

# SAQQARA 2012 AND 2015: INSCRIPTIONS

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**Abstract:** Numerous fragments of decorated limestone blocks attributed to the funerary chapel of the God's Sealer Ikhi/Mery were found during the 2012 and 2015 seasons of Polish excavations in Saqqara. A theoretical reconstruction of the tomb facade is proposed based on the finds and some peculiarities of the decoration are discussed.

**Keywords:** Saqqara, Old Kingdom, funerary architecture, relief

The funerary chapel of Ikhi/Mery was discovered in 2002 (Myśliwiec 2003: 121–125; Kuraszkiewicz 2003: 137–140), but the frontal part was not unearthed until 2012 (Kuraszkiewicz 2014; Myśliwiec 2015; 2016: 62–76). The identity of the tomb owner and his role in the Egyptian administration of the Sixth Dynasty, as well as in expeditions of that period, have already been discussed elsewhere (Kuraszkiewicz 2006; 2013: 275, 280; 2014), one of the conclusions being that the tomb must have been finished earlier than planned (because of governmental reform), which forced the builders to modify its original design.

The chapel was cut in the rock forming the western bank of the western section of the Dry Moat. The extremely poor quality of the rock conditioned presumably additional internal walls and a lining of limestone blocks all around the inside of

the chapel. However, the work in the tomb was never completed. Only the entrance niche with a two-pillared portico, as well as the main cult place and, possibly, a partition wall inside the chapel were built, while the interior of the chapel was whitewashed (Kuraszkiewicz 2014). The limestone structure was to be decorated with relief, but this part of the project also never came to completion: only the sidewalls of the entrance niche and its jambs received reliefs and even these often did not go beyond the stage of a sketch; the rear wall was decorated partly in paint (northern side) and partly left void of any decoration (southern side).

Once the chapel had been hewn, its roof, soft and strongly fissured, subsided significantly, causing the tightly fitted limestone blocks of the entrance niche to crack, and some of them to fall out. This concerns particularly the upper parts of

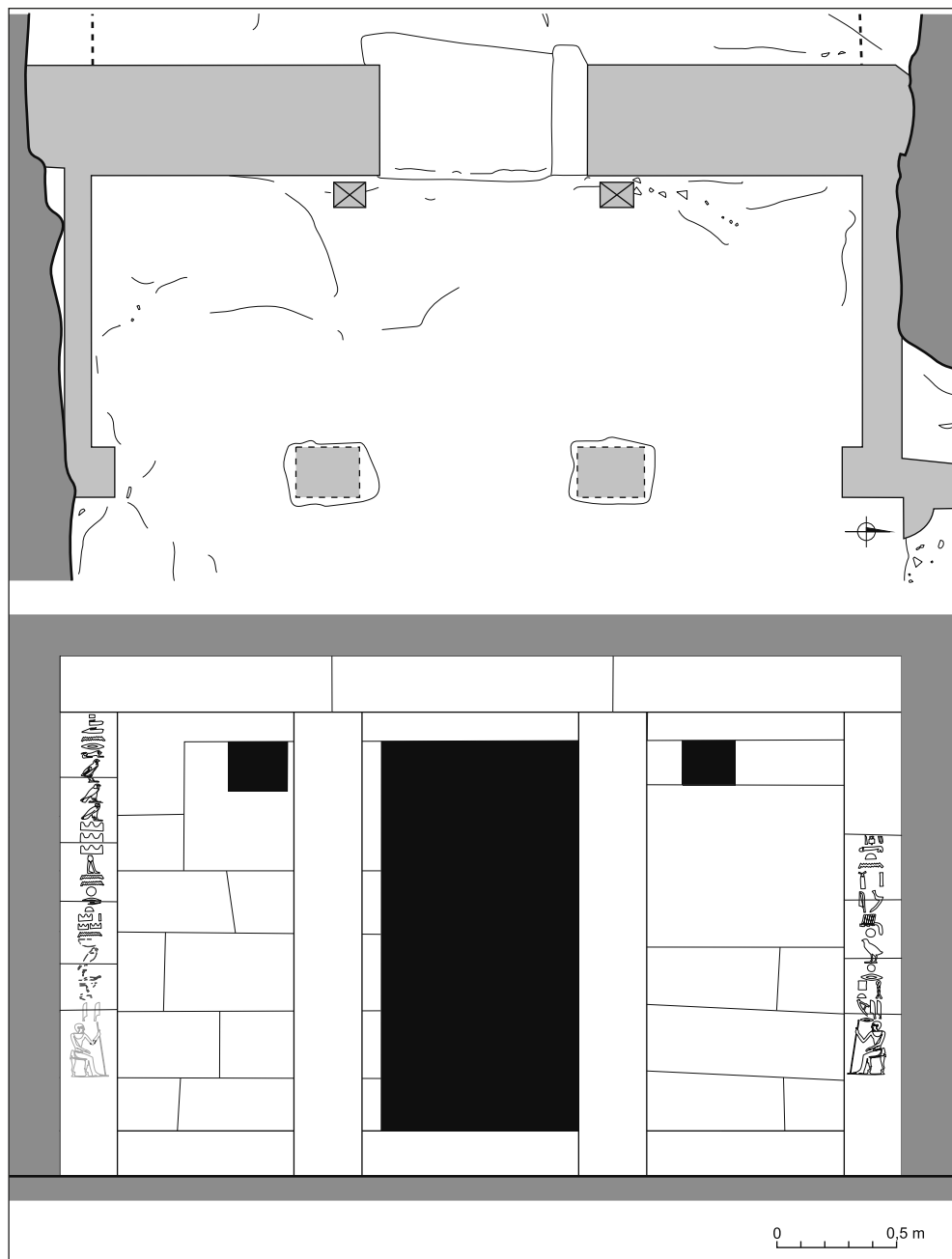


Fig. 1. Plan and reconstruction of the frontal part of the tomb  
(Drawing B. Błaszczuk [plan], K.O. Kuraskiewicz)

both sidewalls of the niche, as well as the southern part of the rear wall (although it cannot be excluded that some blocks were taken out by stone-robbers), while two cracked blocks are preserved *in situ* above the chapel entrance [Figs 1, 2].

In 2012 and 2015, during the exploration of the area within the Dry Moat in front of the tomb of Ikhi, below its floor level, a number of limestone blocks and fragments were found, most of them identified as originally belonging to the decorated entrance niche of the chapel. The fragments formed three distinct groups:

1. Two completely preserved blocks decorated with a column of inscription in sunken relief facing right. The blocks come from the southern jamb of the entrance niche, adjoining the part preserved in place [Fig. 3 left]. The title *ddj nrw Hr m h3swt* is inscribed on these two blocks (Kuraszkiewicz 2014: 205–206). It is,

however, not the beginning of the original inscription on the jamb, as a fragmentary, unidentified sign is visible above the word *ddj*. The preserved part of the inscription reads:

[...] *dd jnrw Hr m h3swt jnn hrt h3swt n nb.f Mr[jj]*

[...] one who places the dread of Horus in foreign lands, one who brings back the produce of foreign lands to his lord, Mer[y].

Below the name, slight traces of a bent elbow are visible, level with the elbow of the sitting figure on the northern jamb (see Kuraszkiewicz 2014: 204). Thus a similar figure can be reconstructed on the southern side of the entrance niche.

The worked top surface of the uppermost preserved block proves that the



Fig. 2. Facade of the tomb of Ikhi/Mery  
(Photo J. Dąbrowski)

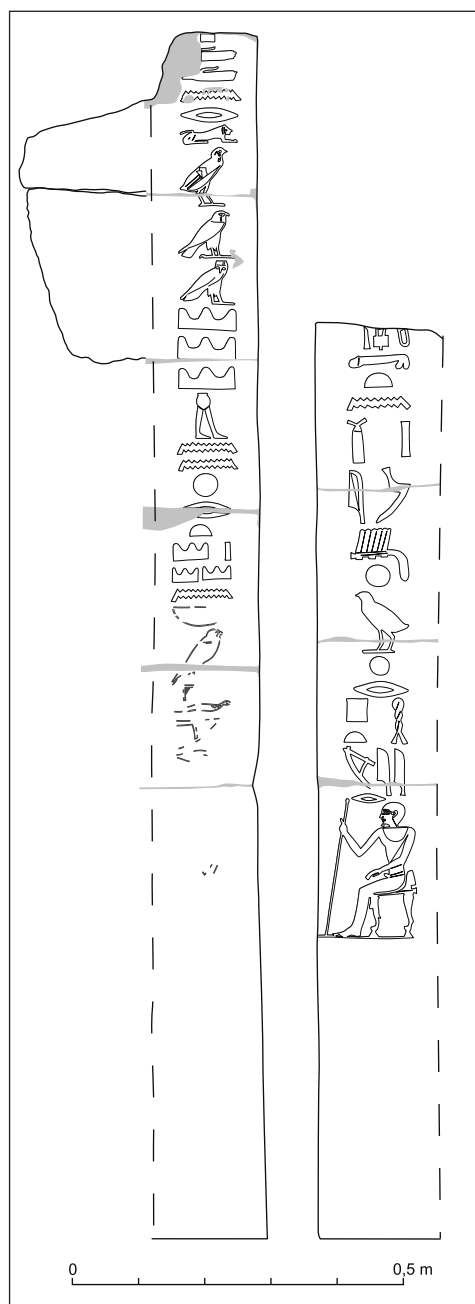


Fig. 3. *Jambs of the portico*  
(Drawing K.O. Kuraszkiwicz)

initial part of the inscription must have been carved on another block that was placed above, either the topmost block of the jamb or the architrave, the latter being more probable. It may be supposed that the architrave was not monolithic, but that it consisted of three parts, each approximately 1.20 m long and 0.30 m high, resting on the jambs and the two pillars of the portico. The pillars themselves have not been preserved. However, their rectangular bases, measuring 0.30 m by 0.24 m, bear traces of plaster, evidencing that the pillars were mounted upon them. It is not known whether the pillars (which must have been about 1.90 m high) were monolithic or built of smaller blocks.

2. Several small (up to 5 cm by 8 cm) fragments of limestone blocks with parts of hieroglyphic signs in sunken relief, apparently coming from an outer wall surface. Among them are signs with distinct orientation. Those facing right (e.g., fragments of signs *j*, *m*, and *jm<sup>3</sup>h*, Fig. 4:a–c) conform to the size and orientation of the inscription on the southern jamb of the entrance niche. However, the space above the preserved part of the inscription seems not high enough for *jm<sup>3</sup>hw hr...*, an epithet to which the signs could have belonged; the fragments thus seem more probable on the missing southern pillar of the portico. This would indicate that not only the jambs, but also the pillars (and possibly also the architrave) were decorated with inscriptions facing the tomb axis.

The stone fragment bearing, most probably, part of the word *dd*, and several other pieces with fragmentary signs facing left [Fig. 4:d,e] may be attributed either to the upper part of the northern jamb of the entrance niche or to the northern pillar. Other fragments, while undoubtedly

belonging to a surface decorated in sunken relief, cannot be attributed to either side of the portico (e.g., *Fig. 4:f*) as they do not contain any oriented or diagnostic parts of hieroglyphic signs.

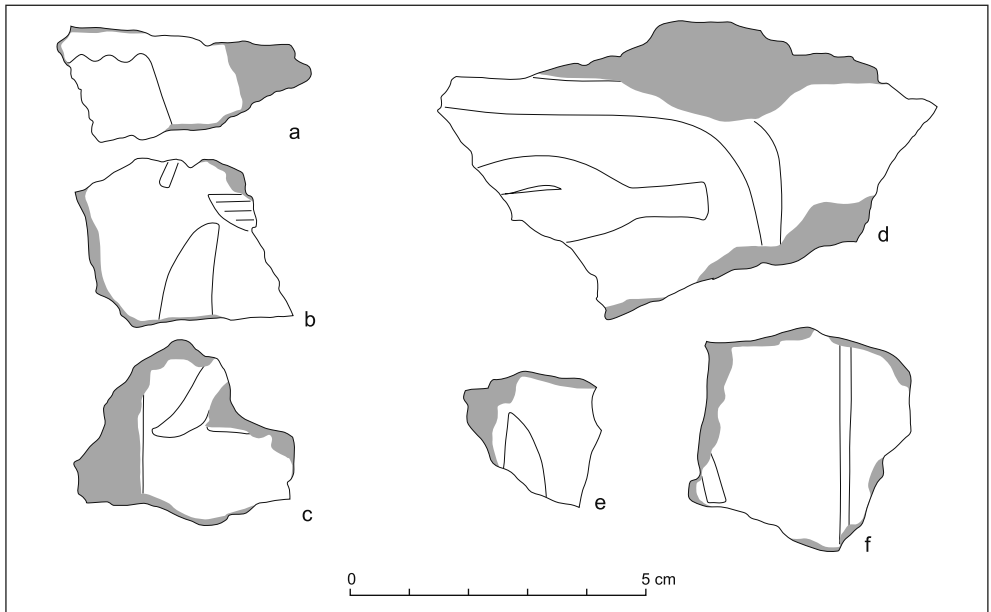
3. Several fragments of limestone blocks decorated in bas-relief. These can be attributed to the north wall of the entrance niche, providing some details for a reconstruction of the decoration [*Fig. 5*]. It consisted of two registers and there is nothing below the lower register to suggest the possibility of there being a scene or inscription planned there. The lower register contains a procession of offering bearers; only four figures were executed in bas-relief, with remains of sketched outlines and some details painted in black still visible. In front of each figure, there is a short label recording its title and name (Kuraszkiewicz 2014: 206–207):

(1) *shd hm(w)-k3 Zji* (2) *shd hm(w)-k3 Štj*  
 (3) *shd hm(w)-k3 Jhj* (4) *shd hm(w)-k3 Špss*

(1) inspector of ka-servants Zy;  
 (2) inspector of ka-servants Sheti;  
 (3) inspector of ka-servants Ikhi;  
 (4) inspector of ka-servants Shepses.

The horizontal baseline, also painted in black, continues behind the fourth figure, suggesting that the procession might have been intended to cover the whole width of the wall.

The main, upper register is composed of two fields; the left one contains a representation of the deceased facing east (i.e., “leaving” the tomb), while the right one was intended for an inscription in columns, facing right, probably filling the full height of the register. Parts of three



*Fig. 4. Fragments of the decoration of the jambs and/or pillars (Drawing K.O. Kuraszkiewicz)*

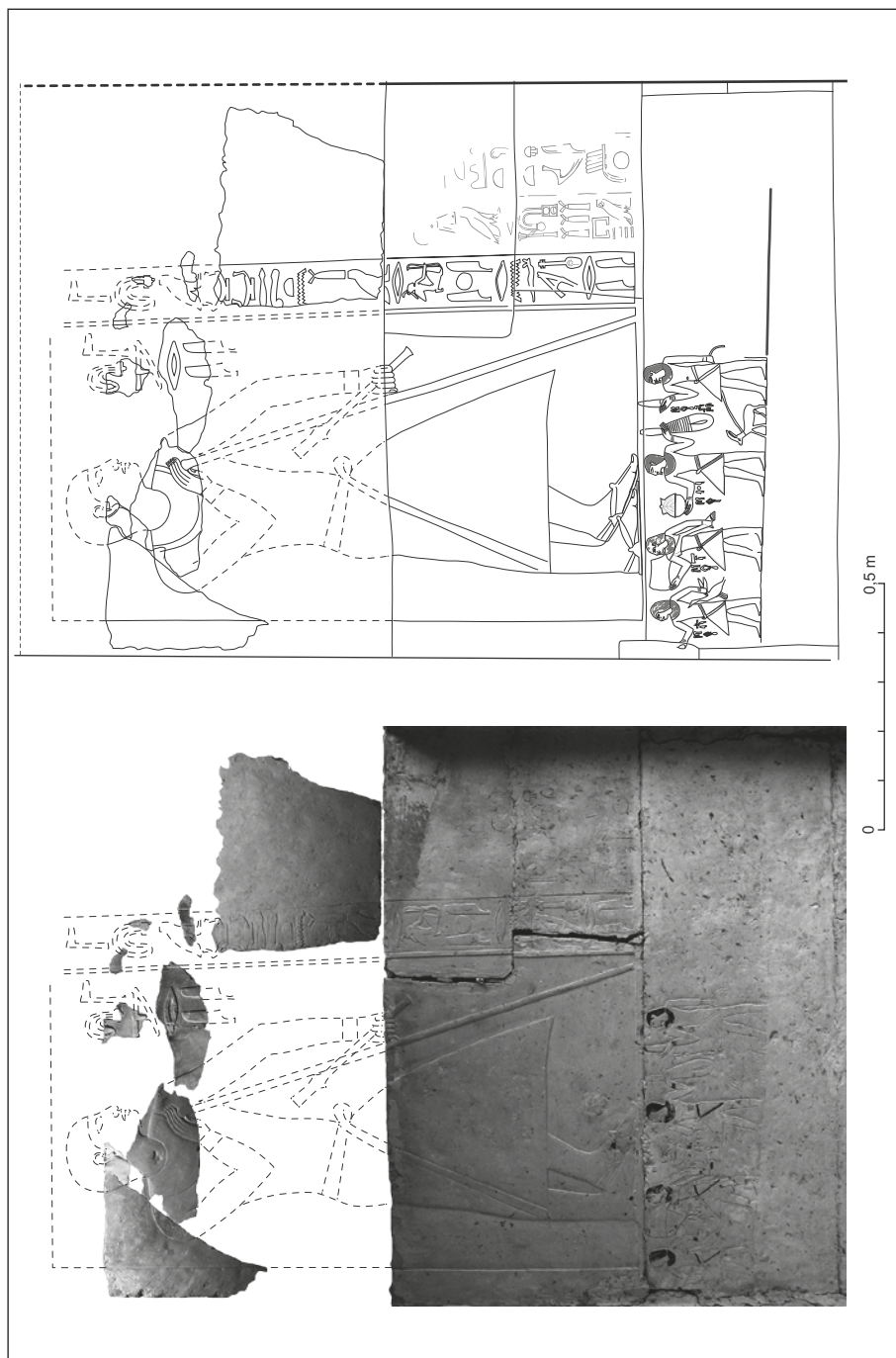


Fig. 5. Reconstructed scene on the north wall of the entrance niche  
(Drawing K.O. Kurasziewicz; photo J. Dąbrowski)

columns have been preserved. The last one was executed in relief; it was not finished, however, the outlines of the signs being carved, but not their internal elements. Two other columns were sketched with black paint. There is enough space for a fourth column to fit in front of the three, but no evidence of its presence:

- (1) [...] *zmjt jmntt jm3h(w)*  
 (2) [...] *hrj-tp [njswt] jmj-r3 zh3(w) 'prw  
 m pr 4*  
 (3) *htmtj-[ntr] m wj3wj 3(wj) mtj n 'pr  
 jmj-r3 m8c Jhj rn=f nfr Mrjj*

(1) [... in the] western desert, honoured one, (2) [... royal chamber] lain, overseer of the scribes of the crews in the four houses, (3) [God's] Sealer in two great boats, controller of the crew, general Ikhi, whose junior name is Mery.

An offering formula may be expected at the top of either the first extant column or the one that may have preceded it.

The deceased was depicted in a fairly uncommon pose, leaning on his staff (Smith 1949: 279–280; Harpur 1987: 127–129; see Bolshakov 2005: 44–45). The preserved fragments allow the upper part of the scene to be reconstructed with fair precision, suggesting aspects that distinguish it from other representations of men in the same position. The figure of the tomb owner was represented wearing a plain short, round wig, with the ear exposed (Cherpion 1989: 58), a *wsh* collar and bracelets; a long skirt and sandals (of type 3 after Cherpion 1999: 231, 273) can be seen clearly on the blocks preserved in place. The deceased stands with his right leg bearing the body weight, the foot flat

on the ground; his left leg is bent, and the foot, slightly raised, resting on the instep of the other foot. It is the 'supporting leg and free leg' pose (type a in Harpur's classification), usually encountered in less formal settings, e.g., in the context of outdoor activities and in scenes depicted on the inner walls (Harpur 1987: 127–128). Use of this theme as an independent scene in the conspicuous, outermost part of the tomb finds parallel to some degree only in the tomb of Neferseshemtah, who is depicted in a similar manner on the door-thickness in the entrance to his offering room (Capart 1907: Pl. XCI).

The distance between the left vertical borderline and the figure's shoulder on one of the fragmentary blocks indicates that the tomb owner was leaning on his slightly tilted staff, but without leaning forward (which is a characteristic feature of the pose identified as type a). The back (right) arm must have been bent across the chest, as the hand rests on the knob of the staff. The other arm is curved round the staff; the hand, however, is not bent to hold the staff (as, e.g., in the tomb of Ibi in Deir el-Gebrawi, Davies 1902/I: Pl. XI), but it points straight downwards (see, e.g., a representation of Djau, Davies 1902/II: Pl. IX). Surprisingly, while it should be the left hand of the figure, it is represented as the right one, with all clenched fingers visible (that is, palm outwards), and the thumb on the left, close to the body. Moreover, it holds a stick or baton, the lower end of which can be seen on the blocks *in situ*. The draughtsman seems to have had some difficulty with representing the figure of the tomb owner in this uncommon pose (see Smith 1949: 276–278, 280; Schäfer 1974: 301–303). It may be supposed that he adapted the left

hand from a template of a standing figure facing left, with its hand hanging behind, by its side (see, e.g., Harpur 1987: 126–127). The baton also proved problematic, as it had to be represented diagonally, in a way inconsistent with the hand position, which makes it appear to be placed behind the hand rather than being grasped by it.

Directly in front of the face and upper torso of the standing figure, within the same decoration panel, there was a short label containing Ikhi's title of the God's Sealer and his *rn nfr, Mrjj*, written in a slightly larger scale than the inscription in the right half of the register. Although only small fragments of the signs have been preserved, there can be no doubt as to the reconstruction of the label. It is not certain whether the inscription continued after the name, but the distance between the arm of the standing figure and the *j* sign (both preserved on the same fragment) suggest that it ended there. The name is written with the horizontal *mr* sign (see Gourdon 2007); in the tomb of Ikhi,

the same form of the sign is used only on the left outer jamb of his false door (Kuraszkiewicz 2006: 194).

It should be noted that the black paint faded in the upper and frontal parts of the wall, which indicates that this section of the facade must have been exposed for a prolonged time.

The decoration of the funerary chapel of Ikhi, which had not only been left unfinished but was also severely damaged, can nevertheless be theoretically reconstructed to a significant degree, based on its remains. In spite of the mistakes discussed above, resulting evidently from the uncommonness of the iconographic motif, the high quality of the relief is noticeable, especially the rendering of the large-scale human figure; also the preserved parts of the sketch deserve to be recognized as the work of a skilled painter. This proves that the tomb must have been executed by a team of accomplished craftsmen, suitable to the high social status of its owner.

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