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Inscriptional Layout in Continuous Texts of the Old Kingdom

JULIE STAUDER-PORCHET*

ABSTRACT

This article discusses features of inscriptional layout in continuous texts of the Old Kingdom. Inscriptions appear to be visual compositions as much as compositions of words. Through layout, salient articulations or expressions in a text can be foregrounded, the structure of a text can be mirrored visually, and core meanings of a text can be projected on the inscribed surface. In some cases, the complexity of layout makes it likely that the texts were composed directly with a view to how they would appear visually on the inscribed surface. The subtlety of some forms of layout, as well as cases of inscriptions revolving around central axes, raise further questions about how inscriptions were experienced in ancient times.

Keywords: layout, inscriptions, Old Kingdom, epigraphy, visual rhetoric.

RÉSUMÉ

On considère la manière dont des inscriptions consistant en textes continus sont ordonnées visuellement à l'Ancien Empire. Les inscriptions apparaissent ainsi comme des compositions autant visuelles que textuelles. Des articulations ou expressions saillantes d'un texte sont mises en avant, des aspects de sa structure poétique reflétés, et les significations fondamentales d'un texte projetées visuellement sur la surface inscrite. Dans certains cas, la complexité des

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phénomènes observés suggère que les textes ont pu être composés directement en vue de leur inscription. La subtilité de certains arrangements, ainsi que des cas de disposition autour d'un axe central virtuel, soulèvent d'autres questions portant sur la manière dont les inscriptions peuvent avoir été vues par les acteurs anciens.

Mots-clés: disposition épigraphique, inscription lapidaire, Ancien Empire, rhétorique visuelle.



AS MATERIAL and visual artifacts located in a particular space, lapidary inscriptions have a complexity as objects far in excess of the verbal text inscribed on them. The present study addresses one specific dimension in which lapidary inscriptions exceed the verbal text that they carry: layout. Inscriptional layout can convey meaning beyond that of the inscribed words. It can contribute to structuring an inscription as a whole or it can mirror its structure. Inscriptional layout, moreover, can bring about a visual rhetoric complementary to the linguistic rhetoric of the text.¹

I discuss relevant features of inscriptional layout in continuous texts in primary inscriptional genres. By continuous texts, I mean texts that display cohesion, integration, and hierarchies between clauses.² (Under this definition, the difference between non-continuous and continuous texts is one of degree: an additively patterned sequence of sentences, as for instance in Netjerikhet's Heliopolis shrine, does not qualify as fully continuous.) The discussion below refers to non-continuous texts only inasmuch as they provide a historical background for some of the practices of layout observed in continuous texts. By primary inscriptional genres, I mean those genres that originated historically, and are functionally contextualized, in the lapidary domain itself.³ In the Old Kingdom, these include, for instance, texts about the rightful construction and ritual integrity of the tomb, ritual self-characterizations of the speaker, the ideal autobiography, or the event autobiography. (By contrast, Pyramid Texts, when inscribed in the sealed interior apartments of pyramids, are secondary monumentalizations, and thereby re-entextualizations, of ritual-performative texts that had been transmitted archivally.) I therefore exclude legal texts presented in inscriptional form and royal decrees, for which the relation to underlying documents is complex. For the same reason, I do not discuss tabular format, which has a major background in non-continuous texts and/or documentary genres. I limit myself to observing that tabular format can occasionally be adapted to other

¹ The present study was realized within the frame of the project “Monumental Discourse in 3rd Millennium Egypt” (Université de Genève & Fonds national suisse, SNSF Professorship PP00P1_163767). I am grateful to John Baines for revising the English of the present text, and Andréas Stauder for a first step in the process. My thanks go further to the participants of the workshop “Lithic texts: Egyptian and Mayan Worlds of Inscriptions” (Université de Genève, May 13th–15th 2019) for discussion, as well as to Christelle Alvarez and Yegor Grebnev for inviting me to take part in the workshop “Transposition and monumentality of writing in pre-modern epigraphic and manuscript traditions” (Centre for Manuscript and Text Cultures, Queens College, University of Oxford, July 25th–26th 2019) and for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

² On the emergence of continuous texts in Egypt in the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE, see STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 9–33.

³ STAUDER, STAUDER-PORCHET 2020.

genres,⁴ and that one of its minimal constituent elements, the split column, is not uncommon in primary inscriptional genres (illustrations are given below). Nor do I discuss features of orientation in general as these have already merited received substantial treatments.⁵

I begin with preliminary observations of general characteristics of inscriptions (section 1). I then study the importance of columns/lines as basic units in structuring the layout of texts, including continuous ones, and the significance not uncommonly associated with column/line breaks (section 2). I proceed to consider inscriptions as wholes (section 3), and how layout can mirror the structure of the inscribed text (section 4) and support, or even add to, the signification of entire inscriptions (section 5). In addition to purely formal aspects, I attempt to provide a sense of how layout contributes to the meaning and visual rhetoric of inscriptional texts beyond the associated linguistic text.⁶

I. BACKGROUND

Architectural space invites bilateral arrangements. Reflecting their ritual and/or display functions, inscriptions often frame passages on the jambs of false-door stela, on the thicknesses of doorways, or on the right and left sides of facades. Ideal autobiographies can be duplicated symmetrically, bearing witness to the fundamentally ritual nature of the genre: for instance, on Neferseshemre-Sheshi's monumental false-door stela (Teti)⁷ or on the two sides of the passage leading into Werkhui's funerary chapel (Izezi).⁸ As a matter of display, the letter of king Izezi to his vizier Shespsesre (Izezi)⁹ is inscribed twice in a similar type of placement. More often, the right and left sides are complementary in nature. Ankhkhufu's false-door stela ((early?) Fifth Dynasty)¹⁰ bears a text that references, reflexively, the making of that same stela. The right and left jambs begin with the same word, "make", and respond to each other: "(R.1)His Person has made (*jrj*) this (= the stela) owing to..." "(L.1)Made (*jrj*) in the presence of the king himself at the opening of the porticoed hall..." On Niankhsekhmet's monumental false-door stela (Sahure),¹¹ a speech by the owner is inscribed on the left jamb and echoed by a speech by the king on the right jamb. The two speeches are thus set in correspondence while being kept physically separate, the king being on the more prestigious

⁴ One example is the inscription of Nebkauhor-Idu/Akhthetep-Hemi (Unis or early Sixth Dynasty, HASSAN 1975: I, pp. 38–41, pl. 26; GOEDICKE 1970, pp. 94–99, pl. 10; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 214–215) which displays a complex mixing of genres. Another example is Henqu of Deir el-Gebrawi (late Old Kingdom / early First Intermediate Period, KANAWATI 2005, pp. 71–73, pl. 29–30, 56, 66–67; GRUNERT 2008; LICHTHEIM 1988, pp. 23–24; STRUDWICK 2005, pp. 366–368), an autobiography that is highly innovative on textual accounts as well.

⁵ The classic study is FISCHER 1977.

⁶ In references to bilaterally organized the inscriptions mentioned or discussed here, "R.#" stands for columns (or lines) on the right side, "L.#" for columns (or lines) on the left side.

⁷ KANAWATI, ABDER-RAZIQ 1998, pp. 24–25, 31–36, pl. 3, 6, 18, 44, 58; Urk. I, 198.9–199.8; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 173–174.

⁸ HASSAN 1944, pp. 240–242, fig. 101a-b; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 110–111.

⁹ QUIBELL 1909, pp. 79–82, pl. 61; EICHLER 1991, p. 150, fig. 3; Urk. I, 179.12–180.10; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 144–145.

¹⁰ REISNER 1942, pp. 504–505, pl. 65b; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017 p. 39.

¹¹ BORCHARDT 1964, pp. 69–173, pl. 39; Urk. I, 38.7–40.3; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 58–60.

side.¹² On Pepiankh-Heryib of Meir's facade (Pepi II),¹³ the inscription on the left side begins in a way that directly echoes the beginning of the overall inscription, on the right side: "(R.1) I spent a lifetime of up to 100 years among the living *imakh* being in full possession of my life-force..." echoed in "(L.1) I spent the whole lifetime that I spent as an official, as a seal-bearer until my end..." In an inscription that is monumental and displayed as such on the facade, the two columns (L.1 and R.1) face each other across the doorway, framing the passage that the visitor is invited to go through to enter the funerary chapel and perform ritual actions on behalf of Pepiankh-Heryib.

Primary inscriptional genres often consist of speeches. For instance, threat formulae, ritual self-characterizations, or ideal or event autobiographies, are spoken by the tomb owner, who is made present in his chapel by the repeated inscription of his expanded name and image. The spoken nature of the inscribed text is occasionally underscored visually. On some facades, figures of the tomb owner have their hand stretched forward in a pose of spoken address.¹⁴ In some cases, the tomb owner's hand reaches into the very text that he speaks, breaching the divide between the otherwise separate domains of text and pictorial representation, for instance on Sankhuptah-Nihetepptah's façade (fig. 1).¹⁵ There, the visual depiction of speech being performed goes still further: the horizontal line *nj-htp-ptḥ dd=f...* "Nihetepptah says:..." is written in retrograde so as to align with the flow of speech coming out of Nihetepptah's mouth. An altogether different representation of speech is possibly to be seen in the boustrophedon layout of the two-line ideal autobiography inscribed on the architrave atop the entrance to Idu's funerary chapel (Pepi I – early Pepi II).¹⁶ Boustrophedon is exceptional in the Old Kingdom that could here be an experimental strategy to foreground the ritual-performative speech of the ideal autobiography as an uninterrupted flow.¹⁷

Hieroglyphic writing is also a mode of visual communication. In inscriptions, writing itself can be displayed, pointing to the amount of material and aesthetic investment that has gone into their creation. The iconicity of many signs makes it possible to communicate significations even to beholders who are not proficient in reading hieroglyphs (see 5, below, for an example) or to enhance those significations for all viewers. On rare occasions, individual hieroglyphic signs are enlarged relative to the other signs in the same inscription ("de-calibrated"), emphasizing their iconic dimension.¹⁸ The outsized jackals in the entrance passages of the funerary chapels of Khufukhaf and Meresankh III (Fourth Dynasty)¹⁹ are writing, for the name *jnpw* "Anubis" in the offering formula, but they are also images of the god, meeting the incoming visitor and conjuring up his presence much more strongly than a regular-sized sign would do.²⁰ (Another important dimension here is that pictorial images of gods were limited to the king's monuments in the Old Kingdom: neither Khufukhaf nor Meresankh III was a king, but both were royals,

12 BAINES 1999, pp. 22–24; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 58–62, 68–71.

13 KANAWATI 2012, pp. 32–36, pl. 75–76; Urk. I, 221.18–224.18; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 302–304.

14 HARPUR 1987, pp. 129–130.

15 KANAWATI, ABDER-RAZIQ 1998, pl. 64.

16 MUNRO 1989; SIMPSON 1976, pp. 20–21, fig. 33, pl. 19; Urk. I, 204.2–10; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 197–198.

17 This exceptional layout might also have been perceived as a token of distinction for the official in a context of competitive emulation among peers (for this general principle in the Old Kingdom, see VAN WALSEM 2013–2014).

18 On de-calibration in hieroglyphic writing, see VERNUS 2020, p. 25.

19 SIMPSON 1978, pl. 15a-b; DUNHAM, SIMPSON 1974, pl. 3c-d; see already BAINES 2004, p. 34.

20 On divine indwelling in images and in hieroglyphic writing, see PRIES 2016.

and in their funerary chapels, in a necropolis associated with the king's tomb, and of a god could have been exceptionally possible, but only insofar as an ambiguity was maintained between written sign and image.) A different case is seen in the oversized boat signs in the inscription on the facade of the Merib's funerary chapel (late Fourth/early Fifth Dynasty).²¹ The signs are an integral part of Merib's titulary, contributing to writing his titles as a *hṯmw-nṯr* N "god's seal-bearer of boat N (= name of boat)." Through de-calibration, the iconic dimension of the signs is foregrounded, visually communicating a part of Merib's official identity.²²

2. SELF-CONTAINED COLUMNS/LINES AND COLUMN/LINE BREAKS

Columns/lines often form basic units of layout, even in continuous texts. Such practices probably had a background in the inscription of non-continuous genres, with which I begin. The additive patterning of the offering formula is often reflected in layout, with each instance of *hṯp-dj-nsw...* being fitted to a column/line (or pair columns on some false-door stela). Through honorific anteposition, the sign for *nsw* "king" is inscribed at the beginning of that column/line, while the name of the official comes at the end of it. In each column/line, a visual relation is thus established between the word *nsw* and the official's name. Fittingly, the former occupies the initial position and the two are spatially separate (e.g., on the architraves of Qar of Edfu, ll. 1–2,²³ or of Harkhuf, ll. 1–3, 8²⁴):

(beginning) <i>nsw...</i>	...NAME (end)
(beginning) <i>nsw...</i>	...NAME (end)
(beginning) <i>nsw...</i>	...NAME (end)

In titularies, the official's name is set either only once at the end of the overall sequence of titles, or repeatedly at the end of each column/line. In the latter case, the titulary falls into units that correspond to self-contained columns/lines. Owing to the honorific anteposition in titles of the type "the king's..." or "king N's...", *nsw* "king," or a king's name, often opens columns/lines. This can result in a visual patterning similar to that just described for the offering formula. For instance, on the columns flanking the doorway on the facade of Sankhuptah's funerary chapel (Teti), the short titulary begins with *hṯm-nṯr dd-swt-ttj* "overseer of priests of Stable-are-the-Places-is-Teti (= Teti's pyramid)." Through double honorific anteposition, the column opens with the royal name and closes with that of the official:

(top) <i>ttj...</i>	... <i>s'nhw-ptḥ</i> (bottom)
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²¹ ZORN, BISPING-ISERMANN 2011; PRIESE 1984.

²² Centuries earlier, on Merka's stela (Qa'a, late First Dynasty), the official's most important ranking and ritual titles, *jrj-p't sm* "member of the elite and *sem*-priest," are inscribed in larger-scaled hieroglyphs (BAINES 1999, p. 26 and fig. 1). Rather than de-calibration proper, foregrounding the visual dimensions of the signs, this is a matter of hierarchy, communicating that these titles, just before the name, and the name itself, are the most important part of the inscription.

²³ EL-KHADRAGY 2002, pp. 205–211, pl. 4–6; Urk. I, 253.10–255.11; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 294–297.

²⁴ For the inscriptions of Harkhuf, see below, §5.

The inscriptions on the right and left inner walls of Metjen's funerary chapel (early Fourth Dynasty)²⁵ presents features of textual integration (such as dependent clauses and semantic coherence) that, however, remain embedded in a higher-order additive texture. The inscription is laid out in self-contained columns that reflect this texture, to the point that some columns are crammed with signs. Shepsesptah's inscription (Niuserre)²⁶ also presents an additive format, in his case considerably more complex in text and in layout. At a time when the practice of inscribing continuous text was substantially more developed, this additive format represents a deliberate choice. The main text is inscribed on a monumental "palace" facade, in itself a token of high prestige. It consists of eight self-contained columns, framed vertically and separated spatially from one another. Each column describes an event or general situation that sets Shepsesptah in relation to a different king named at the top of the column (lost in columns 5-8). These eight columns are set symmetrically, four on each side, around a central part consisting of five symmetrically arranged smaller columns (2-1-2) bearing Shepsesptah's titles. The temporal sequence implied by the named kings in the larger columns, from right to left, is thereby accommodated with the overall architectural symmetry of the monument. All thirteen columns, both the smaller inner ones and the larger outer ones, end with Shepsesptah's name. The iteration of the official's name at the bottom of each column binds the smaller inner and larger outer columns together. In accord with decorum, the royal name is in a high position in the larger columns. The general principle is similar to that seen in some titularies: ROYAL NAME... OFFICIAL'S NAME. Reinforcing what the text says, a tight association of Shepsesptah with one of the successive kings is thus celebrated visually in each of the larger columns.²⁷

Continuous texts can be laid out so that their structure fits into self-contained columns or lines. Seshemnefer IV's ideal autobiography (early Sixth Dynasty)²⁸ consists of two elements: the opening sequence and a developing comment on what it means to "have said Maat." The opening sequence is fitted into one column, the comment into the second:

- (1) I have come from my town, gone out of my district, been buried in this tomb only after I had said Maat, which the god loves, every day.
- (2) It belongs to what is perfect: I used to speak with the king so that it would be beneficial to men. Never did I say anything bad against anyone to the Person of my lord.

²⁵ STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 20–26; ZORN, BISPING-ISERMANN 2011, pp. 30–61; GÖDECKEN 1976, pp. 1–45; GOEDICKE 1966, Urk. I, 1–7.6

²⁶ QUIBELL 1909, pp. 79–82, pl. 61; EICHLER 1991, p. 150, fig. 3; Urk. I, 179.12–180.10; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 85–87.

²⁷ Largely modelled on Shepsesptah's, Sabu-Ibebi's later inscription (Teti, BORCHARDT 1964, pp. 31–34, pl. 65; Urk. I, 82.3–84.6; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 241–243) similarly consists of self-contained, although not spatially separate, columns. At a time when the event autobiography had developed, Sabu-Ibebi chose instead to emulate the inscription of Shepsesptah, one of his predecessors in the function of high-priest of Ptah.

²⁸ JUNKER 1953, 214–216, fig. 83; Urk. I, 57.11–16; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, p. 170.

Architraves can be laid in self-contained lines that combine various textual units. On Hezi's architrave (Teti),²⁹ an ideal autobiography is fitted to line 4, which is thus self-contained:

(4) The *imakh* with the West [Hezi] says: I have come out of my town... ..as much as was in my power. (4, end)

On Mehu's architrave (Teti),³⁰ an ideal autobiography is followed by a statement about the protagonist's reputation during his lifetime. While the former is fitted to lines 7–8, the latter is fitted to line 9:

(7) I have come out of my town...

(8) only after I had buried the one without a son...

(9) This is what used to be said by people as I passed by them: 'Behold, he is an *imakh* loved by the god', thus their voices. (9, end)

On Mehu's architrave,³¹ three offering formulae, fitted to lines 1–3, are followed by an appeal to the living fitted to line 4, a ritual self-characterization of the speaker fitted to line 5, a statement about the construction of the tomb beginning with line 6, and a closing statement of the benefit accruing to whoever pronounces an invocation offering for Mehi on line 7.

Beyond self-contained columns/lines, column/line breaks can correspond to significant structural articulations within a continuous text. Ankhmeryremeryptah-Nekhhebu's inscription (Pepi I) is unique in the Old Kingdom in that it begins as a regular event autobiography, then transitions to an ideal autobiography.³² The turning-point is fitted precisely at the top of a column (L.4). Later, the autobiography of Pepiankh-Heryib of Meir (Pepi II) belongs to a group that mingle elements of the once distinct event and ideal autobiographies. Ideal-autobiographical inserts begin new columns (R.3; R.6).³³

Inscriptions can be laid out so that salient elements are at the top of a column. For instance, in the continuous text inscribed in five columns on the left thickness leading into Hezi's funerary chapel, the threat (col. 2), a ritual self-characterization (col. 3), and, finally, the word "invocation-offering" (col. 5) are all at the top of their respective columns:

(L.1) He says: As to anyone who will enter this tomb...

(L.2) *I will be judged* with him in the assembly of the Great God...

(L.3) *I know all effective rituals* by which an akh-spirit becomes efficient by... ..so that

(L.5) *invocation offering may be performed for me* in it (= the tomb)...

29 For Hezi, see below, §5.

30 ALTENMÜLLER 1998, pp. 31, 87–88, fig. 1; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 195–196.

31 EDEL 1994; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 212–213.

32 DUNHAM 1938; Urk. I, 215.9–221.10; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 250–255.

33 KANAWATI 2012, pp. 32–36, pl. 75–76; Urk. I, 221.18–224.18; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 302–307.

In event autobiographies, expressions of the speaker's action for the king are often fitted to the top of columns. Thus, in the inscription of Ankhmeryremeryptah-Nekhbeu mentioned above:

- (R.4) *jw [...].n(.j)...*
 (R.6) *n-ꜥꜣt-nt jkr(.j)...*
 (R.7) *jw [š]ꜣd.n(.j)...*
 (R.8) *m nbt(.j) r jrt...*
 (R.9) *šꜣd.n(.j)...*

- (R.4) I [...] -ed...
 (R.6) on account of my excellence...
 (R.7) I [d]ug...
 (R.8) in my success in doing...
 (R.9) I dug..."

Other salient elements can be underscored similarly through layout. Punning on his own name (*ppy-nbt-hkꜣ-ib*),³⁴ Pepinakht-Heqaib I (early Pepi II)³⁵ describes himself as one “filling” the king’s “heart.” The expanded epithet begins with col. 6, the last on the right side of the facade, and continues on col. 7, the first on the left side. The expression of Pepiankh-Heqaib I’s relation to the king thus bridges the doorway through which the visitor is to enter:

- ... *m nbtw-jb mh nb(.j)*
 ///—(doorway)—///
 (7) *jb.fjm(.j) m wpt nbt hꜣbt.n.fw(j) jm.s*
- ...as one who is strong-hearted, *my lord filling*
 ///—(doorway)—///
 (7) *his heart with me* in every mission he had sent me in.

In Sabni son of Mekhu’s autobiography (mid-Pepi II),³⁶ a major focus is how the speaker has brought back the corpse of his father, who had died on a mission abroad. The name of the father, Mekhu, occurs twice, both times at the top of a column:

- (2) *mhw...* (9) *mhw...*

Qar of Edfu’s autobiography (Merenre), inscribed in lines 3–7 of the architrave above the entrance to his funerary chapel, focuses on his diligence in performing all manner of managerial tasks in Upper Egypt for the king. The text includes two expressions of the speaker’s diligence, both fitted to the beginning of the line: “... (4) for I was diligent and eminent on His Person’s

³⁴ STRUDWICK 2005, p. 376, n. II.

³⁵ EDEL 2008: II, pp. 682–686, fig. 1–3, pl. 33–34; URK. I, 132.16–135.7; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 259–261.

³⁶ EDEL 2008, pp. 48–63, fig. 32–33; SEYFRIED 2005; URK. I, 135.17–140.11; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 274–279.

heart”; ... ⁽⁵⁾ for I was watchful, for my direction of the affairs of the Residence was effective.” The second expression, synthesizing what the inscription is all about, is fitted to the beginning of line 5, the central line of the autobiographical inscription (ll. 3–7):

- (3) ...
 (4) *n jkr(.j) špss(.j) hr jb hm<.f>*
 (5) *n rs-tp(.j) n mnḥ hrp(.j) ht n hnw*
 (6) ...
 (7) ...

3. LOOKING AT INSCRIPTIONS AS WHOLE

In the remainder of this article, I consider inscriptions as wholes. I begin with two inscriptions of the later Fifth Dynasty, the first spoken by the official, the second spoken to the official by the king.

On the facade of his funerary chapel, Hetepherakhti (Niuserre or slightly later; fig. 2) tells about the rightful construction of his tomb.³⁷ The words he speaks are inscribed in eight full-height columns, four on each side of the doorway (R.1–4, L.1–4). Further to the left and right on each side is a standing figure of Hetepherakhti accompanied by his much smaller son; this standing figure is surmounted by six columns of titulary on the left side (L.5–10; the equivalent blank space of the right side was probably meant to be inscribed similarly). In this overall symmetrical layout, the words about the rightful construction of the tomb frame the doorway that the ritually acting visitor is to pass in order to enter the funerary chapel. The connection between the standing figure of Hetepherakhti and the words spoken is established on several levels:

- Through position, the titulary with name (L.5–10) is associated with the standing figure below it as a caption. Through adjacency and signs of the same general sizes, the titulary with name is also related to the inscribed speech nearer to the entrance (L.1–4 on the left side), so that the standing figure and the spoken words are themselves related to one another.
- On either side of the doorway, the words spoken are introduced by the usual framing expression “TITLE-NAME says...” On both sides, *dd.f...* is aligned vertically with the face of the standing figure of Hetepherakhti, who looks in the direction of the words he speaks.
- The slanting staff of authority held by Hetepherakhti intrudes upon the bottom of the last column of speech on each side (R.4, L.4), with the inscriptions accordingly shortened slightly in comparison with the inner columns (R.1–3, L.1–3). By a kind of metalepsis that is not uncommon in the Old Kingdom (as well as in later times), the otherwise distinct fields of image (the standing Hetepherakhti) and inscribed text (the words he speaks) thereby literally touch one another.

³⁷ Photograph of the facade: HOLWERDA, BOESER, HOLWERDA 1905, pl. 5, reproduced in VAN WALSEM 2020, p. 118, fig. 1; text: STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 78–79.

After the initial framing expression “TITLE-NAME says,” Hetepherakhti’s speech on each side of the doorway opens with *jr.n(=j) jz pw...* “I have made this tomb...” The inscription is laid out so that the first word at the top of columns R.2 and R.3 is precisely *jz*:

	... <i>m st w'bt n wnt</i>
(R.2, top) <i>jz jm n rmt nb...</i>	<i>jr z nb 'k.tj.sn jr</i>
(R.3, top) <i>jz pw m 'bw.sn...</i>	
	...in a pure place in which there was no
(R.2) <i>tomb there</i> of anyone....	Regarding anyone who will enter
(R.3) <i>this tomb</i> being impure...	

The last full column on both sides ends with a statement of being granted *imakh*-hood by the king. On the left, the last word is *nsw*: ...*jnk jmꜣhw hr nsw* (L.4, bottom) “...I am an *imakh* with the king.” On the right, the last column, which additionally expresses the king’s benefactions, is self-contained: (R.4, top) *jn ntr 'ꜣ jr n(j) jz pw m-šwt imꜣb(j) hr nsw jn n(j) krs* (R.4, bottom) “It is the great god (= the king) who has made this tomb for me owing to my state of *imakh* with the king who brought a coffin to me.” On both sides, the block of four full columns is thereby spanned by a virtual diagonal leading from Hetepherakhti’s titled name (R/L.1, top) to the king (R/L.4, bottom). Layout underscores what the inscription is all about: “this tomb,” and that this is a royal benefaction.

A similar account of an official’s having constructed his tomb in a new place, from a century later, occurs in Pepiankh-Heryib of Meir’s autobiography (Pepi II). In this, the name of the newly inaugurated sector of the necropolis is placed at the top of a column: ...*m jmnt m w'rt* (R.8, top) *nbt-mꜣ't m bw w'b m bw nfr n-ꜣs jr.t(j) jm* “...in the West in the sector of (R.8) *Nebetmaat*, in a pure place, in a good place, and not where there had been (prior) work.”³⁸ In two other inscriptions, the same topic of the inscription itself is duplicated at the tops of columns: the royal word and its becoming inscription in Werre (Neferirkare; see analysis below, 5) and the dead father’s name in Sabni son of Mekhu (Pepi: see above, 2). As the temporal distribution of these inscriptions demonstrates (mid-Fifth Dynasty for Werre and Hetepherakhti; Pepi II for Pepiankh-Heryib and Sabni son of Mekhu), these are general Old Kingdom principles of visual composition, not those of a single period.

Another type of inscribed speech is that of kings. In the entrance of Shepsesre’s funerary chapel, a royal letter by Izezi is inscribed twice, framing the passage. The letter adopts the layout of a royal decree, here with one line above twelve columns.³⁹ The text itself is a highly rhetorical instance of praise directed at the official.⁴⁰ In the first two columns (not reproduced below), the king, following the conventions of the genre, refers to a letter that the official has sent, and proceeds to eulogize him. These first two columns take up the full height of the inscription. The following columns (3–12) are shorter, being inscribed above a standing figure of Shepsesre accompanied by a smaller one of his son. They read:

³⁸ Moreover, that this inscription, like Hetepherakhti’s, culminates with the king, the last word of the right side being: ...*m-šw jmꜣb(j) hr nsw* (R.11, bottom) “...owing to my state of *imakh* with the king.”

³⁹ On the layout of royal decree, with reference to earlier texts, see also BAUD 2003 and 2005 (with analyses often different from those in STAUDER-PORCHET 2017). On the textual format of the royal decree, see VERNUS 2013.

⁴⁰ STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 135–147; EICHLER 1991.

- (3) *jw hm hm(.j) rh mrr.k dd ht nb mrrt hm(.j)*
 (4) *j špss-r^c jw(.j) dd(.j) hr.k hḥ n zp*
 ← (5) *m dd*
 ↓ (6) *mrrw n nbw^(sic).f⁽⁷⁾ ḥzzw n nb.f⁽⁸⁾ jmj-jb n nb.f⁽⁹⁾ ḥrj-sšṯ n nb.f*
 (10) *rh.n(.j) hm mrr w(j) r^c hr rdt.f n(.j) tw*
 (11) *ḥ nb jzzj dt dd.k sṛ.k nb n hm(.j) (12) r mdṯt.k hr-^c w m hrw pn d hm(.j) jr.t(j).f hr-^c*

(3) My Person knows indeed how much you like to say everything that My Person likes!

(4) O Shepsesre, I say you a million times,

← (5) in these words:

↓ (6) ‘The beloved one of his lord, (7) the praised one of his lord, (8) the favorite of his lord, (9) the overseer of secrets of his lord!’

(10) I have learnt indeed how much Re loves me on account of his giving you to me!

(11) As truly as Izezi lives forever, you must say all your requests to My Person (12) by a letter of yours straightaway on this day and My Person will have it done straightaway.

In the shorter outer columns (3–4; 10–12), all sentences are laid out so as to begin at the top of columns: the king’s pleasure with Shepsesre’s speech and his own address (3 and 4, with *dd* “tell” in each), and the king’s closing statement and pledge (10 and 11–12). In between these, one line (5) brackets the central words of eulogy that the king addresses to Shepsesre in the four central columns (6–9). In these, each phrase fits into one column, all ending in *...nb.f* “...his lord.”⁴¹ The final *...nb.f* is thus repeated four times, just above the empty space toward which Shepsesre faces and to which the beholder’s eye is immediately attracted.

The text of a royal letter such as that addressed to Shepsesre is likely to have been publicly performed on some ceremonial occasion at court. While the text would no doubt have been drafted on papyrus, the combination of text and image is specifically inscriptional. In the inscription, the king envelops the pictorial representation of Shepsesre with his eulogy, addressing him visually as much as verbally.

4. INSCRIPTIONAL LAYOUT MIRRORING THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERBAL TEXT

Old Kingdom inscriptions often have elaborate structures. In some inscriptions, layout is made to mirror elements of these structures. Insofar as the structure underscores the content, inscriptional layout can contribute to doing so as well. Neferseshemre-Sheshi’s ideal autobiography (Teti) is based on the common generative pattern of the genre, consisting of two parts: the opening sequence, which defines the speech situation and asserts that the speaker has “performed/spoken the Maat”; and an elaboration of what this means in generic types

⁴¹ Observed by Romane Betzeze, “Loyalty to the King on Private Tomb Facades: Between Individual Ostentation and Subordination to the Royal Authority,” paper read at the conference *King and Officials in the Old Kingdom, Separation and Interaction*, Université de Genève, May 13th–15th 2019.

of action. While the overall text is set in the accomplished, or completed, aspect, the end of the first part is marked by a clause with unaccomplished, or incompleted, aspect. The second part of the text also includes a clause with the latter tensing, splitting it in two roughly equal sections. The resulting three sections (I; II, II') are fitted precisely to the three columns on which the text is inscribed twice, once on each side of the false-door stela:

⁽¹⁾ *pr.n(.j) m njwt(.j) h3.n(.j) m sp3t(.j) jr.n(.j) m3' t n nb.s shtp.n(.j) sw m mrrt.f*
dd.n(.j) m3' jr.n(.j) m3' {t} dd.n(.j) nfr whm.n(.j) nfr
jt(.j) n tp-nfr mr(.j) nfr o jm n rmt

⁽²⁾ *wp.n(.j) snwj r htp.sn nhm.n(.j) m3r m-^c wsr r.f <m> shmt.n(.j) jm*
rd.n(.j) t3 n hkr hbs <n h3y>
zm3(.j) t3 m jw

⁽³⁾ *kr.s.n(.j) jw(j) z3.fjr.n(.j) mhnt n jw(j) mhnt.f*
snd.n(.j) jt(.j) jm3.n(.j) n mwt(.j) šd.n(.j) hrdu.sn
br.f nfr rn.f ššj

⁽¹⁾ I have come out from my town, down from my district,
 only after I had performed the Maat for her lord, satisfied him with what he loves,
 after I had spoken truthfully, acted truthfully, said what is good, repeated what is good,
acquiring goods as is right for I desired it to go well thereby for people:

⁽²⁾ I have judged two brothers (i.e., two parties) to their satisfaction, rescued the wretched
 one from the one more powerful than him <as much as> I had power over it;
 I have given bread to the hungry, clothes <to the naked>,
making the one who had no boat touch land.

⁽³⁾ I have buried the one without a son, made a ferry for the one without a ferry;
 I have respected my father, been gracious to my mother, raised their children
 —thus the voice of the one whose good name is Sheshi.

Dating to the same period and set up in the Teti pyramid cemetery as well, Hezi's event autobiography (Teti) also presents a tripartite form mirrored in the inscriptional layout, although an altogether different one. In the text, the longer and more complex outer parts (I and III) contrast with the shorter and much simpler central one (II).⁴² Moreover, two palindromic sequences link the outer parts I and III to one another, bridging the central part II from which they are absent. In the inscription, parts I and III correspond to columns 1–2 and 4–5, respectively, while the central part II corresponds exactly to the middle column 3. The three textual parts thus form self-contained units in layout. Both layout and textual form focus around the central column and part, in which Hezi states his core message with lapidary

42 STAUDER-PORCHET 2015.

simplicity: ^(3, top) jr.n(.j) zš hr hm=f m-h3t zšw jr.n(.j) sr hr hm=f m-h3t srw ^(3, bottom) “I acted as a scribe with His Person at the forefront of scribes; I have acted as an official with His Person at the forefront of officials.”

In part III, corresponding to cols. 4–5, the textual rhetoric is about Hezi’s having performed duties for the king and having been granted benefactions by the king, both being substantially in excess of his rank. This rhetorical trope of event autobiographies is expressed here in two contrastive comparisons. The relevant expressions—*mr m...* “as if...” and *m r3-^c mm...* “in the manner (done) among...”—are attested only in Hezi, speaking further to the strongly rhetorical character of the text. In the second contrastive comparison, *mm* is placed at the top of col. 5, with each owl-sign occupying one square in the column. In the first contrastive comparison, the signs corresponding to the key prepositions and grammatical words occupy the full breadth of the much wider col. 4. *Mr m* is written as one line within that column (note the vertical stroke separating *mr* and *m*, indicating that these are distinct words rather than *mr* with *m* as a phonetic complement). *Sk w(j)* and *m* are similarly written as one line each, resulting in considerable empty space around *m*. Through layout, the two terms of the contrastive comparison, *mr m* and *m*, are thus associated with each other. The verbal rhetoric of the text is emphasized visually:

...*mr m hrj-tp nsw*
sk w(j) m z3b ‘d-mr...
 ...*as if* a royal chamberlain,
even though I was but a territorial administrator... (col. 4)

...*m r3-^c (s) mm srw*
sk w(j) m z3b zhd zš...
 ...*in the manner (done) (s) among* officials,
even though I was but a judiciary inspector of scribes...

From two generations or so earlier, the event autobiography of Senedjemib-Inti A1 (Izezi; fig. 3)⁴³ is the earliest preserved example of the genre, of which it represents an archaic stage. The text is displayed in the portico of Senedjemib-Inti’s funerary chapel in Giza, directly next to three letters by king Izezi addressed to the same official, which are inscribed in a similar epigraphic module (inscriptions A2, B1, and B2). Like these letters, inscription A1 has the characteristic layout of a royal decree, with horizontal lines above columns. The horizontal lines here comprise Senedjemib-Inti’s extended titulary (ll. 1–5) before the date (l. 6), demonstrating an adaptation of the format of the royal decree to an official’s space for display. Along with the format of the royal decree, the spatial and epigraphic association with the royal letters is significant. Although set in the official’s first person, the inscription still speaks the voice of the king. The genre of the event autobiography is here seen emerging out of occasions of royal praise for the official, like those inscribed in the adjacent royal letters.⁴⁴

⁴³ BROVARSKI 2001, pp. 89–110; STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 145–148.

⁴⁴ STAUDER-PORCHET 2017, pp. 151–152, 157–165; 2020a, pp. 102–107.

The narrative part of the inscription, in six columns, falls into two sections: a generalized background narration of the king's recognition of the official's diligent action for him (cols. 1–2), followed by the main event, a singular occasion of royal largesse (cols. 3–6):

(col. 1) *sk w(j) špss.k(j) hr jzzj...*
...wn(j) jr(j) mr st-jb nt hm.f r.s

(3) *jw rd.n n(j) jzzj w3d šm'w jzn n hb(j) [...]....*
rd hm.f tz.t(j).fr hb(j) [...]
rd hm.f wrh.t(j)(j) m'nd...

(6) *n | špss / mnh / mr w(j) | hr jzzj r mrt(j)(j) nb*
 (6a) *jw jr.n n(j) [jzzj wd] zš hm.f ds.fm db'wj.fr hzt(j)*
 (6b) *hr h[t] nb jrt.n(j) [r špss] r nfr [r] mnh hft st-jb [n]t hm.f r.s*

(col. 1) As I was eminent with Izezi...
 ...I used to act according to His Person's desire about it.

(3) Izezi has given me a [neck]lace of Upper Egyptian malachite for my neck [...].
 His Person had⁴⁵ it tied to my neck [...]
 His Person had me anointed with *aned*-oil...

(6) for | I was eminent / diligent / beloved | with Izezi more than anyone like me.
 (6a) [Izezi] has made [a decree] for me, that His Person himself wrote with his (own) fingers to praise me
 (6a) on account of all thi[ngs] that I had done, [eminently], perfectly, diligent[ly] according to His Person's desire about these.

The layout of the inscription mirrors the structure of the text on multiple levels, underscoring its salient elements:

- The two sections of the text are fitted to the columns (cols. 1–2 and 3–6, respectively). Both sections end with a similar expression, which is accordingly placed in distant horizontal parallelism in the inscriptional field (...*mrl hft st-jb [n]t hm.f r.s*, bottom of cols. 2 and 6, respectively).
- Two actions of the king (referred to by name in col. 3, in lacuna in col. 6a) are presented as having lasting relevance (verbal construction *jw sdm.n=f*): the act of royal largesse and the command to have it inscribed. Both are fitted at the top of their (half-)columns (cols. 3 and 6a, respectively).⁴⁶ The second action, the royal command, and its expansion into a closing statement of the official's diligent action, are fitted precisely to half-columns (cols. 6a and 6b).

⁴⁵ The alternation of tenses reflects the Egyptian original; see the next footnote.

⁴⁶ The two other actions of the king (referred to as “His Person”) are set in a different verbal construction (past tense *sdm=f*) and provide a short narrative development of the main event, the king's largesse (STAUDER 2020a, pp. 229–230). Being within the narrative flow, these do not come at the top of columns.

- The two occurrences of ...*bb(j)*... “...my neck...” (on which the material token of the king’s largesse is placed and tied) are adjacent to one another in the central columns (cols. 3 and 4). This placing could be coincidental.
- The inscription culminates in an expression of the official’s eminence with the king. This is not the final part of the text (the royal command to turn it into an inscription follows), but the text is laid out in such a way that it is inscribed at the top of the last column (col. 6). The ternary rhetoric is marked visually by a characteristic split column (signalled in the presentation above by |.../.../...|).⁴⁷ This expression echoes, in distant parallelism, the opening generalized statement of the official’s eminence (at the top of col. 1), thereby framing the whole inscription.

5. THE INSCRIPTION AS A VISUAL COMPOSITION

Some inscriptions go even further in their visual organization. I present two remarkable examples: one, Werre, dating to a time before the event autobiography coalesced as a genre; the other, Harkhuf, with a complex mixing of genres on a facade, where the extensive hieroglyphic inscription is itself an object of display.

Werre’s inscription (Neferirkare; fig. 4),⁴⁸ deriving from the “principal serdab” in the official’s sprawling funerary complex in the Central field of Giza, centers around an occasion of royal speech in a ceremonial setting. The final part of the inscription (cols. 7–10) abounds in metatextual markers that describe reflexively how the words uttered by the king are commanded by the same king to be inscribed as the very inscription that we see. The inscription thus appears to be a royal gift to the official, and thereby in effect a royal inscription. Inserted into the space of Werre’s funerary chapel, it is a potent token of royal distinction for that official.

The text is inscribed on a monumental slab consisting of one horizontal line, beginning with the royal name, above ten columns of hieroglyphs, each ten centimeters wide. The inscription thus presents the layout of a royal decree (line(s) over columns), even though it is not one. The adaptation of the format is seen in the fact that the top line is an integral part of the narrative, presenting the general ritual setting of the event in a predicative sentence. What the layout as a royal decree points to is that, as just noted, this is in fact a royal inscription, speaking the king’s voice as whole.⁴⁹

In the text, the verbatim royal words occur twice. In each case, the key term —*wdꜣ* “be whole (i.e., live)” — is on top of the column. In the final part, the place where this royal speech is to be inscribed — “on/in his tomb” — is also repeated, both times at the top of a column. The layout thus underscores the most fundamental articulation of the text, linking the royal word uttered in a ceremonial context to its becoming the inscription that we see (*wdꜣ* → *hrl/m jz.fj*):

⁴⁷ Compare the similar split column in the culminating expression of Weni, Urk. I, 109.8–10.

⁴⁸ HASSAN 1932, pp. 18–19, fig. 13, pl. 18; STAUDER-PORCHET 2021; ALLEN 1992; BAUD 2005, p.112, fig. 6; BAUD 2003, p. 293, fig. 1; Urk. I, 232.

⁴⁹ STAUDER-PORCHET 2021.

dd hm.f r.f⁽⁴⁾ wd3.ti hrw hm.f
sk dd.n hm.f mry o n hm(.j)⁽⁵⁾ wd3.f wrt ny skr n.f sk...

wd hm.f wd.t(j) o m zš⁽⁷⁾ hr jz.f nt(j) m hrt-ntr...
...r zš hft dddt⁽¹⁰⁾ m jz.f nt(j) m hrt-ntr

His Person said about him: ⁽⁴⁾ “*Be whole!*”, thus His Person’s voice.


As His Person had said: “It pleases My Person ⁽⁵⁾ *that he be whole* without being stricken at” and as...

His Person decreed that it be put in writing ⁽⁷⁾ *on his tomb* that it is in the necropolis...
 ...in writing according to what had been said, ⁽¹⁰⁾ *in his tomb* that is the necropolis.

Right between the king’s word (cols. 4–5) and the king’s decree to turn that word into the inscription that we see (cols. 7–10), is an expression of Werre’s eminent status before the king. Beginning in column 5 and ending in column 6, this is wrapped around a virtual central axis of the 10-column inscription. Around this central axis, the king is fittingly at the top of one column, while Werre is at the bottom of the preceding one:

...sk sw špss
⁽⁶⁾ *hr hm.fr z nb...*
 ...and as he (= Werre) was eminent
⁽⁶⁾ with His Person more than anyone...

Harkhuf’s funerary chapel (early Pepi II), with its extensively inscribed facade (fig. 5), displays complex verbal and visual rhetorics.⁵⁰ The ritual texts inscribed on the architrave (fig. 6) consist of offering formulae (fitted to ll. 1–3 and 8) and an ideal autobiography (ll. 4–7). As elsewhere (see above, 2), each of the offering formulae begins in *nsu...* and ends in *hr-hw=f* (ll. 1–3, 8). In the intervening ideal autobiography, the lines all begin with Harkhuf, either through forms of the verb in the 1st person or as “the owner of this tomb...” (ll. 4–7). Both horizontally and vertically, the king and Harkhuf are thus linked to each other. A reference to the king’s praise is placed, uniquely in an ideal-autobiographical context, is placed in the line above the doorway (l. 4). The whole monument is thereby set under the scope of royal praise of Harkhuf.

An appeal to the living is embedded into the ideal autobiography (ll. 5–6). Introducing this appeal, the address to the visitor (l. 5) is placed at the middle of the line, above the passage leading into the funerary chapel, as is a second address introducing a threat formula (l. 6). In the first address, ‘*nhw* “the living,” is written in the longest possible way () , lending graphic emphasis to the address.

⁵⁰ Analysis: STAUDER-PORCHET 2020b and 2020c. The phrase “verbal and visual rhetorics” is in reference to “verbal and spatial rhetorics” discussed in RICHARDS 2010.

The inscription continues with the first part of the event autobiography spoken by Harkhuf (R.4–14). This is linked graphically to the preceding titulary by horizontal adjacencies across columns R.3 and R.4:

- In R.3, Harkhuf’s title *smr wʿtj hrj-ḥb* “sole companion, lector priest” is aligned horizontally with the same title borne by Harkhuf’s father Iri in R.4.
- Further up in R.3, *nb.f* “his lord” (as part of an epithet in Harkhuf’s titulary) is aligned horizontally to the first named occurrence of the king, “Merenre,” in R.4.

In the first part of the event autobiography (R.4–14), as in that of Ankhmeryremeryptah-Nekhebu (above, 2), most columns begin with expressions of Harkhuf’s action for the king, emphasizing his agency:

(R.5) *jw jr.n(.j) s(j)...* (R.6) *wʿ.k(j)...* (R.7) *jn.n(.j) jnw m ḥ3st tn...* (R.9) *wb3.n(.j) ḥ3swt (j)ptn...*
 (R.11) *pr.n(.j) m t3-wr...* (R.14) *shṭp.n(.j) sw...*

(R.5) I have accomplished it... (R.6) acting alone... (R.7) after I brought back produce... (R.9)
 after I opened these foreign lands... (R.11) I went out through Ta-wer... (R.14) I satisfied...

The lower part of R.6, running along Harkhuf’s staff of authority, reads: “...through Irtjet, specifically Mekher, Tereres, and Iertjetj, in a period of 8 months. I descended...” Even viewers not proficient in hieroglyphs could have noticed that these are toponyms together with an indication of duration: the former through the iconic and recurrent determinative of foreign lands, the latter through the numerical signs. Harkhuf’s staff directs the beholder’s eye to both. It also leads up to the shorter column R.8, from which point on the next six columns (R.8–13) end in toponyms, again easily identified by the iconic determinatives. Harkhuf’s face looks at the toponyms in R.8–10 are looked at by Harkhuf, while those in R.11–13 surround his head. For an expedition leader, this is a fitting “tableau de chasse”:

... *m jrṯt mḥr trrz jrṯt m ḥnt 3bd 8 ḥ3.n(.j)...* (6, along staff)
 ... *ḥk3 lz3tw/jrṯt* (8, end) H
 ... *pr r j3m* (9, end) A
 ... *m ḥmt-nw zp r j3m* (10, end) R
 ... *ḥk3 j3m* (11, end) KH
 ... *r ḥw(t) tmḥ* (12, end) U
 ... *r t3 tmḥ* (13, end) F

The last column of the right side, R.14, reads: “I satisfied him (= the ruler of Iam) in such ways that he would keep praising all the gods for the Sovereign.” This sentence exactly fills column R.14, as if forming a self-contained unit ((R.14, top) *shṭp.n(.j) sw...* ... *jtw* (R.14, bottom)). As in Hetepherakhti or Pepiankh-Heryib of Meir, the right side of the inscription ends with a word referring to the king. In those two inscriptions, the final mention of the king is related to a format that ends with a statement of *imakh*-hood by the king. In Harkhuf, this general format is developed in a different way, making the final mention of the king a culmination of the narrative itself (note also the unusual term, *jtw* “Sovereign”). The statement in R.14 echoes

the epithet “who places the dread of ^(R.3)[Horus in] the foreign lands,” discussed above. As noted, both are emphasized through layout. In echoing each other, they frame the right side of the facade as a whole.

The event autobiography continues on the left side of the facade, in lines (fig. 8). This switch from columns to lines, which has only partial parallels in the Old Kingdom, could reflect a variety of non-exclusive factors: possibly to save space, to cohere visually with the horizontality of the scene of ritual action underneath,⁵² and/or to set this final part of the event autobiography apart from the rest of the inscription. As regard the last possibility, it may be significant that the shift from columns on the right side to lines on the left side correlates with a different narrative texture. The right side gives a terse presentation of actions, characteristic of the genre of the Old Kingdom event autobiography, with significant elements being fitted to the top or bottom of the columns. The left side, by contrast, consists in a more broadly flowing narrative, including more substantial episodic developments, inscribed continuously in lines.

The royal letter carved on the outer right of the facade (fig. 9a) adopts the expected format of the royal decree, with two horizontal lines (1–2) above twenty-four columns (3–26). The letter proper consists of twenty-two columns (3–24), followed by a concluding note on the implementation of the royal order (25–26). In this letter, king Neferkare praises Harkhuf for having brought back a dwarf from Iam and declares this achievement to be superior even to that of another expedition leader, Werdjedeba, who had brought back a dwarf from another remote land, Punt, in the time of king Izezi, a century or so earlier. The parallelism between the two events is underscored through a dense web of interrelations in the inscription. The names of the ruling king, “the king of Upper Egypt Neferkare, may he live eternally,” the reference to “the epoch of Izezi,” and the name of Izezi’s own expedition leader, “the god’s seal-bearer Werdjedeba,” occur twice each. Five of these six occurrences are placed at the top or bottom of columns, in an arrangement that alternates for each, resulting in an overall chiasmic organization. Even non-literate viewers would have easily recognized the royal names as such through the cartouches. Furthermore, some people would have been able to identify the name of the ruling king, and therefore, by contrast, that another king was also evoked:

(6, top) *nsw-bjtj (nfr-k3-r^c) ‘nh dt...*

(8, top) *h₁tmw-n₁tr wr-ddd-b3...*

...m rk (jzzj) (8, lower part) ...

...nsw-bjtj (nfr-k3-r^c) ‘nh dt (17, bottom)

....h₁tmw-n₁tr wr-ddd-b3 (23, bottom)

(24, top) *m rk (jzzj)...*

Horizontal juxtapositions, often at the top or bottom of columns, contribute to reinforcing the parallelism between the present time and that of Izezi, as well as associating the dwarfs with the royal names (fig. 9b):

- At the top of cols. 6 and 7, the name of the ruling king is adjacent to the dwarf’s destined role (...j)b3w n₁tr “the god’s dances.”

⁵² John Baines, p.c., May 13th, 2019.

- Near the bottom of the same columns, *dng* “dwarf” (the one brought back by Harkhuf) is adjacent to *dng* (the one brought back by Werdjededba).
- At the top of cols. 16–17, *dng pn* “this dwarf” is adjacent to the dwarf’s role, *r jbꜣw-nꜥr* “for the god’s dances.”
- At the bottom of the same columns, *ꜥnh wꜣꜣ snb* “alive, whole, and in health” (in reference to the dwarf) is adjacent to the name of the ruling king.
- At the top of the two final columns of the letter proper, 23 and 24, the well-being of the dwarf brought back by Harkhuf is adjacent to Izezi’s name.

The layout in columns reflects the structure of the text, particularly in the final part (cols. 15–24):

- Introducing this, the royal order to Harkhuf forms a rhetorical highpoint in the letter, with a series of elements that go in threes. The object of the order, the dwarf, is fitted within col. 16, while the dwarf’s destination with the king is fitted within col. 17: *m(j) r.k m bꜣt r hꜣnw hr-ꜥw [h]ꜣꜥ jn n.k* ⁽¹⁶⁾ *dng pn m-ꜥ.k jn(.n).k m tꜣ ꜣhtjw ꜥnh wꜣꜣ snb* ⁽¹⁷⁾ *r jbꜣw nꜥr r shꜣmh jb r s[n]hꜣꜣꜣ jb n nsu-bjtj nꜥr-kꜣ-rꜥ ꜥnh dt* ^(17, bottom) “Come downstream to the Residence straightaway, [ab]andon (everything), and bring ⁽¹⁶⁾ this dwarf in your charge, whom you have brought back from the land of the Horizon-Dwellers, alive, whole, and healthy ⁽¹⁷⁾ for the god’s dances, for the distraction of the heart, and for the...² of the heart of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Neferkare, living eternally. ^(17, bottom)”
- The next section, specifying the action to be undertaken by Harkhuf, begins at the top of a column and ends at the bottom of another one: ⁽¹⁸⁾ *jr hꜣ.f m-ꜥ.k... ...s(j)p zp 10 n grh* ^(20, bottom) “When he descends under your charge... ...make inspections 10 times per night!”
- The final section, expressing how important this mission is to the king, is similarly fitted to the beginning and end of columns: ⁽²¹⁾ *mr hm(.j) mꜣꜣ dng pw... ...r mꜣꜣ dng pw* ^(24, bottom) “My Person desires to see this dwarf... ... more than this dwarf.”

In his letter, the king speaks of the reception by future generations of the benefactions that he pledges to make in favour of Harkhuf. The expression introducing this reception to come, *sdm.sn...* “as they (= people to come in future) hear...,” is at the top of col. 13. The king quotes in anticipation the words of generations to come. In these, the transition from the action that the king pledges to perform for Harkhuf to what motivates it, Harkhuf’s action for the king, corresponds to the break between cols. 13 and 14. The words of generations to come are inscribed in cols. 13–14 (with just one word hanging over into 15), corresponding to the exact middle of the letter proper, after the first ten columns (3–12) and before the next ten (15–24). These words of future generations marveling at the unique relation between the king and Harkhuf are thus inscribed in a symmetrically central position comparable to that of the words that the ritually addressed visitors are called upon to speak are inscribed on the architrave (see above):

	3–12	
⁽¹³⁾ <i>sdm.sn...</i>	13–14	reception to come
	15–24	

(...r dd rmꜥw nbw)

⁽¹³⁾ *sḏm.sn jrt n.k ḥm(.j)*

(j)n jw mr nfjry n smr wꜥtj ḥr-ḥw.f

⁽¹⁴⁾ *ḥ3.f m j3m ḥr rs-tp jr.[n.f] r jrt mrrt ḥzzt wdt ⁽¹⁵⁾ nb.f*

(...so that all people may say,)

⁽¹³⁾ *as they hear* what My Person will do for you:

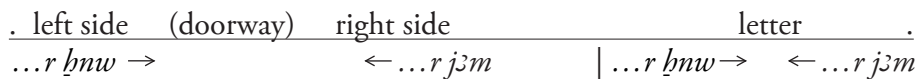
‘Is there anything like this that has been done for the sole companion Harkhuf

⁽¹⁴⁾ as he descended from Iam on account of the vigilance that [he has] exercised to accomplish what his lord desires, praises ⁽¹⁵⁾ and commands?’

Harkhuf’s facade as a whole is laid out in meaningful ways. The doorway—at once separating and connecting the right and left sides—corresponds to the point in the event autobiography where Harkhuf is farthest away in the south. The right, or northern, side of the facade emphasizes motion ...r j3m “...to Iam” (R.4, R.10) while the left, or southern, side of the facade emphasizes motion ...r ḥnw “...to the Residence” (L.6, L.8). This pattern of centripetal motion observed in the event autobiography is thus replicated in the royal letter on the outer right: from Iam in the first part of the letter on the right, back to the Residence in the final part on the left. Motion to Iam (...r j3m) is motion in a mission sent by the king, who resides in the north. Motion to the Residence (...r ḥnw) is motion back from Iam, in the south:

south (Iam)

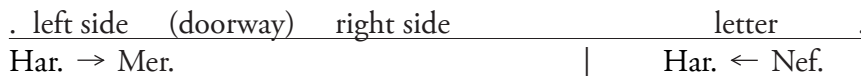
north (Residence)



Inscribed in lines on the left, or southern, side of the facade, the second part of the event autobiography is introduced by a reference to a letter sent by Harkhuf to the king, Merenre, from the place that is farthest away from both Elephantine and the Residence (L.1–2). This reference to Harkhuf’s letter to Merenre is echoed by another letter, inscribed verbatim on the outer right of the facade, the letter sent by Merenre’s successor, Neferkare, from a place that is far to the north, the Residence. The complementary pattern of motions implied by the two letters is thereby inscribed on the facade itself:

south (Iam)

north (Residence)



The facade thus provides an expression of the reciprocity of agency that links Harkhuf, “who brings the produce of all foreign lands for his lord” (expanded titulary, R.2), that is, from the far south, to the king, who “commands” and “praises” (e.g., in the letter, 10–11, 14–15) as well as writes, from the far north. Through layout, the facade as a whole becomes a diagrammatic projection of the physical and ideological geography inscribed on it.

CONCLUSION

The last two examples I discussed, Werre and Harkhuf's facade, are maximally complex, with layout projecting the core contents of the inscription over its entire space. These are exceptional cases. Both, as it turns out, speak the king's voice: Werre is a royal inscription made to be inserted within the official's funerary chapel as a token of the king's largesse. Harkhuf includes a royal letter on a monument that more generally inaugurates and inserts royal agency in the previously uninscribed, far southern locale of Qubbet el-Hawa.⁵³ Without reaching the same heights, other inscriptions also attest to great care in their layout. It may therefore be time to attempt a more general characterization of this phenomenon, as well as posing some of the broader questions it raises.

As noted initially, an inscription is not reducible to the text it bears, owing to its nature as a material artifact in a particular place. As illustrated in this article, one dimension by which the inscriptional text exceeds its verbal text is layout. General features of inscriptional layout reflect the facts that inscriptions exist in architectural or natural space and often frame passages, that hieroglyphic texts are often set in relation to images, and that inscribed texts often contain speech. Beyond these, particular attention to how the text is laid out in column or lines can be observed. Possibly reflecting a background in non-continuous genres (such as titularies or offering formulae), columns/lines can form self-contained units in continuous texts as well. Beyond these, column breaks/line breaks can be made to correspond to salient junctures or expressions in a text. Important expressions can be repeated or associated with one another through direct horizontal or vertical juxtaposition, or made to echo one another horizontally or vertically over a longer distance. Going still further, some inscriptions are organized around central elements (Hezi, Werre, Harkhuf's architrave, Neferkare's letter to Harkhuf). While this disposition may find a partial pendant in concentric textual forms,⁵⁴ it probably owes more to the fact that an inscription is a visual artifact in two-dimensional space. In all these cases, the one-dimensional sequence of the continuous text is laid out in the two-dimensional space of the inscription in ways that are often significant. Inscriptions thereby appear to be visual compositions as much as compositions of words.

The features of inscriptional layout presented above are by and large specific to lapidary texts. This finding raises the question of how the texts were drafted practically, an issue that cannot be pursued here. Here, the sometimes considerable complexity and subtlety of layout must be reiterated, because it suggests that for the inscriptions with the most complex layout the verbal text (the sequence of words) did not have an existence independent of its projected material realization. Put more straightforwardly, some of the texts were probably composed directly with a view to how they would exist visually on, or as, an inscribed surface.

By no means all the features described above can be observed immediately, and some reveal themselves only upon repeated inspection. In addition to dimensions such as the material presence of inscriptions, inscriptional layout in continuous text thus raises questions about how

⁵³ For these dimensions, STAUDER-PORCHET 2020C; MORENZ 2013.

⁵⁴ Examples of concentric forms in the Old Kingdom: STAUDER-PORCHET 2015 (Hezi); KAMMERZELL 2000 (Cannibal Hymn, PT 273-274); MATHIEU 2020 (Pyramid Texts in general); in the Middle Kingdom: STAUDER 2020b (Teaching of Sehetepibre).

people engaged with inscriptions. Ones whose layout is structured around a central element or axis emphasize their nature, not as a one-dimensional text, but as a two-dimensional inscribed field. They appeal to a holistic viewing, and perhaps to the body of the viewer, more than to a sequential reading. Yet the paradox is that these central elements or axes reveal themselves only once the continuous text is read. Or were inscriptions perhaps engaged with in altogether different ways in ancient times? Many other features of inscriptional layout take time to reveal themselves to the viewer—at least to the modern viewer trained in privileging the sequence of words in a text. Could these features of inscriptional layout in continuous texts of the Old Kingdom have been more immediately apparent to the differently trained eye of their original audiences? Thus, inscriptional layout raises some basic questions about how inscriptions were seen, read, and more generally experienced in ancient times.

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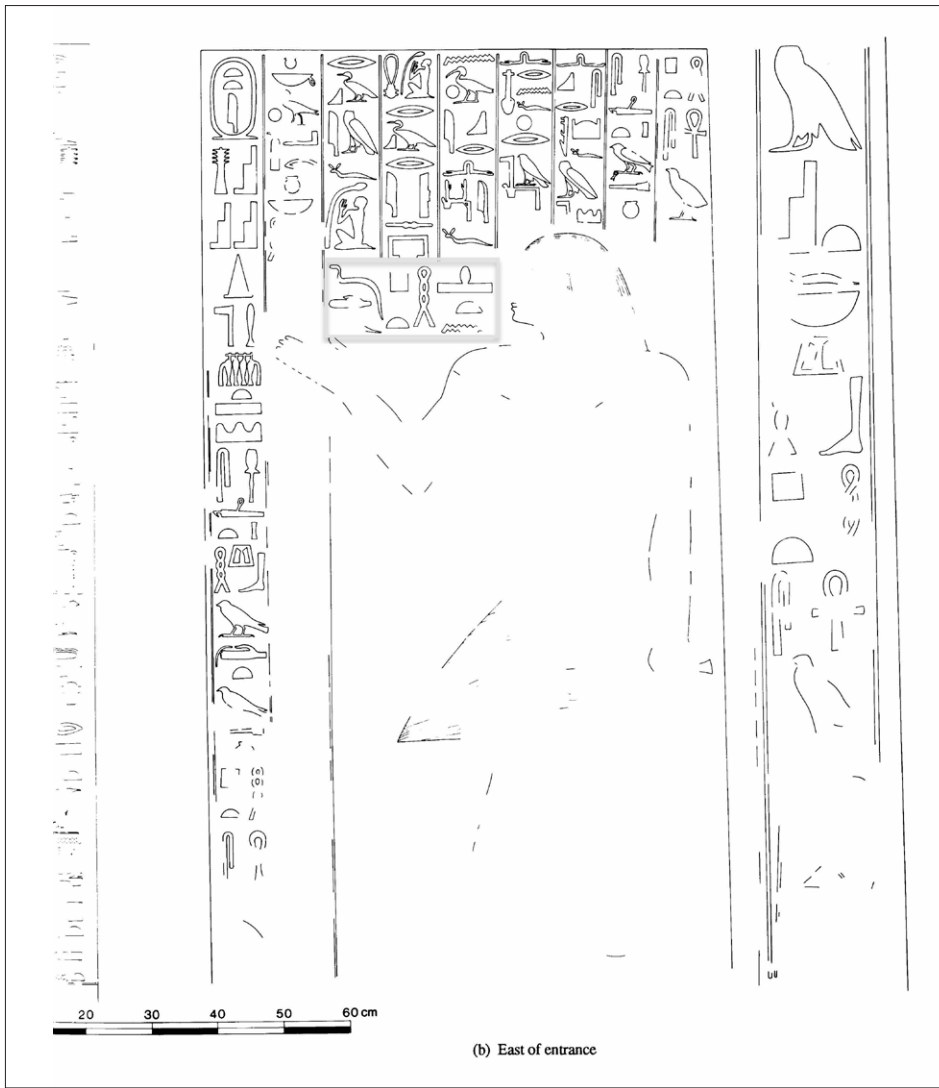


FIG. 1. Sankhuiptah, right of entrance. Time of Teti, Teti Pyramid Cemetery Saqqara (after Kanawati, Abder-Raziq 1998, pl. 64).

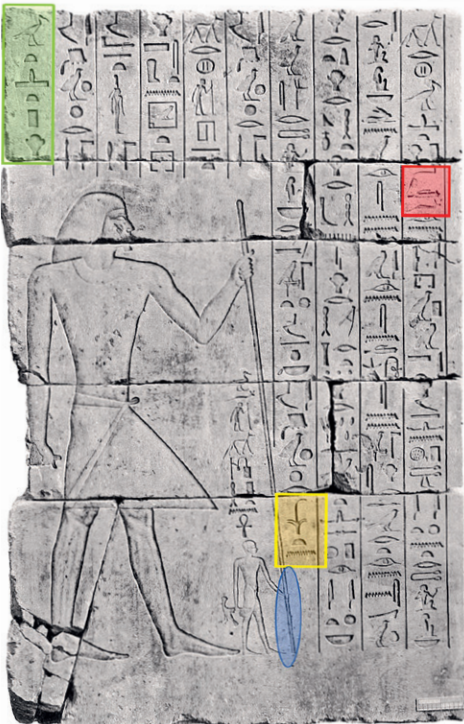


FIG. 2. Hierophantahiti, Mid-VIII dynasty, Saqqara, west of the Step Pyramid of Djoser (after Boeser 1905, pl. V).

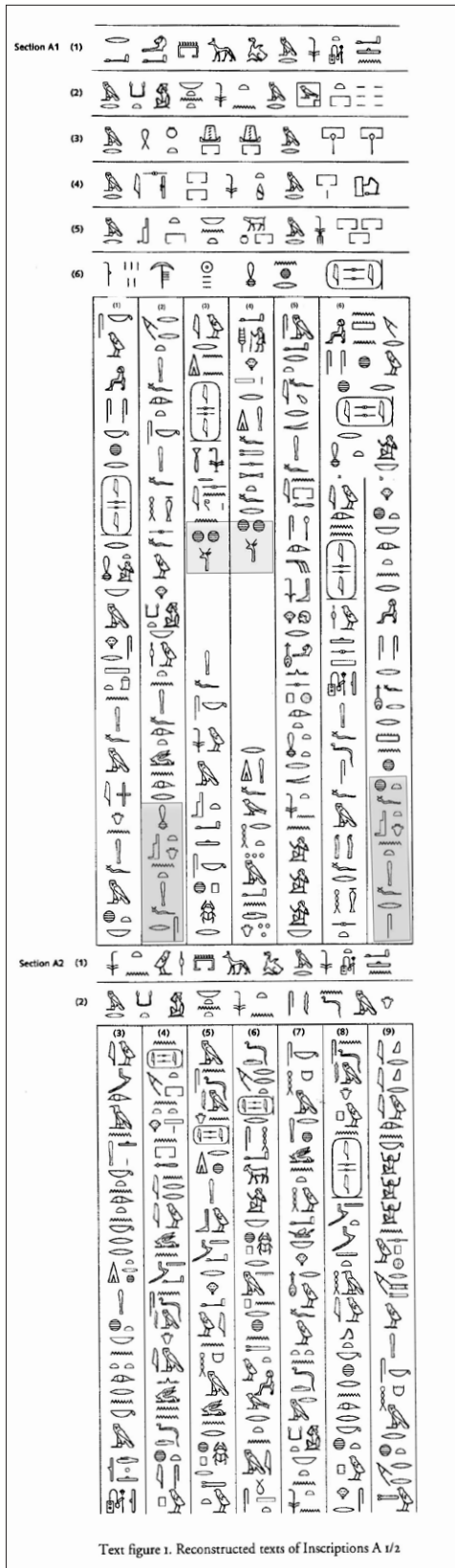


FIG. 3. Senedjemib-Inti Ar. Time of Dejedkare-Izezi, Giza, Western cemetery (after Brovanski 2001, p. 90a, fig. 1).

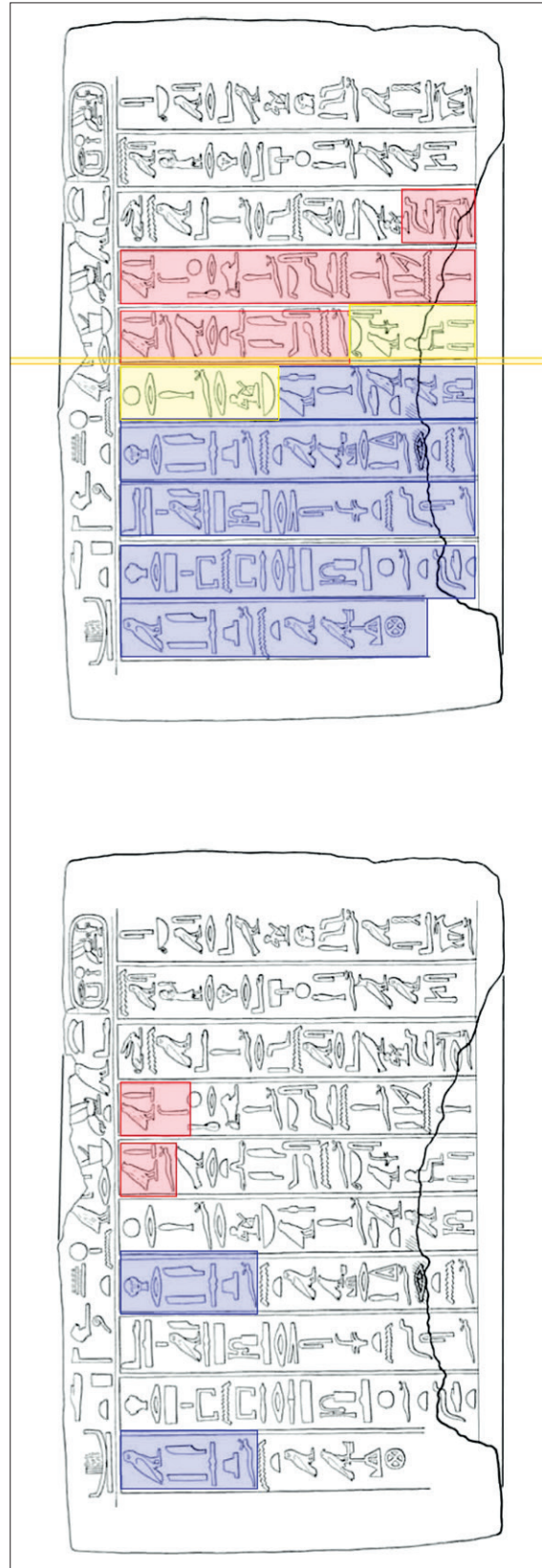


FIG. 4. Werre. Mid-Vth dynasty, Giza, Central field. (after Hassan 1932, fig. 13).



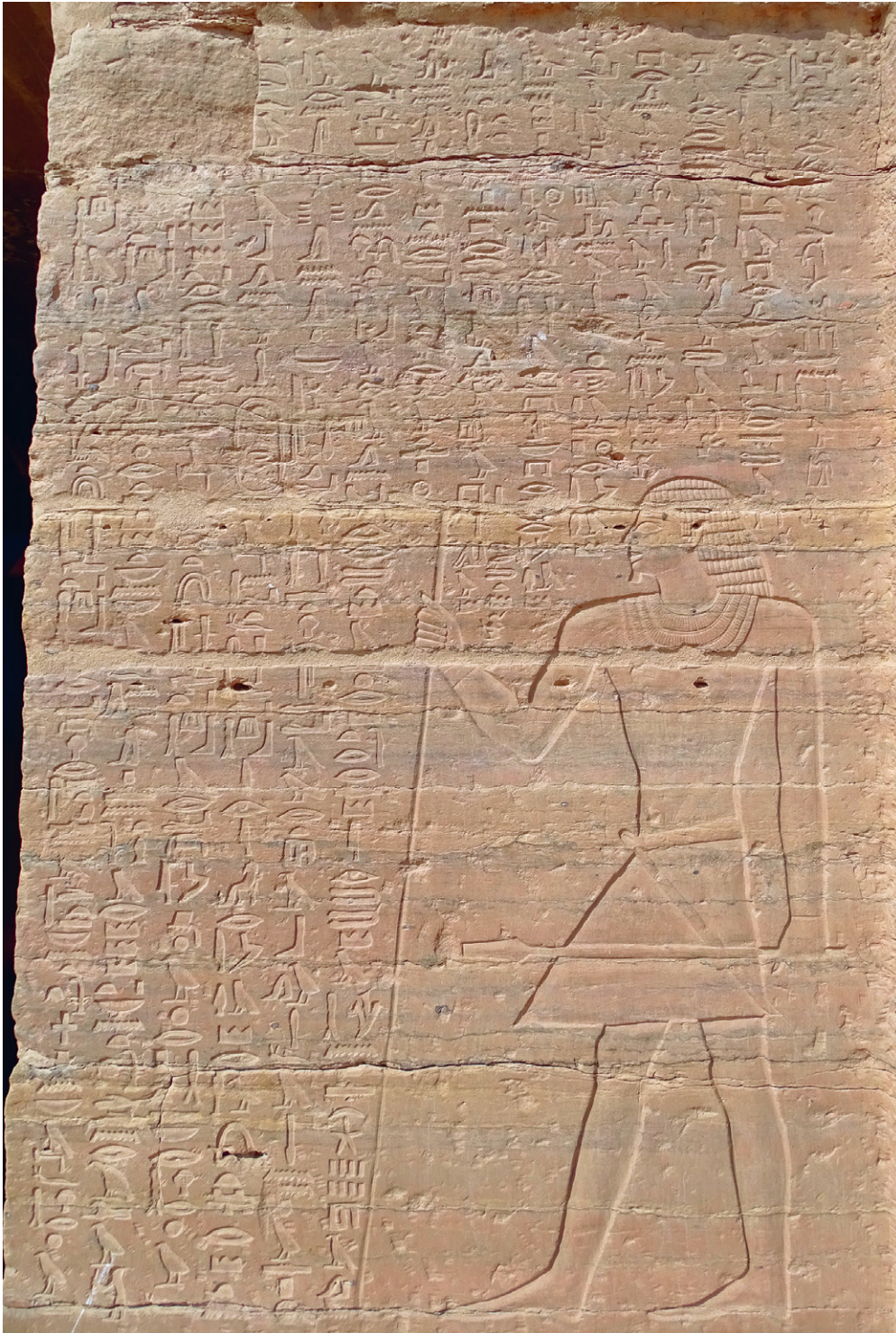
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FIG. 5. Harkhuf, facade. Early Pepi II, Qubbet el-Hawa.



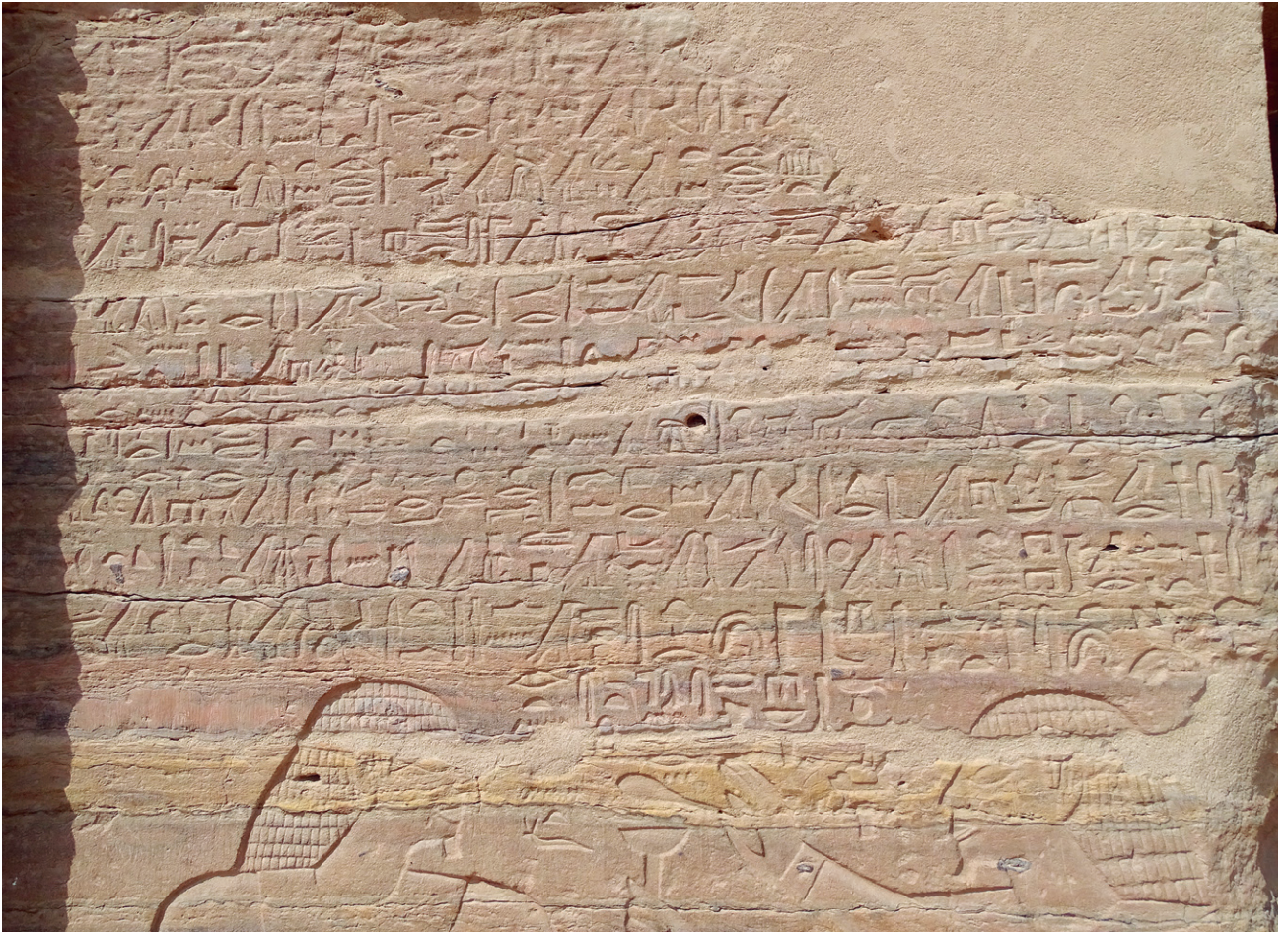
Fig. 6. Harkhof, architrave.

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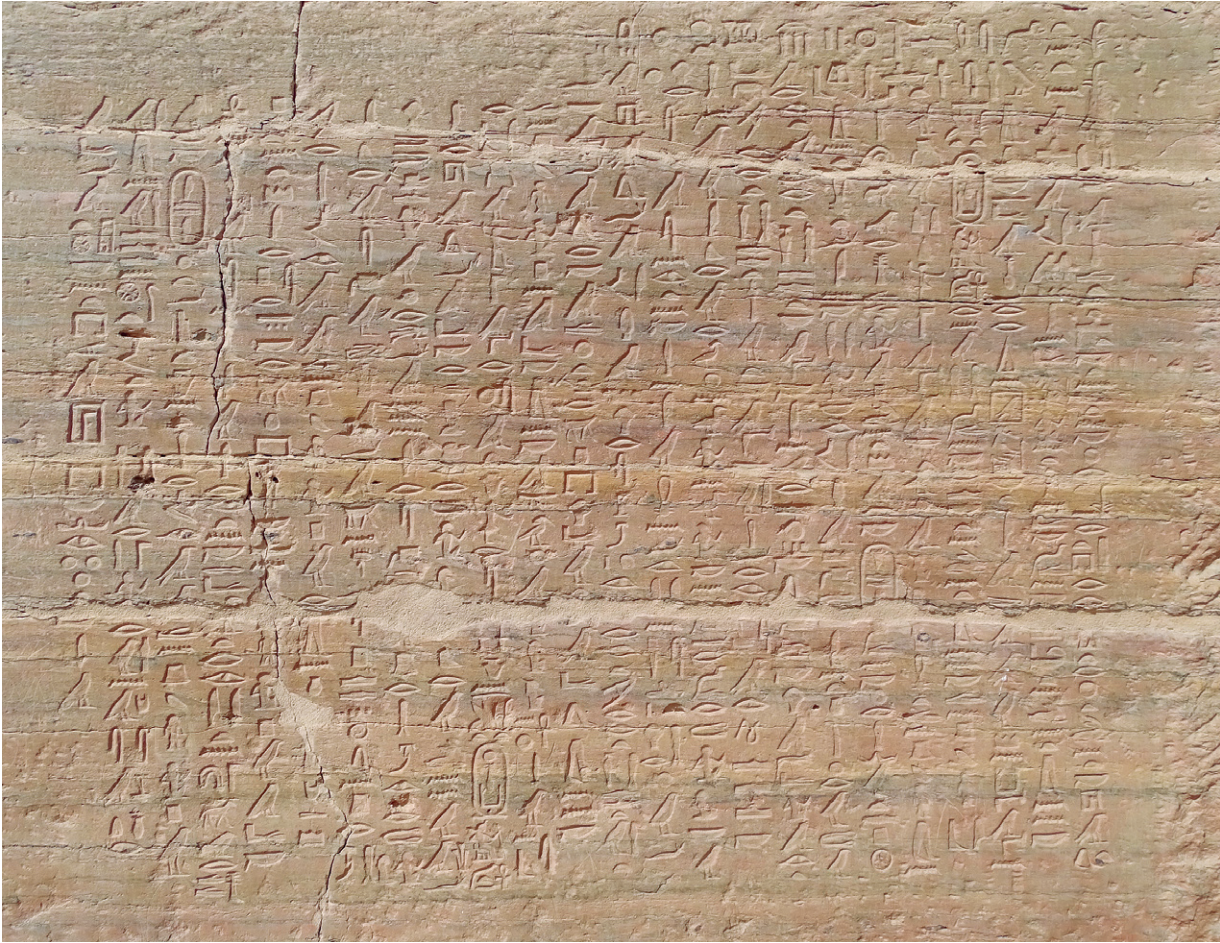
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FIG. 7. Harkhuf, right side of facade.



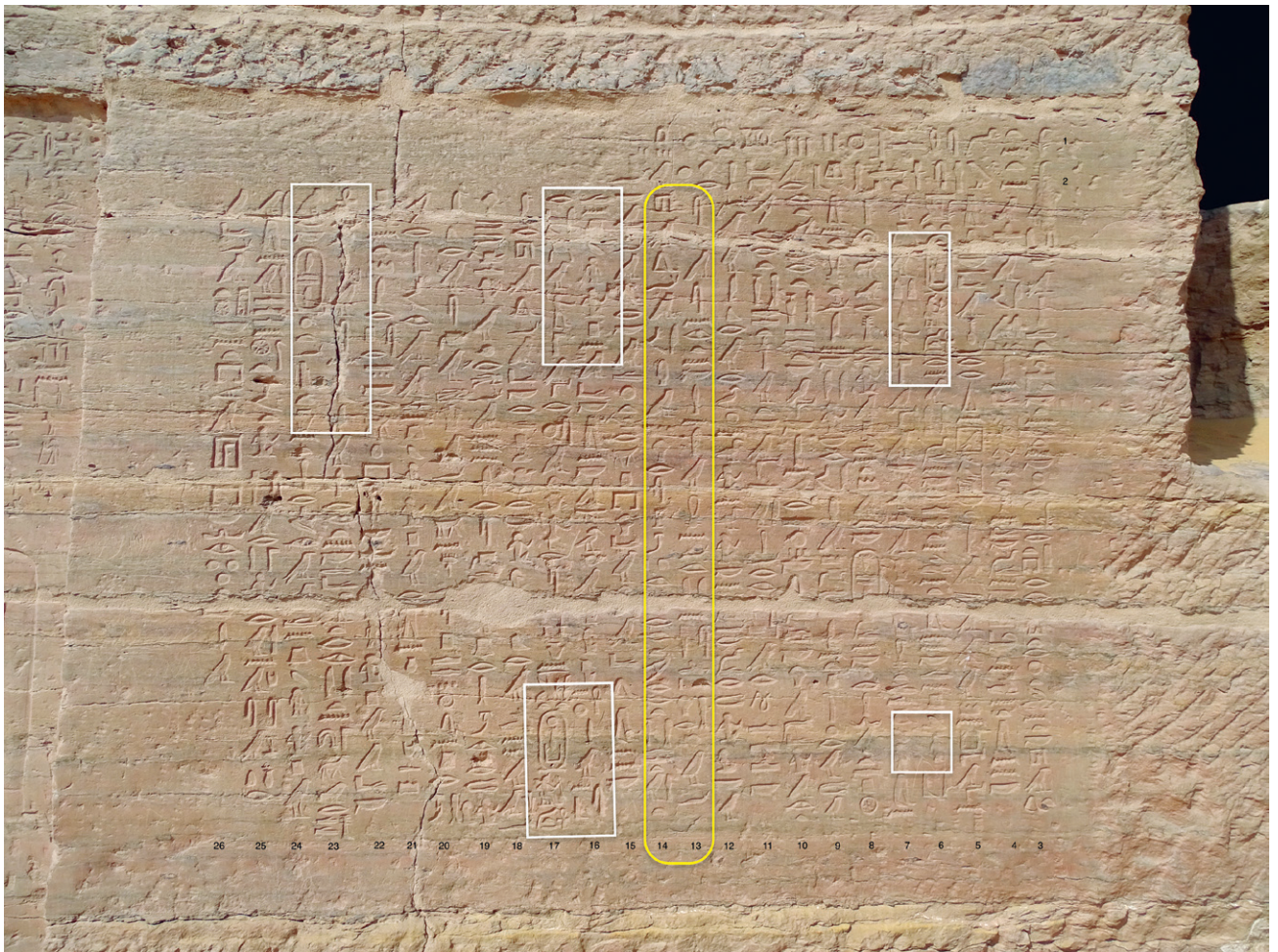
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FIG. 8. Harkhuf, left side of façade.



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FIG. 9a. Harkhuf, letter.



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Fig. 9b. Harkhuf, letter.