KANAWATI, *The Egyptian administration in the Old Kingdom: evidence on its economic decline*, Warminster 1977.

¹¹ Cf. STRUDWICK, *Administration*, *passim*.

¹² E. BROVARSKI, *False doors and 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, pp. 71–118.

¹³ N. CHERPION, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire. Le problème de la datation*, Bruxelles 1989.

¹⁴ Y. HARPUR, *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom. Studies in orientation and scene content*, London-New York 1987.

mastabas, and highlighted a number of dating criteria as to the development of the decorative program of the wall relief. The thoroughness of her study made it indeed invaluable to the process of dating Old Kingdom tombs. In addition, scenes of the private tombs were subject to art analysis by E. Russman and E. Brovarski.¹⁵ They theorize that the end of the Old Kingdom, particularly from the reign of King Pepy I on, is marked by major stylistic changes in the execution of human figures, both in two dimensional and three dimensional sculptures. E. Russman identified characteristics of the late Sixth Dynasty reliefs, referring to the artistic style of that period as the ‘Second Style of Art’ of the Old Kingdom.¹⁶ In a lengthy article, E. Brovarski expounded on Russman’s analysis, and identified more characteristics of the ‘Second Style of Art’.¹⁷

Moreover, H.G. Fischer relied on the paleographical evolution of the hieroglyphic signs as well as the orthographical changes of proper names commonly used in formulae in order to date the corpus of the First Intermediate Period epigraphical materials from Dendera.¹⁸ Fischer, later joined by E. Brovarski, focused the paleographical and orthographical analyses on the offering formula.

The tomb of Ia-Maat lies in a very close proximity to the Pyramid of King Unas in the Cemetery known as Gisir el-Mudir (**Fig. 1**). This cemetery includes several types of tombs. Some tombs are built on the traditional mastaba form without courts or interior chapels, while others are designed with a court sunken into the ground. Such court is accessible through rock-cut steps (**Fig. 4**). The latter type of tombs has rock-cut chapels as well, and burial shafts behind the false door.

This cemetery seems that have been founded in the early years of the Sixth Dynasty. Inscriptions in many of the Gisir el-Mudir tombs were subject to alterations. So far, we know about one case in which a tomb was reassigned to a female singer after it was taken away from its original owner. The offering formula and the titles of the new tomb owner were applied on a thin layer of red plaster right on top of the old inscription that was cut into the rock. Also, evidence of *Damnatio memoriae* is found in that cemetery. In a recently discovered tomb, the name of King Unas has faced acts of erasure, where it was partially removed from the architrave inscription. Ironically, the inscription mentions that Unas commissioned the cutting of a sarcophagus of Tura fine white limestone as well as its transportation to the tomb on a large barge.

Indeed, these acts of reassignment of tombs and alteration of tomb inscriptions have been already met with in the cemetery of the ‘royal guards’ located around the causeway of Unas’s pyramid. N. Kanawati postulates that the reassignment of the tombs of the ‘royal

¹⁵ E. BROVARSKI, A Second Style in Egyptian Relief of the Old Kingdom, [*in:*] S.E. Thompson, P. Der Manuelian (Eds), *Egypt and Beyond, Essays Presented to L.H. Lesko, upon his Retirement from the Wilbour Chair of Egyptology at Brown University* June 2005, Charlestown, Mass. 2008, pp. 69–91.

¹⁶ E. RUSSMAN, A Second Style in Egyptian Art of the Old Kingdom, *MDAIK* 51, 1995, pp. 269–279.

¹⁷ See also K. MYŚLIWIEC, A Contribution to the Second Style in Old Kingdom Art, [*in:*] S.H. D’Auria (Ed.), *Servant of Mut, Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini, PdÄ* 28, Leiden-Boston 2008, pp. 170–178.

¹⁸ H.G. FISCHER, *Dendera in the Third Millennium B.C.*, Locust Valley-New York 1968.



4. Staircase leading to the chapel of Ia-Maat. Gisir el-Mudir necropolis: a) view from the north, b) view from the east (Photos' credit: Zahi Hawass Photo Archive).



5. Ia-Maat himself, as portrayed on his tomb's wall (Photo credit: Zahi Hawass Photo Archive).

guards' is an indication of their evolvment in a conspiracy against the king.¹⁹ This calls to attention the political unrest at the early years of the Sixth Dynasty. From that period, indications are that King Userkare, the second king of the Sixth Dynasty, was assassinated. We also learn from the autobiography of Weni of what could be a 'harem conspiracy' in the court of King Pepy I.²⁰

In this regard, it should be noted that the full name of Ia-Maat includes the element Unas, reading Ia-Maat-n-Unas. It is only mentioned on the wooden coffin, and appears nowhere else in the tomb. In fact, the concealment of the name of Unas in the tomb of Ia-Maat is another incident of deliberate attack on the memory of King Unas. Chronologically speaking, the concealment of Unas's name signals to the early years of the Sixth Dynasty as a possible date for the tomb of Ia-Maat.

Like the tomb of Qar at Giza,²¹ the architectural layout of Ia-Maat's tomb conforms to the type of tombs that consist of a rock-cut chapel and a forecourt reachable through rock-cut steps (**Fig. 4**). Such design is very well known from the time of King Pepy I and continued to the end of the Sixth Dynasty.

Although, the tomb of Ia-Maat is not fully decorated, its wall reliefs conform to the canonical program of tomb decoration set at the time of King Pepy I and continued well

¹⁹ N. KANAWATI, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace. Unis to Pepi I*, London 2003.

²⁰ *Urk.* I, 98–109.

²¹ W.K. SIMPSON, *The Mastabas of Qar and Idu G7101 and G7102, Giza Mastabas 2*, Boston 1976.

into the time of Pepy II. Significant among the elements of such program is the multiple representation of the deceased standing in full regalia holding a sceptre (**Fig. 5**). Such scene traditionally occupies the architrave of the chapel. In the tomb of Ia-Maat, we see that scene decorating the architrave of Ia-Maat's chapel.

Stylistically, characteristics of the 'Second Style of Old Kingdom Art', which appeared at the end of the reign of King Pepy I, are present in the figures of Ia-Maat represented on the architrave. Ia-Maat's figures show slender and long arms, without muscle rendition. Legs lack muscle rendition as well. Shoulders are wide and waist is narrow. However, several other characteristics of the 'Second Style of Art' are absent, like the pushed up waist and disproportionate head on a wide shoulder. Figures of Ia-Maat might have been executed according to artistic tradition that preceded the prevalence of the 'Second Style of Art'.

On the long wall of the chapel, a long offering list, categorically known as Type A List by W. Barta,²² is inscribed. It is however unfinished. Such types of lists appeared from the Fifth Dynasty and became less common toward the end of the Sixth Dynasty. This means that the tomb of Ia-Maat should be placed right in the end of King Pepy I reign and the early years of King Pepy II. This date could be corroborated by the type of false door of Ia-Maat.

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²² W. BARTA, Die altägyptische Opferliste: von der Frühzeit bis zur griechisch-römischen Epoche, *MÄS* 3, Berlin 1963.