Sekhemka—G 1029

The mastaba of Sekhemka (G 1029) was cleared in May through July, 1904, at which time the reliefs were first photographed, the tomb cards prepared, and the objects removed from the burials. In August, 1930, a new set of photographs of the reliefs was made, and in July, 1977, the entire relief surfaces were traced as part of the Pennsylvania–Yale project. Reisner’s notes are abbreviated at this point, and the object list is missing. Several of the finds can be identified in the Robert Lowie Museum of Anthropology in Berkeley, California, to which they were assigned through the Hearst Expedition. The mastaba is approximately 9.80 north-south by 6.10 m. east-west overall, and the corridor chapel approximately 4.70 north-south by 1.10 m. east-west, the last dimension making photography of the wall surfaces difficult.

The mastaba forms part of Cemetery 1000 just west of the great mastaba G 2000, the mastaba of Sekhemka being in the row closest to the great mastaba and separated from it by a narrow street; it occupies the fourth site from the south in the row (pl. I, fig. 1). It appears to have been built shortly before or after G 1027 to its immediate south and lies about 1 m. above the level of the latter. Reisner’s date for the mastaba is Dynasty V, after the reign of Nyuserre, although a later date could be argued. It comprises a decorated corridor chapel with two niches on the western wall, entered from the east at the north end, a large serdab with five roofing blocks, and four shafts (fig. 2). The mastaba itself is of type VIII c (2) with an area of 60.69 sq. m., the chapel of type 5 (a) with an area of 4.93 sq. m., and the spacious serdab, north of the chapel, found intact, but with the wooden statues thoroughly decayed; no other information is available on their number, size, and shape. Five courses of masonry are preserved.

Decoration of the Chapel

East wall (figs. 4-5; pls. II–V). The long scene on the east wall, cut almost entirely in the plaster applied to the masonry, has lost virtually all of its color. The few traces of paint, recorded at the time of the excavation, have been interpolated from N. de G. Davies’ work, particularly in the section of the water plants in the two topmost registers. No trace of the plants could be seen in 1977 nor are traces visible in the 1930 photographs.

The scene is a viewing scene of life on the estate with the owner standing on the right facing left (north) accompanied by the smaller figure of his son in front of him holding the lower part of his father’s staff. Sekhemka stands with the long staff at a diagonal in his right hand in front of him and his left arm hanging at his side with the hand clasping a folded napkin. He wears a shoulder length wig with a layered effect above the brow and at the fall above the shoulders, there being some attempt to indicate curls at the fall. He wears a broad collar with a pendant hanging from a single strand necklace; the kilt is of mid-length with a curve toward the nape of the neck instead of lying over the shoulder.

The long column of text in front provides the caption to the scenes of the five registers to the left: M!?$ sk! $sh jt $jn $js$w,t.f nt nj$w,t.f nt pr,f dt, “Viewing the plowing and the reaping of barley by his crews of his towns of his funerary estate.” Eight additional columns of text above the owner provide his titles and name: Hm-ntr $sp-$j$h-R’, bry $št$i, jm-y-r st $hnty-s pr-r$i, ‘w’b ny$w,t, hm-ntr $hw$w,f, $rr$n$r(r) n$b,f, jm$m’hw […]’r nb, S$h$m-k,i, “Priest of Shesep-ib-Re [sun temple of Nyuserre], privy counselor, overseer of the department of the tenant farmer(s) of the palace, king’s weeb-priest, priest of Khufu, who does what his lord desires, well provided […] every day, Sekhemka.” Four short horizontal lines above the son identify him: $šl.f $š$m$w m$y,f, w’b ny$w,t, hm-ntr $hw$w,f, P$h-n-P$h, “His eldest son, his beloved, king’s weeb-priest, priest of Khufu, Pehentptah.”

First register (from top): Three scribes stand facing right toward the owner and his son. In front of the first two are boxes of writing equipment on the ground. The second writes with a rush pen on a papyrus or tablet, and the third carries a roll in his right hand, the left hand being crossed over his right shoulder. To the left is a representation of water with lotus, papyrus, and other water plants painted in to indicate the locale. Seven men are shown bending forward and pulling plants from the...
water, in which they are knee deep; their loin cloths are wrapped around their belts. The material which they pull from the water resembles the flax of the flax harvest scenes but is evidently pulled from the water. Following the seven men is a papyrus skiff with lashings and laden with water plants. To the far left is a trap net with birds from a trapping scene. The leader and crew manipulating the net have either been omitted through leaving the scene incomplete or else they were represented in paint which has disappeared.

Second register: On the right is a traditional boat-combat scene with two papyrus skiffs facing each other, and with three men in the boat on the left and four in the other. One of the sailors in each boat navigates with his forked pole while the others engage in the combat. Both boats are laden with produce, the one on the right also with a cage of birds. The forward sailor in the right boat has caught hold of the prow of the left boat, just as the forward sailor in the left boat attempts to dislodge him with his forked pole; the latter's success is jeopardized by the other sailor's companion, as he attempts to protect his mate by warding off the thrust with his own pole. The boats are shown on a representation of water with a frieze of water plants rendered as in the register above. Three of the sailors have curls indicated in their hair; one shows the characteristic receding hairline of the farmer and field worker and wears a lotus flower around his neck. To the left is a non-aquatic scene in three parts. In the first section a farmer bends over a plough pulled by a pair of oxen; a companion prods the cattle with a stick in his left hand and holds on to the tail of the nearer ox with the other hand. Above the oxen is the text ḫḥ, “ploughing,” and above the ploughman the text ḫḥ, “plough.” Both wear a belt with pleated tab in front. The second scene comprises the treading of the ground to sow the seed by a group of sheep led by a farmer with a seed bag over his shoulder and driven by three farmers holding whips aloft in the right hand and a staff and the “shepherd’s implement,” a sort of comb-like object, in the left hand. Above the sheep is the text šk:m sḥt, “ploughing with sheep.” The seedman and the central of the three whip men wear a short high waisted wrap-around kilt, the lead whip man an abbreviated frontal tab hanging from a belt, and the third whip man the same garment as the ploughman. The large whips resemble that of the hieroglyph ḫḥ [Sign List V 22–23] and have an opening near the striking end. The three men with whips are followed by two farmers carrying large hoes. The first of the whip men wears what appears to be the lotus flower around his neck. The scene has been discussed, particularly in terms of the unidentified shepherd’s implement, which seems to consist of a group of thongs or prongs.

Third register: This is introduced by an official who stands to the right toward the tomb owner but has turned his head back to the left to join his master in viewing the fieldwork. The first activity to the right, nearest the figure of the tomb owner, is captioned ḫw(j) ṭḥ in jswt ḫ.t.f, “Pulling flax by the crews of his funerary estate.” Three men bend over to pull, while a fourth holds aloft a sheaf captioned ḫḥt, “sheaf,” or “pulled piece.” To the left two sub-registers represent four squatting men engaged, as the caption indicates, in dm3 ḫḥ’t, “binding the flax,” using their feet to hold the cords while their fingers tie the knot. There follows to the left another field scene with the caption: ḫḥ ḫj in jswtn ḫt.f, “reaping barley by the crews of the funerary estate.” Two farmers to the right bend forward to reap, holding a handful of ears in the left hand while cutting with a sickle with the right hand. Following them a farmer rests momentarily with his sickle held under his armpit. Sheaves of barley lie on the ground near three of the farmers. On the left two reapers bend over facing each other to cut their sheaves, while a quail wanders hopefully between them. The artist neglected to indicate the stalks beneath the legs of one of the men, and this provides a welcome if possibly not intentional accent on the heads of the sheaf on the ground to which the quail stalks. Above the reapers is the phrase ḫḥt pw ḫf ḫfr ḫt, “what is this now, O workman?” To the left is a high pile of grain, stacked in the traditional fashion. There follows a group of donkeys, the lead donkey with head to a wisp of barley hurried on by three men following with staves; the lead man claps two staves together. Over the donkeys is the caption ḫḥt, “donkey pack(?).” At the end of the register a fieldhand, facing left, stacks the barley.

Fourth register: Here begins the leading of the desert animals and cattle continued in the register below. The lead man with a kilt with an extended tab in front bends slightly before the chapel owner, places his left hand deferentially on his right shoulder, and carries a short staff. The phrase before him, ḫw nn m3 ṭḥw, perhaps means, “this is to be viewed, O beloved one.” This is the traditional address of the stall overseer, perhaps borrowed from the same situation in the mastabas of...
Seshemnofer II (G 2200) and III (5170). The man is identified by his title jmy-rš md(n), “overseer of the stalls.” He leads an oryx captioned m mš-hd, “young oryx.” There follow three attendants facing left with right hand on the horn and left on the muzzle of an animal, each captioned respectively n (n)j(n), m ndw, and m ghš, “a young ibex, a young addax, a young gazelle.” The spellings are unusual, a single n in m nj(j), and ndw for expected nw-dw. At the end of the file a fieldhand places his left hand on the back of the gazelle and his right on its tail. There follows a seining scene occupying the remainder of the register and the corresponding portion of the register below. Five men in front facing right and four men to the rear with two facing left pull the rope of the fishing net, the front end coil encircling the head of the man who holds it and the end coil resting on the ground. Three of the men pulling on the rope wear shoulder harnesses to maximize their efforts; they wear either the belt with front tab tucked under the belt or the loin cloth with frontal tab pleated or sectioned. The net in the register below has sinkers attached on the lower part and floats on the top. The catch includes a variety of fish and an eel. The captions read hım pw, hš b p(w), jw.s jm.n.(s) hš b nfr, “such a fishing expedition, such a catch; it (the net) comes and brings a good catch.” Connecting the file of animals in the fourth register with the seining scene is a single figure at the end of the file facing left to the fishnet and holding a single large fish.

Fifth register: The first part of the register consists of a procession of oxen led by their keepers. The lead man bends slightly forward holding his scribal tablet and rush pen awkwardly in his left arm and leading an ox with his right hand, the figure doing duty as scribe and farmer. The oxen in the register have coils of rope as collars and terminals on drums on the feet, and a lotus flower at the end coil resting on the ground. Three of the men pulling on the rope wear shoulder harnesses to maximize their efforts; they wear either the belt with front tab tucked under the belt or the loin cloth with frontal tab pleated or sectioned. The net in the register below has sinkers attached on the lower part and floats on the top. The catch includes a variety of fish and an eel. The captions read hım pw, hš b p(w), jw.s jm.n.(s) hš b nfr, “such a fishing expedition, such a catch; it (the net) comes and brings a good catch.” Connecting the file of animals in the fourth register with the seining scene is a single figure at the end of the file facing left to the fishnet and holding a single large fish.

The traditional viewing scene thus represented has few unusual features. It incorporates into a relatively small area scenes which are given a broader range in the mastabas at Saqqara such as Ti’s. The artist has been unusually successful in accomplishing his program by carving in plaster with an unexpected refinement of detail. The few indications of color noted at the time of the excavation suggest that the wall would have been brilliant in its detailed treatment of the subject. Considering the material, it is astounding that the plaster has survived in place this long, and this speaks for the technique used by the craftsmen in using the proper adhesive mixture for the surface. The Antiquities Service has included the chapel in its program of conservation, and the wall surfaces have been maintained in condition through several applications of restoration methods.

South wall (figs. 6, 7; pl. VI). The wall has suffered greatly from the time of its discovery in 1904 and the photography carried out in 1930. A large portion of the lower registers has now been irretrievably lost, and the drawing has been made by Suzanne Chapman on the basis of the actual tracings accomplished in 1977 supplemented by tracings from the earliest photographs and drawings (fig. 6). In addition, we have provided an early inked copy of the scene of the owner in front of the wall hanging, which was presumably made by Norman de Garis Davies in 1904; this shows details of the wall hanging now illegible (fig. 7).

On the right the owner is shown facing left (east), seated on a chair with high back rest (extending over his head), a high arm rest (just below his armpit), bull’s hoof terminals on drums on the feet,” and a lotus flower terminal in back of the seat. He wears a shoulder length wig, a broad collar, and a knee length kilt with curving forward part, and he receives with his right hand a proffered lotus flower from the first of the smaller figures, presumably his son, in the register to the left. The other hand rests on the arm rest of the chair. Above him is the single line of text with his title and name: jmy-rš ḫnt(w)-š pr‘-š Ṣḥm-kš, “overseer of the tenant-farmer(s) of the palace Sekhemka.” Behind him is the representation of a richly woven textile affixed to the wall by the two cords at the upper ends and extending to the level of his ankles, not touching the ground.”

7. Junker, Giza III, 213, but here possibly with the imperfective passive participle instead of the infinitive.
9. Moussa and Altenmüller, op. cit., 97, with references to the use of the text elsewhere. It is represented twice in H. Wild, Le tombeau de Ti, fasc. 2, pl. 113, in the same context.
10. The chair legs with terminals in lion and bull feet resting on drum elements are discussed by J. Vercoûter, “Supports de meubles, éléments architectoniques ou établis?,” BIFAO 78 (1978) 81-100.
11. The textile separated from the floor by a space is discussed by H. G. Fischer, Varia (Egyptian Studies 1), 7, 9, another possible example is Selim Hassan, Excavations at Saqara I, pl. XI A. In many other examples the textile reaches to the floor.
The owner faces four registers of offerings, including vegetables in baskets, trussed fowl, jars on stands, and stands with ewers in basins above and joints of meat below. The lowest register, on the same ground line as the owner’s chair, comprises four figures facing right, the son presenting the lotus flower followed by three offering bearers bringing fowl and covered jars.

The register below consists of abbreviated scenes of dancing and singing. On the right a harper plays on a high harp to the accompaniment of two subregisters, each with three musicians. Two play the traverse flute, one an oboe, and three appear to be singing, two of the latter cupping a hand to the ear. To the left three female dancers raise their arms above their heads, with their left feet raised above the ground, and face to the right a pair of female musicians who clap their hands to the beat of the music. The dancers wear cross shoulder straps (halters) and bracelets, and at least the first wears a masculine type kilt. The clappers wear long ankle-length garments, chokers, bracelets, and anklets, with the garment supported by a single shoulder strap.

The bottom register comprises a procession of offering bearers facing right (west), a single bearer in each case being followed by a pair jointly holding a large tray piled with offerings.

The scene of the owner, with or without his wife, seated in front of the wall hanging to receive a lotus flower is frequent in Dynasty 5 and 6, particularly at Giza. In many cases it includes the presence of musicians and dancers, and the usual setting is the south (short) wall of the chapel.13 The scene of the seated owner in front of his tapestry continues to be placed on the south wall, even when the wall becomes the longer side, as in the rock cut chapel of the mastaba of Iasen (pl. XXXVIII a; fig. 32). The hanging tapestry behind the owner also appears in other contexts on other walls.14

West wall (fig. 3; pls. VII-IX). This longest wall area of the chapel has both a northern and southern false door, but only the left (south) portion of the wall is inscribed and decorated. The long architrave element over the southern false door consists of three lines of the offering formula, a considerable portion of which was never carved in the plaster and may have been represented only in paint or outline of which there are no traces. To the left the husband and wife are represented seated on a low backed chair facing right. She sits behind (beside) him with her left hand on his shoulder and her right touching his arm; she is designated as hmt.t [rḥ] nyswt, “his wife, the royal acquaintance,” but her name above her head cannot now be made out. The text reads vertically from the right, continues horizontally with the second and third lines, and then concludes with the end of the first line and a vertical column in front of the seated pair: htp [dj] nyswt Jnpw jmy wt pr ḫrw n.f m (?) [...] m wp nyswt [m std?] tpy nps wt nb nfr nb htp [dj] Jnpw nb t [... dst jmy-[r?] st ḫtn(yw)-š pr-[?] w b nyswt ḫm-ntr ḫwsw mnr nb.ʃ jm[š]w ḫ tr nfr-š ʃm-kšt “an offering which the king gives to Anubis, he who is in Wet, that an invocation offering may come forth for him at [... ] at the beginning of the year festival [at the adja? festival] at the first of the year festival, at the Wag festival, and the daily festivals, and an offering which Anubis [gives], the lord of the necropolis [to] the overseer of the department of the tenant farmer(s) of the palace, the royal weeb-priest, priest of Khufu, whom his lord loves, the one well provided before the great god, Sekhemka.” Beneath the architrave element is the tablet with the owner seated before a tray of offering breads beneath which are the signs for bread, beer, fowl, and cattle each followed by the numeral 1000. On the lintel element below the tablet the text is abbreviated: jmy-rš st pr-š ʃm-kšt, “overseer of the department of the palace, Sekhemka.” On the jambs of the door on each side a bearer presents a large ox leg with the text ṣḥpt(t) štp, “presenting a choice joint.” The figure on the left carries a foreleg, that on the right a hindleg; the hieroglyphs of the text are carelessly arranged with omissions and use of the same sign in different words.

On the left and extending below the architrave element is a scene of the owner standing with his son and receiving offerings. He faces right (north) wearing a short wig, beard, broad collar, and knee length kilt with tie and sash. With the right hand he holds a folded napkin behind him and with his left the long staff at a diagonal. This hand is also rendered as a right hand, which is unusual and awkward in the context; in most cases the hand holding the long staff is shown with the palm toward the viewer, fingers on the near side of the staff, although there are exceptions.15 The son on a much smaller scale, similarly attired, has his hands at the side, empty, and bears the caption: sš f šnw w b nyswt Ph.n-Pth, “his eldest son, the royal weeb-priest Pehenptah,” who is similarly captioned in the same

12. For women with masculine type dress, see Fischer, in Assmann, Grieshammer, and Feucht (eds.), Fragen an die altdgyptische Literatur, 164.
13. Examples: Nefer (G 4761), facing right, Junker, Giza VI, fig. 13 (with dancers and musicians); Seshemnofre III (G 5170), facing right, Giza III, pl. II (with dancers and musicians). Junker, in Giza III, 231, comments on the priority of the scene on the south wall with owner facing left (east) over the direction facing right (west), noting the return to the older direction in Rawer II (G 5470), Giza III, fig. 47 (with dancers and musicians), as in our case.
14. Examples: Kahif (G 2136), Junker, Giza VI, fig. 34; west wall passageway of Kayemankh (G 4561), Giza IV, fig. 9 (playing seten with dancers and musicians).
15. Smith, A History of Sculpture and Painting, 276, fig. 112; cf. Simpson, Giza Mastabas 3, fig. 2 (Khafkhufu) for an exception.
position of the opposite, east, wall. Above the owner's portion of the wall are unfinished or only partly executed. Evidently no attempt was made to plaster the canopic vessels with their lids (pl. X a), which false door for a continuation of the scenes and texts. Evidently, from which Sekhemka was promoted to the above listed rank.


2. jmy-rA st pr-t, "overseer of the department of the palace." Abbreviation of last title in the narrower space of the lintel element.

3. jmy-rA hnt(yw)-š pr-t, "overseer of the tenant-farmer(s) of the palace." An office of lesser rank, evidently, from which Sekhemka was promoted to the above listed rank.

4. w'bi nušt, "royal weeb-priest."

5. hmtur Ḥwfw, "priest of Khufu."

6. hmr-śt Ṣsp-pḫ-Rḫ, "priest of Shesepibre" (temple of Nyuserre).

7. ḫy śšt, "priy counsellor."

**Titles of his Son, Pehenptah**

šš.t šmsḫw mry.f, "his eldest son beloved of him."

w'bi nušt, "royal weeb-priest."

ḥmr-śt Ḥwfw, "priest of Khufu."

**Titles of Wife (Name Not Identified)**

ḥnt.f ḫ(t)-nušt, "his wife, the royal acquaintance."

**Titles of Unknown Attendant**

jmy-r mdjt, "overseer of stalls."

**Burials**

Shafts and burial chambers (pls. X-XI; fig. 8). Four shafts lead through the mastaba, three through the rocks to chambers beneath, and are lettered A through D from south to north. The largest (A) is aligned with the southern, inscribed false door of the chapel and descends 6.50 m. from the top of the mastaba through the rock. A blocked passage to the west leads to a chamber oriented north-south with a built sarcophagus lid along the west wall (fig. 8; pl. X a). Although plundered, vessels and bones were recorded lying in front of the sarcophagus. Unfortunately, the tomb card for the finds is lacking. They seem to include four limestone canopic vessels with their lids (pl. X a), which can be identified in the Robert Lowie Museum in Berkeley, California, nos. 6-19753, 6-19783, 6-19788, 6-19818, and 6-19819 (courtesy of Dr. Frank Norick). Shaft B led to two chambers. The upper chamber just below the rock surface, B I, had a blocking with rough blocks of stone on top of which were smaller blocks, one with an inscribed drum (without a name). The chamber was partly built in the shaft on the filling from the earlier burial (pl. X b, c). The burial was on its left side, head to north, without a trace of a coffin, skull fallen forward out of position. The lower, original chamber, B II, was blocked by three rough slabs standing on 15 m. of rubble of which the lower part was covered by rough stones piled loosely against it and bound with mud. The burial of an adult, sex not determined, lay on its back, head north, left hand under pelvis (pl. XI a, b). No trace of
coffin or cloth. The floor of the chamber was caked through the action of water. Shaft C of type § a(4), 2.31 sq. m., led to a small chamber on the west with a pit. The door was blocked by three large slabs upright, the northern part a single block, the southern with one block above another. The burial was slightly over on its left side, head to the north, both hands under the pelvis, with remains of cloth on the body (pl. XI c). Shaft D led to an empty chamber, type 8 a(1), 1.05 sq. m., on the west actually resting on the ground and not cut into the rock.